Knut Stene-Johansen,
Christian Refsum,
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# LIVING TOGETHER

## Roland Barthes, the Individual and the Community

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[transcript]

# Contents

# Introduction

"How to live together?":

Roland Barthes and the *phantasme* of idiorrhythmic life

For Roland Barthes (1915-1980), writing was a way of exploring the most essential aspects of life, such as love, death, mourning, and relationships. From his first book *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) to the lecture manuscripts published after his death, Barthes investigated different perspectives on writing. His curiosity, the fact that he was always searching for new ways of experiencing the world and new ways of writing, is particularly inspiring. Whether he wrote about the novel, haiku poetry, the new Citroën DS 19, fashion, hermits from the fifth century, or photography, he found original departure points and left food for further reflection and space for more writing for those who came after him.

When celebrating the *centennial* of Barthes's birth in Oslo in 2015, we chose one of his more unknown works to discuss: the posthumously published lecture manuscripts *Comment vivre ensemble* (*How to Live Together*). Note that the title is without any question mark: Does it mean that it is a *mode d'emploi*, 'a user's manual,' as in Georges Perec's novel?

This amazingly rich manuscript has a special background. On Wednesday, January 5, 1977, Barthes was solemnly appointed to his position as a professor of literary semiology at the prestigious French institution the Collège de France in Paris. Exactly one week after this ceremony and his inaugural lecture, he started his first teaching seminar by addressing a quite surprising subject: 'How to Live Together.' The seminars explored the possibility of creating a community capable of including both collective rules and individual rhythms, habits, and preferences. Barthes's material was not sociological statistics, interviews, and analysis, but literature.

Literature has always been engaged in the problems of 'how to live together,' as probably every novel in the world can be said to address this issue in one way or another. The lecture manuscripts for the seminar in 1977 were published in French in 2002 as *Comment vivre ensemble: Simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens*, in Kate Briggs's translation, *How to Live Together:*

*Literary Simulations of Some Everyday Living Spaces*. Her English translation was published in 2013, following the publication in English of Barthes's last two seminars: "The Neutral" (2005 [*Le neutre*, 2002]) and "The Preparation of the Novel" (2011 [*La préparation du roman*, 2003]). These manuscripts have been subject to increasing attention. For Barthes, literature was always a source of information, art, and inspiration. He elaborated this in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, underlining that literature has three dimensions: *mathesis*, or knowledge; *mimesis*, or art; and *semiosis*, or processes of signification, that is, the force that makes us want to write our self, being "turned toward the sign," as Barthes says (1979: 14).

   Some words on our own contribution are recquired.

   After a couple of years teaching this material at master's level courses at the University of Oslo, we conceived of making a new version of Barthes's *How to Live Together* manuscript. In September 2016 our plan was materialized in the form of a book, called *Å leve sammen: Roland Barthes, individet og fellesskapet* (Living together: Roland Barthes, the individual, and the community). To make this anthology, we invited 30 profiled scholars to reflect upon the 30 concepts that Barthes investigated and analyzed in his original series of lectures from 1977.[1] Along with these, we have made place for the term "Idiorrhythmie/ Idiorrhythmy" because it is so fundamental to Barthes's project, and the term "Utopie/Utopia" (which is not exactly a "trait" in Barthes's inquiries) is likewise made the object of an original reading. In addition, as a 'bonus track,' the anthology includes an article by Éric Marty on Barthes and Foucault. The concepts were partly distributed randomly, partly according to assumptions of competence and academic relevance. All the authors were given relatively free rein, and they were invited to take a single concept as a starting point, draw Barthes's reflections into their own fields of research, and develop an original argument related to the essential problem of *How to Live Together*.

   Many of the contributors met for workshops and conferences in both Oslo and Paris, where the themes were discussed in depth. On these occasions we also discussed Barthes's approach, the question of methodology, the cross-disciplinary nature of the project, the key issues in the lectures, and, in particular, the relevance of the list of concepts today. These meetings across disciplines, institutions, and even national borders were exceptionally inspiring, and with this international edition we hope this inspiration will continue to grow, as the discussions are far from over. We are grateful for the generosity of the Fritt Ord foundation, the Arts Council Norway and the editors' place of living-together, the Department of Literature, European Languages and Area Studies at the

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**1** |  The published version of *How to Live Together* actually includes 31 concepts or "traits." However, we have not included the entry "Idyllique/Idyll" in our anthology, as Barthes also omitted it in his original lecture series.

University of Oslo, which made our meetings and work with the Norwegian and English versions of this book possible.

Our collection of essays is intended as a tribute to Barthes as a researcher, reader, and thinker. It is also an attempt to take seriously the challenges that the different lectures on living together represent. The subject matter may seem ordinary, but the problem of how to live together is addressed within all academic disciplines. As already indicated, it is not in authoritative texts within the academic disciplines that Barthes seeks his answers. As usual, his approach is highly original. For example, he starts with a peculiar desire to *not* live together, as exemplified by the hermetic Desert Fathers of the fourth century AD. Barthes was also fascinated by the fact that these solitary, retired, and introverted existences nevertheless developed peculiar forms of communities, in short, hermit cultures. These communities were later replaced by monastery structures and forbidden by the church. The approach to the literary corpus is characterized by a distinctively Barthesian attitude. He wishes to investigate a fantasy about a form of living where individual and community interests are pursued harmoniously. The project may seem utopian, idealistic, even a bit naive and romantic, but the fantasy of an idiorrhythmic life reveals itself to be a productive way of thinking. In exploring social and political structures, utopian literature may describe rules and guidelines for how an idiorrhythmic community and its values may be understood, if not realized.

It is somewhat similar to the idea behind the French political commentator and thinker Jacques Attali's *Brief History of the Future* from 2006, where the author sketches out a sort of political utopia, using the concept of 'hyperdemocracy,' a global, harmonious situation that will rise on the ruins of possible worldwide conflicts and wars. However, Barthes's idiorrhythmic project is based on the literary imagination rather than political science or psychology. He wants to open up space and time to reflect, to fantasize, to create simulations, before the process is stopped by demands for choices and priorities. This does not mean that Barthes's thinking is elusive or unsystematic, rather that he decides to pursue the topics as far as possible, constantly driven by the power of the literary imagination. Barthes does not seek final answers. Rather, he investigates the literary construction of ordinary but nevertheless deeprooted questions – the "simulations of everyday spaces."

In this book, we explore further Barthes's questions, his 30 concepts, his five main literary references, and the five topoi these references have led us to sketch out.

## THE 30 BARTHESIAN CONCEPTS

Through his readings Barthes decided which issues he wanted to investigate. After having established 30 *dossiers* collecting his observations and reflections on each concept, he applied the concepts to the texts again, seeing them as crystals that illuminate and create new ideas to be explored. His research was led by curiosity, fantasy, imagination, and desire. This is important to point out, as humanistic research in our days is increasingly directed by regulations from bureaucratic and political forces from above, as elaborated by the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller in his reflections on the concept of 'bureaucracy' in our anthology. At this point Barthes refers to Gilles Deleuze and Friedrich Nietzsche and the difference between 'method' and 'culture.' He also alludes to the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who in his *Notes sur le langage* wrote that "all method is a fiction, and is useful for demonstration. It seemed to him that language has appeared as the instrument of fiction: it will follow the method of language (determine it). Language reflecting upon itself." (Barthes 2013: 177, n. 10) The practice of this 'non-method,' this *paideia* or culture is, Barthes says, "an attentiveness to forces" (ibid: 4). And the first force, the one that guides him, is the figure of the fantasy. In his inaugural lecture Barthes talked precisely about phantasmatic teaching as the elaboration of a research inquiry from a fantasy, or, more precisely, a *phantasma*.

It is through reading *L'été grec* (The Greek summer), a very popular essay by the French writer Jacques Lacarrière, that Barthes's fantasy found a concept to build upon, "a word that would set it to work" (Barthes 2013: 6) as Barthes says, and the word was "idiorrhythmy" or "idiorrhythmic" – "the word that transmuted the fantasy into a field of knowledge. Through that word, I gained access to things that can be learned" (ibid: 7). A keyword for the present anthology is therefore the term 'idiorrhythmy,' a concept analyzed by Frederik Tygstrup in his essay below. 'Idiorrhythmy' is derived from the Greek and has to do with individual life rhythms. But, as Tygstrup points out, it is not only society, and the individuals in it, which have rhythms, but in Barthes argumentation, the social economy is also a product of rhythm, just as individuality is a product of rythmic repetition and difference. In idiorrhythmic societies, we could say, the different rhythms presuppose one another in a harmonious way.

In *How to Live Together*, Barthes lists 30 concepts taken from Ancient Greek and French. So, from *akèdia* ('acedy') and *anakhôrèsis* ('anachoresis'), via *événement* ('event') and *fleurs* ('flowers') to *saleté* ('dirtiness') and *xéniteia* ('xeniteia'), we meet a fertile and prolific form of analysis. Barthes states that each concept in *How to Live Together* opens a new 'dossier' (that is, a folder or a file), each to be understood as a perspective, an aggregate of information, and a corpus. To the various dossiers he brings literature and theories that illustrate the notions of communal and individual life worlds. Themes such

as tolerance, habits, and social and cultural relationships and differences are linked to different forms of living discussed in literature and culture in general.

The 30 concepts that Barthes uses represent a kind of concept pool, mobilizing a wide range of questions about how living together is represented in literature – and in the world. These are concepts for further reflection, which might lead into new fields of study and which might grow in various directions.

## THE FIVE TOPOI

Barthes selected five texts as the main literary material for his investigations in *How to Live Together*. The first is the *Lausiac History* (*Historia Lausiaca*), which is an account of the Desert Fathers written by Bishop Palladius in the year 422, followed by Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Émile Zola's *Pot Luck* (*Pot-Bouille*, 1882), and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924). As the last major literary reference, Barthes uses a minor text by André Gide, *The Confined Woman of Poitiers* (*La séquestrée de Poitiers,* 1930), telling the horrific story of Blanche Monnier, a young woman who was locked up in her bedroom by her mother at home for 24 years. Gide's story was based on a trial in the year 1901.

These five main literary texts (there are many more) in *How to Live Together* give us five different topoi: the desert, the island, the city, the sanatorium, and the home.

### 1. DESERT. *Lausiac History*

Bishop Palladius of Galatea (360-42), also known as Palladius Helenopolitanus, was the author of the *Historia Lausiaca*. He traveled around the deserts of Egypt and Syria in order to meet prototypic Christian monks, the so-called Desert Fathers, and write down their more or less spectacular stories. The hermits lived not only in their caves and on their columns but regularly sought a community, always to return to their single lives. In opposition to the rules and arrangements of the monastery, the hermit's life is the source of a number of interesting discussions in *How to Live Together*. From *monosis* (a life alone) and *anachoresis* (secluded life far away – the beginning of idiorrhythmy, Barthes says) to *koinobiosis* (collectively systematized monastic life), Barthes is interested in two energies that flow through these three states: "asceticism" (organizing space, time, objects) and "pathos" (affecting the imaginary).

Among other thinkers who have written about hermit culture and monastic life is the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In his book *The Highest Poverty* (2011) he analyzes monastic rules and forms of life. What is a human life, asks Agamben, if all its expressions or possibilities of expression are identical to

regulations and rules? What happens if the rule is equivalent with life itself? Palladius's narratives took place in the deserts, and led us to the idea that the desert represents an important metaphor that may inspire new ideas in the problems of living together. As a concept, the desert is generally thought of as a desolate, empty landscape, interpreted by writers, philosophers, composers, filmmakers, artists, and critics as a place of extremes. Since the landscape of the desert is dry, silent, marginal, and largely devoid of fauna and flora, it may serve as a metaphor for anything from death, poverty, or religion to the primitive past, desolate future, or nomad culture. It can also metaphorically signal retirement, withdrawal and acedia, a mental state characterized by indifference, boredom, fear and loss of desire. Ever since Palladius's fifth-century *Lausiac History* there has, of course, been an extensive literature on the subject of deserts. As the American poet Robert Frost writes in the poem "Desert Places," the desert is among other things related to loneliness and sorrow, the feeling of bearing a void: "I have it in me so much nearer home/To scare myself with my own desert places." Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and Sara Stridsberg's *Darling River* are other relevant literary works. This topos or platform invites one to think of idiorrhythmy and idiorrhythmic life as vulnerable and exposed to mortality. Keywords here include *religions*, *rules*, *margins*, *silence*, *acedia/melancholy*, *withdrawal*, and *retirement*.

## 2. ISLAND. *Robinson Crusoe*

In his reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, Barthes is concerned with Robinson's everyday life and not the dramatic events in the novel. This leads to the topos 'Island.' In the history of literature and of myths, the island is a metaphor for isolation, individuality, and forsakenness, but also independence, new life, and creativity based on reduced circumstances. The island is to some extent a closed unity, which at times present an alternative word, sometimes an exotic fantasy world, a utopia or dystopia. At other times, or simultaneously, the literary island might function as a model of the existing world, where certain habits, life rhythms, restrictions, and possibilities are characterized in a clarifying manner, as when Robinson recreates his contemporary English civilization as far as possible on his island. The number of mythical and fictional islands is great, from Avalon (Arthurian legend) and Neverland (Barrie) to Treasure Island (Stevenson) and Kokovoko (Melville), from New Atlantis (Bacon) and Utopia (More) to Phraxos (Fowles), the concrete island (Ballard), and Isla Nublar (Crichton). Used as a metaphor in John Donne's phrase "no man is an island," the island prompts a questioning of the very essence of idiorrhythmic life. But the topos of the island also opens up reflections on various encounters, for example related to migration and immigration. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) points to the unmappable spaces – the in-betweens and liminalities – that appear as archipelagoes on

the outer and inner margins of nations and metropoles: they are produced today primarily by global flows of migration and established diasporic cultures in which hybrid identities flourish in contemporary cosmopolitan societies. Keywords for this topos include *isolation*, *boundaries*, *independence*, *individuality*, *civilization*, and *migration*.

## 3. CITY. *Pot Luck*

Émile Zola's novel *Pot-Luck* unfolds in a diametrically opposite environment, namely, in the city of Paris, with all the action allocated to a fashionable city building where residents live out their hypocritical, bourgeois life. It is an amazing novel, illustrating the idiorrhythmy with a sarcasm typical of Zola, who has a sharp eye for falseness, dissimulation, and the comic in the society he depicts. The city may be regarded as the opposite of the desert. Rather than being deserted it is characterized by references to uniform masses, at other times with variety and contingency. The topos of the city has affinities to the island as well as to home. It invites reflections on various idiorrhythmic forms of living. In literary studies the modern city has been described as a mythological heterogeneous space for fascination and imagination (e.g., Benjamin, Stierle, Berman). It has also been regarded as a place for anonymity, crossed by alienated literary heroes (Dostoevsky, Hamsun, Kafka). Cities have been metaphorized as ant colonies and as jungles. They have been recognized as sites for innovation and for speeding up technological solutions, infrastructure, and social relations (Virilio). They are places for activity and exhaustion, but city planners and architects have always acknowledged the need for resting places as necessary conditions for a well-functioning city. Cities can thus be seen as places where rhythms of activity and rest, of engagement and isolation, are central. The topos of the city is characterized by paradoxical dynamics: the crowd/loneliness, interaction/anonymity, speed/rest, and urban landscape/countryside. The city has furthermore been recognized as a place for experimenting with a huge variety of ways of living together, a major theme in fiction from the 19th century on (e.g., Dickens, Balzac, Zola, Sandel, Woolf, Döblin, Joyce, Barnes, Cole, Knausgård). Keywords for the city topos include *urbanity*, *food*, *technology*, *rhythms*, *finance*, *information*, *recreation*, *anonymity*, *single life*, and *dating*.

## 4. SANATORIUM. *The Magic Mountain*

The sanatorium Berghof in Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* gives rise to reflections on patient interaction, epidemics as metaphors, identity through disease and, above all, death. Death is, as Barthes suggests, the actual telos, the fundamental reason for the sanatorium, its *raison d'être*. In her

reflections on the term 'Cause,' the historian of ideas Hilde Bondevik notes the novel's temporal coincidence with some of Sigmund Freud's texts, including *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), with its idea of the death drive (*Todestrieb*). Barthes claims to have chosen the texts randomly and without aiming to reach a clear conclusion. After the tuberculosis epidemic died down in the 1940s, thanks to antibiotics, the sanatorium is a now outmoded concept as a health care institution. The life of the sanatorium and its companion institutions the mental asylum and the hospital is described in novels, short stories, and poems, especially from the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g., Skram, Hamsun, Mann, Plath, Solzhenitsyn, Stridsberg), as well as in our time, where it has featured memorably in films (Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Has's *The Hourglass Sanatorium*), television (von Trier's *Riget/The Kingdom*), art (Pedro Rey's performative project *Sanatorium* at Documenta 13, Carsten Höller's *Henie Onstad Sanatorium*), and theater (Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*). The sanatorium is also described in documents and literature concerning public health systems. The sanatorium is closed but at the same time subject to public supervision. As an institution, idea, and metaphor, the sanatorium includes an exploration of the telos and the idiorrhythmic aspect of recreational life. The sanatorium can be taken as exemplifying various institutions in which people spend some of their lives living together, such as retirement communities, cruise ships, colleges, asylums, and prisons. In addition, the sanatorium could be associated with various art institutions, galleries, and museums, considering the so-called therapeutic effect of art (Alain de Botton, Höller). Keywords here include *health*, *death*, *institution analysis*, *illness*, and *identification*.

## 5. HOME. *The Confined Woman of Poitiers*

The topos of the 'Home' is related to a particular territory that is somehow demarcated physically, as for example a nest, cave, or house. It is established and maintained rhythmically by various habits and routines for internal consolidation and exchanges with the surroundings. It usually signifies everyday routines and family life but is also a metaphor for a place that provides identity, health, nutrition, shelter, and security. In this sense, the home is closely related to the topoi of the island and the sanatorium, and as a metaphor it is also opposite to the city and the desert. Its counterpart is to be found in the notion of 'the working place,' which opens for complementary discussions. In comparison, however, a home is a place where one can obtain privacy and feel homely, as suggested by the German adjective *heimlich*, meaning both 'secret,' and (etymologically, if not in contemporary usage) 'homely.' The home provides for relaxation (bed, furniture, etc.), hygiene (bathroom), and cooking (kitchen, fireplace). But what makes a territory homely in the last instance is usually

related to the relative stability of certain sensory qualities like color, smell, and sound as well as the existence of certain private objects.

The idea of the home has its own history, and through the ages the physical shape as well as the understanding of the home has changed from society to society and within different groups in these societies. Studies in the history of the home include artistic explorations of everyday life, as in photography and video art. Traditionally, food is one of the products of the home and may be studied as a specific sort of idiorrhythmy, linked to the notion of taste as both a physical and cultural phenomenon. In Barthes's research the home is also, in his reading of Gide, a place that may be the scene of a crime, that is, characterized by the Freudian notion of the uncanny – *Das Unheimliche* (1989 [1919]). At the center of home is the idiorrhythmy of shared life as well as the individual, single forms of living. Keywords for this fifth and final topos include *territory*, *the everyday*, *routines*, *habits*, *food ('eating together')*, *rest*, *taste*, and *solidarity*.

## Relevance

Why this book? And why these topics today? We believe that Barthes's 40-year-old lecture notes have even more relevance today, not least because of the challenges we face in the global problems of finding new ways of organizing the increasing multi-cultural aspects of social life.

Barthes's manuscripts are not just about living together but also about living alone. The statistics on forms of living in modern Western metropolitan areas show that, since Barthes held his lectures, the percentage of singles has increased steadily at the expense of married and cohabiting couples. The situation is the same throughout the Western world. In his recent book *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone* (2012), Eric Klinenberg states that while 22 percent of the adult American population lived alone in 1950, more than 50 percent of Americans did so in 2012. The tendency is the same in modern American and European households and is particularly strong in the big cities. The United States is a country characterized by mobility and labor migration. The average American moves both often and far, repeatedly leaving family and networks of friends and contacts. Global migration also creates situations where people – often young men – spend longer periods of time as 'hermits' in urban environments. They are obliged to live with strangers in a melancholic existence that has led Paul Gilroy (2004), a leading thinker in the British black diaspora, to promote a culture of 'conviviality.'

It is a giant leap between the ancient Desert Fathers' attempts to establish an idiorrhythmic form of living and today's urban single individuals, caring for their freedom and connecting to a range of communities. What makes it

possible to associate these lifestyles is that they prioritize the individual at the expense of family. In addition, there is in both cases a fantasy about a way of life that is not static but is rather based on the balance between isolation on the one hand and attachment on the other. The balance can be understood in different ways. In the culture of the early hermits, it was both about seeking calm and contemplation and trying out the ability of the self to sustain loneliness. In modern, urban single life. the rhythm of existence is a result of social formations and economical structures as well as individual choice: we meet at work, in bars, in the theater, and then go back to our shelters, our apartments. Although 'single life' is not a common term in *How to Live Together*, Barthes describes these poles in idiorrhythmic tendencies, such as when he deals in detail with both the asceticism of the hermits and the young charmer Octave Mouret's behavior in Zola's novel *Pot Luck*.

Barthes's lecture notes are playful and experimental, without instructions or guidelines for a good life. They rather explore the many possibilities that lie in the tension between on the one hand our everyday situations and fantasies of idiorrhythmy and, on the other hand, that which prevents idiorrhythmy. Their major advantage is that the lectures – the readings – can inspire an alternative gaze. They do not ask what the best way of life is or what love really is. Nor do they ask for total explanations. Barthes seems more interested in the intensity and dynamism of social and idiorrhythmic life than in its duration and harmony. His thinking here is like an echo from a book published the same year the Living Together seminars were held: "Pourquoi *durer* est-il mieux que *brûler*?" – "Why is it better to *last* than to *burn*?" – Barthes asks in *A Lover's Discourse* (Barthes 1977: 30; 1990: 23). The attention to rhythm has undoubtedly inspired him to think in a less ontological, categorizing, and defining manner. In other words, it is not about finding the right way of living but about finding the right rhythm or balance between different ways of organizing life – a rhythm that neither can nor should be formulaic.

When Barthes once compared his own writing with Marcel Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*, it was perhaps not because it is as rich and extensive as Proust's novel, but probably because Barthes, like Proust, explores what it means to become an author. If the novel *In Search of Lost Time* could be summed up in one sentence, Gérard Genette said, it should be 'Marcel becomes an author.' With Barthes the matter is more complicated: Was Barthes an author, was he a writer, 'un écrivain'? If we are to believe Alain Robbe-Grillet, Barthes has always been an author. But even in the most inspired parts of his production, it is obvious that Barthes *prepares* more than he executes. Barthes is somewhat like these mystics he mentions in *A Lover's Discourse*, these wise men who get drunk by the wine they do not drink (1990: 234). Among the many texts from Barthes's hand that have inspired so much writing activity, from novels and criticisms to journalism and essays, it is undoubtedly his famous *Mythologies*

(1957) and the best seller *A Lover's Discourse* (1977) that are the most important. The first title contributed significantly to a new and critical form of journalism, while the latter is not only dramatized and used as a starting point for new fiction but has also stimulated new generations' understanding of the language of love. If one should summarize and synopsize the authorship of Roland Barthes – from *Writing Degree Zero* to *The Preparation of the Novel* – it has to be: 'Roland becomes an author.' With the Living Together manuscripts, this author invites us now to explore the possibilities for idiorrhythmic life that lie in reading and writing – indeed, in what we could call 'writing together.'

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# AKÈDIA/Akedia

*Kjersti Bale*

Even though the term 'acedy' is seldom used, most of us are familiar with the feeling it refers to. It includes lassitude, sadness, boredom, and loss of heart.[1] Roland Barthes describes the feeling as "no longer having any investment in a way of life. Acedy: the repeated, extenuated, insistent moment when you find you've had enough of your way of life, of your relationship to the world (to the 'worldly')." (Barthes 2013: 22) Furthermore, he depicts acedy as a state of non-desire where the self is both the subject and the object of abandonment and as the mourning of investment itself, not the thing invested in. Being out of step with the rhythm of life – by being restless or lazy – and hence being morally inferior are both distinguishing characteristics of acedy.

Acedy has several features in common with melancholy as described by Sigmund Freud in his seminal article "Trauer und Melancholie" ("Mourning and Melancholia"), such as withdrawal and depression. Yet Barthes carefully avoids mixing up acedy and melancholy and thus separates the cultural backgrounds of the two notions. Whereas acedy connotes boredom, tedium, and lack of care, melancholy is also linked to ideas about creativity and talent. Art history and literary history are both full of examples of melancholics with tendencies toward depression or madness on the one hand and genius and creativity on the other. Unlike melancholy, acedy is always negatively assessed, that is, morally condemned. This has to do with the cultural history of acedy. It starts in the early fifth century BC and belongs to a theological context. Under the entry *accidie*, the state is described in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* as a kind of restlessness, a lack of the ability to work and pray (Livingstone 2013). Acedy is also known as the sin of sloth. Thus, acedy is represented as self-inflicted, as opposed to melancholy, which, according to tradition, is the result of an inborn disposition (Aristotle 2011: 953a10). It

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**1** | The English translation of Barthes's *Comment vivre ensemble* also lists melancholy as a translation of *vague à l'âme*. Yet the connotations of *melancholy* and *vague à l'âme* differ (cf. my comments on the difference between melancholy and acedy below).

is an open question whether boredom, tedium, depression, and acedy are the same or different phenomena. Let us suppose that they form a group of related feelings, emotions, and moods that despite overlapping and historically contingent variations have a common denominator: boredom. It has to do with our relationship with others.

## ACEDY IN HISTORY

But where does the term 'acedy' stem from? It is the Latin version of Greek *akēdeia*, which combines *a-*, 'without,' with *kēdos*, 'care, concern, or grief,' and means 'listlessness.' The noun *kēdia* is used in the Bible a couple of times in reference to the performance of the last offices (2 Macc. 4:49 and 5:10). But first and foremost, acedy is connected to the ascetic hermit monks and their lives in the deserts of Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Palestine from the third century on, who experienced acedy especially at noon when the sun's rays were at their strongest and they were no longer able to keep their attention on God and their asceticism. The monks became restless and unable to pray; after having turned their backs on human beings with the intention of living as hermits in the desert, they turned away from God as well. St. John Cassian (360-435) wrote about the lives of these Desert Fathers, and when he founded two monasteries in Marseille in 415, he implemented their way of life in a monastic community. Cassian thereby transformed the monks' way of living together, but acedy kept being a thorn in their flesh. Barthes points out the continuous connection between withdrawal and depression in the introduction to his lecture on *anachoresis*, which picks up on acedy from the previous lecture (Barthes 2013: 24).

In his *Summa Theologica*, written during the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas identified acedy with what we would call *Weltschmertz* (Thomas 2015: II-II.Q35). This is the kind of grief that St. Paul describes (2 Cor. 7:10) as a worldly sorrow, which brings death, to be differentiated from godly sorrow, which leads to salvation. With Thomas Aquinas, it becomes evident that *accidie*, or sloth, has changed from being a temptation to being a sin, and along with pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, and wrath it is in fact included among the seven deadly sins. Taking his cue from the *Summa Theologica*, Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, divides Purgatory into one terrace for each of the deadly sins, describing sloth as "delay and negligence, / induced by lukewarm love of doing good" (1985: canto 18.107-108). The souls atone for this sin through an urgent desire to race.

The term 'acedy' belongs within the theological framework of the Middle Ages. Yet it crops up again as recently as in Pope Francis's first apostolic exhortation, the *Evangelii gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel) from November 2013, in

which he lays out his vision of a missionary church and asks all Christians to open their hearts to God's unfaltering love and forgiveness. The great danger in today's society is the feeling of loneliness, despair, desolation, and anxiety that comes from a greedy heart, he claims, using the term 'acedy' to describe the tense, burdensome, dissatisfying, and, in the end, unbearable fatigue that comes from a wish to dominate the rhythm of life. He thus refers to the actual tedium and tiredness among priests as synonymous with the spiritual tedium that is a turning away from God (Francis 2013: chap. 2.2.81-83). And he uses the term "sloth," which he describes as a temptation, thus referring back to a time before Thomas Aquinas to indicate the consequences of consumerism.

Within the theological tradition, a striking feature of acedy is that it is connected to a negative moral, which in turn is connected to specific spatial and temporal conditions. On a more abstract level, acedy is characterized by a rejection of the rhythm of the society one belongs to and a turning away from this society.

## ACEDY IN LITERATURE

Roland Barthes takes his cue from acedy as a monastic condition. But he also refers to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924) to show the relevance of acedy – because of its interconnection with asceticism and with withdrawal from a certain way of living – outside of the monastic context. Robinson Crusoe is stranded on a desert island, while Hans Castorp, the protagonist of *Der Zauberberg*, is at a tuberculosis sanatorium in the Swiss Alps. By considering acedy as a configuration of certain features rather than as a sin, Barthes makes it possible to regard texts written outside of a theological context as representations of acedy and its specific rhythm. With this in mind, I will argue that David Foster Wallace's short story "The Depressed Person," published for the first time in *Harper's Magazine* in 1998 and then the year after in his collection *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, can be seen as a variation over what Barthes calls idiorrhythmy, as it showcases an extreme effort to find balance in the relationship between a subject and his or her environment. The short story depicts a desire to live together that cannot be fulfilled within the given culture because ubiquitous selfishness blocks the longed-for empathy. Thus, "The Depressed Person" is suited to scrutinize ethical aspects of living together. Éric Marty points out in his foreword to *How to Live Together* that Barthes sought to edify a personal ethics related to style and form, far from a list of prescriptions or summations (Marty 2013: ix). The distinction throws light on the difference between the kinds of ethics outlined by Barthes and Francis. Whereas Francis writes about ethics at a more general level, Barthes highlights the specific, or

more precisely, the unique, inasmuch as literary expressions are unique in their intertwinement of contents, form, and style. The kind of ethics, or rather moral attitude, to be found in "The Depressed Person" is thus constituted by an array of value-laden conflicting positions and not a consistent attitude.

"The Depressed Person" is a story about a young woman and her relationship to her parents, her therapist, and her so-called Support System. She keeps others as well as herself at a distance. More than anything else she wishes to feel something for others but is not capable of doing so because she consistently suspects her own and other people's feelings of not being genuine. But what exactly is a genuine feeling? The distance between the depressed person and her environment is also narratively expressed and concerns this literary universe in its entirety. The short story is narrated in the third person, with the narration taking place after the events in question. The depressed person is never mentioned by name. An unusual feature of the short story is the many footnotes, which make it seem like a report or a document and do not invite immersion. The number of footnotes increases during the story and threatens to dominate the text. They largely tell a separate story about the depressed person's therapist and the latter's implicit depression – indeed, the therapist ends up committing suicide. Like the depressed person, she seems to be a prisoner of this managed society. Again and again, her hands form enclosing shapes in her lap while she speaks, as if she begs for help to be released. But how can one gain freedom when all human relationships are totally managed?

To answer these two questions about genuine feelings and freedom, I shall use three aspects of the acedy tradition: acedy arises in relation to a specific scenario, it has to do with a disturbed rhythm of life, and it is related to a kind of ethics.

In broad outline, "The Depressed Person" alternates between similar scenarios that characterize the interaction between the depressed person and her environment. In each of these scenarios, the depressed person shuns others even though she wants to form a community with them. The first scenario concerns her parents. They had divorced when the depressed person was only a child, and although they were both well off, they struggled over the expenses she caused. The second scenario is the therapeutic situation. The therapist suggests that the depressed person has developed arrested or vestigial survival mechanisms to prevent intimacy with others. Hence, as an adult the only kind of intimacy she experiences is the one she purchases at the therapist's, an intimacy she experiences as hollow because she notices quick, discreet glances at the clock. Similar to what Barthes points out concerning acedy, the depressed person is thus displaying a disinvestment in the loved object, which is nevertheless a source of distress and misery for not requiting her love. The third scenario is the phone calls the depressed person makes to her Support System (Wallace 2001: 32). This is a group of approximately

a half dozen rotating members, all former acquaintances of hers, who have agreed to let her call them whenever she feels the need to talk to someone. The depressed person is sadly aware that she is a burden to them with her never-ending egotism, her self-reproaches, and her shame over her degrading shortcomings, but she cannot behave otherwise than she does. Her repertoire is simply too narrow.

The depressed person's rhythm of life is disturbed. Because she cannot free herself from patterns established already during childhood, all human relationships seem like repetitions to her. In the short story, the depressed person on numerous occasions watches someone who is feigning interest or otherwise dissimulating. She feels shame on behalf of the person being fooled, who ironically does not feel the same because he or she has restricted insight into the situation, as when the depressed person was at boarding school and watched her self-assured roommate talking on the phone to some unknown boy. The roommate made faces and gestures of repulsion and boredom with the call, tacitly instructing the depressed person to step outside and knock on the open door to break off the conversation. The depressed person's agonizing memory of the incident makes her identify with how boundlessly horrible and pathetic she imagines the boy would have felt had he been aware of the boredom and contempt of the girl he is talking with. An interchangeable incident takes place when the depressed person overhears a boy who is part of a group of popular, self-assured male students comparing a girl she knows with a restroom toilet. The boy states that the only substantive difference is that the toilet does not keep pathetically following you around after you have used it. On the face of it, the depressed person shows a limitless empathy toward the victims of these situations, much like the empathy she would like to see directed toward herself. Yet in a third example, which is at the very end of the short story, the apparent empathy is revealed as grotesque selfishness. The depressed person pleads with the most patient member of the Support System – a single mother of two, terminally ill with cancer – to answer honestly if she thinks the depressed person is unempathetic and without the ability to feel anything for other people:

She needed her feedback, the depressed person wept, even if that feedback was partly negative or hurtful or traumatic or had the potential to push her right over the emotional edge once and for all [...] and therefore now urged her terminally ill friend to go on, to not hold back, to let her have it: what words and terms might be applied to describe and assess such a solipsistic, self-consumed, endless emotional vacuum and sponge as she now appeared to be? (ibid: 57-58)

Rather than despairing because of her lack of closeness with the woman of her Support System, the depressed person despairs because of her own lack of

empathy, her ability to feel. Thus, it is her selfishness and not her empathy that is limitless. What seems like empathy toward other people is rather a projection of the self-pity she feels when she imagines how the therapist or the Support System glance impatiently at a watch each time they have to listen to her endless rants about feeling humiliated, ashamed, and inadequate.

The ethics of the short story is not concomitant with the personal ethics linked to style and form that, as Marty noted, Barthes explored around 1950. I will nonetheless argue that style and form are in fact linked to value-laden attitudes in Wallace's short story as well. In "The Depressed Person" there is no moral norm that can identify the depressed person as good or bad. Rather, the short story displays an array of contradictory attitudes displayed by the very same person. No one condemns the depressed person more strongly than she does herself. Nevertheless, she cannot stop annoying others with her selfishness. She is extremely on the alert for the unethical behavior of others, but her empathy with their victims potentially harms the victims, whereas the unethical behavior itself did not. By telling her Support System about the female student who was compared with a toilet, she risks that the unknowing victim becomes aware that she has been an object of derision and contempt. And when the therapist kills herself, the depressed person is unable to feel anything for the deceased, only pain because of the consequences the incident entails for her. Her varying positions are tied to the short story's ironic mode of narration, that is, the literary form.

## The pain of selfishness

"The Depressed Person" examines living together in a society where it is impossible to find a good balance between being alone and being together. To suspect that others are just pretending and are actually only concerned about themselves is so deeply rooted that genuinely living together becomes hopeless. The depressed person's own selfishness even lessens the possibilities. In all kinds of situations, the depressed person repeats the very same turning away from others and toward herself. She is unable to overcome her depression, acedy, and boredom because her experiences have led her to conclude that society is totally untruthful. In the short story this is indicated by the facts that all human relationships that the depressed person takes part in (with her parents, her therapist, and her Support System) are conditioned by economy and that there is an incongruity between what people say and what they do, as when the body language of the therapist undermines the empathy she expresses.

Pope Francis has pointed out that such self-centeredness is a problem specific to our commercialized era. The problem is moral, he claims, and exhorts the priests to resist selfishness and spiritual laziness (Francis 2013:

chap. 2.2.81-83). In a theological style he describes precisely the depressed feeling of life: everything seems normal, but in reality faith is worn down and is degenerating toward selfishness. But whereas Pope Francis thinks we have a choice, "The Depressed Person" explores a situation where choice does not exist. The anthropologist William Reddy has written insightfully about how emotional freedom and suffering depend on the possibilities we have for changing emotional goals in situations where there is conflict between normative and individual goals (2006: 112-137). The better our possibilities for change, the greater the freedom and the lesser the suffering. The scope of possibilities is conditioned both by the societal conditions and individual ones. It is therefore not relevant to query what a real feeling really is, because every emotion is a result of the possibilities and solutions available in a given situation. The depressed person is unable to find new solutions in new situations. The embarrassment she constantly feels on her own as well as on others' behalf expresses both that she is extremely sensible to social norms and that these norms are very strong. This is probably why she is unable to vary how she behaves around others. The price to pay is the terrible and never-ending pain she experiences and is unable to express.

When Barthes brings the term 'acedy' up to date as a feature of idiorrhythmy, he points out a way of life that includes how the depressed person is living. When we read Wallace's short story, however, an aspect that Barthes himself does not pay attention to is brought to our attention: the genderedness of acedy. Barthes exclusively connects acedy to the lives of monks, never nuns, even when he writes about the various female ascetic and philanthropic communities known as the Beguines. Similarly, the priests that Pope Francis points to are Catholic, obviously, and consequently men. Even the literary figures Barthes cites in connection with acedy, Robinson Crusoe and Hans Castorp, are men. As opposed to this, Wallace's depressed person is a woman. According to the World Health Organization, depression is twice as prevalent in women as in men (WHO 2015). By describing the depressed person as a woman, Wallace throws light on an aspect of acedy that is especially relevant to our own era.

What, then, may be Barthes's intention when he includes acedy among the features he focuses on regarding the phantasm of idiorrhythmy? To find a balance one has to find a zone between extremes, he writes (Barthes 2013: 9). Acedy is exactly such an extreme condition. Even though the phenomenon belongs within the context of monastic life in the Middle Ages, it does not belong exclusively to the past. Barthes closes his lecture on acedy by describing modern acedy as "no longer being capable of investing in other people, in Living-with-several-other-people and yet at the same time being incapable of investing in solitude. → Throwing it all away, but without even somewhere to throw it: waste without a waste bin." (ibid: 23) A more precise description of the depressed person's emotional breakdown is hard to find. Barthes never draws

the connection, but there are two female figures in his material that seem to suffer from acedy: the nun who neither eats nor talks in Palladius's *Lausiac History* (Barthes 2013: 81-84), and André Gide's story about the confined woman of Poitiers (*La séquestrée de Poitiers*). These three withdrawn women who are all scorned, or who feel scorned, form a historical prism suggesting that there is a female version of acedy in addition to the more renowned masculine one.

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# ANAKHÔRÈSIS/Anachoresis

*Knut Ove Eliassen*

In "Séance du 12 janvier," the first lecture of *Comment vivre ensemble*, Roland Barthes sets out – somewhat curiously – without directly addressing the lecture series' announced theme of how to live together. By way of an oblique maneuver, a discussion of Friedrich Nietzsche's opposition of methodology and culture, Barthes offers a surprising entry-point to the matter at hand, the 'phantasm' of living together. Nietzsche, he observes, defined culture as a thought formation and an unconscious brought forth by selective forces ('force' is here used in the Deleuzian sense of 'violent production of difference'). These pre-reflexive forces of culture express themselves as desire and, he underlines, become manifest in the figures of phantasms (2002a: 34; 2013: 4).[1]

Thus, by way of detour, Barthes arrives at his point of departure, *the phantasm*, and more specifically, the phantasm understood as a figure of difference emerging in all communal life (difference understood existentially as the experience of the relation between the self and the foreignness of other beings). The phantasm of living together resides, Barthes suggests, at the base (*origine*) of culture. Still, it is not cultural representations that provide the material of Barthes's initial analysis, but rather the forces and drives he is familiar with from himself. True to the program announced one week earlier in the inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, his private phantasms are made the starting point of the seminar (1978: 43; 2003: 25).

*L'idiorrhythmie* is what Barthes names his particular phantasm of conviviality. In the psychoanalytic tradition Barthes draws on, phantasms are not pure psychic constructs; rather, they feed on external sources, such as experiences, images, and literary texts, that provide the cultural material for the creative and figurative powers of the imagination. Thus, in turn, the phantasm can become a drive for further reading, even for study, and thus also the trigger

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**1** | *Fantasme* is awkwardly translated as "fantasy" in the English edition, thus losing an important distinction in the Freudian vocabulary (cf. "Fantasme," in Laplanche and Pontalis 1967).

of a scholarly undertaking (2002a: 34; 2013: 4). The word 'idiorrhythmy,' a word Barthes culled from his readings on the monastic traditions of the Eastern Church, is a case in point. As a conceptual crystallization of his fascination with the possible ways of organizing communal life, the word also provides a tool and a perspective for his analyses. Hence, the monastic traditions of the Christian church become the material that frames his investigation into the phantasm of living together. Barthes starts out by distinguishing between three models of the self's relation to others: *anachoresis* (*Vivre-Seule*), or eremitic living; *koinobion* (*Vivre-Ensemble*), or collective regulated life; and *idiorrhythmie*, a utopian notion of a shared existence based on the individual rhythms of group (2002a: 40).

## LITERARY PHANTASMS OF ANCHORITIC LIFE

In line with his emphasis on the phantasm's central role in his undertaking, Barthes's interest in the anchorite practices is less driven by historical, religious, or sociological interests than by an admittedly private "force of desire" (2002a: 34; 2013: 4), or in the words of the seminar he held in 1978, "Le neutre": "One studies what one desires or fears" (2002b: 261). As Barthes points out, however, he is not alone in this idiosyncratic fascination with solitary living, since so many literary works seem to be haunted by the phantasm of the anchorite – it is a recurring literary site (ibid: 187). Seclusion and retreat are – as strategies of living – de facto negations of conventional communal life. The important word here is 'conventional,' as anachoresis does not per se entail total isolation – on the contrary, it could be considered a model form of "cohabitation" (2002a: 36; 2013: 6). It is important to bear in mind that the phantasms Barthes aims to study are not representations of a given reality but *simulacra*, images without pre-existing models. Phantasms exist as the imaginary articulations of drives and notions, as cultural and not social realities. For this very reason, they are particularly well suited to explore the experience of living together (2002a: 44; 2013: 12).

The subtitle of Barthes's lectures, *Simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens* (*Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*), signals his interest in the relation between living together and the organization of time and space. A phantasm is "a scenario," he notes, bathed in "the glow of desire" (2002a: 51). Thus, Barthes organizes his literary readings under five different literary spatio-temporal loci, or "maquettes": the desert, the den, the city, the sanatorium, and the home (2002a: 44; 2013: 12). Focusing on the concept of 'anachoresis,' I will in the following first present the cultural material that opens and frames Barthes's study, that is, the anchorite tradition of the Church. Then, in three brief literary readings of three texts dealing with anchorites,

I will explore the different dimensions of Barthes's project. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1778), and Gustave Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1874) illuminate in various ways Barthes's interests in, respectively, anchorite living, the phantasm of anchorite living, and the textuality of this phantasm – or, framed in Barthesian terms, *mathesis*, *mimesis*, and *semiosis* (1978: 17).

Defoe's novel is discussed extensively by Barthes. While the 1977 course only mentions Rousseau in passing, *Reveries* figures prominently in next year's lectures, *Le neutre*, under the title "La retraite" (2002b: 179). Rather than highlighting 'the retreat,' the following will focus on the literary phantasm it expresses, that which Rousseau calls *mes chimères*. The third example, Flaubert's impossible epic poem about St. Anthony, shifts the focus from the drive behind the phantasmatic figures that motivate Barthes's study to the textuality of the material support of the novelistic simulations.

## The early anchorite tradition

*Anachoresis* stems from the Greek verb ἀναχωρέω (*anachōréō*), signifying 'to withdraw, go back, retreat.' Coined as a concept in the Hellenistic period, it commonly designates the religious practice of separating oneself from the worldly community of the χώρα (*chôra*) in order to facilitate a life consecrated to religious spirituality. While both the practice and the term antedate Christianity, they are primarily associated with the early Christian anchorites, such as Anthony of Egypt (286-356) and Simeon Stylites (390?-459).

The Christian tradition makes a distinction between anchorites and hermits. Hermits (ἐρημίτης) are characterized by their will to live a life of seclusion (*monosis*), removed from all human commerce. Although isolated, eremitic life is not necessarily sedentary, and the hermit's spiritual calling is not contingent upon residing in one unique locality. Contrary to eremitism, anachoresis is defined as being bound to a particular location. This trait is manifest in the later medieval practice of individuals that for years literally lived intramurally in small spaces constructed within church walls. This practice did not exclude communication with the outside world – in counter-distinction to the life of the hermit – quite on the contrary. Many of the most famous of the anchorites of the Middle Ages, several of them women, were visited by both clergy and laymen for spiritual counseling and guidance. Communication was made possible by openings in the wall that facilitated both the provision of food and the removal of refuse. Such anchorites often became local attractions and added to the prestige and holiness of the church. Also the early anchorites offered counseling, and many of them had a reputation as spiritual teachers,

although they are today mostly known for their ascetic life outside of the *communitas*.

As anchoritic life as such entails neither seclusion nor solitude, the anchorites furnish Barthes with a model of living alone that does not preclude participation in a community (2002a: 35; 2013: 5). Not only did the early Egyptian and Syrian anchorites – the so-called Desert Fathers – settle in the immediate vicinity of cities and villages, hundreds, even thousands, lived side by side in relatively limited areas pursuing their individual rhythm of life and occasionally socializing. What this shows is that anachoresis does not require absolute physical distancing from other humans; it should rather be seen as particular principle for organizing everyday life.

According to the chronological table of Palladius's *Lausiac History* (1904: C), Pachomius (292-348) established the first anchorite monastery at Tabennisi, Egypt, in 318. This collective solitary living of the early anchorites is often considered as a precursor to the Christian cenobitic monkhood. What Barthes is interested in, however, is less how the early anchorite practices anticipate the cenobitic traditions than how they differ from them. While retreat and seclusion are the premises for all monastic life, the Pachomian legacy has been handled differently in the Orthodox and Coptic churches than in the West. The principles laid down by Benedict of Nursia (480-543) are often seen as foundational of the cenobitic traditions of the Roman church. An important aspect of *The Rule of Saint Benedict* is the emphasis on how rules and discipline must provide the framework of the convents' communal spiritual life, the *koinobion*. The Pachomian tradition of the Orthodox Church differs by insisting less on common activities, instead giving more room for the individuals' particular rhythms of life, the practice referred to as *idiorrhythmy*. Anachoresis and eremitism, idiorrhythmy and cenobitism, thus provide two conceptual symmetries that organize the framework of Barthes's initial reflections.

The strict protocols of the cenobitic tradition are not limited to communal property and collective activities but instead involve complex spatio-temporal structures. Western monastic time is divided into fixed periods of praying, working, eating, sleeping, and so forth. Basically constructed on the distinction between the outside and the inside – the word 'cloister' itself stems from Latin *claustrum* ('enclosure') – monastic space is further differentiated by the allocation of specific functions to distinct spaces within the cloister (rooms dedicated to work, prayer, meals, sleep, etc.). In the final account, the chrono-topical regimens of the cenobitic orders originate in a principle of hierarchy, that is, of power structures (2002a: 41, 69; 2013: 10, 35). The cloisters of the Eastern Church, on the other hand, give their inhabitants a high degree of autarky in the members' interaction and are thus more horizontally than vertically organized. Thus, whether it is the Desert Fathers of antiquity or the present-day monks of the autonomous polity of Greece's Mount Athos, anchorite living offers models

for idiorrhythmic life. The rather relaxed protocols of the Pachomian tradition allow for the coming together of the idiosyncrasies of the individual and the rhythms of the collective, thereby making possible the realization of the double "wish of living alone and of living together" (2002a: 35; 2013: 5).

Spiritual withdrawal is not merely a negative gesture. Each social order produces its own forms of seclusion and practices of disconnection. The retreat always has a specific target, as well as a positively given, active component, *ascesis*. *Ascesis* goes beyond self-deprivation; it is an exercise, a practice, and a form of living (2002a: 49, 225; 2013: 17, 201). The retreat from the sensual plenitude of worldly existence is not a goal in itself, it is a means and a strategy. In the desert the noise of the world fades; it is a space for eventless living. Freed of the concerns and sensual plethora of the everyday, the anchorites are thus at liberty to turn their attention to the identification of and ensuing confrontation with the shortcomings of the flesh and the devil's avatars. The paradigm for this strategy is Jesus's retreat in the desert and his ensuing struggle with Satan (2002a: 99; 2013: 63), but also Anthony of Egypt's confrontations with the many shapes of evil – simulacra in the forms of creatures of temptation and wild animals (2002a: 63; 2013: 29) – have often been depicted. The isolation sharpens the anchorite's receptivity for the work of Providence – the many signs God has left in the world and the divine order they refer to. Like Moses on Mount Sinai and John in the wilderness, the anchorite withdraws from the world to gain insight into the designs of God.

Anachoresis is an individually orientated, ascetic form of living that historically incorporates elements from the Stoic and Cynic traditions. Hence, there is more than a passing resemblance between the philosophical practices and exercises of 'the dog philosopher' Diogenes of Sinope – to take a famous example – and those of the Desert Fathers. Thus, a central point in the *ascesis* of antiquity that also holds for the anchorites is that the ideal is not the *good* individual but the *beautiful* one, as *ascesis* is not merely the expression of an inner essence or purity but is also a social relation. This is illustrated by a passage from the most important source to the wisdom of the Desert Fathers, the *Apophthegmata patrum* (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*), where the ulcerous thigh of Simeon Stylites is described as a sight of spiritual beauty.

Barthes refers to Simeon and the stylites on several occasions (2002a: 42, 96, 133, 167; 2013: 11, 60, 92, 121). Simeon distinguished himself from his desert predecessors by withdrawing in the heart of the *chôra* by living on a pillar situated in the middle of a city. According to the tradition, Simeon spent his first years in a desert retreat, but as the rumor of his sanctity spread and generated an increasing and eventually bothersome number of visitors, he reputedly arrived at the insight that only the anonymity of a major city could provide him with the solitude he needed. His holiness was so manifest, however, that not even a metropolis like Aleppo – at the time the second largest

city in the Roman world – was large enough to disappear from sight. Being unable to flee the world horizontally, he found his refuge at the top of a 50-foot pillar, thereby instigating a long tradition of stylites, with cases of stylitic living being documented in Syria as late as in the 19th century. And as Barthes remarks, there is a striking parallel between Simeon's strategy and that of the present-day Greek monasteries at Meteora, which, perched on a peak, is virtually inaccessible (2002a: 58; 2013: 25).

## ROBINSON CRUSOE

Slightly surprisingly, Barthes emphasizes that *Robinson Crusoe* calls for a "Lukacsian" or "Goldmannian," in other words, a "Marxist" reading (2002a: 46 n. 8; 2013: 15). The Marxist interest in Defoe's novel goes back to Marx's remarks on how little there is of "primitive man" in Crusoe's ways of handling his fate as a castaway (Marx 1962: 90). There is very little of the spontaneous or superstitious in Crusoe's dispositions once his first panic has abated and it is clear to him that he is stranded, Marx notes in *The Capital*, as his initial reaction is to keep track of time and to establish a calendar. Instinctively, he divides the days into workdays and holidays, and the days into work, restitution, and sleep, in a fashion that bears more than a passing likeness to the monastic principle of *regulae* (2002a: 161; 2013: 116). Robinson commences a log-book patiently, noting events, successes, and failures and taking stock not only of his spiritual progress as a penitent but, just as importantly, also of his growing material wealth. Crusoe, Marx concludes, has turned the social realities of capitalist society into a second nature, living a life partitioned between work and leisure, meticulously keeping account of expenditures and revenues. The *homo oeconomicus* central to the notion of the Robinsonade is nothing but a product of culture. The "den" (*le repaire*), Barthes's maquette, is the topological expression of this (2002a: 46; 2013: 11). With the den a territory is established, an inside and an outside, a home and a wilderness, a cultural space and time (2002a: 161; 2013: 116), and hence also schedules, habits, and obsessions (Barthes 2002b: 185).

The incarnation of capitalist sociality, Robinson might be living in involuntary retreat, isolated and insulated, but he is not abandoned by the modern world since he carries it within him. The fate of this English Puritan of German descent is less a consequence of the providential force he often invokes than the expression of what Max Weber, in the wake of Marx, called "Protestant ethics" (1934). Robinson's island is thus populated and administered long before the protagonist himself begins to domesticate animals, map the island systematically, turn cannibals into subjects, and constitute himself symbolically

as sovereign and master of creation. Robinson Crusoe is "a capitalist, colonial administrator, and a slave trader" (2002a: 46; 2013: 11).

Much more than the epic of the rise of mercantile capitalism, Defoe's text is also the tale of an anchorite atoning for choices that made him stray from the path of righteousness. While Crusoe's almanac certainly functions as a ledger, it is also the spiritual journal where the penitent tries to open his heart in order to see and understand the signs and designs of divine providence (Defoe 1994: 121). Textually, *Robinson Crusoe* is a hybrid. The author's three successive prefaces to the first, second, and third editions make it blatantly clear how the book mixes pastiche, fiction, and allegory. It is well-known that its immediate pretext is the British sea captain Woodes Rogers's account of his rescue of the marooned sailor Alexander Selkirk after four years in isolation on an island off the Chilean coast. But as Defoe emphasizes in the second preface, *Robinson Crusoe* is less a historical account than an apologue, that is, a fiction. It is a moral tale, Defoe insists, an allegory of the prodigal son and a parable about the loss of God and the ensuing privation, pain, and, eventually, penitence. The den here should thus be read as the allegoric expression of the transformation of the island from a wilderness into a retreat that is a place for the sinner's atonement for his original sin, namely, his breach with his father's commandment, and his reconciliation with the divine will (ibid: 141).

Thus, Barthes's Robinsonian phantasm is not limited to the den or its echoes of the anchorite retreat or of the motherly womb (and as a libidinally charged psychic space). What eventually moves into the center of Barthes's focus is the symbolic interface between Robinson and the wilderness of the island, *in casu*, its animals. At the core of his analysis resides the question of anthropology, the constitutive distinction of man and animal (2002a: 59; 2013: 26). The affinity between the anchorite and the animal, Barthes notes, antedates Robinson Crusoe and his domestication of his island's wild animals. The first anchorites were liminal figures not merely because they resided close to the city's borders but because their humble ways of living, reduced to the bare necessities, placed them in a semantic field between the civilized and the natural (once again not unlike the dog philosophers, the Cynics). Thus, when Robinson dances with his goats (as did his model, Alexander Selkirk), he negotiates and confirms a particular anthropologic economy of communality; what takes place is the double process of the hero becoming an animal and his animals becoming human. But, as Barthes points out, while Robinson's initial encounter with the island's animals is egalitarian, his increasing mastery of surroundings eventually leads to their domestication and to an anthropological hierarchy (2002a: 60; 2013: 27).

Despite the ideological values at the core of the novel's many and complex allegories – anthropological, mercantile, Christian – Robinson Crusoe remains a non-conformist and a figure of idiorrhythmy. Despite his internalized spatio-

temporal reflexes, he is also a character driven by the need to establish a life founded on his own rhythm. His initial departure was fundamentally a flight from the externally inflicted rhythm of life of the *koinobion*. The spatio-temporal grids that order the castaway's world might well be projections of a second nature and the manifestations of an internalized social order (that of the 'middle station' eulogized by Robinson's father in the novel's opening chapter); they are still the expressions of Robinson's will to live by his own rhythm. With the increasing complexity of the island's society – Robinson the hermit, Robinson the farmer, Robinson the master, Robinson the sovereign – the novel offers a series of scenarios that explore increasingly more complex situations of communal life. Robinson's seclusion might very well be a penitence, but it also provides an exploration and a mapping, a *mathesis*, of the basic forms and challenges of living together. It is also worth noting that the outcome of Robinson's penance is *not* his re-integration into the larger community. Contrary to his fellow members of that particular social format called the middle station, Robinson has experienced its exterior and hence the premises on which it exists. Paradoxically, this sets him apart from the very order he incarnates and enacts, as the insights he eventually gleans from his adventure de facto annul the moral objective of the tale, the prodigal son's return. Significantly, the young Defoe's religious sympathies lay with the Dissenters, a collective term for the British reformed churches that would not accept the dogma of the Anglican Church. Nor does Robinson want to conform upon his return to England. In the continuation of the novel, Robinson once more returns to his island to live in the utopic world that coincides with his phantasm.

## The reveries of a solitary wanderer

In the middle of Paris, Jean-Jacques Rousseau lived alone, a modern-day Simeon Stylites. The aging citizen of the Geneva Republic had withdrawn from the world, not horizontally but rather vertically (that is spiritually), to what he himself refers to as the world of chimeras (*le monde de chimères*). Rousseau does his best to evade the regular interruptions from members of the Parisian society who pester him in order to witness the Diogenes of the Enlightenment, first portrayed as such by Denis Diderot in *Le neveu de Rameau*. A recluse in the middle of multitude, Rousseau turns his gaze away from the world and inward to the kingdom of phantasms. In *The Reveries of a Solitary Wanderer*, his chimeras provide a phantasmatic world infinitely richer and more rewarding than the one outside his door, populated as it is with cherished characters from the world of literature, spanning from his childhood readings to his own fictional writings. To give up the conviviality of the real world to the world of

phantasms is the final renouncement of the social ambitions that had once marked the young Jean-Jacques (Barthes 2002b: 191). "Tout est fini pour moi sur la terre. [...] Tout ce qui m'est extérieur, m'est étranger désormais," Rousseau complains in the introduction to the first reverie (1959: 999).[2]

It is well-known that the young Rousseau saw things differently. His treatise on education and upbringing, *Émile, ou L'éducation* (1762), emphasized the importance of craftsmanship and practical knowledge for any educational program. The young Rousseau's ideals were orientated toward the challenges and demands of life in the material world. The aim of education was to turn children into useful citizens who were not prone to philosophical or literary fancy but who rather worked for the common good, the *koinobion*. There is thus little room for fictional works in the program of the Swiss educational reformer. Like Plato before him, Rousseau wrote diatribes against the written word. However, there is one exception to Rousseau's ban on books, namely, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. This book, Émile is told, contains all that a man needs to know about life in this world.

Rousseau's reading of *Robinson Crusoe* marked a turning point in the reception of the book. In a stroke, Defoe's novel was transformed from religious parable to a piece of educational fiction for young men. Its allegorical wrapping is peeled off along with the protagonist's various adventures before the shipwreck – as a sailor, a slave of the Moors, a Brazilian plantation owner, and so forth. The novel is turned into a tale of the craftsman, the farmer, and the entrepreneur. In the end, Rousseau's fascination reveals the drive behind his island phantasm. No longer Defoe's prison or cleansing purgatory, the island is a paradise where the hero, liberated from the fetters of civilization, bad conscience, and peer pressure, can realize a phantasm of immediate self-presence. Rousseau's Crusoe founds a one-man society where Freud's "His Majesty the Ego" unfolds freely: "J'aurais voulu qu'on m'eut fait de cet azile une prison perpétuelle" (1959: 1041),[3] Rousseau much later muses on his "insular phantasm" (Barthes 2002b: 180).

The opening salvo of *Les rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire* is famous: "Me voici donc seul sur la terre, n'ayant plus de frère, de prochain, d'ami, de société que moi-même" (Rousseau 1959: 995).[4] At the end of his life, Jean-Jacques sees his lifelong desire to withdraw from the society of others realized. The striking frontal position of objective pronoun *me*, the preposition *voici*, and the

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**2** | "All is at an end for me in this world. [...] All that is external to me is from now on foreign to me." The author's translation.

**3** | "I would have liked to have had this asylum made a perpetual prison." The author's translation.

**4** | "Me, here, thus alone on the earth, without any other brother, neighbour, friend, or society than myself." The author's translation.

caesura-like comma, ('Me here thus alone, ...'), all contribute in emphasizing the sentence's pathos and its stress on Rousseau's *sentiment de soi* ('feeling of self'). Like Simeon Stylites before him, he finds his refuge in the center of the world that he wanted to escape, namely, Paris. It is here that he finds his private island through the powers of his preferred company, his *êtres imaginaires* ('his imaginary beings') (ibid: 1081).

Rousseau's phantasm of a physical life removed from all human commerce does not cease to haunt him, even in this late work's most resigned passages. Famous is the account of his happy exile on the island of Saint-Pierre in the Lake Bienne close to Neuchatel, having escaped the angry mob's lapidation in Moitiers. The lack of any acknowledgement from his countrymen was for Rousseau the final confirmation that "hell is other people." However, if brothers, neighbors, and friends fail him, if he cannot be a citizen of Geneva, nature is willing to receive him and provide him with a home. For six weeks Rousseau lives a life of idle ease at Île de Saint-Pierre, where the nature that surrounds him satisfies all his material needs. The life on the island is described as a *far niente*, and the days fill him with absolute bliss, a *nunc stans* that seemingly lasts forever beyond the flux of time and change.

But Saint-Pierre does not provide a permanent location for Rousseau; the realities of the world of his peers catch up with him, and he must leave. Not even nature can offer him a retreat; only in the worlds of his imagination does he find the semblance of a sanctum, and even this is at best an unstable and precarious solution as the world continually forces itself on him. Thus, in the second *rêverie*, on his way home to his apartment in Paris, after having happily forgotten his plights while botanizing in the Bois de Boulogne, still lost to the outer world, Rousseau is run over by a Great Dane trailing a passing horse carriage. He falls, loses conscience, and wakes up, sore and beaten, some hours later, learning to his dismay that the accident has caught the attention of all of Paris, from his next-door neighbor to the chief of police.

An anchorite in a world of phantasms, Rousseau may yet find a retreat that reduces the risks of being exposed to the reality principle: "De toutes les études que j'ai tâché de faire en ma vie au milieu des hommes, il n'y en a guère que je n'eusse faite également seul dans une ile déserte où j'aurois été confiné pour le reste de mes jours" (ibid: 1013) [5]. Beyond the obvious escapism the world of *mimesis* is not merely falseness. *Le monde des chimères* is beyond true and false. Literature is a place where the self might measure itself, confront itself, and elaborate itself ethically, that is, study its relations to others.

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**5** |  "Among all the studies I have undertaken among men throughout my life, there is hardly one I could not just as well have undertaken alone on a deserted island where I could have stayed for the rest of my days." The author's translation.

## THE TEMPTATION OF ST. ANTHONY
## AND THE PHANTASM OF WRITING

In order to avoid civilization and its discontents, Rousseau retreats to the world of *his* literary phantasms. Gustave Flaubert's writings seem to map out the opposite trajectory; whether it is the young Flaubert traveling to Egypt or his long series of driven and tormented protagonists, the creations of literary fancy are the starting points of existence rather than a safe retreat. Over and over again the author's heroes and heroines collide with the prosaic realities of the world, eventually leading to the failure of their life projects. Whether it is Emma Bovary, Frédéric Moreau, or the two failed polyhistorians, Bouvard and Pécuchet, Flaubert's literary creations experience and understand the world through a filter of literary and affective templates; they are all citizens of Rousseau's *monde de chimères*, living their life pursuing literary phantasms. Their destinies, Barthes notes briefly, are variations on how their willingness to invest in literary phantasms prove of limited value in their confrontations with the world (2002a: 196; 2013: 149).

Despite Flaubert's marginal role in *Comment vivre ensemble* (two passing references), his little read opus magnum, *La tentation de saint Antoine*, provides a highly relevant perspective on Barthes's undertaking. According to tradition, Anthony of Egypt was the first of the Desert Fathers to go into the wilderness – according to Palladius around AD 270 (Palladius 1904: C). He is therefore often hailed as the founder of the anchorite practice. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* documents his work as spiritual tutor, and, under the sobriquet ά, he holds the place of honor as the first one in the alphabetically ordered catalogue. Flaubert, however, draws much from Jacques de Voragine's *La légende dorée*, which in detail narrates the saint's confrontations with the Tempter and his simulacra (a famous motive in the iconographic tradition, notably in Hieronymus Bosch's and Pieter Brueghel's paintings).

While Flaubert's novels all turned out to be aesthetically successful accounts of failed lives, his epic prose poem was by most standards a total literary failure. Flaubert himself saw *La tentation de saint Antoine* as his most important undertaking, working on it for 40 years, and publishing four distinctly different versions, the first published in 1845 and the last in 1874. The poem oozes with erudition, every paragraph is filled with historical and theological knowledge. The poem suffers under the author's sheer delight in sharing his knowledge with the reader. In Flaubert's rendering of the mores of Normandy, the richness of detailed knowledge that is effortlessly blended into the realistic background becomes a mere catalogue of antiquarian information. But while it fails eminently both as literature and as a historical account, it provides a privileged point of access to the author's phantasm of writing.

Spending years studying the historical context of the anchorite, Flaubert did his utmost to authentically recreate Anthony's intellectual and spiritual universe. The poem is if anything a fruit of the author's philological zealousness. Michel Foucault suggested that *La tentation de saint Antoine* could be considered the product of a new type of author made possible by the establishment of a new institution, the state library open for public access. What characterizes this particular text is that it is the fruit of the author's lifelong labor in a modern library, and that it hence expresses a specific historical articulation of what Foucault famously calls "the author-function" (Foucault 1994b). Flaubert's prose poem is an example of a new form of aesthetic text production, made possible by the public library. This new constellation of the reader, the writer, the library, and the audience makes possible a new kind of historical phantasm that expresses itself in the intersection between the library and the fabulous, the scholarly and the idiosyncratic. "The imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality in order to deny or to compensate; it grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of quotes and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the in-between of texts. It is a phenomenon of the library" (Foucault 1994a: 297).

For Foucault, *La tentation de saint Antoine* is the first literary production that acknowledges the library as an archive. Flaubert produces "the first literary work whose exclusive domain is that of books"; it's a text originating in a self-conscious relationship not only to the printed word but also to writing itself, an activity that for him "remains indefinitely open" (Foucault 1994a: 298). What fuels the Flaubertian undertaking is his *fantasme de l'écriture* (Barthes 2003: 241), or in his own words, quoted by Barthes in *La préparation du roman*: "Je voudrais faire des livres où il n'y eût qu'à écrire des phrases" ('I would like to write books where there was nothing to do but to write but sentences,' ibid: 241).

A central insight in Flaubert's understanding of his own historically framed identity as a post-romantic author was that neither the solitary lyrical genius nor the bard were viable role models. The poet is no longer the steward of the collective's aesthetic community; rather, his identity is contingent upon a prosaic and discursive reality that sets the limits of his artistic autonomy. The lesson of the public library is that the writer's work can no longer be conceived of as unique; his sentences are always already preceded by other sentences. Literature finds its conditions of possibility in what the library collects. Writing has thus discovered its fundamental relationship to copying – witness Flaubert's two copying heroes, Bouvard and Pécuchet (Barthes 2002b: 34n. 3). The library provides a new and different room, a refuge that permits a different form of anachoresis, one that finds it point of origin in the endless circulation of texts and signs – semiosis – and the phantasms nurtured by the new economy of writing. The reading room becomes the place where the writer now can take part and enjoy the phantasms of literature. The fancies of literature do not

draw their energy from the sleep of reason but from erudition and culture. The chimeras of literature henceforth arise "from the black and white surface of printed signs, from the closed and dusty volume that opens with a flight of forgotten words" (Foucault 1994a: 294-295).

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# ANIMAUX/Animals

*Peter J. Meedom*

> We cannot help but feel that all humanity is on a desert island alone…
> VIRGINIA WOOLF, "ROBINSON CRUSOE"

> Have we ever seen a human culture that is purely human? Isn't every human culture also an animal culture?
> DOMINIQUE LESTEL

## 1.

 "And what am I, and all the other creatures wild and tame, human and brutal, whence are we?" (Defoe 1994 [1719]: 68) With this question, Robinson Crusoe suggests that his own being is inseparable from other beings and that their status is defined by ways of living together, of relating to differences in a distribution of power and role assignments. Being wild or being tame is not something you can become by yourself. Cultural techniques are implied, as is the possibility of cultivation and humanity as reversible processes. In Roland Barthes's seminar notes *How to Live Together* (2013), a few pages are dedicated to the *trait* "Animals," specifically concerning *Robinson Crusoe* – one of the five primary novelistic works in the seminar – in which a human lives alone outside collective life. This essay can be read as a development of Barthes's intimations concerning the importance of animals in *Robinson Crusoe*, a novelistic simulation of the nature of humanity, animality, and civilization. The power of *Robinson Crusoe* resides in the apparent simplification of living reduced to *bare* survival. Do we not witness a man forced to make do with whatever is at hand, relying upon himself, alone?

In *How to Live Together* Barthes was not looking for 'an ideal way to organize power,' rather the figure of 'idiorrhythmy' denotes a 'domestic' fantasy in which an individual rhythm is sought that both belongs to a group flow and disrupts it. Can idiorrhythmy be extended to include human-animal relations and co-

habitation as implied by the trait "Animals"? How can the novelistic space be understood as an installation of the human in the becoming with animals?

The trait "Animals" calls into question modernity's understanding of history, succinctly expressed in the 19th century by Jacob Burckhardt as "the break with nature caused by the awakening of consciousness." Similarly, the human has been conceived as the break with the animal. The category *human* is generally whatever the *animal* is incapable of – a veritable conceptual obsession with the proper of the human, what Barthes calls the "circularity" of "humanity-animality" (Barthes 2013: 30). This circularity, that is, the conceptual bind of human-animal, has later been developed by Giorgio Agamben in *The Open* (2004) and by Jacques Derrida in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008) and his last course, *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2011). The interest in animals in history, aesthetics, and politics cannot be explained with any one cause, rather we should attribute it to a confluence of developments like climate change and the lately proposed Anthropocene – a possible new geological epoch to describe the transformation of humanity from the intentional subject of universal history to the partly unintentional geological subject of planetary history. Even within historiography – based on human actions alone since its modern inception with Giambattista Vico – the advent of human-animal studies has shown how alleged human history is itself increasingly unthinkable without including the horse as the perhaps most decisive weapon of war – when looking very broadly at global history until the 19th century (Illies 1973). Writing history from the point of view of animals would seem an insurmountable task, though not for historians like Éric Baratay (2012), who finds the traces of animal agency in already existing records. In ethology (i.e., the study of animal behavior), prominent voices have long argued that humans and other animals evolve at the interface of nature and culture – provocatively expressed in the works of Vinciane Despret and in the title of Dominique Lestel's *Les origines animales de la culture* (2001).

We became humans because of our relationships with other animals, and we remain humans inseparably tied to other animals for food, companionship, sport, hunting, spectacle, and symbolism, besides the myriad ecological ties extending principally to encompass the planet as the finite space of habitation. The history of human-animal relations, however, cannot limit itself to the specific relations themselves but has to include the structuring principles decisive for the way these relations evolve or should evolve. Thus, the animalization of certain human groups – like the colonial subaltern – and the role of animals as symbols and cultural carriers are as much a part of studying human-animal living together as the concrete forms of co-habitation. More to the point, there is no *concrete form* of living together without the constant negotiating and creating of roles. Humans and other animals appear in social spaces structured by relations of power. When discussing the ethics and

politics of treating non-human animals, the question often revolves around who and what can be killed and eaten. There is a world of difference between being a cow in India and a cow in Argentina, precisely because the cow is just a cow, and thus never just a cow – domestication is the most obvious example of a becoming different together, or a *natureculture*, to use Donna Haraway's term from *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003). Animal idiorrhythmy is not limited to relations and distributions of power but also includes the uses of animal designations shaping these relations and distributions of power.

Barthes proposes a deliberately incomplete concept of idiorrhythmy as an analytical tool to both study literature and to use it to exemplify the formations and habits. Idiorrhythmy does not pose a self-contained subject as prerequisite for analysis. The point is to use literature itself to throw light on the operations of the forms of living together. In other words, literary texts are not reflections or expressions of prior social forms, but rather sites where multiple forms cross and collide. A precondition for considering animal idiorrhythmy is thus not what kind of subjectivity a bee or a bear either has or does not have. The only presupposition needed is disavowing the notion that animals live in a closed world while humans live in an open world mutually enclosed from each other. To believe that we should determine beings before looking at their relationships and entanglements would be an idealistic distortion Barthes seems to suggest. Rather, we begin with the human-animal relationships to better understand the kinds of beings that emerge.

What sets Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1994) apart from the other novels treated in *How to Live Together* is Robinson's years of living as the *only* human – "I am divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from human society" (ibid: 49). As an "anachorite" – another 'trait' in Barthes's lectures – he risks descending into animality, although he manages to sustain himself through different relations with animals. For Barthes, *Robinson Crusoe* contains "all the major types of relation between man and animal" (2013: 27). The island space makes up a distribution of human-animal relations in which he "has to contend with a problem of adaptation analogous to the problem of Living-Together: objects, nature = human beings. Nature: he's obliged to live with other forces, a game of resistance and complicity." (ibid: 15) As we shall see, Defoe's novel contains an interplay of a way of living together where the human is never separated from other animals, although the attainment of humanity necessitates leaving the state of nature. It is worth remembering that humans were given their species designation only sixteen years later with Linnaeus's classification *homo sapiens* in the tenth edition of his *Systema naturae* (1758). As a species, *homo sapiens* is a "taxonomic anomaly" since the species distinction is not given, "but rather an imperative as a species difference" (Agamben 2014: 25). According to Agamben, the imperative for the anthropomorphous animal is to "recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human" (ibid: 27). In

this regard the novel *Robinson Crusoe* can be understood as a tuning in on humanity, as a micro-space for attaining a specific form of power perceived as a preordained divine pattern where civilization and cultivation are reversible processes. Provocatively for those who see the novel as the epitome of modern economic individualism, Robinson's own (re)-becoming human happens as the result of living together with animals.

## 2.

*Robinson Crusoe* marks the increase of the theme of the mastery and cultivation of nature as a prerequisite for social progression in 18th-century culture. The first requirement for the development of civilization was for Man to learn how to control nature, to transform the given in order to become what he himself was created to be. Robinson lacks a place in the world; as the third son, no trade awaits him. Robinson – who writes his own tale – presents himself in a rather confused state at the beginning of the story with his "head [...] filled very early with rambling thoughts" (Defoe 1994: 4). His inclination to go to sea seems insuppressible, bringing about a direct conflict with the plans of the father, what he will later call his *"original sin"* (ibid: 141)

Robinson's arrival on the island marks the return to a state of nature – "I, that was reduced to a meer State of Nature" (ibid: 88) – but also a chance of a new life, a *vita nova*, as Barthes named his own novelistic project. The modern political philosophy of sovereignty characterized by the division of the state of nature from the social contract shines through the pages of *Robinson Crusoe* as a structuring principle for human-animal idiorrhythmy. For Robinson, to strand on the island paradoxically saves him from an anterior state of suicidal rebellion against the father because it allows him to exit the state of nature and become a man, seemingly all by himself.

One can hardly overstate the significance of the 'I' in the novel. 'I' stands as both the first word in the novel *and* in the embedded "Journal": "I, poor miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwrecked, during a dreadful storm, in the offing, came on shore on this dismal unfortunate island, which I called the Island of Despair" (ibid: 52). In Ian Watt's classic study, Robinson stands out as the figure of modern economical individualism. For Watt "the primacy of individual experience" so crucial for the novel's literary import occurs through "[the] total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir" (Watt 1957: 15). Moreover, Robinson's birthday, September 30, coincides with the date of the shipwreck. But does this 'I' come about by Robinson's labor alone?

