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Citation for final published version:

Badmington, Neil 2016. Bored with Barthes: ennui in China. *Textual Practice* 30 (2) , pp. 305-325. 10.1080/0950236X.2016.1129733

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2016.1129733>

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This is a pre-publication version of an article which is to be published in 2016 as part of a special issue of *Textual Practice* entitled 'Deliberations: The Journals of Roland Barthes'. It is being made available publicly in line with the publisher's 'Green Open Access' policy. For the authoritative text, please see the published version.

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Typescript submitted for publication on 8 September 2015

Bored with Barthes: Ennui in China

Neil Badmington

‘In the desert of the Orient, how my ennui grew!’
Jean Racine, *Bérénice*.¹

In the beginning was boredom. So believes the narrator of Alberto Moravia’s *La Noia*, who tells us that he planned as a boy to write a ‘universal history according to boredom’.² He outlines his masterpiece in the following way:

In the beginning was boredom, commonly called chaos. God, bored with boredom, created the earth, the sky, the waters, the animals, the plants, Adam and Eve, and the latter, bored in their turn in paradise, ate the forbidden fruit. God became bored with them and drove them out of Eden; Cain, bored with Abel, killed him; Noah, bored to tears, invented wine; God, once again bored with mankind, destroyed the world by means of the Flood; but this in turn bored Him to such an extent that He brought back fine weather again. And so on. The great empires – Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman – rose out of boredom and fell again in boredom; the boredom of paganism gave rise to Christianity; that of Catholicism, to Protestantism; the boredom of Europe caused the discovery of America; the boredom of feudalism kindled the French Revolution; and that of capitalism, the revolution in Russia. (pp. 8-9)

The preparation of this epic history of ennui begins well: the narrator relates how he sketched out a summary and started to write ‘with great enthusiasm’ (p. 9). But things soon go wrong: ‘I grew bored with the whole project and abandoned it’, he recalls (p. 9).

I was not surprised to discover that Roland Barthes was familiar with Moravia’s tale. He mentioned it in passing at the Collège de France on 9 February 1980, a little over two weeks before the traffic accident which would lead to his death. The lecture was part of the course on ‘the preparation of the novel’, and Barthes ended the week’s discussion

by turning to the relationship between writing and boredom. The meaning of the term ‘ennui’, he observed, has changed over time: while in the seventeenth century it had a ‘much stronger’ sense of ‘unbearable pain, intolerable torment, violent despair’, in the modern era ‘it means the complete opposite: a state without hate and without love, a loss of drive’. Boredom, he concluded, is ‘actually a very subtle word: it refers to the strength, as it were, of a weakness, to the intensity of a lack of intensity’.³

It is equally unsurprising to find this explicit engagement with ennui towards the end of Barthes’s life, for it seems to me that his body of work becomes increasingly beset by boredom as time goes on. This is something that has not received extensive attention to date, perhaps because Barthes’s ennui is, as I will explain in what follows, at its most apparent and acute in the posthumous body of work. Boredom certainly figures in the texts that appeared during Barthes lifetime, but not with quite the same force, the same visibility, the same intensity. When it does come to bloom, moreover, its incarnation is elusive and resistant to incorporation into a grand narrative, a sweeping story about ‘the human condition’. Before I turn at length to *Travels in China*, the posthumously published journal in which ennui reaches its excruciating peak, I want to set the scene by surveying boredom in Barthes.⁴ If this prelude becomes unbearably boring, the reader is advised to leap ahead to the section entitled ‘The Writing of Boredom’, which is where things become *really* boring – for Roland Barthes, that is.

Barthes, Bored

Ennui is there early in Barthes. (*In the beginning was boredom...*) In a letter to Philippe Rebeyrol dated 13 August 1932, the young Roland begins by apologising for not having been in touch sooner with his friend. ‘I was afraid of boring you’, he writes, before reporting that his current ascetic practices of erudite reading, education, and meditation are turning him into a ‘positively boring boy’.⁵ Barthes was just sixteen years old when he wrote those words, and he would go on, many of the letters published for the first time in the *Album* of 2015 reveal, often to raise the prospect of boredom in his correspondence with acquaintances.⁶ Ennui surfaces early in the chronologically presented *Oeuvres complètes*, too. The fourth text in the first volume is a short piece of just three paragraphs published in *Existences* in 1943. Its focus is a

huge recent issue of the journal *Confluences* devoted to ‘Problems of the Novel’. Barthes is not persuaded by much of what the 57 authors have to say, and he writes of ‘an impression of confusion, of boredom, of uselessness’ likely to beset a reader.⁷

Existences was the journal of the sanatorium of Saint-Hilaire-du-Touvet, where Barthes was a patient in the 1940s while he was suffering from tuberculosis. During his confinement, he undertook the early work for what would become his second book, *Michelet* (1954), in which the mapping of the historian’s ‘organized network of obsessions’ included two sections in which Michelet discusses boredom and, more specifically, ‘*the literature of boredom*’ which made its mark as a genre in the time of Bonaparte.⁸ One year after the publication of *Michelet*, a short piece for *Les Lettres nouvelles* entitled ‘La Vaccine de l’avant-garde’ addressed the place of ennui in Jean-Louis Barrault’s adaptation of *A Sleep of Prisoners*, in which ‘boredom has become an intolerable physical pain’.⁹

But these are early examples with swift and somewhat slight resonance. It is not until the 1970s, I think, that the theme becomes much more noticeable, more frequent and forceful, in Barthes’s work. If this is the decade in which Barthes, as Éric Marty puts it, ‘profoundly reorient[ed] his journey through the notion of pleasure, through first-person writing, through the use of the novelistic or of autobiographical elements’, it is also, I would argue, the period in which there is a more marked turn to ennui.¹⁰ With pleasure comes a blooming of boredom. In the opening pages of *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), for example, ennui arises from writing which ‘might be said to *prattle*’, while a later section announces famously that ‘[b]oredom is not far from *jouissance*: it is *jouissance* seen from the shores of pleasure’.¹¹ (I will return in time to the curious, drifting fame of this line.) Two years later, in the pages of *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, Barthes told Jean-Louis Ézine that books can easily bore him, which leads their being cast aside.¹² Meanwhile, speaking to Jacques Chancel on 17 February 1975, he recalled that he had been bored often as a child, but added that this was much less common in his adult life.¹³

