

# Talking about the Weather

## Roland Barthes on Climate, Everydayness, the Feeling of Being, and Poetics

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### Abstract

The paper reads Rolands Barthes' considerations on weather and climate in his last lecture cycle *La Préparation du Roman* by contextualizing its brief remarks with his previous discussions on this topic. Barthes develops a phenomenological concept of climate, showing how experiences of place across the seasons shape certain habits. These manifest in expectations, perceptions, daily routines, and language. However, his particular interest is devoted to the question of how an existential experience of weather in its contingency can be regained. Furthermore, he investigates how poetry tries to capture the uniqueness and singularity of respective weather appearances against the patterns and narratives of the climate sedimented in the language system.

**Keywords:** Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Roman Jakobson, weather, climate, language, habits, everyday life, body, mood, perception of time, city vs. country, haiku, poetics.

### Resumen

El artículo ofrece una lectura de las reflexiones de Roland Barthes sobre el tiempo y el clima en su último ciclo de obras *La Préparation du Roman* contextualizando estas breves observaciones con pensamientos previos acerca del tema. Barthes desarrolla un concepto fenomenológico del clima demostrando cómo la experiencia de habitar un lugar en el transcurso de las estaciones del año forma ciertos hábitos que se manifiestan en distintas expectativas, percepciones, rutinas diarias y un cierto lenguaje. El texto se centra, específicamente, en el modo de recuperar una experiencia existencial del clima en su contingencia. Además, Barthes investiga cómo la poesía trata de capturar la especificidad y singularidad de ciertos fenómenos climáticos sin retornar a los modelos narrativos del clima anclados en el sistema lingüístico.

**Palabras clave:** Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Roman Jakobson, tiempo, clima, idioma, hábitos, vida cotidiana, cuerpo, humor, percepción del tiempo, ciudad vs. campo, haiku, poética.

“Pour ma part, j’ai toujours pensé que le Temps qu’il fait: un sujet (une *quaestio*) sous-estimé” (*Préparation* 71), confesses Roland Barthes in his last major lecture series at the Collège de France in 1978/79. ‘Toujours’ is not an exaggeration, because Barthes had written frequently about the subject of weather in notes, essays and books since the 1950s. However, these brief remarks often seem rather casual. When Barthes set about

preparing his lecture in the summer of 1978 (*Préparation* 31), he must have picked out the quotations and earlier ideas again from his slip box, in which he had collected them over the years. In any case, many of the older examples and considerations reappear in the lecture. Barthes now presents them more coherently and continues his reflections in many respects. Therefore, *La Préparation du Roman* can be considered the sum of Barthes' decades-long work on this underappreciated subject.

*La Préparation du Roman* investigates the desire to write. Barthes is concerned with getting from the mere desire to actual writing. In the lecture, the starting point is the transition from perception to notation. As the series progresses, Barthes asks more and more about the prerequisites of this transition. He talks about environmental conditions, the appropriate mood, and the organization of time. Eventually, his inquiry leads him to ethical questions about the conduct of life, which prevent disturbing influences and create favorable conditions for writing. The large-format novel, to which the title alludes, serves only as the vanishing point and is successively approached through smaller forms. The lecture series fits seamlessly into Barthes' late work, which explores in ever new approaches the relation between material and semiotic aspects of writing.

In the course of the lecture's argumentation, Barthes devotes large parts of his discussion to the weather as a physical influence, as an ephemeral phenomenon and as a literary topos. The concentrated presentation of his ideas collected over decades, however, leads to a dearth of explanation on many points. For, unlike in his earlier writings, Barthes names his theoretical inspirations in the lecture only at the margins, discusses many arguments briefly, and refrains from quoting and interpreting them when citing references. By tracing Barthes' thought back through his theoretical references and examples, and by drawing on the preliminary work scattered throughout his writings, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the lecture. Establishing systematic links between Barthes' own words often makes it necessary to add substantial explanations. That which is less comprehensible in the lecture's dense formulations, which seem otherwise to be connected only by an associative logic, thereby takes on a surprising significance. Such a contextualized reading is the goal of this essay. It traces Barthes' reflections back in four steps and concludes by linking his arguments to current debates.

