Sign the body and ecriture in Roland Barthes

David Vincent Hagan

The University of Montana

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THE SIGN, THE BODY, AND ECRI TURE in Roland Barthes

by

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B. A. University of Montana, 1985

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This study discusses the role of the figure of the body in the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes. The concept of the body, which can be discerned in Barthes' early theoretical writings, is central to the way in which Barthes later describes the creation of meaning in the reading and writing of literature.

The study begins by situating Barthes work within the framework of modern French literary theory. This is followed by a discussion of Saussurian linguistics and the concept of "positive linguistic value". A close reading of Writing Degree Zero reveals the possibility of viewing écriture not only as an ethical concept but, perhaps more importantly, as a linguistic concept. Similarities are noted between the linguistic sign of Saussure and what one might call the "literary sign", or écriture, in Barthes. Écriture, in other words, can be considered as a linguistic sign which competes with the Saussurian sign and which takes its place alongside the signs of Freud, Kristeva and Lacan in as much as it is subject to disturbances of affectivity. This disturbance is linguistically productive.

A discussion follows in which the concept of écriture is used to explain Barthes' peculiar position with regard to poetry. Next, Barthes' use and later rejection of the structuralist method is considered in the works On Racine, Criticism and Truth, S/Z and The Pleasure of the Text. It is argued that the concept of the body plays an important role in the development of Barthes' changing theoretical positions. The way in which Barthes liberates the body through "writing" is seen as a further commitment to the principle of écriture first mentioned in Writing Degree Zero.

The concluding chapter summarizes the central role of the body in Barthes' perspective in general.
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Introduction:

Roland Barthes' critical works are quite varied with respect to subject matter and theoretical approach. Yet, in all of his works there is a constant concern with language as a form invested with both human freedom and alienation. From Writing Degree Zero (1953) to Camera Lucida (1980) Barthes' analyses and his use of language show a deep fascination for this peculiarly human form -- for its powers in containing and directing thought and in its agency in structuring human activities. In particular his essentially structuralist view of (what we call) natural language and its "analogues" has led him through various conceptions of the literary object and the nature and functions of literary criticism.

Barthes' early concern with the formal properties of language and literature led him to postulate, in Writing Degree Zero, a history of "modes of writing" whose political engagement could be identified by their form (on the side of the signifier) rather than solely by their content (within the signifieds). In other words, works by Camus or Quenneau, for example, could be said to be politically engaged without ever overtly raising political issues within their content.
This same work presented the public with Barthes' concept of écriture which is the focal point of my study. Much has been made of the "ethical" aspect of écriture in connection with the historical analysis offered in Writing Degree Zero. Little has been said, however, of the endurance of the linguistic foundation of this concept or of its development in Barthes' later work. I will argue that the linguistic nature of Barthes' argument in Writing Degree Zero has not been fully recognized by commentators and critics of his work. I will show that despite the fact that Barthes did not read Saussure until 1957 there was nonetheless a good deal of Saussurian (structural) thought behind his formulation of the concept of écriture.

By stressing the linguistic rather than the ethical aspect of écriture I will show how this concept constantly fascinates Barthesian theory which is ever concerned with what Kristeva calls the "borders of language". Ecriture is, in a metaphorical sense, a geographical concern with language and its boundaries. It is concerned with sign systems within language -- their possible configurations, their meeting places, their gaps and divergences.

Barthes' formalist concerns, combined with his Marxist philosophy, led him early in his career to examine the influence of ideology on language. This examination, first suggested in Writing Degree Zero, led to his linguistic analysis of the phenomena of "myth" in the second edition of
Mythologies (1957). Myth is the "stealing" or impregnation of language by ideology --another language. Ideology, Barthes argued in "Myth Today" (1957), is able to deform the arbitrary relationship which exists between the elements of a linguistic sign by virtue of the confusion which can result between the meaning of the sign and an ideological concept. In "mythic" communication the linguistic sign functions as a partial sign-- as a mere signifier --for the larger ideological sign. Below, I have represented a modified schema of the mythic language which Barthes describes in Mythologies (115).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language-Object</th>
<th>1. Signifier</th>
<th>2. Signified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MYTH</td>
<td>3. Meaning/</td>
<td>II CONCEPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I FORM (signifier)</td>
<td>(signified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III SIGNIFICATION (sign)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Myth easily functions within language because the arbitrary relationship between the elements of the sign (at the language-object level) does not permit a foreclosure of meaning. This is what distinguishes a language from a nomenclature. In other words, denotation does not exhaust the language sign's power to signify. Signs resonate meaning through their connotative and associative powers --and much of Barthes' structuralism aims at explaining the "system" of these connoted associations which are largely driven by
metaphor and metonymy. In the case of myth, however, the original meaning of the sign is displaced. It remains only as an "alibi" for the ideological concept which now functions as the dominant signified of its host language.

What Barthes finds objectionable in myth is not uncontrolled signification, but that fact that the ideological signified passes itself off as the "natural" signified of the first-order linguistic sign. Ideology has the look of the first, object-level language. It takes the "naturalness" of the first order language as a cover for its ideological communication. (I shall discuss the illusion of "naturalness" below in treating Saussure's sign theory.) The added superstructure which is schematically described above is never announced in mythic language. It functions covertly. It can do this because of a logical affinity which exists between the ideological concept and the original meaning of the sign. It is here that there is a motivated relation between signifier (the first-order sign) and signified. The concept and the meaning are put into a whirlwind spin, like a top, whose blurred image does not disclose its dual nature.

This process, which fascinated Barthes during the writing of Mythologies, The Fashion System and Elements of Semiology largely informs his understanding of the poetic ("polysemic") power of language. This schema allows him to express in linguistic terms what he had expressed prosaically in Writing Degree Zero and the first edition of Mythologies: that is, how
literature always comes to signify something other than its narrative content; how it signifies and serves conservative interests of bourgeois culture.

In *The Fashion System* Barthes schematized the contrast between *connotation* (which is basically the system described above) to that of *meta-language*. The difference between the two is that, whereas myth enslaves another language's sign and uses it clandestinely as a signifier, as a *form*, for its own signifieds, meta-language treats the sign of the object-language as its signified. It openly tries to pick up this sign-as-signified in order to explore it within the logic of its relations. A *meta-language* does not hide itself as does mythic language. Barthes contrasts the way in which these languages can take root in object-languages in *The Fashion System*. I have reproduced his schematization below with a few modifications:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-Language</th>
<th>Signifier</th>
<th>Sign/(signified)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object-Language</td>
<td></td>
<td>Signified</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth/connotation</th>
<th>Sign/ (signifier)</th>
<th>signified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signifier</td>
<td>Signified</td>
<td>Object-Language</td>
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(the ideological communication). In *meta-language* the sign of the object-language functions as the signified of the second language. In myth something alien is at work within a host system. In *meta-language* the object is simply to understand the structure of the host system. A distance is needed in order to evoke this system—a distance which can only be supplied by another, meta-, language.

Both of these languages have their origins in semio-sociological studies which focus upon the sign's ability to exceed denotative expression and to function in other language systems. Myth exploits the indeterminacy of the sign, whereas meta-language tries to limit this indeterminacy, to "pin it down", so to speak. A casual reading of *Mythologies* might lead one to think that Barthes prefers meta-language to mythical language; but the situation is not so clear. In chapter three I shall discuss the problem which Barthes has with structural interpretation, especially the way in which it "pins down" and closes literary signifieds. In short, Barthes admires the "mythic" power of language. He is deeply fascinated by it. For him it is the seat of the pleasure of the word. That which he dislikes in "myth" is simply the way in which it serves ideological means. And when he finds that semiology is not enough to weaken the power of myth he resorts to what he calls "semio-clasm", or the breaking of signs. How does this activity relate to that of the structuralist? What does it entail? These are questions which I shall treat in
subsequent chapters, especially when considering the role of the body in Barthes' sign theory.

Connotation and meta-language are soon employed in Barthes' literary analyses. Connotation is the phenomenon which, for Barthes, generally accounts for the poetic and "polysemic" nature of literary language. Meta-languages, like those employed by the literary critic aim at an explanation of the power of the literary sign, and attempt to assign a unified structure of meaning to these signs.

With Barthes' interest in *meta-language* one can see that his treatment of the sign evolves. It is becoming increasingly scientific and responsive to calls for responsibility in the interpretation of texts. The radical form of writing which he named *écriture* continually escapes or is ignored by his systematic theories, and he eventually breaks from the structuralist model of literary criticism largely for this reason. In 1971 he approaches the literary work from another point of view. With *S/Z* Barthes abandons the search for any unified content structuring the work in favor of a focus upon the interplay between the "codes" of the text. He abandons the conception of the literary object as a "work" --a conception which always favors a closure of meaning-- in favor of a conception of the open, social "texturing" of the literary text. In so doing Barthes explodes the object of structuralist study. I will show how this change in position is consistent with his original
concept of the sign which surprisingly few commentators have noticed in *Writing Degree Zero*. It is a conception which is visibly operative just at the surface of *Writing Degree Zero*.

With all of these changes in his critical project Barthes nevertheless returns to the use of familiar linguistic terminology to explain his views to his reader. His positions constantly evolve. One commentator has argued persuasively that Barthes is ultimately more interested in the idiosyncracies of strategies and of methods and what they produce, than in ever trying to produce a coherent and unified theory of the literary object or of writing. The more one comes to understand Barthes the less surprising this becomes. In fact, it is what seems of most value in his work. His work is like so many paths leading to different horizons. They are all tempting. They all offer a certain promise. but, it is not immediately clear how they relate to each other; how they might converge at a central point, in the person of Barthes himself. It is for this reason that I choose to study his work from the point of view of the linguistic sign. Barthes repeatedly returns to the linguistic sign as a model for explanation. It comes to function as *lingua franca*. His concern for the "health" of languages, for *écriture*, can only be understood from a linguistic point of view, from an understanding of the essential elements of the sign.

The sign is also a central linguistic concept which provides a ready relay to other concepts of importance in
Barthes' structuralist work. I believe, however, that there are two different conceptions of the sign in Barthes. And if I am correct in this, the debate over Barthes evolution, whether or not his later work is a continuation or rejection of his structuralist period, may become clearer.

Barthes had a conception of the Sausurrian sign which he got from discussions with Greimas while convalescing from an early illness. I believe his understanding of this sign to have been highly idiosyncratic, and for that reason, deeply rooted in Barthes' personal "logos".

His original formulation of the sign, generally unrecognized by other critics, had, I believe, a formative influence on his later, post-structuralist thought. In this regard Barthes' work forms a circle -- in that he returns and develops ideas dear to him at the time of the writing of *Writing Degree Zero*. In my estimation Barthes' structuralist period -- which he refers to as his "heroic" period -- is the period where he was most involved with ideas that were not his own. He was exploring by synthesizing the ideas of others, rather than developing his own. In this regard the concept of the sign at use in Barthesian thought can be used as a vehicle to unify (at least thematically within a linguistic perspective) what has been thought of as unrelated elements in Barthes' work. Barthes never abandons the concept of the sign even though he supposedly renounces semiology and abandons
structuralism for a new approach which focuses on the reader's (textual) pleasure.

Because so much of Barthes' earlier scientificity is linguistically based, and because the structural aspect of modern linguistics is at times misunderstood, misrepresented or artificially delimited in its application by linguists and critics alike, it will be useful to review some of the central tenets of Saussure's Course in General Linguistics. I will present the basic concepts necessary to an understanding of structural linguistics as put forward by Saussure. These concepts are, in the main, accepted without significant change in Barthes' work; however, some important differences between the two men will be discerned.

SOME KEY CONCEPTS IN SIGN THEORY: ORIGINS IN SAUSSURE.
The sign, the signifier and the signified:

What is language? Saussure finds in language a system of "pure values" (24) which is made of the marriage of organized thought coupled with organized sound. Language is a field where abstract and amorphous thought and sound are brought together, fragmented, and unified through a system into signs. This combination of sound and thought creates a form, not a substance—a distinction stressed by Saussure.¹ The exact origin of language is impossible to determine, however it seems reasonable to suggest that the plastic, divisible nature
of sound provides thought with its signifiers. The role of language is not to create material for expressing ideas, but to serve as a "link between thought and sound, under conditions that of necessity bring about the reciprocal delimitations of units" (112).

Psychologically our thought—apart from its expression in words—is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language (111-112).

This point of view echoes that of Rousseau who states in his Discours sur l'inégalité and his Essai sur l'origine des langues, that man's "state of nature" was pre-linguistic. Man was incapable of any conceptualization without language. Rousseau indicates that he understands the intricate relation between language and thought, where he states that language and conceptualization give rise to each other. One is not possible without the other.
Saussure states that we often do not think about the nature of language; that we take it for granted, and that when we do think of it, we tend to see it as a system of nomenclature. This is the common sense view of language. Because things (or ideas) have names, we tend to think that words point to things and that this is the function of the word. This view makes the word the representative for the thing named, i.e., the referent. The referent becomes the content of the word. But this supposition is false, argues Saussure, because it presupposes the existence of all things for which we have names. It presupposes, for example the existence or, rather, the pre-existence of ideas before language. Saussure sees this as an overly-simplified view of language (97-98).

Arguing against the nomenclature view, Saussure states that such a perspective sheds no light as to whether a word is to be viewed as a vocal or as a psychological entity, when it is, in fact, both (98). For Saussure, a linguistic "unit" is a two-dimensional thing: it has two terms both of which are psychological. (Neither of which is the referent.) The linguistic sign does not unify a thing and a word. Rather it is the unity of a concept and an acoustic image which is also mental. This image, Saussure states, is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that
it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept which is generally more abstract (66).

The psychological nature of acoustic images is evident, Saussure says, when we consider that we can "hear" a voice when we talk to ourselves mentally, or when we recite verse without opening our mouths or moving even our tongues.

The linguistic sign, then, is a binary entity both sides of which are psychological. It is for this reason that Saussure uses the term sound-image, which is mental, instead of sound in describing the elements proper to language. A language need not be based on sound.

This conception of the sign is difficult to grasp because we are in the habit of viewing the linguistic unit, the word (the sign) as if it were only a "sound-image" whose function is to represent something outside of language. But, this is not the case, stresses Saussure, who laments the fact that the word "sign" is somewhat unclear:

I call the combination of a concept and a sound-image a sign, but in current usage the term generally designates only a sound-image, a word, for example (arbor, etc.). One tends to forget that arbor is
called a sign only because it carries the concept "tree," with the result that the idea of the sensory part implies the idea of the whole (67).

In other words, the word --which we too easily mistake to be the representative for the thing, the referent-- is in fact a binary element of language, already containing a concept which corresponds to the referent (supposedly outside of language). Saussure insists upon the double nature of the sign. It is not enough to say that the word represents the concept: this would be to fall back into the nomenclature circle. The "word" is already a complete sign. To avoid this potential misunderstanding he gives to each element of the sign its own appellation. The acoustic-image he calls the signifier, the concept he calls the signified.

Is the sign, then, simply the union of a certain sound and a certain concept? Not exactly, says Saussure, because such a conception of the sign does not consider the sign within its system. It gives the impression that meaning is given only by the signified; that it is the positive anatomical content of the sign. Such a view encourages the idea that one can create meaning by simply adding signs together to determine a meaning--the way a classical French critic might add historical-biographical material together to produce a truth on Racine. But this is not the case, for as
we shall see below, the content of the sign is determined differentially within a system of signs.

The Arbitrary Nature of the "Sign":

Saussure explains that the relation between the two elements of the sign is completely arbitrary, i.e., there is no logical necessity which relates the one to the other. That is to say a given signified could have been conjoined with any other signifier to form a sign. This view is supported by comparing signs between languages. The concept "chair" has the signifiers "stol" in Norwegian, "chaise" in French, and "silla" in Spanish. There is nothing in the shape of the signifier "chair" (in any of these languages) to determine its relation to the signified (the idea of) chair. Signifiers, then, are different from symbols which have a "motivated" (natural or analogical) relationship to their signifieds. Saussure makes this clear stating that the signifier for the signified "justice", which is a blindfolded woman holding a scale, could not be equally well symbolized by a chariot, for example (68).

