Introduction

Il essaye (ou il ne peut s’empêcher) de tenir un discours qui ne s’énonce pas au nom de la Loi et/ou de la Violence; c’est-à-dire qui ne soit ni politique, ni religieux, ni scientifique. Il ne lui reste donc plus que le discours esthétique.

Comment pourrions-nous encore appeler ce type de discours? Tout simplement le discours individualiste.

Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (inédits)

The shield of the Collège de France shows a book resting on a leafy background, with the legend ‘Docet Omnia’ – ‘Everything is taught’ – framed by stars. It is inlaid in the floor of the Collège’s main entrance on Rue des écoles in Paris. Elsewhere in the building, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phrase describing the institution’s promotion of experimental, unregulated teaching is carved in large gilded letters into the wall: ‘Ce que le Collège de France, depuis sa fondation, est chargé de donner à ses auditeurs, ce ne sont pas des vérités acquises, c’est l’idée d’une recherche libre’. Roland Barthes taught at the Collège de France from 1977 to 1980 as holder of the Chair of Literary Semiology. He imagined having his own motto for his lectures. Not carven, but effaceable, it would be a sign hung beside the bust of Henri Bergson in the lecture theatre where Barthes lectured on Saturday mornings. The sign would feature a quotation from Montaigne’s Essais: ‘Je n’enseigne point. Je raconte’. Montaigne was an enthusiastic adopter of mottoes, having Greek and Latin maxims, many of them drawn from Sceptic texts, cut into the rafters of his study: ‘Iudicio alternare’, he reminded himself, and ‘Que sçay-je?’ The carvings at the Château de Montaigne prioritise inquiry, reflection, and abstention from quick decisions. Barthes is drawn to this intellectual spirit: he reminds his audience in 1978 of the medal that Montaigne had had struck in 1576, which depicted a set of balanced scales, and the Pyrrhonian legend ‘Epokhe’: I hold back. Barthes imagines erecting a notice which would demonstrate that he too will abstain from judgment: ‘Comment mettre sur ma demeure ou mon entreprise intellectuelle un écriteau: “Fermeture de jugement pour congé annuel”? ’ (N, 254).

The imagined mottoes that Barthes wishes to display upon his
teaching at the Collège de France are the ‘signs’ of an intellectual project that is radically self-effacing, at the same time as it makes subjectivity central to the investigation. It is the argument of this book that the Collège de France lectures represent an important addition to Barthes’s corpus which allows us to arrive at a new reading of his thought. This new reading involves opposing those perceptions of Barthes according to which the potency of Barthes’s work diminishes towards the end of his life as it becomes more subjective and aesthetic in focus. I shall argue that the value of this late work inheres in its questioning of the grounds of subjectivity, and its coverage of important critical, ethical and social problems via a deliberately contingent discourse. All of Barthes’s work as cultural and literary theorist, including his increasingly creative late work, involves, ultimately, the complex relationship between the individual and ideology, and an imagining of how this relationship might change for the better. Utopian thought, always rooted in subjective response to social conditions, is central to Barthes’s conception of the importance of his work as writer. The Collège de France represents the apogee of Barthes’s career as a public intellectual. This book examines his conception of the role of the intellectual as shown in his teaching there; his elaboration of particular social values; his emphasis on everyday life; and his desire to valorise aesthetic experience, often seen as less valuable than discourses of religion, philosophy or science. I shall place these issues in the context of post-’68 French thought and certain insistent themes therein, notably the idea of community; the doctrine of intellectual engagement (which Barthes believes needs to be refined); and the instrumentalisation of Asian thought in French theory. A preoccupation throughout the book, and notably in the final chapter, is Barthes’s extensive use of fragmentation in his writing and teaching. I shall consider the ways in which techniques of fragmentation are linked to his anti-systematic thought generally. The book will also examine the institutional context of post-war French thought in the humanities by focusing on the particular status of the Ecole pratique des hautes études and the Collège de France, both of which played important roles in the careers of several of the most influential thinkers in post-war French theory: Barthes, Bourdieu, Foucault, Derrida and Lévi-Strauss.

Barthes’s chair at the Collège de France is in literary semiology, the emphasis lying with the qualifier. Barthes is interested in the ability of literary language to express the complexity of the world, and to evade, in a kind of perpetuum mobile, the crushing force of ideological language. The positive charge of literature is celebrated in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in January 1977. Barthes subsequently gives four
lecture courses: *Comment vivre ensemble*, focusing on the problems of communal life; *Le Neutre*, which explores the ideal of a ‘neutral’, non-conflictual mode of being; and *La Préparation du roman I et II*, in which he examines the fantasy of writing a novel. In all four of these series, Barthes treats his material indirectly, relying on metaphors and shunning definition, concept, and pre-organised goals. His thought is aesthetic insofar as it is perspectival in its approach to epistemology: Barthes’s continual question, formulated in Nietzschean terms, is ‘what does this mean for me?’5 This aesthetic contingency and individualism are linked to an ethics of the intellectual. Barthes is radically distrustful of the idea of the intellectual as mouthpiece for truth. For Barthes, rather, the intellectual is important as somebody who will assume his/her own contingency and interests, and demonstrate that ‘il n’y a pas de vérité qui ne soit liée à l’instant’ (N, 18 February 1978, 39). This uncovering of the occultation of the arbitrary that usually takes place in discourses of power – including intellectual discourse – is central to Barthes’s work. Significantly, Barthes opens his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France by describing himself as an essayist. The unstable, destabilising nature of that genre, shuttling as it does between art and theory, is ideally suited to the work that Barthes wishes to do. Additionally, the intellectually independent nature of the Collège de France favours the staging of Barthes’s aesthetic, counter-ideological theories. This is what this book shows.

Barthes’s Montaignian mottoes indicate both his rejection of dogmatism and his investment in the importance of individualistic discourse. He describes his teaching as a tentative process in which he is only barely ahead of his audience: ‘Ceci est une recherche en train de se faire. Je crois en effet que, pour qu’il y ait une relation d’enseignement qui marche, il faut que celui qui parle sache à peine un peu plus que celui qui écoute (parfois même, sur certains points, moins […]). Recherche, et non Leçon’.6 Thus he rejects intellectual showmanship. As the Montaigne ‘sign’ says, ‘Je n’enseigne point’. But the second half of that motto is ‘Je raconte’. Personal experience is central to the work. In the *Essais*, Montaigne’s avowals that he is not providing any authoritative knowledge always have as their correlate the fact that he will talk about himself: ‘Qui sera en cherche de science, si la pêche où elle se loge: il n’est rien de quoi je fasse moins de profession. Ce sont ici mes fantaisies, par lesquelles je ne tâche point à donner à connaître les choses, mais moi’.7 Thus Montaigne refuses confinement to any disciplinary subject, and shapes the ‘essai’ as a questing, oppositional genre, in which the vagaries of his own interests dictate every digression.8 In a strikingly similar fashion,
Barthes, in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1977, declares that his teaching will be based on personal fantasy: ‘C’est à un fantasme, dit ou non dit, que le professeur doit annuellement revenir, au moment de décider du sens de son voyage’.