According to the criticism, all animals in *Robinson Crusoe* – from the lions and leopards in the Africa episode to the wolves and bears of the Pyrenees – act

as stand-ins for a battle between good and evil, God and the Devil: "The beasts subdued by Crusoe are standard biblical symbols of evil, forces which God's elect (lambs) must overcome during their pilgrimage." (Hunter 1966: 198) If we follow Barthes, a different picture emerges. We become aware that *Robinson Crusoe* can be read as a simulation of the "ascendency from animal to man" that "runs in parallel to another symmetrical movement: the domestication of animals" (Barthes 2013: 26). Robinson lives in fear of the ocean, of earthquakes, of wild animals, of cannibals and their potential to strip him of his humanity and his life, what Derrida calls Robinson's "great phantasm" (Derrida 2011: 77). When Robinson is cast ashore, his fear of being *like an animal* induces sheer panic of

being devoured by wild beasts; and that which was particularly afflicting to me was that I had no weapon either to hunt and kill any creature for my sustenance, or to defend myself against any other creature that might desire to kill me for theirs [...] and this threw me into terrible agonies of mind, that for a while I ran about like a madman. (Defoe 1994: 36)

For a human to be possible prey is to be killable and thus like an animal. To protect himself against real or imaginary dangers, Robinson immediately begins to shape his environment – he is after all a founding entrepreneur in the mythology of modernity, as noted by, for instance, Karl Marx and Virginia Woolf.

The novel itself presents a nature guided by providence in which animals and savages are not members. The more Robinson works, the more the divine pattern reveals itself, in turn becoming a source of strength in the dangerous encounters with cannibals and the mutineers. The pastoral quality of the island on which Robinson rules both as sovereign and lone shepherd is due to the lack of dangerous predators – he "found no ravenous beasts, no furious wolves or tigers, to threaten my life" (ibid: 96). Robinson does not arrive entirely without companions, though, as he carried the cats from the ship with him, while the dog swam ashore himself. The dog serves reliably for years, yet his excellent company lacks speech: "I only wanted to have him talk to me, but that would not do. As I observed before, I found pen, ink, and paper, and I husbanded them to the utmost." (ibid: 48) In the Western tradition, language circumscribes the human island uninhabitable by barbarians and nonhuman animals possessing only an innate and natural language. Thus, Robinson is left to his own devices as his own interlocutor: "Then I called a council, that is to say, in my thoughts," (ibid: 40) The capture of a parrot makes possible a lending of human speech, and when the parrot finally speaks, it repeats the name given to him, "Poll," in turn emphasizing the Adamic gesture. Barthes goes on to describe how domestication can create substitutions for humans,

both as language holders and as companions. In this living together, the idiorrhythmy of taming, or rather the "resistance and complicity" of exercising force, is not without response from the animals, as Barthes stresses: "Man is truly born in Robinson Crusoe – with the story of the young goat." (2013: 27)

The story of this goat begins with an accidental laming and conscious starvation before the goat begins to follow Robinson around "like a dog: and as I continually fed it, the creature became so loving, so gentle, and so fond, that it became from that time of my domestics also, and would never leave me afterwards." (Defoe 1994: 82) The securing of foodstuffs and habitation in the recognition of a divine pattern brings about a state of happiness for Robinson (ibid: 82). Yet Robinson is not the only one to change, as the goats change their behavior too: "My goats wanted to be milked too […] and the poor creatures were in great pain and inconvenience for want of it." (ibid: 115) As such, domestication changes all parties in the process. The domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants result in a pastoral economy in which certain animals are resources to be protected: "I considered the keeping up a breed of tame creatures thus at my hand would be a living magazine of flesh, milk, butter, and cheese for me as long as I lived in the place." (ibid: 111) After having secured food and safety for his condition, Robinson seems to have overcome the state of nature, though not by achieving a civic condition; rather, he lives in a paradisiac condition of superfluity without accumulation.

The castaway Crusoe slowly attains sovereign mastery over his own life, enabled by the domestication certain animals. Hunting gives partly way to domestication when Robinson realizes that he cannot shoot animals indefinitely: "This was the first time that I entertained a thought of breeding up some tame creatures, that I might have food when my powder and shot was all spent." (ibid: 56) As Alex Mackintosh argues, care and affection "are not antithetical to Crusoe's self-interest; they are perfectly aligned with it" (2011: 39). The shared affection derives from coercion and domination. It is no contradiction for Robinson to have a living magazine of flesh and affective relationships with the very animals providing this flesh, although a certain sentimental dissonance results from this living together where a domestic companion can become flesh. Consider the extraordinary dining passage that Derrida, too, cites in *The Beast and the Sovereign II* (Derrida 2011: 57-58):

It would have made a Stoick smile to have seen, me and my little Family sit down to Dinner; there was my Majesty the Prince and Lord of the whole Island; I had the Lives of all my Subjects at my absolute Command. I could hang, draw, give Liberty, and take it away, and no Rebels among all my Subjects. Then to see how like a King I din'd too all alone, attended by my servants; *Poll*, as if he had been my Favourite, was the only person permitted to talk to me. My Dog who was now grown very old and crazy, and had found no Species to multiply his Kind upon, sat always at my Right Hand, and two Cats,

one on one Side the Table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a Bit from my Hand, as a Mark of special Favour. But these were not the two Cats which I brought on Shore at first, for they were both of them dead, and had been interr'd near my Habitation by my own Hand; but one of them having multiply'd by I know not what Kind of Creature, these were two which I had preserv'd tame, whereas the rest run wild in the Woods, and became indeed troublesome to me at last; for they would often come into my House, and plunder me too, till at last I was obliged to shoot them, and did kill a great many; at length they left me: With this Attendance, and in this plentiful Manner I liv'd; neither could I be said to want anything but Society, and of that in some time after this I was like to have too much. (Defoe 2001: 137)

When studying this quote more closely we recognize how Robinson's 'I' is in fact conditioned by the presence of animals negated in his self-proclaimed loneliness. In the domestic dining tableau, the unstable categories of being alone and living as family, of companions and subjects, are all but clear. The animals in this passage move between being persons, servants, subjects, and pests. Cats can become thieves or pets depending on their proximity and behavior, either placing them within the domestic confines of Robinson's habitation or animals outside the law, as "infra-nature" (Barthes 2013: 29), that is, as pests to be exterminated. Robinson understands his *vita nova* in a comparative perspective, often resorting to English comparisons to highlight the differences and similarities. The goats take up the same place in the domesticated living together as cattle did in England: "I had my enclosures for my cattle, that is to say my goats." (Defoe 1994: 111) One might note here that Defoe was a staunch supporter of the enclosure movement as witnessed by the *Tour Thro' Great Britain* (1724-1727). When Robinson makes an enclosure for his crops of barley and rice, wild goats and the hare-like creatures immediately set to forage, threatening the production. The dog is then used to enforce the separation of friend and enemy. Later, fowl threaten his crops and are duly punished as "thieves":

I served them as we serve notorious thieves in England–hanged them in chains, for a terror to others. It is impossible to imagine that this should have such an effect as it had, for the fowls would not only not come at the corn, but, in short, they forsook all that part of the island. (Defoe 1994: 85)

On the animal island crows can be criminals and executed to scare the general crow populace. The island, a small world modeling the larger, acts as a controlled environment to distill, or maybe even simulate humanity as the product of a living together. As such, the novel *Robinson Crusoe* expresses profound ambivalences in human-animal living together. The animals allow

for Robinson's humanity in the same movement that he denies this dependence in order to uphold his sovereign humanity.

## 3.

What does it mean to eat? Eating is perhaps the most significant element in the animal idiorrhythmy of *Robinson Crusoe*: "Killing and eating a body, whether animal or human, is a direct expression of power; so too is dictating what others may or may not eat." (Mackintosh 2011: 24) Thinking *Robinson Crusoe* as a novel of animal idiorrhythmy would be incomplete without the specter of the cannibal. The word *cannibal*, of course, came into European languages via Columbus's usage, probably from the Carib people he encountered. Eating greatly preoccupies Robinson, who spends whole days with counterfactual imaginings, especially concerning his own hypothetical lack of tools:

I should have lived, if I had not perished, like a mere savage; that if I had killed a goat or a fowl, by any contrivance, I had no way to flay or open it, or part the flesh from the skin and the bowels, or to cut it up; but must gnaw it with my teeth and pull it with my claws, like a beast. (Defoe 1994: 95)

Here, to be without a tool is to be like an animal. Robinson's fears are greatly heightened when one day on the beach he sees another person's footprint – a declaration of war turning the island into a martial space: "When I came to my castle (for so I think I called it ever after this) [...]" (ibid: 112). The Hobbesian schematics of sovereignty are clearly drawn upon the moment when Robinson fears being discovered by the cannibals traveling intermittently to the island. Freedom only works as long as no one else claims a freedom of equal proportions encroaching upon said freedom. When he later witnesses a cannibalistic feast, Robinson believes seeing the obverse of providential nature:

All my apprehensions were buried in the thoughts of such a pitch of inhuman, hellish brutality, and the horror of the degeneracy of human nature, which, though I had heard of it often, yet I never had so near a view of before; in short, I turned away my face from the horrid spectacle; my stomach grew sick, and I was thus at the point of fainting, when nature discharged the disorder from my stomach. (ibid: 120)

Tellingly, witnessing the ingestion of human meat turns Robinson inside out. After many days of murderous fantasies and obsessive planning, Crusoe finally ventures a Montaigne-like argument: "They think it no more a crime to kill a captive taken in war than we do to kill an ox; or to eat humane flesh than we do to eat mutton." (ibid: 124) The distinctive feature of the cannibal is their lack of

a distinction between humans and other animals as nourishment. The logic of cannibalism disregards the anthropological difference, in turn justifying the colonial project for Robinson: his goal is to change their habits of unnatural appetite for human flesh and supplant it with only non-human animals. Disciplining the appetite is the first step in domesticating the indigenous wild to become proper subjects under Crusoe's governance. He therefore lets Friday know that he will kill him if continues his cannibal ways: "In order to bring Friday off from his horrid way of feeding, and from the relish of a cannibal's stomach, I ought to let him taste other flesh." (ibid: 152) Becoming human means learning to eat the right animals.

With Friday – Robinson's companion, slave, and friend – a human being situated between humanity and animality is introduced into the animal idiorrhythmy of the novel. The instability or dissonance inherent to Robinson's relations with animals is also present in the case of Friday. Despite Friday being "the aptest scholar there ever was" (ibid: 152) and their living together in "happiness," Friday remains forever below. On the one hand, the civilizational process produces order against the chaotic wild, continually drawing the lines between wild and civilized. On the other hand, the civilizational process is anything but friendly, peaceful, and mild. It is hardly a coincidence that Coetzee – one of the contemporary writers to most consequently explore the ethics of human-animal living together – has demonstrated a lifelong engagement with the works of Defoe, most explicitly in *Foe* (1986), where Friday has no tongue.

# 4.

After the hardships and happy years on the island, Robinson and Friday manage to return to Europe. Surprisingly, the mild nature of the island is supplanted by the ferocity of European wild animals – the bear and the wolves – a concluding episode Barthes fails to mention. Indeed, the novel's ending is rarely commented upon despite its rather peculiar animal content. In fact, the only incident involving predatory animals in *Robinson Crusoe* happens on European soil, in the Pyrenees. The two linked scenes are markedly different regarding anthropological superiority. First, the encounter with the bear – "a very nice gentleman" (Defoe 1994: 211) – develops like a histrionic display in which the powerful animal is outsmarted by Friday's antics. The bear only attacks when attacked, as opposed to the wolves, the "ravenous creatures," which Robinson and his party encounter on the road: "The wolves howl in the wood on our left in a frightful manner, and presently after we saw about a hundred coming on directly towards us, all in a body, and most of them in a line, as regularly as an army drawn up by experienced officers." (ibid: 215) The wolves are *wild* in the sense that they appear as a true threatening force, eerily

similar to a human army. Indeed, the battle with the wolves marks the greatest fear in a life rich in dangers: "For my part, I was never so sensible of danger of my life." (ibid: 218) The historic extermination of wolves and bears in Europe was indeed a centuries-long endeavor mired in lore. The institutional remnants still exist, ready for the current return of the wolf. In Robinson's case, his party barely escapes and Robinson goes on to further pursuits, as described in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719).

What is the good telos of human-animal living together? Without opening the extensive dossier of animals in political and ethical thought, I would like to conclude this essay with some remarks concerning human-animal living together in view of Barthes's expressed concern with the loss of wild animals in favor of only domesticated animals and a general lowering of species diversity. For Agamben, the good telos would be the *Shabbat*, understood as the suspension of Man against Animal that echoes Isaiah's vision of the living together of wolf and lamb, "a way in which living beings can sit at the messianic banquet of the righteous without taking on a historical task and without setting the anthropological machine into action" (Agamben 2004: 92). And what would these living beings eat at the messianic banquet, one might ask? How do we decide who should be sitting at the table and whom or what should be served as dinner? It is difficult to imagine a world in which humans do not exercise power over animals. In what regard can animal idiorrhythmy be instructive concerning human-animal living together? In *Zoopolis* the political theorists Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka propose a preliminary threefold division of animals: domesticated, liminal, and wild. Liminal animals – like squirrels and raccoons – are neither domesticated nor living independently of humans. Our cities are teeming with these liminal animals whether we pay attention or not. No animal species can be said to live without human interference, though there are certain groups of animals that should be accorded a respectful distance. To our domesticated animals we owe a special consideration given that they have shaped us, and we them, for the obvious reason that "we domesticate species like dogs and horses precisely because of their ability to interact with us." (Donaldson/Kymlicka: 31) Finally, we might return to Barthes's sentence and consider that we – like Robinson – have to live with the "resistances and complicities" of "other forces" and beings. Yet, unlike Robinson, we do no longer need to pretend that society only consists of humans.

## Acknowledgement

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# ATHOS/Mount Athos

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Six pages long, "Athos" is one of the most voluminous of the 30 traits in Barthes's *How to Live Together*. Being one of the first of the alphabetically ordered traits, "Athos" introduces many important themes on which Barthes elaborates in the following chapters. In the presentation of what Barthes refers to as "my fantasy: idiorrhythmy" in the very first chapter, he claims that "it was in the course of a chance reading" about Mount Athos that he started to reflect and write on a central concept in the lectures, namely, "that the fantasy encountered the word that would set it to work" (2013: 6). The concept "idiorrhythmy," which Barthes initially encountered in Lacarrière's book-length essay *L'été grec*, was "the word which transmuted the fantasy into a field of knowledge" (Barthes 2013: 7). At Athos, some monks were part of cenobitic convents, others lived "according to his own rhythm" in "their own individual cells". With the exception of some common arrangements during the year, these individuals ate their food in these cells and "were permitted to keep any personal items they owned at the times of taking the vows [...] In these peculiar communities, even prayers are optional, with the exception of compline" (ibid: 178 n. 23; Barthes quotes Lacarrière 1976: 40). Barthes characterizes Athos as "the crystallizing word" that set him reading and delving into other texts, especially literary ones (ibid: 10). The process of crystallization Barthes refers to is a key concept in Stendhal's treatise *On Love* (1822), and it is therefore also at play in Barthes's own treatise *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, which was published in 1977, the same year he held the Living Together lectures.

The word *Athos* differs from the other traits, being not a concept but a proper name. The independent monks' republic of Athos is still a highly real place in the actual world. In autumn 1985, five years after Barthes passed away, I found myself knocking on the entrance door in Ouranoupolis, the City of Heaven, in order to enter Athos, a peninsula in the northeastern part of Greece. I did not succeed, however. A prerequisite for entering was a visa from an official office in Thessaloniki, preferably accompanied by an attestation from a Greek Orthodox priest. I had neither. Arguing that I was a Christian of Protestant

conviction did nothing to further my case, nor would it have helped if I had tried to present myself as a Roman Catholic.[1] Thus, one of the things I have in common with Roland Barthes, in addition to being raised as a Protestant, is the plain fact of not have been to Athos: In Barthes's words: "Athos (where I've never been) conjures a mix of images" (2013: 7). Athos was for Barthes a place of fantasy, not of experience. There is little or no evidence to suggest that he even tried to go there or even desired to enter the gates of the real, existent Monks' Republic. In addition to having the special visa mentioned above, you must also belong to the male sex in order to visit Athos. The laws make it clear that only adult men and boys accompanying their fathers are allowed to enter. The only exception to this strictly regulated male-only politics is cats, and that is solely due to practical reasons. One consequence of the fact that all goats in the peninsula are male is, as Barthes notes, that the grass has not completely disappeared. In the homosocial Orthodox Monks' Republic Athos, it is really not an asset, if you really want to enter, to present yourself as homosexual. From the beginning in the 10th century, an absolute prerequisite for living on the Holy Mountain was to share the Orthodox creed as well as to refrain from any form of sexual activity.

For Barthes, Athos is "a very pure fantasy," an idealized and idyllic Mediterranean landscape complete with mountains and terraces where he is able to picture himself in the possession of "two rooms for my own use and two more close by for a few friends + somewhere to come together for synaxe (the library)" (Barthes 2013: 7). He chooses to abstain from imagining anything that disturbs and problematizes this notion: his fantasy "glosses over the difficulties that will come to loom like ghosts," since "we erase, in this case, the dirtiness, the faith" (ibid: 7). The real Mount Athos is thus in Barthes's lectures depicted as an *a-topos* and as a privileged fantasy.

The formal reason why "Athos" is presented as one of the first traits in the lectures is that the letter *a* is the first in the apparently arbitrary order of the alphabet. The inconspicuous and ordinary letter is able to turn the meaning of words and concepts all around. As a prefix, *a* is a negation. *A-topos* is thus the opposite of 'topos,' a non-place. As shown in his texts, Barthes had a great affinity to the sign of *a-*, the prefix of negation both of doxa and of apparent reality. In his lectures, Barthes links both the concepts of *a-topos* and *a-theos* to the proper name of Mount Athos. In the latter case the association is close at hand, as it is really about adding an extra letter, an *e*. To insert extra vocals in concepts was a practice French philosophers were highly skilled in.

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**1** | Compare the entertaining story the Catholic-raised author William Dalrymple gives of his not-all-too-welcome first meeting with the inhabitants of Athos (Dalrymple 1998: 8-10).

The fantasy of an idiorrhythmic life contrasts fantasies of the couple, which for Barthes is a dominant literary theme: "for there are a great many novels about couples but not very many about small groups." (ibid: 10) The fantasy also differs from the "other side of the stage," namely, from life in "macro-groupings, large communes" (ibid: 8) and in the larger strictly regulated, as well as regulating, societies. The latter are absolutely not objects of fantasy's desire. In all their difference, both the couple and the powerful macro-society threaten life in small groups, and they share an opposition and hostility to all forms of idiorrhythmy (ibid: 8).

Individual life lived in a peculiar rhythm commuting between solitary and communal life has (nearly) no place to rest its head upon. It is barely possible to portray such a marginal and distinct way of living. For Barthes, it is obvious that idiorrhythmic life very seldom is depicted in literature: "As far as I can recall, there is no such thing as a novelistic maquette for idiorrhythmy" (ibid: 12). There are however some glimpses to be found of this marginal way of living even in literature: "But almost all novels contain bits and pieces of material pertaining to Living-Together (or Living-Alone)." (ibid: 12-13) In the lectures, Barthes tries to trace and find some of these glimpses.

Traces of idiorrhythmic life are hard to find also outside of literature. This happens to be the case also in the Church and in religious life as well. That is why the prefix *a-* is important even here. The idiorrhythmic way of living in Athos points to *a-* as negation precisely because it in "ethical terms" is "an unclassifiable phenomenon." A possible reason for this could be "because it's always been implicitly linked to a mystical experience. And mysticism is the *atopia* of the Church as society" (ibid: 33). For Barthes, even mysticism is without place in the Church and in theology. This is a theme he elaborates several times in the lectures. In the introduction he proposes that by using a new theory of reading "(a kind of anti-philological reading)" it is possible to read in a way "that dispenses with the signified" – in this case, "reading the Mystics without God or where God is a signifier" (ibid: 12). In other words, God in this way of reading is not "the ultimate signified" in what Barthes refers to as "good theology." This sort of anti-philological reading is a way of "reading exempted from the signified, from all signifieds" (ibid: 12). One example of this anti-way of reading is to try to understand another writer with Protestant roots, namely, Sartre, without using the term 'commitment.' In this case it will be a reading based on "exemption of faith." Barthes underlines that this includes all sorts of faith "in whatever form it presents itself (political faith included, now the substitute for religious faith for the entire intellectual caste" (ibid: 12). He stresses that the effects of this way of reading "are for the moment incalculable, almost intolerable." However, he insists that what is at stake is exactly freedom: "What this would give rise to is a sovereign reading – sovereignly free". In other words, "it is a matter of working at non-repression" (ibid: 12).

To read "without God" or a-theistically thus does not mean to erase the word 'God.' Rather, it is a way of reading that does not consider 'God' or any other concept as "the ultimate signified," as a privileged starting-point as well as the end of the process of reading. This is a draft of an a-theological way of reading that clearly has common traits with forms of anti-metaphysical philosophy and theology that were developed later, for instance by Gianni Vattimo, Richard Kearney, and John D. Caputo, intellectuals from different traditions who all write about a weak god, with or without a capital G (cf. Kearney 2001; Caputo/Vattimo 2007).

Mysticism, as Barthes understands the phenomenon, has an affinity to the a-topical and non-classifiable. The element that fascinates him most in Athos is the more or less constant "fluctuation" in which "the single stable element" seems to be "a negative relationship to power" (Barthes 2013: 35). This sort of implicit criticism of all sorts of power is for Barthes a general aspect for all forms of idiorrhythmy: "The demand for idiorrhythmy is always made in opposition to power." (ibid: 30) A central element in Barthes's fantasy of life in Athos is a relaxed attitude to all forms of rules and regulations. This relaxed attitude also points toward what Barthes characterizes as "the doctrinal marginality of idiorrhythmy" (ibid: 34).

For Barthes an idiorrhythmic way of living is thus closely related to a distanced attitude to all sort of power, to all forms of demands of correct doctrine, and to all rules and regulation. In other words, it is a way of living that permits a high degree of individual freedom. Whether this is an apt understanding of the way this phenomenon has been experienced in real history by the people living in the geographical place called Athos is to be doubted. Barthes for his part describes it as a fantasy, which set him reading about similar phenomena in Western (Church) history, covering classical monastic life as well as Beguines and the solitary friends in Port Royal. The result however, was disappointing: "For example, I learned nearly nothing from the monastic forms of idiorrhythmy, Beguinages, the Solitaries of Port Royal, or small communities." (ibid: 7) In Barthes's view, the Beguines were dominated by a Roman legalism very different from Eastern idiorrhythmy. Their way of living was controlled by a hierarchy and Barthes, interestingly, criticizes them for being more engaged in charity than in mysticism.

In this way the major parts of Western Church life, comprising both the Roman Catholic Church and later Protestant denominations, fall outside Barthes's field of interest. All forms of organized Western monastic life and the plurality of Christian forms of living throughout a long span of history are dismissed with a few critical comments. The Western mystical tradition is barely mentioned. On the other hand, Barthes regards witnesses and texts from the traditions of Eastern Churches as far more interesting.

The way Barthes describes various forms of life in the Eastern Church results, broadly speaking, in a glossy picture. The fantasies of modes of living – which in no way are affected by strict demands of correct doctrine, which stand in a marginal relation to the political power structure, and which above all are characterized by individual freedom – stand in striking contrast to common descriptions of characteristic features of the dominant Eastern Churches. The Russian as well as the Greek Orthodox Churches have been zealous in their fight for what they have regarded as right doctrine, and they also share a history of close relationship to the ruling political power.

After some rather cold years during Communist rule in Russia, the Orthodox Church has restored the warm relationship that it traditionally has enjoyed with the political rulers in Moscow. This uncompromising insistence on correct doctrine and praxis, combined with a close relationship to state power, has led to great challenges in ecumenical work for unity between churches as well for the international dialogue between different religions. In recent years, the dominating Orthodox Churches, in an unholy alliance with Western right-wing Evangelical Fundamentalists, fronted the fight for so-called traditional ways of living together and for traditional gender roles in the worldwide Church. Not surprisingly, topics regarding homosexuality and the rights of sexual minorities have played a central role in the at-times very heated discussions between different confessions and Churches. Looking back, what really is surprising is to register the way Barthes nearly 40 years ago fantasized about the Orthodox Monks' Republic as a sanctuary characterized by safe distance toward both political as well as ecclesiastical power, toward all rules and disciplinary measures regarding deviant ways of living and to the strict demands of right doctrine. The lectures depict nearly all forms of Western monastic life as contrasts to the positive picture Barthes gives of Eastern idiorrhythmy. Barthes does not at all mention that both religion and monastic life play a certain role in the Western literary texts he refers to. Instead, he uses the fact that both Robinson Crusoe and Hans Castorp, the protagonist of Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, suffer from *acedia* as an argument that shows that acedia is not only related to monastic life. In Barthes's words: "We're not monks and yet we're interested in acedy" (Barthes 2013: 22). The portrait of Crusoe in Defoe's novel is nearly unintelligible when overlooking the historical Protestant framework and the references to a modern form of asceticism. On the other hand, Mann's novel contains clear references to Western monastic life. In a conversation between Castorp and Settembrini, the latter refers to the dining hall as the "refectory." Castorp finds this amusing: "There really is some resemblance – I've never been in a monastery, but I can imagine it's much like here. And I can rattle off the litany of the "rule" and observe it quite faithfully" (Mann 1999: 230) Later in the work, Mann gives the impression that Castorp's

life on the mountain was like a monk's: He was in the first time a "novice" and had then afterwards taken "wows" (ibid: 279).

The lectures that comprise the main part of *How to Live Together* are all dated. The first was read January 12, 1977, the last one on May 4 of the same year. Knowing the date of each lecture makes it possible for the reader to catch glimpses of what was in play at the time they were held. The exact dating also offers insight into the historical distance between the *then* of the lectures and the *now* of today's readers, 40 years later. In this way, texts that are dated help us gain insight into what was then as well as what is now, that is, insights into the *then*-ness of the text as well as the *now*-ness of the reader. This makes it possible to grasp what has changed in this period. The 1970s and early 1980s were, as many of us still can give testimony about, a time where the idea and ideal of communal living was important. At the same time, criticism of marriage as an institution was widespread, as was a general mistrust in monogamy. Many of us experienced our political engagement as a form of religion. At the same time, paradoxically, few even among theologians expressed positive views on religion as such. One of the most important theologians in during my theological studies in this period was the Lutheran anti-Nazi martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who was famous for insisting on the importance of å way of interpreting religious phenomena without using signifieds such as 'faith,' 'God,' and especially 'religion.'

Something important has changed in the period from the mid-1970s to our era, 40 years later. We can no longer presuppose that philosophers and intellectuals belong to the left on the political scale, in France even less so than in the Nordic countries. Political engagement, self-evident only a few years ago, has eroded. The popular support for right-wing populist organizations has grown at the expense of the popularity of the classical left. At the same time, serious-looking political journals have lost the battle with glossy magazines dealing with marriage, interior design, and fashion. In the Nordic countries, at least, a great deal of gays and lesbians now perceive the battle for the right to marry in a church in the same way as heterosexuals, namely, as a climax and an end to the fight for equal rights. In our contemporary situation, it is also difficult to set social phenomena such as faith and religion in brackets. Social scientists, philosophers, and literary authors are at present more engaged in what is called the return of religion. And following closely, as a seemingly unavoidable companion to such a return of religion to our contemporary society: mysticism.

At least when it comes to the latter development, regarding religion and mysticism, it is fair to state that Barthes, also in this respect, was in the avant-garde of an important cultural and intellectual process. His lectures, held *before* the fall of the wall separating Eastern and Western Europe, as well as *long before* 9/11 and the far-ranging consequences of that historical event, still characterize

the world as we know it. His lectures, in other words, stem from a situation *before* important philosophers started to reflect in a serious manner on the meaning of religion and mysticism.

The aforementioned Gianni Vattimo set the tone for later investigations and reflections when he and the French philosopher Jacques Derrida coorganized a seminary on "Religion" in Capri in 1994 (Derrida/Vattimo 1998). Another important Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, has in recent years reflected and published extensively on the connection between religion and politics, on what he calls political-theological concepts. Agamben has in several of his texts dealt with monastic and ecclesiastical forms of living. The named philosophers do not stand out in isolation but are part of a larger movement that in also includes philosophers as different as Slavoj Žižek, Simon Critchley, John D. Caputo, Richard Kearney, Alain Badiou, and even Jürgen Habermas. Barthes's reflections on religion and mysticism is in this way a forerunner and a signal pointing toward a wave of different publications by philosophers dealing with these topics as an integral part of an analysis of our contemporary political and cultural situation. Thus, the lectures, read 40 years later, do not seem as provoking and daring as they did in 1977. Whether Barthes himself would have appreciated to be part of such a philosophical mass movement is something we can only speculate about.

The connections between Barthes's reflections and that of the philosophers coming after him are clear. There are, however, important distinctions to be made between the starting point of view of Barthes in comparison to that of philosophers who have been writing on mysticism and religion in recent years. Barthes stresses several times that little, perhaps even nothing, is to be learned from Western monastic and ecclesiastical life patterns. He explicitly links this mistrust of Western theology and praxis to the fifth-century schism between East and West, when the Western Church became a state church under imperial control just at the same time as the monastic way of life abandoned various marginal idiorrhythmic attempts and more complex ways of living together (Barthes 2013: 10). Many important scholarly works that were published after Barthes's lectures, such as Peter Brown's book on early Christian asceticism (1988) and Edward Said's treatise on European Orientalism (1978), document very clearly the problematic side of operating with such clear-cut distinctions between West and East and of systematically rejecting the former and idealizing the latter.

Most of the philosophers writing after Barthes, for instance Derrida and Caputo, disagree with him in the evaluation of Western versions of Christianity. For these philosophers and their followers, Western mystics such as Meister Eckhart are in fact highly interesting. In his book on monastic forms-of-life, Agamben deals with the developments both in the Western and Eastern Churches. Clearly, Agamben does not at all share Barthes's disinterested

attitude toward Western monasticism. The English philosopher Simon Critchley refers extensively to Meister Eckhart and several other mystics in the Western tradition. Interestingly, Critchley in his book *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* takes as his point of departure a phenomenon that Barthes also mentions, namely, the Beguines, in order to show the future potential for a mystical anarchism (Critchley 2012: 103-153). Critchley clearly interprets this movement as well as the efforts of other learned mystics much more positively than Barthes did in the lectures. Barthes, in contrast, viewed the Beguines as bearing the stamp of Roman legalism, characterized by austerity, hierarchy, and control (Barthes 2013: 40).

In the same way as Caputo, Vattimo, and Derrida, Critchley's criticism of metaphysical concepts of God and the investigation into mysticism does not take the defense of individual freedom as its point of departure. Their pleading for the concept of a weak god is instead connected to the weight placed on the importance of good deeds in the contemporary world, with diaconal acts directed toward neighbors as well as acts and deeds aiming at changing the world as we know it through political engagement. Barthes, on the other hand, dismisses the Beguines, who were dominated by women, as a movement that Barthes describes as more "focused on charity (helping others in society) than on mysticism," or as he overbearingly characterizes it with a flavor of traditional male prejudice, "a very domesticated form of idiorrhythmy" (Barthes 2013: 41).

Barthes's lectures on communal and individual forms of living were delivered in a context in which (leftist) politics was experienced almost as a religion by its adherents. At the same time, few intellectuals were concerned with religion, in the traditional meaning of the word. It is exactly the accurate dating of the lectures that prevent them for becoming outdated. The datedness of the lectures make it possible for these texts to help us navigate in a situation highly unlike the one in which Barthes and his contemporaries lived and acted. Of course, it is still possible to wonder why Barthes had a dream and fantasied about living in a place where women were shut out and homosexual acts were taboo, or, in a more fundamental sense, to wonder how it is even possible to reflect extensively on living together without even mentioning erotic desire and sexual acts (except as disturbing sounds from the room next to your own).

It could also be that the lectures can prompt us to ask a more pressing question, namely, what sort of phenomena does our contemporary way of viewing the world make us blind to? Perhaps, we can ask ourselves, the direct way of talking about sexuality, religion, and even mystical experiences that we have incorporated in our vocabulary in the aftermath of the seventies has made it more difficult to observe and recognize the wholly other ways of living that exist and unfold before our very eyes?

Barthes's fantasy about standing in a Mediterranean landscape, looking at the sea at a time when the waters were not full of desperate refugees, and his

dream of meeting good friends whenever and only when it suited him, and his philosophy of living in his own rhythm still remind us of the danger of making the ideals of good life too narrow and tiny. In this way, nearly only in this way, the fantasy of Mount Athos is able to open up for new insights into the art of living together and alone, either in a monastery, a nursing home, or in other homes.

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# AUTARCIE/Autarky

*Arne Melberg*

Autarky: one of the lesser *dossiers* that Roland Barthes collected while working on his examination of how to live together without forgoing one's individuality. The term implies self-sufficiency; in the edition based on the lectures, *Comment vivre ensemble* (2002), in English *How to Live Together* (2013), Barthes imagines a small group, a 'colony,' where the participants are dependent on each other but independent of the rest of the world. He offers two examples: The first is the sanatorium, taken from Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924), a "wholly autarkic milieu" (Barthes 2013: 37) where the world outside disappears and everything concentrates on the interior, the inner life, the *sana*. The second example is Captain Nemo on his submarine *Nautilus* in Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870): the sea provides him with everything he needs, and he does not need and does not want to go ashore and meet anyone else. Nemo is a recluse, the sanatorium is a monastery: living as a hermit and living in a monastery are recurring examples when Barthes is fumbling for a formula for the impossible – living together without living together. The hermit, by definition, does not live together with anyone at all, but Barthes imagines colonies of hermits where everyone lives on his own terms – where one lives in "idiorrhythmic clusters" (Barthes 2013: 6), that is, in your own rhythm but still in tune with the group, like a preliminary to the regulated life in the monastery. The hermit goes too far, of course, when it comes to self-sufficiency and cannot qualify for living together, and neither the sanatorium nor the monastery will give enough space for individuality.

Barthes admits that his file on autarky is incomplete and hopes for others to enrich it. I will now try to do this with some examples from none other than August Strindberg. During his rich, intense, and many-sided life as a writer, he found time to cultivate autarkic fantasies by giving literary form to some efforts in utopian and ideal forms for living together. I will present three of his efforts, as they illustrate and comment the different versions of autarkic and "idiorrhythmic" living-together imagined by Barthes.

*Utopier i verkligheten* (*Utopias in Reality*, 1885) consists of four short stories, written while Strindberg lived with his family in Switzerland. The stories were written directly after *Giftas I (Married I*, 1884). We read *Married* today as rather idyllic stories from married life, but in those days they brought the writer a prosecution for "blasphemy." Strindberg was acquitted, but after the trial he went directly to Switzerland, where he found a refuge from everything he associated with a reactionary Sweden. He was not the only one: in Switzerland Russian "nihilists" and "anarchists" gathered after escaping their oppressors back home. Taking an interest in this setting, Strindberg cultivated mildly "anarchistic" ideas and tested "utopias." The only novel that is actually a utopia is called "Nybyggnad" ("Under Construction"). It deals with the young girl Blanche, who struggles for education, science, profession, love, and equality – quite unusual objectives for a woman (in Strindberg's version of a woman). Strindberg's women, as they are depicted in *Married*, are normally not fully women until they have a husband and child. And it is only later, starting with the second volume of *Married*, that women start spoiling the male projects in the imaginary world of August Strindberg. Blanche is therefore an exception. Furthermore, Strindberg allows her to find a setting that makes it possible for her dreams to come true: a so-called *familistère*.

Strindberg had found such a setting in real life, namely, the *familistère* created by Jean-Baptiste Godin in Guise in the north of France. Godin had been impressed by the utopian *falangstère* imagined by Fourier, and in the 1870s he built a "social palace" meant to accommodate and organize the families that lived and worked for him. The factory fabricated iron stoves; as far as I know it is still possible to find a Godin stove. The inhabitants also did some farming, making up a small and more or less self-supporting society. This *familistère* was actually in use right up to 1968. Strindberg must have read about the place. He later visited it and wrote an enthusiastic article. He was impressed by the autarkic character: Strindberg, at this period, was convinced that traditional self-sufficient farming was the base and future of society. The fact that the traditional family tended to dissolve in the "social palace" – with a collective kitchen and children as a common concern – was all the better. He finished the novel with Blanche finding her place in the *familistère*: she can practice her science and her profession and she can unite with her lover, Émile, in conditions that one could call – after Barthes – 'idiorrhythmic.' Finally, Émile proposes:

– Do you want to live with me or without me!
– With you, Émile, or I cannot live at all.
– Like my wife, free, eating your own bread, that is our utopia in reality.
(Strindberg 1990: 73)

The next example is *Klostret* (*The Monastery*), an autobiographical novel written in 1898 but never published during Strindberg's lifetime. Maybe the reason for this was that Strindberg intimately describes his second marriage to the young Austrian Frida Uhl, although not as wounded and indignant as the story from the first marriage, *En dåres försvarstal* (*Defence of a Madman*, 1893). (Moreover, this latter, furious novel starts with an idyllic part, including an enthusiastic description of a marriage where both husband and wife live their own lives without intruding on each other; Barthes would call it 'idiorrhythmic.') The story about the short marriage with Frida is framed by two versions of a 'monastery,' both aiming at an ideal living together. The first 'monastery' was simply the tavern that Strindberg payed a daily visit to during his period in Berlin 1892, calling it Zum schwarzen Ferkel ('The Black Piglet'); in the novel the tavern is called the Monastery. For a while, the Ferkel was frequented by a happily drinking clique of mainly Nordic writers and artists, such as Edvard Munch. All participants confirm that Strindberg was the central figure in the drinking, singing, and talking.

In the novel, six years later, Strindberg describes the interior of the tavern at length, making it quite different from other evidence we have of the real-life Ferkel. Strindberg describes the tavern – in reality quite plain – as an Oriental hide-out with room after room in an "endless labyrinth." In every corner some kind of cultural activity is said to have been practiced in different but always harmonious constellations, where "new thoughts were born in fellowship, and it was difficult to say who brought them to the world" (Strindberg 1994: 16). "Here was everything except a clock," he adds (ibid.) – Strindberg wants us to understand that in the ideal collectivity of the monastery there is no time. This timeless sense of community culminates in a New Year party, described as a collective orgy.

When Strindberg calls the tavern a "monastery" and invents its labyrinthic interior, I presume he had another monastery in mind. He actually visited a Belgian monastery, and in a letter he described in detail his idea of such a "confession-free monastery for intellectuals," to borrow Strindberg's phrasing from the novel (ibid.106). He has already made plans and rules: "The aim was educating an Übermensch by way of asceticism, meditation, practice of science, literature and art." (ibid: 106) Rather far removed from the tavern-monastery, this imagined monastery is predicted to become the next station for the main character after his leaving the failed marriage.

The third and final example is *Svarta fanor* (*Black Banners*), written in 1904. The novel was not published until 1907: Strindberg had difficulties finding a publisher for this *roman à clef* with characters and settings taken from the cultural life in Sweden and especially Stockholm. This cultural life consists simply of everybody making war against everybody – and as a contrast we have a monastery. Some disappointed men escape the miseries of the city

by gathering in "a kind of monastery on the Sickla-island" (Strindberg 1995: 92). This is an islet that you pass when approaching Stockholm by boat. The monastery is therefore at a moderate distance from Stockholm; the lights from the city could be seen by the "monks" if they looked to the west. This monastery is a "sanctuary for tired men" (ibid: 92) – perhaps Strindberg is remembering here a Norwegian novel from 1891, Arne Garborg's *Trætte mænd* (*Tired Men*). In order for the monastery to become a real sanctuary or "an asylum, if you wish" (ibid: 94), no women are allowed to enter or visit. The monastery consists of several rooms that are tuned to help the tired men to achieve a better mood: "Every room was like a poem, complete in its scope, form, colour." (ibid: 94) The central room is the well-filled library, called the "hunting-ground." It reads like a commentary on what Barthes imagines in the beginning of *How to Live Together*, namely, that the library of the monks on Mount Athos might be the ideal place to gather for those who are free. For their part, Strindberg's "monks" spend their time reading "dialogues" to one another. It comes as no surprise that these dialogues consist of Strindbergian fantasies of the kind he cultivated and collected in *En blå bok* (*A Blue Book*, 1908), addressing such diverse topics as truth, monism, alchemy, migrating birds, Dreyfus (guilty), Wagner (overrated), and so on. In the novel these dialogues, plus glimpses of monastery life, are contrasted with horrible scenes from the decadent cultural life in Stockholm.

Strindberg's utopias of living together in *Utopias in Reality*, *The Monastery*, and *Black Banners* were conceived as contrasts to the repressive forms of living together that he saw around him; with Barthes's term the utopias could be called idiorrhythmic. But Strindberg's examples also show that the autarkic unity – the *familistère*, the monastery in its different versions – has conditions and costs. I am tempted to say that Strindberg's utopias are interesting by being demonstratively defective.

What would life be like in the *familistère*? That is not demonstrated in Strindberg's story "Under Construction" but must be imagined from its extrapolation. If you take the time to find a visual depiction of the *familistère* building in Guise, then your suspicions will be roused. For the building is strikingly in tune with the prisons that Michel Foucault comments on in *Surveiller et punir* (1975): a huge house built as a square around a courtyard, with every room being visible from all the other rooms. The free living-together expected by Blanche in the story presupposes a social supervision reminiscent of surveillance.

The versions of a monastery presented in *The Monastery* and *Black Banners* have a striking quality in common: they renounce the company of women, who are regarded as a threat to the peaceful living-together in the monastery. When the male character in *The Monastery* meets his "little wife" (as she is called), she makes him promise never to "go to the Monastery" again – he has to abandon the utopian living-together among the men at the tavern. When the little wife

is away, he goes there in spite of his promise; then another woman appears, called Laïs, who corrupts the life in the monastery and brings about the "fall" of our character. This is why no women are permitted in the final vision of the monastery.

The same goes for the monastery in *Black Banners*: women are not permitted. Still, the monastery does not stay free from women or from cultural life. From the depraved city come virulent "streams" from women and male city-dwellers, corrupting the free men. Their "dialogues" are therefore full of ressentiment, and we read them like bizarre fancies rather than free thinking.

Strindberg's utopias of living together demonstrate the costs and the limits of the autarkic fantasy. Such limitations also mark the examples given by Roland Barthes in *How to Live Together*, although not as striking as with Strindberg. Still, Barthes does not bother to expand his perspective by going into the political history that offers so many examples from the 20th century, namely, of regimes that sought to create an ideal society by closing the doors to the world outside and becoming self-sufficient. Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, Hoxhaist Albania, and, today, North Korea provide horrifying examples. Barthes concludes his seminar by stating that man is in between "*Never again* and *Later on*," adding that "there's no such thing as the present: it's an impossible tense" (Barthes 2013: 136). Strindberg's autarkic fantasies, his utopias, are situated in a vague "later on" while his characters are doomed to live in the "present" – the very present that Barthes deemed "impossible." What I learn from Strindberg is that it would be wise to stick to the present, even if it is impossible.

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# BANC/School (of fish)

*Dag O. Hessen*

Social organization is not only a topic for sociology but also a core topic within biology, in the contexts of ecology, evolution, and behavior alike. The trade-offs between the individual and the group appears at all hierarchical levels, from cells to individuals, further to groups or tribes, and then to the village or local community up to the state and beyond. At all these levels there is a potential conflict between the lower and higher levels. Still, the group has some benefits relative to solitude: it is simply profitable from the individuals point of view to *belong*. There is more to gain by being inside than outside. This is why multicellular life is more advanced than unicellular life, this is why a person is stronger as a member of a group or tribe than alone, this is why social organisms by and large are more successful. For humans, the basic issue is not really why humans always belong. This is in fact the very core of humanity: we are well equipped with 'social instincts,' hormones that promote empathy and social bonding and that suppress the pure self-interest to the benefit of the group. The issue is rather how large units that can serve as in-groups, how small groups can be nested within larger units, and whether in-groups always imply out-groups and selfishness at the group level (e.g.Wilson and Hessen 2014).

Are groups basically different in animals and humans? Yes, they are, claims Roland Barthes in his lecture notes *Comment vivre ensemble* (2002, in English as *How to Live Together*, 2013), where the concept of "Banc/School [of fish]" is among the 30 topics he addresses. "Here we have," says Barthes (2013: 37), "what appears to be the perfect image of Living-Together, one that would appear to effect the perfectly smooth symbiosis of what are nevertheless separate individual beings." Barthes here refers to a school of fish that is an aggregated number of individuals but likely without an individual recognition. Clearly, this differs from a human society, but Barthes claims that also animal *societies* are substantively different from human societies. The anthill society and human society differ in the fundamental way that insect societies are driven by innate ('instinctual') behavior, while human societies are based on reasoning and

learning, that is, 'culture.' In one sense this is correct of course, except that also insect societies are more flexible and adaptive than previously thought, and thus have some kind of culture, while also a fair amount of human behavioral traits are rooted in our evolutionary past.

Barthes argues that the organization of the insect societies and mammal societies represent independent examples of social organization, which is true. In both cases the major force is the division of labor, where the benefits of staying together exceed individual costs of sacrificing some self-interest. As such, insect societies and mammal societies represent convergent evolution, just as the wing of an insect or bird both have evolved independently for the same function – namely, flying. Still, these animals are genetically completely unrelated and have arrived at the same solution by different evolutionary pathways. The same applies to whales and fish, both with a shape that is adapted for saving energy when moving through water. But is the development among animal and human societies really unrelated in the same manner? Clearly, there is a convergent evolution when we deal with groups as different as ants, termites, bats, meerkats, and humans, which have all independently 'discovered' the blessings of a society. But for chimpanzees and other big apes, perhaps even for all primates, we may assume that there is a common origin of our societies, and in fact oxytocin and vasopressin, the key brain hormones for being social and feeling compassion and empathy with the other, run through the entire vertebrate clade, although with some modifications in structure and effects.

Barthes does however claim that it is not only insect and human societies that differ fundamentally, since the former are automatized by a set of innate, genetic algorithms while human societies are governed by norms and intellect. He goes further and rejects the notion that *any* animal society shares a commonality with human society: "One should never seriously compare traits of animal ethology with traits of human sociology, never infer one order from the other." (Barthes 2013: 37) This is not least because only humans have language.

A basic issue in sociobiology and the later evolutionary psychology, however, has been to demonstrate the commonality behind the evolutionary adaptations in animal and human societies. In 1978, the year after Barthes held the original *Comment vivre ensemble* lectures, the founder of sociobiology, Edward O. Wilson, attracted considerable anger from fellow scholars within the humanities by claiming that "genes hold culture on a leash." More specifically, his argument went on as follows:

The leash is very long, but inevitably values will be constrained in accordance with their effects on the human gene pool. The brain is a product of evolution. Human behavior – like the deepest capacities for emotional responses which drive and guide it – is the

circuitous technique by which human genetic material has been and will be kept intact. Morality has no other demonstrable ultimate function. (Wilson 1978: 167).

No one would disagree, however, that culture as broadly understood plays a major role for human social organization, not least through religious, normative, and legal practices. It is also obvious that Barthes is right that, despite their similarities, we should not make direct parallels between insect and human societies, not least because the most advanced insect societies are organized by a caste system where it is tempting to compare the individuals to cells in a multicellular body. Even the reproduction is outsourced to the queen and a few drones, while the vast majority are sterile workers that genetically speaking should be willing to sacrifice themselves since their own genes can only be passed on by the queen.

If we thus disregard insects and stick to mammals as a point of departure for understanding human social affairs, there are obviously a number of evolutionary common denominators behind the development and maintenance of groups and even societies. We could even start with something as distant as vampire bats to illustrate the differences, which by no means are as absolute as Barthes claims. Despite their unsavory reputation, vampire bats are social animals with a highly developed brain for their size and quite a long life expectancy (Wilkinson 1988). They live in large colonies where a striking form of sociality and cooperation may be observed. After their nocturnal hunt for blood, they spend the daytime side by side in the roof of their cave, some well fed after a successful hunt, others not. Two or three nights without success may be critical, however, and they may then beg their good neighbor for an oral transfusion of blood. The obvious interpretation would here be that those providing aid to others in such a way are close relatives, that is, that they are helping 'their own genes' (kin selection), but this is not the case. The key to this social behavior seems to be their ability to recognize individuals, hence the need for their cognitive abilities also to remember their previous acts and distinguish selfish individuals from cooperative or altruistic ones. Every bat has to make a choice when its neighbor begs for blood: either to help, or to refuse with an immediate selfish gain. The cost of this selfish act will however be a 'bad reputation,' reducing the likelihood of being rewarded with a reciprocal favor when in need. The selfish strategy could thus fatal in the long run, while sacrificing a bit of your surplus and gaining a reputation as a 'good vampire bat' will pay off. This evolutionary 'back-scratching' strategy is evolutionarily straightforward and beneficial, and genes promoting this social trait will increase in the gene pool.

Most animal societies have similar kinds of mutual aid, which from an evolutionary point of view is perfectly rational and familiar also to human groups, where it also serves moral purposes of kindness within groups. This

is even more obvious when we compare with our closest relatives among the primates, where also the trade-offs between selfish and altruistic behavior, between 'them' and 'us,' between in-groups and out-groups, is easily recognizable (cf. De Waal 2013). Thus, for smaller societies where individuals easily recognize each other – typically up to the size of the socalled Dunbar number of 150, referring to how many people any one individual can engage with in a stable social relationship (Dunbar 1992) – this kind of mutualism does in principle not differ between humans and other animal communities. As societies grow more complex, norms, legal rules, and state regulation typically become more important and turn human societies into something particular (see, e.g., Pinker 2011; Diamond 2012; Harari 2014).

Returning to the specific term under consideration here, namely, 'Banc/ School,' there are of course also various ways of organizing large groups of individual animals. As Barthes states, the school per se is loosely aggregated, yet the individuals per se may behave impressively synchronized by use of 'quorum sensing' or 'swarm intelligence.' The ethologist and Nobel Prize laureate Konrad Lorenz (1960) suggests different levels of successively more organized and coherent groups. First, there is the anonymous school, for example a school of herrings, where individuals have gathered at the same place for feeding, mating, or protection from predators. They do not recognize each other as individuals and do not really interact. At the next level, for example colonial birds like terns, individuals do interact, there may be weak hierarchies, and there is a certain mutual aid, for instance by protecting nesting grounds from intruders. At the third level, for example rats, there are strong bonds, and the groups are often family clans where there is a strong internal coherence and defense of territory, and a correspondingly aggressive behavior toward other groups. Some with a Hobbesian perspective would think humans fit well into this category, but according to Lorenz we belong more to the fourth level, where groups have also developed strong bonds of friendship or love that glue the group together and also cancel out much of the potential in-group conflicts and aggression.

Such bonds of affection have always been common in human societies where the point of departure have been the family, clan or other close kins, but over time this have extended also to unrelated individuals in the larger society. We can muster sympathy for complete strangers and also for individuals of other species (pets). Also here, however, the core is social groups based on expectations of mutual benefits ('If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours') – that is, a situation akin to the other primate societies, where such scratching or grooming is literally performed to form alliances. Such strategies may sometimes be just strategies, even Machiavellian ones at that, but often also involve strong emotions for the other. Like the rat gangs, also human social groups frequently have a good inward attitude and coherence, but less so toward

other groups and social structures (this is in accordance with the principle of the inverted refrigerator, generating heat inside but cold outside). The flip-side of group solidarity may thus be group selfishness, and the major challenge is to make nested group structures where one can belong both to the local group and to higher-level societies, nations, and beyond.

Roland Barthes does however also raise another potentially negative attribute of the group – namely, the group conformism where the individual is lobotomized by the 'system,' the social coherence that also drifts the entire society toward an unhealthy conformism. Various trends or fashions, whether clothes, books, music, or even norms or a lack of such, may suddenly escalate and gain popularity to the extent that all within a target group conform to the same fashion. One way of describing such familiar, cultural, and infectious phenomena is the concept of memes, introduced by Richard Dawkins (1976) and conceptually developed by Susan Blackmore (1999). The term represents a cultural parallel to genes and is an amalgamation of the words "gene" and "memory." Thus, cultural conformism is driven more by memes than genes. There is clearly no strict definition of memes as they have no material basis (except that they originate among the neurons), and the concept per se is disputed, but for lack of a better concept they can illustrate the rapid and often invasive dynamics of cultural traits. The point is that all cultures are characterized by the spread of ideas and innovations (which in fact is not unique to humans, as there are many examples of how the use of tools and inventions may rapidly spread also in animal societies). The basic question is which kind of ideas, norms, or fashions take off, and not least why. Clearly, there are many examples of memes that do not at all promote fitness in the biological sense.

In *Culture and the Evolutionary Process*, Boyd and Richerson (1988) describe this kind of cultural aggregation where people mimic others in a cascading manner. This kind of cultural conformism is exactly what Barthes sees as troublesome and is also close to the many examples of social epidemic impacts that Malcolm Gladwell describes in *The Tipping Point* (2000). One could argue, as Barthes does, that this at times acts as a strong constraint of freedom and individuality for members of the group. On the other hand, group affinity is also the very core of identity. Group members do indeed show their state of belonging through all kind of real or metaphoric uniforms (Moffett 2013; Harari 2014). No doubt, however, there are local communities where religious norms or other norms put a heavy toll on individual freedom, as belonging often comes with a price as well. In Norway, the negative side of local conformism is well known as the *Janteloven*, or 'law of Jante,' basically saying that you should not believe that you are *something different* – you are just another ant in the anthill. This has definitely changed since when Barthes reflected about the blessings and the drawbacks of the group, and it is hard to say, at least in Western societies, that this kind of forced conformism is common. Rather, the focus has shifted from

'us' to 'me' with the promotion of 'myself' as a strong, current meme – yet also this could of course be seen as part of a megatrend.

To belong and to be seen are basic needs for humans, coming after the fulfillment of the basic, physical needs in Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow 1943). To belong has been the evolutionary key not only to our cognitive abilities but also our sociality at large, our empathy and morality – but also our almost self-destructive success as a species. The ability for solidarity not only for those within, but also for those outside, as well as for coming generations and other species, is no doubt a major challenge for our society. This implies an 'expanding circle' in Peter Singer's terminology. How altruistic is solidarity really when it comes to 'the others' and the out-groups? The somewhat inconvenient truth is that we have not come very far in expanding the circle, but on the positive side we have become less brutish and more human (Pinker 2011).

Social trust is a key concept for good groups and good societies. This depends not only on social or economic equalities but also on the size of the society. Large, anonymous societies, where the feeling of the collective 'we' is dwindling, reduces the motivations for mutual aid, the responsibility for the common good, and the feeling of belonging. The solution may be either to seek this in smaller subcultures or indeed in loneliness or withdrawal (cf. Putnam 2007). A certain degree of equality also provides a feeling of social justice, a willingness to contribute (by volunteerism or paying taxes), and a feeling of being on board in the same boat. This is in fact the basic recipe for the Nordic model, and the global trend with increasing equalities does indeed challenge these values (cf. Wilkinson and Pickett 2009; Stiglitz 2012; Piketty 2013).

Barthes wrote his text during an era when we were still under way from the village to the global society. The globalized world – with its increasingly skewed distribution of income and welfare, with its massive migrations partly owing to the same inequality (with climate problems on top of that) – challenge the group in fundamentally new ways. Whether or not we are currently facing a reversed trend back to nationalism and tribal societies is hard to tell, though perhaps will we see new ways of belonging, like we already see in the digital and virtual world. Likely, and hopefully, they will not replace the physical ways of belonging, but one conclusion stands firm: humans are social creatures and will always seek their identity within the group.

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# BEGUINAGES/Beguinages

*Thomas Fechner-Smarsly*

## I

Early one Easter Sunday in the late 19th century, an old housekeeper named Barbe begins on the way to the Beguine houses of Bruges in Belgium. She has the day off, and this gives her the opportunity to be with her friends in the little women's community, where she also hopes to be able to spend the last days of her life:

Visiting the Béguinage was one of Barbe's greatest, indeed one of her only joys. Everyone there knew her. She had a number of friends among the beguines and dreamt of going there herself in her old age, when she had accumulated some savings, to take the veil and finish her life like all the other – happy! – women she saw with their faces of old ivory enshrouded in a cornet. (Rodenbach 2012: 71)[1]

Barbe is a literary character in Georges Rodenbach's (1855-1898) decadent novel *Bruges-la-Morte* from 1892. She is a veritable *cœur simple* – a simple soul – and as such acts as a kind of counterpart to the book's protagonist Hugues Viane, a widower who, after the sudden death of his young wife, exchanges a restless life in noisy Paris with a completely retrenched existence in the melancholic city of Bruges. On nightly walks through a quiet city, Viane meets a theater dancer who he thinks resembles his wife. When he establishes a relationship with the doppelgänger, this soon provokes a scandal in the conservative city. Rumors about Viane's shameless behavior also spread among the Beguines, who urge the completely ignorant Barbe to quit the service of her mansion. This puts

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**1** | "C'était une de meilleures, une des seules joies de Barbe d'aller au Béguinage. Tout le monde l'y connaissait. Elle y avait plusieurs amies parmi les béguines, et rêvait pour ses très vieux jours, quand elle aurait amassé quelques économies, d'y venir elle-même prendre le voile et finir sa vie comme tant d'autres – si heureuses! – qu'elle voyait avec une cornette emmaillotant leur tête d'ivoire âgé." (Rodenbach 1977: 57)

Barbe in a predicament, since she could hardly get a similar position that would give her the opportunity to save money, which would in turn mean the entrance fee to the Beguine Community.

Rodenbach's novel presents two ways of life mirrored in the relationship between the protagonist and his housekeeper. The first is the secluded, anchoritic life that Hugues Viane lives quite consciously in an urban environment, a life that the mourning widower has devoted to an almost religious cultivation of lost love. But this opportunity for a life in contemplation of a mystical (or mystified) love and its absence presupposes the housekeeper's quiet but nevertheless constant presence:

Barbe, the old servant, a little sullen, but devoted and meticulous [...] often went to the Béguinage to see her only relation, Sister Rosalie, who was a beguine. From these frequent visits, from these pious habits, she had retained the silence, the gliding step of feet accustomed to the stone flags of a church. [...] He had had no other servant, and Barbe had become indispensable to him, despite her innocent tyranny, her pious, old-maidish ways. (Rodenbach 2012: 28)[2]

In other words, Barbe's religious Beguines correspond well with the protagonist Hugues Viane's need for a life in sorrowful contemplation. Together they form something that could almost be called a *folie à deux* – an idiorrhythmic couple in Roland Barthes's sense of the word.[3]

## II

In Roland Barthes's lectures in *How to Live Together,* Rodenbach's small novel is not mentioned in a single word. But for Barthes, the Beguines are interesting because they neither follow a cenobitic rule nor strive for an anchoritic life.

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**2** | "Barbe, la vieille servante flamande, un peu renfrognée, mais dévouée et soigneuse [...] allait souvent au Béguinage voir son unique parente, la sœur Rosalie, qui était béguine. De ces fréquentations, de ces habitudes pieuses, elle avait gardé le silence, le glissement qu'ont les pas habitués aux dalles d'église. [...] Il n'avait pas eu d'autre servante et celle-ci lui était devenue nécessaire, malgré sa tyrannie innocente, ses manies de vieille fille et de dévote." (Rodenbach 1977: 20)

**3** | See, for example, Barthes's section on "Couplage/Pairing," especially under "strong pairing" with its structure, in *How to Live Together* (Barthes 2013: 71-72), but also about "Domestiques/Servants": "Exemption from all domesticity: the contemplative subject is responsible for meeting his own needs. [...] To dedicate itself to spiritual occupations (to spiritual desire), the community delegates the task of meeting its needs to a functional group of servant monks." (Barthes 2013: 75, 76)

According to Barthes, they introduce an idiorrhythmic space in the Catholic-dominated Western world. He traces the history of the Beguines and their specific form as *continentes*, or chaste women, both rich and poor, who lived together under the same roofs. Although Barthes does not go into detail about this, we may well ask if it is not exactly here that a part of the explosivity lies that repeatedly led to the suspicion of heresy – just in this mix of prosperity and poverty in an urban environment. Barthes concludes that idiorrhythmic groups are often characterized by the same problem: a tension between power and marginality.

According to the German historian Herbert Grundmann, these religious communities of lay women began being founded in 1207 and started appearing as autonomous convents from around 1228 (1976: 205). The origins of the Beguines must be seen in the light of various ideological currents in the Middle Ages, especially layman movements that stood in the sign of penitence. With the apostolic ideals of chastity, poverty, and obedience serving as their moral guidelines, they strived for a Christian life beyond solid conventions. The Beguines were not bound by solemn promises, and the rules of cohabitation did not rule out a later marriage of a virgin or a widow's relegation. But at the same time this was associated with the requirement to leave the society.

The word 'Beguine' appears for the first time in the Rhine region around 1210. Its origin is unclear. To connect the Beguines with the Albigensians is not reasonable. More likely, however, it seems that the outer appearance of their uncolored clothes led to the nickname *beges* ('beige'). A semantic connection with different expressions for beggars (Fr. *bégards*) may also be relevant. Another theory could also explain the organization of their habitats: a little before 1200, a priest from Liège, Lambert de Beghe, gave some land and small houses to single virgins. The so-called beguinages, or beguinage houses, were mostly surrounded by a wall and consisted of a number of houses and a main building, as well as a church and a hospital. The society led a relatively autonomous life, and the women chose a leader from among their own (a so-called *martha* or *Meisterin*). They were not subject to the rules of a convent but had committed themselves to follow *consilia evangelica*, the councils of a life devoted to God: chastity (or virginity), poverty, and obedience.

The Beguine movement spread from Flanders and Brabant (in today's Belgium) across large parts of Western and Southern Europe, where smaller convents were formed, often consisting only of a single house. As a social form, beguinages should be regarded as an urban phenomenon. The reasons were complex. Attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon with a 'women's surplus' in the Middle Ages caused by various violent conflicts, not least the Crusades, that turned many wives into widows. The intensification of urban life resulted in many unmarried women or widows seeking a monastery

where the capacity was soon full, so that women began to unite in independent societies:

In what is today northern France and Belgium, an exceptionally strong influx of women to monasteries begins in the middle of the twelfth century. At first they are picked up by the Premonstratensian Order, but when at the end of the century the Premonstratensians object to accepting so many women, the women flock to the Cistercian Order, which for a few decades had been experiencing an enormous increase in women's convents. In spite of all their resources, however, the Cistercians cannot cope with the influx and, like the Premonstratensians before them, they ultimately reject the further acquisition of new women's monasteries. The women who do not succeed in being admitted into an order are nevertheless united in religious communities, making a living from their hand-work or in exceptional cases also from begging, willing to live in poverty and chastity, and nearly always being dependent on a male monastery under the pastoral care and guidance of monastic leaders or priests. (Grundmann 1976: 204-205)[4]

At the outset, the proportion of women from wealthy and well-educated classes was remarkably high, both from the nobility and merchants. At the same time, in the 13th century there had been a need for a new moral orientation and for alternative forms of life. Only in the second half of the century did the proportion of women from the poor classes who sought into the beguinages also increase.

The Beguines also sought economic autonomy but not for a life turned away from the world. They were diligent in the field of charity and were active in different areas of practice, and especially in textile production they did not always represent a welcomed competition to traditional values.

Already in 1216, the Beguines received the spoken approval of Pope Honorius III, after Jacob de Vitry went in prayer for them (Lexikon für Theologie und

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**4 |** "Im heutigen Nordfrankreich und Belgien setzt Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts ein außerordentlich starker Zudrang der Frauen zu den Klöstern ein; anfänglich nimmt der Prämonstratenserorden sie auf; als am Ende des Jahrhunderts die Prämonstratenser sich gegen die Aufnahme so vieler Frauen sträuben, strömen die Frauen in den Zisterzienserorden, der nun für einige Jahrzehnte einen enormen Zuwachs an Frauenklöstern erfährt, mit allen Mitteln aber den Andrang nicht bewältigen kann und schließlich wie vorher die Prämonstratenser sich der Übernahme neuer Frauenklöster ganz zu erwehren sucht. Die Frauen nun, denen es nicht gelingt, Aufnahme in einen Orden zu finden, schließen sich gleichwohl zu religiös lebenden Gemeinschaften zusammen, leben von ihrer Hände Arbeit, in Ausnahmefällen auch vom Bettel, gewillt zu einem Leben in Armut und Keuschheit, fast stets in Anlehnung an irgendwelche Männerklöster, unter der Seelsorge und Leitung von Ordensleuten oder Priestern." (Grundmann 1976: 204-205) All translations are by the author.

Kirche 1980: 115). Nevertheless, this official support could not prevent the Beguines from being suspected of heresy like so many other communities who were in favor of a life of self-chosen poverty. Such an ideal must have been provocative at a time when wealth began to grow. The attacks and discrimination went so far that monks were banned from talking to Beguines outside the church or without witnesses. A monk who visited a Beguine house could risk being excommunicated. The persecutions meant that the Beguines eventually disappeared, were included in traditional convents, or were absorbed by the Reformation. In the wake of *devotio moderna*, however, Beguine thoughts were revived, with for example the Brussels beguinage housing around 1,000 residents in the 17th century.

But not only the Beguine society as such was considered suspicious. Some of the most significant female mystics of the 13th century were Beguines: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and, above all, Marguerite Porete from Valenciennes in northeastern France.[5] From what we know, Porete was a wandering Beguine and not settled in any society. Her work *Le miroir des simples âmes* (*The Mirror of Simple Souls*, about 1290) led her to be accused of heresy and suspected of being a follower of the individualist movement the Brethren of the Free Spirit (so named after a passage in Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 3:17). This both mystic and pantheistic group sought immediate contact with God. Their teaching was that perfection would already be possible in earthly life, through the union with God. It was, as Norman Cohn writes, "a passionate desire of certain human beings to surpass the condition of humanity and to become God" (1970: 174).

If the Beguine movement as a collective form had a volatile effect through self-imposed poverty, the alleged heresy showed itself in the Beguine Marguerite Porete and in others in the spiritual freedom directed against the authorities. As Kurt Ruh notes, "There is a double danger in the foundation of the lives of the Beguines: the subjective danger of heresy and the objective danger of the Inquisition. It is always present in the writings of Hadewijch and Mechthild. As for Marguerite, the procedural acts testify to it." (Ruh 1984: 240)

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**5** | "Die geistesgeschichtliche Bedeutung dieser Bewegung ist nicht gering. Sie ist [...] der Boden für die deutsche Mystik, nicht nur für die ekstatische Frauenmystik [...], sondern auch für die spekulative Mystik – denn das ist Theologie für religiöse Frauen. Sie bringt die ‚Verdeutschung' der religiösen Literatur; auch die Bibelübersetzung hat anscheinend durch sie einen starken Antrieb erhalten." Grundmann 1976: 221 ("The significance of this movement is not small within the history of ideas. It is [...] the foundation of German mysticism, and not just of the ecstatic female mysticism [...], but also of the speculative mysticism – since it is the theology of religious women. It leads to the 'Germanization' of religious literature; also Bible translations have experienced a strong driving force through it.")

Marguerite Porete was sentenced and burned to death in Paris the last day of May in the year 1310. But what made Marguerite's text *Le miroir* heretic? In short, it formulated a promise: the promise of the possibility of a divine perfection already in mortal life – through the extinction of the soul, or more precisely, through the achieved state where "to want, to will, and to desire have perished" (ibid: 246). The extinction of the soul not only made the fusion with God (in love) possible but also realized a true freedom. This immediately threatened the church as a grace institution and therefore could not be tolerated.[6] As Simon Critchley asks (and answers), "Why was *The Mirror* condemned as heresy? For the simple reason that once the Soul is annihilated, there is nothing to prevent its identity with God." (2012: 130) Compared to the practical everyday life of the early collective society, this striving for the extinction of the soul and the mystic love seems to be far more radical: it is in consequence a displacement from society. Nevertheless, it may be asked whether it is not both aspects of the Beguine life that correspond to the two extremes mentioned by Barthes in *How to Live Together*, where idiorrhythmy was to create a new, communicating form of living that established a third alternative. Or transferred to Barthes's life as an intellectual: between the loneliness of the writer and his participation in the public sphere. But maybe these two extremes were no longer as specific to Barthes's thoughts – maybe there was something underlying this. Perhaps the question no longer applied to life but to death.

## III

Ultimately, however, we are concerned with an even deeper question. It is about how a life with others could possibly succeed: By remaining alone and regularly assigning to a group? By concentrating on a selected partner and interacting with him in different friendships? The fact that Barthes is seeking answers to this question has to do with an idea and a reasoned fear that it can become one of his central questions after the death of his mother (Ortheil 2015: 72-73).

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**6** | "Es ist weit mehr als die ontologische Gleichheit der vernichteten Seele mit dem Göttlichen die in der Gotteseinheit erreichte Freiheit, die die Lebensform der *ames a(d)nientie* bestimmt. So steht sie denn auch in der Inquisitionspraxis ganz und gar im Vordergrund. Die kirchlichen Edikte gegen Begarden und Beginen richteten sich fast ausschließlich gegen diesen Freiheitsbegriff." Ruh 1984: 247 ("Far more than the ontological identification of the annihilated soul with the divine, it is the freedom achieved by the union with God that determines the form of life of the *ames a(d) nienties*. Therefore, it stands firmly in the forefront of the practice of the Inquisition. The ecclesiastical edicts against the Beghards and Beguines are almost exclusively aimed at this concept of freedom.")

In this way the German author Hanns-Josef Ortheil, in his small edition of *Soirées de Paris*, comments upon Barthes's secret or unconscious intentions behind his lectures on how to live together. It seems that it is death that lay like a shadow over the question of living in successful idiorrhythmy. In the prologue of her Barthes biography, the French author and professor of comparative literature Tiphaine Samoyault asks what Barthes really died of. The answer lies – for the reader – in some kind of disillusionment after the beloved mother's death, a depression that neither the intellectual community nor the constant *rendez-vous des amis* in the hospital had the power to overcome.

Even before the fatal accident on February 25, 1980, it was clear that Barthes was no longer thriving, neither in Paris nor in Urt nor on journey. He feels *sans abri véritable*, without any real shelter (Barthes 1995: 1278). Already in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* he had attributed such a basic feeling to the solitary lover:

Like the early mystic, scarcely tolerated by the ecclesiastical society in which he lived, as an amorous subject I neither confront nor contest: quite simply, I have no dialogue: with the instruments of power, of thought, of knowledge, of action, etc.; I am not necessarily 'depoliticized': my deviation consists in not being 'excited.' In return, society subjects me to a strange, public repression: no censure, no prohibition: I am merely suspended *a humanis*, far from human things, by a tacit decree of insignificance: I belong to no repertoire, participate in no asylum. (Barthes 1990: 212-213)

Like Hugues Viane in *Bruges-la-Morte,* who also was "barely tolerated by the church he lived in" and walked through Bruges at night, Roland Barthes did the same in his *Soirées de Paris:* both are grieving flaneurs who stroll until dawn. But while Viane finds a new love object,7 Barthes is aware that he could never find a replacement for his lost mother, as he for example testifies in his *Mourning Diary*. The protagonist in Rodenbach's novel is looking for nothing but accidentally meets a kind of ghost of his late wife. Barthes, on the other hand, apparently plagued by a fundamental loneliness, seems more and more to be looking for a kind of metaphysical consolation. This is confirmed by his reading of Pascal's *Pensées,* something he mentions in *Soirées de Paris* and the *Mourning Diary* for September 1 and 2. The fact that Barthes begins his record of his nightly walks just a few days after a stay in Urt, writing the diary in parallel with the already ongoing *Mourning Diary,* in one way forms the two sides of the extremes of idiorrhythmy: loneliness and the intellectual community (i.e., the

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**7** |  It would have been tempting to compare the fetish-like love of *Bruges-la-Morte* and its Catholic features (Hugues Viane preserves, for example, his wife's hair braid as a relic) with Margarete Porete's spiritual love, where ecstatic fantasies about self-destruction are at the center, but that must remain material for another text.

coenobium).[8] *Soirées de Paris* is mostly about three subjects: food and pleasure (alone or with a friend in different cafés), erotic approaches (at the same place or on the way home), and loneliness and death (he reads Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outres tombe,* and in the dark he listens to women's voices on the radio).

The diary *Soirées de Paris* is permeated by a weariness that more and more becomes a feeling of vanity. Perhaps Barthes acknowledges that he has no asylum. He becomes aware that he no longer wants to participate. Now he is like the old mystics. And the mystics played a not insignificant role in *A Lover's Discourse*, for example in the section about *l'absence* – the absence. But could mysticism really represent a kind of way out for an intellectual like Barthes? Not even resorting to prayer represents any solution, as one of the last records in *Mourning Diary* seems to suggest. On September 1, 1979, Barthes once again visits his mother's grave in Urt: "But once there, I have no idea what to do. Pray? What does that mean? What content? Simply the fugitive sketch of the assumption of a position of interiority. So I leave immediately each time." (2010: 241)

In Georges Rodenbach's novel, the housekeeper Barbe's visit to the Beguines and her participation in the worship is marked out as a central event. The visit takes place in the middle of the book, in the eighth of a total of 15 chapters, at the same time it is the only chapter in which the protagonist Hugues Viane is completely absent. Thus, as a sort of hub at the center of the novel, we have an alternative model to Viane's morally dubious cohabitation with his dead wife's doppelgänger. This is a model characterized by poverty and asceticism instead of lavishness, chastity instead of licentiousness, community instead of selfishness. In the era of decadence, the Beguines' way of life once again becomes a form of heresy.[9]

It is not sure that the lifestyle of the Beguines really could serve as a model for an intellectual like Roland Barthes. At least, asceticism and chastity were certainly not, according to *Soirées de Paris*. To state it plainly, neither the

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**8 |** Like *A Lover's Discourse* and *How to Live Together*, the two diaries could also be read as complementary: the flaneurish diary *Soirées de Paris* ends on September 17, and the *Mourning Diary* two days earlier, September 15. See also "Délibération," one of Barthes's latest essays, published in *Tel Quel* in winter 1979: "Je n'ai jamais tenu de journal – ou plutôt je n'ai jamais su si je devais en tenir un." (Barthes 1995: 1004) ("I have never kept a diary – or rather, I have never known if I should keep one.")

**9 |** Today, this cohabitation model finds new followers. This occurs in the wake of feminism, as a critique of materialism, and as a search for new (or old) models of cohabitation, not old age as an opportunity to avoid poverty and loneliness. See, for example, the Kölner Beginen community (http://www.beginen.de/cms/modules/content/?id=1) and Beginenhof Köln community (http://www.beginen.de/pdf/Flyer_Beginenhof.pdf) in Cologne.

household life represented by Barbe in Rodenbach's novel nor the mysterious love of Margarete Porete (or of Ruysbroek in Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*) could offer any viable way for a mourning intellectual. On the other hand, in the perspective of the Beguines, and in their ideas of life, the idiorrhythmy Barthes dreamed about would have been a phantasmic hallucination.

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# BUREAUCRATIE/Bureaucracy

*Robert Pfaller*

My approach to the issue of bureaucracy is informed by a couple of contemporary political experiences. What we have observed over the last two decades is a growing absence of political decision-making and its replacement by bureaucratic administration – for example in the EU's striking inability to find a political solution to the Greek government-debt crisis. This shift from politics to bureaucracy also entails various consequences for the ethical dimension of life that Barthes was interested in. Health, for example, ceases to be a good that society helps the individual to obtain; instead, under bureaucratic auspices, it becomes a duty the individual owes to society. The same goes for happiness: even happiness is not fun anymore but a duty to society. And things that used to be pleasures until recently turn into disgusting threats: for example, studying at universities, an exciting adventure until the mid-1990s, has become, due to bureaucratization and privatization, a potential nightmare these days. These contemporary concerns are why especially the notion of 'bureaucracy' in Barthes's study attracted my attention.