*La Préparation du Roman* begins with a diagnosis of the present. Although climate is still deeply imprinted in today's language, talk of the weather has lost its reference. To the extent that people's lives have become more and more independent of weather conditions, according to Barthes, talking about the weather has almost become synonymous with small talk in Western cultures. Based on this observation, Barthes sets himself the goal of regaining the referentiality of weather. The second section deals with this point. Barthes has noticed that when on holiday he enjoys living more in harmony with the rhythms of the weather. Apparently, aesthetically motivated cloud watching is inherited from more practically oriented weather observation practices of earlier times. Barthes examines his holiday impressions and shows how changes in the weather affect

his experience of time, and thus his moods, much more so than in his everyday life in Paris. A third section discusses how moods gain their tone from the interplay between one's expectations with regard to weather, be it hopeful or fearful, and their fulfillment or frustration. Building on this observation, Barthes develops the thesis that the perception of weather is narratively preformed. Every look at the sky is immediately classified into familiar patterns of experience, as rain, for example, is often followed by sunshine. Barthes regards the narrative preformation of weather experience as the everyday understanding of climate. Such narratives set in motion a hermeneutics of the present by drawing attention to signs of the brightening of the sky after the rain. At the same time, these narratives associatively create a connection to other habits and memories that have nothing to do with the weather, and these accompanying circumstances are reintegrated into everyday interpretation schemes. Language's climatic imprint and the tendency of perception to narrative contextualization lead Barthes to the question: how can the weather, in its own never-recurring uniqueness, which resists the dispositions of perception and language, be expressed in words? The next section is consequently devoted to Barthes' poetological reflections on haiku. He sees in this poetic form the project of the linguistic recovery of reference realized in all its respects. For Barthes, the haiku is emphatically a form of weather writing, not climate-writing. To interpret Barthes lecture is rewarding, it can be concluded, because it contributes fruitfully to contemporary debates. Barthes developed a concept of climate that can be experienced life-worldly. As a literary critic Barthes devises various strategies that allow literature to transcend the climatically preformed language of everyday life. From this, finally, a systematic distinction can be drawn between three strategies of literary weather writing.

## Climate and Weather

In *La Préparation du Roman*, Barthes distinguishes between climate and weather. Barthes does not use the term climate explicitly, because in his phenomenological approach he is not interested in scientific meteorology at all. He adopts an understanding of climate that derives from unreflective practice, for which ordinary people would therefore never use a scientific term like 'climate'. Literally on the quiet, he replaces the scientific concept with this more original understanding based on everyday perceptions and habits. In the lecture, climate is understood as recurring weather patterns and their typical development. According to Barthes, meteorological measurements and their statistical analysis are not necessary in order to abstract from these patterns; rather, habituation to the weather conditions of a place in the course of the year already subconsciously arouses certain expectations. The recognition of a particular weather phenomenon immediately triggers certain behaviors. The climate can therefore be compared with a linguistic system. It assumes typical characteristics and changes in the weather, comparable to the formation of linguistic categories in their generality and the grammatical specification of the links between them. The verb determines sentence

structure from its possible objects, and particular phrases suggest a certain continuation or response. If climate corresponds to the language system, weather is its counterpart, equivalent to the actual use of language. Although, and precisely because, lexicon, grammar and convention provide possibilities for the combination of words and sentences, they do not strictly determine the choice of words and the sentence structure of the individual speech act, and thus open up leeway to place one's own emphasis. The same applies to the climate code. Barthes notes this in his lecture manuscript: "*le temps qu'il fait* = le code *parlé* par le moment, le jour, l'heure, l'individuation de l'existence, c'est-à-dire qui accomplit, ou qui *déjoue* (toujours la fonction rémunératrice, compensatrice, rectificatrice du discours par rapport à la longue)" (*Préparation 72*).