That the linguistic sign is partly composed of sound, or sound-images means that the signifier (the sound-image) is qualified by its temporality. It is "unfolded" in time. Human language depends upon this unfolding, as do such art forms as poetry, narrations, music. The elements of language
are presented in a succession. Signifiers are grouped linearly to form "chains" of signification (70).

Difference. The creation of positive value:

Value is one of the most important of the Saussurian concepts bequeathed to structural linguistics. Rather than focusing on the atomic meaning of sound units in the language—be they conceived as words or signs—Saussure speaks of a value, related to signification, which is delimited by the sign's "competition" with other signs. The key to value is negative difference within the two substances of language considered independently, i.e., sound and thought. The sign, as we shall see, has positive value, only when viewed in its totality—as the union of signifier and signified and as a segment informed by language as a system (122).

For Saussure, meaning (signification) is probably less important than value not only because the former is dependent upon the latter, but because meaning (signification) parades itself as the independent content of signs.

The fact that a signifier evokes a concept (and vice versa) is one aspect of value. However, to confuse value with signification is to miss the truly structural aspect of language; it is, again, to revert to the idea of language as a nomenclature. Both conceptual value (at the level of the signified) and material value (level of the signifier) are produced only through the simultaneous presence of related
terms in the language. If one considers signification as the vertical relationship between the signifier and its signified then value (which encompasses this relation) is the addition of the sign's horizontal relationship with other signs in the language.

Whether considered materially or conceptually a sign offers the possibility of a comparison and an exchange (115). Exchange is the value of the relationship of the two different elements within the sign. As a dollar is worth, say, a pint of beer, a certain signifier is "worth" a certain signified and vice versa. However, a dollar can be compared to its own kind, that is other elements of currency --so that one dollar can be compared to two quarters, etc. (A dollar is, of course, worth four quarters; but comparison does not require equivalence; only a meaningful similarity.) Hence, we can compare either of the two elements of the sign with their own kind, i.e., signifieds with other signifieds, or signifiers with other signifiers. In so doing what is noticed is that the value of a sign cannot be fixed by isolating only its exchange value because the value of the sign is fixed as well by the concurrence of everything that exists outside it. This is why Saussure says that "all definitions of words are made in vain" (14).

Exchange value reveals the paradoxical nature of value (115). This becomes evident, Saussure argues, when we notice that words used to express related ideas delimit each other.
reciprocally. As an example Saussure gives us the paradigm "redouter" (to dread) "avoir peur" (to fear) and "craindre" (to be afraid). If "redouter" did not exist in the language, he says, its content would go to the other terms within the paradigm. A signifier can support a plurality of signifieds. In this way Barthes argues that a text can support a plurality of readings.

From the point of view of value, concepts are themselves purely differential, defined not by their positive content but negatively with respect to other terms within the system (paradigm). Material value is determined in essentially the same way. It is the product of phonic difference. This difference, always within a system where sound and thought are brought together in language, carries signification. A phonic segment of a language can only have value by its non-coincidence with the rest of the language. Saussure reminds us that the sound in and of itself has no positive value in the same way that the value of a coin is not determined by its metal content. Value, then, is possible only through oppositions and differences within an environment, i.e. a system or paradigm (117). This is why words which are taken to be equivalent in two different languages are ultimately not truly equivalent. They have a different shape, semantic load, and range. Or, put another way, their performance in the language is restricted in dissimilar ways. Saussure's example of this is the words "mouton" and "sheep". They do
not have the same value in their respective languages. "Mouton" can signify an animal and a meat. We, on the other hand do not eat "sheep"; we eat "mutton". Because of this, one can argue that a dictionary entry is ultimately not equivalent to its definition. Saussure’s conception of value also argues against the notion of pre-existing concepts to which signifiers give form. If there were such apriori concepts, we would find that the terms of different languages would have the same value. In other words, the systemic nature of the environment which sustains signs influences the very content of those signs. To isolate a sign, to cut it up and spread it out is not to grasp its essence. It must be seen to function within a system of opposition (within a paradigm) which operates moreover, within the over-arching structure of language. "Proof of this," says Saussure, "is that the value of a term may be modified without either its meaning or its sound being affected, solely because a neighboring term has been modified" (120). Saussure stresses the important role of the system in the determination of value where he states:

A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas; ... and this system serves as the effective link between the phonic and psychological
elements within each sign (120, my emphasis).

A language, then, is a structured economy of interrelated values which can only be determined through comparison and exchange of its material (phonic) and conceptual (ideal) elements. Either side of a language taken separately reveals only negative values. The two purely negative values of signifier and signified form a positive value through their union within a system.

Now it appears that the nature of the system has considerable importance as to the positive value contained by its elements. It is not enough to try to determine the value or meaning of an element without considering its systematic importance. It is only by viewing language as a system that the linguist can fully appreciate the significance of one of its terms. Or, as Saussure puts it: "it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object" (8).

Before moving on to the first of Barthes' published works let me briefly consider two concepts which pertain to this system: those of language (langue) and speech (parole).

Langue/Parole:
Language and speech, since Saussure, are no longer confused with each other.

Speech is an act, the product of the individual's will. Saussure says that it is heterogenous, and by this he means that one cannot consider it from a single point of view
because "it straddles several areas simultaneously—physical, physiological, and psychological" (9). Moreover, it belongs both to the individual and to the society as a whole. Furthermore, speech is made up of the more or less accidental combination of signs, the stops and starts and repetitions which the individual employs in the speech act. Speech, then, is a complex, willful, intellectual activity which takes place within the moment. Determining the full content of any speech act is probably impossible. Saussure adds that speech precedes language, logically, since language is built up, as it were by the deposition of all speech acts within a community (18).

Language, on the other hand, is the encompassing systematic blueprint for all speech within a community. "It is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images, and in which both parts of the sign are psychological" (15). It is the product of the faculty of speech—a "sedimentation"—which, in dialectical fashion, makes such speech possible. Unlike speech, however, which can be divided into heterogenous aspects, language is homogenous, unified, an entity unto itself. It is a faculty which each member of the community possesses. However, it does not exist perfectly in any single individual because it is the product of the greater community, and thus outside of the individual who cannot create it or modify it himself (14-15).
It is not difficult to see how this distinction can be conceptually fruitful. Nor is it difficult to imagine how the distinction might travel to another field to be applied analogically. Any concrete linguistic phenomenon can be considered as the product of an engendering system. A poem or a modern novel, for instance, could be considered as a system unto itself, sustaining its own relations of coherence without any outside reference. One could, in other words, theoretically grant the status of *langue* in turn to "Literature", or a group of literary works, or a single work—as long as one shows that at each level a unique "system" of internal relations is identifiable. These relations then must be reflected at another level of "language". By granting such status to a work, one renounces the idea that the work is a message—that it carries a determined content. *Langue* is not communication; it is what makes communication possible. My reading of Barthes' work leads me to suggest that he follows exactly this progression. In *Writing Degree Zero* he speaks of literature as its own language with each work being an instance. *On Racine* is the structural analysis of eleven of Racine's tragedies, the search for Racine's *langue*. Each play taken separately is an instance of *parole*. In breaking with this approach *S/Z* is the study of the "plurality" of a single work. Barthes shows that many readings (parole) are possible within a single text. With *A Lover's Discourse* and other later works, Barthes goes so far as to eventually renounce the
meta-linguistic approach to criticism (a parole) in favor of a criticism which is at the same time its own aesthetic object.

What might parole be, if we push the analogy further? It would be a temporalization—an act within this language. It would be, in a word, a willful act of signification (or communication). It would be like a critic selecting a reading of, and giving a meaning to a work. Is "meaning" too strong? Speech, after all, is used for communication—the selection and determination of sign values. A language, taken as a homogenous whole, does not signify. There is no reason to impose meaning on the system. What does French mean? Meaning comes out of it—in speech. Or maybe the critic respects the work as a language-subject. Barthes refers to literary works as instances of institutionalized subjectivity. The work is a subject, a freedom, which defies definition. A "being" of literature, it is still alive. What does the critic produce, then, if not a paraphrase? What is his language compared to that of the work? It is a meta-language built upon a signified which imposes a meaning upon the original work. Being (most probably) artless, it falls away, like a speech act. Maybe the critic should view the work not as an object to be described or defined, but as a "pre-text", a textuality, a sanctioned point of departure for a socially engaged discourse focusing on contemporary questions.
The above is intended only as a sketch of what the langue/parole distinction might inspire when one looks at signifying phenomena from a structural point of view. Barthes' Criticism and Truth addresses these possibilities, and others, but only after making room for innovative discourse based on the literary text. First, he must displace the monolithic historical-biographical single reading of the text which dominated French criticism, as will be seen later.

An analysis of the linguistic elements to be found in Writing Degree Zero require a brief summary of the radical nature of Saussure's conception of language. In language, everything is representation. Referents, sounds, concepts, all that we are apt to consider material of some kind is, in the sign, given psychological representation. Even a word has a representative "shape" in the mind, and this is what is left when the physiological (enunciatory) and phonological aspect of the signifier falls away. All is representation within a system of signification. This system, Saussure makes clear, creates its objects. This system is language. Its units function within an "economy"; their value is determined by mutual delimitations within a sub-environment within the language. This environment is the paradigm of related and, thus, competing terms. Still, no positive value is discernable within the two elements of the sign until the sign is considered in its totality, that is, when it is put into play, when it functions within the language. Positive value
is a linguistic and social fact in Saussure. It is not created, but only used by the individual according to a social convention. In other words, speech uses the positive value of signs—of which Barthes will try to show there is a surplus which is rooted in the expressive body—a positivity which is a function, of a specific deviant language use. It is not a function of all speech. Thus, to consider the above analogy once more, the positive value recognized within any given segment (or sign) of the poem is "framed" by its participation in the whole homogenous surface, the texture of the poem itself. There is no "fixed" meaning of a sign other than its difference. One must consider the system in which it operates, and express one's self within this system, by its rules of relations, in order to determine the content of a sign. All of this follows from the langue/parole distinction as it is applied to the example of the poem.

It is clear that this approach gives considerable weight to the immanent structures of language. "Truth" is replaced by "validity" as the object of critical investigation. If it is language which sanctions speech, and not something which lies outside of language, then critical discourse would not have to rely on the authority of the author or on a critic's historical positivist quest into the author's biography. Language is its own frontier. But, what exists outside of language? I am not speaking here of the "referent", which, for language exists only as something which has already been
incorporated into language. What could be said of the outer surface, the "outside" of language? Here we must turn to Barthes' first major publication, enigmatically titled *Writing Degree Zero*. I will emphasize the linguistic aspect of this work, which I feel, has been neglected at the expense of the ethical argument which it contains. This argument, in any case, is strengthened once the linguistic supports which Barthes uses are better understood.
END NOTES

1. Saussure 113. This statement is repeated twice in Course; the second time Saussure repeats it (122) he lays the failures of linguistics up to the present time on the linguist's insistence upon viewing linguistic phenomena as substance — as though the content of a sign were fixed. Such a view, he feels, is incapable of recognizing the systematic nature of language.

2. Discours sur l'inégalité (III, 129). Rousseau's argument is that "amour de soi" gives rise to "amour propre" by which the individual spontaneously prefers himself to others. This gives rise in turn to an appreciation of differences, particularly the ordering into binary oppositions and the development of hierarchy which encourages the repression of one term over another through preference.
CHAPTER 2

The sign, the body, and écriture.

*Writing Degree Zero*, is Barthes' presentation of a new concept which informs a new Marxist reading of the history of literature, and which gives a critical appreciation of the nature of avant-garde writing. Barthes presents literature as a self-reflexive object -- an object having its own subjectivity so to speak -- which has become increasingly aware of its historical position, and which is concerned with its own justification vis-à-vis the class which consumes it. Barthes traces the history of this self-consciousness and its relation to History proper, stating, in effect, that the formal "signs" of literature reflect literature's relation to man and to History. Such signs, in other words, are not merely ornamental. They are not empty. Answering Sartre's call for "engagement," Barthes declares that even before the writer begins, he is faced with the difficult choice of having to choose between various modes of writing. He must choose his form. He must define his position with respect to these "signs". This choice of form is in itself an engagement because it is made in the face of all literary writing, which, owing to its relation to the classes which consume it, cannot be considered a naive social form. The choice of form, then,
is an ethical choice, no less so than the Sartrian choice of content.¹

All of this depends, of course, on the political nature of "form" as Barthes defines it. In fact, he does not choose the word "form" to discuss the formal aspects of an author's writing. This word is too easily confused with genre, and it naturally leads to the "form" versus "content" binarism. Instead Barthes chooses the term écriture --the French word for "writing" which has usually been translated into English as "modes of writing". In either language the concept looming behind the word is somewhat difficult to grasp for two reasons: the term chosen is already semantically filled by the ideas of "writing" and "penmanship", and Barthes uses the term écriture somewhat ambiguously to mean two different things, neither of which are directly related to the ideas of "writing" or "penmanship". (If the pen is stronger than the sword "penmanship" --as opposed to "swordsmanship"-- would not have made, in fact, such a bad candidate for what Barthes suggests by écriture).

In Barthes, écriture is a special kind of writing and yet it can also be just a "mode of writing". Almost all commentators, with the exception of Blanchot (as noted by Lavers), have missed the specifically linguistic aspect of this concept in Writing Degree Zero. Vincent Jouve, for example, in his excellent analysis of Barthes' literary theory says that the écriture which functions in Barthesian theory in
1972 "hardly has any relation with the concept of the same name in Dégré Zéro." (La Littérature Selon Barthes p. 34). Commentators like Jouve are surprised to see écriture used some twenty years after WDZ in a different way -- in a way more closely associated with "excess" in language -- which is to say that they have missed something important about the role of "excess" in Barthes' argument for a new ethical history of the forms of literature. They do not see the genetic relationship between Barthes' somewhat unusual concept of "style" (its relation to the body) which is the source both of "excess" and of new language on the one hand, and the ethical aspect of écriture which is all too familiar today. The ethical reading of Degree Zero dominates to the extent that commentators view it as a direct response to Sartre's Qu'est-ce que la littérature?. They mistakenly assume that Barthes is responding in kind to Sartre's argument for an engaged literature -- by which Sartre meant only engaged prose. Barthes and Sartre, however, do not share the same fundamental conception of language.

Barthes himself is responsible for this confusion which his everyday term écriture produces. He could have chosen a term having more to do with "modes of writing" than simply the French word for "writing", and he could have used a another term to describe the specifically novel character of new language which is also indicated by the term écriture. But, on the other hand, the confusion which results from his
deformation of the original sense of écriture is exactly the kind of result which defines overly determined signs caught up in the phenomenon of écriture. But, because this novel aspect is just a moment in the life of a form which soon becomes a "mode of writing", it is possible that Barthes did not see the need to split his concept into terms representing these two moments. However, because an understanding of these two moments is important if one is to appreciate the continuity of Barthesian thought, I will not consistently translate "écriture" into "writing" or "modes of writing" as has usually been done by Colin Smith, Susan Sontag, Stephen Heath and others. My reason for this is twofold. As an alien term for the English reader—a new signifier—écriture offers the possibility of denoting a specific meaning which is somewhat antithetical to what is suggested by "mode of writing". That meaning can best be expressed in English, I feel, by leaving the term in French. By "écriture" I mean to isolate the freshness and "innocence" of a "mode of writing"—or, what amounts to the same thing in Barthes, simply a new configuration of language produced by invention and deviation.

What follows in this chapter, then, is an argument for the essentially linguistic aspect of Barthes' concept of écriture found in Writing Degree Zero. I will support my reading of the linguistic nature of this concept with numerous citations from Barthes' history of literature and the analysis of its forms presented in Writing Degree Zero. In so doing, I will
show that these arguments have their full force only if one accepts the linguistic aspect of *écriture*.

