Chapter 11

BAFFLING DRAMATURGY: BETWEEN THE OBVIOUS AND THE OBTUSE

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> Since, as I have tried to suggest, this teaching has as its object discourse taken in the inevitability of power, method can really bear only on the loosening, baffling, or at the very least, of lightening this power.
>
> —Roland Barthes 1979 [1977]: 15

> If you allow your mind to guide you,
> Who then can be seen as being without a teacher?
>
> —Chuang Tzu 2006: 11

> That was our conundrum.
>
> —Alvis Hermanis 2014: 187

In 1979, Roland Barthes published two texts that addressed the work of Cy Twombly: one under the title 'Cy Twombly – works on paper' and the other 'The Wisdom of Art' (at least, as they appear in their English translations). Although different, both essays not only share their ostensible subject but even many of the same sentences and it is precisely between the same and the different that the ground of their relation – that of the neutral – becomes legible. This legibility is not necessarily proposed by the essays' author, but by what one might call (in the context of dramaturgy here) their 'staged reading'. Barthes offers an image of both the writing and the writer as gauche or obtuse, counter-pointed – in a key thought-image for reflecting on modes of knowledge (as practices of power) – with the disciplining of children. In Barthes's celebration of baffling systems of expertise and authority,

both the Twombly essays include, for example, identical observations on the kind of graphism commonly associated with children. In 'Works on paper', we read,

> In Twombly, the letter – the very contrary of an illuminated initial – is produced without deliberation. Yet it is not childish in form, for the child applies himself, presses down, rounds off, sticks out his tongue in his efforts; the child works hard to join the code of the grown-ups. Twombly draws away from it, loosens. (Barthes 1991: 158)

While in 'The Wisdom of Art', we read,

> In Twombly, the letter is the very contrary of an illuminated or printed letter; it seems to be formed without deliberation, and yet it is not really childish, for the child is diligent, presses down, rounds off, sticks out his tongue in his efforts; he works hard to join the code of the grown-ups; Twombly draws away from it, loosens, lags behind. (1991: 188)

Through the evocation of Twombly, then, we are offered a scene of writing – a relation between image and thought, effort and code, child and adult, discipline and practice (not to mention, of course, punishment) – that may seem more or less 'obvious'. That this example of writing was worth repeating indicates how much Barthes appreciated such a drawing away from the 'code of the grown-ups', especially with regard to that code's pretentions to defining knowledge as 'right', whether in distinction from wrong or, as we shall return to, left – in a dynamic of the 'obtuse' running counter to the 'obvious'. This 'loosening' offers an alternative to that discipline to which, in its own way, the very application or deliberation of the child expresses a resistance. Between the tightening and the loosening in this example of composing letters by hand (rather than using a pre-formed type on a keyboard or of gilding the initial letter of an illuminated authority), we see Barthes's concern with what – in the words of his friend Jean Louis Schefer – 'opens up (or, strictly speaking, invents) the emotional body' (1995 [1980]: 61). Rather than the recognition of learning or discovering, institutionalized practices of knowledge – disciplines – typically define themselves by the standards of the pre-formed, as those of the correct (or the correctable), as the assertion of generic 'methodology' over the surprise of the particular – or, indeed, the baffling. Barthes evokes, by contrast, an experience that may be profound as if 'without deliberation', without

the expected attributions that govern disciplinary knowledge and its objects (together with their academic reproduction in an essay such as this one) – including claims concerning 'dramaturgy'.

The desire of both of Barthes's essays on Twombly 'to situate an ethic' that eschews a sense of 'possession' with respect to the work being discussed (or to its 'subject') is explicitly signalled by another shared pair of references – to Webern and to the *Tao Tê Ching*.