But Barthes wants to go beyond mere analogy to language. He explains that climatic conditions are deeply imprinted in the system of individual languages, the *langue*. Climate has shaped lexicon and grammar. Despite the combinatorial freedoms of the *parole*, the prescriptions of climatic categories and the linguistic possibilities of connection may seem inadequate. Inadequate in two respects, because on the one hand the possibilities of expression given by *langue* and the sensual impressions of the weather can diverge. Barthes' point can be described in this way: Even though different languages distinguish types of precipitation conceptually with different precision, they are always abstractions from the sensual experience. In French, the word *nuage* means clouds of any size, color and density. The concept is therefore not able to differentiate more precisely between them. Hence, the concept levels out the uniqueness of the respective weather phenomenon. The climatic specifications of the language cannot grasp this uniqueness and appear coarse and rigid. And if, as in *il pleut* in French, it is only expressed with an impersonal subject, this betrays ontological assumptions about the nature of the powers of nature. That is why there is no possibility within the limits of grammar to express the way nature's powers seem to act as their own agents. On the other hand, in some situations language may not be general enough. A conversation about *nimbus*, *stratus* and *cumulus* simply does not seem suitable for small talk.

The tension between things and words can never be completely resolved, but it can be shifted to one of the two poles in language usage. In order to outline this thought more precisely, Barthes refers to the work of Roman Jakobson. The latter had noticed that language use varies in order to accentuate certain inherent functions, thus making them more apparent. Jakobson (21–27) ultimately distinguished six language functions, each of which runs within language towards its different exteriors, and thus mark the limits of what can be said. Barthes takes up Jakobson's distinctions and develops them further by assigning them to two fields of tension that cut transversely. He does not formulate this idea explicitly in the lecture, but rather he bases his further argumentation on it.

Barthes sees the first field of tension as lying between the *referential* and the *poetic* functions of language. The referential functionalization of language, on the one hand, shifts the relation from words to things. Such a use of language looks for possibilities to depict reality mimetically, even in resistance to the system of language, but nevertheless

by using language as the medium. The poetic functionalization, on the other hand, emphasizes the inherent logic of language. 'Poetic' does not only mean literature, but all kinds of self-referential linguistic gestures. By noticeably increasing or decreasing the language-immanent connections, the otherwise transparent form, mediality, and order of language itself becomes the focus of attention. This language function aligns with the visuality or sonority of language as well as semantic distinctions and logical conclusions. What, from the point of view of referentiality, must appear as an obstacle to the linguistic reproduction of the weather, seems from the poetic point of view as the independence of the *langue* from the specific circumstances of the weather.

However, the use of language is not limited to the tension between words and things. As a form of communication, language connects people, and not only through the mediation of meaning, but physically through the sound of the voice or writing on paper. This opens up a second field of tension that lies transverse to the first and is limited by the extra-linguistic poles of 'I' and 'You.' Here, however, there is not a single basic polarity that determines the play of forces. Tensions arise from the interplay of four vectors, which are oriented by the *emotive*, *conative*, *meta-linguistic* and *phatic* functionalization of language. The emotive function focuses on the transmitter's relation to speech, just as the conative function emphasizes the relation to the receiver. The meta-linguistic function accentuates the use of words and their meaning. The phatic function, finally, underscores the aspect of relation. The communicative force field can be characterized by two overarching principles: relations between people cannot be mediated exhaustively by language, and language adds something of its own to these relations.