Barthes' presents his concept of *écriture* in the introduction to *Degree Zero* and in the chapter entitled "What is Writing?". He gives as an example the writing of the revolutionary pamphleteer, Jacques Hébert (1757-1794), who always began each issue of his newspaper with an exhilarating string of obscenities. These obscenities, says Barthes, meant something, though they could never signify anything specific to anyone other than Hébert himself. It would be impossible to render the exact meaning of Hébert's expression. And yet these expletives expressed something quite important --the revolutionary feeling of the day. In Hébert's writing, Barthes says, we find

an example of a model of writing whose function is no longer only communication or expression, but the imposition of something beyond language, which is both History and the stand we take in it (*WDZ* p.1).

What interests me here is not simply the idea that one may take an ethical stand by virtue of the form of language used, but that, for Barthes, there is something which an individual can impose *beyond the boundary of language* even while using this language. There are gaps in the prison walls of language.
One can easily recognize that there is a use for language which is not necessarily dependant upon the determined meaning of words. Words, by their *indeterminacy*, can signify much more than their dictionary content. But, Barthes is saying more than this. One can use language in such a way as to go beyond the boundaries of language --which is to say, beyond the boundaries of constituted thought in language. This going beyond the boundary is a uniquely individual act for Barthes, one by which an author makes his mark, takes his stand, and reveals his style. *Ecriture*, then, is a very loaded concept having little to do with the everyday uses of the word "writing".

Barthes gives us the anatomy of *écriture* in *Writing Degree Zero*, saying that it is the product of the mixture of both the individual's *style* and *language*. To understand *écriture* then, we must examine more closely what Barthes has in mind when he uses these terms. Like *écriture* they are not used in their every day sense. In my examination of these concepts I will make several references to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, especially his work *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). The difficulty in grasping some of what Barthes says about language and style can be alleviated by Merleau-Ponty's discussion of these terms. Also, it seems likely that the French phenomenologist had an influence upon Barthes' conception of *écriture*, which is unquestionably the foundation of his argument in *Writing Degree Zero*. He mentions Merleau-
Ponty by name only for the first time in 1964 in his work *Elements of Semiology*, but notably in conjunction with that of the linguist Brondal from whom he obtained the concept of *écriture blanche* or "neutral writing" which is a prototypical concept for Barthes' writing at the "zero degree". I believe the juxtaposition of these two thinkers at this later period indicates an earlier influence on Barthes by Merleau-Ponty.

**Language:**

Barthes has written in the introduction to *Mythologies* that he did not read Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* until 1957. I will argue that Barthes' concept of language in 1953 is already structural --that it is the same conception, or nearly so, that we find in Saussure, but with one important difference: *écriture*. This concept implies a dynamic relationship between the individual subject and language which is found neither in Saussure nor later in Lacan.

Barthes conception of language clearly incorporates a *langue*/*parole* kind of distinction. However, unlike Saussure Barthes does not oppose *langue* to *parole* in a binary fashion in *Writing Degree Zero*. Rather, he opposes the concept of language to that of style as on opposition between two languages. And it is this concept of style which may be in the end the most personally innovative, informative and enduring in Barthesian thought.
In the chapter, "What is Writing", Barthes' opening line would put the structuralist reader on familiar ground: "We know that a language is a corpus of prescriptions and habits common to all the writers of a period" (9). Here language is less the common substance belonging to a nation of speakers than a body of rules under which writers labor. "Language" in this instance appears to be writer specific. It is the artist's language, the language of Literature, which has its rules and prescriptions delimiting the scope of Literature. It is, in effect, not just the rules of the mother language, but the rules governing the "signs" of literature. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to distinguish between two levels of language in Barthes. What he refers to as language, in other words, is not necessarily the mother tongue, the "master" language of the larger community. Rather, it is any body of signs which function within a closed system. Barthes' view is that one can have a language within a language. i.e., the language of Literature within the French language.

There has been some discussion among linguists whether or not language is a closed system, that is, whether or not the individual can effect any changes upon the structure of language. With his concept of écriteur Barthes takes a position in the debate. For him, language is almost completely closed but not totally. Ecriture, the going beyond language, and the flexibility of language which this implies, is always possible. Speaking of political modes of writing,
Barthes refers to them as "closed" and as "hardened systems". These are languages of diminished flexibility. Their connotative richness has been purged. But, he also refers to these languages within language as a "spectacular commitment of language" belonging to an "elsewhere" of language (20). This "elsewhere", can be like the revolutionary Hébert's desire to go "beyond language", or like the author's "orphean dream" --the attempt to say what is thought to be unsayable within the existing language. The "elsewhere" of writing is the visionary source of the language system. In Sartrian fashion, Barthes says that all writing carries with it "the weight of a gaze conveying an intention which is no longer linguistic" (20). It is the master signifier which remains unnamed, but to which all signs within the system point. This gaze is the inspired center of an écriture whose circumference may or may not remain open. Political modes, according to Barthes, do not have this openness. They are too "axiological", Barthes says, because they collapse fact and value. There is no exchange of terms within its dogmatic confines. A closed écriture, one whose terms become "fixed", is extremely coercive (20).

Barthes, then, generally considers established modes of writing as closed. For him, language is "an abstract circle of truths, outside of which alone the solid residue of an individual logos begins to settle" (9). This seems a rather cryptic phrase. But it seems to me easily decipherable within
a structural and phenomenological framework. Structurally, language is an "abstract circle of truths" in the sense that relations are more important than elements, and that, once constituted, language becomes all the more clarified, carrying less and less of the "residue" of both the world which it "absorbs" and of the individual writer's style. Language becomes a clarified metaphor of the world. (I will discuss this dynamic below when considering Barthes' conception of "style".) As its signs become increasingly ordered, language increasingly becomes a self-consistent referential system which is closed. It no longer seeks expansion. If it does, it will have to absorb more of the non-linguistic and purify this over time.

Such a language has boundaries: an "inside" as well as an "outside". Literary language is a form which says to the writer "here and no further". The writer may not see the boundaries. He may view language as a clarity --which is to say that he remains within it and thus unconscious of what Barthes calls the "problematics of language"-- the relationship between language and the world it describes and represents --including one's self in-the-world. Such a writer is not apt to question this relation. Merleau-Ponty puts it in this way:

We live in a world where speech is an institution. ... We possess ready-made meanings. ... The linguistic and
intersubjective world no longer surprises us, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself, and it is within a world already spoken and speaking that we think. (Phenomenology of Perception, p. 184)

The writer's language gives him a world which he takes for "the world", and so he assumes an identity between linguistic signifieds and actually existing referents. A writer unaware of the "problematics of language" cannot radically push the boundaries of his art, because he accepts the world as given to him by the language which he inherits.

For Merleau-Ponty language is built up from the sediment of speech. There is, then, something of a geological history of speech contained in language. (Barthes speaks of the "geology" of the text in Writing Degree Zero (85)). But nothing is added to a language if all expression and representation take place within its boundaries. Only by going beyond the "circle" can the subject leave a residue which marks the expansion of a language. In order to go beyond the prescribed circle, there must be an awareness of the limiting nature of language as a closed form. Barthes says this awareness in literature dates from the middle of the nineteenth century, and that it is related to the political relation between literature and class divisions in French society. Writers began to write for or against the
bourgeoisie, not just in their choice of content, but in the very forms chosen for literary expression.

There appears to be a contradiction, however, in the idea of going beyond language. How is it possible to go beyond language? What lies beyond language? What can be expressed in language which is not now already in it? To go beyond language cannot be to express a thought which has not yet taken linguistic form. There is no pre-linguistic thought -- no thought which isn't shaped by language. Language constitutes thought. It is not merely the means of translating thought. We are misled into thinking that this is the case, says Merleau-Ponty, by thought which is already constituted in language -- where no new production of thought into language takes place. For the most part language is used to give expression to our ideas and intentions. It is fueled by desire, not by clearly defined ideas. It is the arena in which desire and ideas become complete, become clear. The "sense-giving intention" behind speech, then, is not reducible to a thought, but can only be defined as a "lack which is asking to be made good". In the main, language is adequate to this task, because that which the speaker wishes to express is already in the language. Merleau-Ponty defines these intentions as "pure" thought.

Pure thought reduces itself to a certain void of consciousness, to a momentary desire. This new sense-giving intention
knows itself only by donning already available meanings, the outcome of previous acts of expression. The available meanings suddenly link up in accordance with an unknown law, and once and for all a fresh cultural entity has taken on an existence. (Phenomenology of Perception. p. 183)

This fresh cultural entity is the individual speech act— a very light sedimentary deposit. But what if the "already available meanings" are not sufficient to express the intention of the speaker? What if the "lack" of the speaker is mirrored by a lack of available meanings in the present language? The writer who pushes the circle of language is motivated by a greater "lack"—a greater desire for language. His lack cannot be specifically defined. That would put us back inside of language. By definition this something would have to be, at least denotatively, unutterable. This is the "orphenian dream" of which Barthes writes in Degree Zero--the dream of saying the un-sayable. The writer labors under this "dream" knowing that language "is not so much a stock of materials as a horizon, which implies both a boundary and a perspective; in short it is the comforting area of an ordered space" (WDZ, 9). But the writer which Barthes describes does not want this "comfort". Language provides a perspective but it also polices his thought. It is an order, and "order
always indicates repression" (26). Language has a resilient, plastic quality to it which resists the individual's effort to go outside of it. But, a writer cannot truly claim freedom within an already constituted language. And if the writer has no measure of freedom within the language he employs, it follows that he cannot be engaged (83).

Nothing gets in language that is not somehow already represented in it. But, what does one make of Barthes' claim that the writer takes nothing from language in the "thrust" which goes beyond its horizon? Of course, the writer uses language for his expression. He has to do his "thing". Barthes' point is that it isn't language which gets the writer "there"--outside of literature--because the language which is available to him isn't his own. This is especially true of Literary language, but it is also true of language in general. The "orphaean dream" of which Barthes writes is the dream of the creation of new language. We will see that this new language comes from "style".

Language, then, is not really the writer's tool. It has a history which works against his intention. It is an inheritance which he must use, but which has compromised him from the very beginning. For Barthes, this "distant setting of familiarity" (language) is fundamentally alien to freedom. Barthes says that it is a "nature"--a given which, in itself, is closed (13). And yet, he argues for a permeability in
language. This openness can only come from a "circumstance" in language which does not belong to it (20).

Style:

In the development of the concept of écriture, Barthes opposes "language" not to "speech" but to "style." Ecriture, I argue, should be understood as a dialectical freedom which emerges, momentarily at least, from two kinds of necessity, or two kinds of negativity, confronting the writer: language and his own personal style. Lavers argues that both speech and écriture function as a safety-valve to release the writer from the oppressive natures of language and style (Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After, p. 58). But, in saying this she is caught up in Barthes' levels of language. Literary expression is governed and rule bound, but speech is not. Lacan would probably disagree with this conception of the liberating faculty of speech, seeing, as he does, that it is not the subject who speaks, but rather that the subject is spoken. In Lacan the imaginary self is produced by the symbolic—which is to say that the subject is determined in language.

Ecriture is different from speech. It becomes quickly reified, so that it passes quickly over into closed language—a "mode" of writing. It has a formal duration. Speech, on the other hand, has no such duration and functions better as the symbol of freedom and autonomy. Language, for Barthes then, is in dialectical opposition to style.
Style is the mark of the writer's body in his work. It is not the style we usually speak of: it is not the product of conscious thought or of a reasoned choice. It is, rather, the author's linguistic finger-print. It is an unconscious factor in literary production. For this reason Barthes says that "its frame of reference is biological or biographical, not historical"—the historical always implies a freedom and is thus opposed to the "natural" in Barthes. Style is the source of the writer's individuality, and this source leaves its trace on everything which comes from it. Barthes calls it "a decorative voice of hidden secret flesh" operative where "flesh and external reality come together" (11). Style, then, and not language, is the meeting point of the individual subject and the world. The individual's language may order and structure psychic experience, but it does not determine a fundamental being-in-the-world. The mode of this contact is the domain of style. Style is a deep and rather inaccessible inwardness which "plunges into the closed recollection of the person and achieves its opacity from a certain experience of matter" (11-12). Like language, style is also closed. Unlike language, however, style is a murky and cumbersome compliment to language because it touches "matter". It is this opacity which is purged from established modes of writing.

Barthes repeatedly refers to style as an expressive "sub-language" (11). And this term reappears in Sur Racine (p. 54) where, as I shall show, it escapes the structuralist's
analysis. Its origins are in the "first coition of words and things" (10). The fact that style is placed at the confluence of flesh and external reality indicates its phenomenologically constructive function. It has an interpretive and ordering function which allows the world to get into language. Style is what first gives us representation of our world. It is the body's first language.

Though style makes no appearance independent of a signifying intention, it is, nonetheless where "the great verbal themes of [the author's] existence come to be installed" (10). It "rises up from the writer's myth-laden depths and unfolds beyond his area of control" (11). It adds an opacity, but also depth and dimension to the writer's work.

Considered from the point of view of speech (parole), style adds a dragging weight to the communication process. Communication theory would label style as noise. It will be related, some twenty years later, to the "unreadability" factor of the modern, "writerly" text analyzed in S/Z. It adds a "vertical" dimension to the "horizontality" of speech, slowing down the linear flow of clear communication, as it were, and burdening it with its density (11). This density, however, may serve to obscure or to clarify communication, depending on how it is coded.

Style is an element which Barthes adds to what could be called the development of the "heterogenous" sign which, unlike the Saussurian and Lacanian sign, contains within it
elements which are not reducible to mental representation. It
is a sign which is covered, so to speak, with an affective
coating. Its signified is occulted or absent. The signifier
functions "archaically," allowing for the condensation of pre-
symbolic affectivity of the subject. Such a sign is first
found in Freud's early work on aphasics where he says the
"word"

corresponds to an intricate process of
associations entered into by elements of
visual, acoustic and kinaesthetic
origins. .. The idea, or concept, of the
object is itself another complex of
associations composed of the most varied
visual, auditory, tactile, kinaesthetic
and other impressions. (On Aphasia: A
Critical Study, pp. 77-78).

Kristeva's critique of Lacan is largely based upon this
eyearly configuration of the Freudian sign which is replaced in
Lacan by a modification of the Saussurian model: S/s (meaning
the signifier dominates the signified). Lacan later modifies
his theory with a concept which is reminiscent of Barthes'
"style". Lalangue, notes Kristeva, is "completely different
from the dialogue of the symbolic--which for Lacan is the
locus of social exchange--lalangue is called upon to represent
the real from which linguistics takes its object" (Shuli

Merleau-Ponty had previously described style in similar fashion when describing patients who would read a text and put exactly the correct "expression" into it without understanding at all what they were saying. This is possible, he wrote, because spoken or written words carry a top coating of meaning which sticks to them and which presents the thought as a style, an affective value, a piece of existential mimicry, rather than as a conceptual statement. We find here, beneath the conceptual meaning of the words, an existential meaning which is not only rendered by them, but which inhabits them, and is inseparable from them. (Phenomenology of Perception. p. 182)

Barthes, Merleau-Ponty, Freud, Lacan and Kristeva all find an element in language which does not belong to it. That is, they all employ a non-Saussurian sign within their theories. It is easy to see that, like Barthes, Merleau-Ponty's conception of style also has little to do with the common conception of style as "form". Style is existentially linked to the individual's affectivity and is in itself
capable of transmitting attitudinal, affective or gestural information even when the denotative message of the words is not grasped. This, is exactly what gives "meaning" to the revolutionary Hébert's expression. The fact that so much can be communicated apart from the content of the language suggests that style communicates a good deal more than "stylishness". Style, says Barthes, contains "fragments of a reality entirely alien to language" (12), and yet these fragments which are "secretive" and occult, express themselves metaphorically in the author's work.

In contrast to style -- which Barthes can compare to speech because he considers style a "sub-language" -- speech is a linear transference of meaning from a producer to a consumer, where all is revealed within the limited "duration of its flow". Meaning is constantly superseded in a continual production and passing away. Words come and go in the medium of sound. In the absence of style, there is an admirable clarity and economy to the signification in speech because meaning is so clearly determined. The beloved "clarity" of classical French prose marks an absence of style. (It is for this reason that Barthes can say that Gide was a writer without style (12)). When meanings are not clearly determined, communication falls back upon the affect of style; the clarity of speech is greatly hampered. Style tends to mislead the communication in speech. And yet for Barthes, style, this dark, muted and churning center of the
individual's *logos*, is his greatest asset even though he cannot control it.