The Webern quotation (which, indeed, provides the subtitle of the first essay in French) is from a dedication of his six Bagatelles for string quartet (Op.9) to Alban Berg: *Non multa, sed multum* [*not many but much*]. (The more explanatory, or less enigmatic, English version of the essay's title refers to the fact that it first appeared in a catalogue raisonné of Twombly's works on paper [1982: 162].) The aphoristic condensation of Webern's dedication – consonant with the Bagatelles themselves, which expressly avoid anything expansive – might be taken as a variation of the famous dictum that 'less is more'; itself offering a modernist reformulation, perhaps, of Gertrude's advice to Polonius to present 'more matter with less art' (Shakespeare 2016: 2.2.95). If not a criterion of dramaturgy necessarily, this dictum is standardly applied by critics – at least in the UK, where the implications of the post-dramatic are largely decried by the literary management of what is called 'new writing'. That this claim for the 'new' is, nonetheless, all too often produced by means of the 'old theatre' attests to a sense that what might be experimental in this theatre remains literary rather than, precisely, theatrical (where 'writing' is still read, predominantly, in terms of the 'dramatic'). Barthes himself glosses the modernist sense of 'art' not in terms of more or less, but through a relation between 'density' and 'rarity' (1991: 193), as this generates a sense of enigma – or, one might say, of bafflement. Indeed, he remarks on his own expanded sense of 'literature' that 'because it *stages* language instead of simply using it, literature feeds knowledge into the machinery of infinite reflexivity' (1979 [1977]: 7, emphasis in the original). In Barthes's sense of 'writing', the scene of legibility *concerns* the 'emotional body' as it resists the demands of what is already codified institutionally.

The quotation from the *Tao Tê Ching* appears as the final gesture of both the Twombly essays and raises its own questions of and for reading, displacing 'comprehension' (let alone 'conclusion') into the domain of the enigmatic. Reference to the *Tao* is part of Barthes's later course at the Collège de France on the Neutral and my discussion here begins again with the potential of this ending. After all, enigma introduces a question of textuality and 'signifying' (*signifiance*) – through the

suspension of any anchoring in the signified (whether by denotation or connotation) – with which a reading of Barthes becomes necessarily engaged. Here then is Barthes's closing paragraph on Twombly, common to both essays, with its citation of the *Tao*:

> There are paintings which are excited, possessive, dogmatic; they impose the product, give it the tyranny of a fetish. Twombly's art – this is its morality, and also its great historical singularity – *does not want to take anything*; it hangs together, it floats, it drifts between desire, which subtly animates the hand, and politeness, which is the discrete rejection of any desire to capture. If we wanted to situate this ethic, we could only go looking for it very far away, outside painting, outside the West, outside the historical period, at the very limit of meaning; we would have to say with the *Tao Tê Ching*:
>
> > He produces without taking for himself,
> > He acts without expectation,
> > His work done, he is not attached to it,
> > And since he is not attached to it,
> > His work will remain. (1991: 175–6; 194)

Although one might suppose that Barthes is speaking here not only for, but also of, himself, the ostensible subject of these lines obscures its own potential questions of translation. I am not competent to trace the complex relations between the Chinese 'book of five thousand characters' and its transformations in – and between – French and English. However, in situating 'this ethic' of art between these two European languages, there is an interestingly enigmatic play between the 'what' and the 'who' of its apparent subject. The French in Barthes's citation (which is, typically, uncredited[1]) – *Il produit sans s'approprier* (1982: 162, 178) – could as well be translated by 'it' as by 'he', referring

1. The translators of *The Neutral* note that

> as he will do most of the time during the course, Barthes quotes Lao-tzu from Jean Grenier, *L'Esprit du Tao* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973) … Grenier himself uses Henri Maspero's French translation of the *Tao te king* (*Le Taoisme*), vol. 2 of *Mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine* [Paris: SAEP, Publications du Musée Guimet, 1950]), a book that Barthes also consults occasionally. (Barthes 2005: 213)

to 'the deed' or 'the teaching' rather than 'the sage' (evoked in the lines preceding those quoted by Barthes).