In this way, he adds, the teacher can debunk expectation, ‘dévie[r] de la place où l’on l’attend’. An ‘enseignement fantasmatique’ is conceived of by Barthes as a discourse that refuses ideological systems, sidelining them in favour of a focus on the constantly shifting, contingent complex that is the relationship between the self and its environment. Barthes, like Montaigne, discusses the importance of objects ‘for him’. Though this initially leads to a loss of general significance, his hope is that this is found at another level, by virtue of the presentation of his own tastes as a ‘universal particular’. His subjective tastes are explicitly used to generate subjects in which he hopes his listeners will also invest their interest, such that a more universal importance is established. This book examines how this oscillation between the particular and the universal is brought about.

This discourse, which aimed above all at eliciting the listeners’ own critical engagement with experience, was delivered to a large and diverse audience. All lectures at the Collège de France are open to the public. Barthes was nominated to the Collège by Michel Foucault, and elected by a majority of only one vote in May 1976. Required to provide 26 hours of teaching per year on a topic of his choice, to be divided between lectures and ‘seminars’ at will, he gave four individual lecture courses and two ‘seminar’ series with invited speakers between January 1977 and his death in March 1980. His weekly lectures, like those of Foucault, drew a considerable crowd who queued for hours in advance before filling the Collège’s largest lecture theatre as well as an adjacent room furnished with a video link-up. Enthusiastic listeners recorded Barthes’s every word onto cassette. Barthes wrote very full lecture notes, and tended to read them out with minimal improvisation. However, his lecture notes were not included in any of the posthumous publications edited by Seuil’s François Wahl during the 1980s. Wahl asserted that Barthes would not have wished the lecture notes to be published due to his strict distinction between spoken and written texts, and also claimed that neither lecture notes nor recordings existed in sufficiently complete form to permit any kind of publication. In summer 1991, an unauthorised transcription of part of one of Barthes’s lectures from the 1978 Neutre series appeared in Bernard-Henri Lévy’s journal, La Règle du jeu. This led to a court case in September 1991, in which the journal’s publishers were convicted of breach of copyright and ordered to pay damages to Barthes’s half-brother and heir, Michel Salzedo.
Salzedo subsequently deposed the archive of Barthes’s manuscripts with the Institut Mémoires de l’Édition contemporaine (IMEC) in 1996, it became apparent that full handwritten notes for all of Barthes’s Collège de France lectures existed, and could be supplemented by the amateur recordings of the lectures. The texts of Barthes’s notes for *Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens* (delivered from January to May 1977), and *Le Neutre* (delivered from February to May 1978), were published in November 2002. The final two lecture courses, *La Préparation du roman I et II* (December 1978 to March 1979, and December 1979 to February 1980) appeared one year later. Also made available were MP3 recordings on CDs of the entirety of the lectures. Éric Marty oversaw the publications, which were released alongside his 2002 re-edition of Barthes’s *Œuvres complètes*. Since the Collège de France material has appeared, Marty has embarked upon a series of publications of the notes of Barthes’s seminars at his previous place of employment, the École pratique des hautes études, also in Paris. In 2009, to the ire of François Wahl, two diaristic texts of Barthes’s were published: *Carnets de voyage en Chine*, which catalogues Barthes’s experiences of visiting China as part of a Tel Quel delegation in 1974, and *Journal de deuil*, a collection of ‘fiches’ expressing Barthes’s grief after the death of his mother in 1977.

When preparing the Collège de France material for publication, Marty and his editorial team chose not to issue a transcription of the lectures or an edited text combining the oral and written versions of the originals. The published texts are in most respects identical to Barthes’s manuscript notes. Unobtrusive editorial notes are present in footnotes; these pinpoint or elaborate Barthes’s references, gloss any abstruse terms, provide links to other texts by Barthes, and occasionally add an elucidatory phrase from the relevant oral recording. Marty was determined not to turn these notes into an entirely book-like text. His preface to the series stresses that ‘ces notes sont davantage ce qu’on pourrait appeler un infra-texte’ (Marty in CVE, 12). Their nature is not textual so much as epitextual, in Genette’s sense: provisional, oral, self-reflexive. The texts are published as part of Seuil’s *Traces écrites* collection, which is devoted to the publication of lectures and seminars. The covers are designed to resemble a spiral-bound cahier, and the text is printed in a typeface reminiscent of typewritten script. Littered with Barthes’s ellipses, arrows, brackets and abbreviations, the text appears within wide margins, in which the reader can make notes, as Barthes did in his scripts. The visual appearance of the books thus seeks to remind the reader of the contingent nature of the material.
These are strange texts in a quasi-archival mode. They share this curious status with many other texts: there has been a general trend in French publishing over the last fifteen years whereby the pedagogical work of post-war French thinkers in the human sciences has become available on a large scale. Following the publication of notes from a selection of Merleau-Ponty’s Collège de France lecture notes during the mid-1990s, the publication of transcriptions of Michel Foucault’s lectures began in 1997 and is ongoing. Émile Benveniste’s final lectures at the Collège de France have just been published, and more publications are projected. The notes of Jacques Derrida’s seminars at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales are being published almost simultaneously in French and in English translation. For all of these thinkers, their ‘archive enseignante’ is becoming part of their œuvre; the pedagogical material arrives late, supplementing the corpus, and enabling scholars other than those who attended the lectures to undertake a study of these thinkers’ pedagogy. In the case of Barthes, the Collège de France lecture notes permit a retroactive assessment of his thought, as Jürgen Pieters and Kris Pint point out in their introduction to a collection of articles about Barthes’s Cours. Pieters and Pint portray the Barthes of the Collège de France period as being ‘in the uneasy situation whereby the theoretical doxa he opposed was to a great extent influenced by his own thinking’. The lecture courses show us ‘a man shadowboxing with an earlier self’: Barthes’s literary semiology seeks the inclusion of aspects of language and literature overlooked by his previous, more systematic semiology. This mission is inherently risky, as Pieters and Pint remind us: ‘this revision often turned into a mere regression’. The lectures are thus a ‘riddle’ of sorts, not least because the fantasies that they employ are never realised. Thus the lectures, far from being ‘a final post-scriptum’ to Barthes’s œuvre, constitute instead ‘an invitation to return to [the] œuvre’ and to recalibrate Barthes’s legacy.