When considering Barthes's notion of *bureaucratie*, I have started by asking myself a fundamental, Althusserian question: What is the *objet de connaissance* (the object of knowledge, or rather, of cognition) of Barthes's enterprise in his lecture series "Comment vivre ensemble"?

- Is it the *fictitious* forms of social existence of some fictional literary characters, such as for example the inhabitants of the sanatorium in Thomas Mann's novel *Der Zauberberg*?
- Is it the *historical* forms of social existence of specific groups of people, such as anchorites, monks, or Communards?
- Is it the *actual* forms of existence of poets or intellectuals within contemporary society? And, as a consequence, is the interest of this research to investigate the *conditions of production* of literature and theory?
- Or is it a specific *fantasy* or utopia that underlies the act of reading and its pleasure? A moment, when the cozy solitude of the reader maybe mirrors

itself in a fantasy of the solitude of the literary character, for example on a remote island? That is, is the object of this research a specific *effect* of literature?

This multiplicity of meanings and perspectives seemed then to me to correspond perfectly to the title that Barthes has chosen: *Comment vivre ensemble*. This title is actually to be read as what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called a 'sentence-radical' (Wittgenstein 2009, §22), that is, a kind of rudimental sentence that, in its indeterminacy, leaves the most obvious questions unanswered. Thus, Barthes's title lacks in the first place a grammatical subject, so it does not answer the question who lives together here – for example, *them* or *us*? Second, it lacks a modal verb, so it does not tell whether those people in question *should* live together like that, or *could* live together, or whether they actually *do* or *did* live together, or whether they *should not* live together like that, and so forth. In the same sense the title also lacks at its end a sign that would tell us whether it is to be understood as a question or as a description, an advice, a command, a warning, and so on.

In its indeterminacy, the sentence-radical of Barthes's title somehow builds the common denominator of a couple of meanings and thus condenses perhaps even contradictory aspirations, hopes, fears, and the like. In this respect it can be compared to Sigmund Freud's title *A Child Is Being Beaten* (1919), the name of an infantile fantasy that contains, among other things, the sadistic hope that the father might beat one's brother, the masochist-erotic wish to be oneself beaten by the father, and so on.

This seems to explain why Barthes in this research appears so hesitant to introduce any sharply defined concepts (in contrast to how he in earlier works clearly outlined concepts such as 'mythology' and 'zero degree'). Barthes here does not want to rigorously cut an object of investigation off from its ideological misrecognitions and go for a distinct cognition. On the contrary, Barthes seems to purposely use a few very provisory concepts, such as 'idiorrhythmy,' that allow him to look at something and then look back at himself. The 'object' of his research is thus to be understood as a kind of Lukacsian 'subject-object.' He does not only want to look at an object; he also wants, by looking at an object or by pretending to do so, to turn his gaze and look back upon himself. And this applies even to his gaze. The gaze, too, is twofold: objective and subjective. Barthes wants to see both in order to *know* and in order to *dream* and fantasize. He certainly wants to know what things were like in history and perhaps also what his own condition and its possibilities are like. But he also wants to dream about historical or fictitious environments, or to find out what fascinates him when dreaming of those things, or to find out what the dreams of those people were, or to dream about his own condition.

If this is the specific nature of Barthes's object, such as it is determined by concepts like 'idiorrhythmy,' then we can start to understand his notion of bureaucracy. Obviously, bureaucracy in Barthes's sense is to be understood as a danger – a danger to idiorrhythmy. Following this track, we not only gain a proper understanding of bureaucracy in the Barthesian sense, we can even gain a more refined understanding of idiorrhythmy itself. For we can ask ourselves, what does bureaucracy, as a danger, tell us about idiorrhythmy? Or put another way, how do we have to understand bureaucracy in order to get to know more about idiorrhythmy?

In order to answer this, I will try to make use of one of Barthes's methodical inventions. For Barthes, literature does not only function as an object of investigation; it is for him always at the same time also an instructive theoretical instrument by which he proceeds. In this sense, I will rely here on two instruments of this kind as my theoretical tools: first, Marco Ferreri's 1973 movie *La grande bouffe*, and second, Blaise Pascal's famous remarks about mankind's inability to remain quiet in a room.

Two plausible misunderstandings should be avoided, however. First, 'bureaucracy' does not designate *the political problem of a political structuring of private life*, that is, a structuring via delegation and building of institutions – such as Barthes's own problematic (and theoretically humanist) notions of 'alienation' and 'reification' appear to suggest. And second, 'bureaucracy' does not designate *the political problem of separation between private and political life* (for example, in the Sennettian sense of the 'fall of public man,' etc.). Instead, the problem indicated by the notion of 'bureaucracy' is to be understood in a more fundamental, philosophical sense. The question is not what bureaucracy does to private life or to its separation from public life, but rather what bureaucracy does to life as such. This philosophical problem refers to the *profound ambiguity of life itself*, maybe analogous to the fundamental ambivalence of an enclosure – in Barthes's example, the anchorite desert – as either a "joyous space of solitude" or a "demonic, sterile region" (2013: 63). If we follow this track, then we will eventually rediscover the specific problem of bureaucracy, and precisely in the political sense as it poses itself today, under neoliberal, postmodern conditions.

## THE UTOPIAN COMMUNITY OF WITHDRAWAL IN *LA GRANDE BOUFFE*

Marco Ferreri's movie shows a community that would perfectly fit into the pattern examined in Barthes's seminar. Four men, eponymously played by Marcello Mastroianni, Philippe Noiret, Michel Piccoli, and Ugo Tognazzi, withdraw into a beautiful villa that, although situated in the middle of Paris, seems no easy task to leave. As we slowly learn, the men have decided that they will eat copious amounts of delicious food until they die. As I argue elsewhere

(Pfaller 2011: 215), if ever a modern movie captures the spirit of de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, that movie is *La grande bouffe* (even more so than Pasolini's actual adaptation from 1975, *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*). The key features it shares with de Sade's novel are striking: the protagonists are four men; the location is a remote place separated from the outer world by masses of snow; there are young ladies subjected to the four men; a more mature woman, treated with considerable respect, is endowed with a special function; there are children, though they are not tortured (which thus proves to be of no decisive importance for the Sadean philosophy); and, most importantly, there is a preestablished rule or agreement between the gentlemen, namely, that they have decided to die for their pleasure.

This latter point is precisely why *La grande bouffe* chimes so well with the crux of de Sade's philosophy. This has been pointed out by Jacques Lacan in his study "Kant with Sade" (1977a): the Sadean libertines are ready to face the threat of death. Kant, on the contrary, had claimed that sensual pleasure can never amount to such a strength – as he showed through the so-called gallows case – and that only moral duty was able to make one ready to sacrifice one's life.[1] Yet, as Lacan emphasizes, de Sade demonstrated precisely the opposite: his heroes are ready to die for their attachment to good life. For them, pleasure weighs more than even life itself; thus, they would pass Kant's hypothetical gallows test.

The same is shown in *La grande bouffe*: the heroes die for their delicious food. But in order to understand this properly, we have to take into account a fact that Sigmund Freud has pointed out with regard to the dream: Whatever the dream represents, it is represented in the grammatical form of the indicative. Whatever in the dream thought is imagined as a possibility or as a wish, as a 'may it be,' it is represented in the dream as an 'it is happening.' Now the same goes, as I want to claim, for films. What the movie claims *could happen* has to be depicted as actually *happening*. This is the reason Ferreri's heroes have to die: it is because the movie tries to show us that they are *ready* to die. And that is also one of the reasons this movie, despite the deaths of all its male heroes, is not at all a tragedy.

If we compare *La grande bouffe* to the examples given by Barthes – Thomas Mann's novel *Der Zauberberg* on one hand, and D. A. F. de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* on the other – we can see that Ferreri's movie condenses the two models

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**1** |  Kant's ethical thought experiment of the gallows case is as follows: "Suppose that someone affirms of his inclination for sensual pleasure that he cannot possibly resist temptation to indulgence. If a gallows were erected at the place where he is tempted on which he should be hanged immediately after satiating his passions, would he not be able to control his inclination? We need not long doubt what would be his answer." (Kant [1788]: 140)

that Barthes has distinguished. If, according to Barthes, death is a secret telos, or aim, for the Zauberberg community but not for the four libertines in de Sade's novel, this distinction vanishes in *La grande bouffe*. Ferreri's heroes are libertines, yet they have the same more or less secret goal as the Zauberberg patients.

This leads to a second problem to which Ferreri's movie may provide an answer, namely, one of the major, unanswered questions that Barthes's study confronts us with: *Is there sex in an 'idiorrhythmic' community, or not?* Why can Barthes put such different groups as anchorites, privileged patients, libertines, and communist Communards together in one category? What do they have in common? Moreover, how can the liberation *from* sex and the liberation *of* sex be regarded as more or less the same endeavor? What is the philosophical feature shared by both the *metaphysicians* who withdraw from society in the name of religious transcendence, and the *materialists* who withdraw precisely because, for them, this world here is the only real one? What is the common point between the metaphysicians' making their life resemble a life after death, and the materialist libertines' attempt to make their life not resemble death at all – or as Bertolt Brecht put it, to "fear bad life more than death" (1984: 653)? In short, is idiorrhythmy in Barthes's sense properly a-sexual or rather pro-sexual?

Here, *La grande bouffe* shows an interesting solution. The four protagonists explicitly discuss the question of whether, in their ideal community with its lofty goals, sexuality is allowed or not. Marcello suggests that some ladies he knows – prostitutes, in fact – should be invited, and the other men agree. Three ladies arrive, and in the beginning they enjoy participating, but after a while they get sick from all the abundant eating and leave. Meanwhile, a replacement has occurred: a group of schoolchildren and their teacher visit the house's garden, and later on the teacher, Andréa (Andréa Ferréol), accepts the men's invitation for dinner. She now becomes the Woman in the community. Interestingly enough, it is allowed for one of the protagonists (Philippe) to marry this woman, yet this does not imply sexual exclusivity. Andréa should now be the woman for all of them – the utopian principle of 'sexual communism' suggested by most of the ancient philosophical schools (see Hossenfelder 1996: 23, 157).

If we read the movie through the lens of Barthes's considerations, we could maybe say that the *bouffe* community undergoes a regression from the figure of the wife to that of the mother,[2] a mother who oversees the dying of the four 'boys' and feeds them to their end. This is probably why the liberation *from* sex and the liberation *of* sex make no difference in Barthes's eyes. What both the

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**2** | Cf. Barthes's laconic verdict that getting married is "to pass from your mother's food to your wife's (whose food, if it goes down well, will become that of a second mother)" (2013: 110).

'sex-negative' and the 'sex-positive' attempts have in common is much more important: both are withdrawals from the social institution of the family.

Herein lies the shared radicalism of these various kinds of anti-social withdrawal: they are all *anti-family institutions*. As Slavoj Žižek has emphasized recently (2013), when Jesus teaches that only those can become his followers who hate their father and mother, when Michel de Montaigne claims that friendship is an intimate enemy of the family, it highlights that the social institutions of withdrawal have such a polemic side. These collectives, whatever their internal principles may be, are to be understood as attempts to break with contemporary societies' fundamental principle, the family (see Engels 1973).

It is here that, with the help of *La grande bouffe*, the fundamental ambiguity of life becomes visible, an ambiguity that the collectives of withdrawal attempt to answer in their characteristic way. If the anchorites or Communards form a group in opposition to the institution of family, then this new institution renounces all the principles constitutive for the family: the communes renounce the Oedipus complex – in all its dimensions. In the first place, they renounce the Oedipal rendering of *sexual difference*: they replace the Oedipal order of opposition 'male/female' with the pre-Oedipal opposition 'mother/child.' This may be one of the reasons why the Oedipal principle of monogamy gets equally suspended in *La grande bouffe*: a mother can be more easily shared by four brothers than a wife by four husbands. Under a psychoanalytic perspective, the four men and their female companion Andréa appear to form a kind of inverted 'primordial herd': a herd of brothers, with a kind of 'primordial mother' in their middle. (This pre-Oedipal, 'maternal' dimension may also explain one of the key features of Barthes's notion of the 'proxemic' space: the bed or the bedsheet can be experienced by its inhabitants as a kind of mother.)

Second, the Barthesian communes also replace *genealogical sequence*:[3] individuals do not take a position in the sequence of generations, and sexual relationships can now extend to the previous generation ('mother'). Nor does there seem to be any need to care for a future generation – the community can die out, as in *La grande bouffe*. This leads to a third, more general anti-Oedipal consequence: in the collectives of withdrawal, both economic and biological reproduction are largely suspended. In radical cases, there seems to be no reproduction, or at least no accumulation of wealth. Barthes explains this nicely with regard to the prohibition of female animals at the Athos monastery: animals should not be proliferated through biological reproduction, because this would lead to the monks' trading (2013: 76). This was why, during the short period of Enlightenment in the Austro-Hungarian Empire under Emperor

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**3** | According to Grunberger and Dessuant, both of these features are characteristic of the narcissistic, anti-Oedipal position: renouncing sexual difference and genealogical sequence (see Grunberger/Dessuant 2000: 73-80)

Joseph II, many of the monasteries were abandoned, with only economically productive monasteries being allowed to persist.

As *La grande bouffe* demonstrates with the greatest possible clarity, the principle in such collectives seems to be to waste yourself, your time, and your possessions. If there ever are any new members at such collectives, they are obviously not gained through biological reproduction (it is in this radical sense, it seems, that Barthes's formula of "family without familialism" has to be understood).[4] This finally explains why sex, in Barthes's theory, plays a minor role: it is because if there is sex, it is sex without reproduction, that is, it is anti-Oedipal sex.

Withdrawing from the Oedipal principle of genealogical sequence implies withdrawing from time and from the obligations that time imposes upon human beings. Wasting one's possessions, one's life, as if one could live like that forever: this amounts, finally, to renouncing the *reality principle*, and also renouncing the superego that watches over it. Bureaucracy would, under this perspective, appear as a safeguard of the reality principle, as superego's social embodiment, as a limit to the generosity of endless wasting. As an Oedipal intruder into the idiorrhythmic but ultimately deadly homoeostasis of the pure pleasure principle, bureaucracy could be understood here as a safeguard even of life itself.

The anchorites, as Barthes points out, extinguish all interest in, desire for, and curiosity about the outer world. Thus, they cut themselves off from outer reality by avoiding all *melodramatic patterns* that the latter brings with it: the melodramatic patterns, for example, of discovery, development, love life, and so on, trajectories that always involve a promising beginning, then a climax, then a decline. Avoiding all this, the anti-Oedipal communities of withdrawal can thus be regarded as attempts at a total *disavowal of death*: wasting life as if it would never end, and *not going anywhere* (a principle that appears to find its mirror in Barthes's own somewhat obscenely aimless investigations in *Comment vivre ensemble*). But not going anywhere is a typical feature of life's opposite. Obviously, disavowing death comes at the price of making life totally resemble death.

Yet it is precisely here that we encounter the profound ambiguity of life, since the opposite can be argued just as well: at least, one could say, what the anchorites and Communards in fact do is not to pretend that there were meaning to life, a meaningful melodramatic path. They waste life, because life, just like love, only exists when it gets wasted. We may understand here Barthes's sympathy for the anti-familial model: for if there is one intimate

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**4** |  See Barthes (1994: "Preface" [n.p.]). Cf. Barthes (2013: 49): "the guarantee of reproduction -> the family in the patriarchal sense."

enemy to Barthes's philosophy, it is the notion of meaning, as can perhaps be seen most clearly in his short text for Michelangelo Antonioni (Barthes 1984).

The meaninglessness of life is precisely what the Oedipal model of the family disavows. Sexual reproduction can be seen here as an attempt to cover up the lack of meaning, to displace the failure to create any meaning, to pass this failure on to the next generation. Is it not often the case that one can observe how people who do not really know what to do with their life, and where to go next, decide to have children? Thus, they charge the next generation with an unbearable burden that tends to be passed on again. By disavowing the meaninglessness of life, the Oedipal principle of the family in its turn disavows death. By accumulating resources for the next generations and passing them on, families act as if there were actually something that could escape death. Yet precisely by not wasting life, they kill life and prevent it from escaping death. They deprive life even of the short time that life may have for remaining untouched by death. Today this dialectic can probably be seen most clearly in the economic failure of 'austerity measures': we must not charge future generations with huge debts, it is argued, yet avoiding debts ruins whole economies today.

It is here, at the point of the fundamental ambiguity of life, that we can observe the other, perverse side of bureaucracy, too. Bureaucracy does not allow life to pass by unrecorded. Thus, it disavows the meaninglessness of life by attempting to give a meaning to it, or, more precisely, by acting as if recording would give a meaning to life. Yet, as Friedrich Nietzsche (1903) has pointed out, all recording is at the cost of some life, and abundant recording can easily amount to killing life. Here bureaucracy reveals itself to be a disavowal of death: since it acts as if life were not scarce, as if recording would not happen at the cost of life, and as if killing life through recording could never happen.

This is precisely the point where the notion of bureaucracy takes on its contemporary, neoliberal, postmodern significance. Today bureaucracy acts as a disavowal of death, since it constantly kills life in the name of life – precisely by replacing it with records, with signs of life. In a sense that would have interested the political semiologist Barthes, we can describe neoliberal bureaucracy as a mechanism that is deeply nominalistic: it constantly replaces things with their names, and realities with their records. For example, bureaucracy replaces real scientific research with project applications and research reports. It replaces real thoughts with numbers or credits of publications. It replaces productive forces, for example teachers and researchers at universities, with forces of registration, with controllers and agents of monitoring and evaluation. And it replaces realities with signs: when, for example, during the Bologna Process reforms, bureaucracy introduces the term 'lifelong learning,' this means that students will be kicked out from university after six semesters, if not earlier (through drop-out exams). When bureaucracy insists on 'employability,' this

means in fact that it provides certificates for employability – but no actual jobs. When bureaucracy speaks of 'transparency,' this means that matters are most opaquely hidden in masses of papers. When bureaucracy speaks of 'creativity' or 'individuality' that has to be enhanced by university studies, this means that actually these studies are going to be subject to strict regulations that suffocate every spark of creativity or individuality.

When it comes to health issues, bureaucracy is maybe at its best. At this seemingly 'unpolitical' field, full of 'evidence' that appears beyond discussion, bureaucracy can prosper the most and carry out initiatives before democratic politics can do so. With regard to health, bureaucracy assumes that life has to be preserved at any cost – ultimately even at the cost of life itself. Measures undertaken in the name of health make us so healthy today that we get ill from the healthy behavior, for example in so-called orthorexia, a new illness that arises from only eating healthy food.

As can be easily shown, people do not get healthy from bureaucratic figures, warnings, and prohibitions, but only from political measures ensuring, for example, that people do not get deprived of resources like clean water. In the first place, a bureaucratic politics of warnings and prohibitions functions as a 'nominalist' cover-up for the lack of real politics of ensuring people's access to fundamental health resources. And second, people can only be healthy when they themselves can decide how healthy they want to be. It is definitely healthier for them to have an idea of what life is worth living for, and pursuing such a life (even if this is likely connected with unhealthy substances and practices), than to obey health measures that, in the final analysis, tend to go over their corpses. A sovereign attitude toward health is better for people than an absolute subjection to health.[5] As Georges Bataille would have put it, people need health in order to live, but they do not live for health. And if they tried, they would kill life.

By treating matters like health as if they did not contain any dimension of sovereignty and decision-making, bureaucracy imposes itself and replaces politics. This is the specific neoliberal version of bureaucracy that we are confronted with today: bureaucracy in its strict sense is not just administration (or institution-building, law-making, etc.), it is acting as if there were nothing

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**5** | I have argued this in detail concerning the 'rituals of interruption' such as having a coffee break or a cigarette break (see Pfaller 2013). Significantly, these rituals are always centered around a more or less 'unhealthy' substance. Yet prohibiting these substances and thus depriving people of their ability for interrupting creates a number of new diseases, such as attention-deficit disorder, or addictions such as hyperactivity, workaholism, hyperconnectivity (the need to be permanently online), sleeplessness (which can also be understood as an addiction to being awake), and even an addiction to self-help groups, etc.

that could not be subject to administration, as if decision-making were a dispensable, old-fashioned practice. In this precise sense, since it seduces us to forget about decision-making and, as a consequence, about life itself, bureaucracy has become a force of death.

The profound ambiguity of life that we have encountered in this antinomy can therefore be summed up as follows: either we find people who carelessly do not bother about reality, that is, about life, and waste everything, or we have people who only care about life, do not allow anything to get wasted, and thus kill life. Bureaucracy as a hindrance to idiorrhythmy in Barthes's sense can obviously be understood both ways: either as a hindrance to total waste, or as the total waste itself, which consists in not allowing for any waste.

## The impossible calm according to Blaise Pascal

This antinomy leads me to my second guiding source here, Blaise Pascal's thoughts about diversion. Here, Pascal formulates the same antinomy. And his formulation may allow us to find a solution provided by ancient philosophy – a solution that reappears in Barthes's text, yet in a symptomatically disguised form.

When looking upon mankind's frequent misery, Pascal asks his beautiful question: *Why are people not able to simply stay quietly in their own room?* (1995: 37) Yet, Pascal answers himself, if they did so, they would have to face their miserable existence, their mortality, the meaninglessness of life. This is what drives them out from their chambers, lets them go for dangerous adventures, whether in love or in battle, where they may die. Thus, when trying to escape death they seek death. Pascal, just as later Sigmund Freud, constructs here a metapsychology composed of two conflicting drives:

They have a secret instinct driving them to seek external diversion and occupation, and this is the result of their constant sense of wretchedness.
They have another secret instinct, left over from the greatness of our original nature, telling them that the only true happiness lies in rest and not in excitement. (ibid: 40)

Translated into Freud's terms, this would mean that people either go directly for rest, which would imply following the death drive, and, accordingly, separating from life and from the erotic drive that seduces them to it, or they follow the erotic drive, thus deflecting the death drive from its direct goal (death), letting it mingle with the erotic drive and make a detour around some desired object (aim), just in order to get again back to death. In this sense, Jacques Lacan has argued that every drive is ultimately a death drive. This is, why according to Pascal, human beings can never be happy. For either they encounter painful

difficulties in their endeavors, or, when they succeed in overcoming them, it's even worse: "We seek rest by struggling against certain obstacles, and once they are overcome, rest proves intolerable because of the boredom it produces." (ibid: 40) So, if human life appears to be caught up in this antinomy, if difficulties make one just as unhappy as their overcoming, and if staying just as well as running reveals itself as an expression of a death drive, what can then be done? For this situation, some philosophers have provided a specific trick that consists in first running and then stopping. The name for this trick is 'epoché' – the ancient term given to this two-fold movement by the Pyrrhonian Skeptics (see Hossenfelder 1996: 290) and recalled by Barthes (2013: 46, 73). An example for this double movement is given in the beautiful Pyrrhonian advice to the philosophers, when encountering seemingly irresolvable problems, to take the painter Apelles as their model. Apelles had once tried to paint a galloping horse, with the characteristic foam before its mouth. He succeeded well in the horse, but failed when it came to the foam. Trying again and again, he became desperate and finally threw his sponge on the canvas and rushed in anger to leave the studio. Yet at the door he stopped, looked back, and discovered that he had now succeeded in painting the foam. Thus, Apelles had performed a double movement: first, he pursued his goal but could not reach it, and then he stopped in order to recognize that he had already reached it. At the moment of stopping, of the epoché, it became clear that precisely what had appeared as the irresolvable problem was in itself the solution. The epoché allowed for this change of perspective. Bureaucracy, on the contrary, would mean here always to stick to the first chosen approach and perspective – which means, respective to the antinomy epitomized above, either not allowing for a waste of life, or (by not allowing for any waste) wasting life totally. But it would not allow for first following one of these approaches and then arriving at a reflexive distance to it. 'Bureaucracy' reveals itself here to be another name for the exclusion of epoché, and the inability to achieve a reflexive distance.

Arriving at the epoché is thus a dialectical procedure. It involves a shift of perspective from what first appears as an irresolvable failure.[6] Now this shift of

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**6** |  For the dialectics involved in this shift of perspective, see Slavoj Žižek's brilliant comment on the Soviet joke about Rabinovitch, "a Jew who wants to emigrate. The bureaucrat at the emigration office asks him why; Rabinovitch answers: 'There are two reasons why. The first is that I'm afraid that in the Soviet Union the Communists will lose power, there will be a counter-revolution and the new power will put all the blame for the Communist crimes on us, Jews – there will again be anti-Jewish pogroms. . .' 'But,' interrupts the bureaucrat, 'this is pure nonsense, nothing can change in the Soviet Union, the power of the Communists will last forever!' 'Well,' responds Rabinovitch calmly, 'that's my second reason.' The logic is the same here as in the Hegelian proposition 'the spirit is a bone': the very failure of the first reading gives us the true meaning."

perspective is what requires the presence of others. This may be one solution to the fundamental problem in Barthes's study: *Why, if idiorrhythmy is so difficult to achieve, live together at all?* We may here rely on another example of an epoché. Take Lacan's (1977b) famous logical paradox about the three prisoners who, in order to get free, have to guess the color of a plate behind their back – three of the possible plates are blue and two are white, and each prisoner can only see the others' plates but not his own. Initially, none of them can draw a conclusion from what he sees, so that all three remain silent. Thus, the problem again appears irresolvable. But in a second step, they all are able to draw conclusions from the others' silences. At first, we could say, the three prisoners are all doomed to despair: they cannot see their own plate, and the others do not say anything. But precisely this becomes, at the moment of epoché, a precious hint that allows for the rescuing conclusion. The epoché here is the moment of conclusion from the consecutive silences of the two other prisoners. As Lacan points out, this of course requires that all prisoners think, and that they think equally fast – that they have, as it were, an idiorrhythmic speed of thought.

From here we could deduce a definition of idiorrhythmic friendship: friendship means lending oneself temporarily to others for a moment of conclusion. Thus, friendship allows us to recognize that what we were running for is already there, behind our backs – just as Bertolt Brecht has described it: "Everyone chases after happiness, not noticing that happiness is at their heels."[7]

Friendship is thus the medium that allows for the epoché that is necessary in order to experience happiness. We need other people in order to run for happiness and stop somewhere (i.e., not go anywhere anymore) in order to detect its presence. The name for happiness in this precise sense is, in the term of Epicurus, 'ataraxia' (calmness, lack of agitation). It appears a bit strange here that Barthes seeks this concept only in the Christian tradition, where he finds it in the notion of 'hesychia' (Barthes 2013: 63, 73, 202). Maybe the problems of idiorrhythmic life would have been more systematically accessible in the Epicurean tradition, for Epicurus himself had undertaken to assemble a utopian, idiorrhythmic group of friends. His advice for the withdrawal from society was to 'live unnoticed' (*lathe biosas*). And the exemplary 'proxemic' space that Barthes searches for was, for Epicurus, his garden. The avoidance of this whole issue by Barthes could be regarded as a symptomatic point in his investigation. Of course, Barthes's own enterprise, as I have tried to point out, is not to be read as an attempt to obtain knowledge straightwardly about

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(1989: 175) Significantly, it is again here bureaucracy that proves unprepared for such a 'sovereign' shift of perspective.

**7** | "Denn alle rennen nach dem Glück/ Das Glück rennt hinterher" (Brecht 1984: 1118).

some precisely defined object, but rather an exercise in dealing with a subject-object, in producing moments of epoché, in looking back by looking forward. But still, one feels inclined to ask: *What is it exactly that Barthes does not want to know* when avoiding the Epicurean tradition?

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# CAUSE/Cause

*Hilde Bondevik*

Roland Barthes begins his discussion of the term "Cause" with a reminder of how the central term "idiorrhythmy" – understood as the individual rhythm of life – unfolds itself in practice, in the tension between seclusion and sociality. He then poses the question of what it is that unites groups of individuals who will take care of their own particular rhythm while tolerating that of others: in other words, "What brings them together?" (Barthes 2013: 43). It is in the extension of this question that Barthes discusses different types of causes for groups to come together and maintain this over time. The distinction between "cause" with a lowercase *c* and "cause" with a capital *C* – that is, "Telos" – is essential in Barthes's discussion.

The main literary reference in the section on cause is Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* (1924). The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion's studies of group dynamics are also central (1961). *The Magic Mountain* is undoubtedly a rich, complex novel that can be read in many different ways, for example as a novel of formation, a novel of development, an ideological contemporary novel, an allegorical novel, and a genre parody. However, regardless of the different readings and thematic perspectives, disease and its identity-creating function and the therapeutic framework of the disease play a significant role. The lung disease tuberculosis and the reclusive sanatorium of Berghof thus constitute the pivotal elements of the novel. "A sanatorium is a well-defined place to explore how a particular group lives together," writes Barthes, who himself suffered from tuberculosis as a young man and who knows the sanatorium and the illness from personal experience. A sanatorium, it can also be added, is a suitable place to study how disease challenges the rhythm and self-understanding of both the individual and the group.

Together with Barthes's discussion of causation and the theoretical notions of Bion, *The Magic Mountain* provides a unique opportunity to investigate the many dimensions of both illness and idiorrhythmy. In this contribution, Barthes's distinction between causes with a small *c* and a large *C* will be introduced into the reading of *The Magic Mountain*, but it will also be extended

beyond the literary world and into another field of knowledge, namely, the field of health and medicine. A key question will be, what can Barthes's critical examination of the concept of cause and causation within a health institution add to our understanding of illness and institutional treatment and suffering?

## BARTHES'S CONCEPT OF CAUSE/CAUSATION

People have probably always had a basic need to take causes as a means to understand and explain phenomena. The theories concerning the metaphysics of causes and causation are thus extensive and will only be elaborated upon here to the extent that they refer to Barthes's concept. One of many lexical definitions of the word "cause" is the following: "That which produces an effect; that which gives occasion to any action, phenomenon, or state. Cause and effect are correlative terms" (Oxford English Dictionary 2015). This points to an understanding of cause as causality and is in line with modern science's perception of the term. In *How to Live Together* we meet another, extended understanding of cause, which has resonance in natural science as well as in the humanities' understanding of the term, but which can also be understood as a criticism of the belief that the modern use of the term can contribute some significant insight into the understanding of the basic aspects of being human. According to Barthes, there is a fundamental distinction between cause and Cause.

Among the first type of cause, Barthes mentions motive, determination, causality, in other words, the *why* ('pourquoi'). The other type of cause is that which embraces the purpose, the goal, the object, or the idea that fascinates, attracts, mobilizes, and orientates a tropism, that is, for *what purpose* or *for what* ('pour-quoi'), its telos. For Charcot and Freud, for example, this will be *the thing*, the sexuality, Barthes writes. It is the latter type of cause that Barthes is concerned with.

In the context of the novel *The Magic Mountain*, an obvious reason for the gathering of the patients in the Berghof sanatorium is the disease, pulmonary tuberculosis, and its treatment. An apparent goal is healing, but also the protection of society from infection, shielding it from suffering and standardizing the treatment options. However, where something seems obvious it is, according to Barthes, always important to investigate further. And the underlying motive, the point that fascinates and unites the patients at Berghof, the novel's telos, is nothing less than death itself. According to Barthes *The Magic Mountain* is a novel about death.

Barthes's interpretation of the different causes in *How to Live Together* does not represent any systematic examination of causation; the different causes are mentioned and grouped under cause and Cause. Nor does the litany of

different causes and different groups point to the classical division between causal explanation (where the phenomenon X is the cause that led to the effect Y) and explanation of purpose (where a person's more or less conscious reasons form the basis of a given action). Rather, I think we should understand Barthes's concept of cause as far more differentiated, as a kind of trial or thought experiment more than a scientific investigation, as a transcendence that embodies a deeper, more existential driving force or impulse. That is, it is an understanding of causation that also has some threads leading back to Aristotle, the first philosopher to develop a systematic theory of causes and causation.

Aristotle operated, as we know, with four different types of causes, of which the cause of purpose/reason – or the teleological cause – is as essential or even more fundamental than the cause of efficacy (Aristotle 1947). Along with the cause of efficacy (*causa efficiens*) and the cause of purpose/reason (*causa finalis*), the material cause (*causa materialis*) and the formal cause (*causa formalis*) constitute the four causes that can explain a phenomenon, a substance. At the transition to modern times, many philosophers disputed the principle that the cause of purpose should be an independent one. Galileo, for example, was among those who rejected all use of such *causae finales*, and according to him, a typical feature of physics is that this cause no longer has any place. The modern concept, of course, can be regarded as a continuation of Aristotle's *causa efficiens*, and our understanding of it is mainly influenced by David Hume's treatment of it (2007). The following characteristics are emphasized by Hume: locality (proximity in time and space between cause and effect), succession (cause comes before effect in time), and regularity (the same cause always produces the same effect). Accordingly, a statement of causation must in principle contain a universal scientific law linking cause and effect together. However, this is a strict principle, also within the natural sciences, including biomedicine (which I will return to), where it is understood and managed in moderated forms.

When Barthes writes that the objective cause of the patients being admitted to Berghof is tuberculosis, it refers of course to an understanding of cause in a less strict sense than absolute causality. There is no necessary connection between proven tuberculosis or indications of the disease and the hospitalization at Berghof or another sanatorium. Only a very small minority ended up in such places, and some ended up there without being affected by the disease, yet it can be said that we have identified a cause for which patients were admitted to Berghof. We are on safer ground when we say that the TBC bacterium (discovered by Robert Koch in 1882) is the cause of the disease, but nor is this a causal explanation in the strictest sense. You can test positive for the bacteria without developing the disease, but you cannot get the disease without being infected by the bacteria. The patients' own reasons or intentions

in seeking the sanatorium may be a desire for relief, tranquillity, security, understanding, and healing. But all of this remains a question of causes that falls within the category of cause with a small *c*, and Barthes is, as we have seen, little interested in such causes. That is not to say that he does not find them important, relevant, and genuine, but he leads us beyond this, behind the obvious and self-evident, to something more existential, to the question of what it means to be human, to what drives us, engages and fascinates us in a deeper sense.

Aristotle defines the human as a *zoon politikon*, a political being; in other words, he puts emphasis on the community and how we best can live together within the framework of the city-state. We have just touched upon Aristotle's concept of causation and that it consists of several causes, but that the *causa finalis*, the substance's telos, appears to be the most important. This has often been explained as something that works outside the thing itself, but if we understand it in a more ecological context, we can say it constitutes the natural space and function of things. In light of this understanding, it is interesting to follow Barthes and interpret *The Magic Mountain* as a novel about death. We humans are all undeniably mortal beings, and as the existentialists emphasize, our assurance of death is the only sure and most understandable condition of human existence, as in Heidegger's term *Sein-zum-Tode*. Sigmund Freud writes the following about death: "If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that 'the aim of all life is death' and, looking backward, that 'inanimate things existed before living ones'" (1984: 310-311). In this context, we can note that only four years before *The Magic Mountain* was available, Freud published his original and perhaps most difficult text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). It is here that Freud introduces the term "death drive" and treats it as one of the two categories of drives, the drive of life or *Eros* and that of death, later called *Thanatos*. Until then, Freud had outlined a theory with an operational duality between the ego and the libido. Now certain properties are isolated and redistributed in the new categories. May Freud's thoughts of a death drive shed light on Barthes's understanding of the role and function of death in *The Magic Mountain*? Is there something about the spirit of the time – *Der Zeitgeist* – that can be traced in Mann's text, and that later forms a kind of foundation for Barthes's claim on the novel's overall telos, the Berghof patients' fascination with death? As Steen Klitgård Povlsen (2000) writes, European modernism is remarkably concerned with death as a theme, including Thomas Mann.

### *The Magic Mountain's* universe of disease, death, and how to live together

According to Barthes, the sanatorium of Berghof, with its very special sociality, serves as a well-defined place to investigate how a particular group lives. But *what* brings the patients together, what *causes* do they have to be admitted and continue to stay at the sanatorium? It is here that death is introduced by Barthes as a kind of a cryptic dimension in the novel. In the obituary "Les morts de Roland Barthes," Jacques Derrida writes that an underlying driving force in Barthes's authorship has always been a definite idea of death (2003: 80). We will not take the whole novel into account, or the many readings of it, but concentrate on death and how illness and death are brought together with illness as personal as well as social identity. In parenthesis, it should be noted that between 1890 and 1960 as many as 250,000 people died of tuberculosis in Norway, that today one-third of the world's population is infected, and that the World Health Organization estimated in 2009 that 1.7 million people died of the disease (Folkehelseinstituttet, 2015).

The narrative in *The Magic Mountain* is set in the years before the First World War. The young engineer Hans Castorp has traveled from Hamburg to Davos Platz in Graubünden to visit his sick cousin who has tuberculosis and has lived at Berghof for almost half a year when we meet him. In the preface we are told that it is not easy to end the history of Hans Castorp. A three-week visit led to a seven-year stay where sickness and death constitute a constant recurring theme and a natural framework for the rest of the story. We encounter death both initially and at the end of the novel: the outbreak of the First World War tears Hans Castorp from the sanatorium; he is discharged properly enough as healed but sign up as volunteers for the military, and on the last pages his possible death on the battlefield is implied.

Already in the first chapter we encounter death in combination with a fearful delight. When Hans Castorp meets his cousin at the train station and is introduced to secluded Berghof, he bursts into laughter when he is told that in the winter the neighboring sanatorium carries the dead bodies down on bobsleds because the road is impassable (Mann 2005: 10). And later in the same chapter, when the cousin talks about the two doctors, saying that one of them, the assistant doctor Krokowski, a trained analyst, was engaged in the dissection of the patients' souls, he laughs so hard that his tears trickle through the hand he holds in front of his eyes (ibid: 10). Laughter, but at the same time anxiety and fear of death. We see that clearly when the same night Castorp dreams that the corpse of his cousin is lying on one of the bobsleds of the sanatorium and riding down a steep course (ibid: 20). It is also here that it is suggested that the same doctor must be right about the outbreak of disease in the young protagonist: Krokowski can hardly believe Hans Castorp is healthy and says,

"In that case, you are a phenomenon of greatest medical interest. You see, I've never met a perfectly healthy person before" (ibid: 19).

In the next chapter, the arrival of Berghof is described in detail and this also serves as a warning that in addition to the disease we will meet death in several forms and settings throughout the novel. The presence of death is indicated by a number of indirect signs (stupid signs, according to Barthes): oxygen containers outside the door, shrouds for the corpses, the smell of formalin, pale patients, powerless coughing, and technological innovations such as an X-ray apparatus (first tested in 1896). Death is thus present as a theme, as is the disease itself. At Berghof everyone thinks about tuberculosis and talks about it. But nobody talks about death – it is taboo. Death is more like a shadow cast over everything else, like a silent but unifying point of fascination.

The details in the novel also describe how the patients, the two doctors Behrens and Krokowski, and the other staff at Berghof live together, how the rhythm of the patients and the rhythm of the institution unite and form the life and the order of the sanatorium. But death is also present, almost as an organizing principle of life and of the rhythm of the sanatorium. Someone arrives, someone dies, and death is handled tacitly and effectively. Hans Castorp quickly embodies the rhythm of Berghof, and apparently it seems very easy to adapt to it. He becomes part of the social and institutional life and is obviously shaped by it. At the same time, the life and rhythm of the institution both frighten and fascinate him: the precise and regular routines (like the morning wash and the measurement of body temperature several times daily), the daily trips, the abundant and frequent meals, the beneficial rest cures under camel-hair blankets or in leather bags on the balconies, and not least the social etiquette and the game.

When it is discovered that Hans Castorp has a slightly elevated temperature and Behrens finally sees a spot on his lung, he becomes a full member of the patient group. Castorp will soon become an absolutely perfect tuberculosis patient. He cultivates his illness, as many of the other patients do, and they do it together and thus confirm their individuality and the others' identity as ill. The diagnosis becomes almost an opportunity and a prerequisite for Hans Castorp's personal growth and formation, which gives his life meaning, which forms his self-understanding and identity. In addition, Hans Castorp acquires considerable knowledge about the disease, about technical and radiographic aspects of it, different surgical techniques and therapies. But he also learns about the disease as something prestigious and of high value. It is the disease that makes him interesting and gives him status. Tuberculosis is enthroned at the top of the hierarchy of diseases at the mythical sanatorium of Berghof.

In her book *Illness as Metaphor* from 1977, Susan Sontag, who was a significant reader of Barthes, several times mentions *The Magic Mountain* in her remarks on tuberculosis. She reads the novel as a collection of comments on the myths

associated with the disease. Many of the myths surrounding tuberculosis, such as sexual desire, increased appetite, and sharpened vitality, play a significant role in the novel, as of course do the myths of death. But it is also quite obvious that Thomas Mann, especially through Hans Castorp, Settembrini, and Napatha, introduces the reader to philosophical and ideological debates from his own time and that he uses this isolated world beyond the other world to say something about the real world, about social and political issues, about the fear of war, and about debates around medical and psychological knowledge. Through his ironic and ambivalent style, Mann also shows how disease is produced and reproduced within a particular context, how group dynamics may be as important as the disease itself, and how identity, disease, and death are in a mutual relationship of exchange. That death is an obvious theme in *The Magic Mountain* is indisputable, and that illness and death form the basis of other issues in the novel is clear. But that death is the most important topic and that it is the fascination of death that brings the patients together is more surprising and thought-provoking.

When Barthes substantiates and exemplifies his view of the role of death in the novel, he draws particular attention to the fascination of death, to death as a taboo, to the actual death surrounding tuberculosis, and to the function of the group (2013: 45). It is here I think we need some help from Freud to decipher Barthes, as well as from Barthes himself, his biographical contact with tuberculosis, and his experience of the sanatorium. This refers to some basic ideas in psychoanalysis, and in particular they point to the idea that fascination and cultural taboos are interrelated. We are both attracted and repelled by certain objects and phenomena, such as sexuality, death, or the loss of a mother figure. Cultural taboos are supplanted but always return and reveal themselves in language. When Freud introduced the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a basic human instinct, parallel to the life drive or libido, his hypotheses of its existence seem to be confirmed through the surroundings: the aftermath of the First World War, the culture of death among the Viennese intellectuals, the common double moral standard of sexuality, in short, the *Zeitgeist* referred to above. As the Danish authors Ole A. Olsen and Simo Køppe state in their introduction to Freud's psychoanalysis, the generalized concept of the death drive was a result of Freud's possible passion for such contemporary tendencies, not only the fatalism of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Spengler, but also the philosophical demand for a holistic vision including biology, psychology, and sociology (Olsen/Køppe 1986: 341). The death drive aims at annihilation and self-destruction and is directed at the subject, but it can also be channeled outwardly as aggression or be coupled with sexual activity to take the form of sadism and masochism. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud returns to the subject of death and states that "as well as Eros there was an instinct of death. The phenomena of life could be explained from

the concurrent or mutually opposing action of these two instincts. It was not easy, however, to demonstrate the activities of this supposed death instinct. The manifestations of Eros were conspicuous and noisy enough." (Freud 1985: 310) Both drives, which Freud tries to derive from each other, are in other words given a place in his interpretation of existence, and several places he states that "the eternal struggle between Eros and death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction," is a struggle that finds its fulfillment in humanity and that cultural development is based upon (ibid: 314, 325).

We may wonder if it might be precisely this struggle – which, according to Freud, arises as soon as people are faced with the task of living together – that is staged in a concentrated form in *The Magic Mountain*, like a microcosm and a kind of nodal point that fascinates Hans Castorp, the other patients, and the two doctors, and maybe even Barthes himself in his reading of the novel. Bion (1961) claims that the emotional situation in a group is almost always tense and confused. Such is the case at the Berghof sanatorium. The mentality of the group moves between extremes (an example of which is the "good" and the "bad" Russian table), and as with Bion, it is always a matter of whether the leaders evince solidarity or are passive or hostile. Perhaps we can say that illness and death in the novel represent an emphasis on specifically human and social aspects.

If we follow Roland Barthes's idea that death is a superior albeit unconscious telos for the strange community of the sanatorium in *The Magic Mountain*, Freud's thoughts on death are not far removed from this. At the same time, it is important to state that for Freud, the time dimension of the unconscious is a singularity, namely, eternity (eternal life). A number of psychoanalysts support Freud's concept of the death drive, for example Melanie Klein and her followers. Others reject it, such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who in *Anti-Oedipus* are, to put it mildly, critical of the death drive (1983: 332-333). Barthes, like Thomas Mann, has a somewhat ambivalent relationship to psychoanalysis but frequently refers to both Freud and Lacan (who also served as Barthes's therapist for a very short period of time). He notes in the *Mourning Diary* that death, like grief itself, is "banal" (Barthes 2010: 222). Nevertheless, grief is also the place that brings forth literature, and if it is about life, it will always be about death.

In relation to this, it is interesting to note that Roland Barthes in *How to Live Together* initially draws some parallels between his own experience with tuberculosis and Hans Castorp's history. Barthes says that although he had only a slight memory of *The Magic Mountain* from when he read it as a young man, he was almost overwhelmed by the novel when he read it again after being affected by the disease. Barthes finds the novel moving but also depressing and indeed almost unacceptable in its staging of patients' intense investment in social relations and death. Barthes says both here and more extensively in his

autobiography that he feels like a historical witness for Hans Castorp, stating, since recognition is one of the strongest powers of literature, that "that's exactly it" (Barthes 2013: 16). And in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, he finally states that his body is contemporary with Hans Castorp (Barthes 1978). In other words, it is a form of the same reality that shows the connection between life and literature, as Claude Coste also mentions in his preface (Coste 2013: xxiv). From his autobiography we know that at 19 years old, on May 10, 1934, Barthes detects a lesion on his left lung, and from then on he goes in and out of health institutions and gradually improves as a result of the treatment, but the tuberculosis recurs. Barthes was affected by the disease, and his biographer Tiphaine Samoyault (2015) devotes considerable space to Barthes's experience of illness, suggesting that it affected him and influenced his choice of study, his professional interests, and perhaps also some of his reading. It is also worth noting how Barthes justifies the selection of fictional texts he discusses in *How to Live Together* as well as his methodical approach, which rather evinces a methodological skepticism. In the introduction he notes that his choice is "entirely subjective, or rather entirely contingent. It has to do with the kinds of texts I read, with my memories" (Barthes 2013: 13). Of course, we should be careful in taking account of his biography in our reading of *The Magic Mountain*, but life always manifests itself in literature, and here it may serve as a supplement to our understanding and interpretation of Barthes's view of disease and the role of death in Mann's novel. Tuberculosis – and thus the theme of death – undoubtedly motivated Barthes's interest in it.

## The telos of illness in our time

Barthes's reading of *The Magic Mountain* gives us a unique opportunity to analyze his treatment of the term "cause" more in detail, an analysis that may in turn provide insights into our understanding of health and our approach to death. I would therefore like to conclude by focusing the discussion on some aspects of the modern concept of disease and the current issue of medicalization.

Barthes's idea of an overall telos shows how illness and death are primarily an existential and social phenomenon and not something that can be reduced to natural science and biomedicine, that is, to biological and physiological defects, morphological abnormalities, and dysfunctional organs. Such a reduction inevitably leads to displacement and exclusion of the existential and social dimensions of life, all that concerns life itself. In *The Magic Mountain* we meet illness and death in many dimensions, such as individual experience and identity, as shared human experience, as socially based phenomena, and as something that is medically understood and managed. For example, if we follow Marinker's (1975) distinction and divide the concept of malady into the

three dimensions of *illness* (the patient's own experience), *sickness* (the social context), and *disease* (the medical understanding), we may say that Barthes's first type of causes primarily points to a disease in its ordinary way, that is, more or less to the dimensions identified by Marinker, while the other type goes beyond such differences and can lead to a more complex and integrated understanding of disease.

The understanding of the concept of cause and causation in biomedicine is logical but is often understood as mono-causal, reductionist, and dualistic. If we follow Barthes, such an approach will be categorized as cause with a small *c*, whereas cause with a large *C* (i.e., telos) naturally falls outside its scope. Of course, medicine may not relate to all dimensions and all causes, but there is still a need for an expanded debate on the limitations of modern medicine and a more complex understanding of the concept of disease is being sought. Barthes's implicit criticism of the modern concept of cause and his discussion of the different causes may contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of the concept of disease. It may also call attention to the richness of the various dimensions of the singular, the individual, as well as the social experiences of illness, not least related to identity, insight into one's own health, and the relations and cultural contexts we are part of. In this, there is a significant source of knowledge for medicine, whose starting point and overall goal is of course the individual patient. Critically, Barthes's discussion can also help to shed light on today's widespread medicalization of life – that more and more areas of life are subjected to a medical understanding and treatment. Birth, suffering, sadness, grief, behavior, gender, sexual orientation, beauty, food, and not least death all constitute areas that are increasingly covered from a medical viewpoint and are spoken about in medical and health-related terms. An important question that springs from this is, How can we live together both existentially and socially in our time? How should we live together as vulnerable people today, tomorrow, next month, or in ten years?

In his analysis of *The Magic Mountain*, philosopher Bjørn Hofmann (2003) reminds us that the health care system should be sensitive to the identity-creating aspect of disease to be able to practice medicine in line with its moral basis, to help people. The lack of such insight may be one reason why health care falls short, he writes. At the same time, Hofmann warns of today's medicalization and argues that this novel shows that illness also has some identity-creating aspects that should be kept outside the health service's domain. Obviously, we need care and treatment, to be seen, understood and taken care of when we are ill and suffering, but we also need space for consolidation, reflection, and personal growth whether we are ill or healthy. In other words, we must be aware that medically based knowledge is still interfering with new areas of life – for better or worse. Nietzsche goes a long way in thinking about medicine as a supreme entity in society. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche (1994: 149

[sect. 243]) reflects on the future of medicine, including the physician's position in society, with greater horizons of medical attention than a medicine based on rationality, methodology, and causal thinking can offer.

If we allow ourselves to ask what causes today's tendency toward medicalization, over-diagnosis, and overtreatment (Hofmann 2003), an obvious answer will have to do with scientific development and the ambition to heal and to provide for health and well-being, therapeutically as well as prophylactically. However, if we go behind these causes and ask what types of telos are less obvious (which may also lie behind the widespread obsession with health and well-being that is characteristic of our age), not just asking *why* but for what *purposes*, we move into Barthes's conceptual world. Here, the overall cause, as we have seen, can surprisingly enough be based existentially. I think it is important to ask when some form of medicalization serves to promote life, and conversely, when it reinforces our fear of disease and thus contributes to health fears and to a displacement of death. Is it advantageous, for example, that prolonged grief after the death of a loved one appears to be a specific diagnosis in the new diagnostic manuals, DSM-5 and ICD-11, or that people are increasingly prescribed psycho-pharmaceuticals to treat this? And what about those who suffer from so called orthorexia, those who are so obsessed with being healthy and well that they are rendered ill from compulsively following the world's more or less scientifically based health advice, those who follow all kind of diets and therapies in the hope of achieving the best possible health?

Philosophers have always discussed and critically examined causation. In medicine, a natural, science-based perception was reached after recognizing the role of microorganisms as pathogenic factors. On the other hand, there is obviously nothing new in discussing causal conditions, as this has always focused on why disease occurs. And it is obviously important, because the more we know about the causes of health injuries and illness, the more likely it is that we can treat disease, avoid health injuries, and relieve suffering. However, medical and biological explanations of causes differ from other scientific explanations and define causes of disease as factors that affect disease risk or the likelihood of disease. According to the Norwegian professor of medicine Dag S. Thelle, part of the problem is that "the thought of one factor – one disease" has long dominated modern biomedicine (2007: 36-37). That diseases might be caused by several factors, or that several assumptions had to be met, took a back seat when modern microbiology and antibiotic treatment were directed at certain factors, he writes. Logical and scientifically responsible reasoning is a prerequisite for modern medical activities, but at the same time we need a new orientation and should turn toward a more complex understanding of causes and causation that is also sensitive to the contextual conditions of the causes and includes a more profound and existentially rooted understanding of the human being. The biosemiotic concept of *final causality* and the ideas

of a *dispositional ontology* and *causal dispositionism* may be interesting concepts to bring to bear (Santaella Braga 1994; Kerry et al. 2012; Mumford/Anjum 2012). In other words, an expanded etiology is required that appears both heterogeneous and unified. The health sciences today, including medicine, are characterized by many perceptions (ontological as well as epistemological) of how to understand causes and causation, perceptions that are often in conflict with one another. What might be addressed is a humanistic-medical approach to it, and Roland Barthes's reflections in the text of different causes and his reading of *The Magic Mountain* open up to this.

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# CHAMBRE/Room

*Mari Lending*

Roland Barthes's first of two seminars on "Chambre" opens with a reference to Joseph Rykwert's *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*; the second ends with Piranesi's imaginary prisons, *Le carceri d'invenzione*. Rykwert's book, which soon became a classic, was at the time a novelty. His reflection on the foundations of architecture became an important premise for *Comment vivre ensemble*. Barthes frequently returned to Rykwert's history of the theories of architectural origins with his students in the autumn of 1976 and the spring of 1977.

In the context of Barthes, the word *chambre* readily evokes his study of photography. *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* appeared in 1980. Yet the notes from the two days devoted to *chambre* are all about architecture. His enduring popularity among architects and students of architecture notwithstanding, this is perhaps the only occasion on which Barthes wrote (spoke) exclusively on the subject of architecture. And when Barthes engaged directly with the subject, he turned to a fundamental aspect of architectural thinking, namely, the origin of architecture, and consequently the origin of the enclosed, inhabitable, humanmade space: 'Chambre/Room.' Numerous examples on the topic borrowed from Rykwert are sprinkled throughout Barthes's lecture notes. The trope of Adam's little house in paradise is a classic among architecture's many theoretical foundation myths, an explanatory model that appears in new guises across time and space, or as Rykwert puts it: "Throughout these many transformations, my theme returns as a guarantee of renewal." (1981: 191) In addition to the biblical account, the oldest preserved version of this story in the Western tradition appears in Vitruvius's *De architectura*. In the Vitruvian account, a forest fire in a distant, idealized past simultaneously furnished primordial man with the skills to speak and to build. Variations of this story has been handed down by Rousseau, Quatremére de Quincy, Hegel, Viollet-le-Duc, Daniel Defoe, and many others, making ever new starting points for conceptualizations of the origin of architecture.

These origin myths are primarily theoretical rather than historical tropes, and as such enjoyed particular popularity in the 18th century, when lavish displays of Enlightenment-fueled first principles were in vogue. A canonical model was presented in Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* of 1753, in which the French Jesuit priest identified a principle of origin in a primordial version of a simple wooden structure from beyond time and space, metaphorized in *la petite cabane rustique*, the primitive hut – the very form that he claimed made the structural model for the Greek temple. A century later, Gottfried Semper theorized a completely different origin of architecture in the figure of the textile enclosure. Originating in ritual and rhythmic movement, the woven wall enclosed, and thus invented, spaces or rooms (cf. Hvattum 2004, particularly chapter 1, "The Cult of Origin"). Although such explanations of first beginnings were largely unsubstantiated by historical or archeological evidence, the 19th century continued the attempt to locate the origins of constructive and tectonic traditions in distant pasts by translating theoretical assumptions into historical events. In 1880, in a Norwegian context, Herman Major Schirmer, reflecting on the development of national styles, championed the idea that the origins of architecture could be identified in the shift from vernacular building (*Bygningsvæsen*) to architecture as the art of building (*Bygningskunst*), constituted by "the substitution of wood with stone as the main building material" (cf. Lending 2007, particularly chapter 4, "Opprinnelse"). Similar examples are key foundations for Barthes's preoccupation with rooms while he explores the conditions of living together.

Adam's house in paradise was a rather private affair, so to speak, as were the caves and ephemeral structures to which eremites and others would retreat from what we anachronistically might term public space. From Vitruvius dedicated *De Architectura* to emperor Augustus, and throughout the Vitruvian tradition, however, musings on architectural origins have been firmly linked to ideas about communities and communality, by conflating phenomena such as architecture, language, and society. A few years ago, Hollywood presented *Oblivion* (2013), a sumptuous movie that, beyond forming a cornucopia of architectural references, rehearses discourses on the origins of architecture. The movie is set in the post-apocalyptic future of 2077, after the destruction of the moon in 2017 by hostile forces caused tsunamis, earthquakes, and the obliteration of civilization and humanity. The scenery is distinctly American. And yet the film evokes the state beyond time and place that traditionally has characterized theories on origins. Eventually, we get a number of clues that a new primitive hut, from which will spring a new world and a new civilization in the ashes of Armageddon, is situated somewhere in upstate New York. The hero of the story effortlessly traverses huge distances in no time aboard his futuristic, helicopter-sized aircraft, called the Bubble Ship. Yet a moment before he touches down in the secret idyll of a green valley in an otherwise

destroyed world, he catches a fleeting glimpse of the torch of the Statue of Liberty emerging from a deep crack in the surface of the Earth, in a scene that reads as an homage to the grand finale of the original *Planet of the Apes* (1968). Tom Cruise, cast as the clone Jack Harper, is the master builder of a simple wooden structure that shares certain features with the primitive hut as described by Vitruvius. It is fair to say, however, that the edifice somehow lacks the elegance of Laugier's version, as canonized in Charles Eisen's engraving that served as the frontispiece of his 1753 *Essay on Architecture*. Accompanied by a beautiful allegorical figure, Eisen's image intended to show how a few trees in a forest would soon be petrified in the Greek temple's columns, entablature, and pediment.

The American fascination for simple country living is arguably on a par with the Norwegian cult of the cabin, and American popular culture provides countless examples of a deep longing to escape the burdens of civilization. Initially, one might not think that *Oblivion* is a drama about the primitive hut and first beginnings. However, director Joseph Kosinski – a graduate of the architecture school at Columbia University (GSAPP) who teaches 3D modeling and graphics – has constructed a sophisticated apparatus of historical references that cinematically reverberates millennia-old theories of the origins of architecture. "We won the war, but the world was ruined," says Tom Cruise, qua clone. Notably, the scattered fragments of ruins that have collapsed into a world-wide barren geological field deprived of nature are not ruins of familiar ruins of antiquity, such as the Parthenon or the Colosseum. Here, it is American modernity that has fallen into devastating destruction. We can spot a broken Pentagon, rubble from both the Capitol Dome and the Washington Monument, wreckages of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco littering the desert, and a super tanker on what was once the seabed of the Atlantic or the Pacific and that is now part of an endless volcanic lava landscape (substantial parts of the film was shot in Iceland). But most important, as always, is New York City. The avenues in Manhattan can be glimpsed in deep ravines, and Yankee Stadium resembles the ruin of a Greek amphitheater. Still, the two most significant modern ruins to appear in the film are the top of the Empire State Building in the desert, and the New York Public Library. The library is completely buried in the ground, but Tom Cruise bravely descends into the remains of the Beaux-Arts beauty of the Rose Main Reading Room through what was once its roof.

The bad guys who destroyed the planet are in the process of sucking up the last remains of water on the planet with colossal Hydro Rigs floating above the surface of the Earth. They live in space on the installation Tet, which clearly alludes to the visionary paper architecture of the late 18th century, such as Étienne-Louis Boullée's cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton or Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's windowless, spherical spaces (cf. Vidler 2002). Both the exterior and the interior of the Tet structure evoke the sublime. More precisely, it

illustrates what Immanuel Kant was thinking about when conceptualizing the *mathematically* sublime, the incomprehensibly large. Kant, who hardly ever left Königsberg, imagined that St. Peter's in Rome was perplexing and bewildering in its incomprehensible immensity. His other architectural example when discoursing on the sublime was the pyramids: overpowering entities, immeasurable in their age, magnitude, and weight. For Kant, the pyramids were perhaps the only man-made objects that together with glaciers and other natural phenomena could express pure magnitude, as stated in the famous section 26 in his 1790 *Critique of Judgment*.

No less essential to the narrative is the private home of the clone Jack Harper. The backstory is as follows: In 2017, the astronaut Jack Harper was on a mission in space when the disaster struck. To make an extremely complicated story short, he and the beauty he now lives with, in a spectacular residence 1000 meters above ground, are cloned descendants of courageous American astronauts. Tom Cruise does not know this, as his memory has been wiped, and neither does he know that he, as a drone mechanic, works for the bad guys and that the anthropomorphic drones he maintains are programmed to kill the last survivors of humanity. Nor does he know that both he and his partner are serialized and that the same couple, on the same mission, live in the same replicated house across the planet, or that in the Boullée-like structure floating in space there is a depository with countless identical versions of both of them. "Gorgeous" was a recurrent description of this hovering Sky Tower dwelling in the first reviews of *Oblivion*. The Sky Tower is the science fiction embodiment of one of the most elegant of the Case Study Houses designed by outstanding architects in California after the Second World War. The private home of the replicated couple shares obvious features with Pierre Koenig's Stahl House (Case Study House # 22, 1959) in Hollywood Hills, a house that was catapulted into celebrity in Julius Shulman's glamorous photographs. In *Oblivion*'s post-apocalyptic environment, the iconic view of Los Angeles from the glasshouse cantilevering over the city is replaced by a magic, panoramic sky, shot from one of the tallest mountains in Hawaii.

The floating glass house also alludes to modernist icons such as Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois (1945–1951), commissioned by the neurologist Edith Farnsworth, as well as the Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut (1949), designed by Philip Johnson for himself and his partner. Both glass houses were conceived as second homes for busy professionals working in Chicago and Manhattan. Mies made Edith Farnsworth's house of hovering, horizontal planes enveloped in glass hyper-famous even before its completion (the model was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1947 and the project was massively published). Thus, Edith Farnsworth was constantly under siege by hordes of architourists, and she later described the house as an X-ray, and the experience of living in it as similar to being an animal on display:

"The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel as a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening. I feel as a sentinel on guard day and night." (quoted in Friedman 2007: 141) Severely depressed, she gave up the celebrated house and fled to Italy. For his part, Philip Johnson, even though he had a large and beautiful parklike property at his disposal in New Canaan, took a bold stance with his own house, made out of one continuous room and with only the bathroom sheltered by solid walls in homophobic 1950s America. However, transparency is not an issue for the two clones living together in their Sky Tower home in *Oblivion*, nor is the blurred distinction between surveillance and privacy. High above a desolate planet, there is nevertheless a strange American suburban life unfolding in this hyper-styled minimalism.[1] Every morning Tom Cruise routinely departs to repair drones and kill all signs of life, and after a day's work, he returns home for dinner. He parks his Bubble Ship on a small platform in front of the house, passes a swimming pool with a transparent floor, and is met by his impeccably dressed spouse. In addition to taking care of the house, she is also his so-called communication commander, surveying his every movement while in constant contact with "Sally," who is monitoring the world's destruction from her sublime Tet installation in space.

One might think that this in every sense transparent life may appear limited and limiting, even for a clone (who is not aware he is a clone). "*Our job is not to remember, remember*?" However, constantly moving around, he slowly starts connecting fractions of memories from the lived life of the original Jack Harper, the astronaut. In the ruins of Yankee Stadium, he experiences the sound of the 2017 World Series. At the spire of the Empire State Building, he recalls a beautiful, unknown woman and a marriage proposal. More than 60 years earlier, at "the top of the world," he presented her with a golden ring in front of one of the telescopes: "Look through here and I will show you the future." While, as usual, shooting to kill everything that moves, he discovers Thomas Babington Macaulay's book of poetry, *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), in the remains of the New York Public Library. From the Earth's crust, he collects dispersed souvenirs of bygone times. Eventually we realize that he brings these relics into an allegedly radioactive zone into which he, in stolen moments, manages to disappear with his Bubble Ship. In this little reservoir, there is still nature and water, and this is where he has built his primitive little shed and gathered the remnants of a lost world: a New York Yankees cap; a teddy bear; a weathered, precious baseball; a pair of sunglasses; a small library (the

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**1** | What Barthes might have thought of such transparent modernist monuments we may detect from the session on rectangles: "There's a pollution effected by the rectangle. Agents of that pollution: architects. Importance (tyranny) of 'regulatory lines': 'every architect should use them' (Le Corbusier)" (2013: 114).

camera zooms in on Dickens's *Tales of Two Cities*); and a collection of albums (Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Duran Duran). In this miniature paradise, there is still fish in the pond. The clone replaces his futuristic work uniform with a piece of Americana, a checkered, washed-out shirt, and plays basketball while Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale" rings out over a timeless American Arcadia. This version of Adam's hut in paradise simultaneously portrays the end of civilization and a new beginning. Yet it goes without saying that the new American Adam cannot live as a hermit in paradise.

Again, resorting to a brutal ellipsis: While the original Jack Harper was captured and cloned, Julia, the beautiful young woman from the roof of the Empire State Building, has spent 60 years in delta sleep in a capsule orbiting the Earth and is still as young and beautiful as in 2017. Consequentially, we are presented with a marvelous anachronic tableau: Jack Harper/Tom Cruise is apparently as timeless as Julia, but differently from her, he is timeless into eternity. He is a non-aging clone. It is thus a fairly quirky reunion that allows an original and a copy to re-experience a moment of happiness in paradise: "You said when it was all over you would build me a house on a lake," she reminds him, evoking the words of his prototype at the time when they were a couple in love – and still in sync, in 2017.[2]

Apparently, at this point we are close to a happy ending, but not entirely, as the clone Jack is still married to the clone Victoria, and from Tet in space the evil Sally is about to suck the last drops of water from the surface of the earth. And, truly, the end of *Oblivion* is not happy. At least it introduces, and perhaps involuntarily, a few ethical predicaments with regard to those envisioned to live together in a future that springs from such a neo-primordial architecture with all its props from American popular culture. When Jack heroically sacrifices his own clone existence as he exterminates both the evil Sally and the infinitely replicated Victoria, we accept that this is an act of necessity and that we are not expected to mourn the life of unborn clones. They are, namely, foreigners: this has been emphasized from the very beginning and is tellingly signified by Sally's dubious Southern dialect and Victoria's British accent. The implicit moral conclusion is that you cannot live smoothly and harmoniously with strangers, even when using the same language.

Equally dystopic, yet presented as unreserved happiness, is the very last scene of the film. Julia, pregnant when the clone Jack died to save a future civilization, is at the moment living alone with their little daughter in the primitive hut by the lake. Played by the Ukrainian beauty Olga Kurylenko, she was awakened from her delta sleep as the prototype of an Americanized

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**2** | This anachronic love story rehearses, in a lovely and twisted way, the Swiss author Johann Peter Hebel's 1811 short story "Unverhofftes Wiedersehen" ("The Unexpected Reunion"). For a discussion of this story, see Zumthor/Lending (2018).

Russian astronaut and scientist. However, years of simple country life, in which high-tech operations in outer space have been replaced by subsistence and farming, have changed her. In lieu of her stylish astronaut hairdo, her hair now hangs loose and natural, and even her physiognomy has been translated from one world to another. She has become what in today's United States is called first-nation people, native and original, uncorrupted by civilization. Before we even get to ponder that a mother and a child alone cannot build a new world, Jack suddenly appears, in paradise. However, he has neither survived nor is he resurrected. While the 'original' Jack was # 49, Jack # 55 has been drifting all over the planet and finally, and most probably accidentally, arrives in paradise, as replaceable with the Jack that was cloned in 2017 as with any of his serialized ahistoric replicas. The child nevertheless immediately recognizes her cloned father who died before she was born, and the face of (the by now three-year-older) Julia promises a long and happy future. The last line reads: "I am Jack Harper, I am home."

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# CHEF/Chief

*Fredrik Engelstad*

Roland Barthes had a dream about the monastery as a place for complete devotion. Life in the monastery consists of prayer, domestic work, and reading and writing: three sides of a triangle, constituting an enclosed form. As described by Erving Goffman (1961), the monastery is a total institution insofar as those living there are fully concentrated on these three tasks. For them, there is no outside world. A total institution is an organization that has complete control over its inhabitants. The monastery has an abbot who represents Jesus: he is the chief of the monastery. In the total institution the abbot exerts total power.

In *How to Live Together* (2013), Barthes dreams of an idiorrhythmic monastery, which both is and is not a total institution. It is an institution that is all-embracing for those who live there, but without an abbot. That is how monasteries were before they were institutionalized, before the abbot had become a power holder, before Christianity was established as the state religion. The idiorrhythmic monastery was a community where the inhabitants lived in isolation; they could choose their own way to devotion of God and be together in silence or in conversation when they felt it proper, like stylites in the same landscape within vocal distance of one another.

The idiorrhythmic form of monastery had a short life, before monasteries turned into hierarchical organizations. From the fifth century they acquired their form in accordance with rules determined by St. Benedict of Nursia. The absence of the abbot in the previous period was not an absence of governance but of management in an organizational sense. Governance was based on fully spiritual leadership; if there were leaders, they were gurus and role models to emulate, not chiefs who make decisions and govern their subjects. A reminiscence of this form is found on the holy Mount Athos in the northeast of Greece, a peninsula on the Aegean Sea with the status of an independent monastery state outside the jurisdiction of the European Union.

Roland Barthes never came to visit the monasteries on Mount Athos, but he could not avoid dreaming about them. How can we understand this dream?

The answer, I suggest, is mostly as a dream of absence or abolishment of power. His dream is more than a vague fantasy because material examples exist, even though exotic and distant, in both the past and the present. The idiorrhythmic monastery was a threshold, a long, golden moment where something is emerging, before it acquires a form securing stability and life in the long term. A parallel is Max Weber's distinction between sect and church, between charismatic groups centered on spiritual devotion and large organizations with ambitions of universality. The latter develop into bureaucracies because they adapt to a "charisma of office," maintaining general rules covering a large variety of members (Weber 1978: 1204-1210).

Barthes's dream is productive because it seeks and concretizes communities without power – the golden moments where the world still seems to be open, not yet closed. He is aiming at *anachoresis*, withdrawal from power relations, "a life structure that is not a life system" (2013: 26). Is it possible, and if so, how long can a power-free state endure? Jean-Paul Sartre raised a similar question. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason* he circled around alienation, or what he called seriality, that is, the mute force that emerges in large and fixed organizations (1991). He drew a contrast to situations with moments of collective freedom and community, from the storming of the Bastille in 1789 to spontaneous action to realize common goals in transparent groups.

Taking a different point of departure, I have for a long time tried to come to grips with power. A recurring theme is that power is inescapable. Power is present – as factual or potential – in all forms of social life. This is not equivalent to saying that "everything is power." Power is one of many aspects of social action and social patterns. Even if power is unavoidable, it is ambiguous. We have an inherent tendency to withdraw from control by others over us. At the same time, we have an interest in the existence of power that regulates others around us and their actions concerning us. If not, our world becomes impenetrable, maybe even chaotic.

The question, then, is not whether we can live without power but what kinds of power are acceptable in our lives. This implies a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate power, and in parallel, between necessary and unnecessary power (Shapiro 1999: ch. 6). But Barthes's reflections point in a somewhat different direction. How long can the golden moments endure, and why must they always be too brief? There is no definitive answer, but the question can be elucidated by sketching some types of situations often understood as zones where power is out of place. The examples I use are all-consuming love, good friendship, collegial research communities, and work collectives. They yield an understanding of how different forms of power may be present and how they possibly may be neutralized.

## All-consuming love: Romeo and Juliet

Love may become perfect and all-consuming; as total as the closure of the brothers and sisters in the monastery. In the mutual gaze of the lovers there is no place for power, because their reciprocity is perfect. Both are him- or herself in the other, and keep the other in themselves. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet says, "My bounty is boundless as the sea,/ My love as deep; the more I give to thee,/ The more I have, for both are infinite" (Shakespeare 1997 [1595]: 2.1.175-77). For Juliet and Romeo, the gaze, the reciprocity, must be incessantly present. But is it enough? How long can human beings live on the gaze of the other? If still alive, Romeo and Juliet could extend the moment by turning their back on everyday life. Like Harry and Monika in Ingmar Bergman's *The Summer with Monika* (1953), they could indulge in the sunny and warm Swedish archipelago. Yet when summer is ending and the days are getting shorter, Harry and Monika must find their way back to everyday life. They become other people, with different obligations and roles. He takes on the obligations; she feels that they stem from a power she does not want to subordinate herself to. When the gaze wanes, reciprocity fades, and Monika wants to move away. The summer unites; the fall divides.

Now, imagine it was another film, with a different ending. When they approach everyday life in the fall, Harry and Monika retain their similarity with Romeo and Juliet. Both want to be together, want each other – that's what they want. They must then negotiate a form of equity without a total presence. The balance is fragile. If they loosen the grip only for a moment, the equilibrium may be disturbed. Even if the balance does not tip over, the uncertainty, the white spaces on the map, the problems of interpretation, cannot be kept at bay. They will appear and remain present, if only implicitly. The couple must negotiate a common understanding of the open spaces between them – no simple task. "What did he say now? Really." "Is she a little disappointed with me, a little less attracted, or is it only a bad day?" When Romeo reflects on his love for Juliet and tries to interpret her love for him, imbalance easily occurs and becomes an unequal power balance. The one who is somewhat less absorbed in the other gets the upper hand. Power seeps in, either by her exploiting the situation, desiring small advantages, or in his preemptions, a little more identifying with her wishes than she with his.

Power is like the elephant in the room: they cannot push it away but are unable to talk about it. Nobody can talk incessantly about power yet simultaneously maintain a community. If so, community disintegrates. Power must be handled indirectly so as not to provoke. It must be accepted and experienced without being fully exposed. Is this love's most sensitive spot? For the two to continue living together, power relations must be handled such that they simultaneously know that they are dependent on the other and know

that the other knows. They are in the power of each other; they preempt the reactions of the other to their own actions. Jealousy is the reaction to breaches of this power balance.

This is different from Barthes's dream of idiorrhythmic monastery life. There the monks are not dependent on each other; they are basically self-sufficient. When they seek community, it is on the condition that they may withdraw at any time and go back to their own cell. Jealousy is not part of their life. The power relation between Romeo and Juliet is also different from the idea of the authority in a guru rather than a leader/chief. Like the guru, the lovers may well be role models for each other; because they are different, they can reach for the example of the other. Barthes (2013: 55) refers to Wilfred Bion's theory of group dynamics where one modality is to fight or flee when the group is threatened from outside (Bion 1961: 65). The guru does none of this; he is self-sufficient and rather indifferent to his adepts. Being an idiorrhythmic monk, he does not establish long-term relationships as Juliet and Romeo wish to do.

## FRIENDSHIP

Friendship has similarities to love but not in all respects. The difference is expressed in the melancholic jazz standard "Just Friends": "Just friends, lovers no more." In its optimistic version, friendship is durable over time, without developing into a form of cohabitation. In its pure form, friendship is what Kant in *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (2000: 105) wrote about art: purposeless purpose. This is community with limited reciprocity and limited obligations. Friendship does not have deep reciprocal dependence as an implicit goal, like love. It rests on another reciprocity; the body is restrained, passion neutralized.

What we usually think of as real friendship is based on equality, whether in upbringing, experiences, or desire. This is Kant's version in pure form. For how long can it last? Friendship does not create equality; it is the reason for friendship. As long as equality remains, the friendship is not threatened and may persist as a power-free zone. But if differences emerge, the friends acquire different experiences, life plans, and self-images, and freedom from power becomes absence of cohesive forces. The friendship withers away, albeit slowly. Nice to meet from time to time, maybe, but not much more.

In Per Petterson's *I Refuse* the friends grow apart from each other in a more dramatic way (2015: 144-145). Superficially, it is due to differences in family situation, occupation, and life career. But basically, it builds upon a catastrophe from their younger years. Jim and Tommy went skating together on a lake, the ice started breaking up, they ran to the bank, but Tommy happened to push Jim out on the ice again. Was it an accident, did he just lose balance? Or was it half-

conscious, a sort of fight? Jim reaches the bank anyway, and they try to talk the episode away. But Tommy's guilt over his own betrayal does not vanish. Their failure to encounter the external threat breaks the friendship down.