To summarize, in contrast to language, which is a social form, style is the individual's own language, hidden away, and thus problematic for the understanding of others. Though it is crude and seems to have little desire to be exposed to the white light of society (or Lacan's "le nom/non du Père") it is the seat of the writer's greatest work. It "transmutes" his humors and "carries man to the threshold of power and magic" (*Degree Zero* 12).

**Linguistic écriture:**

Saussure, I have shown, spoke of the positive value and content of the linguistic sign when considered in its totality and functioning within the closed system of language. (This view has not been forgotten by Derrida, who examines closely the relationship between the constituent signs of a system, their play, and their relationship to a central, albeit deferred, signified, (*Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*). In all other respects the signifier and signified have only a negative value, a value through pure difference. In a similar way Barthes describes the elements of écriture, which again underscores the structural nature of his argument. He refers to the elements of language as "forms", avoiding the positivist mistake of treating etymons as historical substances, and he states that
"every form is also a Value, which is why there is room between a language and a style for another formal reality: writing" (13). Lavers points out that this value has a dominant ethical connotation in Barthes' argument; but that the concept is used, nonetheless, in the Saussurian sense (Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After, p. 54). When Saussure wrote that, "in language there are only differences without positive terms" (Course, 120) he was promoting the idea that in linguistics one must focus on synchronic structures rather than historical derivations in determining the meaning and value of a term. The "negativity" of difference within the structure of language is what provides the "positivity" of speech. In Barthes as well, both language and style have a negative value based upon différence.

There are many examples of this structuralist logic in Degree Zero. Language is conceived negatively as a "nature". For example Barthes says that "to say that Camus and Queneau speak the same language is merely to presume, by a differential operation, all languages, archaic and futuristic, that they do not use" (10). The same is true of style, which is a sub-language entirely owing to the individual's "carnal structure". No two are exactly the same. The negative value, then, of both language and style in Barthes, is owing to their différence as well as to the freedom which both make possible, on the one hand, but tend to exclude on the other. Language "is the initial limit of the possible", and style is
a "necessity which binds the writer's humor to his form of expression" (13, my emphasis). For a writer who fails to go beyond language, both language and style, Barthes argues, appear as a "nature" in which "the energy expended is purely operative, serving here to enumerate, there to transform, but never to appraise or signify a choice" (13). Such a writer does not in any way push or de-center the language he employs. The idea that restructuring the language, providing it which a new center, provides a new positive re-valuation of its terms is not news to Barthes. But he goes further than this, for the restructuring of which he speaks profoundly involves choice. This choice is the writer's moment of formal engagement. It is structurally and existentially the creation of a new positive value:

A language and a style are data prior to all problematics of language, they are the natural product of Time and of the person as a biological entity; but the formal identity of the writer is truly established only outside the permanence of grammatical norms and stylistic constants, where the written continuum, first collected and enclosed within a perfectly innocent linguistic nature, at last becomes a total sign, the choice of
a human attitude, the affirmation of a

certain Good (13-14, my emphasis).

To speak of value through difference, and to assign a
negative value to the two parts of a language taken
separately, and then to bring these together and speak of a
total sign, is indeed Saussurian structuralism. Whether
Barthes' insight comes from keen personal intuition, or a
general awareness of the claims of structural linguistics is
not important here. What is remarkable, however, is that,
like Saussure, and contrary to the fact that today's
structuralist ideology recognizes only negative value through
difference, Barthes here, like Saussure, speaks of a positive
value which results from two negative values, and which
characterizes a "total sign" (Course 120). Positive
valuation, which has largely been ignored in structural
studies because of historical contingency, is nonetheless an
extremely important aspect of any synchronic study. However,
unlike Saussure, whose sign is purely psychological, the
Barthesian sign is dynamically reproduced by a freedom, rather
than simply inherited. The moment of écriture is, for
Barthes, the re-affirmation of the non-motivated relation
which exists between signifier and signified, as well as the
affirmation of "play" in a healthy linguistic system. This
"play" is what separates language from a system of
omenclature. The movement which takes the writer outside of
language (the orphean dream), transforms his language when
language expresses the vision of this dream. And what is perhaps most interesting of the phenomenological aspect of Barthes' description of the "total sign" is that its moment of birth is characterized as an "innocence". It is "enclosed within a perfectly innocent linguistic nature". This "innocence", I believe, is to be identified with the arbitrary nature of the sign itself. Interestingly, Barthes associates this freedom of language, which exists only through choice, with the expressive freedom of the whole body. 

One further consideration: one may object and say that in arguing for a structural reading of Writing Degree Zero I am speaking of two different "total signs": linguistic in Saussure, and literary in Barthes. One is composed of signifiers and signifieds; the other of a language and a style. I argue that we are simply speaking of two different orders of the same phenomenon. The new sign, in Saussure, takes its positive content only through a reflection which involves the whole of the ambient language. The sign of which Barthes speaks involves not only the whole of a language; but also the whole of the individual--the individual's relationship to his mother tongue and to himself as constituted, in the Lacanian sense, by this language, as well as that part of him which is structured as a "sub-language": his own personal "style". The difference is that, in
Saussure, the individual remains at the static end of any linguistic process. All change is too large, too slow to involve him. In Barthes, on the other hand, the individual’s relation with language is given more flexibility through écriture—even though language remains in itself a negative entity.

It is, I believe, useful to remember that in Saussure all discussion of the "sign" takes place at the object level of science. I mean by this that the "sign" is almost always conceived at the level of the word, or at least beneath the level of the sentence. For Barthes, the signifier of a sign is almost always conceived as beyond the word. This explains why he may speak of a "total sign" in which language is but a part. Barthes is very daring in applying structuralist insight to linguistic phenomena. For him "language" may designate the mother tongue, literary prescriptions, and other signifying systems at various levels of relation with language proper. In The Fashion System language is always only one part of a sign, which is otherwise composed of photographs. In Mythologies he demonstrates that a whole expanse of language may function as a single signifier, as in a novel (120). Indeed, this claim is the whole basis behind Writing Degree Zero: that literature itself is a sign subject to historical interpretation.

In Saussure, the arrival of a new sign changes the prescriptions of selection in the paradigm in which it
functions. That is to say, a new distribution of meaning and value results between the signs in the paradigm. In Barthes, the new total sign is the destabilization of a previous language. The old order of language may appear to remain, but all is charged with new valence.

This new language is problematic for communication. Barthes describes the difficulty of reading écriture when he discusses the "writerly text" in The Pleasure of the Text, when it is the boredom of such texts that makes jouissance possible. With écriture, that is with new language, comes the possibility of a new world. This brings me back again to Merleau-Ponty.

Although Merleau-Ponty disagreed with the concept of the conventional sign in Phenomenology of Perception (because of the argument which holds that the sign does not have content—which is to say he did not see the positive content established by a given synchrony of language), he nonetheless has the same dynamic explanation for the birth of meaning that we find in Barthes. For Merleau-Ponty the creation of the sign is gestural and, most importantly, involves the whole body as a signifying boundary (Phenomenology, 180). The new "spoken word" in Merleau-Ponty is similar to the new sign in Barthes. It is "a gesture, and its meaning, the world" (184). This gesture in Merleau-Ponty, like the sign in Barthes, is not the translation of a pre-determined thought. How could it be? The gesture is rather the accomplishment of this unformed
pure thought (178). Saussure and Merleau-Ponty come together in Barthes' écriture. For all three thinkers, and despite Merleau-Ponty's argument with structural linguistics at this time, the creation of a sign is the co-creation or what Merleau-Ponty more aptly terms the accomplishment of a signifier (gesture) and a new signified (thought). For Merleau-Ponty and for Barthes the new signifying gesture deeply involves the body, calling upon its unique "style" in the groping process of finding adequate language for an idea beyond language.

There are significant similarities between Merleau-Ponty and Barthes regarding the subject of new language. In Degree Zero Barthes refers to the repository of the individual's source of new expression as a "gestuary," which reminds one of Merleau-Ponty's "gesticulation"—the body's expressiveness in language. The juxtaposition of Merleau-Ponty with Brondal in Elements of Semiology, the similarity between Barthes' écriture and Merleau-Ponty's conception of new language, the positive content of the sign (which Merleau-Ponty was by no means willing to let go), and the role of the body speak of Merleau-Ponty's influence on Barthes. This influence may not explain much of the structural aspect of Barthes' thought, but it does help to explain the occult and neglected content of Writing Degree Zero which escapes and survives this structural period. I shall discuss this below in my treatment of Sur Racine which marks the apex of Barthes' work in structuralism.
What escapes this approach is precisely the aleatory element of the body developed here.

In Michelet and later in Sade Fourrier et Loyola Barthes develops in greater detail his consideration of the role of the body, especially in regard to figurative expression. What interests Barthes in Michelet is not so much Michelet's narrative of history, which Barthes says is predictably determined by a bourgeois perspective, but Michelet's introduction of personal and highly unusual figures in the historical narrative. What interests Barthes is Michelet's écriture. That écriture, says Barthes, is a function of Michelet's personal, bodily relation to history. Michelet, it is known, suffered horribly from migraines and nausea brought about by what Barthes calls his "eating" of history. His were "historical migraines".

Everything was like migraine to him: the cold, a storm, spring, the wind, the history he was narrating. ... Michelet's whole body becomes a product of his own creation, and he established in himself a surprising sort of symbiosis between the historian and history. The nausea, the dizzy spells and the depressions no longer come only from the seasons and climates; it is the very horror of
narrative history that provokes them, (17-18).

It is possible that Barthes is captivated by the romantic image of the writer who suffers for his work. But his discussion on style, I believe, absolves him of naively romanticizing such activity.

Barthes is captivated as well by Michelet's peculiar obsessions. The old historian was obsessed by bodily humors, most notably the menstrual blood of his young wife—the suffering in the productive function. Wife and the World intertwine in Michelet. Michelet loved the world's body, its waters from which the fish are born and every thing slippery, sliding, and silken like a woman's body, a woman's skin. History is gendered. It is male and female, moving in accordance with the rhythms of birth, life and death. World-woman gives her body to history's figures. History is flesh.

Barthes finds the key to Michelet's writing in the view that "In the final analysis, all history rests upon the human body," and he cites the early Marx who writes that the first task of the historian is to appreciate the "corporal organization of these individuals and the relation which this organization gives them to the whole of Nature" (Michelet, 80).

What gives Michelet's écriture its special flavor is not just that he writes "from the body", but that he is so at
pains to be aware of the bodies of his historical subjects. In Michelet, Barthes notes that:

The historical subject has almost no psychology; he is reduced to a single substance, and if he is condemned, it is not by his motives or his acts, but by virtue of the attraction or repulsion which is attached to his flesh. ... The human body is thus an immediate judgement, but its value is of an existential order, and not intellectual. Michelet condemns by virtue of his nausea, not by his principles. (86, my translation.)

I will examine more closely Barthes' concern for the body in my last chapter. I mention it here only to indicate the degree to which the body is truly associated with écriture in Barthes. It would be a mistake then, in my view, to see only the ethical aspect of écriture which is so easily recognized in Writing Degree Zero, and to fail to appreciate that Barthes is concerned with the body as a signifying boundary which is active in the structuring of new language. This concern for the body is found not only in his later works, but from the very start. The concept of écriture must be understood, I argue, from the point of view of its linguistic determination.
which, in the final analysis, outweighs the ethical determination in the remainder of Barthesian thought.

In the following chapter I propose to put my reading of écriture to the test in solving the problem of poetry in Barthesian literary theory. Commentators have given widely varying explanations for Barthes' position against a "humanism" of modern poetry. I believe the concept of écriture developed here can help to explain Barthes' unusual theoretical position.
End Notes:

1. In fact Sartre's apparent formal distinction between poetry and prose as literary forms which can or cannot support a political engagement collapses into a distinction of content. There are three major periods to consider in determining Sartre's perspective on the question of poetic engagement. In L'homme et les Choses, Sartre roundly criticizes François Ponge for his "mineralization" of man. In Qu'est-ce que la littérature Sartre states categorically that poetry is incapable of a lucid communication of a political message. But, in Orphé Noir, he applauds the poets of the negritude movement for their engagement and cites the simplicity of the message -- the reclaiming (or inventing) of black soul -- as the reason for its political success. The opacity of the poetic medium is remedied by this simplicity, as well as by a common code sustained by the black experience which, Sartre claims, uses the French language even as it tries to destroy it.

2. Barthes writes in his introduction that "Classical art could have no sense of being a language, for it was language . . ." (WDZ, 3). This cryptic phrase can only be understood by following out the implications of Barthes idea of the birth and evolution of literary language. It is first burdened with the heavy signs of the writer's sous-langage, which are idiosyncratic tropes and neologisms--all of which call attention to the fact that one is in
the presence of new language because of its awkwardness. Classical
(French) language, on the other hand, has been purified through the
manipulation of many writers working under the same prescriptions,
through the classification of figures and the codification of their
use. The language becomes so highly stylized as to lack that style
which belongs to the individual's body. This language of
literature has no competitors after the decline of baroque writing.
It is a clarified language, and one has direct access to its
signifieds. It is for this reason that Barthes says that classical
language leaves no "deposit".

3. In the Phenomenology of Perception (1945, trans. 1962),
Merleau-Ponty does not yet make the same langue/parole distinction
as Saussure. He does so later, for example in Signs (Gallimard,
1960). Saussure does not speak of parole as an institution, but
rather reserves this status for langue. It is interesting to note,
then, that Merleau-Ponty and Barthes are both keenly aware of
speech as having an institutional character, one which reflects the
presence of a certain "determinacy" in language. By "determinacy",
I mean the determination of signs by a system outside of language,
such as ideology. However, like Saussure, Merleau-Ponty places
speech in an anterior relationship to language. Language becomes
the "sediment" of speech which "constitutes an acquisition for use
in human relationships. (Phenomenology, p. 190).

4. Several authors have noted that Barthes' analysis does not
stand for a History of general literature; that his claims are
based solely upon the analysis of a few French authors. (See
Philip Thody's, *Roland Barthes: A Conservative Estimate*, Chicago, 1977). But it is, in my view, the model of Barthes' analysis which is of value here, not some deliberation on its universal applicability, or the priority of French Literature over any other—something which Barthes never claimed.
CHAPTER 3

Écriture, ethics and the problem of poetry:

I have argued for a linguistic approach to Writing Degree Zero showing how this work is informed by the langue/parole distinction. Écriture, I have stated, is something of a hi-bred concept at two levels. Ethically it represents the writer's moral and political choice in the face of literary language which becomes historically compromised as its signs come to serve bourgeois ideology. Linguistically, it is the creation of a language within language, a new system of relations, which provides for the expression of an Orphic dream, a brief innocence of language. The concept is hi-bred in another sense as well. Unlike the Saussurian sign, écriture, considered as a sign, transcends the purely linguistic and incorporates within its "practice" --for it is an activity-- elements which belong solely to the individual, that is, style and body. This sign, then, already contains much of what is to follow in Barthes' subsequent works.

Barthes' object in Writing Degree Zero was to establish a historical connection between literature and its signs on the one hand, and the history of class division and struggle on the other. Class conflict, he believed, is reflected in the development of écriture, in the establishment of various
"modes of writing", and in the production of new "signs" of literature which indicate the writer's choice in writing for or against the bourgeoisie. But, what exactly are these telltale signs of literature? Are they the figures and metaphors used by a writer? Or do they involve a deeper structure (or structuration) of the narrative form?