Today, as Barthes points out in *La Préparation du Roman* (71), talking about the weather seems to be the paradigmatic example of phatic speech. Talking about the weather is almost completely absorbed in its relational aspect, while almost completely detached from the experience of and reference to weather itself. Thus its content is almost as arbitrary as the weather is incidental. Talking about the weather is meaningless. This seemed remarkable to Barthes a few years earlier. To say nothing, one can simply be silent. But within language, as Barthes already wrote in 1971, "*rien ne peut se dire que rien; rien est peut-être le seul mot de la langue qui n'admet aucune périphrase, aucune métaphore, aucun synonyme, aucun substitut.*" To say nothing, a more indirect strategy must therefore be chosen. "Dire *le temps qu'il fait*," Barthes explains,

a d'abord été une communication pleine, l'information requise par la pratique du paysan, pour qui la récolte dépend du temps; mais dans la relation citadienne, ce sujet est vide, et ce vide est le sens même de l'interlocution: on parle du temps pour *ne rien dire*, c'est-à-dire pour dire à l'autre qu'on lui parle, pour ne lui dire rien d'autre que ceci: je vous parle, vous existez pour moi, je veux exister pour vous (aussi est-ce une attitude faussement supérieure que se moquer du temp qu'il fait). ("Pierre Loti" 1403; see already "Mythologies" 706 and 715)

The meaninglessness of talking about the weather, Barthes notes only briefly in the lecture, reveals itself in two extremes: the possibility of talking to anyone, or of talking to

someone who is so close that there would actually be no need to talk at all (*Préparation* 71).

In his autobiography, Barthes had described how he converses with people in Urt, his holiday home in the south of France. In the village shop he greets the shop girl: “*il fait beau, il fait gris*, etc.” Then the postman passes by “(il fait lourd ce matin, quelle belle journée, etc.) et, un peu plus tard, dans sa camionnette pleine de pains, la fille de la boulangère (elle a fait études, il n’y a pas lieu de parler du temps)” (“Sur Roland Barthes” 156). Barthes concludes by commenting on these scenes: they clearly show his bourgeois habitus. In earlier remarks, talking about the weather still seemed to convey emphatically ‘vous existez pour moi’. Now it turns out to be mere existing, a basic mode of encounter that does not imply recognition among equals. One does not have to talk about the weather with someone of the same class. Later, Barthes in his autobiography returns to the scene again: “En somme, rien [est, U.B.] de plus culturel que l’atmosphère, rien de plus idéologique que le temps qu’il fait” (“Sur Roland Barthes” 229).

### The Feeling of Being

Barthes’ bourgeois habitus is an attitude that he cannot completely abandon even in the countryside. Life in a big city like Paris has become alien to nature. Only where the referential function of language has lost its meaning does a phatic re-functionalization become possible. However, weather has not become completely lost as a referent. Yet, before Barthes can touch on the reference of language to weather, he must first regain the reference itself. He therefore first thinks back to the pre-linguistic experience of weather (*Préparation* 66).

“Cet investissement *individuel* (par exemple esthétique) dans la Saison (le Temps qu’il fait)”, explains Barthes in *La Préparation du Roman*, “continue l’intérêt des civilisations rurales pour la saison et le temps (*Weather*)” (*Préparation* 68). In the city, the distinction between everyday life and vacation has taken the place of seasonal rhythms, and the weather is no longer an obstacle to almost any activity. During his vacations in Urt, however, Barthes enjoys the fact that his life is more in harmony with nature (even though he is aware that he is clinging to a modern myth with the idea of rural harmony). Located close to the Pyrenees and the Atlantic Ocean, the climate there is completely different from that in Paris, and Barthes develops an entirely other sense of his body: he goes so far as to claim that he literally has two bodies, a Parisian and a rural one (“Sur Roland Barthes” 114; see also “La lumière du Sud-Ouest” 720). In addition, temporality can be experienced differently if it is not determined by the beat of abstract clock time, but can be apprehended sensually by changes in weather and lighting conditions.