In thus returning to the œuvre, however, we need to be aware of the formal specificity of these texts. These are situated, semelfactive texts, whose moment has passed. The two seminar series, ‘Qu’est-ce tenir un discours? Recherche sur la parole investie’ (1977) and ‘La métaphore du labyrinthe: Recherches interdisciplinaires’ (1978–79), are incomplete, consisting only of Barthes’s notes, without the interventions of the invited speakers whose presentations constituted the bulk of the series: it is for this reason that I shall not analyse these seminars in detail. Similarly, I shall not analyse the seminar on ‘Proust et la photographie: examen d’un fonds d’archives photographiques mal connu’ (1980), which was not given due to Barthes’s untimely death. The lecture series, on the other
hand, despite their partly interlocutory character, are monologic, and thus self-contained. I have found it logical to accept the lecture notes *a priori* as a textual addition to Barthes’s corpus, though with the caveat that these are indeed *not* books.26

Barthes’s forced monologism is both uncomfortable and enabling. At the Collège, he feels ill at ease being the sole speaker, not privy to the circulation of ideas amongst his listeners, and distressed by seeing people standing, or sitting uncomfortably on floors or windowsills in order to hear him speak. But he plays on this too: from the declaration of the ‘enseignement fantasmatique’ onwards, all of the lectures play upon the forced centrality of *himself*. His resistance to the magisterial form of the lecture leads to a style that constitutes its own dialogism, with Barthes constantly breaking up his own discourse, organising the material in an aleatory fashion, and undercutting his own mastery by a deliberately heavy reliance on others’ material. This very idiosyncratic lecturing style serves to underline the counter-ideological message of Barthes’s work. The lecture courses beneficially refocus our attention on Barthes’s philosophy of form, and the manner in which much of the substance of his work inheres in its formal experimentation. This experimentation is elaborated within his pedagogy: Barthes’s last three published books, *Roland Barthes* (originating in a seminar), *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (based on two years of seminars) and *La Chambre claire* (partially elaborated during the *Préparation du roman I* lectures) are each, in terms of their construction, richly inventive.27 A similar formal innovation is found in the lecture courses, where Barthes exerts himself to practise an unmagisterial teaching in a magisterial setting.

The first lecture course, *Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens* (January–May 1977), begins with a lengthy setting-out of what this method will involve. Drawing heavily on Gilles Deleuze’s *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Barthes opens the first lecture by discussing the Nietzschean opposition between ‘method’ and ‘culture’.28 Whereas a method implies that the thinker has a predetermined goal towards which he wishes to advance directly, ‘culture’ involves allowing thought to be formed by various unpredictable forces including one’s unconscious. ‘Culture’ is a routing towards heterogeneity: ‘des bribes, des bornes de savoirs, de saveurs’. It is this idea of heterogeneity, which will not be hierarchised in accordance with any preconceived goal, which will inform Barthes’s methodology, as will the idea of the fantasy – for fantasy could be seen as ‘origine de la culture (comme engendrement de forces, de différences)’ (CVE, 12 January, 34). The ‘fantasme’ of the first lecture course is the ‘vivre-ensem-
ble’, an ideal of both personal and collective living which Barthes designates using the word ‘idiorrythmie’, a term borrowed from the vocabulary of Greek orthodox monasticism. Barthes discovered the word in *L’Été grec*, a recent book by Jacques Lacarrière. In this study of Greek monasticism, Lacarrière discusses the monks of Mount Athos who inaugurated a community which was only lightly regulated, and which thus constituted an alternative to the highly regulated monastic community from which they had broken. ‘Idiorrythmie’ refers to the individual rhythm or pace at which each of these monks lived. For Barthes, *idiorrythmie* is a form of living which manages to reconcile the problems of social living and those of a life too solitary, producing a quotidian ideal which balances the right mixture of elements of companionship and space. This *idiorrythmic* fantasy is distinguished from the most common exemplars of living together: Barthes makes it clear at the outset that he is not going to discuss the family or the couple: ‘le lieu du couple n’est pas balayé par le fantasme qui précisément ne veut pas voir l’immuable chambre à coucher, la clôture et la légalité, la légitimité du désir’. Similarly, the recognised marginalism of groups which have an overt cause – communes, convents, phalansteries – is not of interest, for these groups are structured ‘selon une architecture de pouvoir’ and are thus ‘déclarativement hostiles à l’idiorrythmie’ (*CVE*, 12 January, 39–40).

Throughout the lecture series, Barthes examines the conditions that are required for the attainment of such an imagined ‘idiorrythmie’, and those that are antipathetic to it. The important questions regard whether *idiorrythmie* is possible in our culture, and whether a small group could exist in which the benefits and comforts of communal living would be experienced without that sense of community impinging too much upon one’s sense of individuality, and without an ideological ‘telos’ ultimately determining the group. Barthes examines these issues using a heterogeneous corpus. On the one hand, texts treating monasticism and cenobitism are examined. Barthes refers often to the problems of ancient Western monastic life, which he associates with the repressive aspects of Christianity. He promotes the much more desirable conjunction of the group and the individual that he sees in the ‘bouddhisme doux’ of the monks of Ceylon. This is the first occurrence in the *Cours* of the positive ‘eastern’ exemplars which we will see Barthes employ throughout his time at the Collège: this is discussed in Chapter 4. The other important group of texts in *Comment vivre ensemble* is a set of five ‘textes-tuteurs’ (*CVE*, 4 May, 182) each of which allows Barthes to examine the implications of certain types of space and community. Thus Palladius’ *Histoire lausiaque*, a fifth-century account of Egyptian, Palestinian and Syrian monks,
is linked to the space of the desert. Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* is used to discuss the ‘autarkic’ space of the sanatorium. Robinson Crusoe provides material for consideration of solitude and the idea of the hide-out or lair. Gide’s *La Séquestrée de Poitiers* is also examined for what it reveals regarding obsessive solitude, and Zola’s *Pot-Bouille* stages the space of the archetypal ‘immeuble bourgeois’. By using these texts as well as the monastic intertexts and various other sources including reference works such as the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Barthes elaborates his fantasy of the ideal ‘vivre-ensemble’. Both positive and negative aspects of communal life are examined, and the question of the imbrication of power in language is constantly present. Running in tandem with the *Comment vivre ensemble* lectures, the seminar on ‘Tenir un discours’ is concerned with the force and ‘intimidation’ inherent in certain uses of language; after sessions by seven invited speakers, Barthes’s contribution to the seminar is an analysis of Charlus’s speech to the narrator in Proust’s *Le Côté de Guermantes*.

The fantasy of retreat is examined in *Comment vivre ensemble* as a ‘solution individualiste à la crise du pouvoir’ (59). Its central problematic is the search for the ‘distance critique’ between oneself and others. Barthes characterises this research as a ‘problème d’éthique de la vie sociale’ (222). The search for *idiorythmie* is a search for ‘le Souverain Bien’ (178), which in fact, Barthes concludes, can only ever be found in writing, thanks to its shifting and fragile nature. Thus, in the final lecture of the series, Barthes gently refuses to put together any set of prescriptions which would define the nature of the ‘vivre-ensemble’, and says simply that what is desired is ‘délicatesse’: ‘une distance qui ne casse pas l’affect’ (179). This is a theme to which he will return in the following year’s lectures.