Barthes analyzes *écriture* in the Novel and in History and shows how both are narrative forms extremely dependent upon the preterit verb tense which he calls "the unreal time of cosmogonies, myths, History and Novels" by which events are no longer perceived as mysterious or absurd (30). This verb tense, he says, is one of the obsessive signs of the bourgeois narrative. The preterit renders an event as "a lie made manifest, it delineates an area of plausibility which reveals the possible in the very act of unmasking it as false" (32). The content of these narratives, he suggests, is credible but, at the same time, flaunted as an illusion. Illusion --a falsehood-- serves the "truths" of bourgeois ideology. Behind this mechanism, Barthes suggests, is the bourgeois myth by which the power of "universal truths" is shown to "fecundate" even through the fictitious character of its art. Narratives, then, --especially those belonging to the literary canon-- have a palpable pedagogical function which is accomplished only through literature's "second-order appeal" to bourgeois dogma. Here we see the seeds of *Mythologies*. 

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He then analyzes the various uses of the "obsessive" sign of the third person in the Novel. The "he" of the Novel becomes a "victory" of the "I" inasmuch as it conjures up a state at once more literary and more absent." (37) This convention runs the risk of belittling the characters, says Barthes, and of giving the narrative an unexpected sense of destiny, so it is an unstable convention which can be used consciously by the author to attack the conventions of Literature. Nonetheless, this convention has considerable power over its audience through the ideologically strengthened belief in the independent ego.

"Modernism", says Barthes, "begins with the search for a Literature which is no longer possible" (38). It is clear by this statement that there is considerable continuity between the early Barthes and the later author of S/Z and The Pleasure of the Text. The "readerly" and the "writerly" texts are concepts which are in nascent form in Writing Degree Zero.

Barthes describes the Novel as a tool by which society accomplishes a transcendence. The writer, then, must be under a social obligation. He transforms life into a meaningful and well oriented death, allowing the sincerity of society to feed on a body of "conspicuous falsehood". It is a "food" which can be consumed but which forever leaves its trace in literary practices. But, by serving up this literary cake, the writer's écriture becomes indentured. Rather than écriture Barthes terms this writing écrivance. The writer has become
a scribe. Such a writer is knowingly an accomplice to his own alienation.

But there is question about the ethical nature of poetry in Writing Degree Zero. And it is very difficult to resolve questions pertaining to the status of poetry, because, as Vincent Jouve points out, Writing Degree Zero is the only work in which Barthes recognizes the specificity of poetry. The reading of écriture which I propose here, helps, I believe to better understand the problem.

Barthes considers classical poetry to be based upon the same mode of writing as is classical prose. It is the same language, so it shares the same écriture (42). The only difference is the ornamentation which announces it as poetry. If one names these ornamentations as "A", "B" and "C" (possibly representing the conventions of the alexandrin, rhyme or stock images— all of which Barthes describes as "useless") poetry, then could, be summed up by Mr. Jourdain's formula (in Molière's The Bourgeois Gentilhomme) as "Poetry = Prose+a+b+c" (41). Classical poetry, according to Barthes, is "never a different language, or the product of a particular sensibility." It is a highly social form of writing, somewhat burdened by its ornamentation, but which never attempts to deviate from the canons of logic and clarity which define the classical mode for prose. In a statement reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty, Barthes writes that the classical view of poetry is one which expects the form to translate a "ready-
made thought" which is the product of a fossilized language into the proscribed language of poetry --itself a language which has been made "relational, which means that in it words are abstracted as much as possible in the interest of relationships." Borrowing from Merleau-Ponty, Barthes calls such language "mathematical". (Merleau-Ponty, in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" describes any language which no longer tries to absorb new matter as an "algebra"). The abstract transparency in question is not a transparency which allows language to touch the real. No language does this, according to Barthes. Rather, transparency is the absence of style within the language --an absence which may very well lead to an uncritical attitude towards language and support the idea that such language is natural and, therefore, does touch reality.

Merleau-Ponty is more optimistic than Barthes, however, stating that such speech "differentiates significations no one of which is known separately; it is by treating them as known (and as giving us an abstract picture of them and their interrelations) that language ends up imposing the most precise identification upon us in a flash" (Signs, p. 44). Language signifies when instead of copying thought it lets itself be taken apart and put together again by thought. There is nothing new in such a language--neither in its thought (signifieds) nor in its expression (signifiers).
Classical écriture is a medium designed for the uninterrupted flow of a sanctioned idea. Its vocabulary is one of use, not of invention. It does not contain "the depth and singularity of an individual experience" (45), by which Barthes means that it is a language devoid of the individual body and its style discussed above. There is nothing inherently wrong with such a language, in Barthes' view. He objects, however, to certain consequences which result from a fixed language. These are many. Such a language becomes highly coded --to the point that it is more suited to communication than to artistic expression dependant upon the "play" in language. (For this reason Barthes says that classical language is essentially a "spoken" language (49), not because millions of Frenchmen orally recite La Rochefoucauld, but because classical language, like speech, has reduced ambiguity.) Such a language invites the immediate investment of a sanctioned signified, promoting the idea that the expression is to judged on the merits of this signified. It becomes a self-satisfied language which lays claim to a natural relationship between language and the world. It fosters the belief that the existing state of the language is sufficient to possess the world (49). In this way it "polices" thought.

In contrast to classical poetry, modern poetry works behind language, as it were, trying to exploit the contingencies of language so as to evoke an idea which has
most certainly gone through, or is the result of, a critical reflection upon language itself. From Hugo on, writes Barthes, poetry has tended towards an "explosion" of words. Modern poetry distinguishes itself from classical poetry, and from any form of prose, classical or modern, Barthes says, because of its attempt to destroy

the spontaneously functional nature of language, and leave standing only its lexical basis. It retains only the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality. The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purpose, it becomes prosody and is no longer anything but an inflection which acts only to present the Word. (46-47)

Poetry is somehow antithetical to the "nature" of language. It is interesting that Barthes writes of the "spontaneously functional nature of language" in condemning modern poetry when he has so opposed the "natural" elsewhere. What is the "natural" function of language? It is communication within the context of speech -- the selective use of signs whose signifieds are reduced to a uniform flow by context. Speech, Barthes says in Leçon, is "immediately assertive". Like a magic wand, it tends to produce a signified. It has an
"implacable power of designation", so much so, that "negation, doubt, contingency, the suspension of judgement require particular operators which are themselves taken over by a play of masks" (15). The expressive and productive aspect of speech, like Hébert's obscenities, is secondary in language to the function of nomination. This tenancy towards nomination, towards fixity, produces rigidity in the language. Speech requires the "determination" of linguistic signs for the clarity necessary to communication. Speech, Derrida says, "communicates a determined content, an identifiable meaning, a describable value." (Margins of Philosophy, p.309, 1982, [quoted in Weiss]). Polysemy is largely reduced in speech through the establishment of a single code by context. Barthes, on the other hand, describes speech as "empty". This view of speech might seem incomprehensible if one fails to understand the role of the body in écriture. Barthes says of speech in Writing Degree Zero that it is nothing but a flow of empty signs, the movement of which alone is significant. The whole of speech is epitomized by the expendability of words, in this froth ceaselessly swept onwards, and speech is found only where language self-evidently functions like a devouring process which swallows only the moving crest of the words. Writing, on the contrary, is
always rooted in something beyond language. (19).

By "empty signs" Barthes means signs which are (pre-) determined through repetition, signs whose function within the system of communication have been settled. Their content is "crested" for the economy needed by speech. They are empty in the sense that they contain nothing of the body of the signifying agent.

In a language which anticipates that of Mythologies Barthes describes the word in poetry as a vertical sign which is made up of overly determined significations. In Barthes' view, the modern poetic phrase signifies everything which it could say, because it is not caught up in the horizontality of a speech intention. There is no identifiable communicative context in poetry. It is a language without a functional nature. It is as though it wants to function as an etymological dictionary, and yet, "it is an act without an immediate past" and "without environment" (47). Poetry cuts across any given moment (synchrony) of language, even the present, in its "hunger" for the total meaning of the word. There simply is no structure, no possible ethos which defines the relation of the modern poet to society, and thus there is no poetic écriture. This lack in modern poetry, says Barthes, makes speech terrible and inhuman. It initiates a discourse full of gaps and full of lights, filled with absences and
over-nourishing signs, without foresight of stability of intention, and thereby so opposed to the social function of language that merely to have recourse to a discontinuous speech is to open the door to all that stands above Nature.

(48)

It is clear that for Barthes écritoire must be deployed within a social intention. From this, Barthes concludes that there can be no humanism, no écritoire of modern poetry (50). For him, such poetry is fundamentally an attempt to modify nature. "In it, Nature becomes a fragmented space, made of objects solitary and terrible, because the links between them are only potential" (50). Modern poetry is trying to get behind language, even to destroy it by fragmenting it; it wants to touch the thing-in-itself.

If, for Barthes, the world is structured like a language, maintaining the infinity of its terms within a grammar, then modern poetry can be no reflection of this world.

When poetic language radically questions Nature by virtue of its very structure, without any resort to the content of the discourse and without falling back on some ideology, there is no mode of writing left, there are only styles, thanks to which man turns his
back on society and confronts the world of objects without going through any of the forms of History or of social life (52).

Barthes' analysis of poetry reveals the view that *écriture* needs a syntactical and social structure capable of sustaining a string of signifieds — some semblance of an ideology. It must allow for the selection of signifieds as well as their coherent union. In other words, Barthes requires of poetry a partial respect for the semantic history of words and of the rules of language which allow for their association. Modern poetry risks collapsing into the *sous-langage* of *style* — the language of the individual body — a "logos" cut off from all others.

This judgement of poetry, of course, has its dissenters: among them Jonathan Culler who suggests that there is in fact an *écriture* of modern poetry, but that Barthes may disfavor it for the reason that, as an anti-poetry, it is too successful in resisting recuperation by literature (*Roland Barthes* New York, Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 59). That is to say, it too successfully completes the movement toward anti-poetic poetry, whereas anti-literature eventually collapses into literature. He notes the difference here between Sartre and Barthes. Sartre, in *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature* argued, in a somewhat classical way, that prose was used to describe and discuss the world (nature) and that poetry was an experimental
form, a playing with language. Sartre, oriented by content, whereas Barthes is concerned with the responsibility of form, excluded linguistic "play" and so excluded poetry from the domain of ethical writing. Here we see that for Barthes the reasoning is reversed. Poetry moves asocially towards the essences of nature, whereas prose, the experimental form, is available to human transcendence through its "play". Culler suggests that Barthes is unhappy with our tendency to read into such poetry a plenitude of meaning, when we could see it more as the total absence of meaning -- the virginity of empty signs. But this view fails to understand the role of the body's sous-langage in any écriture. Where there is "play" between the elements of the sign there is the space for the writing of the body. Barthes does not pine for empty signs anymore than he wishes for the "full" signs of ideological language. "Death of the Father", he writes in The Pleasure of the Text, "would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. ... Isn't story telling .. speaking one's conflicts with the Law" (PT 47). What he longs for is the recognition that there is room for "play" in language -- by virtue of the lack of motivation between the elements of the sign. He does not consider the signs of modern poetry empty but, rather, too full. "The word", he says, "is like a monolith, or a pillar which plunges into a totality of meanings, reflexes, and recollections" (47). Nor does he want to empty the sign. In Elements of Semiology he takes up his goal of the "zero
degree" in writing, noting that "it is not a total absence (this is a common mistake), it is a significant absence" (77).

Ecriture is the meshing of the deep language of the individual, style, with the mother tongue. In The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes says that "the writer is someone who plays with his mother's body . . : in order to glorify it, to embellish it, or in order to dismember it, to take it to the limit of what can be known about the body" (37). The writer's relationship to his language is clearly "incestuous". It is the very same relation which Ben Stolfuz finds in Robbe-Grillet's Le Mirroir qui Revient. ("Toward Bliss: Barthes, Lacan, And Robbe-Grillet" Modern Fiction Studies, vol. 35 1989). Language (mother/mother tongue) is the domain of the "symbolic" --the Law, the Father. The mother is taken over by the father just as language is taken over by ideology. If one can extract from this field the impregnation of ideology (the Law, the Father), then the "imaginary" (the displaced "written" self) is free to immerse its "real" (the primitive, instinctual self) in the "symbolic". But, without the mother tongue, that is, without its structure, there is no receptacle for the subject's desire. Barthes' argument with poetry, in my opinion, has less to do with the supposed emptiness or plenitude of signs in poetry, than with the lack of a possible discourse (textuality/body) with which the reader can mingle his/her body. "I am on the side of structure, of the
sentence, of the phrased text" he writes in Roland Barthes (96, my translation).

Barthes' discussion of Asian literary forms is helpful here. Between the alternatives "plenitude of unstructurable meaning" and "structures of empty signs", the latter is preferable, for Barthes, because it is closer to what he calls an "adequate discourse". The concept of "adequate discourse" merits further study in Barthesian theory. It can be considered the last evolutionary step in what could be termed Barthes' geometrical concern for language, that is, its circumference considered as structure before he turns to structuration. It is most closely associated with language (langue) and is the terminal structure in Barthes' process of analyzing smaller and smaller units of language. Barthes' first concern with language was with the whole of literary language as in Writing Degree Zero. Next he considered a corpus of literary language (as in Sur Racine), positing a langue/parole relationship between the generated model of this corpus, the simulacra, and the actual body of literature under investigation. The simulacra, which is the sum of the relations and functions found within the corpus, is analyzed from the point of view of another (sub-) language system such as psychoanalytic or Marxist language. Sur Racine marks the height of Barthes' structuralist period. And Barthes gives an accessible account of the method behind Sur Racine in "The Structuralist Activity" --the most anthologized of his
articles. Though a highly responsible and engaged model of criticism, Barthes soon dismisses it for the closure which defines its signifieds. Finally Barthes rejects even the use of meta-languages in favor of a "science of literature" whose task is not to provide a content for the work, but to illustrate how a content, or a plurality of contents, is possible. (Criticism And Truth, pp. 73-74). S/Z is the product of this decision. No unified reading of the text is offered. Rather, Barthes offers an analysis of the polysemy characteristic of the "readerly" text whose unity is only that which the reader ascribes to the text at the object level of language. Such a science does not call upon a secondary, analytic language. It does not produce a meta-linguistic criticism. It is interested only in addressing the plurality of voices within a given text. In his own writing, Barthes even begins to break the unity of the language of the literary object. A Lover's Discourse is Barthes' example of the collapsing of a literary language and a critical discourse in one and the same artistic form. In "Science versus Literature," Barthes argues for the collapse of criticism into the literary object.

The logical continuation of structuralism can only be to rejoin literature, no longer as an "object" of analysis but as the activity of writing, to do away with the distinction derived from logic which

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turns the work itself into a language-object and science into a meta-language, and thus to forego that illusory privilege which science attaches to the possession of a captive language. (Le Bruissement de la Langue, p. 17, my translation.)

This collapse of criticism into the literary object is marked by two new critical movements. Having argued from the beginning of his career for the uncertain space within language, the interstices of meaning within the word, Barthes finally returns to the common idiom and employs the poetic freedom which he had earlier maintained. Second, he writes in the form of fragments and waves the banner of the arbitrary in language by organizing the fragments alphabetically by title. Such writing engenders the polysemy which he admires in the text. This is because long, un-broken expanses of text constantly invite the invasion of an ideology or, which amounts to the same thing for Barthes, the positing of a unified subject (an author), or signified behind the text, which, in turn, determines the signification of signs. "An ideally free language", Barthes had written as early as Writing Degree Zero, "never could function as a sign of my own person, and would give no information whatsoever about my history and my freedom" (27). This statement clearly
anticipates Barthes' call for the "death of the author" in critical analysis.

An "adequate discourse", then, is closely related to Barthes' idea of the fragment. In *Barthes par Barthes* he remarks upon the difficulty in locating a subject behind fragmentary writing:

To write in fragments: fragments are thus the rocks around the perimeter of the circle. I spread myself around: my whole little universe in crumbs; in the center, what? (*Barthes par Barthes*, p. 87; my translation)

Fragmentary writing creates a minimal expanse of the signifier. Its attributed signified becomes the responsibility of the reader, since it cannot be attributed to the author. The fragment serves the reader's opportunity for pleasure or *jouissance* within its contours. An "adequate discourse", then, is a discourse aware that it is essentially language and which, like haïku, knows that it "is not at all an exact painting of the real, but a merging of signifier and signified" as an event. This emergence of language is perfectly representational of *écriture*. Haïku is close to poetry because it is where Barthes finds the example of the emergence of a "thing" into language. It is permeable language. Haïku gives him "the fragile essence of appearance." It is that "strictly speaking ungraspable moment
in which the thing, though nothing but language, will become speech" (Empire des Signes, 1970 p. 100) One sees that Barthes is still concerned with the emergence of new language—what he terms at this point "'the awakening to the fact' a grasp of the thing as event, not as substance" (101).