When Barthes invoked these bouts of childhood boredom, he had recently finished *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, the text which contains probably the most significant discussion of boredom in the work published during his lifetime.¹⁴ In the photographic section which opens the book, beneath a picture of Barthes taken in 1923, when he would have been around eight years of age, sits the following paragraph:

As a child, I was bored often and greatly. This evidently began very early, it has continued my whole life, in gusts (increasingly rare, it is true, thanks to work and to friends), and it has always been obvious. It is a panic boredom, to the point of distress: like the kind I feel in colloquia, lectures, parties among strangers, group amusements: wherever boredom can happen. Might boredom therefore be my hysteria?¹⁵

The opposite page of the text continues the diagnosis. A photograph taken in Tokyo in 1966 shows Barthes at the podium. ‘*Distress: lecturing*’, reads the caption (p. 25; italics in original). Beneath lies another image, this time captured in Milan in around 1968. Barthes is in front of a microphone, seated and surrounded by a number of other men. He appears to be frowning and fidgeting with a pen. ‘*Boredom: a roundtable discussion*’, runs the accompanying text (p. 25; italics in original).

Here the ennui is personalised, an attribute of the narrator of the text (which must, a handwritten notice at the beginning of the book stresses, ‘all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel’ [p. 1]). But *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* is, as Sophie Létourneau has observed, a volume whose photographs establish family connections in the depicted poses, notably in the ‘pensive elbow’ apparent in images of Barthes, his father, and his father’s father.¹⁶ And boredom appears to have been inherited with pensiveness, for elsewhere in the book a photograph of Barthes’s maternal grandfather is accompanied by the following caption: ‘*In old age, he grew bored. Always seated early at the table (even though the dinner hour was constantly brought forward), he lived further and further ahead of time, more and more bored.*’¹⁷ This, in fact, is the first appearance of ennui in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* – and it is one that reaches back to the distant past. Between this inaugural textual flicker and the paragraphs about the narrator’s childhood boredom lie two related references. First, beneath a photograph of Bayonne, a long sentence about evening strolls contains a reference to ‘boredom’s drift’ (p. 17). Then, several pages later, underneath a delightful image of a toddling Barthes on a beach circa 1918, in a paragraph about childhood there promenades a sentence in which the narrator sees in his younger form ‘the dark underside of myself’. At the very beginning of the ensuing list of personal qualities sits boredom (p. 22).

All of these references gather near the beginning of the text, in the section where the narrator announces that he will discuss a number

of images as a treat to himself ‘for finishing his book’ (p. 3). In the celebration of writing, that is to say, boredom’s refrain resounds. And it resounds beyond this initial section of the book, for the reader later encounters statements about: boredom and avant-garde texts (p. 54); boredom and Michelet (p. 55); the way in which cruising arises from boredom (p. 72); the boring nature of accounts of dreams (p. 87); the possibility that the repressed boredom of childhood is responsible for migraines (p. 124); the boredom of self-commentary (p. 142); the boredom of ‘foreseeable discourses’ (p. 152); boredom and scholarship, apropos of Bataille (p. 159); the narrator’s tendency to postpone until later what bores him (p. 174); and even the boredom which has haunted the writing of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* itself (p. 71).¹⁸

But however striking the eruption of ennui in this late book might be, and however much the text foregrounds a theme which had circulated less forcefully in Barthes’s work for decades, it is in one of the posthumously published texts that Barthes is at his most bored – and maybe even at his most boring. The volume in question is related closely to *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, for, although it was not published in full until 2009, it was written in 1974 while Barthes was working on his self-commentary.¹⁹ I am referring to the *Carnets du voyage en Chine*, known in English as *Travels in China*.²⁰

The Writing of Boredom

The text has its roots in a visit that Barthes paid to Mao’s China between 11 April and 4 May 1974, following an invitation from the Chinese embassy in France, which was in turn initiated by Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi.²¹ Accompanying Barthes on the trip were François Wahl (who was, among other things, his editor at Seuil) and, representing *Tel Quel*, Julia Kristeva, Marcelin Pleynet, and Philippe Sollers. As Pleynet noted in the introduction to his account of the expedition, those three weeks produced ‘a vast series of news reports, no less than five articles in *Le Monde*, two issues of the journal *Tel Quel* and, a little later, a book by Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises*, published by Editions des Femmes’.²² He might also have mentioned in the list his own book, which appeared under the title *Le Voyage en Chine* in 1980, and it is now possible, of course, to add Barthes’s *Travels in China*.

On 8 May 1974, a few days after returning from China, Barthes gave an account of the voyage to his students in Paris. The written

version of this presentation, which runs to about fifteen pages, was published in 2010 as ‘Compte rendu du voyage en Chine’, and it bears a close relation to one of the articles mentioned by Pleynet as having appeared in *Le Monde*.²³ The latter piece – in essence a condensed version of what Barthes reported to his students – was entitled ‘Alors, la Chine?’ (‘Well, and China?’) and was published in the paper on 24 May 1974.²⁴ Looking back on the recent trip, Barthes makes a startling statement: ‘In a way, we go back home (except from the political answer) with: **nothing**’ (p. 116). The travellers arrived, he reports, armed ‘with a thousand urgent questions, urgent and seemingly natural ones’ (p. 116), but nothing fell from ‘the tree of knowledge’ when it was shaken:

We want there to be impenetrable phenomena, so that we can penetrate them: an ideological atavism has made us deciphering creatures, hermeneutic subjects. We believe our intellectual task is always to discover a meaning. China seems to resist yielding this meaning, not because it hides it, but more subversively, because (in this respect very un-Confucian) it defeats the constitution of concepts, themes, names [...]. It is the end of hermeneutics. (pp. 116-17)

The disappointment continues when Barthes describes China as insipid, filled with repetition, clichés, and what he calls ‘bricks’ [*briques*] – solid, pre-formed units of discourse.²⁵ All that China offers for reading, he concludes, is its ‘political Text’.²⁶