A challenge to friendship is the management of competition. Who is older, better, smarter, more experienced, more knowledgeable? In other words, who is in a power position in the relationship? Friendship is confronted by inequality, whether as a challenge or a justification. At the same time, some friendships are based on inequality. As when the beautiful Helen and the pale and twiggy Elvira choose each other as bosom friends: Elvira highlights the beauty of Helen, who in turn throws luster on Elvira, demonstrating that one like her may be admitted into the community of the beautiful. Here dependence and power are clearly visible; Elvira has everything to lose by breaking out of the relationship, while Helen has no problems finding another friend. The inequality becomes an underlying condition.

Friendship may also have strands of common interests and projects. Friends acknowledge each other because they desire something outside of the relation itself. They want the relationship but with the addition of an instrumental aspect. Does it become something else than reciprocal self-development? If not, it is possible that one of them becomes a leader, the other a supporter. This can be compensated where friends each possess their individual strengths. The differences demand more distance and other forms of neutralization than is the case for love. The space for distance that is opened by friendship is what Barthes dreams of. A monastery community defines the equality that is necessary for a pure and durable friendship. At the same time, it constitutes a common project where mutual exploration and self-development are possible. But is it possible to realize this equality without a constitutive power as the base?

## The Republic of Letters

The Republic of Letters has many similarities with monastery life, not only in a metaphorical sense. It can be an almost total institution, something that was true for centuries in the history of universities. Until the Reformation the dominance of theology meant that learned men had to live in celibacy. When priests were permitted to marry following the Reformation in Northern Europe, it became possible, albeit controversial, for masters of college in English universities as well. But in an act from 1570 Queen Elizabeth I demanded that the younger fellows live in celibacy (Morgan 2004: 297). In universities the learned man was to live immersed in the universal rationality: women might distract from the narrow path in various cunning and lustful ways.

In the Republic of Letters, it is not power but the force of the better argument that claims validity. This means that authority is realized by role

models, in the same way as the guru Barthes refers to: a person who relates to error and misunderstanding by argument, without sanctions or self-interest. But power is implicitly present here too. The better argument can hardly ever be presented in pure form. The force of persuasion is driven not only by logic but also by rhetoric. The argumentation must affect the recipients, it has to be spelled out in a way that is understandable to a relatively large group with different experiences. In addition to rhetoric as such comes what is referred to as agenda-setting, a clumsy term referring to what Plato, and later Aristotle, called *kairos*, that is, the right time (and, we may add, the right occasion). *Kairos* is there as a possibility, but it is also something that is set by a speaker who is able to persuade others what is the essential matter to be discussed.

No argument can grasp all relevant matters at the same time. It has to be focused, contextualized; all credible generalization rests on selection, on localized cases. That is how the Republic of Letters becomes the hotbed of critical thinking, how it becomes academic competition. That is also how arguments are interwoven with social power, though not in the sense that Robert Merton's (1968) norms of scientific productivity are annulled. Here, sociologists of science from Foucault to Latour have overdrawn the account. But the production and diffusion of learning rests on prioritizing time and energy, on discursive specificities, on competing conceptions of rationality. What necessarily remains of uncertainty, ambiguity, and white spaces are filled in by struggles of paradigms and power relations in all issues from academic career progression to research grants. The guru slides into the role as chief.

## THE WORK COLLECTIVE

Experiencing the solution of common work tasks can be exhilarating. In *I Refuse* Per Petterson draws a moving portrait of the two friends digging a ditch together. Jim and Tommy are engaged in the same task. They immediately recognize themselves in the activities of the other.

Gradually as they were hacking and shoveling away the rhythm of it was easier to find, the sensible solution already existed, hidden in the work, in those specific movements, and was only waiting to reveal itself, and waiting for their hands and arms. And they felt it coming, and moved towards it and fell into it and let their bodies swing for every stroke. (Petterson 2015: 74)

In other collective work groups the members are assigned more and different tasks. The roles are differentiated in order to fit together; cooperation seems obvious because everyone understands they are each different from the others yet part of a common project. Common challenges elicit common learning

about how the good is created or how it is used. A prominent homage to this form of cooperation was written by Karl Marx in Paris 1844, under the title of *The Alienated Work* (Marx 1986). The essence of human beings rests on their creative potential, on their autonomous plans of what to produce and an understanding of how it is to be used. Alienation emerges when a foreign power takes command over the worker, the creative human being. So why should the work group have a leader, a chief? A leader forces the individual to comply and thus mobilizes resistance. The work group would do better without him, if so, it becomes a shared task to mobilize interest and zeal in the participants.

This is indeed possible, and there are many examples of equity in cooperation between equal coworkers. If everyone has equally valuable skills, if all have a feeling of community without competition, a group may function very well without a leader. Subject to the condition that the group is stable and is situated in a stable environment, it may then be governed by direct democracy – maybe even the tasks can be circulated between the members, as pointed out by Barthes (2013: 43). But stability is precarious, both internally in the group and in relationship to the environment (cf. Engelstad 1990). In many cases problems occur vis-à-vis the environment, that a small group of people is better suited to handle than the rest. Alternatively, obstacles may more easily be resolved if taken care of by one or a few persons. A group as a whole cannot negotiate a good financial contract with a bank or a favorable agreement with a contractor. Internally in the group, some members make mistakes more frequently; others are not so good at coping with uncertainty. This becomes increasingly critical if the collective is plagued by high turnover, whereby some have much experience while others are novices who have to learn the tasks they are to carry out. If such forms of instability become the norm, the work collective will disintegrate, either by imploding or by appointing a leader to sustain the collective, in both cases in contrast to Barthes's dream (2013: 54). Even if power is seen as destructive, it is not necessarily the case; it also becomes necessary to maintain the overarching goals in turbulent environments.

A contrast to the work collective is an organizational form that has more in common with a meeting place, like a medical center or a barbershop, or more high-grade, like a group of sculptors with their studios close to a marble quarry. The participants are self-employed working side by side. They have a similar occupation, similar tasks, each working for themselves, and sharing a common infrastructure, work space, and maybe even equipment. This is close to Marx's idea at the end of *Capital* (Marx 1991: 959) of the associated producers to emerge after capitalism. It is also quite close to Barthes's idea of idiorrhythmy: each participant is self-sufficient and assumes responsibility for himself. The difference is that neither the medical center nor the barbershop has the characteristics of a total institution. They both lack the intensity of

monastery life that Barthes also dreamed of. When the workday is over, the hairdresser and the physician go home for dinner.

## INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

In *How to Live Together* Roland Barthes basically appears as an anarchist. He seeks *autarky*, with the overarching project to escape from power relations (2013: 36). Power is broadly interpreted as everything that enforces a stable structure. The idiorrhythmic monastery life is the utopian expression of this resistance to power. Nevertheless, it is more than a utopia. The form of monastery life that existed in the initial period is still in existence at Mount Athos. But the history of Mount Athos is not rectilinear; rather, it is characterized by alternations between idiorrhythmic and hierarchical forms of organization (ibid: 30-31). This raises the question of whether the monasteries at Athos have ever been exempt from power. Even if their size is now reduced, they still accommodate several thousand monks. How can such an arrangement persist without clear traits of bureaucracy (ibid: 42)? Bureaucracy is also required to organize a strict and purposeful teaching and socialization of new monks in a *coenobium*, a hierarchical community, over a period of three or four years (ibid: 31). Small groups of semi-eremitical monks do exist in parallel, but they too are the object of the defining and regulating power.

When the lecture series about how to live together commenced in the beginning of 1977, Barthes imagined the idiorrhythmic monastery as a utopia. When he gave his last lecture in the series later that May, with Utopia as its theme, his conception had changed. The social utopias written down from Plato to Fourier were too well ordered, he contended: they organize power but do not transcend it. Against the social utopias concerning society as a whole, Barthes poses the small group, a "domestic" utopia (2013: 130), combining nearness and distance – a friendship group of autonomous, even self-sufficient individuals, where nobody is dominant and the rule is reciprocal consideration, even delicacy (here we may have Proust in mind). The group is flexible, governed by rules, not regulations; it follows a complex *rhuthmos*, not routinized rhythms. The flexibility rests on all members being basically independent.

Such groups exist in large numbers. In contrast to the total monastery life they are limited in their range; they lack the stable, all-embracing trait characterizing utopias. In the parts of life outside the group it is impossible to withdraw from power relations. Is there an alternative to the withdrawal from power? It must be learning to live with power, call it into question, neutralize it. Calling it into question is not very difficult; it is about asking whether power is justified, legitimate. Why should we have leaders? Is it necessary that they make the decisions they do? Neutralizing power is more demanding. It means

the constitution of power balances in everyday life, which is not immediately negotiable. There are many things that cannot be said, Barthes points out; they must be written, exposed in an objectified form (ibid: 131). But the conflicts of everyday life cannot be resolved by writing; they have to be met by actions that are preemptive in relationship to the other or others. Living with power is not possible if the parties are self-sufficient. It only becomes possible when they acknowledge and accept their reciprocal dependence. This may happen without individuals waiving their autonomy, by everyone perceiving that the other is a part of him-/herself, internalized as a character present in the inner dialogue. This has found many expressions in psychology and social science, in partly overlapping theories of attachment and object relations, of symbolic interactionism. Juliet and Romeo do not have to die for their love to remain stable. But they must experience a common history that gradually makes them acknowledge what they are to each other, by signs, interpretation, and reinterpretation. If living such a history is also a utopia, it is a somewhat different utopia to what Roland Barthes dreamed of.

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# CLÔTURE/Enclosure

*Mette Birkedal Bruun*

In the chapter on enclosure (*clôture*), Barthes turns his attention to physically demarcated forms of existence. The dynamic between text and praxis underlies the chapter and indeed the very publication of *Comment vivre ensemble*. On the one hand, the "novelistic simulations of everyday spaces" studied by Barthes oscillate between animal and human modes of being on one side, and on the other literary explorations of such modes of being in descriptions of the correlation between space and existence, and Barthes discusses the capacity of fictive texts to bring out nuances pertaining to this correlation. On the other hand, the translation of Barthes's lectures at the Collège de France into a textual whole, complete with explanatory notes, involves a transposition from oral discourse to edited text, from academic praxis to literary representation and from the enclosure of the academic auditory and its scholarly community to an indefinite and partly anonymous universe of readers and commentators. The interaction between text and practice is explored in the substance of Barthes's work and exploited in the emergence of the volume. The generic challenges and dynamic potential of this interaction are worth keeping in mind as we turn to texts that present a monastic vision of (co)habitation.

Our point of departure is taken in Barthes's concern with *clôture* as a physical boundary and as a demarcation of privacy. Monastic enclosure (Latin: *clausura*) serves as our point of orientation.[1] The monastic mode of being offers a wide array of paradigmatic dimensions associated with enclosure. The monastery involves architectural demarcations such as walls and gates; rules that regulate

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the crossing of those walls and behavior within them; an anthropological ideal that prescribes the annihilation of the fallen self and a set of practices aimed at shaping human beings according to that ideal; a delineation of the communities that belong respectively within and without the walls, and a competing delineation of groups who are occasionally allowed to partake in the isolation; aesthetic exploitation of the enclosure; and, finally, a fundamental vision that motivates it all and is disseminated in genres legislative, historiographical, poetic, meditative, and exemplary. As with Barthes's volume, each of these textual genres must translate between practice and text and deal with questions concerning audiences, genre-specificities, the ability of text to convey practice, and that proprium of text and practice, respectively, that defies any translation. The monastic movement takes architectural, sociological, aesthetic, and existential dimensions of enclosure to a degree of physical concreteness that makes it a suitable vantage point from which to look at questions that hover less manifestly over the enclosures discussed by Barthes. The focus is partly on the desert monasticism that is one of the five basic focal points of *Comment vivre ensemble* and its repercussions in Benedictine monasticism, and partly on notions of privacy in the classical age and the *grand siècle*, Barthes's epochal *point de repère*. Barthes's idea of *clôture* as a system of concentric circles that define a particular anthropology connects our different historical foci.

## Murs de délimitation

Monastic enclosure has its historical roots in the Egyptian desert. It comes charged with Hellenistic and biblical mythologies associated with the wilderness *(*Barthes 2002: 99) but above all with a set of practices shaped by the religious and social circumstances of the period. The first half of the fourth century saw a wide-ranging institutionalization of religious withdrawal from society, spanning from the ascetical balancing act of Symeon the Stylite (ibid: 96) to the congregations of hermits in regulated communities pioneered by Pachomius (d. ca. 348). In the Western world the cloistered life was epitomized in the Rule of Benedict (ca. 530) that became the blueprint for Benedictines and Cistercians. This rule augments the role of place with its demand for steadfastness (*stabilitas loci*), and it deploys the challenges involved in cohabitation to disciplinary ends. Medieval Cistercians described the nature of their enclosure with reference to the wilderness; modern scholars took their foundation myths at face value and charged them with hypocrisy because the Cistercian sites were not, technically speaking, deserted (Bruun 2008; Bruun/Jamroziak 2013).

Enclosure is key to monastic life. Medieval abbeys abiding by the principles of the Rule of Benedict and related regulations are organized in zones of withdrawal: from the physical border with the wider world created by the

outer wall, via the zones pertaining to courtyards, workshops, stables, and guest houses to the central complex built around the monastic court and the cloister that surrounds it. This is the heart of the abbey from which there is access to the central buildings: the church, the chapterhouse, the dormitory, and the refectory. The church itself has several zones, most importantly a demarcation that separates the choir from the nave and the choir monks from other churchgoers. The monastic life lived in these zones is minutely organized in different spaces, each of which hems in a particular activity: the church sustains a focused prayer, the refectory stages the attention to bodily needs at mealtimes, and the chapterhouse serves the orientation to the rule and its fulfillment. The medieval Cistercian manual *Ecclesiastica officia* carefully describes how monks must comport themselves in each of these rooms.

The hood of the monastic habit creates an individual enclosure. It shields the monk from his surroundings and prevents his gaze from wandering. The hood forces him to focus and keeps him on the *via regia*, the direct road to salvation (cf. Num. 20:17, "we will go along the King's Highway, not turning aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory"). The hood prevents the monk's gaze from turning left or right and reins in his curiosity. Much is at stake, for it was curiosity that drove Eve and thus humankind into the Fall, and the slightest restlessness or lack of concentration is a Fall *en miniature* (Cassian, *De institutis coenobiorum* 4.17; Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* 10.28; *Ecclesiastica officia* 72.14). The body marks the enclosure of the soul: the senses are described as doors and windows that give access to sin (Bernard of Clairvaux, *In dedicatione ecclesiae* sermo 3.1; *Dominica VI post Pentecosten* sermo 2.5; S*uper Cantica canticorum* sermo 35.2). The soul is the innermost core in a concentric system, and it is the soul that all these demarcations serve to protect: the abbey walls; the cloistered yard and its surrounding rooms; the hood and the body.

Benedictine enclosure can be breached on several occasions. The two most salient are the entries of postulants and guests, respectively. Such entries come with a dispensation of segregation; they are fraught with danger and surrounded by legislative and practical safeguards. For whomsoever wants to be a monk, the trial of monastic life is condensed at the abbey wall, and the postulant has to stand by the gate for several days in order to show his persistence before he is allowed to enter the apprenticeship of the novitiate. The Rule of Benedict states that no one who seeks to enter monastic life should be allowed easy access (58.1). Only gradually is the hopeful candidate admitted through different sections of the abbey, moving slowly toward its center. First, he enters the guest house, and after a trial period he proceeds into the novices' area (the Rule of Benedict 58.1-26); only after a year is he allowed full access. The novice's entry goes but one way; guests who belong to the world and will return to the world pose a correspondingly greater threat to the enclosure. On the one hand, the

obligation to cater for strangers and travelers is incumbent upon Christian and, particularly, monastic life, and the guest house is a mandatory monastic building (e.g., Puzicha 1980; Kerr 2008). On the other hand, guests upset the, ideally hermetic, enclosure. The tension becomes especially acute in early modern French monasteries. In the aftermath of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and its concern with lay edification, catechisms and devotional manuals increasingly encouraged laypeople to withdraw from the world in *retraites* of some eight to ten days. Thus, abbeys became places of resort and loci of devotion not only for monks and nuns but also for devout laypeople. They offered the possibility of a strong dose of devotion, but they also incarnated the simplicity so treasured by contemporary aesthetics. Guests wrote rapt reports, conveying their impressions of enclosed existence to the wider world. They praised the clarity and simplicity that characterized monastic life and described their visit as a veritable peek into beatitude (e.g., Félibien 1671). In the meeting between the monastic inmates and their guests, the demarcations within the abbey were negotiated. They became zones where guests were permitted to partake for a while in monastic life and where, in turn, monks and nuns had to protect themselves from the external threat to their enclosure posed by guests they were bound to welcome. We can only begin to imagine the practical frictions; they seldom come out in the texts.

For some visitors the gradual entry into the abbey began well beyond the monastic precinct. Guests who came to the isolated Cistercian abbey of La Trappe in Normandy in the late 17th century recall how the abbey – like some Grail castle – was so inaccessible that they had to hire a local guide to find it. Such visitors' reports conjure up a vision of the monastic enclosure in which notions of withdrawal, seclusion, privileged insight, and secrecy merge (Félibien 1671: 6). Devout members of the nobility had apartments in abbeys or on their fringes. No matter how physically concrete and devotionally absolute, monastic walls were also porous and permeable. Such modulations of the monastic enclosure found different architectural expressions. Four paradigmatic types are Mlle de Guise, Marie de Lorraine (1615-1688), who regularly withdrew from her Parisian palace to her apartment at the Abbaye de Saint-Pierre de Montmartre, where her sister was abbess; Anne of Austria (1606-1666), who had a pavilion for retreat, built on pillars, adjacent to the convent of Val-de-Grâce in Paris; Mme de Sablé's (1599-1678) apartment in the convent of Port-Royal in Paris, which had access from the street and a window that opened into the church and thus offered a lodging perched on the very wall (Lafond 1984: 205; see also Barthes 2002: 102-103); and Mme de Guise, Élisabeth d'Orléans (1646-1696), who had a lodge in the outer court of La Trappe. As a woman she could not reside within the monks' enclosure, but as a princess she could not be excluded from the precinct either. The monastic walls competed with other forms of demarcation. Mme de Guise was Louis XIV's cousin, and when the

abbot of La Trappe visited her at her lodge there, he was not allowed to sit. In a religious sense the abbey was his turf, but socially it was hers.

This quick sketch reminds us that enclosure may heighten the density of (religious) ideals and aesthetics and require finely chiseled control in order to do so. It also shows the titillating potential of enclosure and the communicative clout of the correspondent who has gazed within. Our examples are monastic. It may be suggested, however, that most of Barthes's "novelistic simulations of everyday spaces" gain momentum from more or less explicit rehearsals of similar traits – from the protective and civilizing potency of Robinson Crusoe's barricade, to the mental intensity personified in the confined woman of Poitiers and in Barthes's mapping of the zones of voluntary and involuntary, physical and psychological sequestration inherent in Gide's portrayal of her.

## COMMENT VIVRE ENSEMBLE

The *clausura* not only shuts people out; it also encloses the inmates together. The life prescribed in the Rule of Benedict is cenobitic (from Greek κοινός βίος, 'common life') rather than eremitical (cf. the Rule of Benedict 1; see also Barthes 2002: 49), and it raises with particular weight the question of how to live together. The shared life strengthens the individual against diabolic attack (the Rule of Benedict 1.3), but the cohabitation also becomes a part of the monastic discipline alongside ascetic practices such as fasts and vigils. The underlying idea is that intense communion with other human beings is an ongoing trial. In the monastic universe, cohabitation tests humility and underpins the desired annihilation of the proud self (Cassian, *Collationes* 20.1; Asad 1993: 125-167). Within the enclosure the monk is overseen by the abbot and his fellow monks. Above all, however, he is monitored by God, whose angels report to their divine master the monk's every movement, adding to the basic panoptic tenor of monasticism. The monk is, in the abbot of La Trappe's words, an *homme regardé*, an observed human being (Rancé 1689: 1.125). The monks testify to each other's misconduct in order to help their peers to perfection (*Ecclesiastica officia* 70). In their cohabitation they test and hone self-control on a daily basis. They must converse harmoniously and suppress any trace of anger. They must, however, not become so absorbed in friendship that their attention is led astray from God or love of neighbor. In the cenobitic life silence becomes a fence that protects each monk from expressing ire, wit, rebellion, or love beyond brotherly care (the Rule of Benedict 4.68-73 and 6). No fence is impenetrable, however, and even silence cannot prevent the monks from harassing each other with gestures, sneering, murmur, laughter, or frowns. This gallery of grimacing faces appears in a sermon that thus offers – perhaps

– lived life caught in a textual snapshot (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Super Cantica canticorum* 29; Bruun 2011).

Just as, in Benedictine monasticism, the monastic precinct disciplines the monk spatially, the canonical hours discipline him temporally. Barthes argues that the ideal *idiorrythmie* appears in the monastic complex of Mount Athos, which is less minutely organized than the Benedictine schedule: "Chaque sujet y a son rythme propre." (Barthes 2002: 37) It is the ideal of Benedictine monasticism that each monk's own rhythm is subject to the common rhythm, indicated by the seven daily services of the Divine Office at which the 150 psalms from the Old Testament are chanted each week (the Rule of Benedict 10-19). These prayers ensure that the monks' focus is turned toward God and help to structure their day so tightly that not a minute is left for idleness. In these services the monks' own rhythm is bent toward the common rhythm and is eventually subsumed in a divine rhythm ostensibly decreed by the Bible (cf. the reference to Ps. 119:164 in the Rule of Benedict 16.1).

The Benedictine cohabitation is a Procrustean bed. It molds individuals so as to enable them to discard postlapsarian pride and fit the anthropological ideal of humility and obedience in a surrender of their own will to the abbot's discretion on God's behalf. The community is a source of strength, but it is also a disciplinary means. The monastic universe is but one example, but at the same time it is an example that throws light on fundamental features of cohabitation intensified by enclosure. This demonstration of a willful and conscious pruning of individuals within the Benedictine community and its temporal, spatial, and ascetic organization reminds us how cohabitation may serve the shaping of oneself and of others – in ways pertaining to body, mind, and mores.

## LE PRIVÉ, C'EST LE TERRITOIRE

For Barthes, the notion of *clôture* is closely linked to the notion of privacy, which in turn is closely linked to that of territory. He speaks of the concentric circles of privacy – estate, house, room, and bed (2002: 93) – but historically speaking it makes sense to add to this structure the circles of body and soul or self. The term 'private' and its derivatives come from Latin *privatus,* which means 'divested,' 'robbed,' or 'liberated.' The notion of privacy is, at its semantic basis, a negation, and the state of privacy is the state of one who is *not* in office. In a classical context, the *vita privata* is the opposite of the public life with its offices and obligations. Cicero's great manifesto on civic obligations *De officiis* (44 BC) is permeated by the dichotomy between public and private. He describes, for example, how private property is based on the allocation of things that by nature are common (*pro communibus*) to individuals (*privati*) through usage, purchase,

or military force (Cicero, *De officiis* 1.7). He lists the duties of the magistrate, the private person, and the foreigner and describes the ways in which the private person must cohabit with others in order to fulfill his obligations as a good citizen. He must be neither servile nor domineering and in matters of the state ever labor for peace and honor (ibid 1.34).

Vitruvius defines the ideal physical framework for private life in the sixth book of *De architectura* (ca. 15 BC), dedicated to the ideal private home. He structures domestic space in respectively private zones, those that are accessible only to the inhabitants, and zones to which guests also have access. Unless invited, guests cannot enter private rooms such as bedrooms, private dining rooms, and bathrooms, while anyone may enter the common rooms (Vitruvius, *De architectura* 6.5.1). This restricted access means that private homes must be shaped according to the profession of their owners and the professional duties, representative and otherwise, that these owners must be able to execute at home (ibid 6.5.2).

Marcus Aurelius' meditations (170-180) add yet another element to the notion of privacy. Written in Greek, the work evidently involves a terminological move away from the root *privat-*. More importantly, however, his meditations approach an association of physical withdrawal and meditative withdrawal into oneself (εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀναχωρεῖν, 4.3). The ἀναχώρησις (anachōrēsis, 'withdrawal') described by Marcus Aurelius is in some ways related to the withdrawal exercised by the Desert Fathers some 100 years later. Their more lasting and radical segregation from society is augmented by their ἄσκησις (askēsis, 'asceticism'), a form of training aimed at disciplining the anchorites so that they might triumph over their body and in their entire existence turn toward God (Endjsø 2008: 101-129; Hadot 2009: 81-125). This discipline brings us back to the monastic enclosure and communal honing that goes on within it as a way to support, survey, and test the ascetic.

The notion of privacy is not central to the early monastic tradition, which prefers notions of hiddenness such as *secretum*. It gains ground, however, in the early modern period. The English term *privacy* occurs from the mid-15th century (Huebert 1997: 28), while French and German show a preference for adjectival constructions. For example, *vie privée* indicates a life that is not associated with a profession, while *oraison privée* is the prayer that is performed not by a priest but by the individual believer, no matter how public the location. Similarly, *Privatandacht* denotes a devotion that takes place in a domestic, more intimate sphere as against the public church service. With the intensified cross-confessional emphasis on sincerity and heart-felt devotion in the 17th century, privacy became a privileged place fit to sustain the earnestness desired, and Pietist circles, to mention but one example, treasured the personal faith nurtured in privacy. But what was positively charged for devout believers proved problematic for the authorities. Decrees such as the one issued in Denmark-

Norway on October 2, 1706 (*Seiner Königlichen Majestät zu Dennemarck und Norwegen ernstliches Edict wider die Privat- oder heimlichen Zusammenkünffte der Pietisten*) sought to curb the Pietists' private conventicles. Such decrees placed private religious meetings under official ecclesiastical control, prescribing the public church service as the ideal. For Barthes, privacy connotes the territory of the individual (2002: 93). The private sphere may be a safe haven for those who are within it, but for the authorities it is uncontrollable and potentially threatening, exactly because it is private.

In early modern devotion, privacy may be a state wherein believers give up their official insignia, indeed their professional territory, and surrender themselves to God. This is applicable not least in a French context, which maintains linguistically the negation inherent in the Latin *privatus.* Here the idea of a life divested (*privée*) of worldly honors and professional distinctions chimes with contemporary, devout norms regarding a life orientated toward God in renunciation of the fallen self. This ideal to some extent adopts the monastic concept of regulated withdrawal and leads to a host of manuals that prescribe a minutely structured life including prayers at specific hours and regular retreats. *Solitude* becomes the locus of both the radical enclosure of monasticism and the private person's religious withdrawal from the business of everyday life. The enclosure of cenobitic monasticism and the private non-official life both enact early modern French Catholic notions of religious *retraite* as a *vie privée.*

In his grand pious-pedagogical compendium *La methode d'étudier et d'enseigner chrétiennement & solidement les lettres humaines* (1682), the Oratorian Louis Thomassin (1619-1695) establishes a connection between the classical notion of *vita privata* and the Christian idea of *solitude.* Thomassin introduces his chapter on the private life with an avowal that "la vie privée, une condition mediocre, la retraite, la solitude, le silence sont des biens preferables à toutes les grandeurs de la terre" ("the private life, a modest condition, retreat, solitude, and silence are preferable to all the greatness of the world," Thomassin 1682: 452). He visits Horace, Virgil, Cicero, and Martial, explaining how well their texts on the private life accord with Christian ideals, and he lingers over the Horatian claim that retreat and solitude become something special when dedicated to studies and when "on se soustrait à tout ce qui est au dehors, pour rentrer en soy-mesme, & y contempler ces veritez & ces regles de sagesse & de justice, qui fixent l'ame & la font joüir d'une heureuse tranquilité" ("one withdraws from everything that is outside [oneself] in order to enter into oneself and there contemplate those truths and those rules of wisdom and justice that anchor the soul and enable it to enjoy a happy tranquility," ibid: 454). Thomassin is most enthusiastic about Seneca's statement regarding the happiness of those who enjoy peace far from the tumultuous splendor of court, awaiting death without trouble and fear (ibid: 454-455). In this version of a private life the human being

is no longer concerned with being known by others but only with knowing him or herself as created and fallen and thus dependent on God's grace.

Seen from a *grand-siècle* religious point of view, the "private" renunciation of worldly honors may be portrayed, textually, as far more heroic than any martial exploits. The retirement of the former commander Louis II Bourbon de Condé (1621-1686), known as *le grand Condé*, to his palace at Chantilly and his renunciation of both his offices and his former libertine mores for the pursuit of a life of devout and erudite absorption was seen as an eminent expression of a *vie privée*. Within the palatial *clôture* that demarcates the *vie privée* of Condé and those of like mind, cohabitation involves a close, if potentially numerous, circle of family, servants, and friends; stripped of a certain worldly distinction, it is seen as an instance of voluntary diminution. One of the funeral sermons is cued by this diminishment for a claim to grandeur, stating that "le Prince de Condé n'a jamais êté, ni paru plus grand, que dans sa retraite; c'est le dernier comble de sa grandeur d'avoir êté un Prince d'un merite universel, qui a soûtenu le caractere de Heros jusques dans sa vie privée" ("the Prince de Condé never was or appeared to be greater than in his retirement; it is the ultimate culmination of his grandeur to have been a prince of universal merit, who maintained his heroic character even into his private life" Daubenton 1687: 25). The literary rehearsals maintain the view that Condé's greatness hinges on a turn to God in his private mode of being. His is an existence in which he gives up his territory in a professional sense, retreats to his territory in an architectural and social sense, and thus enters God's territory in a devotional sense.

## Perspectives

The modern understanding of privacy takes its point of departure in a definition formulated by the American lawyers Samuel D. Warren (1852-1910) and Louis D. Brandeis (1856-1941) in an article published in 1890. Their definition of privacy as "the right to be let alone" (1890: 193) emerged at a time when the press had begun to chase stories of prominent people's private lives: "Instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life; and numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that 'what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops' [Luke 12:3]." (ibid: 195) The article avowed that "solitude and privacy have become more essential to the individual" (ibid: 196) and referred to the citizen's right to "his reputation." Having explained how legislation can no longer make do with paragraphs on rights concerning property, life, and conviction but has to preserve less tangible values too, the authors conclude by pedagogically describing the problem by way of an architectural image that brings us back to Barthes's idea of the private realm

as a territory and a domain: "The common law has always recognized a man's house as his castle, impregnable, often, even to its own officers engaged in the execution of its commands. Shall the courts thus close the front entrance to constituted authority, and open wide the back door to idle or prurient curiosity?" (ibid: 220) The article laid the foundation for the understanding of privacy featured in article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which concerns the right to privacy and family life and which at once opens and closes the door in its understanding that privacy, while being an indisputable right, may shield activities that pose a threat to the state and its citizens, along the lines of the suspicion that dogged the Pietist conventicles:

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. 2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Whereas the classical world deployed the notion of *privatus* to define a particular status, in the early modern period privacy became a place and a state that human beings could – and, from a religious perspective, should – seek out. When privacy came under pressure, it was increasingly defined as a right. Warren and Brandeis insist that the back door to the territory must be kept closed, and they exploit the domestic enclosure metaphorically to describe the need for a legally defined boundary against the curious gaze. Since then the issue has only become more pertinent. We hone, abolish, and negotiate enclosure on a daily basis with barriers around our homes that make us invisible and glass walls in our offices that turn us into *hommes regardés*; we delineate virtual intimate spheres with privacy protection, spam filters, and firewalls. Within such concentric domains it becomes germane to ask again – with Barthes – how are we to live together? How live together within and across different enclosures? How to treat 'in novelistic simulation' these different enclosures and the human life led inside them; how to translate issues related to such practices in texts fit to explore their nuances?

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# COLONIE/Colony

*Iver B. Neumann*

Barthes's review of the colony is based on an existential theme: man's life as a recluse in the desert. Barthes's earliest example is the Jewish Qumran sect, documented in the Dead Sea Scrolls circa 140 BC, but his central example focuses on the Sinai Peninsula in 300 AD, where a growing stream of loners ('drop-outs,' 'anchorites') tried to find a way to meet their God in peace. Instead they often found wild animals and people with more sense for profit than idiorrhythm. A few pulled up on pillars. Most searched in groups for protection. The groups found unstable souls ('drop-ins') along the way. The colony is a special community that arises in relation to a larger community that members have left or been cast out of.

Barthes holds forth on this way of life, called 'idiorrhythmic clusters,' that is, clusters where everyone lives in parallel, according to their own rhythm, as their favorite fantasy. He insists on individuality. There is every reason to try to insist, for the story he tells about hermits is also the story of the origins of monastic orders. By taking a look at the codification that was made at this time, especially the Rule of St. Benedict, one sees immediately that the individual was read out in favor of a more common rhythm: "The vice of personal ownership must by all means be cut out in the monastery by the very root, so that no one may presume to give or receive anything without the command of the Abbot; nor to have anything whatever as his own, neither a book, nor a writing tablet, nor a pen, nor anything else whatsoever, since monks are allowed to have neither their bodies nor their wills in their own power".[1] Historically, then, the entire Christian monastery tradition is a non-starter for idiorrhytmy, for the strict regulation of everything from sleep via meal times to ownership of things that may be used to undertake one's own projects is so strictly regulated that there is no room for pursuing anything else but the monastery's rhythm. Barthes's answer to this is to hold forth more anarchic colonies that all are to

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1 | From chapter XXXIII: Whether Monks Ought to Have Anything of Their Own. Available as http://www.holyrule.com/part7.htm, retrieved 4 December 2017.

be found outside the Catholic tradition, in Athos, Egypt, Constantinople. He concludes resignedly by discussing a monk who had had enough of asceticism and, we are to believe, draws consequences by returning to mainstream society.

Politics form the primary question that presses on, and it is not about the relationship to the other, so Barthes suggests, but the relationship between the one and many: Is a life of community where everyone can follow their own rhythm possible? Were there specific reasons why idiorrhythm disappeared in the 300s, or is there something about the very nature of such communities that spells their doom from the beginning? If we turn to archeology, we find two major changes in assumptions in the formation of such communities. The first is big game hunting; the second is rural society (or, to be more precise, access to food that is so stable that it makes sedentary life possible; in Northern Europe, fishing and oyster hunting sufficed before agriculture came). Big game hunting is at least 300,000 years old. It brought with it what we might call a Paleolithic political revolution, in that wildlife could only be captured if adult men hunted together. Thus, ability and the willingness to cooperate became vital. Alpha males went from being social cranks to being leaders. The social structure was flatter, but not very flat; what little we know about society that is organized this way suggests that other members, both men and women, used enormous amounts of time keeping the best hunters at bay. In Shostak's (1981) famous study of the !Kung people of southern Africa, we see that as much as half of their conversation could be to remind the best hunters how dependent they were on group support and how important it was to share. Here, there was little room for individual rhythms.

After centuries and millennia experimenting with the increasing production of everything from hazelnuts to oysters came the Neolithic political revolution, which gave groups relatively fixed supplies of food in the form of agricultural commodities. Agricultural products can be stored. Surplus food can be exchanged for other goods. Some get richer, others become poorer. Whereas the Paleolithic political revolution flattens hierarchies, the Neolithic revolution spearheads them again. The room for one's own rhythm shrinks further. The members of the Qumran sect and their followers, that is, precisely the people Barthes discusses, tried to escape the tyranny of rural society, but with little luck.

In the millennium before our own era, there were, in addition to the logic Barthes mentions, at least three other logics that gave rise to colonies. Plato mentions one:

When men who have nothing, and are in want of food, show a disposition to follow their leaders in an attack on the property of the rich – these, who are the natural plague of the state, are sent away by the legislator in a friendly spirit as far as he is able; and this dismissal of them is euphemistically termed a colony. (1937: 503 [*Laws* 5.735-736])

Agricultural society gave relatively fast access to food, but not permanent access. When the hungry attack hierarchy, they are sent off to found colonies. Here we have the basis for the next two thousand years with bandits, pirates, and highway robbers in semi-nomadic colonies, from Robin Hood to Blackbeard (see Hobsbawm 2000). This life may stand in a certain sense, but it hardly provides much space for Little John's own rhythm of life; Robin decides. This draws a line from the Greek colonialization of the Mediterranean from 750 BC to the British colonialization of Australia from the late 1700s and onward to Africa.

The Greeks of Thera (modern Santorini) had set forth a related logic, namely, one where colonialization was due to overcrowding. Herodotus tells how the island in 630 BC, having too many mouths to feed, decided by lot who had to leave for a minimum of five years. Founding a colony proved difficult, however, and after a while the unwilling colonists returned. They were met with a shower of stones from the shore, and once again they had to sail away looking for a place to establish a colony. They found space on the coast of Africa.

The Greeks were not the first with colonies in the Mediterranean. When they settled in this way, it was also in response to the Carthaginian colonization of the Mediterranean (Cunliffe 2008: 284). It had begun almost two centuries before, in 814 BC, when the Phoenicians in Tyre (in today's Lebanon) founded Carthage (today's Tunis). The logic here is about trade routes and military strategy: in a tug-of-war (albeit a maritime one) between the Carthaginians and first the Greeks and then the Romans, domination of trade in the Mediterranean was first settled with the three Punic Wars.

We are talking about a type of colonization that is not operated by the other's desire to live according to their own rhythm, but about structural offshoots. The three logics – diversion of discontent, overproduction, sovereignty over new areas – have been the driving force in settler colonies thrust across the globe and can also be found at the heart of the two major European waves of colonization in 1492-1600 and 1815-1918. Note that this specifically concerns settler colonies. The Greeks did not use a variation of the word 'colony' to denote this activity, but rather *apoikia*, which means 'out of the house,' from *api*, 'outside,' and *oikos*, 'house.' For Greek colonists, it was important to recognize one's hometown, but there was little contact with this hometown and no direct control from it.

Barthes mentions 19th-century utopia. This utopia had two assumptions: that industrialization drives people into cities and that it created a longing for the monotony and innocence of life back in the home village. Most satisfied themselves with nationalism as a counterweight, but there were others who turned to idiorrhythm and founded colonies on the American prairie or the Patagonian pampas. They left because of the dream of a pre-industrial society but also because structural colonialization had opened geographic space. It did not go well for these utopian settler colonies.

Where structural colonialism opened room for settlers, be it those who would like to find their own rhythm or others, there inevitably lived other people whose life rhythms were obliterated by the newcomers. From the late 1700s on, with the emergence of romantic nationalism, people's self-determination was a new ideal and colonies became an insult. The colony is seen here not as a possible microcosm but, quite in line with what happened with the hermits of the Sinai Peninsula in the 300s, as a community that is in a subordinate relation of power to an imperial center, and people cannot be national citizens who determine communal rhythm.

Here we talk about a new sense of 'colony,' which goes back to the Latin word for 'farmer,' *colonus*, which in turn comes from the proto-Indo-European *kwel\**, 'to go around.' Colonies in this sense are therefore not colonies formed by people who strike out on their own, but rather by people who have no choice but to go elsewhere, or are even actively sent away in order to do so. So there are colonies and colonies. The main idea nowadays in English and other Indo-European languages, however, is the one that arose during the transition to modernity from 1750 to 1850, what Reinhart Koselleck calls the "saddle period" (*Sattelzeit*), and what we can see, for example, spread in countercultural political slogans such as "Welcome to Arizona, Nuclear Colony of the United States" (Masco 2005).

It is in this sense, as a political entity of the imperial center, we find the term in the debate about Norway's situation around 1814. The geopolitical situation was that the great power victors of the Napoleonic Wars would compensate Sweden for the loss of Finland to Russia in 1809, in order to avoid Swedish revanchism. The proposed way to do that was to deprive Denmark, which had been allied to France and so was on the losing side of the war, of Norway, and then put Norway under the Swedish crown. The Swedish crown was of course partial to this idea, and as part of its campaign to bring off the deal, it accused Denmark of having treated Norway as a 'Cononie'. For example, one of the main players, the French-born general Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte (then Crown Prince Charles John of Sweden, later Charles XIV John), wrote the following bulletin in his native tongue in January 1814:

Les Norvégiens qui ont éprouvé toutes les angoisses du besoin et de la misère, vont incessamment être prévenus que leur union avec la Suède aura pour première base les mêmes avantages qui viennent d'être rendus aux habitants de la presqu'île Cimbrique; ainsi la Norvège libre et heureuse ne sera plus gouvernée comme Colonie, et jouira de tous ses droits politiques. (Charles XIV John 1839: 597; cf. Hemstad 2014: 88)

This notion that Norway had been a 'Colonie' under Denmark was a central notion in Norwegian nationalism. It is a strange reading, however. Denmark was an empire, quite rightly, and it had colonies. Norway delivered officers to

these colonies on a regular basis, and it received good money on colonial slave trading and other shipping. But Norway was by no means a colony. Norway was near Copenhagen, and thus as Morten Skumsrud Andersen (2015) has demonstrated, is best understood as an imperial semi-core. The largest colonies were Trankebar on the Indian Ocean, the crown colony Danish West India (which was later sold to the United States in 1919), and the typical settler colony of Greenland, whose apostle was Hans Egede, a Norwegian. Numerous Danes and Norwegians lived there in a colonial life that so thoroughly left local life rhythms in ruins.

The European colonialization was a worldwide project, as Barthes wrote in the book we are celebrating, yet had just ended in France's case by the time Barthes delivered his original lecture series in 1977. Barthes lived in a postcolonial world, but, except for an occasional reference to the tricolor in *Mythologies*, this does not seem to have interested him greatly, even though he had lived through a bloody civil war that was about precisely colonialism, and even though immigration from former colonies was to make the metropolis he lived in a multicultural one. These immigrants lived a postcolonial life, where they tried to find a rhythm that could speak both to the tradition they had traveled from and to the society they had become part of (Mbembe 2006). That Barthes, who was nothing but an acute observer, did not have a better eye for the post-colonial, either from his quotidian criss-crossing about the city or from having read Franz Fanon, is, to me, incomprehensible, not least because immigrants in Paris created their own clusters where they tried to find a rhythm that to some degree could remain their own right in the world city. If he thought about it at all, he might not have written about it because he had a suspicion that these marginalized idiorrhythms would have to perish and so would become a coda to the marginalized, utopian idiorrhythmic colonies he wrote of. Whether they became institutionalized slums, like some *bidonville* around Paris, or whether they were like the Russian and Indonesian farmers who tried to copy their villages inside Moscow in the 1920s and Jakarta in the 1960s respectively, they ended up assimilating, for immigrants assimilate to the rhythms of their new city and their new country. Very few of us make a conscious attempt at finding our own rhythms, for such attempts demand an interest in what Clifford Geertz calls deep play (play where one's very identity is at stake) and utopias, and that quickly proves too much for most.

And yet it is important to keep up with utopias, for they give us reason to go on. The two major obstacles that have stood in the way of the idiorrhythmic project from the beginning – namely, the *animus dominandi* and the fact that a complex society needs a certain degree of hierarchy – are multiply realizable theoretically and historically malleable empirically, and so could be further modified. The utopia of finding one's own rhythm within a community may, however, come in the way of a social understanding of what kind of rhythms

people actually live. If a utopia is what is being sought, then there should be no illusions about what one is up against, which is actually the weight of the world in its entirety.

*Translation by Amanda Cellini*

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# COUPLAGE/Pairing

*Eivind Røssaak*

In the "How to Live Together" lecture series from 1977, Roland Barthes develops what he calls a 'fantasy' on idiorrhythmy. He explores certain 'rhythms' of living, that is, how practices of life (i.e., the connection between thinking and life) can be organized according to specific rules, habits or techniques, of the self. This turn to life and living is a radical break with structuralist and certain textualist trends in French theory. However, Barthes's turn to life and living enables us to see his ongoing commitment to an ethics of writing in a new light. The project predates and is in many ways different from Michel Foucault's later hermeneutics of the self, but they both shared a turn to notions and connections between life, ethics, and writing. Among the 30 terms or figures scrutinized by Barthes, the term *couplage* will be in focus here. We will examine how it potentially also may explain Barthes's own idiorrhythmy, working habits, writing practices, and text theory.

Roland Barthes's notion of *couplage* is inspired by Wilfred Bion's notion "pairing." In Bion's group dynamics therapy, 'pairing' is one of the possible tacit assumptions that creates diversion or tension in a group. 'Pairing' happens as two people in a group suddenly entertain a more intimate relationship. This 'pairing' structures and displaces the interaction in the group. In contrast to the English term 'pairing,' the French term *couplage* also resonates with technology and hybridity in nonhuman connections like *assemblage, interaction entre des systèmes* ('assemblage, interaction between systems') and *un couplage électrique* ('an electrical connection'). The references to assemblage and apparatus will play a key role in my understanding. Barthes uses the term to analyze relations between two protagonists in a story. His sketch departs from two long quotations. The first is from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, which deals with the relationship between Aunt Leonie and her maid, Françoise. The aunt is hopelessly dependent on her maid. Life is unthinkable without her help and presence. Barthes finds a similar life-constraining relation in Palladius's *The Lausiac History from 422, a* seminal work documenting the lives of the early Christian monks who lived in the Egyptian desert. One of the stories is

about the monk Eulogius, who decides to devote his life to help an ungrateful cripple with no hands or feet whom he finds in the marketplace. He believes that through caring for the cripple until death do them apart, he will be saved by God. In both of these examples Barthes circles in on "pairings" determined by an intoxicating dependency: the one cannot live without the other. Barthes calls these relations a *folie à deux* ('a madness shared by two').

While Barthes finds this madness in literature, I will explore a particular *folie à deux* in Barthes's own life. One could have written about his tight relationship to his mother, or about his special relationship to and belief in writing. I will focus on the latter in the most material and seemingly trivial and prosaic way. Barthes had no partner or life companion to share his life or journeys with, but there was one thing he brought along everywhere – his index card catalogue. It became his most sacred *aide-mémoire* as a writer. He lived and traveled with his homemade index card catalogue boxes everywhere. Tirelessly, he worked on his cards; all his books are based on notes and drafts catalogued in these boxes. We can spot them in several of the photographic portraits of Barthes sitting by his writing desk, most famously in the one taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson. And there it is, behind him on the bookshelf – his ever-expanding paper machine, the index card catalogue. What we know is that from approximately 1942 and until his premature death in 1980, he had gathered 12,250 index cards that where continuously appended and reorganized.[1] The index card catalogue became the central nervous system of his writing praxis; it became his *folie à deux*. They were *Alone Together*, to use the wonderfully melancholic title of Sherry Turkle's study of modern technology. While Turkle talks about how electronic *aide-mémoires* lure us into a pseudo-sociality, Barthes, as we will see, uses the index card catalogue to harden a mode of writing that experimentally tries to abstain from the horde-qualities of language. Not unlike the rituals of the monks he explored in his lectures, it helped him live in this world without being contaminated by the language and styles of the masses.

Roland Barthes's intimate relationship to and belief in writing as a way of life is well known, but in my approach I will, as Barthes asserts at one point, address this question by "putting things on the most material level" (1985: 177). As I see it, we are dealing with a generative human/nonhuman *couplage* in Barthes's case. To fully grasp the value and function of this *couplage*, we need to seek assistance in the so-called technical or material turn within the humanities rather than in Bion's social psychology. The production of knowledge, criticism, and art is tied to a network of media and tools that changes over time. Here, human and nonhuman qualities get entangled in

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**1** | These have now been moved from the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC) and are kept under limited access in the manuscripts section of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, at the Richelieu site in Paris.

historically shifting assemblages. Bruno Latour's "ethnography of inscriptions" and media archaeologists like Friedrich Kittler and Lisa Gitelman have been crucial in the study of such *couplages*. The human/nonhuman *couplage* can be studied from a variety of entry points. Wolfgang Ernst has investigated how the micro temporalities of computers affect human time, Jussi Parikka's "geology of media" proposes "deep time" as key to understanding nonhuman interventions, and scholars like Ben Kafka and Markus Krajewski explore the creative writers' connections to the development of the techniques of modern bureaucracy. These studies explore philosophical and political questions concerning human life and its technologies through concrete and minutely detailed empirical analyses of 'our' things. The main question is simple: How do tools and techniques constrain – and liberate! – so-called free and creative processes?

## WORKING HABITS

While many of the studies analyzing the human/nonhuman *couplage* tend to overdetermine the technical component in the pair, my approach will try to follow closely how Barthes self-reflexively acts as an alluring agent in the *couplage*. He does not simply 'use' tools and techniques, but explores how they at every corner surprise him and can possibly play into his own strategy. We will focus on one of his main tools, the index card catalogue, which is a very complex apparatus, or *dispositif*, as Barthes called it. It serves many functions; it is an archive, an *aide-mémoire*, a companion and an interlocutor. For Barthes and a host of other writers and intellectuals, it even played a key role in their way of thinking and style of writing. Barthes was not afraid of disclosing the fact that he was manically obsessed by reworking and expanding his index card catalogue. This is underscored in some of the interviews with him, by some critics, and in his experimental autobiography *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), which also includes photographs of several of the note-appended cards. These cards are explored, by Barthes himself, as an inevitable part of his daily habits and routines. He peeks through them, re-shuffles and rewrites them, adds things or writes new notes on new cards. In a poetic passage, he reveals how the cards can be stacked differently depending on for example where they were written. Their history and location are evident from their style of writing. Different cards are reprinted in the book to demonstrate their topological differences, with notes being written either in bed, at his desk, or "outside" (Barthes 1977: 75). The cards written in bed are almost illegible; the characters are uneven and some letters are much bigger than the others, as if the bedspread or a pillow served as a writing pad. The cards written outside have titles such as the one labeled "Dans le train" ("on the train"), which was

originally jotted down in miniscule writing on a piece of paper and then glued onto an index card and put into the catalogue box. Only the cards written at the writing desk have the well-known and elegant handwriting Barthes is known for.

In a passage in the autobiography entitled "*Emploi du temps* – Schedule" he describes his daily routines during the "vacation" (ibid: 81). After lunch, "then comes the moment when I drift (*dérive*)," and he usually ends up painting or working on his index card catalogue; he makes "a file, a paper rack" (ibid: 82). In fact, he frequently uses painting to decorate the catalogue boxes. We see one of these home-style decorated boxes at the edge of the desk in one of the photographs in the autobiography (ibid: 39). Unfortunately, the photograph is in black and white. One of Barthes's decorated boxes was shown to me by a librarian at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. She would not let me take a picture of it. It was covered in many colors in Barthes's typical abstract aquarelle style.[2] In the passage called "La Papillonne," he elaborates on what he does when he "drifts":

Crazy, the power of distraction [*diversion*] a man has who is bored, intimidated, or embarrassed by his work: working in the country (at what? at rereading myself, alas!), here is the list of distractions I incur every five minutes: spray a mosquito, cut my nails […] walk down to the garden to see how many nectarines have ripened on the tree, look at the radio-program listings, rig up a stand to hold my papers [*bricoler un dispositif pour tenir mes paperolles*], etc.: *I am cruising* [*je drague*].

(Cruising relates to that passion which Fourier called the Variant, the Alternant, the Butterfly – in the feminine: "La Papillonne."). (ibid: 71-72)

The last parenthesis in this quotation is by Barthes himself. However, the translation is somewhat extended and not necessarily helpful. Barthes uses Fourier's term *La papillonne,* which is a term Fourier uses to refer to man's desire for change and variation. In the translation, a supplement is added; it is called a feminine version of the French term for butterfly (which is masculine in French, *le papillon*), but this does not necessarily explain its function here. On one level the passages in "Emploi du temps" and "La papillonne" talk about the pleasures of life or how Barthes domesticates a writer's intimidation by his work into becoming something more lenient. However, on another and more essential level, these passages are, as always with Barthes, about writing, timing, and modes of capture. The passages encircle a particular form of 'prepared'

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**2** |  Several of Barthes's paintings and painted boxes are shown in the catalogue accompanying the Roland Barthes exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in 2002 (Alphant and Léger 2002: 138-167).

writing. They share a passion for an attentive openness that is nevertheless predicated on the exactness of his procedures and habits. The key terms here are known from many of his elaborations on text theory: *dérive* (the drift), *diversion* (distraction), *drague* (which is translated as 'cruising' but which could more aptly be translated as 'flirting' or 'hitting on' as it belongs to the vocabulary of a romantic date), and finally the series of terms taken from Fourier, namely, the Variant, the Alternant, *La papillonne*. As a part of his *dérive*, he works on his index card catalogue, but the formulation is striking: *bricoler un dispositif pour tenir mes paperolles*. He is installing an apparatus (*dispositif*) to take care of his notes (*paperolles*). From *paperolles* to *La papillonne*. The latter, which is also the title of this passage, alludes to Fourier's passion for variation through the pleasures of irregularity and the unexpected. The engagement with the *dispositif* of an index card catalogue controls and liberates this passion. It is where Barthes, through an act of animated data processing, can store, shuffle, rewrite, and be surprised and inspired by his own notes.

As a part of the Barthes centenary in 2015, the Bibliothèque nationale de France held an exhibition devoted to the notes, cards, and manuscripts leading to his *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* from 1977. It reveals how Barthes worked through his book projects in three stages. First, there are the index cards with all kinds of early drafts and notes, then come the handwritten manuscripts, and finally, the typewritten manuscript. Evidently, it is the work on the cards that is most time consuming, as with the preparations for *Michelet* from 1954. This work took five years to prepare.

Indeed, all writers and intellectuals have a system that helps them remember and organize their thoughts. These systems rely on shifting techniques and technologies. Very little research has been done to explore the effects of these shifting systems and technologies. In this regard, we are all Platonists; thoughts are never affected by technology, or, if affected, thoughts are corrupted, as Plato argued. During Barthes's heyday, many writers and intellectuals relied on a system of index card catalogues to keep track of their thoughts, ideas, notes, and sketches. Many of his contemporaries, such as Michel Leiris, Georges Perec, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, used this system. Before the widespread introduction of the computer, this was the most dynamical notation system. Friedrich Kittler (2002) asserts that the index card catalogue represents the beginning of all modern electronic data processing. The index card catalogue unites in one operation that which the computer divides into two forms of so-called memory, ROM (read-only memory) and RAM (random-access memory). The index card catalogue is most readily associated with the routines of librarians, archivists, and bureaucrats, but before its standardization for professional use a wide variety of idiosyncratic systems of note-taking and cataloguing existed.

Markus Krajewski (2011) has mapped the use of note-taking systems in the history of literature, philosophy, and bureaucracy. He traces the use of

the index card catalogue back to the Baroque period. After the Renaissance and the invention of the printing press, people started complaining about an overload of books. A system for navigating through the book flood was urgently needed. The father of modern bibliography, Conrad Gessner, relied on the technology of indexing. His audience was librarians and young scholars. For a long time they were inseparable; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, for example, was both a scholar and a librarian. Gessner became the first to describe an archival system based on the radical segmentation of information. Each book is examined meticulously, and its specifications are organized as smaller bits of information and sorted alphabetically according to subject, author, title, place and date of publication, and so forth. His *Bibliotheca Universalis* from 1548 proposed a complete classification system of all available knowledge, as well as instructions on how to read and remember through a system of mobile paper slips with excerpts organized in small boxes or fixed onto a tablet or book. This procedure culminated in Vincent Placcius's gigantic excerpt cabinet from the 1680s, which was later acquired by Leibniz. Leibniz did not get the job he applied for at the Vienna court library during those years. Perhaps that is why we had to wait another 100 years before Vienna's library could introduce its own index card cataloguing system: 1780 – alas, the same year the city of Vienna introduced a new system of house numbering.

During the 19th century, many authors started using their own index card cataloguing routines. Indeed, Jean Paul published a fictional biography in 1796 that presents its technique already in the title: *Leben des Quintus Fixlein, aus fünfzehn Zettelkästen gezogen* (Quintus Fixlein's life, extracted from fifteen index card catalogues). The most famous example from Germany is most likely Hegel. Karl Rosenkranz, a friend of Hegel's in Stuttgart, records the following about Hegel's practice of excerpting:

When he was reading, he did it in the following way: Whatever he saw worthy of attention – and what did not to him! – he wrote down on a single piece of paper. The top of the paper was marked by an index determining its placement. He would then write the excerpt's key word in capital letters, often in a Gothic style, in the middle at the top of the margin. These pages were subsequently ordered alphabetically, and this simple arrangement enabled him at any time to easily use his excerpts. Wherever he moved, he took care of these *incunables* of his education. They were kept partly in folders, partly in boxes, onto which he glued etiquettes with informative details. (Rosenkranz 1844: 12)

Presumably, Hegel traveled from Stuttgart to Bern, Frankfurt, Nurnberg, Heidelberg, and Berlin with a card catalogue containing important textual excerpts rather than with a large library of heavy books. Hegel never mentions his card catalogue. However, he writes in the preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that such a catalogue should not resemble a skeleton with glued-on

notes but represent the living essence of its topic, that is, the spirit's own phenomenology – indeed, according to Kittler (2002), Hegel's absolute spirit is like a securely hidden index card catalogue. Several generations of German humanities scholars have tried to find Hegel's index card catalogue, but no one has succeeded so far.

## THE INDEX CARD CATALOGUE AS INTERLOCUTOR

According to Heinrich von Kleist, the midwifery of thought is a human interlocutor. During a conversation, the bare look of a facial grim conveying a reaction is enough to develop a half-expressed thought further. The shift of interlocutor from a human to a machine is simply a shift of interface. Krajewski suggests that the extensive use of the index card catalogue by thinkers and writers from Locke, Leibniz, and Jean Paul to Arno Schmidt, Vladimir Nabokov, and Ludwig Wittgenstein is really an attempt at supplementing a living interlocutor with an interactive memory machine, with the index card catalogue as a kind of pre-electronic database that can conjure forth a potential network of references as one skims through it.

After the Second World War, index card catalogue boxes made of plastic began to be mass produced. Along with my fellow students, I bought Walter Zeischegg's mass-produced vine-red index card catalogue boxes from Helit. Some of us even took the boxes along to seminars for reference. Eagerly, after each seminar or during every book we read, new cards were annotated and added to the box while other cards were amended and updated. This habitual activity was only replaced when the computer arrived – for me, during the late 1980s. Then the index card catalogue was gradually left alone on a shelf or updated to become a list of electronically readable files on a disk, a CD, dormant on the computer's own memory or, like today, in the clouds.

While Hegel was silent about his index card catalogue, the two highly influential scholars Niklas Luhmann and Roland Barthes explicitly turned it into something more than just a practical tool. For both of them, their index card catalogue became what I would call an active agent in their theoretical endeavors and development. Luhmann epitomized systems theory, Barthes text theory. Both theories attacked the notion of the inspired author genius as the sole creator of his or her utterances. They demonstrate how texts and ideas are but folds within a system (Luhmann's version) or parts of a much bigger intertextual web (Barthes's version). Every published work exemplifies this general fold. Significantly, the relationship between an author's index card catalogue and her work can highlight this folding and render it explicit. In the essay "Kommunikation mit Zettelkästen," Luhmann calls the index card catalogue the author's most important interlocutor. "As a result of the extended

use of this technique, one creates another memory, an alter ego, which one continuously communicates with," Luhmann writes (1992: 56).

At the outset the index card catalogue was just a "container," but as it grew it emerged as what Luhmann called a "self-complexifying" system; the index card catalogue as a second memory gradually takes on dimensions larger than any biological memory can hold. As an externalized technical memory, the index card catalogue offers almost an infinity of combinatory possibilities comparable to a computer database. It attains an agential radius of actions that can influence the plan, composition, and the contingent in a work process in ways unforeseen by the author. Luhmann stated, presumably with a bit of irony, that his own work incrementally became a function of his index card catalogue. We do not know how the index card catalogue influenced Barthes, but his theory and method undeniably changed its tone and character as he explicitly went into what could be called a dialogue, or to use Luhmann's term, a process of self-complexification, with his hypertrophically growing index card catalogue. We have already traced some of the changes in the evolution of his work and explored some of the author's self-reflections. Barthes's continuous *dérive* in the autobiography is certainly part of this self-complexification process. One of his first biographers, Louis-Jean Calvet, was among the first to comment upon the role of the index card catalogue in Barthes's method:

It will be remembered that by January 1945 Barthes had already filled over a thousand index cards with notes on Michelet. He took them with him to Romania, Egypt, everywhere, and tried out different combinations of cards, as in playing a game of patience, in order to work out a way of organizing them and to find correspondences between them. [...] It was through his research on Michelet that Barthes discovered a style and a method which suited him. This consisted of writing out his cards every day, making notes on every possible subject, then classifying and combining them in different ways until he found a structure or a set of themes.

*Michelet* is a typical product of this process. On a first reading, it is a disconcerting text. [...] If one looks at it more closely, the text seems to consist of an explosion of index cards, with quotes by Michelet on one side and comments by Barthes on the other. (1994: 113-114)

Indeed, this "method" was used already back in 1945, according to Calvet. But the question is, what is the relationship between Barthes's increasingly self-reflexive use of this method and the development of his later text theory? In *Michelet* the method is not part of a text theory but of an analytical practice that he uses to grasp the structure in Michelet's "existence." This orientation is very different from the one he develops later. In *Michelet* Barthes writes: "Michelet's history is covered by a network of themes [...]. Michelet's discourse is a kind of

cryptogram, we must make it into a grid, and this grid is the very structure of the work." (1987: 203-206)

Only much later, during the 1970s, does Barthes begin to talk about his index card catalogue. His statements are of course part of a highly conscious strategy of self-fashioning. However, they can also be read as Barthes's way of understanding his own self-complexification. As I see it, it is far from a coincidence that Barthes starts explicitly addressing his use of the index card catalogue during the time he also develops his infamous text theory.[3] In an interview for *Le Monde* in 1973, Jean-Louis de Rambures asked if he had a method of working. "It all depends on what you mean by method," Barthes replied:

As far as methodology is concerned, I have no opinion. But if you're talking about work habits, obviously I have a method of working. And on that basis your question interests me, because there is a kind of censorship which considers this topic taboo [...]. When a great many people agree that a problem is insignificant, that usually means it is not. Insignificance is the locus of true significance. (Barthes 1985: 180)

He goes on to urge us to look at these "things on the most material level." He elaborates on his preference for certain types of writing tools, such as the felt-tip pen (he finds pleasure in the fact that it was first developed in Japan), soft pen nibs, and finer fountain pens, but never Bic pens and so on. He also experimented with the electric typewriter at the suggestion of Philippe Sollers. Then, he talks about his index card system. He is minute with details. The cards, he explains, are based on slips of paper precisely one-quarter the size of a usual page, and adds: "At least that's how they were until the day standards were readjusted within the framework of European unification (in my opinion, one of the cruelest blows of the Common Market)." (ibid: 180) Rambures entitled the interview "An Almost Obsessive Relation to Writing Instruments." Paradoxically, it is when Barthes denies his obsessiveness that we really understand its depth. "Luckily, I am not *completely* obsessive," he says: "Otherwise, I would have had to redo all my cards from the time I first started writing, twenty-five years ago." (ibid: 180)

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**3** |  This is also the period he theoretically moves from a structuralist to a post-structuralist view on literature.

## The anti-mythological function

This is the period in which Barthes infamously asserts 'the death of the author.' This should of course not be read literally, but rather as a dramatic way of directing our attention to the fact that the author is not a creator of literature ex nihilo as some romantic myth of the author has it, but rather that the author is a creative node in the midst of a web of *the already written*, and that the reader is invited in to become a co-creative strider of this web. The index card catalogue foregrounds this engagement with the web of literature as both a writer and a reader. In the interview with Rambures, the ethical and political aspect of this theoretical position is underscored. He asserts that the conscious exploration and questioning of the tools and apparatus of writing performs "an anti-mythological action" (Barthes 1985: 177). As I see it, Barthes wants us to explore how such apparatuses as the index card catalogue are not something external that supplements the real act of writing or thinking, but rather that the index card catalogue is a crucial ritual internal to the way he operates as an intellectual and forges his attention. In this way the catalogue itself performs an anti-mythological function with regard to the task of the writer. The catalogue creates a gigantic lacuna in the work. It positions itself in between what the author reads (and thinks) and the work he is about to make. It is part of a process, not simply an educational process, but rather a co-evolutionary process; it creates an archive of thoughts, quotes, ideas, and lists that can be continuously transformed, recoded, and decoded, contributing to "the overturning of that old myth which continues to present language as the instrument of thought, inwardness, passion, or whatever, and consequently presents writing as a simple instrumental practice" (ibid: 177). It readily falsifies the common sense notion of writing as something natural and unmediated and highlights its layers of mediation through history and technology. The catalogue intervenes in between the thought and the writing. It reminds us that language and writing is not a lonely, neutral medium resting peacefully in between the author's thoughts and her formulations on a piece of paper, but rather that any use of language is a journey into the already written, a struggle with culture, tradition, and technologies. The catalogue, as Barthes uses it, becomes a technology where one's own development and struggle with language is imprinted and impressed as an interactive and affective process. The work with the catalogue can be part of a cultural technique of the self, but not simply in Michel Foucault's sense, as a hermeneutics of the self, a *souci de soi*, in a Graeco-Roman (pre-modern) way, but as an ethical mode of becoming writing through a human/nonhuman *couplage*. In this sense,

Barthes's approach to self-cultivation is paradoxically much more historically and technologically sensitive than Foucault's hermeneutics of the self.[4]

The published work, for Barthes, as Walter Benjamin says in a different context, is nothing but a medium in between two index card catalogues: the catalogue of the writer and the catalogue of the reader. The one text Barthes works on through a variety of different times, positions, and situations grounded in phenomenology, structuralism, and post-structuralism is the index card catalogue. It became Barthes's great chain of being. It literally carries within itself a variety of potential texts Barthes never published, and that is probably why it is guarded with such care and attention at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. They let me skim through most of the cards while wearing the gloves of the conservator, but they did not let me copy or take notes or pictures of the text on the cards. Indeed, I was only allowed to take pictures of the card stacks from the side. Most likely, new posthumous texts by Barthes will emerge from this material in the future. Among other things, a series of cards with notes entitled *Vita Nova* is hidden among the stacks of index cards. It is probably the novel he talked about but never published.

Roland Barthes's cards contained not only notes written in preparation for a work; they were much more. They contained thoughts written while he was working on another work, or notes written as afterthoughts to a finished work, or notes written as reactions, commentaries, or supplements to old notes, as if this was an ongoing text or a web of texts of a much more sustained and comprehensive kind than the published works. Indeed, the cards also contain something more elusive and less personal than a thought; he calls them "strikes." He explains their quality in terms of the "fragment":

The fragment [...] implies an immediate delight: it is a fantasy of discourse, a gaping of desire. In the form of a thought-sentence, the germ of the fragment comes to you from anywhere: in the café, on the train, talking to a friend (it arises laterally to what he says or what I say); then you take out your notebook, to jot down not a "thought" but something like a strike [*une frappe*], what would once have been called a "turn" [*un vers*]. (Barthes 1977: 94)

The autobiography plays with the kind of denigration of the self that is at play in the index card catalogue, where he views himself from the outside as he simultaneously becomes an other than himself. This is not a classical *Bildung* journey where the author travels to find or become his real self; it is rather an

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**4** |  This is an interesting paradox as the reception of these two thinkers often tends to conclude that Michel Foucault is the political thinker and Barthes the somewhat more apolitical connoisseur. For more on the profound differences between Foucault's and Barthes's arguments, see Éric Marty's chapter in this collection.

experiment in othering. The work of writing these cards is not a way of being true to one's deepest, most inner self, but about becoming something else, something other, some other place. "I am elsewhere than where I am when I write," says the autobiography (ibid: 169).

Roland Barthes talks about the use of his index card catalogue as "rather fetishistic" (1985: 181). He uses it to put himself into motion, into various modes of affect, as when he is "writing down certain passages, moments, even words which have the power to move me" (ibid: 181). He allows himself to write anything, but in particular, he seeks out moments of affect where a peculiar "rhythm" takes place: "As I go along, I use my cards to write down quotations, or ideas which come to me, and they do so, curiously, already in the rhythm of a sentence, so that from that moment on, things are already taking on an existence of writing." (ibid: 181) Here we are approaching that Barthesian turn in the relation between writing and being. To him, thoughts do not necessarily predate the moment of writing. He experiments consciously and with the utmost concentration and care to get to the zone or a-topia where writing itself gives birth to new thoughts – as if they could come from the outside, outside being, or beyond the practico-inert that tries to determine what we see and write. This is where "things are already taking on an existence of writing," that is, becoming productive. Barthes's index card catalogue is therefore much more than a container or a memory theater, it is a research lab for becoming other, not something nonhuman, but something in between the human and the nonhuman, and that is why the specific *couplage* in question here is such an obsession for Barthes.

## THE TEXT THEORY

The open structure of the index card catalogue inspires Barthes's way of writing most evidently and radically in the published works from the 1970s. These books are unusually complex and well crafted, but at the same time they seem to exist somewhere in between the publishable and the unpublishable. They drift at times toward what he calls "the receivable" (Barthes 1977: 118). This is a deep-seated ethical and political aspect of his texts. They open themselves up toward a place, a sensitivity, and a writing style that is incommensurable with doxic communication and the normal. It supplements his assertions from *S/Z*, where he explored a certain quality and a way of writing and reading that situates itself politically and ethically in relation to time and the contemporary. He distinguished between the *readerly* (that which cannot be written again, i.e., Balzac's style) and the *writerly* (that which is almost unreadable unless one completely transforms one's reading regime). In the autobiography he adds a third textual entity, the aforementioned "receivable":

The *receivable* would be the unreaderly text which catches hold, red-hot text, a product continuously outside of any likelihood and whose function – visibly assumed by the *scriptor* – would be to contest the mercantile constraint of what is written; this text, guided, armed by a notion of the *unpublishable*, would require the following response: I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I *receive* it, like a fire, a drug, an enigmatic disorganization. (ibid: 118)

At times it seems as if the index card catalogue (and some of his texts) becomes a theater for the *receivable*. The attentive production of the *receivable* is also part of a concern Barthes strived for throughout his life, namely, a critique of *doxa* and the mercantile demands of communication and the possibility of approaching its opposite, *paradoxa* and the unavowable. But he takes this inquiry further than most authors have dared to – he wanted to avoid his own ideas. His autobiography contends:

Though consisting apparently of a series of "ideas," this book is not the book of his ideas; it is the book of the Self, the book of my resistance to my own ideas; it is a *recessive* book (which falls back, but which may also gain perspective thereby). (ibid: 119)

His index card catalogue is a place where such a resistance is *gathered* and tried out. This is not a collection of simply personal thoughts but rather a place where the personal is deferred and displaced in an attempt at resisting one's own ideas. Thinking is radically exteriorized with the help of the human/nonhuman *couplage*. The thoughts are carved out as in a relief against a sky of quotes. The catalogue does not rely on an archival system of provenance or classification (order, origins, and dates), but rather on inosculation, displacements, re-edits, and grafts. The drive governing this exercise was present throughout his life as a writer, but it surfaces in his published books, I would say, most strikingly from the 1970s. Indeed, the drive is present in his *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* from 1953, but only as a program, first later becoming a praxis. The later books activated the impulse of the catalogues explicitly. If the index card catalogue existed between the thought and the book, the texts from the 1970s are the not-yet-books, that is, they exist between the unpublishable and the publishable. The late works pull out two traits from the catalogues: first, they explore the mode of the arbitrary by organizing paragraphs, for example alphabetically, and they mimic a bureaucratic principle usually characteristic of the 'normal' index card catalogue; and second, there is a paradoxical presence of the fragmentary (which is also a non-presence) where the segments are reduced to bits and pieces, quotes and claims, the elliptical and the *petite*.

Finally, it is during the 1970s that Barthes develops his so-called 'text theory.' A crucial axiom in this theory is that all texts are always constituted by the already written. They are struck by a *déjà lu* (the already read). Thus, all texts

are an intertextual palimpsest. When this is accepted as a *fait accompli*, his texts change, self-complexification increases. The text opens up to a multiplicity of perspectives and percepts. He uses a host of now well-known terms developed in the 1970s to describe his experiments and pleasures: 'the stereoscopic,' 'decentered,' 'plural,' 'ludic,' *scriptible*, *jouissance*, *dérive*, and so on.[5] This is not simply about playing, or the play of the signifier, as some commentators will have it; this deals with approaching something, call it a zone, an outside, a place, that is extremely difficult to reach. He reminded us that the preferred ideal of the bourgeois individual, which is to write with unambiguous clarity, is actually rather simple. What is difficult is the opposite, which is not meaningless speech but to write in a way where meaning is conjured forth as an undetermined and never-ending emergence. It demands a different discipline – and technique. The index card catalogue, as a place where a specific technique of the self is explored and consolidated, is sheltered from the institutions of the published and the mercantile.

Roland Barthes's intimate entanglement with his index card catalogue was a *folie à deux* of a very special kind. In the "How to Live Together" lecture series, he explored how men and women have been able to live and confront the world in various ethically motivated ways forged through techniques and principles of living. If seen in the perspective of these lectures, and in particular in the lecture on the term "Couplage," the ethical and political ramifications of Barthes's human/nonhuman *couplage* involving the index card catalogue come to light. His obsession with writing tools was not simply a private passion but part of an intricate ethical and political exercise attempting to establish a different style of writing and thinking. This project laid the ground for his special idiorrhythmy.

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**5** | These terms are among the many terms associated with Barthes's text theory as it evolved through essays, lectures, and books from the 1970s (cf. in particular, Barthes 1970, 1971, 1973a, 1973b, 1977, as well as others from the 1970s).

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# DISTANCE/Distance

*Inga Bostad*

What is the ideal distance between people living together? How can we live together, how should we live together and what creates undesirable distances in social communities? How is the distance between people in different public places regulated so that distance is maintained while also preserving human integrity? For Barthes, such questions are sources of hypothetical tests more than scientific research – searching for possible existences more than social analyses. How it is possible to live together respecting different life rhythms, different expectations and needs, desires and longings, cannot be taught or translated from one culture to another: "The subject of living with others, he [Barthes] cautioned, could no longer be taught; it could only take the form of a shared quest – a foray into the culture rather than a methodological investigation." (Stan 2014: 1170)

Barthes's text is an invitation to investigate how much distance we can tolerate in interpersonal situations, in everyday life, and in social spaces. How close and intimate do we want to live in relation to other people? In his exploration and testing of ways to live together, Barthes introduces literary simulations of actual places such as the monastery and the sanatorium. It is also possible to start at the opposite end – with the places themselves and provide alternative descriptions of these. Where Barthes shows us how the novel and the literary portraits may act as future scenarios for possible and transcending coexistences, documentaries from our own time may also expand our ideas of the future. The distance between remote farms in the mountainous Norwegian landscape is documented in a popular TV series (*Der ingen skulle tru at nokon kunne bu*, lit. "Where no one would believe anyone could live") and tells the story of proximity and distance between humans and between humans and animals. These are places where the daily rhythms are regulated by the basic needs of food and care, of physical surroundings and the conservation of homes and land, and dominated by the change of the seasons, by sickness and death, by intimacy, desire, and loss.

## Norwegian nature

Norwegian cultural history shows us there can be large geographic distances in the relationships between people and farms, the center and the periphery, while the emotional intimacy is small and more in line with the individual's rhythms of life. The Norwegian documentary movie *Søsken til evig tid* ("Siblings forever"), about a septuagenarian brother and sister who live and work together on a remote family farm, is a sophisticated illustration of what is immediately perceived to be a life of loneliness and isolation but instead consists of a distinctive form of proximity between humans, animals, and nature – determined by, and interwoven into the rhythm of the seasons, the respectful everyday life of people and animals living together in an interdependent cycle of life. According to Barthes, living 'idiorrhythmically,' that is, in accordance with our own rhythm, can be compared to living alone regularly interrupted by others (2013: 6). Literary utopias or the imagining of different ways of living together hold contradictory ideas about different lifestyles, about different degrees of self-control, self-directed regimens, and diets, but also about rules of conduct in the face of external, cultural, bodily, and physical adjustments (a lifestyle can show "a life, a regime, a lifestyle, *diaita*, diet," ibid: 6).