In D. C. Lau's English version of this second verse of the *Tao*, for instance, we read, 'It gives them [creatures] life yet claims no possession;/ It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;/ It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit./ It is because it lays claim to no merit/ That its merit never deserts it' (1963: 6). Alternatively, in Ursula Le Guin's translation (evoking, in her concern with the powers of language, 'a present-day, unwise, unpowerful, and perhaps unmale reader' [2019: x]), the creativity of the impersonal is taken even further: 'To bear and not to own;/ to act and not lay claim;/ to do the work and let it go;/ for just letting it go/ is what makes it stay' (5). Undoing the relation between communication and subjugation that Barthes identifies in language (1979 [1977]: 5), the key to the *Tao* is a teaching that is undemonstrative and undidactic – one that is, in its appeal to the Neutral, 'undramatic'.[2]

Despite Barthes's hyperbole, then, concerning 'the very limit of meaning', one could say it is the 'discrete rejection of any desire to capture' that 'subtly animates' his own sense of writing, producing a body of work that will itself 'remain' in its own testimony to an encounter with its readings, evading the 'tyranny of a fetish'. As against the 'code of grown-ups', Barthes's writing unfolds with what he calls an 'erotics of the Tao' (1991: 193) – an erotics of that writing itself as it permeates a dramaturgy of the Neutral (of non-possession). Through the analogical theatre of Twombly's painting (at least, in the reading of Barthes), we discover an account of dramaturgy that is obliquely (or bafflingly) interwoven with an invocation of 'the wisdom of art'.

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2. One might hear an echo of this, for example, in Alvis Hermanis's interest in a dramaturgy that is not invested in conflict, exemplified by the theatre of revenge in Shakespeare:

> When someone has a problem the solution for Shakespeare is to *kill* somebody. Our question was, at the outset of *Sound of Silence*: is it possible to invent dramatic forms without conflict? How to show happiness in the theatre would be, perhaps, the most boring thing for the theatre. And that was our conundrum. Another challenge would be for the professional actor to pass across the stage unnoticed. This would be the highest form, or quality, of acting we would say. (2014: 187)

The two essays on Twombly were republished in a posthumous collection, *L'obvie et l'obtus* (1982), translated by Richard Howard and published in English as *The Responsibility of Forms* (1991 [1985]), from which they are quoted here. In this collection, the essays are presented under the separate headings of 'readings of gesture' and 'readings of art', albeit as both engaged with what the editor, François Wahl, calls ('for want of a better term') the 'writing of the visible' (1982: 5). Between writing and reading, then, as between gesture and art, we discover Barthes's analysis of dramaturgy between the obvious and the obtuse. (Wahl's collection also includes a second part on 'the body of music', where both fields of research – the visible and the audible – are distinguished from Barthes's responses to literary questions [ibid.] in essays collected subsequently in *The Rustle of Language* [1986], which was also translated by Howard.)

The change in the terms ('the obvious and the obtuse') by which Barthes's (or, perhaps, Wahl's) volume of essays (concerned with 'writing the visible'[3]) is known in English – 'the responsibility of forms' – is itself of interest. Beyond the 'childish' scene of making writing visible, the English title echoes, perhaps, the Brechtian critique of 'commitment' or 'engagement' – looking back to the (Sartrean) cultural politics against which Barthes's earlier semiotic project was working in the 1950s, rather than looking forward to the concern with 'signifying' (*signifiance*) in the work of the later 1960s. Here the question of and for dramaturgy appears to oscillate between erotics and responsibility—'led astray [as Barthes suggests in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France] not by the message of which it is the instrument, but by the play of words of which it is the theatre' (1979 [1977]: 6). Wahl's commentary in the Preface to the English edition of his volume, indeed, alludes to 'the double movement – focusing and also transcending semiology – [that] develops a method of "reading" which governs the subsequent essays' (1991: v) – that is, 'subsequent' to those already included in the earlier English-language collection, translated by Stephen Heath, *Image-Music-Text* (1977a).