At this point, Barthes takes up Gilles Deleuze’s reflections, to which he refers briefly in the lecture. Judging by the terminology, Deleuze’s *Différence et répétition* is probably his point of reference (*Préparation* 77; Deleuze esp. ch. 1, 2 and 5). Extending Husserl and Bergson’s reflections, Deleuze understands perception as a two-stage process. If the

intensity of the impressions exceeds the threshold of perception, one becomes aware of them as a phenomenon without already being aware of the act of perceiving it. The phenomenon then appears as a spatial and temporal fact in its unique shape, but not yet as something definite. This is what Deleuze calls *passive synthesis*. If this is followed by an *active synthesis*, the singular impression is assumed to be a case of... for which there is also a word. Complementary to this, at the level of passive synthesis one has no ego-consciousness, not even a pre-reflexive one. This is only added in the course of active synthesis. Thus, at the level of passive synthesis, one does not yet know that he or she is the one who has perceived what is perceived. On this level, it is thus a matter of pure experience without the possibility attributing it to the outer world or subjectivity. Above all, Deleuze devotes his attention to passive synthesis, which is what makes his philosophy interesting for Barthes. The latter describes this pure experience, which lacks an ego-consciousness, as the emptiness of subjectivity. Because conceptual definitions are lacking, perceptual impressions of pure being-so follow each other in a flow. They are not senseless, but they are meaningless. In the lecture he describes an experience that is based solely on passive syntheses with the words: "lorsque le langage se tait, qu'il n'y a plus commentaire, d'interprétation, de sens, c'est alors que l'existence est pure" (*Préparation* 84). And he conveys an insight into this mode of experience by quoting from the diary he had been keeping since 1976. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1977 Barthes wrote in Urt: "...ce matin une sorte bonheur, le temps (très beau, très léger), la musique (Haendel), l'amphétamine, le café, le cigar, une bonne plume, les bruits ménagers" (*Préparation* 99; the diary excerpts were published later also separately in *Tel Quel* as "Délibération"). Here, different impressions appear in a flow without any connection. They form an open manifold, not a wholeness, Deleuze would say.

Perception is not instantaneous, such that only the present impression is captured. Rather, the momentary impressions move into a stretched field of perception. In this way, they become synthesized. Although attention within the field of perception is limited by a measurable amount of time, it is not characterized by a predetermined temporal division. Only changes of intensity structure temporality. In terms of the weather, this means that on a gray monotonous rainy day, time seems to stand still since nothing happens. Yet, when the sun is wandering or heavy weather events like a thunderstorm appear suddenly, the flow of temporality accelerates. This point brings Barthes to the ambiguity of *temps* in the French language, which means both time and weather. But rarely does the change of weather alone determine the division of temporality. Rather, its changes often interfere with other fluctuations of intensity. Barthes illustrates this thought by quoting again from his summer diary in the lecture, this time the entry from July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1977: "On dirait que le dimanche matin renforce le beau temps." And adds: "Je voulais dire: une intensité renforce l'autre" (*Préparation* 75).

Within the field of perception, to continue disclosing the epistemological backgrounds of Barthes' argumentation, there is a tendency to organize impressions in regular sequences as rhythms. Momentary perception is always placed into a sequence, in