## Distance and intimacy

Where distance exists, so does intimacy. We seek refuge in creating distance when intimacy becomes threatening, unattainable, undesirable and at the same time overwhelming and desirable. Through intimacy and closeness, through a basic and instinctive longing for the bodies of others and the urge to surrender as one with others, different forms of distance arise as an immediate and necessary response to relationships between people living together, in groups, and in different societies. Intimacy can at the same time trigger a fear of giving way to what is unknown and different – the basic fear of disparity can be just around the corner and, alternatively, the desire for distance may arise as a response to both the desire for the other person as well as to the fear of the unknown.

Barthes insists that this overwhelming longing requires a strategy for developing rules, what we may call a 'rule of distance.' These are rules that ensure a distance architecture and regulations that safeguard a desire-free environment. A radical interpretation of Barthes would be to conclude that such rules should include the organization of all public spaces based on what we may call an 'ethics of distance.' Within such an interpretation, the ultimate fulfillment of the strategy would be the fully covered person who is wearing a full facial veil.

## DISTANCE IN PUBLIC SPACE

What do we see when we see a woman who hides her face behind a veil? A fully-covered woman in the public space may appear as an expression of an architecture of distance; a man should not gaze on a stranger's face, her skin and hair, and then experience a more or less unattainable desire. Fantasies about the hidden are first and foremost about what the observer does not see. That full-length facial cover also creates a distance between people in the public space was a key argument in the decision of the European Human Rights Court in the more common transliteration "the burqa ban case" or the case of *S.A.S. v. France*. The jury concluded that French legislation relating to the prohibition of facial veils in public space was not regarded as a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The ruling emphasizes how a full covering hiding the face may adversely affect open and interpersonal relationships, even as it underlines the value of natural closeness that should be found in an open and free society. It discusses several arguments for and against such a ban (practice of religious practice, integration, freedom of expression, and the need for security in the public space), but the argument that weighed most heavily was protection of the principle of public interaction between people.

Being unable to see the person you meet resembles what according to Barthes's conceptual apparatus may be labeled an 'architecture of hyper-distance,' an overgrown or 'muted distance.' In this way, we can say that Barthes's concept of distance reveals the need for regulation of various public spaces, institutions, and meeting places. At the same time, the ongoing discussion in Europe on women's right to wear facial coverings illustrates both of Barthes's arguments. On the one hand, in some public spaces it will be necessary to follow some common principles that – with respect for people's bodies – regulate the distance between them. On the other hand, such rules are both unnatural and inhuman in the sense that they manifest an inevitable dilemma; we are all in need of bodily contact. At the same time, the Muslim women who cover their body and face in public places are not covered within the private sphere, where they can regulate their own intimacy relative to family and friends.

Today, therefore, we can reformulate Barthes's reflections: How can we live together with women who cover their face? How can we interact with each other with such a distance between us?

Barthes's text on distance was written in 1977, when the world looked different. Although France, as a former colonial empire, has a long tradition of immigration and a multicultural populace, the question is how we can live together given today's rising movements of alienation and intolerance. At the same time, there is a general and time-independent subtext in Barthes's

essay: the desire for proximity to other people is always present, so how can we live together while avoiding this deep and overwhelming longing for another person's body? How can we protect ourselves from this desire for the other person? Barthes's text manifests as an examination of a human existence; how to handle this conscious and necessary restriction of our own desire? By setting limits, by regulating the distance between us, by "a labor of distanciation" (2013: 74). Choosing either to surrender and indulge in the emotions of desire or to refrain from them is, after all, better than not taking a stand. And in the extension of such emotional dressage, the redirection of the desire to religious, political, and cultural activities is the expression of a variation of the "civilization and its discontents" (Freud 2010). Creating distance to human desire is another way of increasing community engagement and community participation – as well as increasing spaces for interacting.

## Ethics of distance

Barthes's own idea of the ultimate rhythm-controlled community is the monastery; every hour of the day is regulated and prepared to create the ideal rhythm for a spiritual life; a contemplative and basic rhythm, where every architectural and aesthetic detail emphasizes and enables the daily rhythm and community. In the monastery, the spiritual rules are both subtle and detailed because they relate to a knowledge of "the workings of desire" (2013: 74) – rules that exist in order to respect the distance between people. In the monastery, it is possible to retreat from society as well as from the constrained patterns of everyday life while experiencing another form of community. Both the ability and the inability to actually meet and express or receive care are present in the monastery – a place for a self-chosen and self-imposed spiritual community.

What communities characterize our time? What imposed rhythms of life or hyperregulation of our ways of living can be said to cast light on new ways of living together today? I want to pursue Barthes's arguments into the asylum centers, more specifically an asylum center in Eastern Norway, to show how this is also organized according to an ethics of distance. In such a reception center, the lives of the individual residents are regularly interrupted by everyday regulations. However, despite the contradiction between the self-imposed monastic life and the obligatory daily life at the reception center, they both show us in their own way how the necessity of living with strangers is safeguarded in the design of the place. Is it isolation or communality that characterizes the everyday life of the institution, and how are private life and common meeting places organized?

## LIFE IN THE RECEPTION CENTER: THE ASYLUM SEEKER'S LIFE

It's a beautiful autumn day when I arrive in the courtyard of a former orphanage for boys located between green hills, farms, and attractive homes. A reception center, a so-called relief operation in Eastern Norway, has been set up here; 140 residents between the ages of 15 and 18 will live together for a few weeks while their cases are initially proceeded.

They were transferred there from a transit center elsewhere in Eastern Norway that had initially registered them and checked their health. The boys are sitting on the grass when I arrive, someone calls to me in a language I do not understand, they smile, others sit on the asphalt tapping on their cell phones, some girls wearing hijabs are standing against the wall – they're also tapping on their cell phones. The scene is just like any Norwegian schoolyard.

The main house, the former orphanage, was once a venerable mansion but is now a dilapidated wooden building that now houses the administration. "I'm mostly in the office all day," says the reception manager, "but it depends on what's going on, so I often take a round, maybe a round a day." The staff is friendly, welcoming, and experienced. They describe the place and the residents' background in a highly neutral manner, using plain and descriptive words, and they show me around with well-founded explanations without adjectives or personal points of view. They say they are safe at work – they are not afraid of the residents and can meet them professionally. The advisors here speak eight languages, and they have a room for conversation with residents, with views from the windows toward the fjord and the apple orchards.

The main house is surrounded by the temporary buildings where the residents live and by the various activity houses. The staff comprises 70 employees, including teachers, environmental workers, nurses, kitchen assistants, caretakers, and administrative staff, but only four are on duty at night. The residents live two and two in the rooms; people with extra needs because of an infection, aggressive behavior, or illness live alone. There are four showers for 40 residents and common rooms for exercise, teaching, and a variety of games.

Boys and girls live separately, on each floor – the girls lock the door to the second floor, with boys having no access, but the girls can visit the boy's wing. "This is imposed by the UDI," said the reception manager, referring to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration. "The girls are to be taken care of." They eat together in the canteen; there are four meals, two of which are hot. Pink plastic cloths with dots cover the tables, which are accompanied by blue plastic chairs. Cooking your own food is not allowed because of hygiene and the risk of infection.

About 90 percent of the residents at the center are boys, and this is reflected in the common rooms; the ceiling of the pool room consists of white

tiles pierced by holes. "That's where they lift up the cues," says the reception manager, pointing to the roof. "The caretaker replaces the tiles several times a week." There is a strength training room at the end of the hallway: brick walls, heavy weights and three to four appliances, nothing on the walls, no music. The public rooms are dingy and cold; the little there is of furniture there is grubby and dirty. The common rooms are dusty and dirty, even though they are washed every day by cleaners and residents. "The number of people makes it impossible to keep it clean," says the reception manager. There is no room for prayer or religious practice. A multi-faith room for such activities is obligatory at a Norwegian reception center, but, after trying with a family room, there was too much disturbance and turmoil and the offer was stopped.

What does it do to the individual asylum seeker when the TV, PCs, games, and even homemade sofas are nailed down? What does it do to the meetings between employees and residents when there is no organized and welcoming common room? "I feel that I have done a good job when residents have been activated," says the reception manager. She talks about the many volunteers who take the young people swimming, on forest walks, or for a trip to the mosque, who bring packages and arrange parties and dancing. There are hairdressers who will cut the girls' hair for free.

Life at an asylum center consists of waiting. The asylum seekers are waiting for the "asylum interview" to decide their residence permit, waiting for the age testing, waiting to start school, waiting to settle down and start a life. It is an institution where vulnerability lies heavy over everyday tasks. How can they live together when uncertainty is about to take over the rhythm of life – every hour and every day? Which rhythm should characterize such an institution, and which distance is desired – and by whom?

The French case of the facial veil in the public space was an example of how distance helps create uncertainty and a security risk. Security at the asylum center is also an important factor in the organization of daily life. Residents must not be tempted to confrontation; genders must be kept separate to prevent abuse; employees must follow routines to avoid unwanted behavior between residents and employees. But the distance also indicates the need for proximity; in the reception center, people are therefore two and two in the rooms, in conversations with employees in their offices, and in some common meeting rooms. Despite these arenas, the reception center manifests itself as a distorted reflection of normal socializing. Nobody wants to be here, everyone wants to get away, and no one has long-term relationships – only rarely do siblings live together in a reception center. So how do you live with strangers while waiting to start a life?

I try to find a comparison, but find none. The reception center does not look like any place I've been to before. It is not a school or a dormitory, not a youth hostel or a special school. The reception center is more than anything else an

interlude from everyday life. It is a resting place where the indoor environment and interpersonal interactions are subordinate. To apply for asylum is to ask for a 'sanction from persecution.' The word 'asylum' has its origins in the Greek noun *asylon*, which refers to something that is inviolable. In ancient Greece, the temples were sanctuaries where legal punishment could not be enforced and extralegal revenge could not be exacted. The same applies to today's asylum center; it is an institution that receives and protects people in need, who need protection. The asylum center in Eastern Norway follows the Norwegian state's policy; some get protection and stay, while others are sent back. It is a place where the temporary regime governs, where privacy is overridden and the distance is maintained.

## The rhythm of distance

In *How to Live Together* (2013), Barthes draws a distinction between "abolishing" and "holding back" the desire related to the body of the other. Restraining one's own physical desire in relation to other people by creating different forms of distance is anything but neutral or objective in an ethical sense relative to a community. Being ethically neutral or objective in relation to how other people in one's vicinity are treated does not follow the ethics of distance. Protecting your own desire through rhythmic life cycles is not in opposition to wanting decent, equal treatment of fellow human beings. The Norwegian sociologist Nils Christie (2010) argued that it was precisely the distance between the guards and the Serbian prisoners in Second World War concentration camps in Norway that allowed torture and ill-treatment. This distance, in contrast, is amoral and neutral in the sense that it breaks down human relationships. The small signs that the prisoners are people – be it a letter, knowledge of family, or a short conversation – hinder objectification of the prisoners. Treating someone like animals, like non-humans, is only possible through an extreme breakdown of common life patterns and ordinary interaction.

How can we be true to ourselves and our own rhythm of life when facing the outside world? What characterizes the distance that is created when someone conceals their face in the public space, and what are the consequences when the elderly in nursing homes and asylum seekers in asylum centers are imposed a constructed life rhythm based on efficiency, safety, and various reconstructed ideals of interaction? Barthes's point of view is thus the literary ethos, where particular life rhythms change over time and change between cultures.

At the same time, distance is about discretion and looking away to respect the privacy of others. In a nursing home and an asylum center, the need for discretion will be clearly present. The Greek term *idios* refers to both a (private) man or citizen and to an individual's rhythm. Looking away when a fellow

citizen in an asylum center has an anxiety attack or an elderly person in a nursing home needs their diaper changed shows discretion, although such looking away can also be perceived as humiliating if you're the one who needs the help. Desiring care and support when having an anxiety attack is also part of life. Is the correct distance therefore an absence of common norms, or norms based on practical and experienced wisdom? And how do we find or recover such wisdom without having any predefined standards?

## The bodily distance

For Barthes, distance is primarily a matter of physical or bodily distance; it is a matter of architecture, of rooms, of bodies living in material and aesthetic surroundings. It's basically about the distance between bodies, says Barthes – about the overwhelming, exhausting, paradoxical, and profound desire for the bodies of others and that physical intimacy. At the same time, this desire is also contradictory and complex, to the extent that it also leads to pain, self-deception, and rejection. The solution is therefore *hesuchia*, according to Barthes, that is, withdrawal or peace of mind. The Greek word *hesuchia* refers to both stillness and calm in the meaning of retreat, and it refers to the description of the life of one who has retreated to live his own life, following his own rhythm of life, we could also say, without being disturbed too much by the outside world.

The experience of rejection also requires a sense of peace of mind, not of moderation or frugality like with Plato, but a state of mental balance or decoupling. According to Barthes, this disconnection appears to act as rules for how the distance between bodies can be safeguarded and respected. Desire in the monastery is diverted, it is transmuted into a spiritual longing for perfection and purity. The soul is close, while the body and desire are out of reach – out of sight. In Barthes's text, the monastery has assumed the role of erotic suppressor, as a desire-regulating community. The lights stay on in the cloisters at night to avoid desire taking over; young monks do not sleep next to each other but have to lie in between the old ones; the belt around the monk's habit symbolizes the tamed virility and elaborate washing rituals that must be repeated and repeated – all these rules discipline and control the body. These controlled rituals also substantiate and emphasize the sinful body driven by desire. Recent revelations about the abuse of young Catholics by Catholic priests also shows how oppression can have fatal consequences.

The ethics of distance are present both in Barthes's text and in the various communities we live in. What society will be able to take care of the diversity of people living and moving in Norway today? What kind of perception do we have about possible forms of living together in our time? The first distinctive character that has emerged relates to principles or values that form the basis

for organizing different communities, communities that can hinder or create distances that can promote or inhibit the respect and integrity of fellow human beings. The second particular feature relates to the aesthetics of distance, to the perception, pleasure, anxiety, and joy of the other and their rhythm. We can imagine that this includes both humans and animals, and even objects, experiences, and material forms – everything that is tangible and attractive. At the same time, these two distinctive features are linked – the aesthetic distance is both personal and forms part of the individual's integrity. Experiencing freedom to follow their own interests, desires, and pleasures in certain communities is usually based on some common norms, which in turn can prevent or reinforce this freedom.

## New dividing lines

When the Berlin Wall fell, an epoch was over. The distance immediately lessened, and new meetings were possible. Today, new dividing lines are being drawn up in Europe, and fences are being re-erected to regulate and direct people who are fleeing. Asylum centers have become the new night shelters, the new hostels that divide stay from rejection, welcome from parting. Can Barthes's reflections help us better uncover what we see today and what we do not see? Where is the distance greatest? In front of us on the street, behind the facial veils, in our heads as imaginations of equal and different, clean and unclean, or in our hearts as the distance between us and them, between naivety and realistic care? Or is the largest distance in our bodies? Is it the body's archive of longing and repressed desire that steers us away from one person to someone else further away? "If I'm never unsettled by someone else's body, if I can never touch anyone else, what is the point in living?" asks Barthes (2013: 73).

There continue to be some archetypal, representative, or prototypical ways to live together, and through Barthes we can navigate by the distance's introspection; society needs the distance between social layers, between classes and genders, to create control and security while at the same time creating new challenges. Distance is about power and power relationships – who has the power to judge what has prestige and what is considered unclean and threatening? According to Nietzsche, "without that *pathos of distance* which grows out of the ingrained difference between strata – when the ruling caste constantly looks afar and looks down upon subjects and instruments and just as constantly practices obedience and command, keeping down and keeping at a distance, that other more mysterious pathos could not have grown wider either – the craving for an ever widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of (,,,) more comprehensive states" (1966: 201 [§ 257]). The

necessity of distance is also a part of democracy, and new dividing lines are created continuously to keep others at a sufficient distance.

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# DOMESTIQUES/Servants

*Corina Stan*

"What fascinates me here: the housemaid," reads the caption of one of the photographs with which Barthes chose to preface his autobiographical tome (1994). The reader's gaze shifts promptly from the central figure of an elderly lady holding a cat to the liminal silhouette of a servant standing in a doorframe. Her relaxed posture suggests that she is unaware of becoming part of the picture – very likely she has not been invited to do so – yet she is there, doubling her mistress, denouncing the hidden reality and support of leisurely life: hence Barthes's fascination for her. Raised in a bourgeois family that had lost its financial means but that strove to preserve its *art de vivre,* Barthes wonders a few pages later whether it might be acceptable to confess publicly his dream of enjoying the charms (albeit not the values) of the bourgeois art of living as a contretemps, or an exoticism, in a socialist society. What exactly are those charms, one wonders, and is the presence of servants necessary for their continued enjoyment? Another biographeme, "Argent" (money), seems to imply that they are not;[1] evoking his childhood in an impoverished bourgeois family, Barthes alludes to the financial crises that were sometimes so extreme as to make food scarce:

He took no part in the values of the bourgeoisie, which could not outrage him, since he saw them only as scenes of language, something novelistic; what he took part in was the bourgeois *art de vivre*. This art subsisted, incorruptible, amid every financial crisis; not misery, as a family experience, but embarrassment; i.e., a terror of certain terms, the problems of vacations, of shoes, schoolbooks, and even food. This *endurable* privation (as embarrassment always is) may account for a little philosophy of free compensation,

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**1** | *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* consists of photographs, captions, and autobiographical fragments ordered alphabetically, what the author calls *biographemes*. This mode of presentation reflects a discontinuous self whose reconstitution is compared to the play of the kaleidoscope, in which the bits of colored glass reorder themselves at the slightest tap.

of the overdetermination of pleasures, of *ease* (which is the exact antonym of embarrassment). His formative problem was doubtless money, not sex. (Barthes 1994: 45)

If financial means were to this point precarious, one can assume that the art de vivre subsisted in the absence of paid servants. If this was far from ideal, what would be the situation in a phantasmatic household, such as the one intimated in *How to Live Together*?

The somewhat awkward position that "Domestiques/Servants" occupies in Roland Barthes's fantasy of living together is suggested by the adjectival use of the word in a late entry, "Utopia," where he specifies that he has in mind "a *domestic* utopia" (2013: 130). With this formulation Barthes refers to the sociality of his community, which he limits to eight to ten people who can thus afford to be close and attentive to one another. He thus situates his fantasy within a paradigm of friendship, familiar to readers of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Montaigne's "Of Friendship," Emerson's "On Friendship," Nietzsche's "To the Friend," and Derrida's readings of these philosophical reflections in *Politiques de l'amitié*. All these thinkers have raised the question of the possible number of friends, in agreement that true friendship is preciously rare; famously, Derrida saw it fit to begin each of his lectures in *Politiques de l'amitié* with Aristotle's paradoxical apostrophe "Oh, my friends, there are no friends!" Although Barthes would not go so far, he is attached to the idea of cultivating "privileged relationships" with every single one of his friends. Referring to himself in the third person, as if speaking about a character in a novel, he writes in the autobiographical *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*:

He did not seek out an exclusive relationship (possession, jealousy, scenes); nor did he seek out a generalized, communal relationship; what he wanted was, each time, a privileged relationship, marked by a perceptible difference, brought to the condition of a kind of absolutely singular affective inflection, like that of a voice with an incomparable timbre; and paradoxically, he saw no obstacle to multiplying this privileged relationship; nothing but privileges, in short; the sphere of friendship was thus populated by dual relations (whence a great wasting of time: he had to see his friends one at a time: resistance to the group, to the circle, to the crowd). What was wanted was a plural equality, without in-difference. (1994: 65)

Barthes's attention to the singularity of each friend, and thus to the singularity of that which emerges from each encounter when it remains exclusive, suggests a certain reticence to the group, to what he calls a "generalized, communal relationship" that would presumably smooth out peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, making everyone "equal," "in-different." If the domestic utopia of the *living together* is to be imagined within a paradigm of friendship, what exactly is the position of servants in it? Aristotle raised the question whether

friendship was possible among two individuals of unequal social status in the *Nicomachean Ethics*; in "Fat and Thin," Chekhov strongly tipped the balance toward a negative answer, echoing Aristotle's own doubts. What is Barthes's position on this issue?

Although the dossier "Domestiques/Servants" focuses exclusively on the noun "servants," not concerning itself with the adjectival use "domestic," Barthes is aware that this topic is loaded with the presupposition of a social hierarchy, which he traces back to the distinction between need and desire.[2] In *How to Live Together*, Barthes does not take a clear position, considering both communities that are reliant on servants, and groups in which the same individuals satisfy both the needs and the desires of the community. In the dossier "Bureaucracy," he gives the example of a community emerging from the so-called sexual revolution in the early 1920s (after the October Revolution), a community of free love whose members, busy elsewhere, neglect house work (no one does the dishes, no one cleans) so that complete chaos ensues (2013: 42-43). The solution is to delegate the domestic work and commission others to buy food for them. Like in a foreshadowing of the later entry "Domestiques/Servants," Barthes summarizes the possibilities: in such communities, one either delegates the satisfaction of needs (which would create the danger of a bureaucratic structure of power, hence of a loss of freedom), or one rotates them among the members of the group (but then, given the diversity of relationships to labor, friction and conflict are likely to occur).[3]

The dossier "Domestiques/Servants" begins by laying out the equation "need equals desire" and its negation "need does not equal desire" as a criterion of classification. In communities where there is a sign of equality between the two, bodily needs are reduced to a minimum so everyone attends to them: presumably everyone participates in cooking, cleaning, and washing up – no one is above their needs, as asceticism implies discipline, including the exercise of domestic tasks. Implicit here is a recognition of ordinariness, of the shared embodied experience of life in all its aspects: "Exemption from all domesticity: the contemplative subject is responsible for meeting his own needs, which he duly reduces to a bare minimum." (ibid: 75-76) Historically, Barthes is quick to clarify, such an equation is only possible in civilizations that have renounced slavery, since the latter was not simply an exploitative practice but reflected

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**2** |  This in turn maps onto the body-mind dualism, which he does not deconstruct. We might also add here the related entry "Sponge," which situates us squarely in the realm of the sacrificial economy of scapegoating and its attending psychological mechanisms of rejection and self-rejection.

**3** |  This is an important source of tension in the community portrayed in Iris Murdoch's novel *The Bell* (1958), which reads like an estranged younger sibling of Barthes's fantasy in *Comment vivre ensemble* (cf. Stan 2014).

an entire worldview, encoded in what Barthes would call 'scenes of language.' Attached to literary examples, he reminds his students of the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and his black servant Friday:

Living-Together with Friday is a matter of living with a slave. Signs   (a) Friday places Robinson's foot on his head himself (as if it were the essential nature of a black man to be instantly enslaved); (b) The first word Robinson Crusoe teaches Friday is to say "master"; (c) While Robinson Crusoe teaches Friday to speak English (to ensure his needs will be met), Friday doesn't teach Robinson to speak his language; (d) Friday is almost as well-dressed as his master. Yet, prior to the shipwreck, when Robinson Crusoe himself was a slave (the property of one of the Salé pirates, from whom he escapes on a small boat), he strikes up a friendship with Xury, a young boy. Their arrangement has all the appearances of a *famulus*: experience in exchange for services. But in fact, when it comes to it, Robinson sells him: so Xury is indeed a slave. (2013: 76)

Barthes offers two examples of communities that fall into this first category of "need equals desire": anchorites from the patristic period, such as the Oriental monks from Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Constantinople (mostly of peasant origin, they constitute themselves as an anti-intellectual marginality, distancing themselves from the very idea of desire, and thus of culture); and the original monks on Mount Athos, who respected an interdiction against the use of servants.

The other situation, captured in the formula "need does not equal desire," recognizes explicitly the satisfaction of needs as work that distracts from the pursuit of the spiritual life. In cenobitic communities, the converted have to pay for their integration into the monastic life, so they are tasked with various chores. Buddhist monasteries, in Barthes's second example, delegate domesticity in order to free the monks from material tasks, but their accomplishment is by no means exploitative: whether it is jobless old people without familial attachments (*upasaka*), teenagers who can thus afford to pay for their education, or hired servants, paid by laypeople who support financially the cenobium, the division of labor in these communities has nothing coercive or degrading about it. It recognizes the position of each individual in life without judgment, even as – Barthes does not fail to notice – these arrangements mirror those of the bourgeoisie.

Ultimately, it is this mirror-effect that Barthes retains for further consideration in the domestic utopia of the vivre-ensemble: not only do communities that rely on servants reproduce the structural divisions in the societies from which they distance themselves, but wherever such a cleavage exists (between those who do and those who do not perform domestic tasks), there is also a mirroring effect. In Barthes's words: "It's a structure of reproduction, imitation, anamorphosis, duplication: the masters are reflected in

their servants, but the image reflected back is a distorted one, a farcical image." (2013: 77) This is the case of the *convertiti* (Lat. 'converted'), of the *famuli*, but also of the micro-society portrayed in Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, with its two humanities, as Barthes puts it, that of the bourgeois and that of the servants. The dossier ends with the acknowledgment of its incompletion, indeed, of it representing but an inchoate stage in broaching such a vast topic. "I'm merely opening a dossier (a vast dossier) whose question would be: every division implies – or necessitates – a mirror. Whence: the mirroring effects of the divisions in the social field." (Barthes 2013: 78) Noncommittal, Barthes is here a structuralist fascinated by the play of reflection, imitation, reproduction, and anamorphosis of social formations, but he stops short of adopting a post-structuralist stance that would be instrumental in a redistribution of the sensible, à la Rancière.

There are hints of this reluctance in later entries, too. Echoing a recurrent insistence, present since the beginning of Barthes's career with *Writing Degree Zero*, on the ethical principle of respecting the singularity of individuals against the homogenization and regimentation of life in late capitalism, his interpretation of a passage from *The Genealogy of Morals* elides the social implications of Nietzsche's formulation "the pathos of distance." *Pathos des distances, excellente expression*, Barthes exclaims (2002: 175), breaking it down into *pathos* (affect) and *distance* (wisdom). He readily follows up with another translation in the slippery alley of language – Eros and Sophia, both necessary in a community as "a distance that won't destroy affect" (Barthes 2013: 179). Where Nietzsche refers approvingly to the desire of the strong to distance themselves from the weak so that their "distinction" – to use Bourdieu's later term – would shine forth, Barthes is oblivious to this aspect, recasting the formulation in the fantasy of a community of singularities equally worthy of respect. The right distance, one that "does not break the affect," is paraphrased as tact, the very principle that governs the everyday interactions of the community members. Barthes borrows it from an old acquaintance of his, the Marquis de Sade, quoting a passage from *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, reproduced in *The Neutral* and here in *How to Live Together*. It features the marquise, who comes to pick up her husband's dirty laundry at the Bastille where he is imprisoned; he pretends not to understand that she wants to wash it (or, since we speak of *domestiques*, have it washed): "Charming creature," he addresses her affectionately, "you want my linen, my old linen? Do you know, that is complete tact?" (Barthes 2013: 124) He will not deny it to her because he respects all tastes, fantasies, and desires; they all go back to "a principle of tact" (ibid: 124). It is this exquisite respect for difference, going as far as the idiosyncrasy of perversion, that will govern the vivre-ensemble of the community. What bears emphasis, however, is that at the very moment where Barthes illustrates the principle of delicacy, or tact, he turns a blind eye on the position of the marquise, who assumes here the inferior role of the *domestique* responsible for the dirty laundry. (That

she will probably delegate the task only defers the issue, but it remains: as the feminist critics of Marx have pointed out, he might have exposed the hidden abode of production, but he ignored the hidden abode of reproduction.)[4] This gesture of turning one's gaze away is not something Barthes will ponder. He alludes to it in the autobiography, under "Arrogance": "He has no affection for proclamations of victory. Troubled by the humiliations of others, whenever a victory appears somewhere, he wants to go somewhere *else.*" (Barthes 1994: 46) *An inclination to move elsewhere*: this is not the attitude of a militant committed to the cause of the underprivileged but that of a hedonist who has developed "a little philosophy of free compensation, of the overdetermination of pleasures, of *ease*" (Barthes 1994: 45). Barthes's delicacy surely excludes the possibility of anyone's mistreatment; if, however, these pleasures and ease can be supported by some domestiques, well treated and engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship, why not?

To conclude, in the fantasy of the vivre-ensemble servants are liminal presences who linger as remnants of an art of living that the bourgeoisie bequeathed to Barthes via literary texts, as 'scenes of language,' whose rituals he would like to preserve, if only its values could be left behind. Is it possible to separate the two? Theodor Adorno, who in *Minima Moralia* remembers fondly the "favors that take nothing from anyone else" (2005: 119), or George Orwell, whose impoverished family went to Burma to maintain their art of living at a lesser expense, would no doubt have understood Barthes. It was the predicament of a generation of European intellectuals caught between two worlds, who made it their task to find the ideal distance between themselves and other people.[5]

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**4** | A suggestive example we might consider here, of a phantasmatic place where the illusions of some materialize at the expense of others, is Jean Genet's *The Balcony*: the brothel, a *maison d'illusions*, where various men come to live out their social fantasies (de Sade would no doubt approve of such a place), but it transpires behind doors that the women who work there feel humiliated, even as they dutifully participate in the make-believe and indulge the "visitors."

**5** | For a book-length study of this historical and philosophical problem, see my forthcoming monograph *The Art of Distances: Ethical Thinking in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2018).

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# ÉCOUTE/Listen

*Christian Refsum*

Roland Barthes's most ambitious outline for a phenomenology of listening can be found in the essay "Écoute" (Listen), written in collaboration with the psychiatrist Roland Havas and published in 1976 in *Encyclopedia Einaudi* (Barthes 1982). His lecture on "Écoute" at the Collège de France in spring 1977 (Barthes 2002, 2013) repeats several of the essay's main hypotheses, but it also offers an opportunity to think about listening anew, in a network of social, technological, and personal life rhythms, enlightened by the central term in the lectures on how to live together: idiorrhythmy. What is the role of listening in rhythmic shifts between withdrawal and participation, control and openness, community and isolation? This question addresses the problem of defining rhythms regulating the defense and consolidation of the subject on the one hand, and its division and renewal on the other. As we will see, this is both a private and political concern. In this essay, I will argue that the work of Franz Kafka is particularly well suited to explore how sound and listening can be related to questions of idiorrhythmy in Barthes's sense. But first it is necessary with a clearer understanding of Barthes's thinking on listening.

The title of Barthes's lecture series *Comment vivre ensemble* implies a musical connotation. In French, *ensemble* means both 'being together' and 'orchestra.' Musical interaction might serve as a metaphor for the fantasy that Barthes put forth in his reflections on idiorrhythmy. All the musicians should be allowed to make their tones be heard, without overshadowing the others. In the concluding notes on "Utopia," Barthes emphasizes that he has gradually sought to define a balance between distance and respect, and at the same time between warmth and thought: "The utopian tension – that inhabits the idiorrhythmic fantasy – stems from this: what is desired is a distance that will not destroy affect" (Barthes 2013: 132).

When studying Barthes's comments on listening, I have been struck by the various connections he makes concerning social and auditive reality. Listening is about sensitivity, whether to the environment, to various sorts of social life, or to the subject's biorhythm. These forms of sensibility are obviously

considered as mutually constitutive. Barthes is also concerned with the role of listening within institutions dealing with the production and consolidation of subjectivity, as in religious testimony and psychoanalytical treatment.

But no matter the specific context, whether music, religion, psychoanalysis, or even everyday life, listening is all about being present. The sound is in the ear and at the same time in the room, it is both intimate and social. In Western philosophy, vision has traditionally been associated with the Apollonian principle of analytical distance. Hearing, on the other hand, has been linked to the Dionysian principle of presence, intensity, and ecstasy. Many of Barthes's examples of listening are equally characterized by a clear distance, as when he quotes Kafka, who in his diary describes how he sits in his room and listens to the sounds in the adjoining rooms. Here, Kafka describes a balance between presence and distance, affect and calm. Kafka is distant, in his room, safe in his territory, but also connected through listening (Barthes 2002: 117-118).

There are certain similarities between Barthes's reflections on listening and those by Jean-Luc Nancy in *À l'écoute* from 2002, for example in this passage from the latter:

> To listen [*écouter*] is to enter that spatiality by which, *at the same time*, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me: it opens inside me as well as outside, and it is through such a double, quadruple, or sextuple opening that a 'self' can take place. (Nancy 2002: 14)

Nancy criticizes the mind-centered philosophical tradition from Descartes to Husserl. Inspired by Heidegger, he tries to think the subject not as a fixed entity but rather as being in a process of renewal and change. Listening is particularly interesting in this respect as an activity through which the subject is penetrated by the world, renewed and consolidated. Barthes had no ambition to develop a philosophy of listening the way Nancy later did, but Nancy's concerns – the future, identity, the renewal of the subject – are equally central in Barthes's texts on listening. In the 1976 essay, for example, Barthes writes about the religious testimony as an attempt to open up for the experience of sin as well as to open up to the future, that which is not settled but is about to become. Also in his essays on music, Barthes is concerned with the performative and creative aspect of listening. And even if it is not always obvious, reflections on listening often implicate reflections on how to live together.

In the 1976 "Écoute" essay, Barthes distinguishes between three forms of listening. The first is *listening by indices*, a hearing common to humans and animals. In this context, Barthes is concerned with the primary function of defining the territory. This aspect of listening is relevant in most of the examples in the 1977 lecture on "Écoute," whether he refers to Kafka's diaries, Zola's *Pot-Bouille* or Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. The second form is

*hermeneutic or semiological listening*, that is, the de-ciphering of signs. Barthes relates this listening to religious practices. The third form is a type of *modern listening* that is not searching for already classified signs and semantic patterns. At this level, there is a productive interaction between the listener and the one who is listened to. It is this last form of listening that Barthes is particularly interested in.

There is a progression in the three listening modes. The first aims to refine and protect the subject's territory, the second aims at developing understanding and community, and the third is directed toward what is not defined or known but is about to become so. The first follows from our nature and is common for humans and animals. The second comes with cultural development, and it attempts to establish a common understanding. The third requires the greatest effort but aims at the same time at a form of innocence.

Listening is at all three levels infiltrated by desire and will to power and might also potentially be used as a means of oppression. This is more clearly emphasized in the 1977 lecture than in the essay from 1976. Barthes goes so far as to write that if there is no oppression, there is no listening. In this context, he makes a distinction between listening and hearing, between *écouter* and *entendre* (2002: 119): we do not listen *(écouter)* to music, we hear *(entendre)* music. In the utopian idyllic community, we hear in the sense of *entendre*, but we don't listen (or spy) at each other in the sense of *écouter* ("dans la musique, on n'épie pas – et, dans un sens, on n'écoute pas," ibid: 119).[1] *Écouter* is here a verb for trying out and consolidating borders implying a power relation, while *entendre* denotes a more conflict-free, harmonious attention to the other. *Entendre* is in a way elevated over the political.

Barthes discusses the difference between *écouter* and *entendre* in a very different manner than Nancy. In *À l'écoute,* Nancy emphasizes that *entendre* can also mean 'to understand.' However, a listening mode aiming to 'understand' can hardly be regarded as real listening. For him *écouter* is an activity aiming at the sound itself and not primarily its meaning. This kind of listening, which he favors, goes deeper than the form of listening Husserl describes in his analysis of the temporal object when he examines how we perceive a melody (Nancy

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**1** |  I quote the French original, since this nuance is not quite clear in the English translation: "With music, we're not listening in on anything or anyone else – nor, in a sense, are we listening." (Barthes 2013: 81) By emphasizing the instinctive listening to what could threaten space and existence, Barthes echoes Deleuze and Guattari's work on the dynamics of territorialization and deterritorialization in books like *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986). In this context, it is worth noticing that Kafka is such a central reference under the dossier on "Listen" in the lectures on "How to Live Together." The reason is that listening and idiorrhythmy are rich themes in his work.

2007: 18-22). Nancy's favoring of the verb *écouter* at the expense of *entendre* implies an attempt to think the subject differently than in the philosophy of mind. It also implies a resistance against the tendency to undermine gesture in favor of conceptual meaning. Both Barthes and Nancy emphasize the bodily aspect of listening, but while Nancy privileges *écouter*, it seems as if Barthes privileges *entendre* in the 1977 lecture series.

The reason for this divergence is probably a slightly different agenda. In the relevant passages, Nancy is concerned with the relationship between *écouter* and *entendre* as a different attention to sensation and meaning respectively. *Écouter* signifies an open process of listening for 'sense,' while *entendre* aims at a fixed meaning. The term 'resonance' (Fr. *renvoi*) signifies how sound seems to echo, duplicate, and develop without being identical to itself. In listening for the *renvoi*, we might enter the fruitful listening of becoming.

The favoring of a listening for the material aspects of sound is obviously close to Barthes's aspirations in his essays on music and aesthetics. However, in the essay "Écoute" and in the later lecture, Barthes is relatively more concerned with how listening relates to power and desire, something that makes his brief notes a fruitful starting point for reflection on the political functions of listening. For Barthes, *écouter* refers to the attempt at avoiding risk, at ensuring the subject's territory and survival. Being *à l'écoute* is for Nancy primarily an open form of listening, while for Barthes it denotes a suspicious listening that inevitably brings with it associations of power, desire, oppression, and resistance. Keywords for this listening are preparedness and defense. Barthes's descriptions of such listening might be associated with surveillance carried out by modern intelligence agencies and by digital service companies like Facebook and Google, but his examples point more toward animal watchfulness. Kafka illustrates such surveillance in several animal stories. In "The Burrow," for example, the protagonist, an animal living in cavities below the ground, listens to silence and for scratches of claws beneath the ground: "You hear the scratching of their claws just below you in the earth, which is their element, and already you are lost." (2007: 163)

Barthes quotes a passage from Kafka's diary in both the 1976 essay "Écoute" and in his lecture the following year. Franz sits in his room and listens to the sounds from outside. He reflects on how he defines his territory. In the lecture Barthes adds the following consideration: "Territory: a polyphonic network of familiar sounds: the ones I'm able to identify and thereafter function as signs of my space." (Barthes 2013: 79) What fascinates Barthes is the connection between the daily symphonic soundscape and the delineation of the room, that is, Kafka's experience that the external sounds define *his space*. His room would not be *his* had it not been part of a larger collective and rhythmic whole where the sounds both are kept at a distance and flow through him. The room delimits, connects, and makes it possible to conceive of the subject dynamically.

Barthes also highlights the distinctive constellation of known and unknown elements. The sounds are encoded, but not always, and it is the discontinuous relationship between the encoded and the uncoded sounds that he finds especially fruitful.

## KAFKA: LISTENING AND THE FANTASY OF IDIORRHYTHMY

How can one seek loneliness and still take part in a community? This is the basic problem of idiorrhythmy. Barthes writes, with reference to the desert fathers and the idiorrhythmic tradition, that the hermit is often condemned, but not necessarily. How can the unproductive individual be granted his own territory and the right to live according to his own rhythm? Such questions are central to Kafka's work as well, whether we read stories like "A Hunger Artist," "The Cares of a Family Man," or *The Metamorphosis*. Here I shall restrict myself to comment on the latter.

*The Metamorphosis* is about Gregor Samsa, who one morning wakes up to find himself transformed into an *ungeheuren Ungeziefer,* a huge insect or vermin of some type. The story is about how the family responds to the new Gregor. *The Metamorphosis* illustrates well how rhythm and territory can be seen as mutually constitutive and how this process might be related to the two listening modes Barthes associates with *écouter* and *entendre*. Let's first consider some references to rhythm in the story. Gregor's transformation is related to a deeply felt need for peace and quiet, to live according to his biorhythm:

'Oh, my lord! he thought. 'If only I didn't have to follow such an exhausting profession! On the road, day in, day out. The work is so much more strenuous than it would be in head office, and then there's the additional ordeal of travelling, worries about train connections, the irregular, bad meals, new people all the time, no continuity, no affection. Devil take it!' (Kafka 2015: 76)

In the beginning of the story Kafka refers frequently to the time and to what Gregor *should* have done during his usual daily rhythm. But all Gregor wants is to sleep a little longer, and in his new shape he actually gets the peace he longs for.

After the strict timetable has been avoided, he dares to leave his 'cave' in order to expand his territory gradually at certain times of the day. Listening has an important function in this renegotiation of time and space. In the beginning, his family and the community at large – represented by the 'procurist' from Gregor's job – try to understand the new situation by listening on the threshold to Gregor's room. They listen to indices, and in a more hermeneutic sense they listen from the outside, while Gregor does the same from the inside. After

Gregor has managed to unlock the door, the family experiments with opening the door and entering the room, and also, little by little with letting Gregor into the living room. In the last half of the story he has been severely weakened by an attack from the raging father, but

this deterioration of his condition acquired a compensation, perfectly adequate in his view, in the fact that each evening now, the door to the living room, which he kept under sharp observation for an hour or two before it happened, was opened, so that, lying in his darkened room, invisible from the living room, he was permitted to see the family at their lit-up table, and, with universal sanction, as it were, though now in a completely different way than before, to listen to them talk together. (ibid: 109)

Here, Gregor has gained an unprecedentedly peaceful place close to his family, even if he is not any longer one of them. When he relaxes, he can also hear (*entendre*) in an enjoyable manner. This is the closest Gregor comes a fulfillment of the positive aspects of the idiorrhythmic fantasy. He has his own 'cave,' with an opening to the family, and he has found a rhythm for regulating closeness and distance to the community with relatively flexible changes during the day and evening.

When the family gets three lodgers, however, it turns out that neither they nor the new cleaning lady can accept Gregor. The turning point takes place when Gregor's sister plays the violin for the lodgers. Gregor is enchanted to the extent that he crawls up to the lodgers and sparks off horror, rage, and finally his own demise. He hears (*entendre*) so raptly that he forgets to listen (*écouter*) for the danger signals. Earlier, he has listened in an elementary manner to indices and symptoms in order to control a territory where he can be relatively safe. But his sister's playing has made him forget about precautions and enter a confident mode of hearing that can be related to the fantasy of the idiorrhythmic community. The satisfaction Gregor usually experiences in the evenings when he crawls out to listen to the eating family is reminiscent of a utopia as it follows fixed regulations of accessibility to the territory. But when Gregor forgets the rules altogether and tries to realize the idiorrhythmic fantasy, he and his family are punished:

And yet his sister was playing so beautifully. Her face was inclined to the side, and sadly and searchingly her eyes followed the columns of notes. Gregor crept a little closer and held his head close to the ground, so as to be prepared to meet her gaze. Could he be an animal, to be so moved by music? (ibid: 117)

Prior to the metamorphosis, Gregor had intended to fund his talented sister's music studies. And throughout the story she has shown more understanding and care for Gregor than any of the other family members. There is a

particularly strong tie between them. Intoxicated by her playing, and in an absurd expectation that she still understands him, Gregor fantasizes about climbing up to her shoulder and kissing her neck – but then one of the three lodgers shouts out to Gregor's father, and the violin goes silent. The lodgers terminate their contracts with immediate effect. Gregor creeps back to his room where he is locked in and perishes.

Why is Gregor so provoking to his surroundings? Thanks to his hard work, the family has been able to buy the large apartment, and when he can no longer work, they are forced first to rent out rooms and ultimately to sell them. A well-known approach to the short story is to see Gregor's transformation as a literalization of a metaphor: Gregor does not feel like working and locks himself into his room to get peace. How does he look at himself? Like a creep. And the story is about this creep (Sokel 1981: 6).

The problem of reserving space for the unproductive individual is central to that of idiorrhythmy. Barthes describes the monastery as an idiorrhythmic institution where the monks are assigned specific belongings. With increased living standards and scarcity of property, it is, however, the space itself that becomes the valuable resource. This is exactly the case in Kafka's story. Barthes writes: "Well, today, Thelemite rule wouldn't provide things (too easy, too inexpensive to act as a consecrating gift), it would provide space – The gift of space: would be constitutive of (utopian) rule." (Barthes 2013: 132)

Gregor works hard to pay for the spacious apartment, but the exhausting work prevents him from actually enjoying peace and quiet in this very home. All he wants is to sleep longer in the morning. And when he cannot, he finds a temporary flight line from the depressing situation. For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "becoming animal" is the most important "line of escape" in Kafka's work, not the least in *The Metamorphosis* (Deleuze/Guattari 1986: 35). The realization of this flight line is at the same time a claim of time and space. The attempt to realize idiorrhythmy implies a rearrangement of the constellation of time and space. Gregor seems to succeed temporarily in finding a position within the family apartment where he can both withdraw and participate according to his needs. But in the end it is clear that the fantasy cannot be realized over time, something that corresponds perfectly with Barthes's general statement that idiorrhythmy is incompatible with family life. One could say that Gregor's flight attempt was doomed from the beginning. The reason for reading the story in an idiorrhythmic perspective, however, is that it illustrates perfectly the role of listening in an idiorrhythmic negotiation of time and space even if the result is negative.

## ACTUALIZATION

Barthes wants to explore the fantasy of idiorrhythmy without problematizing its political consequences. Only then can the fantasy be fully explored as fantasy. However, there is no doubt that it also has political relevance, and I will briefly mention some of the ways in which this is the case. Barthes's comment on the changes in Thelemite monasteries is, for example, highly relevant to the political realities associated with the possibilities of idiorrhythmy in a modern cultural situation. The individual has in many ways greater freedom than ever before, but the competition on the labor market and the struggle for time, space, and peace is actualized in new ways. Let me conclude by briefly mentioning three examples where sound and listening play important roles.

First, both Barthes and Kafka underline how inhabiting a reassuring territory is dependent on a balance between being sheltered from and in contact with the surrounding soundscape. Referring to Kafka's diary, Barthes observes that the limited sounds from the adjoining rooms in an apartment block are more reassuring than the potentially uncontrollable noise surrounding a house (2013: 80). As we have seen, the theme of a safe, peaceful, and quiet (though not completely silent) home within a city environment is also central to *The Metamorphosis*. What is at stake in the examples from Kafka is not only the luxury of a peaceful apartment in a lively city but also the luxury of a separate room within the household. In modern Western city centers, housing prices have been elevated to the extent that only the richest have the economy to live there. In the attractive areas, people from the middle class work hard to pay their rent and living expenses. Many suppress their need for relaxation and fall victim to the same trap as Gregor Samsa: they work so hard to pay for the attractive apartment that they don't have the time to find peace and rest in the obtained space, something that leads to stress and exhaustion. This absurd though entirely common situation is the opposite of that of idiorrhythmy. The wish for peace and quiet is at the heart of the idiorrhythmic fantasy. But the attempt to realize it in a modern capitalist setting often lead in the opposite direction.

Second, the issue of peace and quiet also concerns working life. The tendency in the development of modern bureaucracies has been to allocate a private office space for each bureaucrat, as in monasteries, where each monk has his own cell. In our time, the tendency is to transform closed offices into open office landscapes so that everyone can always be à l'écoute at each other – everyone can at any time see and listen in on each other and at any time peek into each other's computers. The open landscape solution ensures a strong degree of mutual surveillance and social control, which incidentally is symptomatic of the development of a more comprehensive control society, including smartphones and other social media, continuously reporting our

movements and behavioral patterns (cf. Pfaller's essay on "Bureaucracy" in this volume). However, the bureaucrats complain that they get exhausted by the noise. Instead of a balance between peace and quiet on the one hand, and belonging to a productive working community and soundscape on the other, people get exhausted, at times ill, by distracting noise.

Third, and finally, what about homeless people who don't work? Beggars communicate and earn a living by making themselves be observed and heard in order to receive money or goods (cf. Stene-Johansen's essay on "Nourriture/ Food in this volume"). Such begging is often thought of as an unpleasant intrusion of privacy on behalf of others. Many European countries have forbidden begging. An important argument for the ban is that the beggars are better helped by being forced to work than to be given alms on the street. One might also argue that begging in many cases actually is organized crime. However, a possible underlying motive for wanting to ban begging is that the beggars provoke the way Gregor provokes: they are inactive, occupy space, and are nasty to look at. Contrary to Gregor, they also often make sound. In Norway, the beggars' situation seemed to change in the 2000s. Around 2000, beggars actively sought prospective donors, saw them in their eyes and asked for money. In recent years, the beggar culture has changed. In Norway, begging has more and more become a silent activity. The beggars make less noise, are less confronting and usually sit quietly on the street with a cup or hat in front of them. When people call for a ban on begging, even though the socalled 'aggressive (sonorous) begging' has been eliminated, it may be that wasting time, taking up space and being reliant on others' favors is in itself considered provocative. In the ongoing debate on begging, the relationship between seeing and hearing is actualized. Should the beggars be allowed to occupy space – say, one square meter either on the sidewalk or outside the shopping center? Should they be allowed to make sound, for example by playing the accordion or praying for help? To what extent should the view of beggars be allowed to affect the calm and mental balance of passers-by? How should one balance the beggars' rights to exist, be assigned a territory and be heard, up against the wish for peace and quiet for other inhabitants?

As Barthes make clear, literature describes both the fantasy of idiorrhythmic living together as well as its obstacles. His project is to traverse *le phantasme* as far as possible, both as an ideal and as an imaginary field one might be haunted by. But he refuses to investigate the issue of idiorrhythmy in practical politics, beyond literature. Only when real political dilemmas are set in parentheses, when the reader takes the time to follow the imagination all the way, can idiorrhythmic fantasy have the power to exert its radical potential. Only when reflecting freely on fundamental needs and luxurious hopes of security, peace, and quiet, when we put concerns about the possible and impossible in brackets, can we traverse our fantasies and hopes: What would the good life be, regardless

of whether such a life is realistic or not? In which ways would we like to listen and be listened to?

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# ÉPONGE/Sponge

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Roland Barthes begins his meditation on the concept of "Éponge/Sponge" by shifting his focus from who is included in a community to the question of whom we exclude. The exclusion at issue here, however, is of a special sort. Barthes is not interested in the ways in which communities render excluded members straightforwardly absent, but rather in the way in which an excluded member remains present as an exclusion – as what he calls an "integrated reject" (Barthes 2013: 81). This "integrated" or "incorporated reject," Barthes suggests, is far from an incidental occurrence; on the contrary, it may very well turn out to be a requirement, if not the lynchpin, of all communities. He speculates that "there's no such thing as a community without an integrated reject" (ibid: 81).

My inquiry examines the relation between the Sponge and what Barthes calls his "fantasy of an idiorrhythmic community," in which "each subject lives according to his own rhythm" (ibid: 6). The early monasteries of Mount Athos provide Barthes with an example of this utopian "fantasy of a free life lived among just a few other people" (ibid: 9). But, he adds, such an arrangement remains elusive. As Barthes tells us, as "a form it's very eccentric; it's never really caught on" (ibid: 9). Instead, he writes, two other, excessive forms of monastic life have come to dominate: eremitic solitude on one side (in which the religious live in hermetic seclusion), and, on the other side, repressive cenobitism (in which an assimilative community forms). Barthes's fantasy of a "zone that falls between" (ibid: 9) these poles provides the backdrop for his interest in the Sponge and the role it may play within monastic formations, and ways of living together more generally.

To return to the Sponge: Barthes makes the provocation that "all societies jealously guard their rejects, prevent them from leaving" (ibid: 82). In asserting this, Barthes draws primarily upon one of his key reference texts, Palladius's 419-420 work, *The Lausiac History*, which details the lives of the Desert Fathers, early Christian monks who lived in the Egyptian desert. He recounts the story of "The Nun Who Feigned Madness," who "'never sat down at the table

or partook of a particle of bread, but [...] wiped up with a sponge the crumbs from the tables'" (Barthes 2013: 82). This nun, the exemplar of the Sponge, was ridiculed and abused by the other nuns in the monastery, but she never became angry with them. This dynamic was altered by a visit to the monastery from St. Piteroum, who was told by an angel that among them existed "someone more pious than himself" (ibid: 82). His visit irrevocably and perhaps disastrously – for both the Sponge and the community – displaced her from the position of Sponge. After the sisters learn of her extraordinary piety, they confess to their maltreatment of her and begin to treat her as their "spiritual mother." Unable to bear their reverence, the nun disappears from the monastery and is never heard from again.

Barthes implies that the disappearance of the Sponge may have disastrous effects on a community: "Take the world today," he tells us, "very different types of societies, but probably not one without its integrated reject." (ibid: 81) The question I explore here is whether a change in the relation of the sponge to the community might after all have a positive effect by opening a space for an idiorrhythmic life. To foreshadow my argument, I will be interested in exploring what it might mean for a social group to centrally include the Sponge, not as integrated reject, nor as an esteemed, 'sacred' member, but rather as full-fledged Subject. Or, to put it in Barthes's words, I explore what would happen if "the pariah [...] no longer tends to be recognized as such" (ibid: 81). In short, what if the Sponge were subjectivized *as* Sponge?

I begin this line of inquiry by noting that Slavoj Žižek credits Barthes with proposing, "already in the 1950s, in *Mythologies* [...] the notion of ideology as the 'naturalization' of the symbolic order" (1994: 11). Naturalization, the appearance of a historical contingency as an inevitable 'necessity' is, Žižek contends, the most familiar form that ideology takes. But I think it is fair to go further and say that already in the 1950s, in *Mythologies*, Barthes also analyzed how ideology operates in what Žižek identifies as an inverse, less recognized mode. To be specific, through his proposal of the concept of inoculation, Barthes offers a compelling account of how ideology may work by making what *is* actually an unpleasant structural *necessity* appear as a mere 'accident' or 'contingent evil.' Structural flaws are dismissed as unfortunate but unnecessary events – for example, in the aftermath of the publication of the Abu Ghraib photographs in 2004, which revealed the abuse of detainees during the Iraq War, the inherent brutality of the US Army is written off as the regrettable practices of a 'few bad apples.'

This insight in Barthes's work is obscured by his observation that the ideological operation of inoculation is often taken a second step further. The 'contingent' vexation gets reincorporated, but this second time it is reframed as an advantage rather than a liability. It winds up appearing the very thing that makes the system possible and worthwhile after all. In short, this same

pernicious element gets recoded as an advantage before becoming reinscribed as structurally necessary to the system and thus naturalized. Barthes makes this point in the context of the advertising strategy on behalf of Margarine in the short essay "Operation Margarine," asking "What does it matter, *after all*, if margarine is just fat, when it goes further than butter, and costs less? What does it matter, *after all*, if Order is a little brutal or a little blind, when it allows us to live cheaply?" (Barthes 1972: 42) In other words, yes, it is unfortunately true that the army brutally degrades human life, but that is precisely how it enables *us* to live safely.

Barthes's account of the Sponge echoes a structure similar to that of the first step of inoculation: namely, that the element that covertly secures the community's condition of possibility is openly mocked as its contingent irritant. The Sponge, Barthes tells us, figures into the group as "scapegoat": the figure upon whom "a community fixates [...] as the source of all its ills" (2013: 84). Here, the very thing that is ridiculed as a snag in the social system – the reject, the Sponge – turns out to be its salvation. Inoculation functions similarly as a tactic for neutralizing threats to the hegemonic order. Just as a vaccine injects small, controlled amounts of disease into the body in order to immunize us against larger exposure, a system of power will announce small threats in order to "protect it against the risk of a generalized subversion"; "a little 'confessed' evil saves one from acknowledging a lot of hidden evil" (Barthes 1972: 150; 42). Thus, in addition to cordoning off a potential challenge, the element of inoculation, like the Sponge, functions similarly to the scapegoat. An identifiable, discrete "problem" gets in the way of the smooth running of the social order, but in the end functions as a necessary support for the system.

But here a difference emerges between the Sponge and inoculation. The troubling element that is the target of inoculation remains unchanged in the second step when, as in "Operation Margarine," it is recast from exception to necessity. By contrast, in the case of the Sponge, such a recasting is accompanied by an inversion of its status – a transposition that, as we have noted, threatens the community. Like the nun who feigned madness, if the Sponge is recast from pariah to consecrated, from scorned to esteemed, then, Barthes tells us, her presence in the community becomes untenable, and the community as such is made vulnerable. In Barthes's account, then, "the final twist in the handling of the reject problem involves glorifying, honoring, consecrating the rejects" (Barthes 2013: 84). But, he adds, to the detriment of the community, such attention will drive the reject even further away, as exemplified by the aforementioned nun. Thus, unlike the threat that inoculation brings to the fore – namely, a menace that the system incorporates to its advantage – the Sponge becomes threatening when fully incorporated. As Barthes puts it, a community is able to "integrate the anomic by coding its position as anomic. I allow it back in, but in a position where it poses no threat = if they're shrewd enough, it's

what authorities do to marginalities. They set up reservations (like for Indians). They turn intellectuals, for example, into a distinctive, recognized caste." (ibid: 84)

At first sight, then, the consequence of the withdrawal of the Sponge may appear compatible with Barthes's earlier work on inoculation in which parading, rather than masking, the threat neutralizes its power to compromise the system. The threat is, in this sense, driven away. But on second glance we see that although both inoculation and the 'handling of the reject problem' involve openly including the undesirable, the result of the inclusion differs significantly in each case. In the case of the Sponge, the pronouncement of the reject's inclusion comes at the expense of the reject losing her status as reject, and thus risks the community crumbling. In the case of inoculation, by contrast, although the pernicious element of the system is, in Barthes's words, openly and "lavishly displayed" for "the injustices which it produces," and "the vexations to which it gives rise," it fortifies rather than crumbles the system of power (1972: 41). Inoculation, thus, can be seen as complicit with the conservative structure of disavowal that Žižek associates with what he calls "the cynical subject." In Žižek's words, "with a disarming frankness one 'admits everything' [...] 'they know very well what they are doing, yet they are doing it'" (1994: 8). Such cynical 'seeing through,' like inoculation, implicates subjects more firmly within the ideological edifice, by encouraging them to feel 'in the know' and subsequently immune to the political implications of their practices. The cynic is blinded to the fact that his or her ability to see through to how things 'really are' matters very little, indeed merely preserves the status quo. This is because the cynic overlooks the way in which reality is not structured by the way 'things really are,' but rather by the symbolic fiction that props up reality. In endeavoring to see under the ideological mask, the cynic fails to recognize that it is the mask itself that organizes the social world.

I will argue that the disruptive effects of the withdrawal of the Sponge that follow from 'seeing through' her role as pariah confront us with an unexpected political lesson, one that offers a glimpse of the political possibilities afforded to those who do *not* know – to those who, rather than 'seeing through,' allow themselves to be duped. This is the lesson that Jacques Lacan offers in his account of how the 'non-duped err.' According to Jürgen Pieters and Kris Pint (2008), Barthes "valorized Lacan's dictum that 'the non-duped err'" and Barthes's subsequent account of "False Image" in *How to Live Together* affirms the connection of this dictum to the Sponge. Barthes instructs us that the lesson of the Sponge is "become a fool, so that you may be wise" (2013: 81). We may understand this as a directive to allow oneself to be duped – to be taken in by the fiction of the symbolic order. As Žižek reminds us, "the social mask matters more than the direct reality of the individual who wears it" (2007: 33).

In order to understand the radical political possibilities implicit in this apparently conservative political strategy of allowing oneself to be duped, we must make a distinction between two sorts of subjects. On the one hand, after the revelation by St. Piteroum, the nuns in Palladius's text exemplify the position of the cynical non-duped who 'see through' the parade of the Sponge's madness to her concealed sacred status, and thus refuse to be taken in by the symbolic order's deceitful rejection of the Sponge. To put it in Barthes's terms, by rejecting the inherent duplicity of the symbolic order, the 'mad' suffer by refusing to 'be fools.' For Barthes, on the other hand, the fool or the dupe is wise, since by allowing herself to be duped, she avoids the trap of believing that she can outsmart the efficiency of the symbolic ruse. In other words, the subject who allows herself to be duped, who avoids the possibility of believing she can step outside the illusion, inhabits the truth that, deceitful or not, it is the symbolic fiction that structures reality. In Lacanian parlance, one might say that it is by refusing to be fooled by the big Other that one falls into the errant trap of the 'non-duped.'

The duped, by contrast, engage in an inverse form of disavowal: the duped invest in the symbolic fiction – allow themselves to be taken in by the Other, even if it contradicts what they know. To be specific, for the duped, it does not matter if the nun is indeed the holiest among them: as long as she wears a rag on her head and mops up all the crumbs, she is the reject. My suggestion, then, is that, despite its apparent conservatism, this scenario holds interesting possibilities for a radical politics. I discuss this via Barthes's elaboration of Greimas.

In ruminating on the Sponge's fundamental role, Barthes proposes an addition to Algirdas Greimas's actantial model, a schema developed for conducting structural analyses of the action occurring within narrative texts. Greimas identifies six actantial positions, or roles, that are typically fulfilled for the narrative to be successful. Barthes offers a remedy to what he sees as the flaw in Greimas's structure: that it is "too rational, too replete, and harmonious" (Barthes 2013: 83). He briefly sketches his "working hypothesis" that the inclusion of a seventh actant, a "Reject-Actant" (ibid: 83), performing the function of the Sponge, might contribute to a typology of three narratives contained within his source texts. First, Zola's *Pot-Luck* aligns with *The Lausiac History* by including a character, the serving girl, Adèle, who embodies the position of the Reject-Actant. Adèle, we may note, is even referred to as "Dish-cloth" by another maid (Zola 2009: 104). Second, Barthes notes the absence of a character taking on the function of the Reject-Actant in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. If a Reject-Actant is present here at all, its function is fulfilled through the role that death plays in the story. Such an omission, Barthes suggests, creates both a "failing" at the level of narrative form and a success at the "human level" (2013: 83). Here, he suggests, we get a glimpse

of a "civilized, humane" account of community (ibid: 83). Of note here, too, is Barthes's mention of Robinson Crusoe's shared solitude with Friday. In discussing the third and richest case, Gide's *The Confined Woman of Poitiers*, Barthes holds open the possibility of an idiorrhythmic community. Here we encounter a "Reject-Actant," embodied by the figure of Melanie, who becomes "confused with the 'Subject-Actant'" (ibid: 83). Melanie's "paradoxical status" as both the filthy reject *and* the enigmatic subject present us with an instance in which "the two actants [Reject and Subject] get mixed up with same agent" (ibid: 83).

Barthes's reimagining of Greimas's model to include the "Reject-Actant" carries an unmentioned, but deeply resonant, structural corollary. Greimas's model is built upon a binary structure of opposition and negation, but the addition of the "Reject-Actant," without a complementary term, suggests a triadic, rather than dyadic system. Thus, the "Reject-Actant" occupies a paradoxical relationship within Greimas's narrative grammar. As the incorporated exclusion, it works to consolidate the community to which it appears as an obstacle or excess. But it accomplishes that symbolic closure only from the paradoxical point of its own lack. Barthes explains the "paradoxical" status of the "Reject-Actant" in terms of the way in which "two actants get mixed up with the same agent" (ibid: 83) – a possibility already accounted for by Greimas. I propose that the paradox lies elsewhere: namely, that the subject occupies a fundamentally paradoxical position of always and already both subject and 'reject' – both brought into existence by the signifier and yet perpetually 'barred' by it. As subjects, we all covertly straddle this tension between being both inside and bound to the socio-symbolic order, and outside and not-fully accounted for by it. I argue that the public exposure of exactly this ambiguity in the figure of the Sponge has the potential to shatter the illusion of a clear divide between inside and outside, which in turn opens a space for new configurations for subjectivity and living together. I will suggest that this possibility points to a transformative potential of the Sponge to challenge the community dynamic without necessitating the Sponge's retreat. But for this challenge to be realized, the Sponge has to be made a subject *as* sponge – *without being either "consecrate[ed]" or "reduced to sameness"* (Barthes 1972: 151).

This subjectification of the Sponge has the potential of shifting the coordinates that dictate who "counts" within a social structure, as Jacques Rancière puts it. This shift operates outside of the two alternative positions for the Sponge posed by Barthes: first, the Sponge as pariah or "integrated reject," a figure who works to consolidate a community by acting as the scapegoat; second, the Sponge as accepted into the community via its elevation to the status of consecrated or glorified. Drawing upon Barthes's hint of the possibility of "mixing up" the Sponge with the Subject, I suggest a third alternative: the

Sponge playing a transformative role in the community through being accepted as *both* Subject and Sponge.

Here the recent work of Rancière on communities offers a possible alternative path for thinking about the Sponge's potential contribution to the community. For Rancière, the very act of subjectivizing the reject – or what he terms "the part that has no part" – has the potential to transform the distribution of power within a community. In Barthes's terms, this conflation of Sponge with Subject has a transformative potential for a community – pointing to a new way of 'living together.'

The implication here is that, by refusing to code it as anomic, the Sponge has the potential to reconfigure rather than either destroy or consolidate a community. The political project that trenches upon this possibility aims not merely to give representational privilege to those who have been marginalized within a system, but involves challenging the very configurations of the system through which such exclusions have been made necessary. How might this come about?

According to Rancière, the mere inclusion of the excluded is unlikely to destabilize a social system. But the act of centralizing the excluded, of featuring its central role in binding the community, has the potential to trigger what Rancière (2006: 43) refers to as a "redistribution of the sensible." Rancière characterizes the political as precisely such a redistribution of the sensible within the relation between the established social order and an excluded element. Here it is necessary to differentiate Rancière's understanding of the political from other political positions that focus upon a system's exclusions. For Rancière, the excluded element – Barthes's Sponge – has a transformative potential only if it she is allowed to speak and be heard, not as valorized, but rather *as* Sponge. Understood this way, a politics of the Sponge avoids the difficulty that Gayatri Spivak identifies: the problem that when the subaltern speaks, too often her speech is heard as either reproducing colonial order or celebrated as the wellspring of ideological purity. The political potential of the Sponge, by contrast, lies not in valorization, nor in its subordination, but rather in insisting on asserting her equality: what Rancière calls *radical* equality.

Similarly, Donna Haraway cautions, one must be wary of the move to privilege the experiences of the excluded – what she calls "knowledge from below" (1998: 193). She warns us of the "serious danger" in succumbing to the temptation to "trust the vantage point [...] of the subjected [...] of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions" (ibid: 193). The exclusion from power, she argues, cannot offer a neutral terrain for the "true" revelation of ideological mystification. Rancière similarly takes politics to be achieved by creating a 'dissensus': the unsettling of naturalized systems of perception that, by masking the exclusions upon which the impression of such a totality depends, perpetuate the illusion of total

inclusivity. At best, such creation of dissensus enables a community to "sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said, and what can be thought and consequently, a new landscape of the possible" (Rancière 2009: 103). The problematic of the Sponge extends this Rancièrian point of view by posing the possibility of destabilizing the distribution of the sensible, through highlighting the fictional nature of reality itself, thereby helping to envision a community "in which everyone counts" (Conley 2005: 103).

I conclude by suggesting that it is not incidental that the notion of who "counts" speaks not only to inclusion, but also to rhythm – to the count of time. Rancière is careful to note that artisans have been historically excluded from communal structures because of their counting of time – their working rhythms. He draws upon Plato's insight that "artisans cannot be put in charge of the shared or common elements of the community because they *do not have the time* to devote themselves to anything other than their own work" (Rancière 2006: 12). As such, Rancière remarks that "politics revolves around [...] the possibilities of time" (ibid: 13). In a similar vein, the possibility of accepting the Sponge as proper Subject within a group may not only facilitate a radically equal community in which each member occupies a position of the same plane, but also carve out the opportunity for each member to exist in her own time. To be specific, I suggest, the inclusion of Sponge as Subject may undermine the repressive hierarchy that, to the detriment of some and the advantage of others, insists on each member existing and being judged within the same measure of time. As Barthes's example of the mother pulling her son by the arm to match her rhythm demonstrates, 'equal time' does not create equality. The fantasy of idiorrhythmy involves living on the same plane, but in different times. I end by encouraging further thought regarding the Sponge's potential to disrupt the 'apportionment' of time that undergirds the hierarchy of inclusion/exclusion within a social formation. The Sponge holds open the prospect that a subject can shift an assimilative community into one with an appreciation of the idiorrhythmy of living together.

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# ÉVÉNEMENT/Event

*Hans Hauge*

In Richard Wolin's *The Seduction of Reason* we find the following about the student revolts of May 1968 in Paris: "structuralists and poststructuralists had written off the 'event' in favor of the 'longue durée,'" but "the students and Sartre had not" (2004: 227). At the time, the then 52-year-old Roland Barthes was "highly marginalised and irrelevant to the events" (Stafford 1998: 8). He may well have liked that position, because events have a tendency to intrude and disturb. May 1968, it is true, is often referred to as an event: *l'événement de Mai*. But is it true, as Wolin claims, that the revolt was somehow turned against structuralism? Was that the reason for Barthes being marginalised? Wolin might be thinking of Lacan's legendary remark to Lucien Goldmann that "I don't consider it at all correct to have written that structures don't go out onto the streets, for if there's one thing the events of May prove, it's precisely that they do" (quoted in Roudinesco 1997: 341). The revolt, in other words, was not an event when seen from a structuralist point of view, Wolin seems to claim, but it was when seen from a Sartrean or Wolinian point of view. There are, however, others who did connect May 1968 precisely with structuralism, and in that case with Barthes and not with events nor with Sartre. I am thinking of for instance Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut in *La pensée 68* (1985). What, then, was May 1968? Event or structure? In the first place a rhetorical question.

Surely, depending on what is meant by the word 'event' itself, one could argue that Roland Barthes wrote off the event. The event is the enemy of Living-Together, as he writes, but it is also a fantasy that you can "reject the event" (Barthes 2013: 84). But one searches in vain for structuralists using the words *longue durée* although Derrida operated with very *longue durée*-looking historical epochs.[1] Derrida did not write off the event, at least not the word itself. Nor did American deconstructionist critics write off the event. The title alone of *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory* (2001) demonstrates

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**1** |  See for example phrases such as "for at least some twenty centuries" and "for nearly three millenia" (Derrida 1976: 6).

this, and the book came out before Wolin's. Deleuze and Guattari's 'concept' is an event. And whatever he is – structuralist or Sartrean – Alain Badiou's major work is after all called *L'être et l'événement*, while Claude Romano wrote of *L'événement et le monde* (1998). The 'event' is still active whereas there are so few structuralists let alone poststructuralists these days. They have been written off.

It is difficult to dissociate 'event' from its theologico-philosophical provenance and its ties to Heidegger and existentialism. *Vom Ereignis* was, after all, the title Heidegger gave to the book that introduced his new way of thinking after 1938.[2] 'Event' belongs in the same family as 'decision' (*Entscheidung*), the 'message' (*kerygma*) and the 'moment' (Kierkegaard's *øjeblikket*). It could mean that which breaks into the structure or the myth. So if Barthes really did write off the 'event,' it could be because he wished to liberate his discourse from theology, although his historical examples and concepts in *Comment vivre ensemble* often come from theology or religion or at least from that branch of theology called church history, in particular monasteries, hermits, and monks. And he did say that literature was like a religion for him.

## EVENT AND TAO

One-third of the section "Événement/Event" consists of a quotation from Jean Grenier's *L'esprit du Tao*, or to be more precise, Barthes quotes Grenier quoting Lao-Tzu.[3] On the basis of the quotation, Barthes concludes that Tao is defined as the suspension of events. Taoism wrote off the event. It is suggestive that Martin Heidegger also connected *Ereignis* with Tao.[4] Also Lacan had worked with Lao-Tzu and Tao. There are several subjects in the section: "a subject of suspense," "a subject of the nest," "the ambivalence of subjects," "the Tao subject," and finally "the Zen subject" (Barthes 2013: 84-86). It is difficult to determine which one of them is Barthes'.

*Robinson Crusoe* and Taoism are juxtaposed and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is referred to, and so is the founder of cenobitic monasticism, the

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**2** | The English translation of Heidegger's *Vom Ereignis* is 'Enowning.' The German root *eigen* (the adjective 'own') is lost in the more common English translation 'event' (from *ex*, 'out of,' and *venire* 'to come').

**3** | Barthes could have encountered Lao-Tzu in his reading Bertolt Brecht and his poem "Legende von der Entstehung des Buches Taoteking auf dem Weg des Laotse in die Emigration."

**4** | He noted how the two words were untranslatable and could not even be rendered as "road" (*Weg*), which would in other respects sounds genuinely Heideggerian.

Egyptian Pachomius (ibid: 10-11). His idea was loneliness in community.[5] The members of the *claustrum* had to eat together and wear the same clothes. Our first impressions of these examples would be that *Robinson Crusoe* is about living alone and not together, while *The Magic Mountain* (1924) is about living together and not alone. The community depicted in Mann's *Zauberberg* is constituted as a community when "it ceases to respond to outside events" (Barthes 2013: 85). In Pachomius's monastery one lives together, and also this community admits of no news (events). Robinson is not disturbed by events, if you disregard Friday, but he is not living together like they do in the sanatorium on the mountain or in the monastery in the desert. So why did Barthes include it, he asks himself? Why not be content with Tao, Mann, and Pachomius?

## The charm of Mao's China

The juxtaposition of possibly the first modern novel and the Taoist *wu-wei* – 無 為 – almost looks like a passage from one of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Pound would have cherished this oxymoronic ideogram,[6] which he could easily have made to look like horse feet running. The ideogram means 'non-event,' 'no plot,' 'nothing happens,'[7] and this fits with very well with Daniel Defoe's plotless novel in which (almost) nothing happens. It is well-known how in the 1970s there was a widespread fascination[8] with all things Chinese in *Tel Quel* circles. The group's members were influenced by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi's Maoist *La Chine* from 1972.  Alain Badiou is still a Maoist. Lacan had learned Chinese during the war, and he literally flirted with Macciocchi and was to go with her on a tour to China – the tour itself went through, but he backed out at the last moment when he realized that many others were going too (Roudinesco 1997: 353). Barthes went and so did Philippe Sollers and Julia Kristeva. Barthes was not really taken with China and stayed in his hotel room most of the time 'all alone.' Sollers and Kristeva were captivated, though. They began to insert Chinese characters in their writings (in *Nombres* for instance, a text that Barthes liked). Jacques Derrida was also intrigued by Chinese characters and referred to Ezra Pound and to Ernest Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. Derrida believed they had both escaped Western logocentrism and metaphysics: "This irreducibly graphic poetics [i.e., Fenollosa's] was, with that

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**5** | Pachomius's sister, Maria, founded two monasteries in Egypt.

**6** | It is the radical for "fire" and not "horse" (*ma*). It has been argued that Pound's Confucianism is really Taoism – he just didn't realize it.

**7** | Or it means that action and non-action are the same.

**8** | Jacques Derrida uses the word *la fascination* about Ezra Pound's keen interest in Chinese ideograms (1976: 140).

of Mallarmé, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound's writing may thus be given its historical significance (1976: 92). Chinese was *écriture*.[9]

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1976) confronted the Occident or Western metaphysics with the Orient or China, and Barthes did something similar with *Robinson* and Tao. Barthes dated the disparity between West and East. It began, he says, in 380 with the Edict of Thessalonica, whereby Theodosius made Christianity a "state religion" (2013: 10)[10] and thus, according to Barthes, created the split between West and East. He sees the split as caused by Christendom. Not that many are familiar with the year 380, Barthes remarks, and that is of course true. Theodosius (379-95) was a follower of the 'Western' view (which he had picked up in Spain), and after 380 the homoousian (Trinitarian) orthodoxy was made the true creed, and it still is.[11]

*Robinson Crusoe* figures frequently in Roland Barthes's texts and several places in *Comment vivre ensemble*. He was easily familiar with the novel and with Daniel Defoe's biography. Defoe's house is mentioned, but Barthes does not focus on Defoe as the radical Protestant who was often offensive toward society, a bit like Barthes himself. The novel has changed status from a commercial success to a classic to a children's book, from giving name to a literary mode (the Robinsonade) to giving name to the Swedish reality TV concept *Expedition Robinson* (known in some countries as *Survivor*). This particular expedition, which Barthes could have made a wonderful analysis of à la *Mythologies*, is about living together and about creating communities of the kind Barthes would have loathed. The word 'event' has had almost the same destiny as 'Robinson' in that it has been emptied of all content. We are surrounded by 'events' and 'event managers'; culture has become 'event culture' and everyone loves community. There is nothing more banal than the ideal of living together, precisely because we don't live together. The single family is the most common family form.