At the end of this first lecture series, Barthes describes at some length the manner in which the lectures have been structured. There has not really been a *method* – for, as he had explained in the first lecture of the series, method must be rejected given that it is a ‘chemin droit [qui] fétichise le but comme but’, serving only ‘généralité, ‘moralité’ (12 January, 33). Rather, there has been ‘un protocole d’exposition’ (4 May, 180). Before the series began, Barthes wrote material sufficient for the entire series of lectures. Dipping into his corpus of texts, he identifies ‘traits’ or ‘figures’ that are relevant for the discussion of the ‘vivre-ensemble’. These figures are then named, and shuffled into alphabetical order. The lecture series is thereby composed of fragments, whose sequence aspires to no ultimate outcome beyond that of gesturing, in each case, towards the fantasy which is at the origin of the lecture series. The mate-
rial is then delivered in the arbitrary alphabetical order, with no further constraint except the time-slot of each lecture. The system of ‘traits/figures/cases’, Barthes says in the final lecture, is just like that employed in _Fragments d’un discours amoureux_. This methodological overlap reveals a concern with the role of the intellectual and with that assigned to the reader or listener that is both writerly and pedagogical. Using the ‘traits’, whether in the writing of _Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes_ and the _Fragments d’un discours amoureux_, or in these lectures, is deliberately non-exhaustive. Each ‘figure’ of the lover’s discourse is ‘offert au lecteur pour qu’il s’en saisisse, y ajoute, en retranche et le passe à d’autres: autour de la figure, les joueurs font courir le furet’ (FDA, 30). Similarly, Barthes sees his lecturing role as being merely indicative of areas of interest that may be worth pursuing. He expects that the Collège de France audience run with the suggestions he provides them with, suggesting that the course is like a jigsaw puzzle: ‘Je suis le fabricant (l’artisan) qui découpe le bois. Vous êtes les joueurs’ (CVE, 4 May, 181).

The attempt at a collaborative activity cannot truly be accomplished within the monologic lecture format, but it is important to Barthes to insist that his lecturing is discreet, incomplete, and non-didactic. What he provides are ‘touches successives: une goutte de ceci, une lueur de cela’. He often uses the idea of flashes, ‘scintillations’ or ‘nuances’, when discussing his assemblage of lecture material. Here the ‘touches of colour’ are likened to those in tachistic or divisionistic painting: while the work is in process, it is not obvious from the juxtaposition of colours what the final image will look like:

On juxtapose les couleurs sur la toile, au lieu de les mélanger sur la palette. [...] [Moi,] je juxtapose les figures dans la salle de cours, au lieu de les mélanger chez moi, à ma table. La différence, c’est qu’ici il n’y a pas de tableau final: ce serait, au mieux, à vous de le faire’ (181, my emphasis).

On the recording, we hear him add, <Je n’ai pas une philosophie du Vivre-Ensemble>. No result is provided by the _cours_; if there is to be one, the listener has to furnish it for herself, using the materials Barthes has made available. The incompletion and fragmentation are constitutive. Barthes’s motivations for this type of structuring are aesthetic, epistemological and also ethical: he believes that the method of fragmentation and digression will, in keeping with the subjects under discussion, keep the dogmatism of discursive authority at bay. It is made clear that the mode of _experience_ of the lectures (‘on ne comprend pas où ça va’), as brought about by the aleatory and digressive method, is the central point of his enterprise:
Ce que je viens de dire de la non-méthode laisse entendre qu’au fond le ‘sujet’ (quaestio) n’est pas pertinent. Quoi que je choisisse comme ‘sujet’ [l’année prochaine] […], la pratique digressive, le droit à la digression. Je dirai tant et toujours la même chose. L’indirect sera là, qui est d’ordre éthique. Il s’agira d’une Éthique. (CVE, 184)

The following year’s lecture course, Le Neutre (February–June 1978), is also taken up by the examination of what Barthes characterises as a social and ethical problem. The aleatory structuring is reinforced: this time the ‘figures’ are alphabetised and then placed in a new order, according to numbers Barthes found in a 1959 statistical table. The Neutre is a slippery series of sketchings of what ‘the neutral’ might be, and why Barthes desires it. Lexically, the term has Blanchotian resonances, though these are not explored by Barthes in any detail. He defines ‘le neutre’ as ‘toute inflexion qui esquive ou déjoue la structure paradigmatique, oppositionnelle, du sens, et vise par conséquent à la suspension des données conflictuelles du discours’ (N, 261). The fantasy of this series arises from a distaste for the surrounding logomachy.

Le Neutre bears witness to Barthes’s weariness of what he calls ‘la demande de position’ (18 February, 45). There is, he contends, a social requirement that one should always be prepared to make judgments and defend them, because, due to the agonistic nature of language, not to have an opinion at all (to be neutral) is considered reprehensibly weak. Faced with this, Barthes desires the possibility of abstaining from judgment, of retreating – ‘le droit à se taire’ (49). Barthes had hinted at this in his inaugural lecture, when speaking of the way in which language forces us into affirmation; it was in this context that he made his notorious statement that ‘[La langue] est, tout simplement: fasciste, car le fascisme, ce n’est pas d’empêcher de dire, c’est d’obliger à dire’ (L, 14). The fantasy of ‘le neutre’ is the fantasy of a mode of discourse – and, concomitantly, a mode of being – which would suspend the conflict which Barthes sees as being inherent to much social discourse and behaviour. Barthes elucidates the ideal by examining both positive and negative examples. The figures that ‘renvoient aux modes conflictuels du discours’ (N, 261) include ‘Colère’, ‘Arrogance’, and ‘Affirmation’. But Barthes has also found examples of attitudes which suspend conflict or offer strategic means by which one can temporarily evade the conflictual logic by which language and thus social interaction are structured. Examples of such ‘figures’ are ‘Bienveillance’, ‘Silence’, ‘Délicatesse’, ‘Wou-Wei’, and ‘L’Androgyne.’

The neutral is related to idiorrythmie. It can be seen as the positive distance between human subjects, a respectful space in which expecta-
tions and judgments are minimised. An active version of the neutral can be found in linguistic acts, such as the oblique evasion of persistent questioning practised by figures such as Pyrrho’s disciple, Eurylochus, and the character of Mélisande in Debussy’s opera Pelléas et Mélisande. The neutral is also attained in certain physical and mental states, such as the drug-induced tranquil hyper-consciousness described by Baudelaire in Les Paradis artificiels, or Rousseau’s description in Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire of his sense of being part of a great cosmic whole.