which immediately preceding impressions continue to have an effect and further impressions are already anticipated. Husserl called this *retention* and *protention*. Future expectations are constituted with reference to the assumed regularity of the immediately preceding sequence. The expectation for the near future is that the past rhythm of intensities will probably simply continue or change uniformly. Hence, if it suddenly thundered out of the blue, the surprise would be great. In comparison with the largely calculable routine processes of everyday life, however, the weather is always good for a surprise, especially in a country like France, where Barthes estimates that it more often disappoints than fulfills climatic and seasonal expectations. This increased contingency and the resulting lack of predictability characterizes rural life. The feeling of escaping the alienation of civilization in the countryside and being freed from the constraints of everyday life can therefore easily turn into uncertainty. Yet, Barthes notices about himself that although he welcomes some variety, he does not want to worry too much, especially during the holidays. That is why he also obeys his own everyday routine during the holidays—the daily walk to the village shop, the postman who brings the mail at the same hour, conversation with the baker’s daughter, work on the coming semester. Barthes’ daily life in Urt constitutes a broad present, in which he tries to ignore thoughts of the future and to stick to what is at hand, enjoying himself and consuming. But distraction from outside, which beckons from every street corner in Paris, is missing during the holidays. In moments of boredom or leisure, he therefore pays more attention to changes in the weather. The change of the weather then unfolds its liberating, but sometimes also unsettling effects. By more attentively perceiving the passage of time, he becomes aware that the future, to the extent that it seems unpredictable, appears to be more emotionally expansive, filled with fears and hopes. These feelings radiate as mood back to his perception of the present. Barthes sees two extreme states of emotional excitement: “la misère du ‘paumé’” and “la jubilation ardente du ‘vivant’” (*Préparation* 84).

Barthes experiences his rural body, to sum up the preceding considerations, entirely differently from his Parisian body because it is attuned to another, previously unfelt, feeling of being, “*le sentir-être*” (*Préparation* 72). This feeling of being in the countryside, which he further describes in the lecture as “*la vie, la sensation de la vie, le sentiment d’existence*” (*Préparation* 84), results from an aesthetic attitude of greater openness towards nature and weather in particular. During his holidays in Urt, Barthes can suspend the reductive subsumption of active syntheses, which always take the weather only as an example of a particular climate, and more fully experience the uniqueness of the weather conditions of each individual day. In contrast to everyday life in Paris, his days are not ruled by the clock and divided into appointments, so that his temporality is more deeply structured by changing weather conditions. Not driven by so many everyday duties and with fewer possibilities to be distracted, he also notices more clearly which other changes in intensity also affect his feelings. Barthes had already written about this in 1971,

le temps renvoie à une sorte d’existence complexe mode (de ce qui est) où se mêlent le lieu, le décor, la lumière, la température, la cénesthésie, et qui est ce mode fondamental selon lequel mon corps est là, qui se sent exister (sans parler des connotations heureuses ou tristes)

du temps, suivant qu'il favorise notre projet du jour); [...] il permet de référer à quelque *être-là* du mode, premier, naturel, incontestable, in-signifiant [...] ("Pierre Loti" 1403; see also already "Le Plaisier du Texte" 1522)

As a kind of mood, emotional orientation towards the future lays itself like a filter over present perception and modifies its understanding. This is a thought that Barthes apparently took from Heidegger, who he mentions by name in a different context in one of the later lectures. By using *être-là*, an artificial word in French commonly used as the translation of Heidegger's *Dasein* (literally *being-there* in the sense of *existence*), he lets the philosopher shine through in the quoted passage (see Heidegger 130–149 on *attunement*). On the level of passive syntheses, the impressions of all senses and bodily feelings form an inseparable wholeness, since no ego-consciousness yet accompanies the sensations. The interplay of all these factors tune the feeling of being, which becomes more noticeable in moments of rest and openness.

### Narrativization

If it is not only a matter of anticipating the immediate future, but of anticipating further into the future or classifying rare events, reflexive moments come into play, which involve activating experience and memory. With this thesis Deleuze develops Bergson's philosophy further. Barthes will later follow this thesis with his own thoughts. Active syntheses then intervene in perception. If the surprising thunderclap from the previous section occurred in oppressive humidity, then experience would probably say it was an approaching summer thunderstorm. Although such a thunderstorm does not occur every day, one knows it is possible in the summery south of France. If summer thunderstorms were to cause unending, torrential rains, one would search memory to recall whether such storms have ever occurred before. In this sense, being accustomed to a climate means being familiar with the proto-narratives and narratives of certain weather courses. Generally speaking, temporal perception thus takes place within proto-narratives, in the case of rhythmic sequences, and narrative patterns, in the case of experience and memory. Both are employed in predicting the future since they raise certain expectations. These proto-narrative and narrative patterns also serve as a kind of hermeneutic key to the interpretation of present perception. Hermeneutics attempts to interpret the present as a case of repetition of known patterns, as a case of..., and directs attention to discovering further clues as to the correctness of this interpretation. But if signs do not appear or remain ambiguous, if one has not abandoned a certain expectation as incorrect and pursued other interpretations, such a hermeneutics can take on almost neurotic traits.