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**9** | Similarly, Chinese is deconstruction. Byung-Chai Han writes: "Die chinesische Denken ist dagegen insofern von Anfang an dekonstruktivistisch, als es mit dem Sein und Wesen radikal bricht. Auch der *Tao* (wörtlich: Weg) stellt die Gegenfigur zum *Sein* oder *Wesen* dar." (Han 2011: 9)

**10** | The cradle of the Roman state church to be more precise.

**11** | The Germanic peoples were at that time Arians. The Edict therefore meant the victory of the Roman Church over the Germanic Arians. Theodosius knew that the Occidental-Alexandrian orthodoxy was not enough, so he reconciled it with the bishops of the Orient or the Eastern view. One cannot say that it created a split between the Occident and the Orient.

## Maryland 1966

In 1966 Roland Barthes sat speaking to Jacques Derrida on the other side of the aisle on the plane from Paris to Baltimore via New York (Derrida 2003: 83). They were on their way to Johns Hopkins University and to that conference about the human sciences that came to be an event in American literary criticism. This was when structuralism transformed into poststructuralism, if one is allowed such a journalistic way of describing it. On this occasion Barthes was singled out as one of the first thinkers to distance himself from "structural theory" (Macksey/ Donato 1971: ix) as well as from hermeneutical activities, both structure and event, thereby ushering in a "theoretical deconstruction." In Baltimore Barthes would have heard the youngish Derrida on the conference's last day open his lecture with the words that perhaps something had happened to structure that might be called 'an event.' Was it an event? Had something happened? In his lecture Derrida took Claude Lévi-Strauss and hence structuralism to task. Lévi-Strauss had opposed event and structure (*kerygma* and myth, theologically speaking) in his critique of Jean-Paul Sartre and existentialism in *The Savage Mind*. Did Derrida undo the opposition between the two? He couldn't. Derrida continued to use the word 'event.' In a lecture in Montreal in 1971 the word emerged in his lecture about J. F. Austin and speech acts: "Signature Event Context" (Derrida 1982).[12] Were Barthes and Derrida existence structuralists, or had they really written off the event in favor of the *longue durée*?

In Baltimore Barthes gave the lecture "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" The text as we read it today is put together from his written notes and from what he actually said that day. According to Barthes as well, something new was happening. He did not say 'perhaps,' as Derrida did. Language and literature are finding each other again, he announced, after rationalism and positivism had separated them. The situation now changes, he proclaimed (Barthes 1971b: 134). It was brought about by the linguistics of Émile Benveniste whom Barthes now based his thoughts on. In Baltimore Barthes advanced the idea that the 'I' of writing is not identical with the empirical I.[13] Modern linguistics, he claimed, re-described what already Proust and Mallarmé had said about the difference between the text's I and reality's. This lecture was the germ of the ideas that were further developed in his most famous essay "The Death of the Author," which thousands of literature students all over the world have read but hardly understood.[14] In no time the 'theory' of the death of the author was

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**12** | See also "The Event and the Regime of the Other" (Derrida 1982: 297).

**13** | A view that most American literary critics were easily familiar with from T. S. Eliot and the New Critics (impersonalism).

**14** | I have taught the text for many years. My students liked it, for now they believed they could say whatever they liked about a text. Power to the students! However, they

assimilated and thereby recuperated by the educational system. "The Death of the Author" is now part of the history of literary criticism. Barthes's friend Alain Robbe-Grillet reacted against the idea of the dead author and wrote about himself in *The Ghost in the Machine* (*Le miroir qui revient*, 1984). Marguerite Duras did the same in *The Lover* (*L'amant*, 1984) and in her diaries, and both texts have a theme similar to Barthes's: the Orient meets the Occident (cf. Ryan 2011). Since the 1980s most have reacted against Barthes. The dead writer has been written off, but the author has returned from the dead with a vengeance.

Barthes's talk in Baltimore was followed by a long and heated discussion, as recorded in *The Structuralist Controversy* (Macksey /Donato 1972). Lucien Goldmann attacked Barthes vehemently, claiming that history had disappeared from Barthes's thinking. It was payback time after Barthes had criticized Goldmann's determinism in 1961 (Barthes 1972). Also Paul de Man was fairly critical of Barthes's take on history, but de Man's critique was unlike Goldmann's. Barthes needed the myth of historical progress, de Man remarked, adding that Barthes reified consciousness. De Man took as his point of departure temporality and not history. As early as in the 17th-century 'story,' one could find that complex idea of the I (*moi*) that Barthes claimed first emerged with modern literature. Barthes misrepresented history with his optimism, de Man continued. But what 'story' could it have been that de Man was thinking of? It could very likely be *Robinson Crusoe*, about which de Man had written something around the same time. In 1969 his essay "Symbol and Allegory" was published. Near the end of the essay, de Man compares Rousseau's *The New Heloise* with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. He refers to certain new readings of Defoe's novel that had come out about the same time. *Robinson Crusoe* was read as a Puritan autobiography that represented nature as allegorically as the *Roman de la Rose*. *Robinson Crusoe* was not a 'modern' realist novel. Did Barthes learn something from Paul de Man? Barthes did say about the novel "we forget it has an author." *Robinson Crusoe* is a Christian novel.

## The convent's community

Roland Barthes lived together with Henriette, his mother. She died in the autumn of 1977. Barthes's writings after that event have been characterized as "romantic" (Stafford 1998: 188), and Barthes as antimodern (Compagnon 2005: 404). Barthes belonged to the fairly large group of 'fatherless' French thinkers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre. They were deprived of a Freudian childhood, Barthes complained: there was

also had difficulties because they did not know who, say, Balzac was or any of the other canonical writers referred to by Barthes.

no father to slay. Louis Althusser once described this predicament. He thinks about his own clashes at the philosophical *Kampfplatz* and links them with the fulfilling of the mother's desire. He becomes aware of the philosopher as fatherless. He wishes to be the father's father and not a son (Althusser 2007: 89). The same with Barthes. Since he had no Laius to kill, he wanted to undo *doxa*. He became a secularized Protestant *sémioclaste* (Barthes 1971a). Did he become a father? Today they kill the fathers, that is to say, the remaining tribe of poststructuralists who are being replaced by a number of neos: neo-naturalism, neo-Darwinism, neo-realism, neo-materialism, neo-positivism. In that way one adapts oneself to the new corporate university.

Roland Barthes and Henriette Barthes lived together in a special way. He was not 'all alone,' but they were not a couple, a group or, a community. Barthes attempts, as far as I can see, to re-describe a well-known theme in existential philosophy, namely, the relation between the individual and the mass or *das Man*. Kierkegaard, Ibsen, Heidegger, and others like them feared falling down into the mass or the crowd and disappearing as individual selves. It is, however, as though both Foucault and Barthes dreamed of just the opposite: of disappearing in the crowd and of becoming completely anonymous. Had it to do with their sexuality? This was before the age of the banality of LGTBQIA. Barthes attempted, as I said, a re-description of the relation between the individual self and the community partly by using an alienating Greek vocabulary (he was a 'Hellenist') and by taking his starting point in a number of novels in a text that is, indeed, itself a new kind of novel. This new novel, *Comment vivre ensemble*, is an example of his ill-will toward *doxa*, in this case the 'traditional' novel with characters and a plot. A novel novel, then, although he had earlier thought of himself as a failed novelist. He re-described the relationship between self and community with the word or the phantasm 'idiorrhythmic.' In this way Barthes appears as critic of the growing communitarianism-like living together ideology and the longing for the return of the big, warm We.

Idiorrhythm is a major signifier (*signifiant majeure*), he said (Barthes 2013: 6), but it has not or will not come to the front, as for instance the signifier 'deconstruction' or 'différance' have. He illustrates idiorrhythm with novels and with the life of anchorites (*anachoresis*).[15] Idiorrhythm is neither two (dual) nor a collective (plural), that is to say, it is not a marriage or a family. It is *more* than the individual and *less* than the community (the crowd). It is an example of Barthes's *ninisme* (neither this nor that, but ...). Barthes preferred not to be a member of a big We but of a form of loneliness regularly, rhythmically, and ritually interrupted by gatherings and dinners, that is, events.

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**15** | It is a pity that Barthes was not familiar with that wonderful Middle English prose work *Ancrene Riwle* (Rules for anchoresses, 1230) about women living alone. He would have loved it.

Why then did he include *Robinson Crusoe* in a text or a novel purportedly about living together? The novel has been read as the bible of individualism and liberalism with the subject disconnected from society and community similar to Henrik Ibsen's verse tragedy *Brand*. But as mentioned above, it is also a profoundly religious book. Barthes could read it in his own way because he read the novel against what he believed was the novel's intention and against the 'normal' way, since all that which intrudes upon Robinson's life irritates Barthes's reading and destroys the pleasure in the same way as when one is interrupted in the midst of something nice. He simply skips it. "The charm of *Robinson Crusoe* = non-event," Barthes writes (2013: 84), and events in the novel are disregarded. He did not read for the plot or the narrative, and narratives are made of events.

A somewhat cryptic passage then follows in Barthes's text. The event is the Father, the slaying of the father, and this is what tears the subject out of the Mother's nest. The event is the enemy or God. *Wu-wei*, then, is a rejection of the event and seems to recall the Christian monastic ideal. Taoism and Christianity are almost the same, and his perception of their sameness could be due to Barthes relying on Jean Grenier, who was a Christian thinker. The most intriguing thing about the similarities and differences between Christianity and Taoism is the metaphor he uses: "A hair separates them," Barthes writes, though adding that "that hair is not nothing" (ibid: 86). Indeed not. Is a hair much or almost nothing? It will be difficult to see a hair as a broad gap. Never the twain shall meet, Kipling said about the West and the East, but only a hair separates them for Barthes. A hair is a metaphor (or a metonymy) for "God, Revelation, the Bible (likewise for Muslims)" (ibid: 86). God is a hair and God is the event and the enemy. The enemy/event separates the two.

Barthes finishes with a Lacanian concept: the Imaginary. The Taoist sage accepts the Imaginary and therefore the world as an illusion and a world without events and the Real. An everyday world of Living Together is a *fantasy*: "To fantasize Living Together as an everyday reality" (ibid: 84). The enemy is always there. Barthes tried to write off the event, but he couldn't.

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# FLEURS/Flowers

*Kaja Schjerven Mollerin*

"Why flowers?" Roland Barthes asks at a seminar (2013: 86), about halfway through the "How to Live Together" lecture series, delivered at the Collège de France the spring semester of 1977. He asks in his usual manner: intriguing and a bit surprising. He also asks knowing that the secrets of life might be hidden in the most ordinary things, but what first of all interests him this time is an even more general topic: how human beings live together, what loneliness is, how communities develop, and how we all, from day to day, are drifting between these two states of mind and ways of life, sometimes out of habit, other times out of need, other times, again, out of thoughtlessness.

These are personal challenges, questions each of us has to find our own answers to, but these challenges are also social and political questions we have to solve together. For the simple reason that we are individuals in different ways, it is not just for the individual to find the answer to how we protect the needs of the individual. What looks like protection to one person, might feel like isolation to another, and it is only by sharing experiences that we get to know more about the individual's need, or the individual's rhythm, as Barthes would say. Conversely, for the simple reason that every common matter concerns individuals, it is not just for the community, or the majority, to decide what is the greater common good. This is one of the responsibilities we all have as human beings; to make sure that there actually is a society, something we can share, between us.

Asking "Why flowers?," Barthes both ponders on the individual's fascination for flowers – why we pick them, have them on our living room table, feel happy looking at them – and how we share this happiness with other people, giving a bouquet of flowers to the one we love, or, in a more formal setting, to the host at a dinner party. Flowers are included in so many different traditions, both traditions we inherit, as when we put flowers on the graves of our dear loved ones, and traditions we develop together either gradually or spontaneously, as with the 'rose march' in Oslo in July 2011, a spontaneous march for democracy held three days after the terrorist attack and murder of 77 people. Flowers have

been part of historical events. Many will associate poppies with the First World War because of red poppies at Flanders fields, every summer in blossom, as if life could go on after all the killings. Flowers are plants but also symbols. In romanticism the blue flower was associated with longing, and later on it was associated with romanticism itself. We also have the language of flowers, of course, existing today in so many different forms – some of them invented, one might suspect, by people sharing an office with the people writing horoscopes for glossy magazines. One red rose allegedly means "I desire you." One white rose means "I'd rather die than be betrayed." One red rose and two red buds mean "this must be kept a secret." And so on.

Barthes is concise and epigrammatic in his reflections on flowers. Thinking of flowers, he starts telling about the gardens and open courtyards surrounding a monastery at Sri Lanka. In a fragmentary style, he then reflects on four different themes, all of them in one way or the other following his thoughts on the monastery but not being restricted by it: first, he finds, flowers are associated with the myth of paradise; second, flowers are often sacrifices to the gods, especially in Buddhism; third, bouquets sometimes have symbolic meaning, whether they are part of religious practices or more trivial social life; and fourth, flowers have color, and color, he suggests, has to do with instincts, drives.

In addition to this, Barthes proposes four different ways to expand the problem. One could emphasize the aesthetic aspect (for instance by looking at flower paintings); one could approach the problem metonymically (by exploring, for instance, how certain flowers belong to certain seasons); one could go about hermeneutically (by studying the language of flowers, etc.); and finally, one could dwell on the sociological aspect of flowers (how flowers are used today, in different societies)

From the very first lecture in the "How to Live Together" series, Barthes takes a particular interest in monasticism. That is probably why also his reflections on flowers have their starting point in a religious world. For Barthes, the convents on Mount Athos, and, more specifically, the way they are organized, represent an ideal society because it reflects both how to live alone, according to one's own rhythm, and how to live together, according to the community's rhythm. This way of life, where different rhythms of life do not violate, disturb, or reduce each other, Barthes calls idiorrhythmy. This term does not appear in his lecture on flowers. However, it implicitly informs his reflections, especially the two anecdotes he concludes with and that I will try to further explore below. Before telling the two anecdotes, Barthes reminds us that our understanding of the two stories will depend on what kind of person each and one of us is. This is a general reminder that reading and interpreting is an individual activity but it might also be a more specific self-reflection.

The first anecdote Barthes tells is about the artist Piet Mondrian. In the beginning of the 1920s, at the time of his most abstract and rigid compositions, he was also drawing flowers, Barthes reminds us, and it was easy to sell these depictions of roses, thistles, sunflowers, and so on. It was the drawings of flowers that made it possible for Mondrian to survive as an artist.

The second anecdote has a more political backdrop and is based on a discussion that, according to the Marxist historian Marcel Liebman, Lenin and a group of revolutionary comrades once held. Barthes does not specify when or where this discussion takes place, but it might have been in Paris sometime before the First World War when Lenin was a regular at the cafe Closerie des Lilas. In any event, the topic of the discussion was whether a revolutionary could legitimately like flowers. One of the comrades insisted that this should be strictly forbidden, arguing that "you start by liking flowers and before you know it you are seized by the desire to live like a landowner lazily stretched out in a hammock who reads novels and is waited on by obsequious valets in the midst of his magnificent garden" (Barthes 2013: 88). Lenin, in Barthes's account, argued that a ban might be going too far. What is striking in the discussion is that both Lenin and his comrades seem to believe that appreciating flowers, appreciating what is beautiful and maybe useless, is unpolitical and hence a threat to revolutionary work. But maybe flowers rather represent a threat to the revolutionaries because flowers are something you can enjoy on your own, something that might lure you out of the comradeship and community?

This part of the anecdote makes me think of the beautiful story of Ferdinand the Bull. The story was originally published in 1936, written by the American author Munro Leaf and illustrated by Robert Lawson, and then further popularized through Walt Disney's cartoon version from 1938. "Once upon a time in sunny Spain," the story begins (Leaf 2011: 7), there was a little bull, and the bull's name was Ferdinand. Ferdinand, we are told, was not quite like the other bulls. The other little bulls would run and jump and fight together, but Ferdinand preferred to sit quietly in the shade under the cork tree out on the pasture. The years went by, and one day a group of men came to pick the biggest and wildest bull for the bull fights in Madrid. All the bulls wanted to show off except from Ferdinand. As always, he would rather sit under the cork tree and smell the flowers. This time, however, he was a bit inattentive and sat on a bee. Ferdinand jumped and ran around as if he was crazy. The delegation had, of course, no idea what was happening, and they were all very impressed by his strength, so they took him Madrid and gave him the nickname 'Ferdinand the Fierce.' The day of the fight arrives, the matador enters the stadium, sulky and proud, but Ferdinand is shy and terrified and unwilling to leave his booth. When a woman throws a bouquet of flowers to the matador, Ferdinand finally runs out in the ring – not to fight, but to smell the flowers. The matador is

furious, he tries to vex and tease him, he even begs him to fight, but Ferdinand is unwavering.

Deeply frustrated, the matador tears of his shirt and then, on his breast, Ferdinand discovers another flower, a tattoo. As if Ferdinand had not humiliated the matador enough, he lovingly licks his breast and stomach. "The Matador was so mad he cried," we are told, "because he couldn't show off with his cape and sword." Ferdinand, on the contrary, seems blissful, as he is pulled out of the arena, still smelling the flowers, and finally brought back to his home and beloved cork tree.

*The Story of Ferdinand* was published during the troubled 1930s and immediately read as a comment to an ongoing political debate. The book was banned in Hitler's Germany as well as in Spain, a country on the brink of civil war. It was a period of both strong militarization and intense mobilization for peace. Not least intellectuals of the time held a strong belief in peaceful solutions. This is obvious in Mahatma Gandhi's silent, non-violent protest against British rule in India; it is evident in Virginia Woolf's essays on war, especially *Three Guineas* (1938); and it is obvious in Simone Weil's essay on the *Iliad* (2012). In this context it is understandable that *The Story of Ferdinand* was controversial. To indulge in flowers was to choose a peaceful world, a different revolution than the violent one. This choice is equally striking and important today, in our misguided world, and that might explain why the story continues to be moving. Another reason might be that *The Story of Ferdinand* is a story about the individual's need for sincerity – the need, simply, to be who you are.

"Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," Gertrude Stein observes in her 1913 poem "Sacred Emily" (1990: 167), written a couple of decades before Leaf published his story. Stein wanted to remind us of the obvious, that a rose first of all *is* a rose – not a symbol to interpret, not a code to be broken, but simply a rose. In Stein's poem the phrase "a rose is a rose" corresponds to the reality of "a rose is a rose." That is why Stein repeats the formula so insistently. Thus, she is conveying how language can confirm reality but also implying how reality can exist, as it is, outside of language, regardless of how we understand it or refer to it. These reflections could be understood as part of a controversy against a certain way of reading or rather, a certain kind of reader: the reader who is interpreting when there is nothing to interpret, seeing the rose as anything but the rose.

It is possible to interpret Ferdinand's fondness of flowers in countless ways, but maybe the story's strength is that his lust for flowers simply is a lust for flowers. Ferdinand himself has no need for justifying his desire or his disinterest in the other bulls. It seems harder for the community to accept that Ferdinand does not want to be part of it than it is for Ferdinand to accept that his longings lead him in another direction. When the community finally embraces Ferdinand as a fierce, furious bull, it is because of a misunderstanding. To

me this is the only painful scene in a story that first of all emphasizes the joy and strength of being a person – or in this case a bull – with integrity. The insecurity Ferdinand displays at the bull fight stadium is an insecurity anyone would feel realizing that you are being appreciated for being a different person than you are. That really is an alienating experience. Who would not hide?

In any case, this, as well, has to do with interpretation. You get stung by a bee and people see aggression. You run carefree out into a stadium and still people see nothing but aggression. You sit in the shade under a cork tree and people see a fierce protest against war and militarization. You love the smell of flowers and end up as an apostle of peace.

"Why flowers?" one could ask. "Why not?" one could answer, without being lazy or evasive or cantankerous, because sometimes even the mysteries of life have a straightforward explanation. Why am I here? Because it was me who came to life in my mother's stomach, as the Norwegian poet Jan Erik Vold says in his poem "Funny" (2002: 87). Why do you fall in love with the person you fall in love with and not anyone else? Because this is the person you feel connected to. Likewise, Ferdinand the Bull loves flowers simply because they smell good and are beautiful to look at. He has no intention of using the flowers, no intention of seducing anyone with them, no intention of transforming himself with them. Such an outlook is of course threatening to revolutionaries of every shade because every revolution is about a complete reshuffling – it is about changing 'what is' to 'what can be' and using all means to achieve that. Conversely, the reason we love flowers, Barthes emphasizes, is not least that they are useless. This, one might add, is a trait flowers have in common with something else Barthes spent quite a lot of time reflecting on, namely, art. One recognizes Roland Barthes the aesthete in these reflections, even though he mildly opposes this position.

According to Barthes, the Hungarian artist Brassaï once said about Mondrian: "There's a man who paints flowers to live. And why does he want to live? So he can paint straight lines." (Barthes 2013: 88). Many artists have done the same. What you make a living of, as an artist, is usually not what you are most invested in and often not what you do with most care. In some cases this also implies superficiality. Barthes himself was a generalist and well aware that generalists can be superficial and, in lack of expert knowledge, lapse into a flowery and mystifying language. Having said that, Barthes also knew that one of his great gifts was to ask the right questions at the right time and to see the possibilities in a wide range of subjects.

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# IDIORRHYTHMY/Idiorrhythmy

*Frederik Tygstrup*

In the words of Roland Barthes, delivered at his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France on January 7, 1977: "Science is crude, life is subtle, and it is for the correction of this disparity that literature matters to us." (1979: 7). That science is crude does not mean that it is imprecise, however; science is conducted with utmost precision, but it is a precision that sets out from a generalized (and generalizable) vocabulary from where it can measure the world. The subtlety of life, conversely, resides in the fact that it consists in singularities and therefore rather demands, as Barthes had it in *Camera Lucida*, a "*mathesis singularis,*" that is, an erudite study of the singular, which is exactly what one finds in literature (1983: 8). As an incoming holder of a literary chair at the Collège de France, the very apex of scientific knowledge and enlightenment, Barthes saw it as his task to ask questions that have scholarly import but that still need singular and non-generalizable answers. The topic of his first course, which he embarked upon immediately after the inaugural lecture, indeed lives up to this demand. "How to live together" is on the one hand clearly a question with an immediate and general appeal and relevance, while on the other hand it is evident that it is not a question to which there exists one consistent and precise answer. In this, it testifies to Barthes's eminent talent for making important and wide-ranging questions, albeit beyond reach (and perhaps even beyond the imagination) of science, into objects of a systematic and productive reflection.

The question "how to live together" will clearly be of interest to a multitude of people: it is relevant for entire populations and individual families, for human communities and natural creatures, for the largest congregations of faith and for me and my dog. As such, it is probably to be regarded as an almost impossible question – it has too many possible answers and will surely never be considered as resolved. For the same reason, Barthes does not engage with the many conceivable answers, although they would no doubt be interesting in each their own particular way. To make it researchable, he instead qualifies it by way of a single opposition, which does in fact come up in different guises when engaging with the question, namely, the opposition between autonomy

and community. How can we both secure autonomy and still maintain the community, on which autonomy depends? This figure of thought, which can be traced back to Rousseau, is itself one that predominates in French postwar thinking, where juxtaposing 'the self' and 'the other' is probably the most conspicuous template for thinking. In short, the self will distinguish itself from the other and claim its autonomy, but it also wants recognition from the other *as* autonomous, which in turn undermines autonomy by making it contingent on the other's recognition. From this template, originally presented by Alexandre Kojève in his illustrious lectures on Hegel in the 1930s, French postwar philosophy has developed an entire array of theories of power, consciousness, language, and desire, theories that have had a lasting impact on our modernity by glossing different versions of the encounter of the self and the other, of autonomy and community.

Barthes's original take on this is that he explicitly refrains from presenting the problem of the coexistence of the self and the other in terms of their confrontation. "I don't want to get into the vast dossier on the One and the Two," as he puts it (2013: 93) Rather than starting out from their confrontation (or their 'duel,' a notion that recurs throughout the lectures), he now approaches the question of living together through an alternative inroad, namely, as a matter of *rhythm*, hereby displacing the attention from the stakes of the confrontation to its process, from finality to temporality.

Thanks to this shift, he can describe both the individual and the community in a slightly different manner, focusing now on their mode of existence in time. Communities, thus, can be described as processes of interactions that reproduce a social structure. The interactions of a community constitute an economy, that is, a household, or an *oikonomeia*, where a system of relations and interactions defines the horizon and the purview of the social in an ongoing evolutional process. On the same note, individuality can equally be described as a convergence of different temporal processes, starting out from the rhythm of the bodily reproduction and from the rhythms of habit that eventually crystallize an individual profile. On the basis of this twofold focus on social and individual rhythms, the problem of living together can be considered as an interaction between the common *oikonomeia* and the particular structure of habit, an interplay between rhythms and the ensuing production of interference emerging from living together:

What we're looking for is a zone that falls between two excessive forms:
– an excessively negative form: solitude, eremitism.
– an excessively assimilative form: the (secular or nonsecular) *coenobium*.
– a median, utopian, Edenic, idyllic form: idiorrhythmy. (Barthes 2013: 9)

Living together is defined, in other words, not by way of its positions – you and I, the one and the other – but by way of temporal processes, and then eventually by way of the place that comes about through the encounter between these processes, the "zone" articulated through the interplay of differently organized temporalities.

This approach reveals a quite radical epistemic rupture, even though it is by no means flaunted in Barthes's characteristically probing and ludic presentation. It reveals a break away from the 'egologic' reason dear to philosophy: rather than starting out from an individual first-person perspective to examine the question of living together as a negotiation between egos, Barthes attempts to short-circuit the otherwise so robust atomism by adapting instead to the social as a mesh of rhythms and the individual as a process in becoming, weaving in and out of all the other rhythms that surround it. A shift, thus, from an egological to an ecological perspective.

By rephrasing the question of how to live together from being one of individual egos negotiating identity and recognition to being one of idiorrhythmy and the interference between rhythms, Barthes at the same time announces another major conceptual conversion. In general, rhythm is considered to be a predicative notion that can be used to characterize a nominal object – like the rhythm of a song, the rhythm of seasons, and so on. In Barthes's argument, though, it is not merely a question of communities that have rhythms and individuals that have rhythms; he more audaciously claims that there is a social economy *because* there is rhythm, that there is individuality *because* there is rhythmical repetitions and differences. "What this means," he notes in a sequel to the quotation above on Number One and Number Two: "The One (the single body) is already virtually divided." (ibid: 94)

<div align="center">*</div>

Barthes thus inaugurates his first season at the Collège de France with a kind of program, namely, a quest for finding another language in which one can talk about the experience of communality. The notion of rhythm is seminal in this respect, as a means to break away from the "immense dossier" of identity and recognition. Barthes actually shared this interest in rhythm with a handful of his contemporaries. The theoretical articulation of a proper concept of rhythm took an upsurge round 1980, with some references back also to André Leroi-Gourhan's pioneering work on words and gestures from the 1960s. Among the most important contemporary contributions were Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004 [1992]), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's chapter on "The Refrain" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987 [1980]), and then perhaps, on a less theoretical note, Georges Perec's notation of the rhythms of urban life in *Life: A User's Manual* (2008 [1978]). Although these authors all articulate the notion of

rhythm in their particular ways, there are nonetheless also a number of shared issues between them. They share an interest in productive differences that cannot be pinned down in general concepts, in vital processes rather than static states, and for the interaction between dynamic processes and sensual forms.

And on top of this, at least three of these authors – I don't know about Perec's preferences on this issue – shared an explicit infatuation with Schumann's work, the relevance of which for the exploration of the phenomenon of rhythm Barthes himself has pointed to in a different text:

Rhythm, in Schumann, is a violence [...]; but (as with pain) this violence is pure, it is not "tactical." Schumannian rhythm (listen carefully to the basses) imposes itself like a texture of beats [*coups*] rather than a continuous pulse [*battement*]; this texture can be delicate [...], yet it has something atypical about it [...]. To put it differently: rhythm, in Schumann, singularly enough, is not in the service of a duel, an oppositional organization of the world. (Barthes 1985: 297)

The distinction between *coup* and *battement* in this excerpt recurs in different versions, in Barthes as well as in the other thinkers. Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between measure and rhythm, where meter is a fixed and recurring measure while rhythm is all about variation, about the difference set off by the individual beat; or as they have it, "meter is dogmatic, but rhythm is critical" (Deleuze/Guattari: 346). Barthes is interested in the critical rhythm, for the way in which it engenders difference and variation. In order to emphasize this quality of rhythm, he introduces the Greek work *rhuthmos*: "*Rhuthmos* – the pattern of a fluid element [...] an improvised, changeable form." (Barthes 2013: 7) This is, however, also the closest he comes to actually defining rhythm; obviously not very meticulous when it comes to definitions, he is more intent on parsing his sample of literary texts – the 'archive' of the lectures – for images of different rhythms of life and of living together. The notion of *rhuthmos* is set up to herald a series of punctual readings attentive to emerging patterns, figurations of experiences where a 'texture of beats' characteristically conveys a singular mode of living. Barthes's investment in the literary *mathesis singularis* is explicitly phantasmatic. He attempts to crop images of forms of life that have the capacity of capturing the desire of the reader: *this* is how life can be felt! By keeping an alert eye on the rhythms of life, Barthes gauges the particular temporal structures that emerge in the encounters and exchanges between humans. The rhythms of being together are indeed ephemeral and evasive; Barthes's intention, however, is precisely to scrutinize these small moments of intensity, precisely by reading equipped with a different kind of attention, provided by the notion of *rhuthmos*.

Also for Lefebvre, the explicit goal is to provide a systematic re-description of reality. To him, rhythmanalysis is a new kind of intentionality, no longer

– like in the traditional epistemology – directed at objects, but directed at *processes*. "Everywhere where there is interaction between a time, a place, and an expenditure of energy, there is *rhythm*" (Lefebvre 2004 [1992]): 15, italics in original). For an epistemology directed at objects, time and place are variables that can be used to index a thing, which exists in a specific place at a specific time. Rhythm, conversely, says something about the *quality* of a presence in a specific place at a specific time, thus referring back to an event that bestows the thing with its specific properties. Rhythm, Lefebvre notes, is therefore "closer to Schumann than to Bach" (ibid: 14). Time and space are in other words no longer transcendental coordinates, as they were according to Kantian (and Newtonian) epistemology; conversely, time, space, and thing are now considered as they are articulated together in a qualitative process, through a 'texture of beats,' according to the specific gait of an event. The notion of rhythm has import here, then, because it highlights that we are dealing with an actual, concrete usage of time and space, no longer as general forms of intuition, but as a *lived* time-space where human energy is expended.

This kinship between rhythm and lived time-space, in which time appears as a singular distribution of beats in space, and where spatiality conversely retains its particular qualities through the processual articulation of the contingent surroundings, is also a primary methodological issue for Barthes. He repeatedly refers to the literary examples he uses not as texts that should be interpreted, nor as representations of different samples of living together, but as *models*. He uses the term "maquettes" (Barthes 2013: xxv), which also refer to architectural scale models; working with literature here is like looking into tiny model worlds that present the spatial organization of the temporalities of living together, the architecture of shared rhythms. The interest taken in rhythm is an interest in forms of life, in the processes of life and the forms they produce. In this respect, Lefebvre's sociology and Barthes's literary studies converge in an anthropologically tainted mapping of human life forms.

Architecture, distributions in space, starts out from rhythm. This point is stressed further in Deleuze and Guattari through the concept of the territory. The territory of a life form is initially not delineated from the outside, through the demarcation of a threshold; rather, it is developed from the inside, through mundane practices, through sequential acts, through the demarcation of differences in time. Once a specific act is accomplished and then repeated, with the accentuations of sameness and difference that come with it, a spatial organization takes shape, which precisely becomes the territory of this kind of agency. Rhythm, the routines of repetition and differentiation, transforms an environment into a territory and creates a specific spatial order from the contingent surroundings at hand. The literary models that Barthes examines are such territorialized environments; in the title of the lectures he refers to them as "simulations of some everyday spaces."

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By putting emphasis on the notion of rhythm, Barthes and his contemporaries instigate a number of conceptual turns: from objects to relations, from identities to processes, from space to territoriality. In each of these cases, the 'turn' starts out by reconceptualizing what we otherwise considered as fixed and stable forms as temporal processes. This gesture not only serves to demonstrate the ways in which such forms are themselves only meta-stable and subject to change over time, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how temporality itself emerges through those expenditures of energy that lie at the hearth of rhythmicity. Looking into the phenomenon of rhythm is to tinker with the notion of time itself. We commonly distinguish between two different concepts of time: an abstract, transcendental concept of time, assuming that everything takes place in time and that time keeps passing, steadily and mercilessly; and a concrete, existential concept of time, assuming that temporality emerges by way of how we project and consolidate a future to come through what we actually do. The temporality of rhythm distinguishes itself from both of these. It doesn't count, and it doesn't project: it starts in the middle, as it were, through improvisation, through distributions of beats, through the interferences between different movements, through initially imperceptible and then eventually reverberating variations. In distinction to the dogmatic meter, rhythm always emerges *in-between* multiple fragments of temporalizing practice. Or in Vladimir Nabokov's more evocative wording:

Maybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the gray gap between black beats: The Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like true Time lurks. (1969: 538)

Rhythm is the time of co-existence. The human life-world plays itself out through a complex aggregation of different processes that refer back to social conventions, individual habits, chance encounters. But none of these processes exist in some pure, individual form, they are always already engaged in states of interaction and interpenetration, thus already under way to produce new rhythmic variations. There is no rhythm that is mine alone, just as there is no rhythm that will be able to reproduce itself unchanged for entire populations. The exclusively private rhythm and the fully integrated communal rhythm are precisely those two forms of excess, the two dogmatic forms that Barthes wanted to exclude from the outset of the investigation. The very impetus to look into the phenomenon of rhythm, for Barthes as well as for his contemporaries, is the need to critique the authoritarian homogenization of the rhythms of society, ranging from the familial breeding of behaviors to the modern industrialized

society's organization of life according to the demands of production: "The first thing that power imposes is a rhythm (to everything: a rhythm of life, of time, of thought, of speech)." (Barthes 2013: 35) Such a rhythm is an instance of dogmatic meter. Against this, Barthes posits the second instance of rhythm: "Idiorrhythmy: a means of safeguarding *rhuthmos*, that is to say a flexible, free, mobile rhythm; a transitory, fleeting form, but a form nonetheless. [...] *Rhuthmos*: a rhythm that allows for approximation, for imperfection, for a supplement, a lack." (ibid: 35)

The antidote to the authoritarian disciplining of the rhythm of society to one, big functional throb is not, in other words, the purely individual, private and autonomous rhythm, 'my' rhythm in opposition to that of all the others. Idiorrhythmy is, to be sure, a matter of living in one's own rhythm, but this is not to be obtained through isolation, through 'negative excess.' The goal is rather a rhythm of one's own in shifting accords and disaccords with other rhythms – and others' rhythms – that exist around it. Thus, the notion of idiorrhythmy should be translated in two different, albeit interrelated ways. On the one hand, the quest for idiorrhythmy is a break away from – and indeed a critique of – an anonymous, common rhythm, and an insistence on 'my' own rhythm as something that adds something to, or subtracts something from, the common rhythm. And on the other hand, idiorrhythmy signifies that the self, the 'me,' the *idios* first really emerges through the participation in a common, socially rhythmicized time. It is not just a matter of safeguarding the individual rhythm from the social rhythm, but of leaving room for the individual to become someone by actually participating in this rhythm, participation being something distinct from mere submission. Idiorrhythmy is not a duel, a claim of the self against the other, it is about finding oneself in the syncopated mesh of rhythms. In the first sense, rhythm emerges from the self, whereas in the second, the self emerges from the rhythms through which the individual merges into a common life world.

The research Barthes wanted to present and conduct at the Collège de France should be, as he put it, led by desire, by a phantasm. In *How to Live Together*, his phantasm is that of idiorrhythmy: an exploration of what it would mean to experience the rhythm of the self, and a desire to eventually attain a different image of the self, the rhythmic self, a being with more lightness, a less agonistic mode of being in the world. Or in the final words of his inaugural lecture: "*Sapientia*: no power, a little wisdom, and as much flavour as possible." (Barthes 1979: 16)

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# MARGINALITÉS/Marginalities

*Eivind Tjønneland*

At the end of the 1970s, Roland Barthes studied withdrawal from society in order to find out how people could live together. His method was consciously anachronistic: he concentrated on the hermits and the monks of early Christianity and tried to combine their experiences with those of outsiders in novels from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* by means of a catalogue of concepts. Marginality was one of them.

An important motivation behind the project was that Barthes at this time regarded literature itself as marginalized. Compagnon (2005: 30) points to a conservative tendency in Barthes at the end of the 1970s: the avant-garde no longer represented marginality. Human beings who understood themselves by means of the past were now the real outsiders.

Much has changed the last 40 years concerning how we regard marginalization. The who's who of alternative heroes from the youth culture of the 1960s – Socrates, Jesus, Buddha, the Steppenwolf, Mao and Che Guevara – have lost much of their allure for today's dissatisfied Youth. Criminals, lunatics, and eccentric artists have less attraction as role models. The baby boomer generation masked themselves as Indians and Eskimos in sympathy with the Third World, and as workers in sympathy with the working class; this freak show and the childish slogan of 1968, to give "all power to the imagination" as a means of challenging power in society, have both lost their credibility. Barthes himself tried to free himself from this ideology of 1968 at the end of his life.

The theater of liberation from the 1960s and the 1970s morphed into identity politics when postmodernism became popular in the 1980s, after Barthes's death. Minorities came to the fore and the marginalized started to dominate – at least in the theories of Western intellectuals. The minorities got their power of definition, leading to a struggle for attaining a status as a victim. Being a victim could pave the way for becoming a hero. If you come to the fore in public as an alcoholic or a drug addict, you can become popular. The happy diversity of the 1970s was transformed into a theater where all kinds of minorities fight for

attention. Instead of fighting capitalism, you can fight for more female CEOs. To support minorities can become a way to sustain the status quo (Michaels 2010). To accept and integrate minorities into society has brought about a reaction from the right, where it is felt that minorities get too much attention. Thus, in Germany, Akif Pirinçci (2014) has written a book about the "crazy cult" of "women, homosexuals and immigrants."

Of course, marginalization is as old as human society and has often been represented mythologically through history. If we go back to Adam and Eve – is not the original sin and the fall the first marginalization, the paradigm of all marginalization to come? The first humans were brutally expulsed from paradise. All the later generations are outsiders, on the outside, marginalized until doomsday, when humans (or at least some of them) are given a new chance. This phylogenetic marginalization is of course ontogenetically repeated in the life of each human. We are born, brutally thrown out in the world, as Heidegger expressed with his concept *Geworfenheit*. The naval string is cut and suddenly we are alone in the universe, marginalized from the body of the mother. No wonder Otto Rank spoke about the trauma of birth!

The marginalized position is pathological, but somehow also attractive. Why? Because everybody today feels marginalized: we are not seen, we are not heard, nobody cares about us! To be a part of society today is to feel like an isolated subject, like an outsider.[1] In this situation many try to conquer isolation by exhibiting private pain in public. The Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård has demonstrated how his toil and suffering, published as auto-fiction in his six-volume *My Struggle* series, can be a commercial success. Unfortunately, this strategy will only create more isolation, because the autobiographical novel – at least in Norway – shows a tendency to be applied as an instrument of revenge. Better shy away from authors of such 'novels,' or your private life will be compromised!

Have we always felt as outsiders? Many have observed a marginalization of the artist around 1850 in the history of aesthetics. Peter Bürger claimed in *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1984) that art became more and more distant from everyday living. Artists like Baudelaire created "evil flowers" and wished themselves "anywhere out of the world." Hegel proclaimed the end of art already at the beginning of the 19th century. Art was marginalized. In Norway, however, one spoke of 'the reign of poets' as late as in the 1870s and 1880s. The marginalization did not really become an aesthetic program before new romanticism arrived in the 1890s. Knut Hamsun would announce that

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**1** |  The French philosopher Michel Onfray has described the situation in the following terms: "La famille, la communauté, le groupe, le collectif, l'État, la nation, le pays, la république ne font plus recette. Chacun est devenu une planète froide lancée comme un bolide fou dans un cosmos gelé sans grand probabilité de rencontre." (2017: 578)

literature should depict inexplicable, unconscious phenomena that ordinary people would not understand.

Why is art marginalized? Hegel's basic idea was that the process of rationalization had outrun it. Art could thus not express the central in society any more. This development moves art to a therapeutic space in society. The artist becomes an outsider. The Norwegian author Dag Solstad once claimed that "it is the sorrow of the bourgeoisie that it has not had a single insider author of quality in the 20th century" (Solstad 1971: 89, my translation). Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* (1956), one of the great bestsellers of the 1950s, depicts the outsider as a product of romanticism who cultivated solitude and nature, with desperation and anxiety arriving later on. Wilson referred to a canon of literature from Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* to the existentialist outsiders in Camus's *The Stranger* and Sartre's *Nausea*.

Not only art but also the ordinary citizen is marginalized. At the same time, however, we are also integrated, socialized, disciplined, and put in our place in society. We are the most socially adapted ever. Marginalization is normal, it is important for the understanding of our 'integration' in a modern social-democratic society. The question 'what's in it for me?' has now become all-important. Social democracy has been eaten up by its own success, and solidarity is history.

A part of this narrative is the upsurge of the word 'identity politics.' The term was hardly used in the 1980s, but its use exploded in the 1990s. Marginalization did not only bring about more people identifying themselves as outsiders. We also got an explosion in the sheer number of groups who based themselves on identity politics. Not only sexual and ethnical minorities have organized themselves, but also the obese, the anorectic, and so on – everybody is fighting for their share of attention. The traditional roles based on class and economic position are thus weakened. Instead, identities have come to the fore. The German sociologist Ulrich Beck has made the point that inequality has increased even as consciousness of class has weakened. Identity politics feeds on individualization and globalization.

Each day the individual controls who she is and who she does not want to be. When we discover a pimple in the mirror, it must be eradicated or at least marginalized. Dozens of more or less conscious judgments based on taste, dozens of priorities in acts of everyday life, all define what an individual is and what she is not. One may look at a stranger in the street and find the combination of color of her clothes ludicrous. I would not wear something like that! Likes and dislikes, priorities all the time. This continuous affirmation and negation of what we are keeps our identity in its place. Without marginalization, no identity, no self-esteem. In order to feed our self-esteem something must be marginalized – but not necessarily *someone*.

Of course, individual taste is often the reason one drops persons from one's circle of friends or network. The question is how the implementation of taste determines social relations and why taste can become an instrument of fascism. Taste will always differentiate between good and bad: it is the treatment of what one dislikes that decides if taste is liberal or fascist. Pierre Bourdieu claimed taste to be collective and determined by class. Taste could not be totally individual or unique, as that would be an ideological fiction. On the other hand, taste is not by that reason without personal touch or individuality; a relative autonomy is possible.

When people sacrifice autonomy and always agree with the last speaker, negative judgments based on taste could develop into fascism. Disgust can create scapegoats. If the subject is dependent upon negative definitions of itself to exist, this could lead to violence. Although we never understand the complexity of and the reasons for our likes and dislikes, we should – even by that reason – try to argue for our sensibilities and our judgments based on taste. When our taste remains uncultivated, we are not capable of giving an educated opinion. Our reactions become 'instinctive,' determined by the unconscious: 'This is fantastic,' 'this is disgusting,' without any further explanation. A collective disgust can marginalize those who fall prey to it, as when someone is picked on or bullied. Through "reflexive modernity," to borrow Anthony Giddens's phrase, individuals have become more disgusted by themselves. This new feeling of individual shortcoming could indeed be called "cultural masochism" (Tjønneland 2012). To get rid of the disgust with oneself, one can blame others – they are disgusting! Masochism is thus converted into sadism.

Taste is in itself not fascist, as little as language is (here Barthes exaggerated). The less educated or cultivated taste is, the more it will have a tendency to function in a fascistic way. Shrinking the institution of criticism, judgment based on taste will become harsher. When we cannot check out our own taste and publicly compare it to those of others, the harmony between reason and sensibility is broken. To make rational that which cannot be fully rationalized is important for sustaining liberal democracy. Dogmatic and forceful assertions of one's own taste pave the way for the tyrant in all of us. All politics is on a certain level dependent upon taste, upon likes and dislikes. The aestheticization of politics converts argument and reason into a question of style.

The economy of marginalization is even harder to calculate than future oil prices. The loss of power could over time be converted into a surplus. Deleuze and Guattari – who influenced Barthes – depicted in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) how the Christian hermits moved into the deserts and spent years in an extreme marginalized position. There they accumulated their paranoid energy and prepared themselves to move back from exile to take over. Marginalization can morph into dominance. The suppressed can come back and avenge themselves, as in the repressed memories posited by Freud. The weak can become the strong.

The idea that weakness is a form of power has thus propagated. Powerlessness promotes wet dreams about imaginary power.

The founding father of positivistic criminology, Cesare Lombroso, placed the genius, the criminal, and the lunatic in the same category: All of them were degenerated, but in different ways. To become a genius, other things had to be marginalized. We see the same logic in the so-called *savants*. They have absolute memory and can store libraries in their minds. In other areas they are underdeveloped; they behave like small children and are not capable of taking care of themselves. In the same way, the human race had to sacrifice some muscles to get a larger brain. Darwinists still use this explanatory model – in evolutionary biology, marginalization becomes a principle of development.

Deconstruction was never interested in the core or the center of philosophy but focused on the periphery. Only in the margin could one find what was important – paradoxically, the center! Only the exception made it possible to see the rule. This is an old idea. Hegel quoted Spinoza: *omnis determinatio est negatio*, 'every determination is a negation'. It is first through the negative that it is possible to see the borders of a phenomenon. If the borders are blurred, the phenomenon is hard to deal with.

Any investigation must focus on something and ignore other aspects. In this way it is always possible to criticize a treatise for having overlooked certain aspects. This form of criticism can become an instrument of wishful thinking. One always dreams about the negative, that which is not dealt with in the article or the book; the grass always seems to be greener on the other side of the fence. Edgar Allen Poe called the phenomenon *the spirit of perversion*. One gets too ex-centric by always focusing on exceptions and marginalities. Derrida wrote a book called *Marges de la philosophie* (1972), a study of the margins of philosophy – where the philosophers showed their weaknesses. This paradigm of interpretation has a flair of wish fulfillment: David beats Goliath.

Lately one has spoken a lot about parallel societies in connection with Islam in Europe. The basic idea of Michel Foucault's work is that civilization must expel somebody to constitute itself: all societies need their negative other (the lunatics, the criminal, people with a different skin color) to constitute themselves. This presupposes a hidden identification between the oppressor and the oppressed. If people live apart in parallel worlds without talking to each other, this is not necessarily marginalization. If jazz lovers do not mingle with rock fans, they can live happily without disturbing each other. The idea of a parallel society is also positive: living together all the time can easily become claustrophobic.

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# MONÔSIS/Monosis

*Svein Haugsgjerd*

> Egypt has her cities and even her desert populated by
> armies of saints, living a life like angels.
> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (344-407)

*How to Live Together* testifies to the rhizomatic nature of Barthes's production of ideas. It is not a rigid system of arborized concepts with defining connections between trunk, branches and leaves. Quite the opposite, his ideas seem like scattered jets pouring up from an underground of connected pipelines of fantasy.

According to Nietzsche, culture may be defined as "violence undergone by thought" (Barthes 2013: 3). Barthes's own thought is a deep cultivation of this violence, a thinking influenced by selected forces, putting "the thinker's complete unconscious into play" (ibid: 3). While Bachelard states that the basis of science is a "decantation of fantasies", Barthes takes his starting point somewhere before this decantation (ibid: 4), that is, at some point before the process of fermentation is finished, while the product of thinking is still partly clouded by residues of experience, transformed into dream thoughts.

The privileged fantasy of Barthes is that in the middle between the hermit's self-abnegation and the coercive monastery life, there is an Eden-like condition of idiorrhythmic life-style (ibid: 9), a situation where individuals enjoy a complete freedom within a separate space where they can follow their own rhythm, but where they also may meet like-minded others in conviviality without anybody disrupting each other's rhythm. Here Barthes conjures up a group of people who, while refusing the ruling powers, leave the community and retain "just one or two points of anchoring [points de capiton] with the world" (ibid: 26). From this fantasy follows his fascination for the anchoritic movements from antiquity on, and his joy in the perplexing stories from the lives of the anchorites (*The Lausiac History,* cited in Barthes 2013: 68-69 and 81-82).

The opposite situation, disrhythmia or heterorhythmia, is also illustrated, though not by the marital couple's bedroom, not by the group as Sartre's hell behind closed doors, not by the excited mob disposed to lynching. Heterorhythmia is exemplified by an observation of a mother and child made by Barthes from his window: the mother marches "at her own pace, imperturbably, the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is forced to keep running like an animal, or one of Sade's victims being whipped" (ibid: 9). Barthes cites Pablo Casals's apt phrase "rhythm is delay" (ibid: 35). The necessary precondition for creating postponement is a subject who is attentive, thinking, hesitating, and then acting.

The commentaries on monosis, solitude, start with questioning the possibility or impossibility of being One without Two. The human body, this speaking being, is characterized by duality or symmetry: two hands, two feet, right and left, right and wrong. In most languages, speech is grammatically differentiated in first, second and third person, in singular and plural – in some instances also in dual. In Barthes's words: "Two is the anticipation of One. One is pregnant with Two" (ibid: 94). Psychoanalytically, this means that the meeting of two minds can produce a new thought, like the meeting of two differently sexed beings can create a new, singular being, at first an *in-fans*, literally a voice-less creature. On the other hand, one speaking being can be pregnant with two, not only in the sense of genital reproduction, but also in the sense of being a *split subject,* through becoming aware of what goes on in *the other scene,* the Unconscious, discovering with Rimbaud that *Je est un autre* ("I *is* another").

Barthes's ideas on monosis, based mainly on Palladius's *Lausiac History,* brought forward associations and made me wonder what might have gone on in the minds of the anchorites themselves. What might be the motivations, the experiences and the reflections of the desert-dwelling hermits? Inevitably, my psychoanalytic experience will somehow colour my assumptions and reflections.

What was the motive that urged thousands of anchorites to leave the city (*chora*) to settle in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria between the second and the fourth centuries? According to Athanasius, the chronicler of the life of St. Anthony the Great, no evil-doer, not anyone hurt by the authorities, nor any grievance from the taxman were to be found among the desert dwellers. This is probably a negation, a rebuttal against a common accusation. There were compelling secular reasons for leaving the big cities and going up (*ana*) to the desert, such as heavy taxation, compulsory conscription of young men to military service, and the virulent persecution of Christians under the emperor Diocletian and especially under his successors (303-314 AD). It is estimated that during the fourth century more than 20% of the Egyptian population lived in the desert (Vogt 1984).

We have a rich scriptural tradition from these people. It was their spiritual ambitions and achievements that made this literary corpus possible. The religious fervor prompted them to scriptural expression, to compose arguments, narratives, and descriptions, in texts compiled and transmitted from one generation to the next, texts that surfaced in the tenth century in Athos, in the 18th century in Kiev and Moscow, and today – everywhere. These texts inspire us, and make us wonder. We want to understand these people, know how they understood themselves, their existence as speaking beings in the world of Egypt and Near Middle East anno 300 AD. What was their desire? Judged from Palladius and other contemporary sources, it was a desire for unification with God, the Other (with capital O) who gives life a meaning that exceeds the individual's mundane strivings.

For the first generation of believers in Jesus, this unification was expected to occur with Christ's return at the Mount of Olives. For a master of theology like Tertullian, the notion of the afterlife was dwarfed by the idea of the transformation of the entire universe which was expected to happen with the return of the resurrected Christ (Brown 2015). For the second generation of believers, having waited in vain for Christ's return, martyrdom seemed to be the royal road to immediate unification with the Saviour in his heavenly kingdom. In Cyprian's tract on *Mortality and Exhortation to Martyrdom*, death is a mere moment of "getting through" (*expuncta*). The death of the martyr was the happiest of all. For the martyr, death and entry into heaven happened instantaneous. It was "to close in a moment the eyes by which human beings and the world are seen, and to open these same eyes instantly to see God and Christ" (Cyprian cited in Brown 2015:5).

But martyrdom was a self-defeating strategy for the prospering new faith. Eventually, therefore, eremitism was preferred, in St. Anthony's words, as a spiritual martyrdom. The anchorites wanted to be spiritual martyrs, athletes against the devil, according to *Baarlam's and Joseph's Book*. In ascetic exorbitance they sought death, and at the same time triumph over death, killing their natural taste for convenience, not to mention gluttony, the cardinal sin par excellence. Clemence of Alexandria was the first theologian to recommend asceticism as an alternative to martyrdom, followed by Origen, who even performed auto-castration. By suppressing carnal passions, the devil could be defeated and the soul could elevate toward God. The desert was the natural habitat for self-annihilation: endless and formless, with locations called Nitria ('sodium'), Kellia ('cells') and Sketis ('unsweetened'). It is the place for unmarked graves, the hidden resting place for numberless, nameless remains of human beings, once alive, for long forgotten.

Abandoned places and deserted landscapes are where demons dwell, where the *Djinns – les genies du lieu –* move at wind speed, unexpectedly attacking the peace-seeking monks. The *Lausiac History* reports about demons transfigured

into tasty food, beautiful women, wild beasts, and even as the Adversary in person. Satan whispered into St. Anthony's ear memories of his former wealth, about concern for his orphaned sister and his relatives' wishes. Thereafter the devil took on the appearance of a woman and imitated all the female movements and gestures to seduce him. Years later his cell was filled by apparitions like lions, oxen, bears, leopards, snakes and scorpions.

Narratives like this about the hermits' experiences with demons shaped the assumption that these desert dwellers were the guardians of the city's population, forming a protective shield against the desert's evil spirits, the Djinns. But not all the spirits were wicked – also good spirits appeared in the monks' cells. Sometimes a hermit, not having seen a living human being for months, could be afflicted by confusion. It could be difficult to decide whether a visiting spirit really was an angel or the devil in disguise. The temptations of St. Anthony is a theme that has inspired artists through the centuries, and his ability to discern the true nature of spirits is a classical trope, cited in many spiritual texts. The decisive criterion was the after-effect after the visiting spirit had left. If he, after the spiritual visit, was left in a state of peace and rest, he concluded that the spirit was sent from God. But if he was left sad and restless, the visitor was the devil in disguise.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

After May 1968, Jacques Lacan gave the following year's seminar the title *L'envers de la psychanalyse*. There he developed his theory on the four types of discourses, the four types of social bonds: The Master's, the University's, the Hysteric's and the Analyst's discourses, respectively. The common mechanism is that the sender receives his message returned in inverted form. A product, different from the message is formed, and the motivational force behind the message is also something very different from the face value of the message.

St. Anthony's message (in his texts, included in Philokalia, and in Athanasius' *Vita Anthonii)* is a Master's discourse, typical for the early patristic period. His message about fighting the devil with asceticism, is an interpellation addressed to all devoted believers. It produces a burning desire for unification with Christ, or in psychoanalytic jargon: a desire for the lost first object of love, the fantasy Lacan calls *objet a*. What may then be the hidden truth behind this discourse? All the apparitions that visited him in his cell – a seductive woman, lions, bears and scorpions – testify to what we today will call *the split subject,* split between the uncompromising commitment to ascetic self-annihilation on one side, and the devil's whisperings, female gestures and beastly threats on the other. *On the other scene,* we might say. One divides into Two. Two tries, again and again, to be incorporated into a combined One.

Tales of the eremites' unprecedented endurance made flocks of new anchorites wander into the desert. In the beginning they lived two, three or four together in neighbouring cells, socializing at their own will, idiorrhythmically. When numbers increased, they formed *lavras,* literally hot spots, around a church, and prayers started to become synchronized. Pachomius (292-345), the converted soldier, initiated in 314 the first *koinobion,* community living, in Tabennesi, which soon counted 4500 monks. In this primordial communist society, strict rules and hierarchy became necessary to prevent fighting and disorder. The human animal's natural inclination to hierarchy, territorial fights and mimetic rivalry and desire make cohabitation a volatile state of affairs.

So, the speaking being's desire seems to be perpetual, striving in vain for the fantasized satisfaction, while *jouissance*, the enjoyment of unity with the world, is a short-lived experience, leaving a trace that stains our private fantasy of what full enjoyment, eventually, could be. Nevertheless, as Beckett puts it, we try again, fail again, try harder, fail harder. In this Sisyphus-like endeavour we nevertheless gain a little surplus-enjoyment every time, fuelling us for continuation.

In a non-Lacanian psychoanalytic idiom we could say that the psyche can be conceptualized as having four components: the cognitive-affective effects of what we have experienced so far in life, the capacity to be open, to be affected by the not-yet to come, our capacity to generate meaning from the inchoate totality of real-time sensuous impressions, and our will "to love and work". What else is desire if not this will? What else is the meaning-generating capacity than our appropriation of speech in its infinite variety? Appropriation of speech means submission under a commonly created and shared order that Lacan calls *le nom du père* (the father's name) which in French sounds like *le non du père* (the father's no). Mastery of language means submission under the limitation of language, contingency and finitude, which Lacan calls *symbolic castration*. Words cannot exhaustingly express what our imagination can glimpse, and neither words nor images can grasp reality fully. There will always be a remainder that serves as a reminder.

The affinity between psychoanalytic epistemology and mystical theology is not accidental. There are lines of influence connecting Freud to Kabbalah and Lacan to the Upanishads, with T.S. Eliot as intermediary.

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Could eremitism be conceived of before the advent of monotheism? There are good reasons to believe not. In a society of hunters, the prospective shaman could retreat to a high place and spend days and weeks in solitude, preparing for contact with the spirit world, like Fanny Flounders, the famous Yurok shaman. Among clan-based, nomad herdsmen, Moses is an example of something

similar, seeking Jaweh at Mount Sinai. The difference is that he also is an ethical prophet (Karatani 2014). Anyhow, the retreats of shamans and prophets were temporary and a means to an end: they should return to their community with a divine message or a spiritual purpose.

Polytheism developed in sedentary, agricultural societies where cities grew up and empires later were established, featuring an accumulation of wealth, differentiation in crafts and trades, and social stratification produced castes and classes. In these well developed societies, Mesopotamic or Nilotic, spiritual eremitism would have no meaning except as a training ground for the marginal group of fortune-tellers, soothsayers and magicians – the countercultural providers of mental health. A visible, rock-like God(dess) should be worshiped at his/her proper location, in the appropriate cultic manner, and preferably in public during festival and/or sacrificial occasions. Human sacrifice, repeatedly purifying society from the accumulated contamination of evil, used to be both the foundation and the legitimation of the power of the sacred (Girard 1977).

An invisible deity, on the other hand, located nowhere and everywhere, calling himself "I am who I am" (*ehyeh asher ehyeh*), could be sought for alone, in the wilderness. The prohibition of any graven image of God signifies that God is (a) word, God is wherever his words are called upon, written or recited. This God, audible but never seen, is a quasi-personal "Other" for whom one can long for and eventually unite with. As long as God makes himself present, the eremite will never be alone. After the visit of a demon, he felt low and sad, while the visit of one of God's angels made him uplifted and happy afterwards.

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In the contradiction between the individual and the social, a mediating third is necessary, constituting an interpretant that gives the subject a compensation for giving up his idiorrhythmicity by being subordinated to the obligations of social life. This mediating interpretant could be called The Other. It furnishes the finite, individual life with comfort and a higher purpose. This Big Other is called by different names in our tradition: *Jahweh, elohim, adonai, theos, Gud, allah*. In rabbinic literature, this Big O is also simply called *Shem*, 'The Name'. Plutarch tells us about the statue of a veiled goddess in the Egyptian city of Sais, with the inscription "I am what was, what is and what will become, and no mortal has ever lifted my veil". This was in Kant's view the uppermost of sublimity, testified in a later added footnote in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Assmann 1997).

The most far-reaching achievement of the brained human body is language, transforming the planet by supplementing its biosphere with a semiosphere. The linguistic achievement par excellence is naming. The fact that human infants are given a name is a guarantee for their afterlife, in our tradition.

Burial sites are the earliest archeological evidence for an advanced civilisation. A man bearing a name requires a proper grave after death, to make sure that the soul will find peace and not harass the living like angry birds.

In the caves of Lascaux there is a wall painting, 40,000 years old, of a sleeping man together with a bird and a bison. The man, lying on his back, is dreaming. How do we know? Because he has a visible erection, and already paleolithic man knew this was an indication of being in the dream-rich rapid eye movements phase of sleep. The bird is his soul, which during sleep can leave the body and fly over vast plains, seeing hordes of roaming bisons. In ancient Egypt, Ba, the human-headed bird, symbolized the immortal soul, for the same reason (Dehaene 2014). Dreams, souls and birds are closely connected also in Central Asian and North Amerindian mythology. In clan societies, magic can be considered a mode of exchange: the people bring sacrifices to influence the divinity to give them what they need, be it rain or plenty of animals. Gift exchange is an instrument for reciprocity and sustaining equality. In state societies magic is still present, but with a changed function. In Nietzsche's words, the progress of empires is always the progress towards divinities. The ruler is a *king by God's grace.* The people's observation of religious services is a token of their affection for the divinely installed ruler, who in return give them protection from robbers and hostile neighbours.

The existence of empire is a necessary but insufficient condition for the emergence of universal monotheistic religion. There is a synchronicity between Pachomius's establishment of the first cenobium and emperor Constantine's conversion (313). From 380, a symbiosis was established between church and empire. However, the universal religions were originally hostile to the elements that composed world empires, according to Japanese neo-marxist Kojin Karatani (2014). During these seventeen centuries, the monastic world has had an ambivalent relation to the secular power, most often symbiotic, but at times representing a critical alternative, for instance by preaching the gospel of poverty.

When the semi-anchoritic living together disappeared and the convent or cloister was established as the sanctuary for those who long for unification with God – the monasteries with their strict schedule for both prayer and commensality – what then is left of idiorrhythmy? For the psychoanalyst Donald Meltzer (1992), 'claustrum' is a term for a state of mind in which it is closed from influences from the outside. It is based on an omnipotent fantasy of living inside an idealized inner object, with certain consequences for the personality, sometimes lofty, sometimes obscene, always condescending. This is the mind-set of self-appointed spiritual gurus, cynical pimps, and brutal bullies, but also of those who consider themselves superior and therefore not subject to the laws that ordinary men have to obey, those who think that their higher goals justify

the meanest of means, those who do not hesitate to break eggs in order to make a financial or organizational omelette.

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This contradiction between arrogance and humility, between rigidity and idiorrhythmy, runs through the history of monastic communities. The influence from the early Desert Fathers was still strong when the communities at Athos were founded around 900, and even in the Hesychast revival around 1300 and on those who collected antique spiritual texts in the *Philokalia* ("Love for the Good", 1782) and the Church Slavonic version titled *Dobrotolyubiye* (1789). From this tradition we also have the so-called 'prayer of the heart', a brief prayer silently performed continually all waking hours, following the rhythm of the heartbeat. The prayer of the heart was first formulated by Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessaloniki (born 1296), but a small booklet in Russian, anonymously authored, called *The Way of the Pilgrim* (1884) made it known in the Eastern Orthodox Church and later influential in Christian meditation worldwide.

This prayer, used by *stranniki,* wandering elders (*stari),* was the inspiration for many characters in the works of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, who learned to know this tradition from their visits to the Optina monastery, some distance from Moscow. The *starets* Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* is modelled after the abbot St. Ambrose of Optina, who died in 1891. Ambrose was the successor of Makary, who was the successor of Leonid, who was in turn the successor of Paisius Velichkovsky, the editor of *Dobrotolyubiye.*

As for Tolstoy, the main character in his short story "Father Sergius" is a proud and handsome young officer, Stepan Kasatsky, who discovers that his fiancée has been one of the czar's lovers. Hurt and angry, he retreats to a monastery where the very same Ambrose is the abbot, and he takes a new name, Brother Sergius. Eager to obtain excellence also in devotion – as he formerly was excellent in horse-riding, shooting and drinking – he leaves the convent to live as a poor hermit. He works hard for shelter and wood for fire, praying all the time, and eating and sleeping as little as possible. After some years in solitude, a beautiful young countess, Makovkina, lost from her company, comes to his cave one night during a heavy thunderstorm, her dress soaking wet, asking for shelter. As a good Christian, he could not send her away. During the sleepless night she made erotic ouvertures, described by Tolstoy in juicy detail. The similarity to St. Antony's temptations is obvious. Sergius concludes that she is sent to him, not from God, but from the devil. He leaves the cave, and with an axe he chops off his left index finger.

After this event, Makovkina cuts her hair short and enters a convent. Rumours about this event make Father Sergius notorious for his devotion

and unrelenting ascetic virtues. He receives visitors from far away, who ask for his advice. Even though outwardly humble and soft-spoken, he recognizes his own hidden contempt when he says blessings to a clumsy, feeble-minded teenage girl, daughter of a fat butcher's wife. This unpleasant experience starts to bother him. In a dream he is reminded of an incident from his schoolboy days. He and some friends started to tease a little girl, Praskovya, mediocre in both appearance and wits. The climax was when they persuaded her to lie down in a shallow muddy pond, crawling on her arms and legs, to prove that she could swim. They laughed and called her a toad and left her in tears, her clothes all muddy. This dream made him realize that Satan long ago had taken possession of him, tempting him with pride in his excellence in chastity. He left his cave and started wandering as a *strannik,* searching for the girl he had treated so badly. After many years he finally found her, a poor widow with a feeble-minded daughter and a drunkard of a son-in-law. Sergius spent the rest of his life together with Praskovya, working as a wood-chopper for her fireplace.

This story, however sentimental, heralds the modern conception of religious devotion. The cardinal sin is no longer gluttony or frivolity, it is vanity, pride and contempt for the weak and marginal. Humble service for the lost, the persecuted and the oppressed are the Christian virtue of our times.

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What then about God, the signifier without a signified, as Barthes puts it? What is the meaning of this word today? Did God really die on the cross two thousand years ago, exhausting his divinity (*kenosis*), emptying himself into a mortal human being, to leave us with his good example and nothing more, giving us full responsibility from then on, as Žižek will have it? Is God only a figment of imagination, representing the Kantian universal ethical law? Is He the possible vanishing mediator (Žižek 2014), who eventually could bring about a shift from hegemonic global capitalism to what Balibar calls *equaliberté*, or *real* liberty, equality and fraternity? Or is God still present, in the persona of The Holy Spirit, working undercover for the weak and oppressed, the hungry and thirsty for justice? Maybe God is something that may emerge when people are united in selfless effort, in hope or despair, like the stranger – visible/invisible – joining the two abandoned disciples walking toward Emmaus?

In the second and third century AD, the Desert Fathers searched for unity with God in places like Wadi el Nitrium, the salty valley, in landscapes of sand, infinite, with no fixed points seen in the horizon, lifeless, with burning heat at daytime, biting frost in the night, dry river beds, seas of salt, invisible death and unmarked graves. What is a better illustration of our own times than another desert location, sandy Dubai, portrayed in Mike Davis' essay "Sand, Fear and Money in Dubai" (Davis/Monk 2007). Sheikh Mohammed

al-Maktoum's grotesque playground, containing the highest building in the world (Burj Khalifa), some of the largest malls (Dubai Mall and Mall of Arabia), artificial lakes and islands, mountains made of 'snow'-coated glass and so on. The obscene underside of this wonder is the legion of guest workers from India, Bangladesh and Nepal, the men that built these wonders of the world under the most dangerous working conditions, and who spent their life after 16 hours of work in crowded, can-like dormitories, deprived of even the most fundamental worker's rights.

It is easy to understand why many people from our privileged part of the world today want to escape from this worldscape of overwhelming accumulation of wealth on display and for consumption. Most of us also want to escape from the obsession of being logged on to the worldwide net 24/7. We may long for walking in the footsteps of Thoreau, finding our own Lake Walden. But human nature is complex. We want a free zone where we can retreat, where we can 'be ourselves' and recover from the bruises and pains of social existence, but we also long for company, for being 'seen', for recognition, for comfort and support.

In company, on the other hand, we experience the clashing of souls, and the pull of group mentality, these processes that Wilfred Bion calls *basic assumptions*. These are fantasies, half conscious, about the others, fantasies that influence us to submission and servility, or to seek out enemies inside or outside the group, or paralyze us in fascinated identification with some idealized persons, real or imagined. We are passionate beings, linked to the persons around us with love, hate and curiosity, or detached through disavowal of the same passions, in the guise of indifference, bigotry and snobbishness.

We all need some kind of idiorrhythmy: time for recreation, and freedom to pursue our own chosen interest in whatever direction, manual or mental, aesthetic or physically challenging. But real experience of solitary life, sustained for long time, regularly leads to eruptions of desperation, because we are all, as speaking beings, also split subjects. We desire something more, something we don't know what is. To compensate for the strains following from being subjected to our own unconscious forces, most of us also need to join others in *their* rhythm, be it in love relations or be it friendship, solidarity, and political struggle for equality and freedom.

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# NOMS/Names

*Karin Gundersen*

When introducing his 1977 seminar on how to live together, Barthes outlined how he would operate: there would be no method, no continuity, no unity, only indications, the so-called *traits*. It was in accordance with this ethos that Barthes began his lecture on "Names": "The aim of this figure is to introduce the dossier of proper names as they operate within the space of Living-Together. Three points of reference (or departure), no more than indicated." (Barthes 2013: 97) In other words, these three points would be presented but not developed further.

   The *traits* may be like the figures organizing the fragments of *A Lover's Discourse*, or simple signifiers (one word) that carry a larger, more complex and incalculable signified; their sole justification is to point toward a field of knowledge or culture, alluded to and never elaborated. Culture, not method, should prevail, as the latter proceeds toward a goal by means of an established technique. Preferring culture to method implies accepting the violence of knowledge, submitting oneself to a training (*paideia*) "along an eccentric path: stumbling among snatches, between the bounds of different fields of knowledge, flavors" (ibid: 4). In other words, one should admit thought to be influenced and shaped by selective forces, first by the force of desire or the figure of the fantasy (ibid: 4).[1] When a figure is only introduced and never developed, let alone exhausted, the intention is to allow the listeners at the seminar, and analogical to them, we must believe, the readers who are reproducing the seminar, the right to extend the research of the field according to his or her own idiorrhythmy (cf. Coste 2013: xxiv). Walking or stumbling in another direction than Barthes, supplementing or even contradicting him, would be in his spirit and a proper response to his purpose. It would furthermore be in accordance

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**1** |  This idea of selective forces refers to Nietzsche and Deleuze. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France the same year (January 7, 1977), Barthes had already announced his desire to experiment with "fantasmatic teaching."

with what he ten years earlier had announced as the death of the author, as a condition of giving birth to the reader (cf. Barthes 1988 [1967]).

There are three subsections in the figure "Names": "Nicknames," "Caritatism" (i.e., a pet name or affectionate appellation), and "No Name." Here, I will mainly comment what Barthes says about the nickname and the functional relation between nickname, first name, and surname. He departs from the surnames, which for instance can be names of places or originally a nickname. Surnames are common for the members of the family. A first name, on the other hand, is as a rule never repeated within the same family in the same generation, that is, between brothers and sisters: there, each name is specific and a distinction – every person has an ownership to his proper name. Originally, the nickname was meant to prevent the confusion generating in situations where the first name, which refers to one single person, may also refer to another person within the extended family or in a wider community (the tribe, the village). Within the family as such, the first name functions as a shifter, that is, its specific reference depends on the given context. In a narrow family context, everybody knows which John he or she is talking about, but outside that context it can be unclear who exactly the name is referring to. Then, it is important to distinguish between the different bearers of the same name, for instance by adding physical or professional characteristics. Barthes mentions linkages like Dark John and Fair John, Henry the Blacksmith and Henry the Peasant, and so on. Gradually, the nicknames may become surnames and be included in a register or a catalogue, completely free of context.

Barthes discusses various aspects, such as existential, moral, and anthropological ones, related to the need for and use of names. On the other hand, there is one field that he completely ignores – what is peculiar because he has insisted on the importance of it elsewhere – namely, the constituting significance of names in the novel. Moreover, the novel or the narrative functions as both frame and documentation in this seminar (which features five literary texts where the idiorrhythmy is to be investigated or excerpted), and the *romanesque* is the model for his own presentation, as in "the romanesque without the novel" in *A Lover's Discourse* (Barthes 1990). Why is the novel important for the meaning and the systematics of names? Because the novel is a mixture of reality and fiction. The names reside in the intersection of these two worlds. As institution, they belong to the society described and contribute to the structuring of this very society; as creation, they belong to the fantasy field from where they departed and that they appeal to, reuniting author and reader in a community of imagination and interpretation. In another posthumously published seminar, *The Preparation of the Novel* (2011), Barthes argued that there were several claims to be fulfilled before Proust could start writing *In Search of Lost Time*, one of these being that he must establish a system of proper names (Barthes 2011: 104). That is also what he even more forcibly asserts in

his essay "Proust and Names" (1967): once the names were found, the novel was written "immediately." Although this is clearly an exaggeration, there is no doubt that the names are of extreme importance to Proust's novel and its entire universe. In the same essay, Barthes argues that there is a parallel between the narrator's need to experience epiphanies of past moments before he can write his novel, and the author's need to establish a system of proper names to be able to write his own. The first instance operates on the psychological level, the second on the technical-linguistic level: those are parallel and homological, but never coinciding. One of Barthes's main points is that in Proust's novel, thanks to his poetic genius, names can both generate and evoke a reality, in a creative combination of hypersemantics and conceptual realism.

"Guermantes," "Swann," "Charlus," and "Verdurin" are identity markers: these and all the other names in Proust's novel are inseparable from their owners, that is, the fictive persons who are all unique and recognizable in spite of all the inversions and metamorphoses that they undergo in the course of the novel. The poetry and semantic power of the proper name of Guermantes is particularly striking; this has been repeatedly investigated by Proust himself and commented by Barthes, albeit not here in his lecture on "Names." Here, the name Guermantes is barely mentioned, and then only as an example of differentiating nicknames: "Guermantes: the Duc / the Prince" (Barthes 2013: 97). It is striking because Proust is not particularly absent in *How to Live Together* – there are references to *In Search of Lost Time* all over the text. The examples of nicknames picked up from *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann ("Frau Albumin," "Tous-les-deux") could have been supplied with still more burlesque and comic examples from Proust, who in the following passage reflects on the mechanisms that produce nicknames (including pet names) and that regulate the use of them within a closed community, the aristocratic Faubourg Saint-Germain in Paris:

The Prince von Faffenheim [...], thanks to the craze for nicknames dominant in this circle, was known so universally as Prince Von that he himself would sign his letters "Prince Von" or, when he was writing to his intimates, "Von." The abbreviation at least had the merit of being understandable, given his triple-barrelled name. It was less easy to understand the reasons for replacing "Elizabeth" with "Lili" or "Bebeth," like the swarm of "Kikis" that flourished in a very different social world. One can understand how people, idle and frivolous though they are in general, might have adopted "Quiou" in order not to waste the time it would have taken to say "Montesquiou." But it is less easy to see what they gained by nicknaming one of their cousins "Dinand" instead of "Ferdinand." It would none the less be wrong to suppose that in the invention of nicknames the Guermantes invariably proceeded by syllabic cuckoo-ing. For instance, two sisters, the Comtesse de Montpeyroux and the Vicomtesse de Vélude, both of them enormously fat women, were never known to be addressed, without the least trace of annoyance on

their part of amusement on anyone else's, so ingrained was the habit, as anything other than "Petite" and "Mignonne" respectively. Mme de Guermantes, who adored Mme de Montpeyroux, would, if the latter had been seriously ill, have asked her sister with tears in her eyes if "Petite" was dreadfully poorly. [...] But these are just a few specimens of the many many name-games to which we can always return if need be, and explain some of them. (Proust 2003: 429-430)

Finally, in the subsection "No Name," Barthes says that "in an ideal (utopian) community, there would be no names, making it impossible for people to gossip about one another; there would be only direct addresses, presences, not images, absences" (Barthes 2013: 101). With names one can in fact manipulate the other, talk about (and gossip about) the absent other.