This history of translation into English has a parallel with that of Julia Kristeva's work, where these 'subsequent essays' belong to a

3. This is Howard's translation of 'l'écriture du visible', which (given their close friendship) one may suppose was made in consultation with Barthes (and which, perhaps 'childishly', I gave as 'the writing of the visible', citing Wahl earlier).

context that relates particularly to Barthes's reading of (and with) Kristeva, to whom he described himself as being indebted (1986: 168). In a review of her book *Semeiotike*, for instance, he encapsulates this debt in terms of the reflection that '*any semiotics must be a criticism of semiotics*' (169, emphasis in the original). To use a famous formulation of his own, Barthes's work at this time was oriented by the sense of 'a change in the object itself' – much as occurred with the idea of 'drama' in dramaturgy, not least, with the emergence in Anglophone academia of *performance* studies. Echoing again the scene of the emotional body in 'childish' writing, we might relate Barthes's 'change' to what he called (in the Preface to the re-publication of *Mythologies* in 1970 [1973: 9; 1977a: 167]) 'semioclasm', or, later, to 'semiotropy', as his analysis turned away from simply 'the destruction of the sign' (1979 [1977]: 14). In an essay of particular relevance here (evoking what he called 'the third meaning'), Barthes also refers to this as 'an authentic mutation of reading and its object' (1991: 62); all of which is to give some sense of a genealogy to what often seems baffling to dramaturgy (at least, in reference to Barthes). In terms of 'reading theatre' (to echo the title of a contemporary project by Anne Ubersfeld [1999 (1976)]), this 'change' or 'mutation' in the sense of an 'object' – in this case the legibility of theatrical signifiers (or of what signifies 'theatre') – also involves a staging (or writing) of the visible obliquely by way of painting, or, more specifically, by way of Twombly's art of gesture, in a writing of the event 'transcending' (Wahl) the earlier analyses of, and with, Diderot and Brecht.[4]

Although the 'responsibility of forms' (with its echo, perhaps, of Brecht) remains a vital context for reading (with) Barthes, this title – in the English translation – obscures the guiding distinction (in the French title) between 'the obvious' and 'the obtuse'. (Although it might seem as if the citation of these two terms simply transliterated their Latin derivation, this would itself collapse the distinction in favour of the obvious. The apparent neutrality of transliteration obscures questions of difference in translation, not least as concerns the specific distinction of these terms already at play in the French text.) Chosen by

4. Barthes's work in this respect both echoes, and is echoed by, Jean Louis Schefer's, whose own journey from analyses of the framing of mise-en-scène to the disturbances of colour – specifically that of red – offers a comparative (and companionate) example to Barthes's own. Indeed, Schefer also wrote on Twombly in terms of the 'childish' and the 'left-handed' (1995 [1986]: 148–55).

Wahl as the title for his collection, the distinction between 'obvious' and 'obtuse' is the subject of an essay (as already mentioned) on 'Stills from Eisenstein' – 'The Third Meaning' (1970) – from which Wahl abstracted it to offer an orientation for reading a 'writing of the visible', not least as it addresses *theatre* with an obtuse (or left-handed) question of – and for – dramaturgy.

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With respect then to performance, dramaturgy and even poetics, what 'meaning' might be supposed to be either obvious and/or obtuse in Barthes's reading of theatre, taking into account the 'double movement' (Wahl) of the 'change in the object itself'? What might be supposed of and by the oblique allusion to these practices by way of another, that of painting, or, more specifically, by way of reading (or writing with) the gesture and hand, the art and wisdom, of Cy Twombly? What difference is engaged by 'the discrete rejection of any desire to capture' such practices – distinct from the metalinguistic claims of aesthetics and criticism (Barthes 1991: 152) – in terms of the 'communication' or 'signification' from which Barthes distinguishes such a 'third' (or 'obtuse') meaning? Indeed, as Barthes notes, one can '[r]emove it [the obtuse] and communication and signification remain, circulate, pass. Without it I can still speak and read' (54). The enigmatic is not necessary for communication, for a 'standard' (of) legibility and yet is the latter what one would have the sense of dramaturgy reduced to (as if to eschew what may be baffling in its staged reading)?