But however weary this brief account of the trip is, it lacks any reference to boredom; the word ‘ennui’ appears nowhere in the text. It is also absent from the ‘Compte rendu’ given by Barthes to his students. For boredom, and for a great deal of it, we need to turn instead to *Travels in China*. The book, which was prepared for publication in 2009 by Anne Herschberg-Pierrot, transcribes the journal that Barthes kept throughout the visit to China – the journal which fed ‘Well, and China?’ and the ‘Compte rendu du voyage en Chine’.²⁷ It would be more accurate, in fact, to refer to journals, in the plural, for Barthes’s observations were spread across several notebooks, as Herschberg-Pierrot explains:

Right from the start, Barthes had been thinking of bringing back a text from China. He filled three notebooks on this theme, in blue biro or felt-tip. The first two notebooks, ‘Spiral Crown’, with a blue hardback cover

(Notebook 1), and a red one (Notebook 2), respectively, brought with him from France, are complemented, for the end of the journey, by a Chinese notebook, smaller, in black moleskin, bearing a quotation by Chairman Mao printed in red on the first page (the last, in the order used). These three notebooks are entirely paginated in red felt. Barthes reread them, set out a contents page for each of them, and drew up a thematic index in a fourth notebook.²⁸

I dwell on these material details because the original form of the text that we now know as *Travels in China* – or, to be more precise, the original form of its inscription – is significant. About eight months before he published ‘Well, and China?’ in *Le Monde*, Barthes confessed in the pages of the same newspaper that he suffered from what he called ‘an almost obsessive relation to writing instruments’. He explained:

I often switch from one pen to another just for the pleasure of it. I try out new ones. Besides, I have far too many pens – I don’t know what to do with all of them. And yet, as soon as I see them, I start craving them. I cannot keep myself from buying them.

When felt-tipped pens first appeared in the stores, I loved them a lot. (The fact that they were originally from Japan was not, I admit, displeasing to me.) Since then I’ve become tired of them, because the point flattens out too quickly. I’ve also used nibs – not the ‘Sergeant-Major’, which is too dry, but softer nibs, like the ‘J’. In short, I’ve tried everything ... except Bics, with which I feel absolutely no affinity. I would even say, a bit nastily, that there is a ‘Bic style’, which is really just for churning out cheap copy, writing that merely transcribes thoughts.

In the end, I always return to fine ink pens. The essential thing is that they can produce that soft, smooth writing I absolutely hold dear.²⁹

This elegant, gentle, precise handwriting can be seen in many of the reproductions of Barthes’s manuscripts which have been published since his death.³⁰ The notebooks from the Chinese trip, however, look completely different. As the facsimiles included in the *R/B* exhibition catalogue show (pp. 210-225), Barthes’s observations were made in loose, untidy handwriting and, worse still, often with a ballpoint pen – that object which he had dismissed just seven months earlier as ‘really

just for churning out cheap copy, writing that merely transcribes thoughts'. Gone is the habitual elegance, the 'soft, smooth' script; in its place is uneven, ugly scrawl. This is what Barthes dismissed as 'Bic style', in every sense of the phrase. If, as Claude Coste has argued, *Travels in China* contains little for lovers of fine writing (*beau style*), it also offers nothing for admirers of fine *handwriting*.³¹

There are, perhaps, straightforward practical explanations. First, the notebooks are sites of immediate observation 'in the field', so to speak: on the move, surrounded by information, Barthes needs to write quickly and easily, and a ballpoint pen can be more suitable for such jottings. Indeed, in her editor's introduction to *The Preparation of the Novel*, Nathalie Léger points out that Barthes 'did not like using [ballpoints] but, considering them useful for making the odd note, always carried one on him' (p. xx). Second, air travel with a fountain pen – and Barthes appears to be taking notes during the flights to and from Beijing (pp. 6 and 193) – can be a risky, messy business, as the change in air pressure can cause ink to leak or even squirt out of the nib. Perhaps Barthes wanted simply to arrive in Beijing fresh and clean, and ready to take rapid notes.³²

Whatever the reason for the choice of writing instruments used in the Chinese notebooks, however, the presence of ballpoint pen suggests to me, before I have begun to treat the words as anything more than patterns on a page, that this is inscription without passion, inscription without desire, inscription without what Barthes called, in a short piece entitled 'Writing', 'the pleasure of having before me (like the handyman's bench) a fine sheet of paper and a good fountain pen'.³³ 'For a week', he observes while visiting Nanjing Normal University on 19 April, 'I haven't felt any opening up in my writing, any *jouissance* in it. Dry, sterile'.³⁴ As a fragment written for, but not included in, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* proposes, the body produces different types of inscription 'according to the regime of the idea which comes'.³⁵ A handwritten page, he proposes in 'Writing', can be 'a space that is quite simply the space of art' (p. 168), but not here, it seems to me, not in the ugly notebooks filled during the trip to China. This, rather, is the writing of boredom.

Indeed, it is not long before ennui bores its way into the journal. Barthes is bored before the plan has even arrived in Beijing, in fact. Immediately after commenting, in the entry for 12 April, how disappointed he is to find the aircraft full of Europeans, Barthes refers for the second time in two pages to a mention of the trip in a French newspaper.³⁶ 'Go back over the echo in the *Quotidien de Paris*', writes

Barthes, ‘show the lousy ethics it’s based on. How boring! To have the downsides of fame (the echo of a private trip) and none of the (financial) advantages’ (p. 6).