There is a parallel between the functioning of names in society on one hand, and the classic, realistic novel's dependence on proper names on the other: what is required are good, differentiating, distinguishing, and essential names. In the history of the novel, there was a utopian period, namely, the New Novel in the 1950s and 1960s, when the names were chased out of the novel and only anonymous, nameless, or partly nameless persons were allowed to appear, such as in Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *Jealousy* (1957), where the persons are A (the woman), Franck (the lover), and the nameless observer (the husband). This is one of the ways the New Novel's insurrection against Balzac & Co. (that is, the bourgeois, realistic novel) manifested itself. At its best, like in the above-mentioned *Jealousy*, the result was a fascinating mixture of intimacy and opacity, almost claustrophobic. The direct addresses and the presences dreamed about by Barthes, unfolding themselves in the utopia of the nameless community, could as well close up and limit the space we live in, while images and absences (the naming of names) open the space around us toward an infinity of perspectives. And in fact, when he was reasonable and not caught in a dream, Barthes preferred the classic realistic novel: Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was the novel he would have loved to rewrite.

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# NOURRITURE/Food

*Knut Stene-Johansen*


Roland Barthes's authorship includes a number of texts about nutrition, gastronomy, food, and meal culture. It starts with the famous descriptions of French cuisine in *Mythologies* from 1957. The essays "Steak and Chips" and "Wine and Milk" from this book are high-grade gastronomic literature, with some passages that have become iconic, such as: "Steak is part of the same sanguine mythology as wine. It is the heart of meat, it is meat in its pure state; and whoever partakes of it assimilates a bull-like strength" (Barthes 1972: 62). An important article from 1961, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," addresses the symbolism of food within a more theoretical perspective. Here Barthes writes that what characterizes modernity in this context is the polysemy of food, its generosity, its multi-layered cultural significance: food is not just for eating anymore. Unlike in the past, where the food was symbolically and systematically highlighted only on solemn and festive occasions, food is today associated with everything from sport, leisure, activity, and performance to rest, celebration, and daily life. 'Today' will here be 1961, the year of the article, but it is even more so in our own era, over half a century later: the culture of food has proliferated. In the article "The Kitchen of Meaning" from 1964, the communication system that the food works in is elaborated, so that certain types of aperitifs can be interpreted, for example, as a sign of the host's lifestyle, while a bull depicted in a luxury magazine can be characterized as a sign of theatrical ruralism. In *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971), Barthes includes numerous comments on the signification of food, and he even underscores – in his reading of de Sade – that the "alimentary detail" in literature *exceeds* signification, because it represents an "enigmatic supplement of meaning (of ideology)" (2002a: 810). The descriptions in *The Empire of Signs* of Japanese food as "a collection of fragments" and without "a centre," which to Barthes is the case in *sukiyaki*, or as "lightness," which is the essence of *tempura*, are also worth mentioning (2002b: 364-368, 368-371). "Reading Brillat-Savarin," Barthes's introduction to a modernized and shortened version of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's famous work *Physiology of Taste* (often referred to

as the very bible of gastronomy), is in turn crucial to Barthes's understanding of food culture and the importance of the meal. In this introduction, Barthes reads crucial parts of Brillat-Savarin's work, emphasizing, among other things, the concept of *convivialité*, that is, of table fellowship, of the pleasure of togetherness and sharing a meal. This term could have been an introduction to the questions of our 'living together' topics, as it also includes *comment manger ensemble*, "how to eat together." And not unexpectedly, *convivialité* is one of *How to Live Together*'s references in the field "Nourriture/Food."

## THE FIELD

In his initial analysis of "Nourriture/Food," Barthes states that the problem of food symbolism itself actually requires a whole encyclopedia, a lexical overview that could help to correct today's widespread commercialization of cookbooks. These commercial publications, Barthes writes, use a good deal of energy to communicate (that is, to sell) diets that are produced and defined as 'rational,' all while ignoring the fact that food is always linked to fiction, rituals, and symbols. In addition, hypocrisy abounds around 'hygiene' and 'health.' It is the same with food as with the history of the tears or the social anthropology of the flowers, as Barthes called for in *A Lover's Discourse* and in the lecture on "Fleurs/Flowers" in *How to Live Together*, respectively. Subsequently, books on both these latter subjects have in fact been published, such as *Crying: A Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (1999) by Tom Lutz and *The Culture of Flowers* (1993) by Jack Goodie. Beside the famous *Larousse gastronomique*, first published in 1938, the immense book *Modernist Cuisine: The Art and Science of Cooking* from 2011 might be a heavyweight response to Barthes's demands for an encyclopedia of food. The interest in food and meals, for the nutrition's many cultural, health-related and quality-oriented dimensions, seems to have reached new heights in our own day. "Nourriture/Food" is a huge dossier according to Barthes, who divides his analysis of the term into three stages: rhythm, the food itself, and practice.

Rhythms or forms of food consumption include three fields. First, there is the regulation of common meals, which are important because they give rhythm to everyday life and lead to conviviality, as Brillat-Savarin held so high. Barthes mentions here that the anchorites also had eating rules, usually limited to one meal a day, while the cenobites ate more varied and more often. The second point is about fasting periods, and the last one is about other ways to establish a distance to nutrition, ways of moving food out of the exchange economy, as in begging and praying for alms. Particularly interesting, Barthes finds this represented in Buddhist practice. The food as such mobilizes anthropology, ethnology, and psychoanalysis, especially through the relationship between

prohibition, order, and tolerance. Barthes distinguishes between Oriental anchorites on one hand and Buddhist monks on the other. They represent two different cultures of rules for what can and what cannot be eaten. Then he mentions what he calls the food's connotations, especially associated with the symbolic meanings of the menus and in general terms the semiology of food. A basic distinction is that between ordinary and luxurious food. This open up for a Bourdieu-like perspective, especially when Barthes refers to Brillat-Savarin's almost sociological study of menus in *Physiology of Taste*. Brillat-Savarin systematically notes what kinds of dishes that may be included in three different social layers, or classes, in the Parisian population, according to their economic status (Barthes 2013: 105-106). Meals are like values registered at the stock exchange of History. For Brillat-Savarin, for example, the famous dessert *œufs à la neige* (ice cream with meringue in a bowl of vanilla sauce) is a banal dish, while today it is considered a delicacy in restaurants serving authentic French food. This may be regarded as both distinction and exchange between rural and urban forms of life. Barthes mentions several different menu types and 'literary' meals, including Buddhist monks' breakfasts, *petit-bourgeois* menus, and literary meals in Gide's text *The Confined Woman of Poitiers* and in Zola's novel *Pot Luck*. All this appears as interpretations of food, which causes Barthes to turn his eyes on those eating: "But do we ever do anything other than read each other?" (Barthes 2013: 108)

Then Barthes turns to 'Practice' and to the problem of 'eating together.' Here there is a kind of 'conviviality' in a strict sense. Again, Barthes touches on an enormous ethnographic *dossier*, which spans from the menu of the lonesome, linked to the fear of eating alone (*l'horreur du manger seul*) and to the ritual of the Christian communion as well as the cenobitic practice of communal meals. In terms of biology, food is connected to life and to everything that is vital. Among the literary references in *How to Live Together*, Thomas Mann's *The Magical Mountain* is central also in the chapter on "Nourriture/Food." Patients at the sanatorium Berghof in *The Magical Mountain* are there to save their lives: they want to be reborn outside, or beyond, the disease – or, more profoundly, it is *death* that has caused them to come to the sanatorium, as Barthes alludes to in the trait "Cause" (2013: 43-49). Dietary cures, Barthes writes, are religious rituals, as the encounter with new dishes is similarly symbolically charged: you want to change your life by eating something new (ibid: 110).

## LITERARY MEALS

With this, Barthes's lecture on the concept of nourriture /food opens for the history of literature, with its arsenal of symbolic meals. We will look into a few obvious examples of the literary meal, on how the concept of nourriture/

food can be said to have an eminent place in the diversity of literature. The archive of descriptions in the history of literature can give us insights that go beyond purely factual texts. How Odysseus and his men, in the ninth song of the *Odyssey* (Homer 1968: 147), come across a stock of cheese (feta?) in the mountain cave of a monster, and how Odysseus in the 14th song is treated to roasted pork served with spicy and honeyed wine during his secret return to Ithaka (ibid: 212-213), tells us something about the rudimentary and simple food culture in ancient Greece (as in the tavernas of modern Greece!). But from Homer's simple barbecue in the *Odyssey* to Trimalchio's sumptuous dinner in Petronius's novel *Satyricon*, from Rabelais's great eater Gargantua and Gustav Flaubert's description of the wedding meal in *Madame Bovary* to Günther Grass's *The Flounder*, we also see how literary meals are able to perform both ethical and aesthetical relationships. Included here is people's desire, their aspirations and relationships with the world, all summarized in the problematics of *how to live together*. The literary descriptions of meals and the many thematizations of food and eating seem to have a constant companion in the *delicacy*, understood as the most exclusive treat imaginable – and which has to do with more than pleasure. In French, including in Brillat-Savarin, this is called a *gourmandise*, a term that has also called on psychoanalytical interest (Harrus-Révidi 2003; Stene-Johansen 2012). Every regional or national kitchen has its own *gourmandises*, which also include the *genus loci*, as with caviar from the Caspian Sea (where the sturgeon is now protected), goose liver from Dordogne, or white truffles from Alba. The delicacies illustrate a long for exceeding, for the ultimate well-being or an ultimate distinction, as Pierre Bourdieu would have put it: the exclusive food as well as the way in which food is cooked and consumed can be defined as a signal or hallmark of class, cultural status, sophistication, urbanity, and so forth. The delicacy teaches us that like all other form of arts, gastronomy addresses what comes in addition to what is needed. Like literature, dance, visual arts, or music, it is strictly speaking not necessary for the survival of humanity. But undoubtedly it represents the basics of civilization and culture. The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a fervent critic of gastronomy. For Rousseau, the natural appetite was sufficient: all other tasteful preparations were, in his opinion, unnecessary and unnatural, and therefore reprehensible. However, the distance between the writing desk and the dining table is often strikingly short. Or as Alexandre Dumas expressed it, "One day I may very well replace the pen with a spoon." As we may surmise from the following, the Norwegian writer Alexander Kielland must have had the same philosophy.

## KIELLAND: EXCELLENT SMALL LOBSTERS

Alexander Lange Kielland (1849-1906) is an obvious and noticeable guest in the intellectual *grande bouffe* that the *trait* "Nourriture/Food" invites us to imagine. Most famous for his novels and short stories in the epoch of literary realism, he is also a great writer of letters. He is undoubtedly one of the most celebrated authors in the history of Norwegian literature, but he was also a true gentleman who had great culinary insight and experience in continental *étiquette*. In fact, when the National Library in Oslo organized a jubilee exhibition to celebrate his literary career in 2006, the quotation "I am the only one who shines of festivity" was chosen as the title. Kielland's career lasted a relatively short period of time, about ten years, but he had other interests and also other tools than the pen, such as cookware and frying pans – but at the same time it is not easy to picture the great, bourgeois Alexander Kielland working the stove. He became a prominent editor, mayor, and county governor. Kielland preferred to be served well-prepared food that he probably did not cook himself, but the word *gourmand* is nevertheless something that fits him quite well. For, as suggested, the distance is not particularly large between the pen and the fork (or the spoon), between writing tools and cutlery.

Kielland's favorite dish was partridge (*agerhøns*), more specifically partridge with champagne, which also inspired the title of a book based on his autobiographical notes (Kielland 1983). It was in Paris that Kielland learned to enjoy roasted partridge, as evinced in a letter from 1904:

For in such small hotels on the outskirts of Paris, partridge is treated with due reverence. It is not like home, where the modern housewife puts thrushes in the dry pot, accompanied by a blessing and just a bit of margarine. Here, a nice bird is treated like a small child. First, it is wrapped and covered in fresh wine leaves, and then it receives a snow-white shawl of pork, which is cut as thin as paper, and then it is roasted for a long time with love and butter-flavored with finely chopped herbs and truffles. (1992: 121)[1]

In Kielland's works, the color of time is everywhere, for example in "A Dinner," which is the title of one of his brilliant short stories from 1879. The story is about a conflict between generations, a standard issue in literature. In the short story's ordinary, idiorrhythmic drama, we notice certain details, as when the evening's host is to give his speech and it became "suddenly so quiet at the table that one could hear the lively conversation among the ladies, who, according to Norwegian tradition, dined in the adjoining rooms" (1969: 47). Times change: though expressions such as 'gentlemen's dinner' still exist, and though women

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**1** | Translations from German and Norwegian are the author's own, unless otherwise stated in the reference list.

and men still arrange gender-restricted meals, as a convention this is today of course nothing less than an idiorrhythmic anachronism. But at the time, and in Kielland's bourgeois milieu, it was standard practice.

The fourth chapter of the novel *Garman and Worse* from 1880 includes a priceless scene where two brothers are down in a wine cellar. They taste different varieties of unlabeled wines, mostly burgundy but also madeira, until they find the appropriate selection: "At the end of the bottle, they got up and clinked their glasses together. They then took each his bottle of Burgundy for dinner, hung their coats on their arms, and went up into the daylight." (Kielland 1885: 45-46) Such a small passage, depicting brotherly reconciliation and reminiscence in a wine cellar followed by a bourgeois dinner, reflects Kielland's own background.

The final chapter also has some lines that suggest Kielland's culinary passion and knowledge:

Per's wife made many apologies, as is but right and proper on such occasions, for the repast, which, however, consisted of coffee, with cream and sugar, bread and butter and cakes, and lastly a dish of small lobsters. She insisted that it was a shame to offer such small lobsters to her guests. It was a pity they had not some larger ones. But now it was just one of the pastor's favourite theories, and which he always defended with much energy and conviction, namely, that small lobsters are really better and more delicate than large ones. [...] The sun shone so brightly through the small window-panes, the room was so clean and comfortable, the table-cloth so white, the cream so yellow, and the small lobsters so red and appetizing, that the pastor felt constrained to improve the occasion [...] The pastor dwelt on the uncertainty of human affairs, how often we are dis-appointed, but how there is a leading thread which seems to run through our existence. [...] He then set to work on his small lobsters, which he found excellent. (ibid: 301-303)

The priest's speech is an allegorical, critical, and moral passage à la Kielland, a discourse that the priest lets the others digest, while he himself, in the words that conclude the novel, eats the small, tasty lobsters. When Kielland's appetite is combined with his expertise, style and taste merge in a way no other Norwegian author of his generation – not Lie, not Garborg, not Ibsen, not Bjørnson – was able to create. And maybe the subsequent generations of writers have not had enough weight to combine good manners and writing? On the other hand, Kielland's weight can also be associated with one of the epoch's well-known plays, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *Over Ævne* (1883), translated into English as *Beyond Human Power*, though perhaps *Beyond Human Capacity* would have been more appropriate. Although the inspiration for Bjørnson's play lay elsewhere, in the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and his theory of *grand hysteria*, the title connotes Bjørnson's colleague Kielland and his eating and drinking habits, which became both healthily and economically

a major problem to Kielland, who died 57 years old at the considerable weight of 136 kilos.

## PROUST: "FRANÇOISE, MORE ASPARAGUS!"

Marcel Proust – himself a good deal slimmer than Kielland, though by no means of less literary heft – is undeniably Roland Barthes's most frequent literary reference. There is a lot of food, meals, and eating in *In Search of Lost Time*, and the famous madeleine cake is not the only dish described in Proust's novel. In the novel's first volume, *Combray*, it is the family's servant Françoise who controls the kitchen. And what a kitchen! The desire is wakened by a passage where Proust not only lists ingredients from rural French cuisine, but gives them a place in the story:

For, upon a permanent foundation of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, jams, biscuits which she no longer even announced to us, Françoise would add – depending on the labours in the fields and orchards, the fruit of the tide, the luck of the marketplace, the kindness of neighbours, and her own genius, and with the result that our menu, like the quatrefoils carved on the portals of cathedrals in the thirteenth century, reflected somewhat the rhythm of the seasons and the incidents of daily life – a brill because the monger had guaranteed her that it was fresh, a turkey hen because she had seen a large one at the Roussainville-le-Pin market, cardoons with marrow because she had not made them for us that way before, a roast leg of mutton because fresh air whets the appetite and it would have plenty of time to 'descend' in the next seven hours, spinach for a change, apricots because they were still uncommon, gooseberries because in two weeks there would not be any more, raspberries that M. Swann had brought especially, cherries, the first that had come from the cherry tree in the garden after two years in which it had not given any, cream cheese, which I liked very much at one time, an almond cake because she had ordered it the day before, a brioche because it was our turn to present it. When all of that was finished, there came a work of art composed expressly for us, but more particularly dedicated to my father who was so fond of it, a chocolate custard, the product of Françoise's personal inspiration and attention, ephemeral and light as an occasional piece into which she had put all her talent. (2004: 72-73)

This appetizing imagery reveals a dietetic and idiorrhythmic meal style that links diets not only to seasonal rhythm and inventive French reasoning but to art and the admiration of art (culinary, in this case). And like a prose poem in itself, the gastronomical reflection ends with a beautiful joining of aesthetics and ethics: "To have left even the tiniest morsel in the dish would have shown as much discourtesy as to rise and leave a concert hall before the end of a

piece under the composer's very eyes." (ibid: 73) The taste is physiological and aesthetic, and it is linked to a civilizational code: etiquette.

Proust gladly allows the narrator to reflect on idiorrhythmic and symbolic aspects of food, as in the scene with a Guermant dinner. The dinner guests are compared to the Apostles of Sainte-Chapelle: "And in fact they did assemble there like the early Christians, not to partake of merely material nourishment, which was in fact exquisite, but in a sort of social Eucharist." (Proust 2003: 512) This sharp social observation, however, is supplemented immediately with a return to the taste, the desire, and thus to the individual rhythm, for "along with all this, as I savoured one of the Yquems from the recesses of the Guermantes cellars, I enjoyed ortolans prepared in accordance with various recipes tastefully devised and modified by the Duc himself" (ibid: 512). Of course, it would have been interesting to know what recipes for thrushes the Duc has followed, and not least how he has modified them to match the sweet and noble Sauternes wine from the Château d'Yquem. It is obviously world class snobbery that is being conveyed here in an exquisite way, in this space between language and taste. And in fact, in Proust, taste and language may in many ways coincide, as when Madame de Guermantes' vocabulary of "antiquated expressions" is characterized as being as

[...] richly flavoured as the dishes you can come across in the delicious books of Pamille, but which have become so rare in real life, food in which the jellies, the butter, the juices, the quenelles are all unadulterated, in which even the salt comes specially from the salt-marshes of Brittany: from her accent, her choice of words, one felt that the basis of the Duchesse's conversation came directly from Guermantes. (ibid: 501)

Taste appears as a part of desire, which in Proust occasionally may appear like an erotico-gastronomic dream of absorbing and merging with another substance: hot and soft, for example, like Albertine. But is it possible to 'enjoy' the beloved's (sleeping) body the same way as you taste something? Proust writes, still in *The Guermantes Way*:

But the lips, designed to bring to the palate the taste that lures them, have to be content, without understanding their mistake or admitting their disappointment, with drifting over the surface and coming up against the barrier of the cheek's desirable impenetrability. (ibid: 362)

It is as if taste reaches beyond the kiss, and the dining table beyond the bed. But what reaches farthest of all is the novel. In the novel we meet a longing for life in perfect idiorrhythmy.

## ENJOYMENT

This allows for more fundamental, though very short discussions about pleasure, moderation, and taste within the concept of Nourriture/Food. Roland Barthes must be considered among the few Western theorists who openly appreciate and value pleasure. The little pamphlet *Le plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*) from 1973 is a good example. Pleasure's limit here seems to be set at its own threshold, understood as enjoyment, in French *la jouissance*. For while pleasure is idiorrhythmically and subjectively founded, and at the same time fully possible to share with others, as in the conviviality of a meal, the *jouissance* is asocial. Perhaps the experience with the ultimate delicacy, *la gourmandise*, is related to jouissance and impossible to describe, linguistically, and thus share with others? Is this the key to Kant's rejection of gastronomical taste in *Critique of Judgment*?

Pleasure seems to represent a crucial part of our understanding of what makes life worth living. Barthes's sensibility and intellectual hedonism are well-known, with deep historical roots, for example, to antique philosophical reflections on food and dietetics. In Plato we can read about moderation and diets. According to Plato, a reasonable and healthy diet consists of cereals, vegetables, fruits, milk, honey, and fish, while meat and wine should be consumed in moderate amounts. He is interested in preventive diets, but nevertheless, Plato warns, among other things, in *The Republic* (3.407c) against "excessive care of the body," because it "it makes a person think he's ill and be all the time concerned about his body" (1977: 1043). Xenophon is even clearer in in chapter seven of *Memorabilia*, his personal recollections of Socrates, where he remembers Socrates advocating that people should notice what food, drink, or physical activity is appropriate to them and how to benefit from this to live a healthy life (Xenophon 1997). This is a sensible speech of moderation.

But moderation must also be moderate, according to Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller, who in the book *Wofür es sich zu leben lohnt* (Why life is worth living) writes that in modern life we are "moderating ourselves immoderately" and that moderation must therefore be "applied to the moderation itself, so that it moderates itself moderately" (2011: 27). This is reasonably dealing with reason, *vernünftiger Umgang mit Vernunft*, as one of the chapters is titled (ibid: 148).[2]

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2 | Neither Robert Pfaller nor Roland Barthes seems to be particularly fond of Socrates. Indeed, Barthes affirms that "in general, I don't like, I have never liked Socrates (I am not the only one)" (2007: 341). Nevertheless, in an early text, Barthes makes sure that Socrates does not end his life by drinking the cup of poison, as described in the Apology. It is in "En marge de Criton" (In the margins of Crito) from 1933 that Barthes presents a pastiche on Plato's text. Here Barthes lets Socrates survive, as he cannot resist the

One of the innumerable historical lines for the term "Nourriture/Food" dates back to the 18th century, to the entry for the term 'taste' in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopedia*, in an article where both Voltaire and Montesquieu contribute. Here taste is treated both physiologically and culturally as a fundamental civilizational aspect. But is the experience of the taste of food, drinks, and meals something of high value – can it be an experience of art? Kant rejects this in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (part two, § 67) from 1798, as the taste experienced through the mouth is subjective and not universal or 'reflected.' Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin answers a couple of decades later in his *Physiology of Taste* that this is incorrect. Taste goes through several stages, he says, and ends in a reflection. His main example is the taste of champagne. First, it is direct when its aromas meet the tip of the tongue, then it is complete as the aromas continue inward, and finally it is *reflected* in the form of a final judgment of its taste.

Barthes seems to share this aesthetics, or ethics: it is important to find a diet against the diet, a healthy release from the health dictatorship and the hysterical sense of guilt that is thrown over us from all sides. Indeed, the sense of guilt and the tendency to ignore idiorrhythmic life are civilizatorian neuroses, cultural diseases that Barthes's studies in *How to Live Together* try to heal.

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temptation given him by his friends: a plate of figs! This is Barthes's "first text" and, in a way, his only text of fiction (Barthes 2002: 497).

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# PROXÉMIE/Proxemics

*Reinhold Görling*

Is it possible to speak with distance about proximity? Is it possible at all to be beyond proximity? Language, at least, is always already so near that it is impossible to speak without it. In the 1960s, what Roland Barthes called *écriture*, writing, was exactly the affirmation and exploration of this proximity: "dans l'écrire moyen de la modernité, le sujet se constitue comme immédiatement contemporain de l'écriture, s'effectuant et s'affectant par elle" (Barthes 1984: 29). There is a space and a time of writing, a chronotopology of writing, that cannot be thought otherwise than as a quality of proximity. The subject is not identical with language, but it is not without language either; both are coemergent. Barthes doesn't think this is a combination of passive and active but sees it as a special mode, as *l'écrire moyen* and *voix moyenne* (ibid: 29), as the middle voice.

As the editors of this volume note in their introduction, *Comment vivre ensemble*, the title of the first lecture series Barthes gave at the Collège de France, doesn't end with a question mark. This too can be seen as clue that Barthes's theme is neither a search for moral values or principles nor the analysis of living together as a clear-cut object of research. The one who says *comment vivre ensemble* is always already living together and saying these words as part of it: these words are an utterance made in the middle voice, an utterance that isn't made by a subject who by adding a question mark would actively place an object in front of him- or herself.

The concept of proxemics is a neologism coined by the American sociologist Edward T. Hall. Barthes says that he will use it in his own way, but he refers to Hall's book *The Hidden Dimension*. For Hall proxemics is a systematic description of the social space. Hall differentiates between four spaces that are determined by the distance between a person and other persons: intimate distance, private distance, social distance, and public distance. He sees this classification as a transcultural phenomenon, but there would be clear cultural differences between the definition of these distances. Ignoring these differences may lead to severe misunderstandings in intercultural communication (Hall

1990: 131-164). Barthes restricts his "use of the word to the very localized space of the subject's immediate surroundings" (Barthes 2013: 111). This is not identical to the space that for Hall is determined by an intimate distance. Barthes isn't interested in a quasi-objective scale or systematic typology of social spaces. Proxemics, distance, and *xéniteia* aren't concepts within a single scheme. These descriptions of space-times are superimposed, or layered, supplementing one another.

The subject of this lecture course on "novelistic simulations of some everyday spaces" is not only space, as the subtitle of *How to Live Together* indicates, but also time. In fact, right at the beginning Barthes introduces two temporal concepts related to living together: contemporaneity and idiorrhythmy. He came across the latter word by chance while reading a book about Greek history. It is used to describe a particular group of monks on Mount Athos: besides those who live together in buildings sharing a more or less strict schedule, there are other monks who live alone and who are free to join the others whenever they like, but they are not obliged to come to the meals or to the services. 'Idiorrhythmy' happened to be the word, Barthes says, that made his fantasy work – "le mot qui l'a fait travailler" (2002: 37).

It may be useful to say a word about the seemingly straightforward translation. Barthes writes "Mon fantasme: L'idiorrhythmie" (ibid: 36), translated into English as "My fantasy: Idiorrhythmy" (Barthes 2013: 6). One of Barthes's main psychoanalytic references is *The Language of Psychoanalysis* by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. In exactly this context in his series of lessons, he quotes what they say about the *Familien-Roman*, the family romance, a concept coined by Sigmund Freud. "Dans l'optique analytique, le vrai fantasme!" (Barthes 2002: 36) In English: "From the perspective of analysis, this is the ultimate fantasy!" (Barthes 2013: 5) Already at the end of his *Leçon*, his inaugural lecture held on January 7, 1977, five days before the first meeting of the seminar we are talking about, Barthes spoke about *le phantasme* and had used the word in allusion to a psychoanalytic argument. It is obvious that he is familiar with what Laplanche and Pontalis themselves wrote about the problem of translating the German word *Phantasie* and that he is familiar with the important essay by both French psychoanalysts, first published in 1965 in *Les temps modernes:* "Fantasme originaire: Fantasme des origines, origines du fantasme." Fantasy is a key concept in Freud's oeuvre. He plays with the double meaning the word has in German: it can be used to talk about a certain fantasy and to talk about the capacity to develop fantasies, that is, the imagination. There is a second German word for imagination – *Einbildungskraft* (lit. 'the power to form images'), as featured most prominently in Kant's aesthetics – but Freud never uses it. "All power to the imagination" was the English translation of *L'imagination au Pouvoir*, the famous slogan of the revolt in France in May 1968, the German translation being *Die Phantasie an die Macht*. I think Freud

was very conscious about the impossibility of making a clear distinction between fantasy and imagination, between the single image and the capacity to have fantasies. And Barthes follows him here, just as he follows Laplanche and Pontalis's interpretation of Freuds idea of the *Urphantasie*, the original fantasy or fantasy of origin. The origin of fantasy, the capacity for fantasy, is always already a fantasy, and a fantasy always already engenders the capacity to fantasize. "Le fantasme comme origine de la culture (comme engendrement de forces, de différances)," Barthes writes (Barthes 2002: 34). Or as translated into English: "The fantasy as the origin of culture (as the engendering of forces and differences)." (Barthes 2013: 4)

What distinguishes fantasy is that it is never a single, isolated object but a kind of scene, that it has a 'scenic' character, as one would be able to say in French or German, where the adjective isn't mainly used to describe a landscape. Barthes writes: "Il faut bien comprendre que pour qu'il y ait fantasme, il faut qu'il y ait scène (scénario), donc lieu." (Barthes 2002: 37) In English: "Let's be clear that a fantasy requires a setting (a scenario) and therefore a place." (Barthes 2013: 7) Fantasy is always a scene. And a scene always has the quality of a fantasy, because both a scene and a fantasy are characterized by engendering forces and differences that are not yet made or transformed into clear-cut objects or words that are part of the symbolic order. In this respect fantasies are quite similar to dreams: you may recall a dream that seems to be a scene with two or three persons you know, but the moment you start to think about it, you recognize that the identities were changing and that even your position was not really determined. Fantasies are about relation and not about identities; in fantasies the relational aspect is always more important than what the relation brings into contact.

Barthes transposes this idea of fantasy into the university. "La science peut [...] naître du fantasme," we read in *Leçon* (1980). And Barthes continues saying that an academic teacher, deciding over the sense of the route his journey will take, has to come back to the fantasy, *le fantasme*, "de la sorte il dévie de la place où on l'attend, qui est la place du Père, toujours mort, comme on le sait; car seul le fils a des fantasmes, seul le fils est vivant." ("He thereby turns from the place where he is expected, the place of the Father, who is always dead, as we know. For only the son has fantasies; only the son is alive." Barthes 1979: 14) 'Idiorrhythmy,' the word that makes Barthes's fantasy work, is also coined by the tension between being a concept describing a relation and being a concept characterizing entities in relation. On the one hand, idiorrhythmy means that some kind of entity may live and develop in its own rhythm of continuity and discontinuity, change and standstill. But what is at stake is not the inner rhythm, which is a kind of condition for the entity or individual; what is at stake is rather the rhythm of exchange between an entity and its ecological field, its *Umwelt*. There is no entity that would be completely closed,

and all living entities are extremely dependent on an exchange and therefore very vulnerable. Barthes quotes Émile Benveniste's article on rhythm in his "Problems in General Linguistics": *rhuthmos* was originally "never applied to the regular movement of waves" or other forms of flow but to "the pattern of a fluid element," of a letter, a peplos, which is a kind of tunic for women, a mood, "an improvised changeable form" (Barthes 2013: 7). "Since *rhuthmos* is by definition individual," Barthes continues, "idiorrhythm is almost a pleonasm: the interstices, the fugitivity of the code, of the manner in which the individual inserts himself into the social (or natural) code." (ibid: 7-9.) Idiorrhythmy is "a median, utopian, Edenic, idyllic form" (ibid: 9) somewhere between the loneliness of the eremite on the one hand and the subordination under a given regime of time on the other.

There is an example Barthes presents to the students and to which he refers to a second time in a later part of his lecture series. Because it pertains to proxemics, I will discuss it briefly. "From my window (December 1, 1976), I see a mother pushing an empty stroller, holding her child by the hand. She walks at her own pace, imperturbably; the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is forced to keep running, like an animal, or one of Sade's victims being whipped" (Barthes 2013: 9). And Barthes continues: "She walks at her own pace, unaware of the fact that her son's rhythm is different. And she's his mother!" "Et pourtant, c'est sa mère!" (Barthes 2002: 40).

Perhaps it is exactly this little sentence, or even this exclamation mark that interrupts the flow of speech, that best expresses the fantasy that comes into work by the utopia of idiorrhythmy. The utopian scene is the relation between a mother and a child where neither of them obliges the other's own rhythm, because they interact, they experience the other. In his book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, Daniel Stern gives a rich variety of observations and examples that make clear how multifold the mutual, interpersonal relation between a mother and a child is already during the first days, weeks, and months in the life of a newborn. And it makes clear that the newborn needs this mutual relation to develop elements of what will become a self. There is an interaction of the baby with its environment practically from the first moment, an interaction coined by rhythms of intensity, of movement, of sound. Stern calls these rhythms 'vitality affects.' Babies notice these rhythms and reflect them in their own behavior, and vice versa, the person the baby is interacting with also reflects the baby's mood and ways of expression. Such vitality affects have much to do with what Barthes calls idiorrhythm. Barthes couldn't have been familiar with Stern's book, which was first published in 1985. But Stern quotes a good deal of research that was known and popular at that time. In the 1960s, film began to be used as a tool to study the behavior of mother and child. Especially slow motion seemed to be a useful instrument for observing this affective attunement between mother and child. Hall refers to the research

made by William Condon, who even speaks about a synchronization of body movements (Hall 1989: 72). Stern again doubts that there would be such a synchronization. Newer research with more precise methods didn't confirm this thesis (Stern 1998: 84). But he presents something that will be of greater importance for our context. Already a four-month-old baby has the ability to recognize temporal structures that different phenomena share. When a baby is confronted with two films on two screens, but only one sound that is in sync with one of the films shown, the baby recognizes this connection and starts looking at the synchronous film with more intensity and more attention. For Stern, this ability proves "that temporal structure is a valuable invariant in identifying core entities" (ibid: 85). Babies see things or movements that are in sync as entities. Doesn't this mean that idiorrhythm is an essential condition to recognize something as an entity? And this is also true for the affects of self and the emergence of the core self. The baby experiences itself mainly as a temporal structure or fugitive code. In the example Barthes gives, then, the mother who pulls her child doesn't force her rhythm, her time, on the child. She doesn't establish any synchrony, but by ignoring the in-between of time she impedes the child in his need to establish an idiorrhythm, a coherent time scheme for itself. "The power – the subtlety of power – as effected through disrhythmy, heterorhythmy." (Barthes 2013: 9)

According to Barthes, proxemics "belongs to a typology of subjective spaces in that the subject inhabits them affectively" (ibid: 112). He gives examples of such dwellings that point to different affects, that are constitutive for these different spaces: one is territory or domain, which is the space that the subject is in relation to sensually; another is hideout, "where things get taken, where things get hidden," as exemplified by Robinson Crusoe's hut; a third is proxemic space in the more restricted sense, as a niche or nest, as the place "where things are reached for, where things are touched" (ibid: 112). Barthes then continues to determine proxemics less topographically than by describing two objects the subject identifies with ("auxquels le sujet tend à s'identifier," Barthes 2002: 156): the lamp and the bed. The use of the psychoanalytic concept of identification once more suggests Donald W. Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* as another important intertext of Barthes's lectures. Winnicott sees identification with the object as a mechanism of the investment, or cathexis, of the object (2009: 118). By translating "s'identifier" with "to gravitate," the English version of *Comment vivre ensemble* misses this point (Barthes 2002: 156; 2013: 112).

Barthes notes further that there is a variation of objects like the lamp or the beds throughout history. "For centuries: the hearth, the fireplace, the source of heat … Today: the television tends to serve the same purpose." (2013: 112). What Barthes would have said about our present environment, for example about our cell phones (or our notebooks)? Aren't they today what the fireplace once was and what the television for some decades has been? We identify with these

objects; they are always at hand, they have light inside, we share a lot of very private or even intimate things with them. And they give us the impression that we have much more in our hands – nothing less than the whole world, in fact. What does it mean when this central object is independent from any fixed space or place, when we can carry it with us?

The cell phone is a strongly temporal device that concerns the question of idiorrhythmy in a very direct way. It is always there, like a good mother. In charge 24/7. It is advertised as a servant, but it has become a master, especially in the sense of idiorrhythmy. It binds us into a regime of time that seems to be a constant flow. There is always something happening, something changing. It teaches us that time is running and we have to negotiate the question of rhythm. Especially social media programs influence the rhythm of day and night We identify with the cell phone or the notebook. This does not only mean that they are a kind of prothesis; rather, we become part of them, we change with them. It may lead us to a center, it may be part of what we call concentration, but it may also lead us to a kind of dispersal, because the center is without place.

The lamp, the fire, the television set, the cell phone are phenomena that can be seen as a kind of interface for the transmission of affects: we read, we eat, we communicate with the other, they are part of the territory, but they also have the characteristics of a hideout, a niche, a nest. Such a nest, or rather a bed as Barthes describes it, is "the very essence of proxemics; in some ways, a part of the body; a prosthesis of body, like a fifth limb: the limb, the body itself like an organ at rest" (Barthes 2013: 113). The bed is described through metaphors of embodiment. The paragraph though starts with a different image: "The sick bed: the strongest form of proxemics, the one we have the most intense experience of." (ibid: 113) To be ill can be understood as being in a situation where the interchange between the subject and the world is in trouble. It is perhaps less a space of protection than a time of restructuring the relation. We dream in bed, working through our experiences. In bed the world of fantasies coincides most completely with the given world. The bed is a "foyer d'expansion fantasmatique du sujet," Barthes says (2002: 158). *Foyer* is a word that has the same origin as the word *feu*, 'fire,' and it is still used in this sense as well as in a more metaphorical sense as *foyer de troubles*, or in the medical context, as a *foyer de maladie*, 'focus of a disease.' 'Focus' comes from Latin *focus* and means exactly this: a place of fire. In this respect: the bed and the lamp coincide. The bed, Barthes continues, is a *foyer* of the subject's expansion "through fantasmatic fabulation; Léonie invents imaginary plots to entertain herself that she then follows, enthralled (for instance: that Françoise is stealing from her)" (Barthes 2013: 113-114).

But the lecture in which Barthes opens the dossier on proxemics begins with another literary example and phantasm: in *La séquestrée de Poitiers,* André Gide reports a historical case that became public in 1901. Mélanie Bastian lived

in a dark, closed room lying on her bed for about 24 years. The room was part of her mother's house in a bourgeois quarter of Poitiers; the servants brought her some food, but the room was again and again covered with filth. When she was found, her body was merely a skeleton, her skin was full of disease, her hair was completely uncut and matted. She had a brother who lived in the same street. Nobody was sentenced because the court was unable to determine the form of violence in a manner that would coincide with the laws. And what really is disturbing is the impossibility of deciding how far Melanie, who in reality was named Blanche Monnier, yielded to the treatment. Was she forced to stay there in the beginning and forgot all resistance over time? Did it start with a kind of depression that forced her into this retreat with the family excluding her over time? Late in the series of lectures, when Barthes talks about *xéniteia*, he again refers to her as an example of "radical" *xéniteia* (Barthes 2013: 127). She lives in extreme proxemics, never leaving her bed, but her self is located in a place in separation from her ecological environment and her body.

There is no possibility of determining the function of a certain space, to decide if it is good or bad, a dream or a nightmare, without reflecting on time. Neither lamp nor bed define the time of "living together," the idiorrhythm. And what kind of rhythmic relation between Melanie and her mother, lasting 24 years! How different and how similar to the example of the mother who pulls her child behind her.

The fantasy "qui a fait travailler le fantasme" is not just one scene. It is a scenic constellation that can have various concretions. It is there like *le foyer, le feu* of Barthes's writing, of his *écriture*. There is one other and last concretion of the fantasy I would like to refer to: Baruch de Spinoza. "Spinoza, philosophe de la proxémie?" Barthes asks (2002: 158) at the end of retelling a short episode that he had found in Jean Colerus's brief text *The Life of Benedict Spinoza*, the first biography on the Dutch philosopher. The episode concerns how after the death of their father, Spinoza's sisters tried to exclude him from the succession, whereby he left them "everything but one bed, in truth a very good one, and the items around it" (Barthes 2013: 113).

There are two other contexts where Barthes refers to Spinoza and Colerus's biography. Both are examples of ways of living with others: first, near the end of his life, Spinoza rented a quite small room and lived there with a controlled and small diet of food, writing his *Ethica*, before dying there in 1677 at the age of 44; the second example concerns his ability to be conscious of the affects and control them, affects that touch and change him and that touch and change others. It is unlikely that these little hints were the only reason that brought Barthes to the question "Spinoza, a philosopher of proxemics?" (Barthes 2013: 113). Obviously, Barthes understood them as an expression of a characteristic of Spinoza's writings, of his fantasy. But what makes Spinoza a philosopher of proxemics? "All things that are, are either in themselves or in something

else." This is the first axiom of the first part of Spinoza's *Ethics*. God alone is "self-caused" substance, "which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed" (Spinoza 2002: 217). In her reading of Spinoza's *Ethics*, Luce Irigaray highlights that only God is capable of an autodetermination that provides a place: "Itself autoaffecting itself, potentially, as in the middle-passive, but never passively affected by anything else." (Irigaray 1977: 40) But all that is said to be finite is "limited by another thing of the same nature," writes Spinoza (2002: 217). Men need to have an envelope that gives them a place, and it is the mother who gives this envelope and place. When Barthes speaks of proxemic spaces as "espaces subjectifs en tant que le sujet les habite affectivement" (Barthes 2002: 156), as "subjective spaces in that the subject inhabits them affectively" (Barthes 2013: 112), isn't it modeled exactly by the envelope the mother provides? The question of proxemics then "is still the problem of place, of the need to receive place (unless one is God), as a result of the passage from middle-passive to passive, from autoaffection to heteroaffection, from autodetermination, autoengendering, to determination, creation, even procreation by someone other" (Irigaray 1997: 41). There is a strong contradiction between what is an envelope and what is in front, between proxemics and limitation. Can the one who envelops be the same as the one who provides a limit? Is the one who envelops "of the same nature" as the one who provides a limit? Between the affection by the other and the selfdetermination that can be seen as part of what Spinoza calls *conatus*, there is a constant tension. Affection can lead to joy, but it can be negative too, can lead the subject to be sad, desolate, angry, or even destructive. In this sense it is possible to say that in the core of Spinoza's *Ethics* there is exactly this: *comment vivre ensemble*, or "how to live together," without a question mark because it is not a question, it is a reflection on something – we are always already doing, and we are doing in the moment we talk about.

"And let's not forget the Active / Passive turnstile. To invest in a discourse = to be invested by a discourse" (Barthes 2013: 149). These words are part of Barthes's notes for his seminar "What Is It to Hold Forth / Tenir un discours" that he held parallel to the series of lectures. They are put down near the end of reflecting on the concept of investment, 'investment' being the concept Freud's notion of *Besetzung* usually is translated with into English and French (*investissement*). *Besetzung* seems to be an activity directed to an object that is occupied by affects of the desiring subject. But the English word 'investment' has a more passive etymological meaning. Barthes cites an unidentified dictionary entry: "'To invest = to clothe,' that is to say 'to bestow or invest with a power, an authority, through various ceremonies, one of which is to be dressed in a garment'" (ibid: 149). Barthes doesn't mention that the word 'investiture' has the same meaning in Romance languages as in English and German. And

even the German word *Besetzung* keeps a memory of the middle voice, for example when it is used in the sense of casting; in theater or film a role *wird besetzt*. If one emphasizes this way of understanding Barthes's text, the whole movement of his discourse appears as a search for forms of living together in which the contradiction between envelope and object is suspended, in which, so to say, a living in the middle voice becomes possible.

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# RECTANGLE/Rectangle

*Adrian Forty*

Do rectangles mean anything? Compared to other geometric figures – circles, squares, triangles, all of which are loaded with symbolism – rectangles signify little. Whether as boxes, books, bricks, rooms, or other solids, or as two-dimensional shapes such as frames and paper sheets, it is what is *inside* rectangles that counts. As Barthes said elsewhere, the rectangle is a "space of flocculation": it awaits a *stuffing* (Barthes 2011: 262). And his description of the *traits* in *How to Live Together* as boxes to be filled in makes the rectangle a kind of primordial *trait* (Barthes 2013: 24, 133). The emptiness of rectangles and their apparently low level of signification could have been a reason for Barthes's choice of them as a *trait*, but that does not seem to have been the case.

Barthes was ambivalent toward rectangles: although attracted to them as containers, he disliked them because of their association with authority. To say, though, as Barthes did, that the rectangle has been civilization's revenge against nature, the basic shape of power, was a cliché of 1960s countercultures: think of all those domes and wonky buildings, from California to Vienna's Hundertwasser. A contempt for right angles, and the association of irregular forms with communitarian living, can be traced back to Rudolf Steiner, who made a point of avoiding rectangles, whether in room plans or door and window openings. Of course, the great exponent of non-orthogonal buildings was Frank Lloyd Wright, while in France in the 1960s, Claude Parent's cult of the 'oblique' extended this to sloping floor plates.

But notwithstanding these few isolated acts of rebellion, the majority of buildings have been, and continue to be, predominantly rectangular, both in plan and in section. This cannot, as Barthes suggests, simply be characterized as a form of pollution, for whose spread architects are to blame. Rectangular buildings appeared long before there were architects – and in societies that knew nothing of Euclidean geometry. Rectangles clearly offer advantages that even those untutored in geometry have been able to work out for themselves. When it comes to packing and stacking, and to subdivision, the rectangle, as Philip Steadman has shown, is superior to all other geometrical shapes, and

these reasons have certainly favored its prevalence. However, Steadman argues, it is above all the freedom with which one or the other axis of rectangles can be lengthened or shortened without distorting the internal angles and the configuration of the whole that gives rectangles their greatest advantage over other shapes (Steadman 2006: 127).

While circular and other non-orthogonal shapes may be suited to single-room structures in free-standing situations, they are difficult to join together without creating all sorts of awkward left-over spaces, making them inconvenient for multi-cellular buildings and those aggregated together in groups. The archaeological evidence is that while single-room circular buildings are common in nomadic cultures, as soon as societies become settled, their buildings tend to become rectangular. Traditional building forms like the *bories* of southern France or the *trulli* of southern Italy may be circular when isolated, but once they are aggregated together to make multi-cellular structures, the ground plans become square or rectangular. When non-orthogonal building forms persist, even in our own culture, they tend to be free-standing, single-room structures – most commonly either religious buildings, or kiosks and pavilions of various kinds. Although there have in recent years been many attempts by architects to break away from the predominant rectangularity of buildings, especially for cultural projects like art galleries and concert halls, careful examination shows that while one or two principal internal spaces may be non-orthogonal, all the subsidiary rooms in these buildings tend to be rectilinear: a good example is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, whose exterior suggests it to be totally irregular in plan, but this is not in fact the case, and only the principal gallery spaces are non-orthogonal. At a more modest level, Donnybrook Quarter, a prize-winning housing scheme in East London completed in 2006, designed by Peter Barber Architects, is characterized by trapezoid-shaped upper floors; however, the ground plans of most of the houses are rectangular, and the divergences occur only on the upper stories, where roof terraces between the units accommodate the irregularities within the overall grid. Departures from the rectangle in building are the exception, and generally take place within an overall arrangement that is still predominantly rectangular.

As well as being difficult to fit together, non-orthogonal spaces also present problems of use. As inhabitants of domes in the 1960s found to their cost, circular and trapezoidal rooms are inefficient when it comes to inhabitation and to the placing of furniture and other contents, most of which are orthogonal. Beds, cupboards, tables, fabrics, books, and paper all come in rectangles, partly, as Barthes observed in relation to Crusoe's difficulties with the wheelbarrow, because it is easier to make them in that shape, but also because they store better: the same advantages of packing apply. A non-orthogonal room invariably ends up with some unusable dead spaces. While slight departures from 90°

corners may not be noticeable, there is a point beyond which human perception recognizes the non-orthogonality of a space, and once a room is distinct as a trapezoid, difficulties will arise in the placing of furniture, unless it is specially made for the room – in which case, it cannot be moved elsewhere in the room, nor to another room, unless that room has identical angles. Rectangles may seem to signify a rule, and to be a constraint, but in reality the absence of rectangles turns out to be a great deal more restricting. At least in terms of building, rectangles have been not so much a constriction but more a liberation for how we live.

More compelling than his remarks about architectural deployments of the rectangle are Barthes's insights about the *frame*. The possibilities of the frame relative to the procedures of artistic and literary composition were to come out most clearly in Barthes's subsequent, and last, series of Collège de France lectures, *The Preparation of the Novel*. In the session of February 9, 1980, he cited Paul Valéry's distinction between two alternative artistic processes: "in the first, the work is answerable to a predetermined plan, in the second the artist fills in an *imaginary rectangle*" (Barthes 2011: 260). As a way of writing, it was this second procedure that most strongly appealed to Barthes, who described the rectangle as "a fantasized form of the book that is gradually *filled in* with spots of color, fragments, bits and pieces, like certain painters before a rectangle of canvas" (ibid: 261). Of the 'certain painters' that Barthes might have had in mind, the most likely candidate is Cy Twombly, about whom Barthes had written two essays in 1979, the year of the "How to Live Together" lectures. In one of these essays, "The Wisdom of Art," Barthes referred to the same passage from Valéry and described Twombly as a filler-in of rectangles, his fillings being of a scattered, porous kind that left a lot of space between the various marks, such that the interstices became as important as the marks that constituted the filling. For Barthes, this feature evoked both Oriental aesthetics, but also large, sparsely furnished rooms in Mediterranean houses, an image he again borrowed from Valéry. "Basically," Barthes wrote, "Twombly's canvases are big Mediterranean rooms, warm and luminous, with their elements lost in them." (1991b: 183)

Although Barthes's enumeration of the incidences of the rectangle as a frame is highly suggestive – books, rooms, paintings, comic strips – he says very little about the frames themselves, of what they are made, what determines their edges, their positioning, and so on. In Barthes's account, the frames are largely inert, and passive, pre-existing recipients of invention or action. The only exception is in his remarks about the framing of desire, of the necessity for desire to be directed by some kind of mental or perceptual frame – though again, we are left guessing as to what exactly constitutes such a frame, or how it comes about.

Something of what rectangles do in relation to their contents may be found by looking at works by two artists who each very deliberately drew rectangles, Kazimir Malevich, and, again, Cy Twombly. Malevich, having invented pure pictorial abstraction around 1915, went on to make several hundred small suprematist pencil drawings between 1917 and 1919, mostly drawn on squared paper from a drawing pad (Andersen 2011; Fer 2015). Around each of these drawings, of which there were sometimes more than one to a sheet, Malevich drew, freehand, a rectangular frame. This was a curious thing to do, and went against the expectations of the time: the radical act in drawing was to make the drawing expand beyond the confines of the paper, as if the edges did not exist. Ironically, having achieved the most extreme step in modern painting, Malevich chose to complete his sketches by reverting to an utterly conventional notion of drawing and re-instituting the frame around them. Why exactly he should have chosen to do this is not clear, but certain questions arise from the deliberateness of the act. One such is whether the four lines that he drew around each composition are to be seen as *part* of that composition, as might be implied by their being drawn with the same pencil as the compositions, and by the compatibility of the lines of the frame to the abstraction of the forms in the compositions, or whether they are *outside* the composition. Even though we do not know if Malevich intended there to be uncertainty about the lines of the frame being in the picture, or outside it, there is no getting away from this ambiguity. For the compositions, the consequences of drawing frames around them are momentous, for rather than being drawings that expand outward from the center of the page, as was usually the way with drawings, the frames compress them inward. And furthermore, the presence of the frames changes the relationship with the paper surface, which normally functions as both support and the ground of the composition; but here, the act of framing the compositions relieves the paper from being the ground of the composition, and instead projects them into some other space. For all these reasons, the frame in Malevich's drawings is an active component, and however one chooses to read the result, it sets up of all sorts of consequences. These frames are not *inert*.

Malevich's suprematist drawings are tiny, but the series of 22 drawings Cy Twombly produced in the summer of 1969, known as the Bolsena drawings, are huge, the larger ones 145 × 180 cm, the smaller ones 70 × 100 cm (Del Roscio 2014). Although the Bolsena drawings were not the subject of either of Barthes's essays on Twombly, some of Barthes's remarks apply equally well them – in particular their gestural quality, and the fact that while being very far from the 'instrumental' drawings of architects and engineers, absolved as they are of all technical or aesthetic function, they nonetheless manage to distill whatever it is that makes such drawings fascinating to look at (Barthes 1991a: 160, 169). Made up of scribbles, smudges, words, numbers, fingerprints, and tracings (around shells, and various circular and rectangular objects),

these drawings, apparently produced at great speed using pencil, felt-tip, and wax crayon, constitute an inventory of marks. What the marks represent does not really matter – though people's first impulse seems always to be to look for content. The overall effect is of *stuff* (Barthes's "flocculation") caught in suspension, sometimes drifting upward across the surface, sometimes drawn by gravity toward the bottom edge (in many of the drawings the upper half is virtually empty), but always in motion. The drawings capture moments in the endless movement of nebulae of stuff.

Rectangles are everywhere, sometimes as many as 18 on a single sheet. For such an un-geometric, even anti-geometric, artist, so many rectangles are a surprise, and make one wonder what they are doing there. Predominantly empty, they are just shapes, usually traced around an object (books, cigarette packets? – it doesn't matter) though occasionally drawn freehand. Compared to the tracings of shells, which are often heavily modulated and shaded, the rectangles are manifestly flat, and their two-dimensionality is emphasized by the pairs of numbers often written in or next to them, as if they were dimensions – though they are not, since the ratios do not correspond to the proportions of the rectangles. Sometimes diagonals are drawn across the rectangles, as beds and furniture are represented in architects' plans, and this too draws attention to the flatness of the shapes.

The firm, straight edges of the rectangles, traced around an object, contrast with the looseness of the scribbles and other marks, and their position on the paper provides an anchorage of sorts against the drift of the other stuff. If these are frames, what they 'frame' – in the sense of stabilizing material, and focusing attention – is not what lies within the boundaries of the rectangles (which are largely empty), but on the contrary, what lies outside their edges. This inversion of the normal function of the frame turns the frame into a thing, while making us look elsewhere for 'content.' On sheets of meaningless marks, the rectangles are the *least* meaningful of all: they positively repel signification, pushing attention onto every other scribble and smudge.

Why there are so many rectangles in the Bolsena drawings one can only speculate – but one thing is clear, that as a way of filling up these vast sheets of paper, rectangles are, of all geometric forms, the least intelligible. The paradox revealed by Twombly's drawings is that the rectangle, the most 'technical' of shapes, the one that prevails in the world of buildings and other human artefacts, is also the emptiest of signifiers.

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# RÈGLE/Rule

*Stian Grøgaard*

There are rules that order conduct and rules that order games, though no player feels he is acting in accordance with rules. Games mean forgetting oneself, while rules are always a reminder. *The Rules are No Game* is the title of a book by Anthony Wilden from 1987, and a quip with a life of its own. It says rules are neither at stake nor the end of the game. Rules and games do not share the same sense of humor. Wilden's title may make us believe that only rules are serious business – or at best, that they have no humor. In fact, it is the game that is serious, while following the rules is the pleasure of playing a game.

Games are rule-ordered variations of conduct with an open outcome in which rules are not at stake. Rules limit the game, and these limits persist when rules are broken. Rules give limits to meaning and provide the game with a possible space. Seen from the side of the player, the game expands without limits, the point being that the game and its rules never meet, not even when rules are broken. Admittedly, practicing a game may change its rules without risking the game's identity, with variations falling into a pattern that increase or decrease the interest taken in the game. One instance of such change is the offside rule in soccer, where small adjustments in recent decades to the rule and its interpretation have made the game more offensive and exciting.

At times, there may even be games for rulemaking and for which rule to apply, but the game of making rules is not the game to which the rules apply, neither are the rules changed while the game is still being played. Observing the political game that leads to the passing of laws confirms this point. A game for rules will always belong to another game. So, there are rules to the game of passing laws, laws that nonetheless are no game.

Games have both social and technological causes. Chess, for instance, is feudal, and soccer industrial. The reasons for each game are nevertheless immanent to the game. Any idea of a game already presents a set of rules. Game and rules are born simultaneously, and both give the other reasons to be the way they are. Rules secure a game from becoming a game for other games.

They delimit a world without end: the game lacks nothing. Seen from the side of the rule, it is incomprehensible how a game may make a world.

Wittgenstein termed the iterative speech acts of daily life language games, including acts where speech plays an almost negligible part. I'm not aware he was ever criticized for using 'game' for this practicing of correct grammar. Wittgenstein can hardly be taken to mean that an ordinary language user operates with a player's consciousness of enjoying a game. The mindset is different. Language is not at play in a language game: there are rules to remember, whereas during play there are rules to forget. Further, the outcome of language games will never change the rules the way the interpretation of offside may change in soccer. Rules are best observable from other games, or at the limits of ordinary language. Conversely, within each language game, rules, according to Wittgenstein, are followed blindly. This can be taken as an absolutism of the rule but may simply mean that rules are followed only when out of sight. Blindness is functional, and a precaution against any feeling that the rules are arbitrary. It seems correct to name grammatical rules both nonarbitrary and conventional: they do not express will or intent, nor are they part of a regime.

Rules are visible and out of sight. They are conditions for playing and for the sustainability of a game. In relation to a game they may be termed transcendental. This means they exist for the sake of the game; when existing for their own sake rules become transcendent, and no longer order a game. Grammar may be a liminal case. It does not feel correct to hold language games to be the reasons for an existing grammar.

For Nietzsche, grammar was pure transcendence. He termed grammar the "metaphysics of the people" and the ultimate proof of god's existence (1982: § 354). Since he did not expect grammar to make an exception for him, he had to refine the proof simply through the practice of his mother tongue. The sole release was many gods and a grammatical manifold called perspectivism: each god was but one perspective and one truth. Since no truth could testify to its own worth, it would be better with more truths than one. Monotheism was poor and never made life any greater. In *Anti-Christ* Nietzsche complains: Only one new god in 2000 years!

As stated, marking the relation of rule to 'game' is not done in order to provide rule with humor, but rather to challenge the opinion that rules have an origin outside the conduct they order. Indeed, there is no rule behind the rules of a game. This must have been the point with the term language game: more than a rule for what is allowed or not, grammar represents the limit of meaning.

Games go unmentioned in Barthes's lecture on "Règle," delivered on April 20, 1977. Starting from etymology, he chooses to tie *règle* to territory or domain,

finding support in Émile Benveniste's study on Indo-European languages. There is an etymological connection between rule, dominion, and enclosure. The Greek word *orego* means extending a straight line. In Latin, *rex* signifies the person who marks out a consecrated space, while *regio* signifies "the point reached by following a straight line" (Barthes 2013: 116). Similarly, a *regula* is an instrument used by surveyors for keeping lines straight. These etymological examples all aim to qualify a territorial definition of rule. A territory is the "notion of critical distance governing the relations between individuals" (ibid: 117), which decreases in a state of danger, as with flocks of birds or shoals of fish. Rule is a custom that systematizes habits, Barthes says, an ethical act that makes daily life transparent.

The origins of *règle* or rule are found in custom, and the contribution of rule is to turn originary customs into a system. This shows the difference between rule and law, which in Barthes's account appears at a later stage and as an addition to custom. He presents law, also termed 'regulation,' both as the end of, and as logically opposed to, rule, and seems to do so with a certain unease. Breaking a rule never quite amounts to breaking the law, and to Barthes rule would suffice as a thing worth breaking. Taking monastic life as an example he describes the road to regulation or law in three steps:

First, the Church Fathers St. Basil, St. Augustine, St. Benedict, and St. Anthony all wanted monastery rules to appear in the guise of custom. Ideally, there should be no rules, "only customs" (ibid: 118), tacitly approving the traditional forms of life.

Second, rules are an instrument of control established and safeguarded by asceticism, which is a method for handling *orego*, the straight line. At this point another important concept in Barthes's lectures reappears, namely, *idiorrhythmy*. Etymologically, idiorrhythmy expresses the motions and the achievements of each person in particular (*idio*) and is a measure within every individual, unrelated to everyone else.

Third, monastery rules rely on custom and exert control through asceticism. At this third step, law is announced in the form of a contract with the novice of the monastery, revealing regulation as an already established repressive system. In Benedictine monasteries one was a novice for a year before taking the vows and receiving safety in exchange for obedience. The transition from custom to law is gradual and undramatic, before being finalized in a signed contract.

The institution of the monastery is less the origin of law than an ideal instance of how law develops from a formal set of rules. It is striking how the opposition between rule and law is the final stage in a continuous radicalization of rules into an instrument of control. Obviously, Barthes was confident he could generalize the relation between rules and regulations from this specific example.

Throughout his lectures he refers to Palladius's narration from 419-420 on the eremites of Egypt, the Christian mainland at the time. The early history of the Church provided a string of rules for ritual conduct, and these rituals became the exit from deep theological controversies, not the least the one raging over the divine trinity. In the second century, Ireneus of Lyon had put in writing the rules of faith, *regula fidei*, where faith became defined by its opposition to the Gnostics. Of all these rules, the ones concerning monasteries were the most earthly and flexible. The more particular a particular rule, the greater was the distance from its foundational dogma.

This opposition between rule and law conceals a process from symmetry to asymmetry, from horizontal to vertical, from the agreed rules for equals to authoritarian law. Barthes includes grammar in the final outcome of basic needs in a given territory, and needs develop from habit to rule to contract to regulation, that is, the institution of law. When the Church Fathers wanted monastery rules to appear as customs, it was in order to avoid exposing the subject behind the law, for any such subject would immediately demand justification. With the written contract, an irreparable breach occurs, and a possible punishment. The monastic contracts anticipate the statutes for boarding schools, factories, and military camps. There is a bent toward law that is ideological by necessity, explained by the fact that law, before anything else, is the ideological expression of power.

In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), the boys stranded on a deserted island soon learn they are their own masters, and a string of rules are immediately announced. Although in this instance no original custom is mobilized, the rules are a system of habits that turn an extreme situation into a transparent form of everyday life. It becomes idiorrhythmic in its adherence to a particular community of equals. Every pack has its idiorrhythm, while the law has none. This fact anticipates a decisive difference between rule and law. The law is written, tightly connected to sin and guilt even before being broken. In fact, the law provokes or produces the breach, while rules for their part are just broken and will continuously be broken.

Barthes refers to two expressions from Brecht that highlight Brecht the anarchist: "under the rule, discover the abuse," and "the Grand Custom" (Barthes 2013: 120). For the anarchist, every habit is unwarranted. Furthermore, no anarchist is prone to separate rule from law. Any group will establish a 'grand custom,' and over time all rules succumb to abuse. In another example, from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), Zosima recommends the pious Aliocha to get to know the world, although it violates Orthodox custom to recommend the world to someone shown to be suited for monastic life. Zosima raises his solitary voice, choosing to obey mystical experience before established custom.

The task Barthes sets for himself is to establish a rule that is exempt from the inevitable process of law, when through the intermediary of writing it bestows on others an order that by necessity must be broken. The Marquis de Sade bases himself on the opposition between rules and regulation as being between a horizontal (symmetric) and a vertical (asymmetric) order. In his case, there are exceptions to the law in an agreement between gentlemen, in sharp contrast to the merciless written regulation of the victim. The agreement is a source of aristocratic pleasure placed above the suffering prescribed by law. Brecht belongs to the unfortunate side of de Sade, recognizing the law in any rule, no matter if it is already an established custom.

A society in want of laws develops rules for everything. The law for its part encrypts a social power that lets it appear as though there is no power, only each and every individual under the law. By ridding himself of law (regulation) and punishment, Barthes wishes to avoid an institution of power based on the obvious difference in sanctions between breaking the law and breaking the rules. This difference is perhaps not so obvious. Sooner or later a law is sanctioned, if not already in place. An alternative point of view would prefer simple law to rules intervening in daily life, in the name of transparency. This alternative would be the discretionary justice enforced in 19th-century Texas by Judge Roy Bean, the self-styled 'Law West of the Pecos' known from dime novels and Hollywood movies: under the iron fist of liberalism, and at Bean's whim, everything is allowed that does not immediately lead to the gallows.

Custom is cut with some slack. There may nonetheless be instances in traditional communities where breaking unwritten rules has consequences far exceeding the punishment for breaking the law. The difference between rule and law remains important no matter their interconnection, and yet it is a misrepresentation to reduce custom to a voluntary agreement between equals. Through the agreement, some will always be able to distinguish themselves as more equal than others.

In the idiomatic expression 'rules and regulations,' the conjunction 'and' conceals both the asymmetry between those issuing the law and those on whom law is enforced, and the symmetry in an agreement based on custom. In Barthes's simple choice, the question remains whether custom will have to become law, or whether an unwritten agreement is still possible that does not enforce the law on nearly everyone else.

Resorting to etymology in order to determine the notion of rule territorially may not accomplish much. Etymological origin will never reach the order of grammar, and it suggests an altogether different take on what can be done and what remains involuntary. The origin of a word or of an expression often assumes the form of destiny, which makes no sense to grammar. For Barthes, grammar is explained by needs arising within a territory, and by these needs

moving from habit to rule to contract to law. In a final stage, rule transcends its territory to become law. Transcendence carries little interest for Barthes when compared to the rule-producing flock. Wittgenstein would have recognized transcendence in following a rule blindly. For him, grammar relies less on habit than on practice and actual use. Rules determined by territory presuppose similar subjects, flocks respecting the 'critical distance' between individuals. Language games work in the opposite direction: they allow for similarity in variable forms of life, where language games fill the role of the invariable.

Like St. Benedict, Barthes wants the issuing of rules to be as involuntary as customs coming out of a past beyond memory. His presentation of law as regulation may seem narrow or biased, excluding any possibility of asymmetrical relations that are not vertical. This bias extends to unwritten rules, concluding presumptively that rules are preferable to regulation, lots of rules, rules for everything. The counterpoint to Barthes's bias toward rule would be a preference for simple axiomatic law, few rules and regulations, and no minute interventions in the practice of everyday life. Such an axiomatic law is characteristic of liberalism and a recognizable premise in Franz Kafka's well-known tale *Before the Law*.

From the adverse side of Barthes's rule for individuals in a pack, Derrida reads *Before the Law* as a tale of each and every one under the law (Derrida 1992: 181-82). The tale extends the idiom of standing before the law to a situation of standing before an open door leading to the interior of the law. Kafka is playing on dead metaphor and this play frames the narrative, a point missed in Derrida's interpretation. Metaphor comes to life when the law equals a door that is not quite closed: the door becomes the law as fetish, and passing through the door becomes a promise of acquittal. The fetish does its work surreptitiously, hidden or tongue in cheek. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, subreption means confounding the concept of a thing, based on determinate, objective characteristics in perception, with an idea, which in Kant's world signifies a rule for conduct, an imaginary focus toward which action is directed. When this rule disappears into an object, the latter turns expressive, making a door the focus of a narrative that moves with the paranoid logic of a dream. The fetish is not simply metaphor, it is dead metaphor returned to literalness, surreptitiously changing a rule that orders conduct into a concept that determines an object.

In Kafka the law has a face and is represented by particular persons. A common concern in the commentary literature on Kafka is the inhumanity of bureaucracy and regimes of legality. In fact, the face of law may be taken as an indication of the opposite. Law and the apparatus enforcing the law will never be sufficiently impersonal, as long as everything surrounding the law becomes part of its command center. A vain representative of the law is always prepared to correct a mistake, seeking legal revenge on someone who will never learn the reason for being indicted.

Derrida's point of departure is that there can be no story to the law. As he epigrammatically states, the "story of prohibition is a prohibited story" (1992: 200). In any case, prohibition is uncalled for since no story gives the law any reason to be. The story will have to pause at an open door and be content with the fetish. Derrida refers to *Totem and Taboo* (1913), where Freud indulges in a speculation on a possible prehistory of the law, beginning with the prohibition against incest. This is a far cry from the unprohibited story of the law in the Old Testament, where ten commandments written in stone were handed over to Moses on Mount Sinai as a revelation to the representative of a chosen tribe. The commandments themselves had no story. In Freud's version, the law originated with the insurrection against the dominant male, killing him and distributing guilt to every member of the tribe. This resulted in an agreement between equals, a social contract, to prohibit incest and name a totem animal both covering up and commemorating the crime. This would be the origin of the law handed over to Moses on two tablets and still hiding behind the door in Kafka's *Before the Law*.

In his speculation, Freud restated the reasons for the law through a story of a peculiar kind, confirmed by its very nonacceptability. The law covers up a crime, and it is possible to trace what kind of crime in the things that the law prohibits. Hence, an open chain of causes for the law is exchanged for a closed chain of reasons for the law. In covering up a crime, the law turns into fetish. The problem is that there would be no crime unless a law is broken. Law must already be at work in the story of how it came about. An obscure origin or ground has turned into familiar existence, in the same manner that the king in chess becomes the logic of his moves. Rules ordering these moves are recognized in the royal appearance of a wooden piece. One may speculate whether recourse to fetish may cover needs in the pack to shorten the reaction span in times of danger, expressing territory in the manner of Barthes's etymological definition of rule.

The tale of the murdered father is as impossible to accept as to discard. Derrida terms it a phantasm and a Kantian 'as if,' a metaphor or a symbolic paraphrase, giving the opportunity to pretend, that is, to commit a fiction. By insisting that there is a story behind the law, Derrida concludes, in accordance with Freud, that the validity of the law owes everything to displacement. There are reasons for validity, and they displace the story laying out the causes of the law (the crime). There is a story behind all good reasons, and then they are no longer quite as good. No sound speculation would share such concerns, far less accept dividing cause from reason or 'because.' In his lectures on aesthetics from 1936, Wittgenstein presents the substitution of causes for reasons as confounding physics with logic. The expression "logic cannot bend" recasts logic as an exceptionally uncompliant material (1989: 13-14). Such is the material fetishes are made of.

When presenting the origin of law in the form of a story, Freud forgot it took law to record a crime. The only crime in Kafka's tale is the tale itself. To imagine law as a door open to the one who dares to step inside already entails having a story to tell.

At the end of Barthes's division between rule and regulation, there is a different story that has no need of an original crime. This may explain why the story is easy to accept. All it takes is for needs to move from custom to agreement to rules of control and, lastly, to written regulation, where law appears as an appendix to asceticism. Barthes offers something close to a sociological theory of differentiation. Although rule and law are opposites, there is a story from the one to the other ending with rules put to writ: from horizontal and symmetrical to vertical and asymmetrical, from the agreement between individuals within a flock – which was no matter of course – to an individualizing law that, due to its sadism, becomes only all too human. For both Freud and Derrida, law is never human. A story of prohibition covering up for crime will give the law different reasons from the ones it needs.

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# SALETÉ/Dirtiness

*Thomas Hylland Eriksen*

Few human phenomena seem less amenable to idiorrhythmic practices than human cleanliness. Robinson Crusoe could easily decide for himself when and how he would clean himself, since he lived in splendid isolation on his tropical island, but it transpires from Defoe's account that Crusoe closely followed the British hygienic norms of the day in his exile. Those norms had been incorporated in him before leaving England. In his reading of Gide's *La séquestrée de Poitiers*, Barthes notices that the stench in Mélanie's room is of such intensity that the doctors allow visitors to smoke in the room, in a bid to mitigate a feeling of unpleasantness presumably shared by everyone who enters her room. Mélanie has been enclosed in the room, surrounded or literally embedded in her own bodily discharges, and she continues to evacuate her bodily waste in her bed long after having been moved into a more sanitary and caring environment.

Hygiene is usually synchronized and standardized, but it is also often implicit and undercommunicated. It is one of these social practices about which one might say, at least after potty training has been completed, that 'it goes without saying because it comes without saying.' Conversely, one of the most memorable commercials from my adolescence depicts a couple sitting next to each other in a car, where she turns toward him and says: "Take a look in the glove compartment, darling!" He opens it and finds, if memory does not deceive me, a tube of toothpaste. A deep, masculine voiceover concludes: "You should be grateful if someone tells you that you have bad breath."

The lack of conventional cleanliness is a key symbol in the cult of naturalness characteristic of hippies and other countercultural groups, which Barthes also mentions. Neglecting common hygienic practices can be an exceptionally efficient way of turning one's back on mainstream society. A few years ago, there was a much-publicized conflict at the University of Oslo, involving a postgraduate student who was refused the right to take an exam because of his overwhelming odor. Known simply as 'The Caveman,' he was a large man in a brownish cloak, his face hidden behind massive amounts of unruly hair

and a bushy beard. He lived in a kind of homemade tent, or nest if one prefers, behind the metro station just below the campus. As far as I remember, legal experts supported him, and in the end, he was allowed to take his exam in astrophysics. But the outrage was considerable. Why couldn't he just do what everybody else did?

If it makes sense to say that Robinson's sidekick Friday, a convert to Christianity and a strict work ethic, is a *drop-in*, one may certainly say that self-consciously filthy and unkempt people are the very archetypes of the *drop-out*. The structuralist Barthes sees this kind of inversion in several places, not least among monks who are so spiritually inclined that they have ceased to wash themselves. Indian sadhus have long followed a similar path, and they have a distinct advantage in being blessed with a climate enabling them to spend most of their time outside. Besides, the smells of Indian towns and cities are so rich and pungent that people passing sadhus on the street may not even take exception to their olfactory deviance.

Barthes does not mention Mary Douglas, but he might well have done so. Her book *Purity and Danger* (1966), published in English more than a decade before the Paris lectures, is an unusually original and consistent study of boundary creation and social integration, using the body and its secretions as the pivotal point. Douglas's perspective, which she continued to develop until her death in 2007, connected French structuralism with British structural-functionalism. She regarded symbols and the social order not as two distinct aspects but as two sides of the same coin. It was Douglas, the Miss Marple of social anthropology, who taught us to speak of dirt as *matter out of place* both in a literal and metaphorical sense. (The formulation, often attributed to Douglas, was actually borrowed from the Scottish poet Robert W. Service.) It is not the case that anything is in itself dirt, or rubbish, she argues in *Purity and Danger*; it depends on the context. Following this reflection, she illustrates it with the famous example involving a human hair, pretty on the head but disgusting in a bowl of soup. It cannot be ruled out entirely that John Cleese or Michael Palin, who would later cofound Monty Python, had been exposed to some of Douglas's ideas while at university, as her influence at the time was considerable and interdisciplinary. The fact, in any case, is that Monty Python would subsequently record a TV sketch where He and She are seated in an Italian restaurant looking tenderly at each other. The music is languorous as in *Lady and the Tramp*, the candles flicker, and the corpulent bottle of Chianti is wrapped in straw, as was the custom during the faraway 1970s. It transpires that He has something important to tell Her, but he is shy and cannot get the job done. The situation, moreover, does not exactly improve from him having a thread of spaghetti (a spaghetto) glued to his cheek, and it moves around his face as he writhes in his chair, trying to get started on his task. Of course, he comes across as a comical figure, reminding me of how one of my teachers

in social anthropology, the Zen master Harald Eidheim (1925-2012), defined humor simply as 'wrong contextualization.' You could have said the same about dirt. Dirt is wrong contextualization.

Dirt is gendered, something Barthes doesn't bother to remark upon. Everybody produces dirt, but it is still mainly  women who remove it indoors, even in societies that may otherwise see themselves as gender-equal. On the whole, women are in charge of the domestic sphere, while men are out conquering the world. Outdoors, men often remove dirt; they sweep the courtyard and work as night soil men. In a detailed 19th-century analysis of the 'state of cleanliness' in rural Norway, the country's greatest ethnographer and the founder of Norwegian ethnology, Eilert Sundt (1817-75), described the relationship between the cleanliness of men and women, respectively. In his study from 1868, Sundt – also one of the world's first sociologists – writes about how "women, on Saturdays, lay down on their knees, washing and scrubbing the floor of their front room, and how the men, as soon as the Sunday holiday was over, without the slightest consideration, spat across [the floor] and made it ugly again."[1]

In some places, human feces have been treated in a rather cavalier way, seen from a contemporary perspective. In his study on cleanliness, the otherwise nuanced Sundt cannot conceal his contempt at the fact that smallholders in rural Norway often do not even have an outhouse. He writes that

ordinary farms did not have the 'little house' or 'small house' we are speaking of here; it was only to be seen in the few farms belonging to civil servants or traders, and at coach stations, in all less than ten places in a village of five or six thousand people.