Barthes is particularly interested in these states of existence in which hierarchy and social identity are nullified. In order to discuss these states of ‘minimal existence’, Zen and Tao writings are particularly important to Barthes. The corpus of material for Le Neutre includes an esoteric selection of material ranging from ancient Greek texts – notably texts on the Sceptics – to medieval theology to De Quincey, Michelangelo, and Pasolini. Barthes explains that his sources are almost exclusively drawn from ‘la bibliothèque de ma maison de vacances [à Urt]’ (34). Within the schematic of Le Neutre, and its yearning for retreats, feints, deviations from expectation, the use of the library at Urt can be seen as an a priori retreat. The course is built upon a ‘réponse à côté’ to the question of ‘quelle bibliothèque?’

In Le Neutre Barthes imagines what it would be like to leave behind the conflictual interaction that is brought about by our adherence to binary oppositions. To do this, he has perforce to begin from these binary oppositions (between conflict and tranquillity, East and West, active and passive). Barthes insists that attaining a conduct which would be beyond such oppositional paradigms would involve not the passivity that we tend to associate with the idea of neutrality, but rather an endlessly renewed effort. It is so difficult, in fact, to achieve neutrality in our society that it can only be attained temporarily, as when Rousseau retreats to Lake Biel and writes his Rêveries. Only in certain spaces can the neutral be imagined. Thus Comment vivre ensemble’s ideal of retreat and idiorrhythmie is implicitly present in Le Neutre. The similar structuring of Comment vivre ensemble and Le Neutre, which constitutes its own insistent topos, also confers a thematic unity on both of these courses. I shall be tracing the related ideals of community and retreat in Chapter 3.

In October 1978, Barthes announces that he wishes profoundly to change the form of his writing. This declaration is made in the lecture ‘Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure…’ This lecture, anthologised after Barthes’s death, is broadly similar to the first lecture of La Préparation du roman I (December 1978–March 1979), and outlines the concerns of that lecture series. Barthes’s desire to write a creative work
which would articulate ‘la vérité des affects, non celle des idées’ (‘Longtemps’, 469) brings about a change in the structuring of his lectures. Both of the Préparation series are structured sequentially while retaining the originary protocol of the fantasy. In the first Préparation lecture, Barthes speaks of his desire to break with his previous intellectual work and with the oppressive public expectation it involves: ‘[L]e sujet écrivant subit une pression sociale pour l’amener (le réduire) à se gérer lui-même, à gérer son œuvre en la répétant: c’est ce ronron qui doit être interrompu’. The alternative to this is to embark upon what Barthes calls a ‘vita nuova’, calling to mind the ‘new life’ fantasies of Dante and of Jules Michelet. This ‘new life’ can only be envisaged through writing:

Or, pour celui qui écrit […] il ne peut y avoir de Vita Nova […] que la découverte d’une nouvelle pratique d’écriture. […] Car face au ‘ronron’ de la gestion, deux voies s’ouvrent: 1) ou bien le silence, le repos, le retrait […]; 2) ou bien reprendre la marche dans une autre direction, c’est-à-dire batailler, investir, planter, avec le paradoxe bien connu: ‘Passe encore de bâtir, mais planter à cet âge!’ (PR, 2 December 1978, 29–30).

This citation sums up the two main directions of all the Collège de France teaching – ‘retrait’ and ‘marche.’ He has already explored ‘la dilection du Neutre, de la Retraite’ (PR, 30) in Comment vivre ensemble and Le Neutre. Now, the ‘marche’ is towards the idea of a novel, which shimmers at the horizon ‘à titre de mirage’; the fantasy-based method, as Barthes says at the end of Comment vivre ensemble, ‘est de l’ordre du Plus tard. Tout travail est ainsi assumé en tant qu’il est animé par le Plus tard. L’Homme = entre le Jamais plus et le Plus tard. Il n’y a pas de présent: c’est un temps impossible’ (CVE, 183).

The first Préparation du roman course, subtitled De la vie à l’œuvre, is concerned with how to transmute the matter of one’s own life into the desired new form. Barthes states that his imagined novel would document his present experience, and its ‘dimensions affectives, relationnelles’ (PR, 16 December 1978, 45). The exploration of how one might write a novel thus begins by examining the initial practice of all writing: note-making. In order to find out how he might make the transition from the ‘notation’ of the present to the long form of the novel, Barthes examines the ‘forme brève’ of the Japanese haiku. The haiku is chosen because it exemplifies for Barthes literature’s ability to render the absolute individuality of the ephemeral moment. The haiku, the study of which forms the bulk of De la vie à l’œuvre, is to be a propaedeutic for the novel, which, though a long form, would ideally conserve the intensity of the haiku. The series concludes with Barthes’s admission that his own love for the fragment as a genre means that, much as he wants to translate the
haiku’s qualities into a longer form, this ‘fantasme’ is, after all, untenable: Barthes figures his technical inability to write a continuous, fictional form as a strongly felt resistance to fabulation. The question of his oscillation between the fragment and the desire for the novel will be treated in Chapter 5.

The second Préparation series, subtitled L’Œuvre comme volonté (December 1979–February 1980), moves to an examination of the material, real-world conditions that are necessary in order to write the proposed work. This series has a tripartite structure, corresponding to what Barthes describes as the three ‘épreuves’ which the writer must undergo in order to produce his work. This classically linear structure is determinedly – even, perhaps, parodically – conventional, with a clear introductory section and three chapters or acts. At the outset, however, Barthes tells us that there will be no conclusion, but rather ‘une Suspension, un Suspense final dont je ne connais pas moi-même la résolution’ (184). The first trial is that of the difficult choice of a form for the postulated work. For Barthes, the most profound formal choice is between fragmentation and the continuous. When discussing this opposition, he employs Mallarmé’s distinction between the ‘Album’ and the ‘Livre’. This is a significant paradigm which I discuss in detail in Chapter 5. The second ‘épreuve’ that the writer must undergo is entitled ‘Patience’, and involves the practical challenges faced by the writer who must organise his life in order to provide the time, space, and inspiration required to plan and write the work. This section deals exhaustively with timetables and domestic arrangements, citing many examples from the diaries and correspondence of writers such as Proust, Kafka and Flaubert.