How might the 'erotics of the Tao' open up a question of and for dramaturgy, distinct from reference to 'gestus' (in place of 'subject' or 'topic'), for instance, with Brecht and Diderot (Barthes 1991: 95)? How does the question of 'what is happening here?' or of the 'event' (177) change when posed by Twombly (rather than by Brecht) in Barthes's reading – with reference to its continued framing by 'the Italian curtain-stage' (91) or the 'theatre *à l'Italienne*' (177)? There is, perhaps, an 'obvious' contrast to be made here with the dramaturgy of Michel Foucault's reading of *Las Meninas*, which sets the scene for his genealogy of those modes of knowledge called 'human sciences' (1970 [1966]: 1–16). Although Foucault's analysis addresses the question of light, the conditionality of the visible is primarily oriented in his example by the social hierarchy of art and patronage, of painter and sovereign, and with the power of viewpoint encoded in that 'drama'.[5] In

5. Appropriately enough in this context, Michael Jacobs, in his sceptical reading of discussions of *Las Meninas* that prove to be, rather, 'philosophical

Barthes's reading of Twombly, by contrast, between the obvious and the obtuse (where the latter is a mode of the oblique), how are questions of – and for – theatre 'staged', as it were, without representative actors or performers? This returns us to the question of translation – of an impersonal (or neutral) dramaturgy – of 'it' rather than 'he' concerning the subject of such theatre. As we shall see, this appears to displace a 'dramatic' concern with recognition (*anagnorisis*) and reversal (*peripeteia*) in favour of a 'post-dramatic' concern with matter (*pragma*) and surprise (*apodeston*).

For, in the context of theatre studies, we might obviously think of Aristotle, whose *Poetics* remains a 'founding' text for dramaturgy, part of the 'adult code' of what Barthes (1991: 64) calls 'the myth of C5 BC Athens'. In his essay on 'Greek Theatre' (1965), for example, which is also included in Wahl's collection, Barthes observed that

> what Aristotle contributed to the modern theatre was less a tragic philosophy than a compositional technique (this is the meaning of the various *ars poetica* of the period): a kind of tragic *praxis* was released by Aristotelean poetics, accrediting the notion of a dramatic craftsmanship: Greek tragedy became the model, the exercise and the *askesis*, one might say, for all poetic creation. (1991: 86–7)

By contrast, in 'The Wisdom of Art' (1979), a change in the notion of poetics is proposed – not the prescriptive 'compositional technique' of Aristotle (or even the 'model' example of Brecht), but the suggestion of 'another logic, a kind of challenge offered by the poet [Paul Valéry] (and the painter [Twombly]) to the Aristotelean rules of structure' (185).

At the risk, then, of reducing the Taoist 'wisdom' of art to the obvious sense of a non- or even anti-Aristotelean poetics or dramaturgy, what are the terms of this 'other logic' in Barthes's oblique account of theatre, discussed through the analogy of Twombly's painting? Although one of those terms is, indeed, 'drama', this new poetics expresses a shift from the traditional concerns of dramaturgy toward what Barthes calls (in another Greek term) an 'ergography' (1991: 152; 'ergographie', 1982 [1969]: 141) – that is, a dramaturgy that reads the writing of the 'work' as a process (or 'task') rather than a product, a verb rather than a noun. The subject of the analysis – as of (its) 'drama' – is here part of a set of

responses to *The Order of Things*', uses precisely the term 'obtuse' to characterize them (2015: 49).

relations (including 'ergon') which would resist its simple recuperation by dramaturgy as, for example, being inscribed in 'the [tragic] code of grown-ups'. In the five categories of 'The Wisdom of Art', the sense of 'drama' is displaced by its relation to and within a new constellation of terms (distinct from Aristotle's) exploring the structure of an 'event'. Here drama is one term within the set, rather than that which defines the set in terms of a generic name of and for its composition.