It was as if I had discovered a missing link in the chain. Otherwise, I saw among our common folk so many signs of good sense and consideration, of diligence and a progressive spirit; but in this case, I searched in vain for a similar good spirit.

There was here, I thought, a breach of all reasonableness and decency. Modesty would necessarily be weakened, health might suffer, even agriculture might lose profitable assets by not collecting the manure. But all these moral, sanitary, and economic aspects put together did not make such an impression on me as the very sight (dare I speak of it?) when a human being went behind a wall – and then the goats followed, waiting for an opportunity to lick up and eat that which fell to the ground!

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**1** | "[...] hvorledes kvinderne om lørdagen lagde sig på knæ og vaskede og skurede sit stuegulv, og hvorledes mændene, såsnart søndagshelgen var over, uden tanke om barmhjærtighed spyttede udover og gjorde stygt igjen." (Sundt 1869) My translation into English.

And my incomplete observation chimes with what I now read in a written dispatch from the same village, namely, that the peasants themselves deliberately avoid building common outhouses, although they would in this way be able to collect more manure, and this is considered if not the best, at least among the best fertilizing materials.[2]

Excrement, in other words, could be seen as manure. It was doubtless useful, but it continued to be unclean. The night soil men roaming European towns and cities from the Middle Ages until the late 19th century, sometimes even later, were never fully integrated in society. Like executioners and graveyard diggers, they were located to the margins of society, at the boundary between the inside and the outside. They typically lived outside the city walls, in areas where it was also common for butchers to carry out their work.

For centuries, night soil men were a problematic professional group in various European societies. These workers were necessary but dangerous. They emptied people's toilets and removed dead animals. Someone, clearly, had to do the job. At the same time, it was dangerous to enter into close contact with the families of these men, since their impurity could be contagious. It was often difficult for them to find godparents for their children. If anything, they were a full-fledged low caste.

Human excrement is a special kind of waste. Not only is it universal – all peoples have their ways of handling it – but it can also easily be converted into something useful, namely, manure. This has been done in many societies at different times. As early as the 1860s, the city of Berlin had developed a sewage system that, in a discreet and subterranean way, ensured that much of the pee

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**2** | "[...] almindelige bondegårde manglede det 'lille-hus' eller 'vesle-hus', som her tales om; det var kun at se på de få embeds- og bestillingsmænds gårde samt ved skydsstationer, ialt på ikke så mange som ti steder i en bygd på 5-6000 mennesker.

Det var som et hul i kjæden, jeg opdagede her. Ellers så jeg blandt vore almuer så mange tegn på forstandighed og omhu, på flid og fremskridtssind; men i dette stykke søgte jeg forgjæves efter lignelse til sands og tanke.

Her var, syntes jeg, et brud på al rimelighed og velanstændighed. Blufærdigheden måtte jo sløves, helbreden kunde lide, selv landbruget tabte jo formedelst forsømmelighed i at samle gjødningsemnerne. Men disse moralske, sanitære og økonomiske hensyn tilsammen gjorde endda ikke sådant indtryk som selve synet, dette (tør jeg fortælle?), at når et menneske gik hen bag en væg, så – kom gjederne efter og stod og ventede for at slikke og æde det, som faldt!

Og med denne min ufuldkomne iagttagelse stemmer det, jeg nu læser i en skriftlig meddelelse fra samme bygd, nemlig at selv bønderne tildels forsætlig lade være at bygge sig almindelige aflukker, såsom de på hin måde kunde samle mere gjødsel, og denne ansees for at være om ikke det bedste, så dog blandt de bedste gjødningsstoffe." (Sundt 1869) My translation into English.

and poop from the city ended in the surrounding fields; and in *A History of Shit*, Dominique Laporte (2000) describes how attitudes to excrement as manure has shifted through history. Its practical utility has never been contested, but nearly everywhere, there is a cultural discomfort associated with it. In 18th-century Christiania (modern-day Oslo), for example, some city people ensured that their own excrement should be mixed with animal manure, which apparently made it easier to sell the stuff to farmers (Torstenson 1997).

In many countries, comprehensive educational campaigns and striking slogans are employed to wash away the impurity and low-caste stigma still associated with the business of renovation. Among the most recent bids are campaigns seeking to redefine waste management as an advanced ecological practice, but as early as 1895, the visionary American colonel George Waring, a pioneer of modern renovation, ensured that his army of muscular, diligent trashmen should wear easily recognizable, white uniforms. His wife, who knew more than the colonel about laundry, saw his idea as pure madness, but Waring knew what he was doing. In New York, and later in other cities, renovation workers were now associated with cleanliness and efficiency, not filth and disease, as their new uniforms made them appear as the extended arm of the health service. Their wives had no easy task scrubbing the uniforms on Saturday, but their spouses received their reward in the guise of an unequivocal destigmatization. Filth and cleanliness are, and remain, shaped by societal values and practices. Unless you are a caveman or a sadhu, what the neighbor has to say matters.

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According to the epigraph of the late Brian Aldiss's magisterial novel *The Malacia Tapestry* (1978), civilization is tantamount to the distance man has placed between himself and his excrement. Notwithstanding the gender bias, the epigraph is well said, but is it well thought? According to Mary Douglas, the answer is undoubtedly yes. Barthes would resist the question and insist on rephrasing it. To Douglas, the Durkheimian, the collective has primacy; to Barthes, each individual has his or her own excrement and their own way of dealing with it.

An ecophilosophical perspective would not make a dent in Barthes's stubborn individualism, but it would lead to a different result from Aldiss and Douglas. The young philosopher Tanu Biswas (2014) has analyzed the contrast between the Western view of excrement and the values and practices typical of Ladakh, 'Little Tibet,' a mountainous area in northwestern India that is mainly populated by Tibetan Buddhists. Their relationship to pee and poop is neither holy nor tabooed but quite mundane.

Biswas draws the exact opposite conclusion to the fictional author of Aldiss's epigraph. In her analysis, which is indebted to Heidegger's late writings on technology, the water closet is alienating and ultimately dehumanizing because it creates an illusion of distance to the ecological connections we by necessity partake in. Through their simple functionality, the toilets in Ladakh are reminiscent of a kind of composting toilet that has become popular among cabin owners in the West. These toilets have four chambers, and with limited use, it takes about a year to fill one. One chamber is emptied every year; in other words, the excrement and toilet paper are four years old upon removal, dry and free of unpleasant smells. I have several years' experience with these toilets myself, and have often thought about both Brian Aldiss and Mary Douglas when gleefully considering the civilizational leap forward it entails to be able to grow tomatoes in your own shit.

The latrines of Ladakh are brick structures reminiscent of chimneys, with a lid at the bottom. When people have finished their business on top of the chimney, they cover their excrement with a layer of soil (bark could also be used) in order to increase the speed of composting and the quality of the soil that slowly forms below. Biswas speaks of Western water closets as repulsive because they forcibly remove humans from their natural ecological circuits, while the Ladakh latrines do not establish any alienating filter between people and what they produce, but seamlessly integrate human discharges into the ecology. The idea is simple, and one does not have to travel to Himalaya to find these practices. Even in Western Europe, the stuff of latrines has been used as manure, as in the aforementioned examples from Berlina and Christiania.

There can be no doubt that it would have been more rational to use excrement as manure than discharging it into the oceans, a practice that has become ever more inconvenient and expensive owing to the need for sophisticated sewage plants. As early as 1858, the English realized that the water closet had released forces they had not anticipated. It was the year of the Great Stink, when an exceptionally hot summer, combined with massive use of the recently popular water closets, created a stench emanating from the Thames of such intensity that parliamentary debates had to be interrupted. At that point, politicians reacted and started a long period of chemical warfare – lime, carbolic acid – against an environmental problem they themselves had contributed to, both at a macro-level through legislation and at a micro-level merely by peeing and pooping and pulling the string.

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What some are willing to pay for, others are willing to pay to avoid. These days, we Western Europeans pay taxes not to have to think about our physical waste products; in a not too distant past, others would have paid us a shilling

or two for them. This is not about structuralist inversion, but about the shifting boundaries between purity and pollution. It may well be that these boundaries will soon shift back, if we for environmental reasons insist on transforming the shit to gold, waste to value. What will then constitute impurity, if waste of all kinds – even human excrement – is to be recycled and transformed to value? My hunch is that a whiff of impurity will always hover over piss and shit. Among the Nuer, a nomadic people in South Sudan – these days heavily involved in the country's earnest attempt to tear itself apart – it has traditionally been assumed that grown, circumcised men did not go to the toilet. They were dry and strong, unlike the wet and weak children and women. And the truth is that you generally follow calls of nature in splendid isolation, perhaps not idiorrhythmically, but nevertheless in solitude. In the ongoing media debate about surveillance and personal integrity, it has been argued that honest people have nothing to hide. To this view it has been objected that although everybody goes to the toilet, most of us prefer not to be watched by our neighbors while doing so. One cannot deny that this is, empirically, a convincing view, and that Mary Douglas is right. Barthes invokes the Marquis de Sade, and rightly so, as the marquis was an underrated thinker who understood that attraction to that which others saw as repulsive was a radical and subversive impulse, and thus a naturally revolutionary attitude. De Sade would immediately have understood the rationale behind the alternative hygienic standards of the hippies and their affection for bodily hair and the smell of sweat. But precisely since the Sadean attraction to dirty linen is subversive, it confirms the commonly shared values of the day and its social boundaries as efficiently as Satanism confirms Christianity.

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# UTOPIE/Utopia

*Tereza Kuldova*

## 1

Roland Barthes might have drawn us into his ideal fantasy spaces of harmonious, conflict-free, and power-free cohabitation, but eventually, in line with his resistance to sharp concepts and his love of fragmentary thinking, he admits that, contrary to his originally stated intent, he can't actually construct "a utopia of idiorrhythmic Living-Together" before our very eyes (Barthes 2013: 130). To the reader, this 'failure' does not come as a surprise; it inevitably follows from Barthes's anti-dogmatic and anti-systematic 'anti-method.' Another trouble in formulating a utopia of living together is that such a project demands a deeper engagement with collectivities. But Barthes's explorations are animated by solitariness and the pleasure of the individual rather than togetherness, even when he searches for ways to combine solitude and togetherness and even when opposing atomistic individualism. Barthes circles around the individual's desire for relative solitude, for living in a secluded harmonious environment marked by mutual respect for individual rhythms of the others, where all maintain the right critical and affective distance without power and hierarchy getting in the way. Paradoxically – considering the title *How to Live Together* – any larger shared commonality and sociality notoriously escapes Barthes's visions; his ideal 'community' should not exceed ten individuals. But even such a small group often develops internal power struggles. In the end, only literature presents itself as a "successful idiorrhythmy, as the harmony to come between a writer's solitude and the community of his readers" (Coste 2013: xxvi). Thus, any larger socio-political possibilities of an idiorrhythmic utopian fantasy remain untouched, perhaps symptomatic of our current era of "the disappearance of utopia from Western societies" (Pfaller 2014b: 12), which the book perhaps unintentionally anticipated. And yet, Barthes leaves us with an underlying ethics of tact and distance as a guiding principle toward a 'utopianesque,' harmonious life, a life alone and yet together. The notion of 'tact' is significant here. For Barthes, tact amounts to a

distance and respect, a relation that's in no way oppressive but at the same time where there's a real warmth of feeling. Its principle would be: not to direct the other, other people, not to manipulate them, to actively renounce images (the images we have of each other), to avoid anything that might feed the imaginary of the relation = Utopia in the strict sense, because a form of Sovereign Good. (2013: 132)

Tact serves to eliminate power, disrhythmy, and conflict in favor of harmony, homeostasis, and individual flourishing. Hence, even though this leaves unanswered the core question, as identified by Conte, of "what distance must I maintain between myself and others if we are to together construct a sociability without alienation, a solitude without exile" (Conte 2013: xxv), perhaps the ethical point here is to keep asking the question while acting in the world. The question remains unanswered also because Barthes's fantasy does not fall into the category of utopias of 'construction,' such as of ideal social structures that incorporate hope for better futures. Instead, it falls into the category of utopias of 'wish-fulfillment' – and wishes, as Fredric Jameson (2004) remarked when contemplating this distinction, are notoriously hard to successfully fantasize. As a social anthropologist, what interests me is not utopian literary narratives per se but rather utopian life and the power of utopian narratives over life: How do utopianesque fantasies translate into practice and intersect with the real? Where do utopian myths come from, and toward what futures are they pushing us? Or can such myths be a sign of the loss of future? Instead of a novelistic vignette, I will therefore provide an ethnographic one from Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh in North India, a city dominated by the myth of its golden past, one that evokes Barthes's fantasy of idiorrhythmic life.

## 2

If there ever was a place where tact was cherished, communal harmony elevated to a social imperative, and respect for individual idiosyncrasies fostered as an inherent part of etiquette, it was Lucknow.[1] Or at least, that is what the dominant myth of its golden age during the reign of the Shia Nawabs of Awadh (1775-1856) would make us believe. During this short-lived, historically marginal but symbolically central era, Lucknow was the richest, most magnificent, luxurious, and cosmopolitan Indian city of its times (Llewellyn-Jones 1985; Ramusack 1995; Trivedi 2010); synonymous with cultural refinement, the city

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**1** |  In the context of South Asian studies, the word 'communal' usually connotes an extreme form of group exclusivity that is associated with the practices of discrimination and violence, hence the talk of 'communal riots' and so on (Hindu-Muslim conflicts are most frequently implied thereby, but other communities can be implied as well).

was referred to as the Venice of the Orient, Shiraz-i-Hind, or the Constantinople of India. Even today, the Nawabs are still passionately remembered for their patronage of arts and crafts, indulgence in refined poetry, beautiful courtesans, delicate cuisine, seductive fashion, elaborate etiquette, marvelous architecture, and spectacular festivals, for their pastimes such as dance performances, kite-flying, and cock-fighting, and for their valorization of leisure and relaxation (Mangalik 2003; Sharar 2005; Oldenburg 2006, 2007; Gude 2010; Markel/Gude 2010; Trivedi 2010; Kuldova 2016a). Most importantly, the Nawabs are remembered for fostering a culture of communal peace (Aziz 2007). True or not, this myth of communal harmony, of so-called *Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb*,[2] of politeness in language and manners, mutual respect, etiquette, and elevated culture is still kept alive both in a form of a local social utopia and of a strong place identity. This myth still has residual power to structure social life in the city – even when increasingly under threat from divisive market and political forces. The most fascinating thing about Lucknow is that it has, ever since its golden era, "remained an island of peace and sanity" (Graff et al. 2006: 11) while lying at the heart of an area repetitively stricken by communal violence. Even though the city experienced rapid cultural and economic decline following turbulent events of the Indian Rebellion and the Siege of Lucknow in 1857, it still managed to retain its idealism regarding communal harmony. Like a utopian island in the sea of chaos and conflict, it maintained its peace even throughout the violent Hindu-Muslim riots in the 1920s and the Partition of India in 1947. It even maintained its peace during the famous demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992 by Hindu nationalists in nearby Ayodhya that sparked massive violence across the whole region. When I first arrived in Lucknow in 2008, I wanted to know what made this place resist communal disrhythmy for so long. While most academics were asking why communal conflicts arise, I wanted to know why a place at the heart of an area repetitively hit by conflicts remained peaceful. The answers were complex, a synergy of different factors ranging from local history and the influence of Shia Islam to material relations of production and socio-economic structures (Varshney 1997, 2002; Kuldova 2009, 2016b). Moreover, the local craft cottage industries, relying on networks of co-operation and 'weak ties' (Granovetter 1973) cutting across the divisions of class, caste, religion, gender, and locality, created an economic bridge and interdependency preventing violent outbursts. The key to making sense of this Indian case vis-à-vis Barthes is to understand that

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**2** | *Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb* ('Ganges-Yamuna culture') refers to the culture of the region surrounding the meeting point of the rivers Ganges and Yamuna, with its historical center in Awadh, and reflects the smooth fusion of Hindu and Muslim cultural elements in that area, of which Lucknow was the foremost center with the Nawabs of Awadh, rulers of Persian origin and Shia Muslims, as the foremost proponents.

all these material relations are integrated in the idealized image of Lucknow as the secular city of harmony, tact, etiquette, luxury, and material, ethical, and cultural refinement, as a city refined and polite enough not to indulge in disrhythmy (Kuldova 2016a). Some argued that this over-refinement and lazy and unproductive (profoundly anti-capitalist) attitude to life was precisely its downfall, while others believe that it was its greatest strength. The excess of etiquette ascribed to this era is well captured in a popular local saying, *pehle aap karte karte train chhoot gayi*, which can be loosely translated as 'while giving the other the right of way, he missed the train.'

While this myth of the golden past – a utopian ideal of social organization – still has the power to partially structure the socio-economic relations in the city (cf. Kuldova 2009, 2016b), thereby creating a bridge between diverse communities after the economic liberalization of the 1990s, this myth has been increasingly commodified. The utopia of communal harmony and refinement has become the core of the 'Lucknow brand' with which local products, such as the fashionable *chikan* embroidery popular on Indian catwalks, are strategically infused. The social utopia of secular communal harmony, of peaceful cohabitation of diverse communities, sects, individuals, and renouncers, has also been popular with post-independence secular nationalists who praise composite culture and posit it as a noble blending of diverse cultural and religious elements into a single national whole (Upadhyaya 1992). Again, this form of secular nationalism is today also heavily commodified, for sale to the politically correct – at least in appearances – urban middle and upper classes. While Lucknow is a nostalgic symbol of this 'inclusive' nationalism, this vision at the same time competes with the currently predominant and equally commodified right-wing Hindu nationalism centered on 'exclusion,' and with its commercial utopias of a bombastic future of sterile hyper-modern smart cities, speed trains, and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) designed for first-class citizens (Kuldova 2014). As an example of this, we can take the luxury fashion produced in Lucknow, which serves the elites as a symbol of their preferred type of nationalism but also of their morality and goodwill. And yet this adornment in symbols of a desirable social utopia has little to do with the elite's actions and their often socially and economically divisive (corporate) politics (Kuldova 2014, 2016b). Constraining of the social utopia within the 'essence' of the branded commodity, believed to transmit onto the owner, precisely restricts its potential; it closes down its possibilities and transforms it into a banal 'next hot thing in town.' The more a social utopia is commodified, the less capable it is of structuring actual social relations within the city. In practical terms, the social utopia is robbed of its power by market pressures, corporate and international capital, neoliberal policies, and the rise of divisive politics and 'muscular' Hindu nationalism (Kuldova 2015), all of which transform it

into an inconsequential personal status symbol. An idea of inclusion, in the golden days open to all, is sold today 'freely' in the market, though in practice affordable to few. Within the marketplace, the utopian idea of inclusion and communal idiorrhythmy is turned into a privatized feel-good practice of exclusion. As Frederic Jameson remarked, "the waning of the utopian idea is a fundamental political and historical symptom" (Jameson 2004: 36) and so is its commodification (Murtola 2010). As a result, the *actual place* governed by the local utopian ideals of harmony has been progressively shrinking. The legacy of the Nawabs is consciously kept alive only by few – regardless of its 'brand equity.' Progressively, the actually lived social utopia that once used to encompass the area of Awadh has turned into a *domestic utopia* strived for by relatively secluded and private clubs of aging middle-class intelligentsia and certain descendants of the Nawabs, who attempt to replicate the social utopia in miniature within their domestic spaces. These domestic spaces are truly 'utopianesque' in that they find themselves both within historical time and apart from it. This paradoxical relation between utopian visions (both past and present) and the pressures of the outside, of the 'neoliberal pollution' with all its disrhythmies, speaks also to Barthes's preoccupation with a domestic utopia and to his inability to formulate a social utopia around idiorrhythmy. Against the chaotic forces of market capitalism, some of the descendants of the Nawabs, who by now have lost most of their hereditary privileges, have shut themselves behind the thick walls of their mansions in an attempt to conserve the idealized golden age. They subsist solely on inherited wealth, slowly selling their property, land, and antiques, wasting it all away utterly unproductively. Others turned their mansions into heritage hotels in an attempt to sell the 'brand essence' of the 'Lucknow spirit,' but they won't interest us here.

# 3

In a gated mansion in the old city next to the river Gomti, which in the golden age used to supply the royal courts and landed gentry with cargos of European and Asian luxuries – such as the crystal chandeliers from Austria still hanging in this mansion – an elderly descendant of the Nawabs lives together with his wife, a family of 'servants,' and an unrelated *hijra* (transgender or third gender in South Asian context). The mansion is uninviting to strangers and protected from *the outside* by a locked gate. The ten inhabitants form a paradoxical and unique idiorrhythmic community, considering that at its core it is what at first sight appears to be a classical master-servant relation. But whereas master-servant relations in India are typically exploitative and even abusive (Frøystad 2003), none of that can be felt in this house. Since the Nawab's children moved to the United States some 20 years ago, where he never visits them,

the inhabitants have become a harmonious community, occasionally indulging in religious festivities and dance and poetry evenings. The servant family has been with the Nawab's family for more than 200 years, and all its members are well educated and could easily leave the mansion and get middle-class jobs, but they would not. They are as committed to the legacy and the social utopia as is the Nawab (rather than being loyal to the Nawab); this legacy has turned into a social contract that binds them together and is the cause of the continuation of the 'community' rather than being its origin. The 'servant' family consists of a grandmother, her son, her daughter-in-law, and the couple's three unmarried children, two sons in their 30s and a daughter in her late 20s. The daughter and one of the sons have university degrees (long-distance/correspondence). They all renounce participation in the society and economy outside the gates of the mansion; they do not intend to marry and prefer to spend time reading, dancing, writing poetry, kite-flying, and painting. The collectivity is, in the capitalist sense, fundamentally non-productive and non-reproductive, and they all live from the hereditary wealth of the Nawab's family. There is no attempt at renovating the decaying mansion. There are no children to be born, no investment in and imagination of future; economic and biological growth are renounced, wealth is wasted and never accumulated; the principle of life is renounced and with it also death itself. Precisely here the practice shares in Barthes's utopianesque fantasy and reveals why the formulation or construction of utopia beyond the individual 'wish-fulfillment' fails – it lacks future and hope, that is, the classical building blocks of a social utopia. Behind the gate to the right is the mansion of the Nawab and his wife, to the left an adjoining smaller mansion where the 'servants' live. If we disregard the difference in size, these spaces are a mirror image of each other. Barthes remarks that "the master-servant co-habitation produces a structure of reproduction, imitation, anamorphosis, duplication: the masters are reflected in their servants, but the image reflected back is a distorted one, a farcical image" (2013: 77). At first sight, this might appear so, but the relationship here is more complex, relating back to the vision of an ideal communal harmony. The houses might mirror each other in their organization, but the most important difference is that while the house of the Hindu 'servants' features a temple, the Shia Nawab's house features an *imambara*, that is, a room used especially during the celebrations of Muharram, open to all religions. The Hindu family replicates within this domestic utopia both the courts of the golden era and personifies 'the subjects' over whom the Nawabs used to rule. This arrangement speaks to the relation between an individual and a society and to the problem of being a recluse but still retaining a certain place within a larger whole while not turning into an outcast. Since the 'servants' act also as the Nawab's subjects, they maintain his position within a world that officially robbed him of his titles; in the process, they themselves acquire their 'social' place, in a mutual dependence. While

a good deal of energy goes into cultivating individual passions in solitude, there is also a clear vision of reproducing the idealized social order of this tiny kingdom. During the rule of Asaf-ud-Daulah, Wajid Ali Shah, and other Nawabs, Hindus held high positions at the court and in the military and finance departments and were given personal and religious freedom. Hindu saints and hermits that arrived in Awadh were given plots of land to build temples and *dharamshalas*; the Nawabs wrote plays and poetry on Hindu themes and celebrated diverse religious festivals together with the population. This legacy of harmony and respect is maintained within the gates of the household. Even within the bounds of the mansion, religious festivals are collectively observed, by all – be it Muharram or Holi. The Nawab writes poetry about characters from Mahabharata and the 'servant' daughter dances *mujras* and sings in Urdu. The individual rhythms of the residents are respected at all times; everyone's needs are covered by the servants, in an invisible and undisruptive manner. All know when to speak and when to be silent; nobody is instructed or ordered. While the money stems from the property of the 'ruler,' it is his wife and female servants who are responsible for most of daily purchases and for managing it, even when the market comes to the Nawab's mansion rather than anyone going to the market; vegetables, fruits, fabrics, cosmetic products, kitchenware, crafts, and so on are delivered by the same local producers who have been patronized by the Nawab for years. The walls separate them from the rapidly changing society outside, one increasingly marked in their eyes by division, inequality, disrespect, conflict, greed, and competition. Greed and obsession with the latest commodities are despised the most by all in the household; in all our conversations the Nawab raised the issue of the commodity-obsessed competitive middle class caring only about accumulation and 'showing off' and lacking any passion for non-productive enjoyments, or pursuit of individual passions. The practice of this community mirrors Barthes's own attraction to the critique of atomic individualism and neoliberalism and coterminous valorization of human creativity and playfulness. Our idiorrhythmic group indulges in the same fantasy as Barthes, namely, one of un-realizing the real world and replacing it with its idealized version. But the outside repetitively intrudes into this domestic utopia. After all, without the outside and without people buying up their property they are unable to survive – a much resisted and denied dependency.

# 4

In order to better understand what binds this 'group' together and what it has to do with a peculiar notion of 'tact,' it will be instructive to address the question of how the *hijra* came to live in the household. The story is connected

to a notion of *waz'dari*, a concept pertaining to a certain form of *noblesse oblige* where privilege must be balanced by moral duty and obligation. *Waz'dar* is someone who possesses *waz*, that is, a particular manner or distinct style, but also a person who makes something accidentally his *waz* or lifelong moral obligation. This type of moral duty, however, refers to a personal choice, individual obsession, or moral commitment that is self-imposed and to which one commits for a lifetime – that is, in Barthesian terms, a particular self-imposed and chosen idiorrhythm. *Waz'dari* has been a central notion for conceptualizing individualism amid conformity in North Indian societies, which especially since the 19th century have been steered by strict *adab*, or highly formalized etiquette and manners (Naim 2011). The question to which *waz'dari* has become the answer is, how can a person in an *adab*-governed society assert his individuality while not losing his claim to be fully civil? *Waz'dari* used to refer to minor breaches of the normative behavior, initially in regard to aesthetics and style – for instance a noble man wearing a nose-ring, or dressing for winter in the summer. Over time, such breaches in style and aesthetics became transformed, under the same concept, into breaches of morality. Often these individual breaches came about through an accidental event in which the words of the other were turned into reality; often, class difference was involved in the interaction. Typically, the interaction between different social strata was regulated by the rules of *adab*; however, their breach could then lead to an interaction with peculiar consequences. In one such story, an insignificant man comes to believe that he has a friend in a powerful local landlord and approaches him in the middle of the night to beg for his help to find one of his master's daughters and her servant. In return, the landlord not only helps him but also gifts him land. The lowly man is thus met not with rejection but with an exaggeration of duty on the side of the landlord, who might have reasoned as follows: 'He dares to believe that I am his friend? I will show him how much of a friend I am, and that forever.' Similarly, when asked about how the *hijra* became part of the household, the Nawab simply answered that it was his *waz'dari*. The same concept was invoked when I inquired about the reasons for the household's seclusion from society – the legacy had to go on. And the same concept was invoked when I discovered that the Nawab has a peculiar charitable obsession: every month, he anonymously donates a *riksha* to a poor person selected by his servant. The system of delivery is such that the source of the gift is untraceable. This is the only repetitive and obsessive intervention of the Nawab into the outside world, and it came about in the same way as the landlord's obligation to the lowly man in the story: Twenty years ago, the Nawab was going every day for his morning walk, and for three weeks a man with a *riksha* was standing in front of his house. He offered his services each time, but the Nawab ignored him. Then one day, instead of respecting the Nawab's rejection, the man with the *riksha* appealed to his sense of his duty by saying

'you are the one responsible for providing us with livelihood, no one else.' Since then, the Nawab has made the lifelong commitment to providing one *riksha* a month to a person in need of a means of survival. This resonates with the old ideal civility of the Lucknow elite, who are said to have been providing for their less fortunate friends in secret and without asking for anything in return. According to some commentators, this led to a situation where a large number of the city population had no visible source of income, which in turn led to the city's economic downfall as people ceased to value labor. Other commentators on the other hand praised this culture, claiming that as long as *waz'dari* was alive, the city bloomed. Possibly, both comments are true at the same time. The Nawab even claims that he cannot visit his son in the United States, because each month he has to manage the process of gifting, in accordance with the motto of *waz'dari*: *sir jaye, sauda na jaye* ('lose your head but not the obsession'). Upon meeting the Nawab for the first time, the *hijra* threatened him with bad luck and curses if he does not give him alms – the usual strategy. But then they got into a lengthy discussion. The *hijra* invoked the Nawab's heritage, telling him that in the old days anyone of social worth kept eunuchs, confessed to them, and valued them for their art and that the Nawab was obliged to make his (the *hijra*'s) wish come true. The Nawab then took it upon himself as his *waz'dari* to invite the *hijra* to live with them. The asexuality with which the *hijra* is associated and valued for fit well into this peculiar community, as did the 'idea of a hijra' dating back to the golden age. Because of the *hijra*, they were no longer a household of masters and servants but rather a miniature, ideal kingdom, an idiorrhythmic fantasy of both communal harmonious life and of individual flourishing. Everyone within the bounds of the mansion lives according to their own *waz*, which he or she steadfastly pursues. Here, *waz* translates into a commitment to individual rhythm and to individual moral obligation. For example, the wife of the Nawab obsessively observes *purdah* (ritual seclusion) and lives largely in the *zenana* (female quarters), accompanied by the *hijra*, even though she does not have to do that – it is her lifelong *waz* and individual commitment to traditional order. This shows clearly the peculiar reversal of the notion of *waz'dari* in the context of the changing contemporary society. Whereas in the past it would be precisely the breach of *purdah* that would amount to *waz'dari*, today it is the opposite, namely, the continuation of the idealized social order that becomes the individual moral commitment. For the inhabitants of the mansion, the traditional *adab* is their *waz'dari*, which breaks with the contemporary rule of capitalist relations of exploitation and exclusion. The Nawab's mansion is a place that valorizes humanities, liberal arts, leisure, and inclusion – the same things that Barthes himself wished for, and precisely those things that are most under threat in the current profit-oriented neoliberal regime. It is no coincidence that the competing future-oriented, commodified utopian visions of smart cities are purely technocratic

and exclusionary, accessible only to the successful, rich, and powerful while erasing shared humanity and solidarity from their visions of the future.

# 5

Barthes's and the Nawab's utopias are both marked by nostalgia and centered around a wish of individual fulfillment on one hand and of a communal harmony on the other. But whereas Barthes's fantasy remains largely in the imagination, and at most in the library and in works of literature, the Nawab attempts to realize his fantasy within the bounds of his own mansion. Both share a certain resignation in regard to the political, outside of the bounds of the domestic, where the only existing utopia is one packaged into the newest and latest commodities and gated smart cities. Both of these domestic utopias belong to a time when social utopia became commodified and made available for private consumption. As Terry Eagleton remarked, "On a global scale, capital was more concentrated and predatory than ever, and the working class had actually increased in size. It was becoming possible to imagine a future in which the mega-rich took shelter in their armed and gated communities, while a billion or so slum dwellers were encircled in their fetid hovels by watchtowers and barbed wire." (2001: 7) Facing this now-global predicament, both the Nawab's and Barthes's utopias *lack hope*, traditionally the most powerful element of any utopia; they do not ask 'What if everyone lived idiorrhythmically?' or how such a power-free future world could be achieved. Both utopias are domesticated, no longer holding up any hope for changing the world outside its bounds (if they ever had). They evoke the dystopian movie *Children of Men* (Cuarón 2006), wherein the world falls into chaos as women suddenly stop conceiving – the metaphor of an infertile mankind that has lost any hope and utopia of a better future. The Nawab's household calls to mind the movie's "Ark of the Arts," where some of humanity's greatest artworks are kept and protected from the chaos reigning outside, yet due to the lack of a future, these works are robbed of any meaning. When Theo, the main protagonist, asks the keeper of the Ark how he keeps going when a hundred years from now there will not be "one sad fuck" to see it, he just says, "I don't think about it." The Nawab once remarked that it is his moral duty to keep the legacy going, and whatever may come he does not think about it. It may be that instead of looking for the utopia of an ideal future that might distract us more from current political tasks than help, we should look for strategies of change grounded in present realities and contradictions. Hence, maybe Barthes's failure is precisely the lesson for us here – maybe formulating a utopia is not the most effective strategy for achieving social change. The case of the Nawab's idiorrhythmic household clearly shows how a nostalgic utopia can be utterly inconsequential for the world out there and

as a result not much different from the individual consumption and display of ethical superiority of the privileged few. This brings us to our last question. While both the Nawab and Barthes wish for a certain state of harmonious relations coterminous with the cultivation of individual passions – a noble goal indeed – the question remains if this actually brings happiness: is this at all a utopia of happiness? As Robert Pfaller remarked, "The situation with Utopia is again the same as with wishes and dreams in general: one might dream about a dream house, a dream partner, a dream car, and so forth, but to have it and have to live with it is something else altogether. In this way, also the fairy tales of the red shoes that continue to dance forever, or of the old married couple and the sausage, quite plainly show that wish fulfillment can turn out to be unbearable." (2014a: 43). Alain Badiou once asked if we can reduce happiness to mere satisfaction and harmony, that is, the imaginary as opposed to real happiness; imaginary happiness "neither involves nor allows for any adventure, and least of all any risk" (Badiou 2015). But is not real happiness the true risk? Does not risk, and thus real happiness, depend on a status of exception? Without *waz'dari*, the self-imposed moral duty and the notion of legacy, it may not have been possible for the inhabitants of the Nawab's mansion to keep on going, especially with no future for this particular way of life in sight. The commitment to an idea of happiness and harmony demanded a strong sense of moral obligation without necessarily providing real happiness. Barthes's notion of tact could possibly serve as a similar moral imperative if embraced with a certain *waz'dari*, and while resisting Barthes's flight from the real and instead dealing with the contradictions of the present moment.

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# XÉNITEIA/Xeniteia

*Johan Schimanski*

## 1

The first time it happened, I was in Istanbul. I turned a street corner and was suddenly in Paris. As in many places in Istanbul, several shops that sold the same item were collected on one and the same street. In this case, the commodity was cars. But there was something about the buildings and the topography that woke a memory of another place, making the alien place of Istanbul both familiar and doubly alien. This has happened several times. I could be in one city and at the same time in another one, in a completely different country. It was not a question of using a familiar form in order to understand a strange environment. The experience was one of disorientation, irreality, and confusion, rather than security. But the impression it left was not unpleasant.

After my first experience of this, I noticed something else. When I returned to Oslo (where I lived then, as I do now), it became easier to see Oslo as a foreign place, another city. My habitual image of the street dissolved and I could see Oslo as a tourist or a traveler who was seeing the city for the first time. Modernist or postmodernist aesthetics privilege this kind of experience. Something breaks with the everyday, and according to Shklovsky (1965), our perception process is prolonged, the surroundings are defamiliarized, we see again and look at the world as strangers. I would add, since we still live in the age in which nations are part of our life-world: we see the world as *foreign*. And although seeing the world as strange or foreign is an aesthetic process, it can also be a social and existential phenomenon where the individual feels like a stranger in his own culture or society. In his canonical 1893 poem on urban estrangement, "I Look," the poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder lists the familiar things he sees in the city, signalling aesthetic estrangement through the anaphorical repetition of the phrase "I look", before exclaiming the metaphorical displacement of being "on the wrong globe" (1933: 416). Also when Barthes discusses *xéniteia* ('being foreign' or 'being in foreign parts') in the seminar series "How to Live

Together," his focus is on feeling like a foreigner in your own country (2013: 124-129). Barthes, who is very aware of the connection between society and reality (Barthes 1957), goes beyond the social and into the ontological, presenting foreignness as an experience of irreality (2013: 127-128).

# 2

Implicitly, being foreign becomes part of a process of personal development. The alienating experience of recognizing one city in another was conditional on the fact that I was already familiar with the first city. Within the national paradigm, we are all born into the nation – hence the etymological link in Latin between *natio* ('nation') and *nasci* ('to be born') – and it is first later that the experience of being foreign comes. Barthes presents xeniteia as part of a multi-phase process, finding his inspiration in Christian and Buddhist monastic practices and their schemes for individual development (ibid: 124-125). Going abroad becomes a spiritual quest, a pilgrimage. However, this quest does not always take the form of a physical journey, because it is also possible to perceive yourself as a foreigner in your home country and perceive your homeland as a foreign country. Barthes has a counter-intuitive interpretation of foreignness; for him, the most interesting form of foreignness is to stay behind and discover that one's familiar space is really a foreign space. This is indeed Barthes's main concern in his 'dossier' on xeniteia. There is a tactful, hidden, and more low-key way of experiencing foreignness in the habitual space, which Barthes calls *stenochoria*, the narrow road. Barthes refers to a Christian monastic tradition of traveling while remaining in one place (*perigrinatio in stabilitate*, ibid: 127), but he is also inspired by Taoism. To quote the *Tao Te Ching*: "having gone far, it returns" (Lao Tzu 1973: xxv).

Feeling like a stranger in your own familiar environment is also no unusual topos. Freud's 'the uncanny' (*das Unheimliche*) occurs when a person recognizes the strange in the known (Freud 1989, 2011). Deleuze and Guattari (1989) conceived of a *littérature mineure*, a lesser literature or an underground literature (with *mineur* as either 'minor' or 'miner'), suggesting an experience of following a narrower road within dominant society. This road becomes highly concrete when we think of the 'inner emigration' (*innere Emigration*) of German intellectuals under Nazism, or of what social anthropologist Victor Turner (1967, 1977) calls liminal and liminoid states. Contrary to these thinkers, however, Barthes's fantasy is one of a less psychic, less political, less social, and a more everyday foreignness.

Barthes's fantasy in *How to Live Together* is to be able to live alone while living together, without these two states being opposed (2013: 5). Walking the foreigner's narrow way is to live according to your own idiorrhythmy, while at

the same time being subjected to different socializing forces: on the one hand, a tendency to desire the past and to seek consolation in nostalgia, and on the other hand, a *parresia* ('worldliness,' originally 'frankness'), by which one can deal with all situations, and in which the distinction between homeland and abroad is dissolved, because one feels at home everywhere (ibid: 125-126). Being surrounded by homeliness can lead to an inner fantasy of already living in a foreign place: either through a weariness in one's encounter with society, as when Barthes discovers that he finds himself indifferent to the contents of the morning newspaper *Le Monde*, or a desire to lose oneself (ibid: 128).

# 3

When Erich Auerbach (1967: 310) and Edward Said (1991a: 259, 1991b: 7, 1994: 147) write about foreignness and the strange, they often cite the Christian mystic Hugo of St. Victor (ca. 1096-1141). Barthes, however, does not mention Hugo, even though Hugo's thoughts are relevant to the fantasy of xeniteia. In Hugo, the stages of personal development are clearly presented: during the first stage (what we can call the national), individuals feel at home in their native and foreign world; during the second stage (what Barthes probably means with *parresia*, worldliness), they feel at home everywhere; during the third stage (the most spiritually elevated one), they feel that they are a stranger everywhere, and that everywhere is strange (Hugh of St. Victor 1961: 101).

What brings about this third stage is the world's irreality and foreignness vis-à-vis true reality, that is, heaven. On Earth we are in exile from our homeland, which is heaven. If to feel at home in a particular culture is the broad and common road, to be a foreigner everywhere is the narrow road, leading to the real home of man, heaven. Perhaps Barthes has deliberately avoided mentioning Hugo because Hugo so clearly presents God as the ultimate signified, whereas Barthes expressly strives for a "sovereign reading" of, for example, texts about the early Christian hermits and monastic orders (Barthes 2013: 12). In Barthes's reading, God is put into brackets. Furnishing personal development with different stages that the individual can pass through is often a moral exercise, and Barthes wants to read without guilt and suppression (ibid: 12). Auerbach and Said, however, are in agreement with Barthes on this point: they read Hugo of St. Victor in just such a 'sovereign' way. Auerbach substitutes God with the world, and Said ends up in the secular. Auerbach and Said differ from Barthes in that their interpretations are positive: a universal foreignness is an expression of love for the world, made possible through detaching yourself from your nation and culture. Barthes, however, sees xeniteia as a negative

state. Xeniteia, he writes, exchanges "between unreality (investment in loving divinity) and dereality, the absence of all fatherland (or motherland)" (ibid: 127).[1]

The nation also underlies Barthes reflections on the oppressive variant of his fantasy: feeling like a foreigner in your own society, for example represented by the *Le Monde* newspaper. 'Society' in the singular, when used to implicitly refer to the specific society to which you belong, hides what it really is, namely, the nation ('French society'). Had Barthes been a foreigner in the traditional sense, he would not have had this experience when reading *Le Monde*. The question becomes whether the imagination of an idiorrhythmic xeniteia is reserved for people in Barthes's position, that is, individuals living in their own nation? Or does Barthes's understanding of xeniteia also make sense for migrants, exiles, travelers and others who are either in states of physical emigration, in hybrid situations or in conditions of transnationality? Could it be that the fact that Barthes had himself sometimes lived outside of France has contributed to his fantasy about xeniteia?

# 4

In 1973, four years before Barthes held his seminar on "How to Live Together," Ursula K. Le Guin published the short text "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas" (1975b). This story is a fable about an adventurous and utopian society, Omelas, where everyone is happy and well-adjusted, but where this happiness conceals a brutal fact. In the idyllic community of Le Guin's fable-like story, a small, mentally retarded child is trapped in a dark basement, where it lives in desperate state. It is malnourished and has sores that never heal, because it sits in its own excrements. It is lonely and scared. Everyone in the community agrees that this is necessary. The child is part of the social contract. If the child is freed and taken care of properly, the magic behind the idyll will break, and society will no longer be happy. The text ends by describing the ones mentioned in the title, the few who are not happy with this scheme, and who walk away from Omelas to a place that is not described and may not exist. Le Guin's position in the 1970s as an American West Coast writer, politically on the Left, makes it natural to read the text as addressing the self-image of the United States as an ideal society at the same time that it was at war in Vietnam. It has however a wider applicability.

In Le Guin's fable we find variants of several of Barthes's trait dossiers: the community is an "Utopie," and the child is the community's "Éponge" (sponge, used by Barthes to denote scapegoats). The emigrants turn their fantasy of

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**1** |  "[…] tantôt irréalité (investissement dans l'amour de la divinité), tantôt déréalité, absence de toute patrie (ou matrie)" (Barthes 2002: 174).

losing themselves into reality: having experienced an internal xeniteia in which they no longer feel at home in society, they decide to replace it with an external foreignness. Le Guin's choice of genre is revealing; she writes in a *genre mineur*, a narrower genre, a generic *stenochoria*, when she chooses fantasy literature as her point of departure and at the same time writes beyond its formal limits.

Le Guin's interest in utopias, scapegoats, and foreigners is not limited to this one short text. They are also major motifs in her two major novels from the 1970s. In these, she uses science fiction to answer a question, one that we can express as 'how to live together.' Science fiction is based on a form of foreignness or alienation in relation to our common reality. In technical terms, science fiction – according to its foremost theorist, Darko Suvin – builds on a form of Shklovskian defamiliarization or 'making strange' (Shklovsky 1965), or indeed of Brechtian alienation, which in the context of science fiction Suvin calls "cognitive estrangement" (1972). Le Guin's novels of the 1970s are simulations, to use Barthes's term for the literary examples that he cites in *How to Live Together*, of living together idiorrhythmically.

The title of the 1969 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Le Guin 1981), with its reference to the yin/yang symbol, reveals that, like Barthes, Le Guin is influenced by Taoism. In it, she describes how Genly Ai, a representative of the Ecumen – an interstellar association of different planets, including our own – is sent to Gethen, a planet that is not yet part of the association. Ai must first convince the people there that such an interstellar association actually exists. On Gethen, Ai becomes a pawn in a political game, where skepticism about the Ecumen community has become a means of achieving the goals of local power elites. At the same time, Ai must live as a man on a planet that is populated by people who largely resemble himself, except in one important aspect: they do not have a fixed gender. For the most part, they are androgynous, except in recurrent biorhythmic periods when they become either women or men and can reproduce. This detail has a lot to say for Gethen's social structures and cultures. Among other things, Gethenians often live together in larger collectives, that is, semi-idiorrhythmic groups. In his fantasy about the idiorrhythmic community, Barthes puts the family in brackets; on Gethen, family is completely removed from the equation. As Harold Bloom has pointed out, the Oedipus complex is absent among the Gethenians, along with most forms of physical conflict and aspirations for technological development (1987: 8).

An idiorrhythmic logic also plays out on the interstellar level. Le Guin, in a typically science-fictional way, reifies an idiorrhythmic fantasy in the way she structures her future universe. By allowing physical interstellar journeys to take so long that they can rarely be carried out, the Ecumen remains largely a non-material federation, based on primarily information exchange and a foundational distance (Barthes's trait "Distance"). The communities of the Ecumen live therefore according to their own rhythms. It is not a given that

Barthes's fantasy about individuals living together can be applied to the way in which states or cultures live together, although this conceptual transfer does pose interesting challenges. However, neither is it necessary to go against Barthes's spirit here, because it suffices to read Le Guin's interstellar reification as an allegory of living together as individuals.

The 1974 novel *The Dispossessed* (Le Guin 1975a), in some editions equipped with the subtitle *An Ambiguous Utopia*, describes the development of a communication device that smoothens the union of the Ecumen and its allegorical idiorrhythmy: the so-called *ansible*, made possible through the theories of the novel's physicist protagonist, Shevek, who has grown up in an anarchic self-exiled community on Anarres, a moon circling the planet Urras. Central aspects of Barthes's fantasies about idiorrhythmy are a feature of this novel, which describes Shevek's upbringing in a society where people live together in larger collective units with shared dining rooms. Although the novel describes what we can assume is Le Guin's fantasy of an anarchist utopia, it also belongs to the genre of "critical utopia" (Moylan 1986), that is, a utopian narrative that simultaneously problematizes utopianism. Le Guin's focus here is on a petty, corrupt, oppressive, and leveling tendency that builds (unlike Barthes's fantasies) on an expressly anti-egoistic ideology, and that ultimately makes it impossible for the physicist Shevek to continue his work on Anarres. His contact with colleagues outside this anarchist society has made him a stranger and an *éponge* at Anarres. As with those who walk into exile in "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas," Shevek leaves the moon Anarres in favor of the far more complex societies on Urras, where he becomes a stranger and a foreigner in a more concrete sense. Like Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, he is caught in a political game between these societies on Urras, which are similar to the class-ridden and sexist capitalist societies or socialist dictatorships of the 1970s. Again, like Ai in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Shevek must escape as the conflict of the novel intensifies. As the novel ends, his discoveries ultimately consolidate the Ecumen's 'idiorrhythmy' of different star systems.

These narratives make concrete fantasies around something that may resemble Barthes's fantasies around the concepts of idiorrhythmy, *éponge*, *utopie*, *distance*, and not least *xéniteia*. Foreignness becomes a physical question of movement across state borders, but Le Guin's texts also address an internal form of xeniteia similar to that discussed by Barthes. In *The Dispossessed*, the constant flashbacks to Shevek's upbringing and personal development on the anarchist society on Anarres describe an ever-increasing inner emigration that ends in exile. The same goes for the use of the motif of a positively valued betrayal in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Naturalization and estrangement alternate in a way that is not found in all science fiction yet is clearly emphasized by Le Guin's choice of genre. In her novels, the vague description of the emigrants

in "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas" is replaced by concrete detail and insight into the inner life of individuals. Both novels reach a point where not only one's own space, but also the self itself, is made alien and estranged.

Le Guin's novels sketch out areas in the fantasy of xeniteia that could be developed further. To feel xeniteia in relation to a given society when reading a newspaper from that society – *Le Monde*, in Barthes's case – requires that one basically feel at home there. But as Jacques Derrida points out, the word *chez* ('at') in the French expression for being at home, *chez soi* (lit. 'at oneself'), shows that one must be someone else to be home: a literal interpretation of the sentence *je suis chez moi* ('I am at home') will imply that I am 'with' myself, meaning that I am another than myself. To feel at home, one must always be a stranger (Derrida 1991: 16).

# 5

Today, when exile has once again become part of our everyday life, the negotiation between being at home and being foreign is no longer just seen from the nation's point of view. We have become accustomed to experiencing, hearing, or reading about other points of departure. These can be expressed in postcolonial migration literature. Going back in time to Sam Selvon's 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon 2006), we read about a fragmented community of highly individualized male immigrants from Trinidad, Jamaica, and Nigeria, living in isolation from their families and in poverty in the lodgings across the metropolis. We are presented with a number of anecdotal narratives – prose "ballads" or "calypsos" – about men who follow the rhythms of the streets, of a particularly masculine sexuality, of substance abuse, of racist prejudice, of the English seasons and of varying access to work and food, but also of each their different personalities. In the end, the men are brought together, both at the festivals (*fetes*) arranged in-between the black and white cultures of London (Wolfe 2016: 14), where the steel pan music is followed by "God Save the Queen," and at the get-togethers that take place on Sunday mornings in the dormitory of the protagonist Moses Aloetta, a figure who binds together the other characters of the novel. Caught between being at home and being a foreigner in London, between a nostalgia for the Caribbean and a worldly connectedness to the cosmopolitan metropolis, Moses finds comfort in the regular gatherings, almost as when Barthes imagines the monastery's regular prayer times bringing monks together in his fantasy about the idiorrhythmic group (Barthes 2013: 129-130). But London is not a safe home in which to be an outsider, and Moses's gaze on both the city and the other West Indians of the novel becomes an alienated one. "Sometimes," thought Moses, "after they gone, he hear the voices ringing in his ear, and sometimes tears come

to his eyes and he don't know why really, if is homesickness or if is just life in general beginning to get too hard." (Selvon 2006: 136) Living-Together, as Barthes mused, is "perhaps simply a way of confronting the sadness of the night together" (2013: 129).[2]

Closer to our own time, when Teju Cole sends his New York-based protagonist Julius on vacation to Brussels in the novel *Open City* (2011), the picture of "how to live together" appears in the form of a telephone and internet cafe. The intellectual and radical staff member that Julius gets to know there, Farouq, believes that "it's a test case of what I believe; people can live together but still keep their own values intact. Seeing this crowd of individuals from different places, it appeals to the human side of me, and the intellectual side of me." (ibid: 115) Julius is skeptical, as he is consistently when he is confronting people in the business of creating identities. In Farouq, he generally finds a belief in radical solutions that are to bound to "values" and "places" – and to society. "It happens here," says Farouq, "on this small scale, in this shop, and I want to understand how it can happen on a bigger scale" (ibid: 116). Farouq moves in a direction – how to live together in larger groups – for which Barthes has no place in his fantasy (Barthes 2013: 8-9, 131).

As Dubravka Ugrešić's novel about refugees and other immigrants from the former Yugoslavia in Amsterdam, *Ministarstvo Boli* (*The Ministry of Pain*, Ugresic 2011), progresses, the protagonist Tanja Lucić visits her mother in Zagreb. Here she finds herself a stranger where she had expected to be at home. Like Selvon, Ugrešić describes a variety of individuals with different backgrounds living as foreigners in a foreign metropolis, in this case Amsterdam, but who regularly (and idiorrhythmically) meet in Tanja's university class on Southern Slavic literature. Tanja has acquired this temporary job through her friend Ines, who embodies Barthes's concept of *parresia*, feeling at home everywhere. "Her intimacy with the world around her, her ability to subject it completely to her will, her absolute at-homeness with the crowd" (ibid: 163), both in Zagreb and in Amsterdam, Tanja finds offending, as it stands in contrast to the alienation of the other characters, often strongly affected by the tragedy of armed conflict. It is also Ines and her Dutch Slavist husband who contribute to Tanja's transforming her class from an idiorrhythmic experiment into a rigid overview of Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, and Macedonian literary histories. This shift reflects her own negative development during the novel.

Addressing these novels by Selvon, Cole, and Ugrešić, I return to the somewhat disorienting image of foreignness in the cityscape, the xeniteia with which I began – the feeling of being in Paris while actually being in Istanbul. In *Ministarstvo Boli*, Tanja finds a new perspective on Amsterdam when she

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**2** | "Vivre-ensemble: seulement peut-être pour affronter ensemble la tristesse du soir" (Barthes 2002: 176).

visits the Madurodam miniature park in The Hague, which features 1:25 scale models of Dutch landmarks and buildings, including ones in Amsterdam. This outer view of Amsterdam as a melancholy Disneyland (ibid: 82) and the largest dollhouse in the world (ibid: 86) helps give her a protective distance to social reality (ibid: 252-254). On his return journey from Brussels, Julius in *Open City* finds himself confused when the sight of New York underneath the clouds blends with a memory of an enormous scale model of New York, originally made for the 1964 World's Fair and now installed at the Queens Museum (Cole 2011: 150). This outside perspective introduces the second, decidedly more uncanny or *unheimliche* part of the book, and can be read as both a product of a physical journey abroad and a symbol of an internal foreignness in relation to society. At the end of *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses rhetorically assumes an outside perspective: "As if he could see the black faces bobbing up and down in the millions of white, strained faces, everybody hustling along the Strand, the spades jostling in the crowd, bewildered, hopeless." (Selvon 2006: 139; cf. Wolfe 2016) And in his seminar on how to live together, Barthes reads *Le Monde*, a national newspaper of his own nation, as if he was a foreigner.

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# *Vita nova* versus *bios philosophikos*: Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault

*Éric Marty*

## THE RETURN OF 'LIFE'

There are many ways of approaching *Vita Nova*, the work planned by Roland Barthes and interrupted by his untimely death, whose very diverse substance could well be limited to the eight outlines drafted between August and December 1979 (reproduced in Barthes 2002c). I intend to examine these traces from a different angle to the one we are used to: not from the timeless perspective that death invites us to adopt – the theme of the coming book – but on the contrary from inside the profoundly historical space he belonged to, the beginning of the 1980s, which turned out to be crucial for what has been called modernity, or for the 'modern subject.' To do this, I will focus on the category of 'life,' such as it is thematized by the title of the work itself – *Vita Nova* – in comparison or contrast to the theme of the *bios philosophikos* that was introduced for better or worse by Michel Foucault at almost the same time or shortly afterward, especially in his very last works, teachings, and books, in relation to the "care of the self" and what he then called the "stylistics of moral life."

It is no doubt no accident that Barthes precedes Foucault on this terrain, or rather that the final orientation of their research meets around this term – 'life' – given that these years of the 1980s were such a time of collective distancing from the dry and abstract strategies that characterized the preceding period. Remember Foucault's harsh, mocking laughter – albeit qualified as "philosophical" and thus "silent" – at the great modern era with regard to phenomenology, reduced to an exploration of "lived experience" (1989: 373; orig. 1966: 353-354).[1] This distancing is expressed in the form of a return, to a

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1 | See especially the sub-chapter entitled "The Empirical and the Transcendental" (Foucault 1989: 347-351; orig. 1966: 329-333).

new position, of the categories that were banned a few years earlier, including, thus, the unexpected category of 'life.'

I will put forward a polemical hypothesis, however, with regard to this apparent convergence. Unlike Barthes, Foucault's recourse to the paradigms of antiquity – whether Socratic, Stoic, or Cynic – risks a return to a simple topic that is critically and indeed conceptually sterile, namely, the *philosophical life*, and thus a regression in his own thought, whose consequences are visible today, nearly 30 or 40 years later, with the emergence of a veritable cliché, illustrated for example by the work of Giorgio Agamben on "bare existence" (1997, 1998; cf. Dubreuil 2005), or of Judith Butler on 'the good life,' where the question raised by Foucault has sunk to the mediocrity of the most trivial line of enquiry: "Can one lead a good life in a bad life?" (2014: 55)[2]

While it is quite clear that Foucault's final work calls for more subtlety, and even some extremely strong questions, it seems essential to me to understand in what respects they do not align, or not well, with what Barthes calls *vita nova*. I intend, through this very comparison, to assess what is taking place in thought in the 1980s, that is, I intend to assess what kind of rupture, or shift, is taking place here precisely at the heart of an apparent proximity, an apparent coincidence signaled by the sudden emergence of the theme of 'life,' whose radical novelty in relation to the discourses of the 1960s or 1970s has already been shown.

## Bios/Vita

From a simple lexical perspective, it is striking to observe not only the difference in the dead language chosen – Latin and Ancient Greek – to translate the theme of life, but also another divergence in the discourse itself, between the neutrality (in the Barthesian sense) of the adjective chosen by Barthes – *nova* ('new') – and, in contrast, the semantic weight of the ones that Foucault associates with *bios*, in his last course, "The Courage of the Truth," where it is a matter of the *bios philosophikos* ('philosophical life'), *alēthēs bios* ('true

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**2** | In invoking Adorno, Butler distorts Adorno's whole Nietzschean inspiration regarding 'the possibilities of a just life in a false life,' or 'a true life in a world that is not' into another question with a Quakerish inflection: "how does one lead a good life in a bad life?" (Butler 2014: 55-56). Butler's translator gives the German version of Adorno's statement – *Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen* – and signals the problem in his preface (ibid: 34). See in this regard Fragment 18 of *Minima Moralia*, from which Butler draws her inspiration: "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly." (Adorno 1978: 38, cf. 2003: 45-48) See also the 2005 translation by Dennis Redmond: "There is no right life in the wrong one." (Adorno 2005)

life'), or *euthus* ('straight life') (2009: 215, 235 and others; 2011: 234, 218, 223). It may also be that Barthes's Latin is not as historically grounded as Foucault's Greek; it is a Latin that is entirely his own, without any philological point of reference except perhaps Michelet, though the latter spoke of a "vita nuova" (Barthes 2002b: 446). In contrast, Foucault's *bios* is held within, integrated into a system of discursive 'bricks' (*philosophikos*, *alēthēs*, *euthus* ...) that do not allow for any indetermination, even though these historical determinations, despite distinctions made here and there, often involve ad-hoc syntheses where Socrates, Gnosticism, Christianity, and Stoicism overlap, sometimes intimately, to the point of problematic associations where the Christian perspective overlaps with the Platonic vision of another world and the Cynic's demand for an *other* life (Foucault 2011: 246-247).[3]

Quite unlike Barthes's concept of *neutral*, the fundamental determination and inflection of Foucault's *bios*, whether by way of the Cynics, Christians, Stoics, or Socrates, is thus perhaps to be understood along the lines of what has been called, following Jean Paulhan, Blanchot, or Bataille, 'terror.' Or at least, since modernity's 'terrorist' period is now a thing of the past, it is to be understood as an attempt to maintain or nurture the last flames of a fading terror. The fact that this is the Foucault that Benny Lévy chose to follow in his final works could be an indication of this.[4] We can hear this inflection of Foucault's *bios* in the name of this final course he held at the Collège de France – "The Courage of the Truth" – but also in the whole thematic thread of the scandalous Cynic and the choice of the dog as philosophical emblem, since Foucault speaks enthusiastically about the "guard dog" as a way of describing the philosopher: a "life that barks", *bios phulaktikos* (2009: 224; 2011: 243). Foucault valorizes the polemical position, the antagonistic position, a life given over to "absolute visibility" (2009: 234; 2011: 254), a proselytizing life. This is an inflection that is the complete opposite, it must be said, of the last two volumes of his *History of Sexuality*.

## THE MILITANT, THE WORLD

It is significant to note that when Foucault uses a legitimate anachronism to convey his idea of the *bios philosophikos*, he offers the modern figure of the 'militant,' and does so repeatedly, even going so far as to refer to a "philosophical militancy" (2009: 261; 2011: 284). The expression "the militant life" certainly

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**3** | See the commentary by Frédéric Gros in Foucault 2011: 326-327.

**4** | See for example Lévy's 1996 class on the *Alcibiade* (Lévy 2013), which is very inspired by Foucault, or else his book *Le meurtre du pasteur: Critique de la vision politique du monde* (2002).

seems in his eyes to be the best translation into contemporary French of the *bios philosophikos* (cf. 2009: 169-174, 261, 264; 2011: 184-186, 284, 287). For Foucault, it is about giving a modern complexion to a *logos* – that of *bios* – which is nevertheless, as a matter of fact, completely pre-modern, and for that matter he never really interrogates the category of 'life' as a philosopheme, simply surrounding it with authoritative adjectives: the philosophical life, the straight life, the good life, and so on.

This new adjective, 'militant,' however, is precisely a category that appears in Barthes's *Vita Nova*, but as one to be rejected. Thus, in the fourth version of the outline of *Vita Nova* (August 23, 1979), Barthes places *the militant* under the heading of what he calls *Anti-Discourse*, and he defines the militant as "Priest of Power" (2002c: 1013), or else "Other-Priest" (ibid: 1011). Elsewhere, Barthes positions the militant within the sphere of the world, as an "archetypal object" of the world (ibid: 1008), and within a typology of discourses where it is one of the mouthpieces of the world. Which is to say, the militant is assigned to a place that is the complete opposite of that proposed by Michel Foucault, who situates it in what he calls the diacritical life, the life of discernment (2009: 224; 2011: 243), a position of critique that allows the 'true life' to be defined as the "permanent critique of the world."

Barthes doesn't take this category of the 'militant' seriously, which is held to be central by Foucault, and which will later be redeployed by Alain Badiou within a philosophical imaginary where St. Paul, the Christian point of reference (Badiou 1998, 2003; cf. Marty 2002), completes and perpetuates Foucault's proposition. What Barthes can't take seriously is in the first place the critical force of the militant position, and the Cynic, for that matter, even in his most radical actions, remains within the semantic logic of what he contests, because what he contests is not this logic, the logic of the world, but the fact that its meaning is ambiguous, masked, equivocal. The Cynical subject, and thus the militant one, is the puritan subject par excellence, who pushes puritan logic beyond superficial conventions to the paradox of the "bad reputation" (*adoxia*, Foucault 2009: 240; 2011: 260), precisely in so far as this logic allows this subject to confirm and attest to the univocity, fixedness, and unicity of meaning, but also to confirm and attest to the fixed order of the world whose natural law is one of its fundamental principles (2009: 243; 2011: 263).

If Barthes doesn't take this militant's critique of the world seriously, it is because in his eyes the notion of 'world' has to be redefined so that it is no longer a simple object but a discourse. The world mustn't be naturalized as a thing but seen as a discursive phenomenon.[5] He thus defines the political

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**5** |  "Le Monde comme objet contradictoire de spectacle et d'indifférence [*comme Discours*]" ("The World as contradictory object of spectacle and indifference [*as Discourse*]") (Barthes 2002c: 1008).

space of the militant as the classic example of "False dialogues": "endless contestatory ratiocination" (2002c: 1015). In truth, the critical posture with regard to the world had already long been invalidated by modernity, through the anti-philosophy of Marx who, in *The German Ideology*, makes fun of the Young Hegelians who criticize "everything," and above all through his famous theses on Feuerbach and the number eleven: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." The question is not resolved by adding, as Foucault does, a prefix to 'critical' to make 'diacritical life.' The critical posture in relation to the world has not only been invalidated by Marx's theses, but by all the anthropology peripheral to modernity, inspired by numerous references ranging from Pascal to Kierkegaard, among whom Barthes, for his part, chooses Kafka, one of the great precursors of the concept of the neutral, and his aphorism that has become fundamental in its modern reiteration: "In the struggle between you and the world, back the world" (Barthes 2011: 205; orig. 2003: 272; cf. Kafka 2011a: 456; 2011b: 53).

In light of this, it is significant to see in *Vita Nova* the tremendous power of the paradigm of 'life' – *vita* – in relation to this notion of the world, because the world is no longer flatly identified with the social or normative sphere, as it is for the Cynic, as described by Foucault. The world is a system of life. Thus, in the lecture he held on a methodical life in "The Preparation of the Novel," the course that ran concurrently with his development of *Vita Nova*, Barthes describes the world as a system of life: schedules, places, habits, constraints, structures, meetings, desires (2003: 267-274; 2011: 200-206). He replaces the terrorist position of the Cynic – I want the world to resemble me – with a completely different point of view where the world becomes a subtle and complex space that the *vita nova* invests or disinvests, without resentment, thanks to what Barthes calls "the methodical life," which is one of its aspects.

If, on two occasions, Barthes describes the world as a "contradictory object of spectacle and indifference" (2003a: 1008, 1009), this must be understood from the perspective of the neutral – the active neutral – in which the *vita nova* is engaged. Thus, the alliance of indifference and the spectacle leads to a position of benevolence in relation to the world as structure.

## THE DECISION

Barthes's *vita nova* and Foucault's *bios philosophikos* oppose each other on every point, even in the fact that the philosophical life described by Foucault is connected to a divine mission dictated from the outside and that consequently does not allow the Cynical subject to constitute itself as such, to act on its own authority. In contrast, the *vita nova*, such as it appears from the first very outline of the work, dated August 21, 1979, concerns a decision: "chapter II" of

the plan, after addressing the topics of the world, then "pleasures," is devoted to "the decision of 15 April 78," which is also referred to on other occasions in later outlines. This date and the context of the "decision" – the decision of *vita nova* – are mentioned in *The Preparation of the Novel*, which provides us with the anecdote, a sublime insight during a trip to Morocco faced with the idea of the work to be accomplished (2003: 31-32; 2011: 7-8). The opposition between, on the one hand, a *bios philosophikos* that is defined as being "chosen" by a divine instance, and on the other the "decision" of a subject, symbolized by the satori (sublime insight) that accompanies it, is just as significant as the previous ones.

In reality, the *bios philosophikos* is not at all a disruption or disordering of the world, it is simply a 'place,' a place like any other, like that of the magistrate or warrior: "just as God has assigned each thing its place in the world and the role it is to perform, so God designates certain individuals among humans in the same way, entrusting them with a certain mission" (Foucault 2011: 294; orig 2009: 269-270). The subject of the *bios philosophikos* is a functionary of the universal, or universal missionary of humankind, to use Foucault's precise words (2009: 277; 2011: 301). This is why, moreover, as we indicated previously, its critique of the world is of no importance. The "decision" Barthes refers to is one of the fundamental stages of the *vita nova*, because it is connected to its backbone, writing. On several occasions in fact the "decision" is a direct synonym of *vita nova* (cf. Barthes 2002c: 1013). The *vita*, moreover, unlike the *bios* that is the result of being allocated to a place within a system in order to preserve the order of the world, is associated by Barthes with another disruptive category in relation to order: the event, to which it is a response. The event, here, is precisely life's absolute rival and threatening double, namely death, the death of the mother, and the mourning that is the first consequence of this (cf. Marty 2010). Chaotic, overwhelming, a pure event in the sense that no temporal limit can grasp it, the event thus places the *vita*, the *vita nova*, in a semantic space whose fundamental opposition to the purely conservative one of the *bios philosophikos* is once again clear.

## PARRESIA/XENITEIA

It is perhaps the notion of *parresia*, which the whole world has been enthralled with for several years now, that offers the most significant opposition between the *bios philosophikos* and the *vita nova*.

*Parresia* is at the heart of the last two courses given by Foucault, who gives it a strange weight and credibility in light of what modernity has had to say and think about the very possibility of "straight-talking." In the case of Foucault himself, we remember the first sentence of the great text "The Thought from Outside" (1966): "In ancient times, this simple assertion was enough to shake

the foundations of Greek truth: 'I lie'" (1987: 9; orig. 2001: 546). When we recall this thundering incipit, the privilege Foucault gives to 'frankness' seems surprising, and this surprise may be joined by many others along the extraordinarily unpredictable path of Foucault's thought. But there are other matters of more interest here, such as reading, as a comparison, one of the prologues to *Vita Nova*, namely, the course on "living together" given at the Collège de France in 1976-1977 (Barthes 2002a; 2013). Barthes broaches the question of *parresia* in an extremely critical way in this text, and the contrast is all the more pertinent given that Barthes situates himself within the paradigm of the *bios* in this seminar, just as Foucault does through the analysis of the *bios praktikos* or *bios theoretikos*, for example (Barthes 2002a: 137; 2013: 95). The category of *parresia* is discredited there in a chapter devoted to a radically anti-Cynical stance, namely, *xeniteia*, a stance that does not belong to the classical Greek world that Foucault focuses on, but to Christian ascetic doctrine. It refers to the idea of expatriation, voluntary exile, wandering, in short everything that might horrify the Greek citizen – Cynical or not – as a member of the city. *Xeniteia* belongs to the *vita nova* in so far as it is connected to *akedia*, its precursor: the loss of desire linked to mourning and the journey that *akedia* implies. On another, deeper, level, *xeniteia* corresponds to *stenochoria*, which is presented as an internal exile, as "a hidden life, where no one else knows about the goal I'm pursuing, a refusal of glory" (2013: 125; orig. 2002a: 172). We also find the theme of the hidden life that is present in Cynical discourse in Foucault, but it is in the fairly crude, stereotypical, and well-known form of the "hidden king" (2011: 285; orig. 2009: 263). Barthes, for his part, associates mystical *stenochoria* with the Tao through the shared paradigm of *the narrow path*, since this is the primary meaning of the Greek word.

While *stenochoria* is an orientation that does not imply a coarse, social familiarity with beings and things, but rather maintains a sort of delicate reserve in relation to the external world, *parresia* is described by Barthes as a gregarious, narrow-minded, purely social disposition of pure familiarity, insensitivity, clumsy tactlessness. Barthes defines *parresia* as an arrogance of language, a will to appropriate the world, an excessive graspingness. Barthes adds: "I'll say for my part: *Parresia*: the dogmatic form of language" (2013: 126; orig. 2002a: 172).

The model of *xeniteia* is Spinoza, in the position of mastery he adopted in relation to his affects and emotions (Barthes 2002a: 172-173; 2013: 126). But since Barthes makes a connection between *xeniteia* and Eastern, specifically Japanese, manners, we can illustrate Barthes's violently hostile attitude to *parresia* with the photo in *The Empire of Signs* of General Nogi and his wife, taken the day before their suicide in September 1912, and this comment from Barthes in the caption: "They are going to die, they know it and this is not seen" (1992a: 92-93; orig. 2007: 128-129). Nothing is more contrary to *parresia*.

Barthes goes further in his criticism of *parresia*, because it seems one has make oneself *xenos*, or foreign, against *parresia*, which is to say against the familiarity, insensitivity, and frankness of the one who feels at home everywhere, whereas the *xenos*, the adherent to *xeniteia*, is always telling himself that he has no business being where he is (2002a: 175; 2013: 128). *Xeniteia* thus typically appears as the position of spectacle and indifference in relation to the world that we have seen in passing, but it is also a position that is profoundly linked to life as a system of life, as an organization of daily life where again, Spinoza can serve as a model (Barthes cites here Jean Colerus's *La vie de Spinoza* from 1706). Finally, it is a singular mode of *togetherness* – as an alternative to the 'fellow citizen,' who is the only figure of otherness for the Cynic – once we conceive *xeniteia* in relation to what Barthes calls "a common fatherland, the great Other" (2013: 128; orig. 2002a: 175). The homeland [patrie] is not the city, here it is the community in this de-centering formed by the empty place of the Other – God or absence of God.

Barthes takes the element that connects *xeniteia* and the concept of living together from the organization of monastic life, namely, the 'compline,' the last of the daily prayers before nightfall: "The community prepares to brave the night (imagine a countryside far away from anywhere, with no lights, so where nightfall really means the threat of darkness). Living-Together: perhaps simply a way of confronting the sadness of the night together. Being among strangers is inevitable, necessary even, except when night falls." (2013: 129; orig. 2002a: 176)

## Akedia/Care

To get to the heart of the issue, we need to note the first word of the last outline of *Vita Nova*, dated December 12, 1979: *acédie* (or *akedia*), which refers to the position of the subject who wants, or even needs, a *vita nova*, and which is already treated extensively in *How to Live Together* (cf. Bale's contribution to this volume). *Akedia* is the state of the subject in the grip of disinvestment, caught in the alliance of boredom and anxiety – in *aphanisis*, that is, a loss of investment, a disappearance of desire (2002a: 54-55; 2013: 21) – and who calls for a *vita nova*. For the purposes of our comparison, however, Barthes offers a very illuminating reading of *akedia*, because it seems that *akedia* is composed from the Greek privative *a* and *kedeuo*, which means "to take care of, take an interest in" (2013: 21; orig. 2002a: 54).

*Akedia* thus by definition implies a withdrawal from the *care of the self*, and the *vita nova*, in contrast to the philosophical life or the 'good life,' excludes any positive role of the 'care of the self,' which is central in Foucault's "The Courage of the Truth" and of course the third volume of the *History of Sexuality*, which

bears this title. It is astonishing for that matter that Foucault devotes so many pages to such long paraphrases of authors such as Seneca, only to offer in the end a description of the care of the self that is conceptually deprived, since he says nothing about the meaning of the words 'self' or 'care,' despite the latter's rich philosophical tradition especially in the 20th century. *Akedia* is thus removed from the care of the self in so far as this care of the self does not in any way address the question of existence.

There is another disparity that must be examined, however, because Foucault draws out other thematic threads from the care of the self, such as the curious "stylistics of existence" (1988: 71; orig. 1997: 62), which is expressed in various ways, such as the "stylistics of moral life," or "style of living" (1988: 192; orig. 1997: 222). These notions have since been taken up by numerous scholars. But isn't this category precisely too simple? Underdeveloped? And has Barthes not rendered it irrelevant or ineffective in advance when, already in *Writing Degree Zero*, he rigorously conjoins the notion of style to that of writing, rendering the former unthinkable without the latter. There cannot be any comparable "stylistics of life" in the *vita nova* without its writing, without writing, except in standardized, repetitive forms, outside of any authentic *vita nova*. It is true that at the heart of the *vita nova*, writing is perhaps something other than writing. Caught up in idleness, the idleness of the neutral, it is also a "philosophical inaction" (2002c: 1008). But whatever degree of utopia is reached by writing for Barthes in the *vita nova*, it goes without saying that a "stylistics of life" is unthinkable without writing – something Michel Foucault seems unaware of.

## AUGUSTINE

Within the schema of the *vita nova*, Barthes gives himself two fundamental witnesses: on one side the mother as guide, on the other the Moroccan child, the idle child, both explicitly opposed to the figure of the master. On one side is the mother as 'true guide,' which of itself entails the statement: "Never was a philosopher my guide" (ibid: 1011). On the other there is the Moroccan child, the idle child, which entails another statement, "the absence of the master" (ibid: 1011). This triangular arrangement formed by the narrator, mother, and child as the triangle of the *vita nova* is precisely the one chosen by St. Augustine, in *De vita beata* (*On the Happy Life*). Monica, the mother, and Adeodatus, the child, are both promoted as those who know, and they represent the pair of respondents to Augustine's questioning on the happy life. This triangle is the substitute for the Socratic dialogue. Instead of the slowness of science, of dialectical reason, there is the speed of the inspired logos; instead of the long, ponderous, and also brittle path of the Socratic dialogue, there is the short path of the word of the mother and child. If the mother and son testify to God

(*Vita Beata*) in Augustine, they testify to the neutral (*Vita Nova*) in Barthes. Like Barthes, Augustine, despite or because of the *Confessions*, is opposed to all of the traits of the Cynical subject as presented by Foucault: he is opposed to *parresia*, to the care of the self, to the figure of the master, to the stylistics of life. And he admits, like Barthes in "Les soirées de Paris" (2002d; 1992b), and in particular the experience of the dark room, being able to blush for himself and, better still, to blush for the mother.

*Translation by Melissa McMahon.*

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