But this minor irritation is nothing compared to the boredom experienced by Barthes when he reaches his destination. The main problem, he soon discovers, is that the French visitors’ encounters with Mao’s China are controlled strictly by the Luxingshe Agency responsible for overseeing their visit and for, in Barthes’s phrase, ‘mothering’ the visitors unnecessarily (p. 94).³⁷ The day after arriving, for instance, the guests are taken to see a puppet show in a suburban hall, where Barthes is dismayed to find that the French party is ‘penned in with two rows of elderly Europeans’ (p. 14). It is, he writes, ‘impossible to mingle. The organizers don’t want us to. Hands off bodies. Exclusions’ (p. 14). (He would expand upon this theme in the account of trip given to his students back in Paris on 8 May, where he spoke in summary of ‘ethnic segregation’ and a ‘separation of the body; on one side a mass of millions of Chinese people, on the other side five granules, five European *petits pois*.³⁸)

In the place of mingling, of spontaneity, of surprise, the visitors are made during their stay to sit through many presentations – in a printing works, a naval dockyard, and a housing development, for example – about the glory of Mao’s China and, regularly, the failings of Confucius and Lin Biao.³⁹ ‘Endlessly repeated Doxa’, writes Barthes two days into the trip, ‘Lin Biao and Confucius had the same point of view’ (p. 15). Although the visitors are able to ask questions about what they have heard at these lectures, Barthes eventually gives up: ‘I can’t be bothered’, he scribbles, ‘since the replies are always idyllic’ (p. 110).⁴⁰ In short, Barthes is bored in China, bored by China. ‘This is bound to be really boring’, he remarks when the group arrives at a museum in Xi’an (p. 142), before adding on the following page of his journal, ‘This museum is boring me to death’ (p. 143).

In addition to articulating the boredom as a lack of spontaneity and surprise, Barthes presents matters in terms of the signifier, and it is here, I think, that the place of *Travels in China* within his wider body of work becomes clear. ‘Signifiers are rare’, he writes in his report for *Le Monde*, explaining that ‘signifiers are what exceeds meaning, makes it overflow and reach further, in the direction of desire’.⁴¹ The Chinese journal both repeats (p. 144) and rephrases this statement about rarity. The entry for 25 April, for example, states the following, in brackets, in between accounts of visits to the Pagoda of the Great Goose and a prehistoric museum:

My phenomenological level = the level of the signifier.
In China, the only signifier = writing (Mao, *dazibao*).⁴²

Although Barthes changes his mind in the notebooks about the nature of the signifier in China – he later adds gymnastics, food, clothing, and hands to the list (pp. 127, 129), only then to remove clothing again (p. 144) – the heart of the problem remains: in the midst of the ‘bricks’, of what he also calls ‘a sort of monstrous ventriloquism’ (p. 184), Barthes feels trapped at the ‘[l]evel of the signified: in other words: what blocks the place, what bars the signifier. Total eviction of the signifier’.⁴³ And the signifier, he declares, is ‘basically: everything I like and that alone’ (p. 127).

To understand the resonance and relevance of these remarks, this laying of the ‘bricks’ on the side of the signified, it is necessary to revisit the source, for Barthes, of the distinction between signifier and signified: Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, in which it is proposed that the linguistic sign is made up of the two components in question. Although the relationship between the two is arbitrary, unmotivated, the two elements of the sign are, in Saussure’s account, ‘intimately united’:⁴⁴

Language can also be compared with a sheet of paper: thought is the front and the sound the back; one cannot cut the front without cutting the back at the same time; likewise in language, one can neither divide sound from thought nor thought from sound; the division could be accomplished only abstractedly, and the result would be either pure psychology or pure phonology.⁴⁵

This account of a unified sign was clearly influential in the early work of Roland Barthes, notably in texts such as *Mythologies* (1957) and *Elements of Semiology* (1964).⁴⁶ But things change significantly in the later Barthes – the Barthes who is bored in China; the Barthes who looks back, in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, to ‘his structuralist phase’;⁴⁷ the Barthes who, in one of the unused fragments of that same book, reports on an international congress of semiology by saying that the discipline is no longer for him because it ‘seems to believe that to each signifier there corresponds a signified’.⁴⁸ With the waning of structuralism, with the drift away from semiology in its conventional form, Barthes’s texts become more interested in, more seduced by, the signifier. More

specifically, there emerges a celebration of what, four years before the trip to China, *S/Z* named ‘the magic of the signifier’.⁴⁹

This is precisely the magic that is missing in China. Because meaning is fixed and predictable, there can little play, plurality, drifting. As Barthes writes in his journal on 23 April, ‘it’s the continual presence, smooth as a tablecloth, of Agency officials that blocks, forbids, censors, rules out the possibility of the Surprise, the Incident, the Haiku’.⁵⁰ This is why *Travels in China* so often articulates boredom. Barthes does his best to find something to break up the ennui, however. One of his strategies is best understood, I think, by remembering a moment in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*:

It is a good thing, he thought, that out of consideration for the reader, there should pass through the essay’s discourse, from time to time, a sensual object (as in *Werther*, where suddenly there appear a dish of green peas cooked in butter and a peeled orange separated into sections). A double advantage: sumptuous appearance of a materiality and a distortion, a sudden gap wedged into the intellectual murmur.

Michelet gave him his example: what relation between the anatomical discourse and the camellia blossom? – ‘The brain of a child,’ Michelet says, ‘is nothing but the milky blossom of a camellia.’ Whence, no doubt, the habit of diverting himself, as he writes, by unusual enumerations. Is there not a kind of voluptuous pleasure in inserting, like a perfumed dream, into a sociological analysis, ‘wild cherries, cinnamon, vanilla, and sherry, Canadian tea, lavender, bananas?’ to relieve the burden of a semantic demonstration by the vision of ‘wings, tails, crests, plumes, tufts of hair, scarves, smoke, balloons, belts, and veils’ out of which Erté forms the letters of his alphabet – or again, to introduce into a sociological journal ‘brocade trousers, capes, and the long white nightshirts’ worn by hippies?⁵¹

Barthes is quoting his earlier published work here, but the technique of allowing a ‘sensual object’ to disrupt the flow, to create a gap in the murmur, also operates in *Travels in China*.⁵² While the journal is profoundly listless, there is a sense in which it is not list-less, simply because it contains many lists. Often while Barthes is listening to yet another predictable presentation about the glory of Mao’s China, he copies into his notebook, in the form of long lists, some of the

information that is being presented. When, for instance, the visitors are taken to inspect a new residential district, they are required to sit through a talk by a member of the Revolutionary Committee. Barthes begins to make an inventory, a very boring inventory: '35 buildings, 1,800 homes, 7,000 men. Workers + teachers, doctors, employee. All the public services. Primary school. Crèche. Food. Workshop for spare parts. Hairdresser's, bookshop, bank' (p. 27). But then, after describing what he is hearing as a 'deadly "speech"' (p. 27), he interrupts his list, diverts himself, allows a sensual object to sparkle, in brackets, within the dull discourse: '[I look at my glass of tea: the green leaves have opened wide and form a thick layer at the bottom of the glass]' (p. 27).