In this oblique account of theatre (with Twombly), Barthes's 'other logic' offers these five terms, with each given (perhaps ironically, in honour of a 'discipline') a Greek name: *pragma* (fact), *tyché* (accident), *telos* (outcome), *apodeston* (surprise) and *drama* (action). The terms of this 'challenge … to Aristotelean rules' are disguised, then, in the very language (or 'semiotropy') of the knowledge being challenged. Even if ironic, the use of Greek terms conforms to the value given to the classical as addressed not only to, but also by, Twombly. For the haunting intertext here (at least, in Barthes's reading) is given by Paul Valéry and Nicolas Poussin, that is by the espousal of the classical as modern, rather than (for example) by John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg, ostensibly espousing an aesthetic that might be 'postmodern'. Here we might compare Barthes's 'wisdom' with an earlier essay by Allan Kaprow, that also draws performance out of the frame of composition (as that of painting, with reference to Jackson Pollock) into an event (or 'happening') with his own set of categories: act, form, frame, scale and space (2003 [1958]: 4–6).[6]

While Barthes's dramaturgy of art bears upon the specific qualities of painting – the uses of colour, for instance – the 'wisdom' of the essay is fundamentally concerned with what he identifies in the introduction (or prologue) as its 'event' (1991: 177). The principle of temporality in and of both the work (its 'gesture' or, we might say, 'performance') and its reading is key to the analogy that is founded in a neutrality, rather than a hierarchy, between interpretative disciplines (or faculties) and artistic practices (as, here, between art history and theatre studies).

Comparing the construction of the visible between painting and theatre, Barthes's essay begins with an analogy between the frames of the pictorial support and the proscenium stage: 'What happens on the stage proposed by Twombly (canvas or paper) is something which

6. One might further compare Barthes's private reading of art catalogues to Kaprow's appeal to public participation. The erotics of a 'change in the object' are, after all, particular, not necessarily universal. (An intriguing instance of this can, perhaps, be glimpsed in Barthes's 'acting' appearance in André Téchiné's film, *The Bronte Sisters* (1979), playing the part of William Thackeray.)

participates in several types of event' (1991: 177). But it becomes immediately clear that the new poetics (as equally its politics) has little to do with such framing directly (the condition of its fetishization), in contrast to Barthes's earlier work on what is 'well-composed' (91) with Diderot and Brecht. Indeed, as Barthes had already observed in 1973, anticipating this change:

> It would probably not be difficult to collect, in the post-Brechtian theatre and in the post-Einsteinian cinema, certain productions and performances marked by the dispersion of the tableau, the disintegration of the 'composition', the exhibition of 'partial organs' of the figure, in short, the jamming of the work's metaphysical meaning, but also of its political meaning – or at least the transfer of this meaning toward a *different* politics. (92, emphasis in the original)

Each of Barthes's five (Greek) terms itself evokes an 'obtuse' attention to a detail of (and as) the 'jamming of the work', running counter to anything synoptic (*pace* Aristotle). While not really generalizable, nor necessarily 'applicable' in other cases, these terms nonetheless work to open up a question of dramaturgy (or staging), refracting a sense of theatre through an analogy with painting.

Concerning relations between the reading and the writing of such a dramaturgy, towards the end of 'The Wisdom of Art' Barthes notes that

> there is in French [and in English – Trans.] a useful lexical ambiguity: the 'subject' of a work is sometimes its 'object' (what it talks about, what it offers to reflection, the *quaestio* of the old rhetoric), sometimes the human being who thereby represents himself, who figures there as the implicit author of what is said (or painted). In Twombly, the 'subject' is, of course, what the canvas is talking about; but since this subject-object is only a (written) allusion, the whole burden of the *drama* shifts to the one who produces it: the subject is Twombly himself. (1991: 190, emphasis in the original)

Despite the earlier question of translation concerning the person of a 'third meaning' – venturing into a neutrality of the verb, rather than the hermeneutics of a personal pronoun – this 'lexical ambiguity' (and the subject of its drama) concerns not only Twombly but Barthes 'himself', whose own question, or staging, of the 'subject-object' – of its dramaturgy even – we are, after all, reading here.