In her article addressing Barthes' interest in the Asian poetic forms (haiku and satori) Trin Min-hah argues that Barthes finds essentially what he has been looking for: the experience of the free signifier which she calls the "plural void" --which is a "commentary resisting comment". ("The Plural Void: Barthes on Asia", Substance vol. 36 p. 44). This void, she explains is the effect of "a tissue which is formed as its meshes (mirage, event, nothing, unreal reality, the matte, suspension) take shape". This tissue, this signifier, allows for the production of a "marginal truth" which in haiku suggests Nothingness or Relativity, but does not signify them. Closely linked with the nothing of Non-identity, the Void is however a synonym for tathata, the Non-Void or, more precisely, the This (le Tel). This apparently contradictory coupling is, naturally, intentional. It prevents the conceptualization of the Void, for the "true Void" is not a concept, it is the void of the tathata .. It neither expresses nor describes, it designates and reproduces the gesture of a small child who points at something saying only "This!" in an unmediated movement free from any sense of finalism (47).

Barthes' many faceted ethos of the signifier, then, functions as far as the individual's experience of the void even when this signifier cannot signify this void as a
concept. What keeps haiku (unlike modern poetry) within the realm of écriture, I argue, is that it takes place within a minimal syntactical environment. Unlike modern poetry, it is a closed form. (Empire p. 101) Its closure, however is not on the side of the signified but on that of the signifier. Haiku is made of simple, everyday language. Trin Min-ha notes the structure of haiku.

Haiku is written in perfectly readable discourse; it cannot therefore be called nonsense, nor can meaning be imposed on it. The exemption from meaning within meaning itself is to be understood not as abolition, but as "suspension" of meaning. (Plural Void, p. 45)

In haiku Barthes has found a short expanse of signifier which defies the imposition of a signified. This form best exemplifies non only a fresh emergence of language but also reminds one that everyday language is built upon arbitrary signs which only thinly mask a void which is ever retreating from the naming process. Haiku, as a form, satisfies another requirement of écriture: that pertaining to the body as mentioned in Michelet. Trin Min-ha notes that it is a form which "receives but does not conserve" (45). It is a form which appeals to and engages the sous-langage of the body because it is a mirror which "captures only other mirrors and whose infinite reflection is emptiness itself" (104). Haiku
is also a respite from the linguistically constituted self. "The time of haïku", Barthes writes, "is without subject" (101). It produces a "shattering of that inner speech which makes us persons" (97).

Modern poetry, then, is not so much an enigma for Barthesian theory as a problem which can be solved by understanding the various roles which écriture plays within this theory. Barthes' eudemonistic approach to language provides the key to resolving the problem of his view of poetry. Language is the arena of pleasure and of jouissance. In order to involve the body in language, in order to lose one's self within its signifiers, a displacement must occur. There are two logical possibilities: either new signs must be produced within the language or the existing signs within the language must be made available to new signifieds. The first possibility represents the activity of modern poetry. New signs are produced having nothing to do with the structure of the mother tongue. Between them, they lack the coherence which this first order system can provide. Such poetry may engage the mythic themes of the writer (his style) but it is not a mythic form as is the rest of literature. (In Mythologies Barthes writes that mythic systems --which include all of literature for the reason that it is language built upon language-- must be built upon already signifying systems (110)). On the other hand, to use the mother language is to struggle with an ideology which is already embedded in it.
New "modes" only briefly escape the problem. If successful, they soon becomes established modes within literature thus serving its ideological aims. Barthes' ultimate solution to this problem is the fragment -- a limited expanse of signification sufficient to support a "gaze" beyond language, but which resists ideological impregnation as it resists a determined signification.

_Ecriture_ throws into question the internal relation of all signs within a system. It re-distributes signifieds which only tend to "jell" once again, ideologically. (_The Pleasure of the Text_, 28). The re-establishment of "play" within a rigid system is the experience of _jouissance_. The "play" which results between the signifiers allows for the insertion of the individual's "logos", his body. In the case of _haïku_, the signifieds are suspended even within a commonplace language. Barthes refers to the "adequate discourse" which characterizes all of _haïkai_ as "a polite host who permits you to make yourself at home, with all your obsessions, values, and symbols" (89).

In the first and second chapter of this work I made reference to the similarities between the "total" signs found in both Saussurrian and Barthesian theory. They are different, of course, owing to the levels of language at which they are operative. And yet, as I discussed in chapter 2, they function according to the same model as far as "value" is concerned. Barthes simply applies the concept of language
(langue) in a broader fashion than did Saussure. However, viewed from the model of the sign in Saussure, that of écriture merits further distinction. The Barthesian sign of écriture is composed of an already constituted language which is impregnated by the writer's/reader's own sub-language which accounts for the desire to go beyond language, and which Barthes finds rooted in the individual's body.

The signifier in écriture is language itself. It can function as a signifier because, as an already constituted language, it can bear second order signification, like that found in "myth". What, then, functions as the signified? The signified is what lies beyond language or what is born into it as a presence; it is the "gaze" which is rooted in the body's desire.

The negation of desire and of the meanings which desire generate within a linguistic system is a foreclosure of that system, and consequently, of freedom. Such negation is always present in an ossified, closed, "classical" language. A discussion of Barthes' scientific approach to literature, of his "structuralist" period, follows in the next chapter. I will argue that this period --for which he is perhaps best known-- is a period in which Barthes himself denies the freedom of the text while trying to answer the requirements of responsible criticism.
CHAPTER 4

Structuralism, closure and the open text:

*Sur Racine* marks the most important step in the structuralist criticism of Roland Barthes. With this analysis, Barthes is at the moment of his career where he is the closest to other structuralist theorists, most notably Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose anthropological influence is palpable in *Racine*. *Sur Racine* is an example of structuralism's rejection of "biographical criticism" in favor of an *immanent* reading of a work or corpus.

What distinguishes this period of Barthes' career from earlier and later periods? Why does Barthes later renounce structuralism in favor of a method which seeks only to identify the interplay of codes such as those presented in *S/Z*? What changes in perspective of the literary object do these tactical changes imply? In other words, what are the successes and the failures of the method which Barthes presents in *Sur Racine*? These are the questions which I shall answer in this chapter.

*Sur Racine* is divided into three parts. The first part presents Barthes' structural-anthropological analysis of "Racinian Man", which is itself composed of two parts: a
general study of the structure of eleven tragedies taken together as a whole forming a single universe; the application of the findings of this study to individual analyses of each one of these plays. The second part of the book, which I will ignore here, deals with Barthes' aesthetic analysis of various productions of these plays. The third section of the book, "Histoire ou Littérature?" (History or Literature?) presents Barthes' rejection of "university criticism"—or what is also identified by Barthes variably as "Lansonian", positivist, objectivist criticism. The objectivity of such criticism, its reliance on historical and biographical research, as well as the closure of the readings which it engenders is questioned by Barthes. He disparagingly refers to the analyses which this method overproduces as "promenades littéraires" (nice literary strolls) in order to mark them as largely devoid of any social value.

The Problem:

In Barthes' view there is confusion over the ontological status of the literary work, and because of this the literary critic does not seem to know how to begin his work. The positivist's approach is to see the work as a product, a historical entity which is in some way the consequent of specific, identifiable causes. Positivism naturally tries to identify these causes in order to cast light upon the circumstances of their production and, therefore, to base a
reading of the work upon the historical facts which have been isolated and defined. The problem with this, according to Barthes, is that too often these studies only seem to be historical studies. In fact, often they show a very weak understanding of the historian's project. One learns from positivist readings, for example, that such and such a play produced such a and such an effect during its premier presentation, but one does not learn anything about the public, its class composition, what its disposition towards theater was, what its affective culture was, its eduction, or why these people would tend to go to such a spectacle as the one under investigation. Do they attend for artistic and literary reasons or for "snob" reasons? In other words, how is one to interpret the fact that "the public cried"? The problem is that too often the literary critic makes a bad historian because he is too insensitive to sociological questions. Barthes laments this kind of criticism, especially when it comes to histories which he has read regarding Racine.

Everywhere, it is Racine who makes history appear before him, around him, it is not history which cites Racine ... the very object of the research remains predetermined by an abandoned structure, which is more and more contrary to the idea which the social sciences make of man. The consequences of this are weighty: by settling upon the author, by making his literary "genius" the very heart of the study, one relegates the truly historical objects to some far away nebulous zone; one touches them by chance, in passing; in the best of cases one signals their existence, leaving to others the task of dealing with them,
someday; the essential aspect of literary history falls to pieces, abandoned both by the critic and the historian. (Racine, p. 143 [all translations mine, except where noted])

And further on Barthes concludes that

literary history is only possible if it is conducted sociologically, if it deals with activities and institutions and not individuals (146).

The critic cannot treat historical facts as direct or indirect confirmation of his theories regarding the causes of the author's literary production. History does not stand outside of such events as their factual guarantor. This is so, because there are no simple facts which reveal their own truth or which can, by themselves, verify the critic's postulations. The critic must, at a certain level of his analysis, function without a guarantee (toucher un fond sans preuve) in treating the work and its author. Finally, he must separate historical from literary questions. He must risk something without support from "the facts" which "pour in" from outside of the work --facts which cannot address, in any case, the question pertaining to the genesis of the work. The full power of literary history, armed with all of its biographical, sociological and psychological facts, cannot explain the creation of the work. It cannot demonstrate without assumption that the work is the language product of these circumstances, that it is a grand allegory based upon the imitation of something outside of the text. What does one do, Barthes asks, with the other three quarters of the work
which has managed to escape the "allegorical net"? Such a reading is inevitably incomplete. So why continue with the pretention that the work resembles something which is exterior to it? How does one preclude, for example, the probability that the work is a deformation of the reflected world which is exterior to it? It is, in Barthes' view, more than a little naive to construct direct parallels between the work and the life of the author: to say that Oreste is Racine and that the actress Du Parc is Andromaque. It is a giant and foolish step, then, to go further and to become dogmatic about such a reading. And even if it were true that there existed such a parallel between the life of the author and his work, the interest, for Barthes, would be to demonstrate "in what way it is deformed, denied or even suppressed; imagination is deformation; the poetic activity consists in undoing images"... (154 my translation). The author is not simply a mirror which reflects the light of day. He is rather a lens or a prism which deforms this light. (Proust's favorite image for the writer is that of the kaleidoscope.)

If one accepts this point, then one accepts that there is no literal, causal reading of the "historical facts" of the work, nor of the great "genius" of the author. History and literature are two different orders. In Barthes' view, history approaches the work. It can throw light upon it. But it cannot give to literature its causes of production nor a fixed reading of its significations. It cannot because the
literary work is not an object like other objects. The literary object is what Barthes calls an "institutionalized subjectivity" (156). In existentialist vocabulary the work is a "for-itself" (un pour-soi) which has no defined essence. What object does? Is not our realization of this fact the motivation behind cultural studies? In fact, the situation is even more complicated if one considers the work from a Lacanian point of view. Doubrovsky writes that since Lacan the Barthesian definition of literature as "institutionalized subjectivity" is no longer viable. There is no longer a subjectivity to be studied, only language.

In which case, reading a text means reading through or beyond a text; it means attempting to bring into focus, beyond the appearances of the written work, its true significations, which are those of the real world. It is in this way, feeding on the corpse of literature itself, that the monster of literary history was constituted and perpetuates itself. (The New Criticism in France, p. 111)

The idea that the significations of the work are those of the world is not another new invitation to define and anchor the work with something fixed. The world, after all, changes --as does our conception of it. The relation between the
world and the work is a relation between two processes. The work, like history, goes beyond the individual. It is thus at the level of the literary functions (production, communication, consumption) alone that history can be placed, and not at the level of the individuals who have made it. In other words, literary history is possible only if it is made sociological, if it is interested in activities and institutions, and not individuals. (Racine p. 146)

The semiological perspective of the literary object:

Literary history cannot determine a reading by foreclosure. It is, then, better to abandon the search for the causal antecedents of the literary creation. One must stop conceiving the work as a product, says Barthes, in favor of a conception of the work as a sign.

Little by little the idea of a product has made place for the idea of the sign. The work would be the sign of a beyond of itself; criticism, then, consists in deciphering the signification, to discover its terms, and principally the hidden term, the signified. ... Its
purpose is to open the work up, not as an
effect of a cause, but as the signifier
of a signified (Racine, p. 147-8)

The conception of the work as a sign accepts and supports
the non-motivated relation between the signified (postulated
by the critic) and the signifier (the work). Barthes
constantly protects the arbitrary nature of the sign, thereby
protecting the for-itself status of the work. This conception
of the work as sign also promotes the idea that the work
signifies without end, beyond any signified which is offered
to it. This continual signification is possible because the
relation postulated between the two terms is, and ultimately
must remain, non-motivated.

Not only is there a lack of motivation between the two
elements of the literary sign, but there is also something
arbitrary in the choice of the signified. This is very
important to Barthes' argument. One might perhaps think that
the most "objective" reading would be to identify the work
with the world (as mentioned above by Doubrovsky), by raising
the question of imitation, to say that the work is a
reflection of the real. But Barthes wonders about the worldly
choice of this signifier.

at what level of the world does one stop
the signification? Contemporality (the
English Restoration for Athalie)? At
the level of political crisis (the
Turkish crisis of 1671 for Mithridate)?
At the level of current opinion? At the
"vision of the world" (Goldmann)? And if
the work signifies its author, the same
uncertainty begins again: at what level of his person does one fix the signified? a psychology of the age? an archaic style psyche (Mauron)? Each of these is a fundamental decision, determined less by the function of the work than by preconceived ideas one has of the world or psychology of Racine (149).

To say that the work signifies this or that is always to risk something. It necessitates the introduction of subjectivity into the analysis ... from the beginning. It means risking a choice, made arbitrarily, and to treat this choice as motivated by the work (all the while knowing that it isn't completely motivated). In Saussurian linguistics we know that a single signifier can have many signifieds. In his analyses of myth Barthes shows how these signifieds need not eliminate each other in the course of transmitting a message, but how, on the contrary, one may ride another. To choose one of these signifieds in the domain of literature, Barthes says, is to "impose a stop upon the process of signification" (149). The proliferation of the signification is truncated. There is no innocent analysis of literature (151).

What this means, finally, is that the critic must accept the role of his subjectivity in his work. Total objectivity is not possible. And if it were, it wouldn't be desirable, in any case. Titles would become gravestones. But, as it is, there is no truth, no last word defining literary works. What the critic can bring to the work, however, is a reading which may very well treat historical values, but which nevertheless has its beginning in a openly claimed position vis-à-vis the
work. What the critic aims at, according to this view, is a systematic coherency of his reading, not the truth. For Barthes, the more the literary work supports diverse readings, the more literature in it — for it is the very nature of the literary signifier to defeat a stable signified. Racine's work, says Barthes

lends itself to several critical languages: psychoanalytic, existential, tragic, psychological (one can invent others and others will be invented); none of which is innocent. ... In order to follow this movement, the critic must ... announce his fatal bet which makes him speak Racine in one fashion and not in another: he also is a part of literature. The first objective rule here is to announce the system by which he reads, with the understanding that there is no neutral one (156).

So Barthes does not so much mind the literary promenade as long as it is understood that there is more than one path to take through the park.