Infusing listless lists with asides about tea becomes something of a habit, in fact. A bland transcription of what the visitors are being told about shipping at a naval dockyard, for instance, is disturbed by the following phrase: '[Shanghai tea is much less nice than Beijing tea, which was golden and perfumed]' (p. 23). The following day, meanwhile, an inventory relating to a presentation by the Revolutionary Committee in a hospital is fractured by another aside:

Mao's principles: 1) first prophylaxis. 2) Service provided to the Peasants, Soldiers, Workers. 3) Mass movement in the hospital. 4) European medicine + Chinese medicine.

1) Prophylaxis, Common and epidemic illnesses. Peripatetic teams.

[The tea is better: more golden, with jasmine]

2) Europe + China. 30% of operations under acupuncture.

3) Scientific research: especially into common illnesses.

Examples: chronic bronchitis in the elderly, coronary arthrosis, cancer, cataracts.

4) Education (University level). (p. 32)

Here the diversion about tea breaks into the steady, stupefying enumeration.⁵³ For a brief moment, another possibility percolates. The list continues, of course, gets back on course and makes it as far as a fourth point, but the earlier interruption remains, remains upon the page. What the notebook records is a utopian flicker, a fleeting difference and a fleeting *desire for difference* within monotony.

The turn to tea as a sensual object reaches something of pinnacle when the visitors find themselves in the company of a group of philosophy teachers from Shanghai. There follows what Barthes calls a '[v]ery precise lecture, very historically detailed. A lecture in Marxist

history' (p. 51). So bored by this is Barthes that he cannot record things in the usual manner: '[Trying to take notes, this morning, but I give up]', he writes (p. 51).⁵⁴ He attempts to get back on track by jotting down the time, '10.07am', but then can only manage, 'This history lecture on the Legalists is still going on' (p. 51). There then follows the longest diversion about tea in the entire journal:

[Analyse the Tea system in depth: long session, tablecloth, glasses in wickerwork covers, big Thermos. From time to time they pour more warm water into every glass. It's insipid. But, this, existing on the table, then in gestures, a protocol, a *spectacle*, turns the spoken word into something *indirect*.] (p. 51)

Tea breaks up the boredom, offers an alternative to ennui, by offering something 'indirect' in the midst of the doxa, which is both direct and correct (in that it repeatedly confirms its own authorised account of life under Mao).

In *Le Pas philosophique de Roland Barthes*, Jean-Claude Milner observes that Barthes's use of 'italics, quotation marks, parentheses, quotation marks within parentheses, etc.' is 'knowing' and therefore deserving of critical attention.⁵⁵ As the preceding tea-related quotations from *Travels in China* reveal, Barthes often places his sensual digressions within square brackets. This gives many of the journal's attempts to break up the ennui a visual, typographical quality: the page repeatedly looks different when Barthes is struggling against boredom.⁵⁶ The specific use of square brackets, moreover, makes the diversions more marked, more striking than they would have been if Barthes had enlisted softer, curved parentheses. With the harsher '[]', Barthes squares up to ennui in what might be called a series of 'tea breaks'.

But the brackets ultimately fail: the various sensual diversions away from the overwhelming boredom are brief and slight. What the journal calls 'the subtlest, most futile things' (p. 95) are no match for the endless bricks, the weight of the political signified. The magic of the signifier flickers, yes, and Barthes pursues its promise, but it fades all too quickly. Not for all the tea in China, therefore, is Barthes tempted to linger. As he writes on the day before returning home to France:

[Personally, I won't be able to live in this radicalism, in this fanatical monologism, in this obsessive, monomaniac discourse]
[in this *fabric*, this text without a gap] (p. 192)

As the plane takes off from Peking, he writes a word of sheer relief in his notebook, emphasizing it with an exclamation mark and a surrounding rectangle: ‘Phew! [Ouf!]’ (p. 193) ‘So’, he concludes in one of the journal’s final statements, ‘it would be necessary to pay for the Revolution with everything I love: “free” discourse exempt from all repetition, and immorality’ (p. 195). Little wonder, then, that François Wahl, looking back on the trip some years later in an essay actually called ‘Ouf!', described Barthes’s position in the group of travellers as one of ‘prisoner’.⁵⁷

The Literature of Boredom

And yet, in spite of all of this boredom – not merely the boredom of the posthumously published Chinese journals, but also that which haunts many of the other writings – Barthes tends to be excluded from, or at best marginalised in, scholarly studies of boredom in Western culture. If Barthes was in fact a great professor of ennui, to modify Steven Ungar’s description of him as a professor of desire, I am nonetheless struck by how detailed and persuasive accounts of boredom often implicitly profess an ignorance of Barthes.⁵⁸

Peter Toohey’s *Boredom: A Lively History*, for example, offers precisely what its title promises, and it takes in a wide range of cultural materials – Degas, Goncharov, Edward Hopper, Jean-Paul Sartre, and so on – to tell an engaging story.⁵⁹ Roland Barthes, however, never appears. He does feature in Lars Svendsen’s *A Philosophy of Boredom*, but in just one paragraph containing the quotations about boredom and *jouissance* from *The Pleasure of the Text*.⁶⁰ We find something very similar if we go back in time to the moment of a monument: Reinhard Kuhn’s epic, magisterial survey of ennui in Western literature, *The Demon of Noon tide*, which was first published in 1976. The book’s introduction has as its epigraph twenty-four words from *The Pleasure of the Text* – ‘There are no two ways about it: ennui is not simple. We cannot summarily dispose of ennui ... with a gesture of annoyance or dismissal’ – but Kuhn never actually engages with them.⁶¹ Near the end of the study he returns again to *The Pleasure of the Text*, this time quoting the line about ennui and the shores of pleasure (p. 372). Another sixteen words from Barthes, then, but, once again, there is no engagement with them. The only other reference to Barthes in the entire volume, which runs to

nearly 400 pages and sweeps from Plato to Beckett, is in a footnote which directs readers to a short piece by Barthes on Chateaubriand's *Vie de Rancé* (p. 214 n. 12).⁶²

Elizabeth S. Goodstein begins her formidable *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* by taking Kuhn to task for his ahistorical approach and his 'elitist presuppositions'.⁶³ Her critique is brilliant and compelling. And yet, she inherits something from Kuhn (not to mention Svendsen). Barthes's sentence about boredom and the shores of pleasure stands, in French, as the epigraph to her introduction. Once again, however, the words are never actually discussed, and the author makes no further appearance in Goodstein's lengthy book. Boredom, it might be said, is Barthes glimpsed from the shores of epigraphs.