The more detailed the pre-existing narrative, the more accompanying circumstances it brings into its interpretation of the present. The onset of summer rain may remind one that the windows are still open at home, just like last time. But one might also remember that the storm happened in the disaster movie in the U.S. and not here. The comparison of these narratives with current circumstances therefore always has an effect

on the narratives. Hence, the hermeneutics of the present always reconfigures the familiar or remembered past and expected future. The disaster movie, whose appeal lay in the fact that it depicted a future that will not come, seems to have suddenly become reality through the storm now raging outside. Thus the previously unimportant question arises of whether one could learn from the film hero how to escape the threatening flood. But the accompanying circumstances of the narratives also create associative bridges to distant memories. This creates couplings with completely different narratives, which can then direct the current perception of the weather again. In the lecture of February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978, Barthes alludes in this context to another diary passage without quoting it. It can be found under the previous day's entry in the *Journal de deuil*, unpublished at the time of the lecture, which he had begun to keep after the death of his mother: "Neige, beaucoup de neige sur Paris; c'est étrange. Je me dis et j'en souffre: elle ne sera jamais plus là pour le voir, pour que je le lui raconte" (*Journal de deuil* 103; see *Préparation* 72). No matter what the weather on this day actually was, in his depression Barthes would have experienced it as sad. But Barthes also gives an example of the opposite case. In his diary entry from July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1977 in Urt, the prospect of bright weather modifies his everyday activities: "De temps, éclat et subtilité de l'atmosphère: une soi fraîche et lumineuse; ce moment vide (aucun signifié) produit une évidence: qu'il vaut la peine de vivre. La course du matin (chez l'épicier, le boulanger) alors que village est encore presque vide, je ne la manquerais pour rien au monde" (*Préparation* 84).

## Poetics

Barthes is not as explicit in his examination of the pre-linguistic and then narrative perception of weather as I have been in demonstrating the Deleuzian background of his argument. Because for Barthes, these considerations only set up his actual question: How can the weather in its uniqueness be expressed within the climatically preformed system of language?

Barthes begins the answer to this question with an apology: "J'y suis, pour ma part, d'un sensibilité [météo, U.B.] extreme" (*Préparation* 68); with a tendency to heavy migraine, he informs the listeners of his lecture. That is why he is a passionate indoor writer even on holiday. Where the weather directly intervenes in his writing, where his rural body takes up the pen, so to speak, Barthes' desire to live in Urt, more in harmony with the rhythms of nature, ceases. The diary entries bear witness to the fact that he can nevertheless control the intensity of the weather's influence far less than he would like. Barthes' emotive commentary on his own speech about weather is therefore both a playful reference to his bourgeois habitus, which binds him to the linguistic system of the climate, but also a claim to possession of exceptional competence for speaking about the weather.

For his investigation of how "la force d'individuation, de différence, de nuance, de moire d'existentialité qu'il y a dans la relation de l'homme et de l'atmosphère" (*Préparation* 71) can be verbalized, Barthes seeks out the point of transition where an

instantaneous perception of the weather is written down. Although Barthes can identify approaches to weather-writing in Baudelaire and Proust, he turns to the Japanese haiku in his analysis. What is not decisive at this point, is whether Barthes' enthusiasm for Japan perhaps directed him first and foremost to the example of haiku, and whether his interpretation of these poems is really appropriate. Rather, it is decisive that Barthes systematically considers how the weather can be expressed poetically in a way that is neither tied to climatic patterns nor mimetic at all. Barthes is concerned with an indirect means of presentation, in which language transcends itself and, in the gesture of referring to its own limits, references the weather itself. Hence, Barthes' argument is not about haikus, but more generally about a particular use of language.