For Barthes, ever since Degré Zéro, the author is to be engaged, in the Sartrian sense, not only by the content of his work (le fond), of his writing, but also by means of the very form of his language, by his stance vis-à-vis the language of
literature: his *écriture*. Here, Barthes announces that the critic is engaged as well. The critic offers the public an inter-lingual text. And he must announce the reason for which he wishes to speak of this chosen work. He must justify his activity. It is only normal, after all, that the critic tells us what it is about his reading which has social pertinence. And by doing this he brings us to a new consciousness of the social value of the literary work itself.

The "system of reading" about which Barthes spoke above responds to the exigency of the critic's social responsibility as well. Barthes' view here is that any critical perspective is itself systematically ordered, having its deferred center (Derrida), and thus open to question. Any systematic reading provides a deformation of the work, but it is at least a systematic deformation. The question pertaining to whether or not this perspective should be chosen over another is in the hands of the critic alone. He is free to choose his critical language. It will, no doubt, be partly determined by the work to be investigated, since the single most important requirement to be satisfied is that of coherency. The reading must take into account, even in its distorted way, the whole of the work.

Since all readings which begin with that which is exterior to the work in order to demonstrate the work's determined status are problematic, Barthes eschews all consideration of this exteriority. This is the radical step
of the structuralist. When he constructs the sign of the literary work he refuses all motivation which seeks to determine the choice of its signified. To give a fixed signified is to refuse the subjectivity, the for-itself of the work. According to Barthes, there is no Racine "in-himself" (en-soi). Or as Wasiolek notes wryly, employing the simplistic positivist view of language, in the introduction to *The New Criticism in France*, the *en-soi* of Racine is forever plural.

One may explain Barthes' position by saying that it is a radical identification of sign and referent, for the referent is as many things as there are ways of "writing" about the sign (9).¹

This radicality of the structuralist position pushes Barthes so far as to accept all forms of literary criticism of Racine as having some value --even what for him amounts to "bad" criticism. He writes that, in fact, he admires them all (157). Each one adds a different value to Racine's work. And because the "essence" of the work is always an absence, which cannot be filled except by the reader or the critic in a contingent manner, every different analysis speaks of the value, the plurality, the *différance* of the text.

The important distinction between traditional criticism and that of Barthes is that Barthes wants to read the work
immanently. He wants to remain within the text as much as possible, but enveloped, as it were, within a social discourse which he avows. The second language of the critic is extremely important, having, as it does, considerable orientational power. This implies, it goes almost goes without saying, that the critic must master at least one, and preferably several, of these social discourses. The immanence which Barthes envisions is thus qualified by the second language employed in the critical activity, the language of the critic.

Barthes solution to reading Racine: the simulacrum:

One language is needed in order to analyze another. This, at any rate, is the position taken by Barthes at this point in his career. A convergence of languages is what distinguishes a critical from a non-critical reading of the text. Barthes speaks of these two possible modes of reading in Critique et Verité (Criticism and Truth). The non-critical reader is he who loves the text, he who refuses to "double the word of the text with any other word" (93). The critic, on the other hand "doubles" the work by translating it into another language.

In order to have the right to defend an immanent reading of a work, one has to know logic, history, psychoanalysis. In short to return the work to literature,
one has precisely to leave it and to appeal to an anthropological culture (93).

This anthropological culture is precisely what Barthes brings to his reading of Racine: a discourse of man. "Racinian Man" is but the structuring of man which he finds in the work of Racine, not the biographical traits of Racine, the man. What exactly is Barthes' enterprise? What is the structure of this structuration which doubles the text? What consequences does Barthes' method have for the liberty of the signifier?

Barthes describes the doubling process in an essay published the same year as Sur Racine, (1963). In the article "L'Activité Structuraliste" (Essais Critiques, pp. 213-221). Barthes presents the model for his analysis contained in Sur Racine. According to Barthes, the structural analysis tries to reconstruct an intelligible object which comprises the "structural units" of a text and which brings out the functional relations between these units.

The structure is thus, in fact, a simulacrum of the object but a directed and interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which had been invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object. (Essais Critiques, p. 214)
The simulacrum is not an ideal reproduction of the object, but rather a functional reproduction of the original which it illuminates. Since the internal relations of the object (the text) are enhanced by a second language, by the critic's approach, they are thus "oriented" and "interested". The work is necessarily deformed by the critical language which is involved in choosing units. But this deformation is foreseeable and controlled.

The simulacrum is not the original object but its double -- condensed and reduced to relational functions. However, it is an object which is more "intelligible" than the original. Barthes suggests that the interest of such an approach is that between the original and the simulacrum a new meaning is produced which belongs to the work. According to this perspective the work is historically marked by the creation of this simulacrum. The copy has added anthropological value to the original (Essais, p. 215).

This method is based upon an imitation -- but not the same imitation put forth by the positivist. The structuralist has not postulated a relation of imitation between the work and the world. Rather, he has posited a relation between the work and a functional copy which reveals the "grammatical" relations of its units. As an activity, structuralism is content to remain within this copy, within the work. It accepts the relations which govern the simulacrum as the limits of its activity.
Barthes' *simulacrum* is created by two separate movements: cutting (*découpage*) and arranging (*agencement*). The two operations must follow certain rules. Cutting isolates the units of the object. (It must be remembered that here, the object is a group of Racine's plays. I will return to this point below.) By employing the linguist's heuristic concept of "commutation," Barthes proposes the identification of units by their systematic co-dependance determined by the linguist's test of "commutation." This becomes a question of the level at which one is operating. One is at the level of fundamental units when the least manipulation of the unit in question engenders a change in the totality of units (the work). These units lack meaning in themselves, but they have structural value. They show the relations and the functions which comprise the totality of the object. The units form classes based upon their formal resemblance, where each unit is distinguished by its difference within a class.

The assembly of the *simulacrum* proceeds by a study of the relations between the classes of units, and especially by determining the rules of their association. The structuralist must work to maintain the idea that all relations identified are functional relations and not the result of chance. This effort pays off later in terms of analytical coherency. The regularity of the combinations reveals the forms of relations which give the structure to the *simulacrum*. Thus, Barthes says, that which is constructed is not an idealized object,
nor its essence, but a functional copy.

Finally the *simulacrum* must be interpreted by the critical discourse which helped to create it. Let us look at the application of this method in *Sur Racine*. Throughout the eleven tragedies Barthes isolates the invariable elements of a Racinian synchrony. In the first part of the book, "The Structure", Barthes describes his *simulacrum* translated by psychoanalytic language.

Let us make of the eleven tragedies one essential tragedy. Let us dispose of that tribe of fifty or so tragic characters which inhabit racinian tragedy into a kind of exemplary constellation, and let us find there the actions and figures of the primitive horde: the father, unconditional owner of the lives of his sons (Amurat, Mithridate, Agamemnon, Thésée, Mardochee, Joad, even Agrippine) and the women, at one and the same time mothers, sisters and lovers who are always coveted but rarely obtained (Andromaque, Junie, Atalide, Monime); the brothers, always enemies because they contest between themselves the inheritance of the father who is not quite dead and who comes back to punish them (Étéocle and Polynice, Néron and Britannicus, Pharnace and Xipharès); finally the son, torn to death between his terror of his father and his need to destroy him (Pyrrhus, Néron, Titus, Pharnace, Athalie). Incest, fraternal rivalry, murder of the father, the subversion of the son, these are the fundamental actions of Racinian theater. (14-15).

Barthes avoids giving these elements of the essential tragedy an intrinsic value. All value is determined by function. Thus the "three tragic spaces" have different functions in Racine's plays. The bedroom is always...
the invisible and fearful place where P o w e r lurks: This room is at the same
time the residence of Power and its essence, because Power's secret is
singular: its form exhausts its function:
it kills in order to remain invisible
(10).

In this way the function of the antechamber is described. It is where the tragic figures are made to wait and, by their inactivity, made to speak. The chamber door functions as "the temptation of the hunted to approach the hunter" (11). The exterior, the third Racinian space, is just the other side of the antechamber. This is where all real events take place. This is the non-tragic space which represents the possibility of escape.

In this way Barthes describes the functions of the relations between the terms of Racine's tragedies. "The flaw" for example, is characterized by the relation between the hero and all that is past. "God, blood, the father, the law, in short anteriority becomes an accusing essence (49).

To summarize, one sees that behind the eleven plays Barthes has created an object, his simulacrum which functions as a langue of which the individual plays are the paroles. (This is exactly the perspective which Barthes develops in his "Introduction to the Structural analysis of Narratives".) Each parole is distilled from the work of Racine. And this
object, translated and interpreted by the psychoanalytic language in "Racinian man" serves equally as langue for the paroles in the second part of the book, where Barthes analyses each play, one by one. Barthes moves from structural anthropology to the psychoanalysis of texts.

Some problems with the solution:

The langue/parole relation of the simulacrum to the critics work gives Barthes the cohesion which he is looking for. This cohesion is borrowed from the object itself. The relations belonging to the object function as a grammar. One cannot say just anything. Still, the language of analysis has its own forms --its relations and functions which must be respected. That which is "new", the critical perspective, is produced at the intersection of these two languages. It cannot be anything other than what is sanctioned by them. Here, then, is the vision of an analysis which is a productive moment at the confluence of two languages: that of the author and that of the social discourse which serves as the tool of the critic.

But, what are the vital signs of the simulacrum constituted in this way? Is the work, treated in this way, still alive? How does one keep from thinking that the simulacrum gives stillbirth to signifieds which close the reading of the plays? In other words, as soon as a coherent but nonetheless unitary signified is connected with the
literary signifier, hasn't one limited the work's signification? Doesn't any single reading of a work produce this closure? Finally, doesn't this critical activity find its death as well as its birth in the confluence of these two languages? How does one avoid the idea that the critic has stopped the signification of the text?

In *Vertige du Déplacement* Stephen Heath speaks of the problems which Barthes must have later perceived with this approach. Heath suggests that the idea of *langue* behind the narrative unavoidably functions as a norm against which each work is inevitably measured (*Vertige*, 84). This kind of analysis encourages a closure of the text, even if it has its sole object the search for its structure. (It is clear that Barthes has not yet arrived at Kristeva's phenotext/geno text opposition which informs *S/Z*). Such an analysis still has the tendency to close the productivity of the text's literary language—a closure which Barthes is trying to fight with his definition of the text as a *pour-soi*. Heath writes

Thus the analysis distances itself from anything resembling interpretation or explication of a single text; it has only a general ambition, to (re-)constitute a common language for all the narratives, and as a consequence one needs a corpus: the method can only work with several narratives (and not with one only) united in the quest of determining a single structure, the individual narrative being, thus considered as a message, a *parole* which reflects the general structure. ... In effect, the analysis of the narrative is defined as an analysis of the signified, or of the content, if one wants to admit that there

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is a form of the content, which is the very field of analysis. ... (Vertige, 84, my translation)

The simulacrum is not a genetic element of language. One way or another the generativity associated with language structure escapes the simulacrum. The simulacrum identified by Barthes in the depths of Racine's eleven tragedies is not the "deep structure" of Chomskian linguistics. It does not generate an infinite number of propositions. Rather, it functions as a great over-arching signified -- the result of a reduction of a corpus towards an average. Or, if it contains within itself the generative possibility of langue, the living aspect of the simulacrum is smothered by the admixture of a second (critical) language. That which hampers Barthes' analysis is the apparent loss of the contingent relation between signifier and signified. The criticism is motivated by the simulacrum. The question thus becomes how to conserve the contingency of this relation while at the same time producing an analysis which is not fortuitous. Without daring to treat these problems at this time, I would simply like to remark that here, as elsewhere, Barthes suffers from too much "scientific" success. Because of his debate with Raymond Picard he is no doubt looking for a defensible reading of a text, but he has produced more than that. He develops a "scientifically" restricted signifier which is not a literary signifier. It is not polysemous. It is then interpreted by a critical language, itself suited to communication, which
produces a signified. Barthes finds a signified, but only after having frozen the work in the functional relations of his simulacrum. Is this really what he wants to be doing? My personal feeling is that he is looking for something else, even while he is going through this rigorous process which, unarguably produces good criticism.

In *Sur Racine* there are traces of Barthes' earlier studies which indicate that he is still haunted by the question of the author's "mythological" sources of écriture, first addressed in *Degré Zéro*. This source, we have seen, is what determines the style of an author's écriture. This style is the impregnation of an individual's sub-language (sous-langage) into the literary language of the times. This dense sub-language is the individual's primal affective energy which orders and establishes his relation to the world. Style is that language of the individual's most profound depths which "speaks" through the metaphors and metonymies of his figure. It is this language which, in its early form of écriture, (before écriture is established as a "mode"), accounts for the unreadability (illisibilité) factor of the text which interests Barthes so much, some twenty years later in *S/Z*.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Barthes' concern for sources of écriture returns in his study of Racine's classical writing. Écriture is more than a category of the literary. It represents more than this. It affirms the evocative power of language, and language's ability to escape, undo,
deconstruct structures which are built upon it. And at the personal level, it ultimately mitigates the structuring force of language upon subjectivity.

Barthes reminds his reader of the formal constraints imposed upon the classical writer. Racine must use a language which has been purged of novelty and has already been highly codified. He argues that Racine so skillfully masters these constraints as to effectively neutralize their suppression of his sub-language. The clarity of his literary language exposes his sub-language (59). Barthes makes an interesting case for his argument. He says that Racine's is an example of writing which was destined to be cited. He says that it is a language which makes reference to itself --though he doesn't explain this remark. This tautological state of writing is laudable in Racine's case, Barthes says, because the classical mode which is imposed upon the author becomes a form devoid of all substance. This statement is to be understood as referring to the "clarifying" of stylistic "residues" discussed in chapter two. Racine's clarity is a complete mastery of literary language to the point that one hears in it something profoundly personal. Racine is ultimately indifferent to the language imposed upon him.

This explains Racine's success: his poetic écriture was sufficiently transparent so as to allow the "fish-like" character of the scene to be
perceived: the articulatory substratum is so near that it gives a kind of supple breath to Racinian discourse, a relaxation, and I would say, almost a "swing" (59).

Barthes is, in fact, still working on his Micheletian project to understand the style (as language) of an author. (Michelet, it is often noted, was the favorite of his books.) This is all the more supported by his concern for the "fish-like" character of Racinian theater. Once again, he doesn't explain what he means. This strange concern is a direct holdover from his biographical study of Michelet. Michelet was fascinated by the sea, felt a part of it, and viewed history in aquatic terms (Michelet 39).

The "swing" which characterizes Racine is precisely, in my view, what Barthes is looking for. He would desperately like to locate his free signifiers there. It is the author's "secret flesh" (Degree Zero p. 13) that interests Barthes -- a flesh which he later studies under the guise of music ("Le Grain de la Voix"). But he doesn't dare continue directly with this biographical study. His belief in the "engaged" activity of the critic, his need to produce "responsible" criticism, together with structuralism's immanent reading, all lead him to the simulacrum which, unfortunately for Barthes, fails to produce this "swing".

Barthes' basic ontological view of the text holds that it
is structured and infinite. But his analysis in Racine fails to capture this living aspect of the plays. (How can they be captured in a signified?) Later in *Essais Critiques* Barthes reaffirms this conception of the work as "open" and announces for the first time that the critic never has the last word to say regarding a literary work (9). For him the critic who stops the works signification, who fails to touch the author's sub-language, is at fault. This is a change of position from that found at the end of *Racine*. From *Racine* on, Barthes rejects all signifieds offered to a text. He looks for the possibility of a criticism as alive as the work itself: an approach, a critical language which does not close the text off from its signification. To give an orientation of such a criticism, I will point to the direction which led Barthes to *S/Z*.

In *Critique et Vérité*, Barthes next major work after *Racine*, Barthes puts science at the service of the "plurality" of the text and not at the service of the intelligible reconstruction of its structure. This marks the end for the *simulacrum* as a tool. Barthes is no longer in the business of ascribing signifieds, even plural ones, to the signifiers of the text.

As soon as one is prepared to allow (and to draw the consequences of the fact) that the work is made from writing, a certain kind of literary science is possible. If this science should come into existence one day, its object could not be to impose a meaning on the work, in the name of which it would arrogate to
itself the right to reject other meanings: ... It cannot be a science of the content of works ... but a science of 'the conditions of content, that is to say of forms; ... it will not interpret symbols, but only their polyvalence. In a word, its object will no longer be the full meaning of the work but on the contrary the empty meaning which underpins them all (Critique et Verité, pp. 73-74, trans. Paul DeMan).