How might we begin to account for this repeated absence or passing presence in the form of a sentence or two from *The Pleasure of the Text*? Why does my professor of boredom find himself overlooked in otherwise diligent studies of the condition? Why is Barthes's boredom not, well, *interesting* to scholars of ennui?

I will address those questions and move towards concluding by turning to one of the very few texts to discuss Roland Barthes and boredom in any significant way. In 'Public Parks and Private Gardens: Sartre's Nausea and Barthes's Ennui', Betty McGraw distinguishes delicately between Sartre and Barthes. The difference, for McGraw, is that Sartre's discussion of ennui is metaphysical, in that it makes the condition part of 'his ongoing philosophical inquiry into the universal substance of bourgeois existence'.⁶⁴ The key term here, I think, is 'universal': with Sartre, McGraw proposes, we are in the realm of grand theory, metanarrative, a totalising account of the way of the world. But Barthes, she continues, offers another possibility:

Barthes's writing *about* ennui always overflows the boundaries of phenomenological and existential rhetoric, spilling over as figures of a bodily sort of language. [...] Distrusting the militant imperatives of *littérature engagée*, Barthes does not attempt to put the writing of ennui at the service of an existential anterior truth. (p. 78; emphasis in original)

In short, he 'speaks of ennui differently' (p. 83). Gone is the Sartrean insistence upon the 'Absolutely Universal' (p. 84). For McGraw, rather, Barthes 'wrenches ennui from the totalizing moment of idealistic philosophy and sets it with a semiotic pursuit linked to the personal, the

emotional involvement of an unknown praxis' (p. 79).

To put matters another way, there is no grand theory of boredom in the work of Barthes. Ennui occurs repeatedly, and it is tiresome, but the narrative is always specific, local, located; there is no sense that Barthes's ennui is part of 'the human condition', metaphysical, universal. This, I think, is one of the main reasons why my professor of boredom is often absent, or nearly absent, from critical studies of the condition. Barthes's ennui does not fit, does not fit neatly into an epic tale, a vast and general vista. It would escape the approval, the mighty gaze, of a critic like Reinhard Kuhn, for example, who announces in the introduction to *The Demon of Noontide* that ennui is 'a metaphysical malady' (p. 9), 'a state that affects both the soul and the body. Though its origins are always to be found in the soul, its manifestations are both spiritual and physical' (p. 12). It is, he continues:

the state of emptiness that the soul feels when it is deprived of interest in action, life, and the world (be it this world or another), a condition that is the immediate consequence of the encounter with nothingness, and has as an immediate effect a disaffection with reality. (p. 13)

Ennui in this account is special, and it is significantly different from routine, everyday boredom where the source of irritation is 'a temporary state dependent almost entirely on external circumstances' (p. 6). That kind of boredom, Kuhn states, giving the loaded example of a housewife standing in a queue at the supermarket, is trivial, 'superficial' (p. 181), and 'hardly worth serious study' (p. 6).

Kuhn was writing over thirty years before *Travels in China* was published, and he died in the same year as Roland Barthes. It is impossible to know, therefore, precisely what he would have made of the Chinese notebooks, but I doubt very much that they would have been of interest, would have counted as an expression of ennui to be counted alongside the authentic existential howls of Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Beckett. For Kuhn, I suspect, Barthes's journal would have been easy to ignore, 'hardly worth serious study', because the statements about ennui in China are not metaphysical, not matters of the soul, the spirit, or the human condition. Barthes's boredom, rather, is temporary and has precise external causes: the 'bricks', the stifling of the signifier, the clichés, the working of the Agency. In Martin Doeblemann's typology, Barthes's is a 'situational boredom' – a minor, fleeting, non-existential boredom caused by a common situation such as waiting for a train or reading a long article in an academic journal.⁶⁵

There, I think, lies the heart of the problem. Scholarly accounts of boredom often seek to develop a metanarrative, a metaphysics of ennui. But the bored texts of Roland Barthes, of which *Travels in China* is the most extreme and extensive example, resist such designs. The notebooks from the trip to China are filled with episodes of ennui, but these are never enlisted in a magisterial conclusion, a gathering overview. If a critic wants a mighty truth, an overarching essence of ennui, he or she will have to neglect Barthes, the subtle and specific professor of boredom.

Roland Barthes, I have been arguing, has a place in the literature of boredom – but it is an overlooked, undeveloped place. This essay offers a correction and an invitation to scholars in the field. An invitation to visit the distant, foreign land of Barthes's writings. An invitation to rewrite the familiar narrative, to hear and tell another story. An invitation to read Barthes's boredom, to follow its fretting and share its sighs. An invitation to share Barthes's company, to face his ennui. An invitation not to be bored *by* Barthes. An invitation, rather, to be bored *with* Barthes.

Notes

¹ Jean Racine, *Bérénice*, in *Andromache, Britannicus, Berenice*, trans. by John Cairncross (London: Penguin, 1967), 1.4.234. Translation modified.

² Translated into English by Angus Davidson as *Boredom* (New York: New York Review Books, 1999), p. 8. Some English editions carry the title *The Empty Canvas*.

³ All of the quotations in this paragraph are from Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978-1979 and 1979-1980)*, ed. by Nathalie Léger, trans. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 271.

⁴ What follows is not intended to be a complete catalogue of references to boredom in works by Barthes – the boredom of such a thing! – but is meant, rather, merely to identify some of the notable occurrences that surround the eruption of ennui in the text which sits at the heart this article.