The final trial discussed in L’Œuvre comme volonté is that of ‘separation’ and the sense of being ‘inactuel’ or out of time. Barthes considers the question of how the would-be writer can reconcile his desire for literature and for writing with the strident demands of sociality. Barthes had outlined this theme in his inaugural lecture, when he claimed that May ’68 had inaugurated a crisis in pedagogical values, one of whose results is that literature is now ‘désacralisée’ (L, 40). Given that literature is not central to the concerns of the majority of people, the writer is ‘exilé’ (PR, 16 February 1980, 359). The end of this series is taken up with Barthes’s preoccupations regarding the place of literature in society and the survival of literary language. He concludes that the writer needs explicitly to ‘assume’ his status as an exile, in order to transform any pessimism regarding the marginality of literature into a ‘Forme intense d’Optimisme’. Finally, he adds that he is incapable of producing the novel or the ‘Degré zéro de l’Œuvre’ which has formed the fantasy of the last
two lecture series. The last lecture admits this, but remains determinedly open and unresolved in the end, gesturing towards a future time in which the work that Barthes imagines, characterised as ‘simple, filiale, [et] désirable’ (PR, 23 February 1980, 377–78), could be written. Citing Arnold Schönberg’s statement that, in the wake of the post-serial music he shaped, it is still possible to write music in C major, Barthes concludes his final lecture thus: ‘C’est là, pour finir, l’objet de mon désir: écrire une œuvre en Ut majeur’ (PR, 23 February 1980, 384). ‘Ut majeur’ are the final words of La Préparation in the way that ‘l’Utopie du langage’ is the final phrase of Barthes’s first book Le Degré zéro de l’écriture. The work in C major, despite its untimely nature, remains new in being, to the last, a project. Barthes hands it on, pointing out that this desired work could be written by somebody else (l’Œuvre que je voudrais ou écrire, ou qu’on écrive aujourd’hui pour moi)’ (378).

Throughout the four series of lectures, Barthes focuses on imbuing his pedagogical writing with unmagisterial, ‘provisional’ qualities. Reading these texts is frequently disorientating: we stagger, as Barthes does, ‘entre des bribes, des bornes de savoirs, de saveurs’ (CVE, 34). The ‘Cours-Livre’ or ‘Cours-Théâtre’ (PR, 229) is generically unstable, as Andy Stafford has pointed out: the interplay of elements of criticism, fiction and experiment leads to ‘what Barthes calls in La Préparation du roman, following the German Romantics, “bariolage”, an inter-generic (or extra-generic) form’. As Chapter 5 shows, Barthes cannot produce the fantasised ‘roman bariolé’, but perhaps it is achieved within the Cours themselves, and within their essayism. For it is in fact, after all, the essay that is pre-eminent: an essayism in filiation with Montaigne and with the German Romantics is the very form which accommodates the collapse of rhetorical codings that Barthes explicitly desires, while providing an all-encompassing, permissive form in which one can explore diverse forms and fields of knowledge – always admitting one’s own contingency.

Since Montaigne, the essay has been concerned with the problematisation of genre, and with a rejection of concept-driven logic which tends to exclude specificity. Montaigne indicates this in ‘Des Livres’ in a diatribe against hidebound rhetoric. He vigorously condemns the style of Cicero, with its definitions, dissections (‘partitions’), and wordiness. Such ‘longueries’ are frustrating and inessential: ‘pour moi, qui ne demande qu’à devenir plus sage, non plus savant et éloquent, ces ordonnances logiciennes et Aristotéliques ne sont pas à propos’. He seeks instead a frank discourse which declares the author’s personal interests
and which does away with obfuscatory generic conventions: ‘il ne me faut point d’allèchement, ni de sauce: je mange bien la viande toute crue’.41 Seneca and Plutarch satisfy his desire for immediacy, for they treat ‘science’ in ‘pièces décousues’, leading to a style that is gratifyingly ‘plein de points et saillies, [et] de choses’.42 Against the pre-eminence of discursive systems, with their conflicts and hierarchies, Montaigne sets the details of taste which render truth, as Jean Starobinski comments, ‘more individual, different, and, by this very fact, more apt to become universalised’.

Montaigne is on the side of fragmentation, of thinginess. He finds his echo in Barthes, who proceeds by rupturing the ‘longueries’ of doctrinal discourse – not only because, like Montaigne, he gets bored, but for the more serious reason that the compacity of discourse must be disrupted in order that its ideological sway be attenuated. Commenting upon the system of ‘traits’ in Comment vivre ensemble, he writes: ‘il convient de casser la fixité du langage et de nous rapprocher de notre discontinu fondamental’. While the fragmentation of discourse may be only a small step in this direction – ‘un faux discontinu, ou un discontinu impur, atténué’ – it is worthwhile nonetheless: ‘il est la plus petite concession que nous soyons contraints à faire à la fixité du langage’ (CVE, 52). Throughout his career, Barthes writes in short bursts for this very reason. Much of Barthes’s œuvre is a collection of notes in various directions, which refuse to assemble themselves under one totality. It is for this reason that he is regarded by some thinkers – notably those hostile to the essay as genre, such as Pierre Bourdieu – as insubstantial and flighty. I shall examine in Chapter 2 the manner in which Barthes plays upon such imputations of impurity. Though both Montaigne and Barthes employ the rhetorical tactic of self-deprecation (‘[Je suis] un sujet incertain’), making it clear that they can offer no overarching theory, both share a deep conviction of the value of their contingent discourses. The essayistic is the individualistic, and as a forum for knowledge is thus more helpful to individuals than the generalisations of system are. Indeed, abjuring system becomes vital, because, as Knight points out, ‘one of the problematic aspects of the structuralist orthodoxy which Barthes himself helped to fashion was precisely the gap it inserted between language and the world’.44 And at the Collège de France, as I discuss in Chapter 1, Barthes wants to produce a discourse which is ‘moins technique et plus “humain”’.45

The ‘humanisation’ of discourse comes about through the insertion of sensuous detail: in this too Barthes is the heir to the Montaigene who discusses his liking for salted beef, for unsalted bread.46 In Roland
Barthes, he discusses his desire to insert ‘sensual’ detail into ‘le discours de l’essai’. In this way a double benefit is gained: ‘apparition somptueuse d’une matérialité et distorsion, écart brusque imprimé au murmure intellectuel’. Thus he commends *The Sorrows of Young Werther* for its sudden introduction of a description of a dish of buttered peas. More immediately still, in certain haikus, ‘la ligne des mots écrits s’ouvre brusquement et c’est le dessin même du mont Fuji ou d’une sardine qui vient gentiment occuper le lieu du mot congédié’ (*RB*, 709–10). The importation of sensual detail here is attributable to a desire to use literature to overcome human alienation from reality. Additionally, it is a strategy by means of which the arrogance of conflictual discourse can be set aside: in *Le Neutre*, Barthes discusses the attraction of this *thingification* for Rousseau, who spends his time at Lake Biel describing the plants of the island: ‘jouissance de substituer un savoir irénique (peut-être obsessionel: chosification, inventaire), à un combat d’idées’ (N, 13 May, 181). This same temptation is what leads Barthes to include in the Collège de France lectures references to so many tactile objects and experiences: reaching for one’s bedside table in the dark; drinking tea on a wet afternoon; knocking over a bottle of ink; walking in the countryside above the Adour; reading a menu written in chalk. Not for nothing does the word ‘experience’ – the title of Montaigne’s final, culminating *Essai* – appear as a ‘mot d’ordre’ at the end of Barthes’s inaugural lecture: ‘Vient peut-être maintenant l’âge d’une autre expérience. […] Cette expérience a […] un nom illustre et démodé […]: Sapientia: nul pouvoir, un peu de savoir, un peu de sagesse, et le plus de saveur possible’ (L, 46). The special status of the Collège de France as an institution which allows a teaching unfettered by considerations of syllabi or qualifications means that this essayistic teaching, incongruous though it may (deliberately) be, is possible.