It is this science of literature which is explored in S/Z where all that remains of structuralism is a concern for the codes through which the reader receives and reconstructs the text. These codes belong to the "structuration" of the text, not its structure. And, to the extent that the codes are shared by author and reader, they determine the "readability" or "writability" of the work. This very interesting distinction displaces Barthes' concern for "good" versus "bad" literature. From S/Z forward Barthes' measure of literature is the pleasure he associates with polysemy. In Kristevan terms, he abandons the "pheno-text," the given text, for the "geno-text" which is the text that is open to many genetically related readings.

Barthes abandons his scientific dream, of which the method described above was to be the foundation. In "The Structural Analysis of Narratives" he spoke of gathering together and comparing the structures (simulacra) of all narrative forms to study their differences and how these differences generate meaning. But because he realized that this method tends to equalize texts, he abandoned it. In its
place came the study of différence at the level of the single text. Barthes asks himself how a text can be different. From what? From itself. \( S/Z \) is criticism of the realist text through rereading. We must reread in order to access the différence of a "realist" work, because if we do not, Barthes asserts, we simply read the same text everywhere (\( S/Z \), p. 10). Rereading opens the text's original closure.

Rereading is to "write" the work, to become aware of the full suggestivity of the work as text. It is to bathe in the text's connotationality.

Denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and close the reading) (\( S/Z \) p. 9)

Barthes' new critical activity aims at reconstructing différence: the re-establishment of connotation without the presence of denotation. In narration this re-reading presents the reader with "residues of unresolved meaning at the level of the plural of the text", "semantic noise" (41).

Barthes shows us that the realist novel \textit{Sarrasine} is, in fact a "limit text". It is not just "realist" in that its connotations are coded into denotation of "the real", but, as George Wasserman points out, \textit{Sarrasine} dramatizes the assumptions upon which this mechanism is based. It points to
them. **Sarrasine** is the story about telling a story. The story teller agrees to tell his story to a young woman in exchange for spending a night with her. He reveals the secret of an old man at the party, a *castrato* who sang by the name Zambinella in his youth and was loved by a sculptor, Sarrasine, who did not recognize the first's transvestitism. (S)he responds to the sculptor's declarations of love with "And if I were not a woman?". Sarrasine eventually learns the truth and tries to kill Zambinella when he finds out. The man's story ends; the woman, horrified, reneges on her deal. Sarrasine, Wasserman concludes, reveals the fallacy of realism. "The Realist impulse to go beyond appearances, to accept the code of representation as reality leads to failure" (*Roland Barthes* p. 86).

Without the closure which comes from an ideologically unified first reading, rereading places the reader in the presence of the novelistic without the novel, the poetic without poetry, structuration without structure, the production without product, writing without the written (*S/Z* p. 5). The writerly text, Barthes explains, is not a thing but "play" in language in textual form. It is the zero degree of *écriture*. It is for this reason that Barthes says of the writerly text that it is the least "written". It is the most "playful".

Barthes totally renounces, then, any effort to give a meaning to the text. In its place, he characterizes works by
their readability. Later, in The Pleasure of the Text, he associates the readability factor either with pleasure ("readerly" text) or with jouissance ("writerly" text). Thus Barthes is no longer concerned with a method which unifies the reading of the signs of literature; he speaks rather of the generative aspect of the codes which produces these signs and their reading. And he invites other readers to find other codes. His reading of Sarrasine is not governed by the same principle of découpage seen at work in Racine. The work is cut, but according to Barthes' perception of the working of the codes. In fact, he does not wish to cut at all. He "traces" the length of the work's diverse "textures". The work has become "text" a fabric, or perhaps a living tissue in that it borrows the body of its reader. It is unique. Barthes no longer speaks of an ensemble of texts, but rather of the resonances of intertextuality. This intertextuality is a function of the cultural working of the codes. The text and its reader share the textuality produced phenomenologically in the act of reading. They share the same "structuration" in the process of social signification. Text and reader are both written. What remains --the unwritten-- is left to the body.
1. Wariolek's statement is well taken. However, if one continues to speak in this way, one runs the risk of confusing the signified with the referent, which is objective and outside of the sign. Barthes is rarely interested in the referent, which, in any case always lends itself to an interpretation, that is to say, it always leads itself back to the sign.
Chapter 5

The body within the sign

In an author's lexicon, will there not always be a word-as-mana? ... This word has gradually appeared in his work; at first it was masked by the instance of Truth (that of systems and structures); now it blossoms, it flourishes; this word-as mana is the word "body" (Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, p. 133)

The word-as-mana is the word which serves as a key to all of Barthes' theory. It is his deferred, floating signifier. Barthes wants to bring us back to a biological model of the subject, to involve something other than "personality", the "mind", the "ego" in the processes of agency and signification. The body is this something other. In Barthes' theory it serves as the individual's physical access not just to the world, but to all "meaning" -- the profound meaning belonging to the subject; meaning for me.

The experience of such meaning is intermittent in a linguistically pre-ordained world of experience. It is the experience of the unexpressed word, the sliding of signifiers or, as we have seen in the case of poetry, the emerging presence of the referent in language. But, this experience, rare though it may be, is important as a reminder of the possibility of écriture. This occasional resurfacing testifies to the presence of the erotic body in signification which exclaims joyfully: "That's it! And what's more: that's it for me! ... " (The Pleasure of the Text, p. 13).
The body has special status in Barthes' theory: it is the only reality which he can claim as truly belonging to the individual. It is involved in the production and reception of meaning. It is the origin of meaning for the individual, its point of conception, its emission and reception, the flesh upon which meaning is traced. In other words, the body is what serves as the locus point for whatever subjectivity is left over after the social writing of the subject. The body is what escapes this normative writing of socialized subject.

Haunted by his mistrust for languages and the ideologies they hide, Barthes tries to liberate a single word of all signification in order to use it as needed. He wants a word which incarnates écriture, a word which evokes a substance, an agency outside of all previous system, a word which, when functioning within a system, is deployed in so figurative a manner as not to be pinned down to any stable meaning.

With the concept of the body having no determinate signification elsewhere in Barthes' theory, and having generally been ascribed no agency in Western Philosophy in general, a signifier has been found to which the reader cannot provide a ready signified. It is not easy to delimit the body in Barthes' theory. The body functions both figuratively and normatively within his language --because, like the "gaze" of Degree zero, it is not wholly a part of language.

The body is outside of all ideological structure. It has been displaced from moral and political argumentation. Barthes is happy
to employ the body, then, because he wants the reader to receive the "letter" of his message at the most personal level of meaning. His "lover" in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* provides an example:

That which resonates in me, is what I learn with my body ... the word, the image, the thought acts like the striking of a whip. The interior of my body starts to vibrate, as if shaken by trumpets which call and respond to each other (*FDA* 237, cited in Burgwinkle [my translation]).

The body, as we have seen, is the locus of great writing, of new and figurative language, of *écriture*. The body is also in some sense, the reservoir for residual meaning, felt but not made explicit in communication. *S/Z* introduced the "writerly text" along with the idea of the "written" subject into Barthes' theoretical framework. The textual residue which remains in any communication process demonstrates the "play" in the language which encourages the play of the body in structuring its own meanings. In Barthes' loosely autobiographic *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, he affirms the unique character of each body and its role in producing, in gestalt fashion, personal signs. "The body is the irreducible difference, and at the same time, the principle of every structuration" (*BB*, p. 177). The body, then, serves as the minimal systemic environment within which signs signify --in which they find their positive value. (See chapter 1 for discussion of
positive and negative value of signs). Barthes seems unwilling to "capture" this play by providing examples of individually motivated and differentiated signifieds, yet, curiously, he is irresistibly drawn to the idea of explaining the workings of the role of the body in the creation (writing/reading) of meaning. In _Le Grain de la Voix_, Barthes reaffirms the idea that not all meaning is caught up by the "braiding" of the codes in a text, and that the body is still at the center of his concerns:

Writing begins with style, which is not the same thing as writing well: it refers to, as I said already in _Writing Degree Zero_, to the depth of the body, and cannot be reduced to a nice little aesthetic intention ... Even from simply the tactical viewpoint, one must accept to get beyond style, on the one hand and something which would be more serious, which is to be _in the signifier_, which is to say in the style, since it is there that _écriture_ begins. (_GLV_, p. 19, my translation, emphasis added.)

Barthes would like to understand the functioning and the logic of the "unconscious" of the signifier. Yet it is clear that he doesn't want to reduce this function to a psychoanalysis of the body's figures. Such an analysis could only once again produce an artificial closure because, as far as Barthes is concerned, reason and the body have two different languages:
The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas— for my body does not have the same ideas I do (The Pleasure of the text p. 17)

Clearly there are two languages at work in the Barthesian subject: that of the social subject constituted in "social" language, and that of the body. Jonathan Culler notes that Barthes refuses the cartesian conception of the subject as master of language, but that he leaves himself open to criticism by placing a natural "essence" within the body (Roland Barthes, p. 97). Barthes, he argues, contradicts himself by running back to "nature" after he has denied its workings in naturalizing process of ideology in language (myth). Does Barthes want to give a naturalist explanation of "writing" with the body as transcendental agent? It seems to me that the answer is clearly in the negative. Style/body is not a language which underwrites conscious language sign by sign. It is not a transcendental agency. It is rather a language which helps to establish a focal point, a desire, a deferred signified around which conscious language organizes itself. All it can offer, by way of communication with conscious language is what one might call "correction". Barthes describes his own writing in the following way:

The discourse which first comes to him is banal, and it is only by struggling against this original banality that, little by little he writes... (banality is discourse without
the body). In sum, what he writes proceeds from a corrected banality. (BB, p. 141, my translation).

The body is the individual's signifying essence, not a subjectivity but a grounding for subjectivity. Leslie Hill describes the body as a founding act, an original difference, an energy or potential (Paragraph, Vol. 2, 1988, p.108). In this respect I disagree with Burgwinkle who sees in the body an "identity which is absolutely corporal" ("Le Corps Barthésian," in Constructions, 1985, p. 87). An absolutely corporal identity could have no language at all. The body is phenomenologically caught up in consciousness, in representation, in the production and decoding of signification, wherever the denotative process is shaken, wherever ready made meaning is troubled. It surges up between the gaps between language and desire.

With the figure of the body, Barthes is once again refusing definition and closure. If a literary critic says Racine's works mean one thing based upon a close psychoanalytic reading, Barthes will argue that it means that and more. Reading will always point to this "more". If Lacan says that the subject is written, Barthes accepts, but with the caveat that there is something grounding the production and reception of language which is uniquely individual, and not properly a product of the language system.

The body and ethos:

Barthes concludes his Barthes by Barthes with the enigmatic
phrase "to write the body" [écrire le corps] which in the French is somewhat ambiguous since it is either a command or a (utopic) wish. In either case it represents Barthes' fundamental desire: to give language to the body (and body to language), thereby affirming the liberation of language itself.

Burgwinkle points out that Barthes never claimed that writing the body was more natural or more simple than following the established modes of writing which deny the individual his/her body. To write the body requires a struggle against one's own language. It is a challenge in which the writer is thrown against society, against ideology, and against the very language which betrays his desire even through its apparent clarity. Barthes notes that it is precisely when we experience intense pleasure that the socially constructed self is problematized:

Whenever I attempt to "analyze" a text which has given me pleasure, it is not my "subjectivity" I encounter but my "individuality," ... my body of bliss ... my historical subject. It is at the conclusion ... of a contradictory interplay of (cultural) pleasure and (non-cultural) bliss, ... that I write myself as a subject at present out of place: anachronic subject, adrift. (PT 62, 63).

Barthes is not a writer who falls back on himself and his own sensations after having been disappointed by the failure of his
political ideals. On the contrary, Barthes compares the jouissance of the writer and reader to a destructive force which demolishes the complacency of pleasure, and consequently, of society.

This view of the political nature of jouissance is amplified by Leslie Hill, who argues that Barthes' conception of the kinds of textual pleasures is inherited from Brecht's critique of "culinary theater" produced by the "naturalistic stage". Brecht, Hill notes, envisioned a critically alert theater to which spectators would come not as passive consumers but as active participants. Barthes sees traditional theater as "narcotic" because it is "associated with the repugnant natural order of the self evident" (Paragraph, Vol. 2, 1988, p.116). Hill goes on to note that, against this theater Barthes sets up a theater identified with the act of writing, with the open and plural text. This theater "performs across the surface of the body, across other texts and writings, in a ceaseless movement of detachment and differentiation" (117). Again, these distinctions are based upon Barthes' ever present concern with écriture. Unlike traditional theater, Brechtian theater problematizes language by placing theater itself within crisis. Brecht "activates" theater by refusing to "freeze" history in representation and by not allowing his audience to slip into passivity. Disruptive pleasure is political. Brecht uses pleasure to disrupt ideological narcosis, to trouble closure by perverting the denotative processes.

Hill argues that the body in Barthes must be understood as pining towards the same end: "the act of saying is more charged
politically than what is said, and that history itself is more a history of ways of signifying than of things signified" (117).

The body is a rejection of stereotype as well. Barthes, as we noted in the chapter on poetry, finds certain repetition fruitful—as in the case where everyday language produces a void which is suggestive of a presence. *Doxa*, on the other hand reveals the presence of ideological stereotype. Barthes uses the body to distinguish the two:

A repetition which comes from the body is good. *Doxa* is an unworthy object because it is a dead repetition which does not come from anyone's body—unless, maybe precisely, from the bodies of the dead. (*Bathes by Barthes*, p. 75)

As for stereotype, it is ..

the positioning of the discourse where the body is missing, there where one is certain it is not. Inversely, in this seemingly collective text which I am in the process of reading, sometimes the stereotype (l'écrivance) ceases and *écriture* appears; I am now sure that this morsel of signified was produced by a body. (*BB*, 93)

For the reader, *écriture* represents the real body of the other in writing. It is profoundly meaningful language because it carries a bodily substance caught up in signification. It is a refusal of
the readymade. To refuse stereotype, as Barthes demonstrated in *Mythologies*, is to refuse the most important myths of a society. But, it is also to enjoy what one might term the "maternal capital" held in reserve within a language. Again, Barthes' eudemonism is clearly political:

I would go so far as to take bliss in a disfiguration of the language, and opinion will strenuously object, since it opposes "disfiguring nature" (*PT*, p. 37).

It may be misleading to hear Barthes speak of "disfiguring" language -- forever the love object of his theorizing. What Barthes is disfiguring, is not so much language, which in its healthy state is flexible and admits "play", but the complacency of second order language systems which have been allowed to pass themselves off as "natural". As always, what Barthes objects to is the "masculine" force in language: ideology, system, law, the Father (Lacan) -- all which cuts the individual off from the pleasure of the "maternal" in language. Barthes seeks love in language -- love of mother, love of the other:

the writer is someone who plays with the body of his mother .. in order to glorify it, embellish it, or to cut it up, carry it to the limit of that which, of the body, can be recognized. (*PT*, 60)

Moreover, the "Other" is needed in order to recognize one's own phantasmatic body. The writer and the reader share a virtual body...
within the text:

... my body is the prison of my imaginary. Your body, the thing which seems the most real to you, is without a doubt the most phantasmatic. The other is needed to liberate the body... This other may be an object. (GLV, 339, cited in Burgwinkle. My translation).

To conclude, the body is a textual adventure. It is a voyage, a discovery within language, an expansion of it. It is the experience of écriture as a liberating activity. The body is the site of pleasure, the deconstruction of social constraints within language, a perversion of the subject which language produces. It is a tool which serves the writer and the reader in the pursuit of the fluid signifiers within language. It produces these signifiers, and destabilizes others. It breaks signs apart but provides the possibility for an new inscription. The body creates the absolutely unique within language. It affirms the unique non-self. Because such an affirmation is also a destruction, it is inherently political.
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