⁵ Roland Barthes to Philippe Rebeyrol, 13 August 1932, in Roland Barthes, *Album: Inédits, correspondances et varia*, ed. by Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2015), pp. 27-28. My translation.

⁶ See, for instance, pp. 30, 33, 46, 49, 65, 86, 94, 97, 122, 345, 353, and 357.

⁷ Roland Barthes, ‘À propos du numéro spécial de « Confluences » sur les problèmes du roman’, in *Oeuvres complètes*, rev. ed., ed. by Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 5 vols, vol. 1, p. 52. My translation.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Michelet*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 3, 68-70.

⁹ Roland Barthes, ‘Le Vaccine de l'avant-garde’, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 563-564. My translation.

¹⁰ Éric Marty, *Roland Barthes, la littérature et le droit à la mort* (Paris: Seuil, 2010), p. 10. My translation.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), pp. 4, 26. The translation of the second quotation has been modified slightly.

¹² Roland Barthes, ‘The Play of the Kaleidoscope’, in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 199.

¹³ Roland Barthes, ‘Entretien avec Jacques Chancel’, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. IV, p. 902.

¹⁴ According to the dates given at the end of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Papermac, 1995), the book was composed between 6 August 1973 and 3 September 1974 (p. 180).

¹⁵ Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 24. Italics in original. Translation modified.

¹⁶ Sophie Létourneau, ‘Le Prince de la jeunesse: Roland Barthes, cet écrivain mineur’, *Études françaises*, 46.3 (2010): pp. 149-150. Barthes uses the phrase ‘pensive elbow’ on p. 19 of *Roland Barthes*.

¹⁷ Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 12. Italics in original. Translation modified.

¹⁸ Some of the unused fragments from the book also feature references to Barthes’s boredom. See Roland Barthes, *Le Lexique de l’auteur: Séminaire à l’École pratique des hautes études 1973-1974, suivi de fragments inédits du Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, ed. by Anne Herschberg Pierrot (Paris: Seuil, 2010), pp. 256 and 285 n. 1, for instance.

¹⁹ I use the phrase ‘not published in full’ deliberately, for sixteen pages of the original notebooks appeared in facsimile in Marianne Alphant and Nathalie Léger (ed.), *R/B: Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil/Centre Pompidou/IMEC, 2002), pp. 210-225. This volume is the catalogue of the remarkable *R/B* exhibition held in Paris between 27 November 2002 and 10 March 2003.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Carnets du voyage en Chine* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2009); *Travels in China*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

²¹ In *Roland Barthes: Au lieu de la vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), Marie Gil explains that Macciochi had visited China some years earlier and, upon her return, had published a book which celebrated its ‘socialist paradise’ and which won an audience among Parisian intellectuals who had become interested in Maoism (p. 378). For the English translation of Macciochi’s book, see *Daily Life in Revolutionary China* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972). In her *Roland Barthes: Biographie* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), meanwhile, Tiphaine Samoyault speculates that Barthes had probably read, or was at least familiar with, Macchiocci’s text (p. 499). For more on the background to the

trip, see Philippe Forest, *Histoire de Tel Quel 1960-1982* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), pp. 475-476.

²² Marcelin Pleynet, *Le Voyage en Chine: Chronique du journal ordinaire 11 avril - 3 mai 1974 – extraits* (Paris: Hachette, 1980), p. 16. For a letter dated 25 February 1979 from Barthes to Pleynet about the publication of this text, see Barthes, *Album*, p. 247. For the English translation of Kristeva's book, which first appeared in French in 1974, see *About Chinese Women*, trans. by Anita Barrows (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1986). For overviews of *Tel Quel*'s general engagement with Maoism, see: Chapter 4 of Patrick ffrench, *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel (1960-1983)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Chapter 4 of Danielle Marx-Scouras, *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel: Literature and the Left in the Wake of Engagement* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); and Chapters 11 and 13 of Forest, *Histoire de Tel Quel*.

²³ Roland Barthes, 'Compte rendu du voyage en Chine', in *Lexique*, pp. 227-45.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, 'Well, and China?', trans. by Lee Hildreth, *Discourse*, 8 (1986-7), pp. 116-20. For an excellent account of the differences between this text, the 'Compte rendu', and Barthes's journals from the trip, see Chapter 6 of Claude Coste, *Bêtise de Barthes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2011).

²⁵ Barthes explains ('Well, and China?', p. 118) that the term '*brique*' comes from cybernetics, where, as Andrew Brown notes in his English translation of Barthes's *Carnets du voyage en Chine*, 'it means something like "module". But, Brown continues, 'Barthes seems to draw on its more basic meaning as "brick", a heavy, mass-produced block out of which to construct a discourse'. Translator's note in Barthes, *Travels in China*, p. 199 n. 20. As Claude Coste has pointed out (*Bêtise de Barthes*, pp. 208-209), Barthes had actually used the term in question in *The Fashion System* seven years before travelling to China.

²⁶ Barthes, 'Well, and China?', p. 118. See also 'Compte rendu', pp. 229, 239. For a related point, see Pleynet, *Le Voyage en Chine*, pp. 38-39.

²⁷ In her fascinating 'Roland Barthes and Literary Minimalism', *Barthes Studies*, 1 (2015), Diana Leca calls *Travels in China* 'a generically promiscuous text (travelogue? personal diary? reportage?)' (p. 103). While I do not disagree with her, I will call the text a journal or a diary here, mainly for the sake of simplicity, but also because it seems to me that the terms 'diary' and 'journal' are exceptionally elastic in English.

²⁸ Anne Herschberg Pierrot, Foreword to Barthes, *Travels*, p. viii.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, ‘An Almost Obsessive Relation to Writing Instruments’ in *The Grain of the Voice*, p. 178. Translation modified.

³⁰ See, for instance, the images which accompany Armine Kotin Mortimer, ‘Coïncidence: Reécriture et désécriture de Roland Barthes’, *Genesis*, 19 (2002), pp. 169-189 and many of the manuscript facsimiles in *R/B*, ed. by Alphant and Léger, and Barthes, *Album*.

³¹ Coste, *Bêtise de Barthes*, p. 200.