Barthes links his liking for the sensuous object which disrupts intellectual discourse to a way of writing which rejects conceptualisation in favour of using intellectual ‘objects’ to advance thought:

Différent du ‘concept’ et de la ‘notion’, qui sont, eux, purement idéals, l’*objet intellectuel* se crée par une sorte de pesée sur le signifiant: il me suffit de *prendre au sérieux* une forme (étymologie, dérivation, métaphore) pour me créer […] une sorte de *pensée-mot* qui va courir, tel l’anneau du furet, dans mon langage. (*RB*, 709)

At the Collège de France, these ‘*pensées-mots*’ are the *fantasmes* informing each lecture series. Each series unfurls out of one ‘object’: *idior-rythmie*; the neutral; the novel. But these are not concepts, and their truth is never established. Rather, they are approached obliquely, in simula-
tion, imagination, and above all through metaphor. As a good post-Nietzschean, Barthes is profoundly distrustful of the ‘tyrannie du concept’ (N, 20 May, 200), both in theory and in life, because of its elision of nuances. The concept as generalising instrument makes no place for the non-systematisable, the contingent, or what Adorno calls the ‘non-identical’.

*A word becomes a concept*, writes Nietzsche,

insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless […] cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept ‘leaf’ is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. […] We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual.

It is insofar as the concept is a *reductive* force that Barthes feels it imperative that we turn away from it; he quotes Nietzsche in *Le Neutre*, adding that the concept is a ‘force réductrice du divers, du devenir qu’est le sensible, l’aisthèsis’. The Greek word for sensation quoted here is also at the root of the word ‘aesthetic’. No coincidence this, for to defend *aisthèsis* (feeling), as Barthes wishes, involves an aesthetic method – the use of metaphor: ‘si l’on veut refuser la réduction, il faut dire non au concept, ne pas s’en servir. Mais, alors, comment parler, nous autres, intellectuels? Par métaphores. Substituer la métaphore au concept: écrire’ (N, 20 May, 201). An aesthetic approach to discourse is closely linked to Nietzsche’s perspectivism and to his rejection of ‘truth’ in favour of the idea of multitudes of truths, each invested with personal interest.

In the table of the ‘phases’ of his career included in *Roland Barthes* Barthes declares his most recent phase, from 1973 onwards, as being under the sign of Nietzsche (*RB*, 718–19).

It is an argument of this book that the late Barthes is not only Nietzschean but also Kantian, Schlegelian, and Adornian. He shares the priorities of many of the most important thinkers of the German aesthetic tradition, with the exception of Hegel. Barthes’s late work is an assent to Adorno’s statement in *Minima Moralia* that ‘the whole is the false’: this reverses Hegel’s prioritisation of totality. Barthes’s mistrust of the concept means he is anti-idealist, concerned with everything that Hegel’s dialectics leaves out: the singular, the specific, and the individual relation with the world. In this respect Barthes shares the basic principles of Nietzsche and Adorno, who reject Hegel’s systematism and promote the cognitive power of the aesthetic. Nietzsche, and Adorno in his wake, have their roots in Kant and in the Jena Romantics of the 1790s, though they both tend to gloss over their debts to the Romantics. Andrew Bowie has demonstrated the
importance of Romantic thought to Nietzsche’s conception of language. It is largely thanks to the influence of Romantic thought that Nietzsche can formulate his questioning of the value of truth, and characterise the truth instituted by language as ‘a repressive reduction to identity of something which inherently resists our identifications’. For Nietzsche as for Schelling and the Romantics, modernity is negatively associated with the rule of the concept, which excludes ‘“intuition”, in the sense of the particular, immediate relation to the world which concepts cannot capture’. Nature plays an important place in these thinkers’ theories, as it did in Kant’s Critique of Judgment. Similarly, Adorno insists on the importance of nature (absent in Hegel’s aesthetic theory), and advances his own more austere conception of modernity as a repressive force. Art, in Adorno’s renewal of Romantic aesthetics, becomes the only locus of the articulation of the non-identical. For all of these thinkers, the most vital work to be undertaken within theory is the defence of individual quiddity in the face of pervasive, systematising concepts. Also, the Schlegel brothers, Nietzsche and Adorno all share a conviction of the importance of practising paratactical, fragmented style.

It is no surprise then that Barthes’s late theory is increasingly close in preoccupation to this tradition, or that his final lectures, as I show in Chapter 5, involve a celebration of the German Romantic conception of the fantasised work. His avowed debt to Nietzsche mobilises, often implicitly, echoes of Kantian and Romantic theory. These German influences constitute a thread running throughout this book. Barthes’s final work is, as Knight has pointed out, increasingly marked by ‘Romantic affects […]: love, pity, and a preoccupation with death’. It is the dying Nietzsche, mad with pity, who appears in the final pages of La Chambre claire; in this post-Romantic thinker Barthes sees his own desperate desire for the dead or about-to-die referent of the photographic image. Beginning with the invocation of Nietzsche’s idea of ‘culture’ in the first Comment vivre ensemble lecture, Nietzsche is a tutelary figure throughout this teaching; I examine in Chapter 2 the manner in which Barthes licenses his idiosyncratic lecturing methodology, with its tactics of simulation and fantasy, by recourse to the Nietzschean archetype of the artist.

The Collège de France teaching takes place during a period in Barthes’s writing which is entirely consumed by aesthetic matters; indeed, Barthes’s late work has been castigated for a retrenching into the aesthetic. His published work during this period consists almost exclusively of essays on aesthetic objects: music, painting, literature, film. These late texts are examined in this book alongside the Collège de France
teaching. Through an exploration of the lectures’ most insistent forms and themes, in tandem with a wide-ranging analysis of Barthes’s output in the 1970s generally, I arrive at a reassessment of the critical and ethical priorities of the ‘late Barthes’. His final book, *La Chambre claire*, is often dubbed a ‘novel’ by critics. In fact this text is the essay *par excellence* and the acme of Barthes’s aesthetic, essayistic method, at the crux of which is the problem of how to reconcile the individual and society, the particular response and universal norms. Aesthetic judgment, as Kant showed in the *Critique of Judgment*, is the arena within which this oscillation between subjective response and more universal importance takes place. All aesthetic judgment is based on pleasure or on pain; Barthes extends this Kantian precept when he states that ‘on étudie ce que l’on désire ou ce que l’on craint’ (N, 261). The ability of the aesthetic experience to help us to organise our sense of our place in the world is thus central to Barthes’s late work, and this is made clear in the Collège de France lectures, with their insistent questions: how can a refusal of conflict be recognised? How can grief be expressed? How can we overcome the gap that language institutes between ourselves and the world? How can we criticise the workings of power without becoming part of them ourselves? For Barthes, as he suggests in his inaugural lecture, the answer to these as to so many other questions lies in literature itself, and its ever-renewed attempts to represent the grain of existence.