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To return to the opening instances of this essay – with the thought-figure of what might (or might not) be thought childish, or even gauche, in the knowledge or practice of writing (at least, when thinking of and with Twombly) – it is notable that Barthes was himself left-handed (1977b: 42). With the everyday drama of this embodied 'formation' (with its mystification of cultural practice in terms of 'nature') – reflected on, for instance, in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (a text that concludes with three facsimiles of Barthes's own graphism [187–8]) – there reappears here, paradoxically (if not so bafflingly), a staging of anagnorisis. What is affirmed in the very appearance of this recognition is that it does not reinstate dramaturgy as a meta-language (1979 [1977]: 13) but remains continuous with a play in and of its own practice of reading-writing, as 'the labour of displacement' (6).

In a paragraph that shares essentially the same title with another one in the essay addressing Twombly's works on paper ('Gauche', 1982: 150; 1991: 163), Barthes writes of that novel 'character' who is 'himself' (1977b: 1):

> *Gaucher* – left-handed: To be left-handed – what does it mean? You eat contrary to the place assigned to the table setting; you find the grip of the telephone on the wrong side, when someone right-handed has used it before you; the scissors are not made for your thumb. In school, years ago, you had to struggle to be like the others, you had to normalize your body, sacrifice your good hand to the little society of the *lycée* (I was constrained to draw with my right hand, but I put in the colours with my left: the revenge of impulse); a modest, inconsequential exclusion, socially tolerated, marked adolescent life with a tenuous and persistent crease: you got used to it, adapted to it, and went on. (98)

What, indeed, does it mean 'to be left-handed'? Between the 'code of the grown-ups' and 'the revenge of impulse' is this not another way to be obtuse? (The obtuse is both a quality of someone who apparently makes no effort to understand and an angle, opposed to the acute, that is greater than 90 degrees – that is, an angle that exceeds the standard of the perpendicular and, as it were, offers a parody of the correct.) What might be the dramaturgy, then, of (and perhaps for) the left-handed, especially if – as Barthes says of 'the French language' (1991: 163) – that of Aristotle is right-handed? Is this, perhaps, a clue to the baffling subject in and of Barthes's dramaturgy?

Here the appeal to drama turns in the direction of what one might call a 'post-dramaturgical' poetics where what is symbolic ('obvious')

also falls out of this coding, being in excess of it ('obtuse'), displacing the 'tragic' work of defining character by means of recognition and reversal. With respect to Twombly, Barthes reflects, for example, that

> by producing a writing which seems *gauche* (or left-handed), [Twombly] disturbs the body's morality: a morality of the most archaic kind, since it identifies 'anomaly' with deficiency, and deficiency with error. The fact that his 'graphisms', his compositions, are 'gauche' refers [Twombly] to the circle of the excluded, the marginal – where he finds himself, of course, with the children. (1991: 163)

Although this sounds a little disconcertingly like an evocation of Jesus' recognition of children before the corruption of adults (Mark, 10.13-16), Barthes continues by giving specific attention to the 'controlling' or 'repressive rationality' of the eye within the European history of painting, concluding that 'in a certain sense, [Twombly] liberates painting from seeing; for the "gauche" (the "lefty") undoes the link between hand and eye: he draws without light (as [Twombly] actually did, in the army)' (1991: 163). This 'gauche' sense of drawing (between the poetic and the political) suggests what we might call an 'unwriting of the visible', an inscription of *tyché* within *telos* and of *apodeston* within *pragma*, which opens up possibilities for thinking (or reading) questions of *drama* in and as theatre (without having to accede to the all-too-familiar exclusions supposed, for instance, by discourses of performance art). The oblique sense of theatre as a 'subject' of and for staged reading ('dramaturgy') does not mean a return to the literary in preference to the theatrical (let alone art), but an 'ergography' of metaphor that oscillates (in its 'wisdom') *between* the obvious and the obtuse. It also offers a palimpsest of the proper name Roland Barthes in dramaturgy, not least through the staging, or performance, of writing between the childish and the enigmatic, the theoretical and the practical.

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