³² Except that he failed to arrive in Beijing fresh and clean: the first page of the journal records his having forgotten to wash his ears before leaving and then his dropping of some ‘greyish, greasy rice’ (p. 5) onto his new trousers before the plane has even taken off.

³³ Roland Barthes, ‘Writing’, in *A Very Fine Gift and Other Writings on Theory*, trans. by Chris Turner (London and New York: Seagull Books, 2015), p. 168.

³⁴ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 75. He also refers to the poverty of his notes in ‘Compte rendu’, p. 75.

³⁵ Barthes, *Lexique*, p. 261.

³⁶ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 6. The first reference to the newspaper occurs on p. 5 of the book.

³⁷ In *Le Voyage en Chine*, Marcelin Pleynet makes precisely the same complaint about being ‘mothered’ (p. 68).

³⁸ Barthes, *Lexique*, p. 233. Kristeva’s *About Chinese Women* also notes in its opening pages a sense of distance between the visitors and the Chinese citizens – ‘I don’t feel like a foreigner, the way I do in Baghdad or New York. I feel like an ape, a martian, an *other*’, she writes when recalling a visit to Huxian (p. 12) – but this distance is due to radical cultural difference, not the controlling interference of the Agency. Indeed, Kristeva’s book exhibits none of the anxieties articulated by Barthes – and none of the boredom, either. It is often hard to believe, in fact, that Barthes and Kristeva are writing about the same trip to China.

³⁹ The visit occurred when the ‘Pi-Lin Pi-Kong’ campaign to denounce these two figures was at its height.

⁴⁰ See also p. 163. For a related point, see Pleynet, *Le Voyage en Chine*, pp. 81, 86.

⁴¹ Barthes, ‘Well, and China?’, p. 118.

⁴² Barthes, *Travels*, p. 119. Barthes does not name the museum, but Kristeva’s *About Chinese Women* (p. 58) mentions a trip made by the visitors to the Panpo Museum of pre-history; I presume that this is the institution to which Barthes refers.

⁴³ Barthes, *Travels*, p. 122. The barring image recurs on p. 155 of the text. A later entry in the journal refers to the surrounding ‘repression of the signifier’ (p. 141) and then its ‘silencing’ (p. 142). For a different list of signifiers discovered in China, see ‘Compte rendu’, p. 237.

⁴⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Reidlinger, translated by Wade Baskin (London, Fontana, 1974), p. 66.

⁴⁵ Saussure, *Course*, p. 113.

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, rev. ed., ed. by Annette Lavers, trans. by Annette Lavers and Siân Reynolds (London, Vintage, 2009); *Elements of Semiology*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1973).

⁴⁷ Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 103.

⁴⁸ Barthes, *Lexique*, p. 299.

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford, Blackwell, 1990), p. 4.

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Travels*, pp. 102-3. See also p. 75 and ‘Compte rendu’, p. 238. The image of the tablecloth also appears on p. 64 of Barthes’s *Travels*, while Pleynet has similar regrets about the lack of surprise (*Le Voyage en Chine*, p. 68).

⁵¹ Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 135. For a related comment, made some years later, see the discussion of ‘tangabilia’ in *Preparation of the Novel*, p. 56. Further discussion of the tendency to enumerate can be found in one of the unused fragments of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* included in *Lexqie*, p. 277.

⁵² The invocation of wild cherries can be found in ‘Sociologie et socio-logique: À propos de deux ouvrages récents de Claude Lévi-Strauss’, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, p. 38; the Erté material occurs in ‘Erté, or À la Lettre’, in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 120; and the original reference to clothing worn by hippies comes from ‘A Case of Cultural Criticism’, in *The Language of Fashion*, ed. by Andy Stafford and Michael Carter, trans. by Andy Stafford (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 110;. Diana Leca offers a wonderful account of Barthes’s tendency to ‘stockpile’ tangibilia in her ‘Roland Barthes and Literary Minimalism’, p. 102.

⁵³ For another bracketed digression about golden tea, see *Travels*, p. 105.

⁵⁴ See also pp. 30 and 64, where, during different events, Barthes records that he is unable to take notes on the ‘set theme’.

⁵⁵ Jean-Claude Milner, *Le Pas philosophique de Roland Barthes* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2003), p. 11.

⁵⁶ For a different analysis of typography in *Travels in China*, see Leca, ‘Roland Barthes and Literary Minimalism’, pp. 104-105.

⁵⁷ François Wahl, ‘Ouf!’, in *R/B: Roland Barthes*, ed. by Alphant and Léger, p. 107. Pleynet’s *Le Voyage en Chine* repeatedly records a distance between Barthes and the other visitors. See, for instance, pp. 43, 51, and 59.

⁵⁸ Steven Ungar, *Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

⁵⁹ Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁶⁰ Well, almost. Svendsen writes incorrectly of ‘desire’, not ‘jouissance’, although this may simply be an error caused by layered translation: Svendsen’s book is translated from Swedish and the relevant footnote points to a German edition of Barthes’s text. This possibility does not change the fact that Svendsen has nothing more to say about Barthes in his book. Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. by John Irons (London: Reaktion, 2005), p. 47.

⁶¹ Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 3. Ellipsis in original.

The complete quotation can be found on p. 25 of *The Pleasure of the Text*, although it should be noted that Kuhn has provided his own translation of the original French words.

⁶² It is not clear if Kuhn's dismissal of the *Tel Quel* writers as 'Maoist terrorists' (p. 4) is meant to include Roland Barthes.

⁶³ Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 55. The detailed critique of Kuhn occupies the whole of the first chapter of Goodstein's book.

⁶⁴ Betty R. McGraw, 'Public Parks and Private Gardens: Sartre's Nausea and Barthes's Ennui', in Steven Ungar and Betty R. McGraw (eds), *Signs in Culture: Roland Barthes Today* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 78.

⁶⁵ Doeblemann distinguishes between situative boredom, the boredom of satiety, creative boredom, and existential boredom in his *Langeweile?: Deutung eines verbreiteten Phänomens* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991). As no English translation exists, and as I am unable to read German, I have had to rely on the summary provided by Lars Svendsen in *A Philosophy of Boredom* (pp. 41-42). In his *Boredom: A Lively History*, Peter Toohey translates the first form of boredom in the typology as 'situational'.