As a professor of literary semiology, Barthes teaches us the importance of the aesthetic to our sense of our place in the world, the many ways in which kaleidoscopic everyday reality can be articulated in language, and the value of the non-instrumentalisable, whatever that might be: reticence; elusive social accord; a kind of teaching that is not goal-oriented. These ideals are all present in the ‘fantasmes’ informing the four lecture series. Barthes’s reflections in these lectures are ‘pour [lui], une façon de chercher – d’une façon libre – [s]on propre style de présence aux luttes de [s]on temps’ (N, 33). Barthes is of ongoing relevance because he is a thinker emblematic of modernity: he is tormented by the endless proliferation of meaning, by ‘la marque intolérable du sens affiché, du sens oppressif’ (*RB*, 699), and by its suffocation of particularity. He faces the problem of wanting individual expression, but wanting that expression to also have some general validity *without* being oppressive. He seeks a still place, a ‘minimal existence’ in which expression would be as exact and piercing as grief and love themselves, social relations would be transparent and peaceable, and meaning would be non-combative. This is why Barthes’s teaching at the Collège de France is vitally, affirmatively ‘fantasmatique’.
Notes


9 Barthes, *Leçon* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 44. Kris Pint has examined at length the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the Barthesian ‘fantasme’ in *The Perverse Art of Reading: On the Phantasmatic Semiology in Roland Barthes’s Cours au Collège de France*, trans. Christopher M. Gemerchak (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010). The focus of Pint’s study is on the nature of the reader’s fantasmatic involvement with the text she is reading.

10 ‘The term ‘séminaire’, while it can be used in the same sense as the English word ‘seminar’ (i.e. a small group), tends to be used in France to refer to what in English would be called a ‘course (of lectures)’. Barthes’s ‘séminaires’ at the Collège de France were delivered to a very large audience, but differed from the lecture courses in consisting largely of presentations from invited speakers.

11 As well as posthumous collections of essays, Wahl published the autobiographical text *Incidents*, which includes the diary *Soirées de Paris*, in 1987 (Paris: Seuil).


14 The Barthes archives were moved from IMEC to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Richelieu site) in 2011.

15 There are recordings of every lecture, with the exception of the final *Comment*
vivre ensemble session, of which only the first half exists.


19 For a comparative study of Barthes’s and Foucault’s teaching which focuses strongly on the materiality of the manuscripts and the particular status of the teaching archive, see Guillaume Bellon, *L’Inquiétude du discours: Barthes et Foucault au Collège de France* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2012).


26 My study of the lectures is based on both reading and listening to the material. In most cases my citations are from the printed text, supplemented where pertinent by transcriptions from the recordings.


30 There are still idiorrhythmic ‘skites’ or communités of hermits living on Mount Athos alongside more regulated cenobitic monasteries. See Graham Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Cenobitic monks live communally, praying, eating and working together, under the authority of a head monk. Idiorrhythmic monks live and work alone and dispose of their own goods. According to Lacarrière, the only gathering they all attend is the evening prayers (*L'Été grec*, p. 40).


37 ‘Le neutre-le fragmentaire’ is a key term in Blanchot’s *L’Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). Despite a certain amount of thematic overlap, Barthes and Blanchot are difficult to align due to the vastly different frameworks of their respective œuvres: Barthes’s work prioritises socio-historical situatedness, notably regarding the use of language, whereas Blanchot’s arguments tend generally towards the ontological or mythical. It is clear throughout his career that Barthes admires Blanchot, but he states in *La Préparation du roman* that this admiration is in spite of the fact that ‘mon projet récuse le sien’ (380). Christophe Bident has characterised their divergence by saying that ‘Blanchot was a man of the absolute, Barthes a man of plurality’; ‘R/M, 1953’, *Paragraph*, 30.3 (2007): 67–83 (p. 68). Éric Marty argues convincingly that despite the thinkers’ shared investment in the term, their conceptions of the ‘neutre’ are differently motivated. Blanchot is haunted by lack, whereas Barthes is tormented by an over-abundance of meaning. What links these thinkers, Marty argues, is not so much shared theoretical preoccupations as a shared drive towards a force which would escape mastery, and which they both name ‘neutre’. Marty, ‘Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes, une “ancienne conversation”’, *Les Temps modernes*, 654 (2009): 74–89. Leslie Hill believes that Barthes misreads Blanchot, but also states that the two thinkers’ conceptions of the neutral are radically different: ‘While for Blanchot the Neuter was what preceded all manifestation, challenging the privilege of the visual, for Barthes it was the opposite, as the infinite detail of the figures described in *Le Neutre* testifies; it was what manifested itself without end within the interstices and discontinuities of the paradigm’. *Radical Indecision: Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, and the Future of Criticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 136.


39 *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture*, suivi de *Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil,
44 Barthes and Utopia, p. 8.
49 Douglas Smith has demonstrated that Nietzsche’s thought was revived in France in the early 1970s, not only in Deleuze’s work, but also in Sarah Kofman’s and Pierre Klossowski’s. Transvaluations: Nietzsche in France, 1872–1972 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). On the influence of Nietzsche on French theory, see also Alan D. Schrift, Nietzsche’s French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism (New York: Routledge, 1995).
50 Kant’s aesthetic theory was outlined in the Critique of Judgment in 1790. Critique of Judgment, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986). Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel began publishing what subsequently came to be seen as the founding texts of German Romanticism in the late 1790s. As Kai Hammermeister has shown in The German Aesthetic Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Adorno’s post-war work is a refinement of paradigmatic late-eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Barthes seems to have been unaware of Adorno’s thought. There are nonetheless striking similarities between the two theorists’ work, which I discuss in “Not a Question but a Wound”: Adorno, Barthes and Aesthetic Reflection’, Comparative Literature, Spring 2013 [article currently in press].
52 See Hammermeister, The German Aesthetic Tradition, for an excellent account of these thinkers’ aesthetic theories. Adorno’s Negative Dialectics demonstrates at length his opposition to Hegelian dialectics and his argument that philosophy must concern itself with the non-identical aspects which do not fit in Hegel’s
schematisations.

56 *Barthes and Utopia*, p. 10.
57 ‘J’entrais follement dans le spectacle, dans l’image, entourant de mes bras ce qui est mort, ce qui va mourir, comme le fit Nietzsche, lorsque le 3 janvier 1889, il se jeta en pleurant au cou d’un cheval martyrisé: devenu fou pour cause de Pitié’ (CC, 883).
58 Annette Lavers states that Barthes’s use, in later work, of terms such as ‘pleasure’, ‘charm’ and even ‘aesthetic’ itself meant that he was ‘on the way to being fully integrated into the bourgeoisie’. *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 207.