Similar to his own diary entries, in haikus Barthes thinks he can recognize poetic techniques capable of suspending the linguistic system of the climate far more extensively than in French literature (*Préparation* 62-66). The organizational form of the Japanese language already proves favorable for this. The linking of the words here is more additive than in western languages, so that flow and openness characterize the sequences. But also the brevity and tripartite structure of the haiku is conducive to such poetics: The print layout is characterized by the blank white space of the page. In the midst of emptiness, therefore, the space between the lines, which separates but also connects them, shines more brightly. The lines, in contrast, recede. The limited length also means a reduction to the essential. This creates the impression, the lines after and under each other seem to gravitate towards one center, where they almost merge. Viewed from a distance, the verses tend to become a single word, a kind of holophrase (*Préparation* 57). The haiku can therefore be grasped intuitively at a glance. Nevertheless, the haiku never forms a unity, but an open diversity, differentiated in itself. Altogether, one can therefore speak of a denarrativizing disposition of the Japanese haiku (*Préparation* 131). The haiku aims to refer to reality in its diversity and uniqueness. Hence, it has to transcend the obstacles of the linguistic system of climate. For haikus, it is all about capturing those moments when seasons merge into each other or when the weather changes. Barthes therefore analyses their linguistic articulation of these intermediate states of Neither-Nor, for which there are no terms of their own in language. Haikus mark the season exactly and unambiguously—but only to burst this precision open again. The haiku uses the set of expressions provided by the *langue*, but tries to turn it against itself within language. The haiku therefore prefers classificatory terms with as little scope as possible over broad categories in an effort to counteract the tendency of language towards abstraction. A haiku would therefore not speak of a thunderstorm, but would name the dark gray cloud cover, the lightning, the thunder and the streams of rain individually. The use of haiku language aims to strip away any symbolic charge, even interpretations, aiming to approach mere phenomenality. In the end, this procedure strives to leave behind the referentiality of language at all, to merely point deictically to the weather. The aim is overcoming language completely, evoking the weather phenomenon itself in its pure presence with all its singularity and uniqueness (*Préparation* 68 and 86). Even if this goal cannot be fulfilled

entirely, the haiku seeks to undo the meaning-making of the active syntheses. This performs a gesture that turns against the hermeneutics of everyday life, by going behind the active synthesis back to what is only sensually given in passive-synthetic perception (*Préparation* 94 and 123).

The effort to capture phenomenal impressions in their uniqueness goes hand in hand with the attempt to reproduce their momentariness. The haiku can thereby fully play out its already denarrativizing disposition. The haiku only strings together impressions without causal or logical links between them. It thus works against the inherent aspiration of language to determine regularities. Correspondingly, it leads to the impression that everything happens contingently to the utmost degree and never recurs exactly. This creates a strong authenticating effect. In three lines, the haiku repeatedly begins anew to describe a single impression without capturing it completely. The haiku operates indirectly to circumvent the boundaries of language. The respective uniqueness of the individual impressions occurs through the series of parallelizing descriptions, which differ and thus enter into considerable tension with each other. However, the descriptions do not remain in pure succession, but merge asymptotically into an instantaneous perception through their brevity. The different moments interact in the sense of intensities that reinforce or weaken each other and thereby differentiate each other. Hence, as Barthes puts it, there are “pas de référents dans le haïku [...]”; on pose seulement des entours (circonstants), mais l’objet s’évapore, s’absorbe dans la circonstance: ce qui l’entoure, le temps d’un éclair” (*Préparation* 90).

The haiku not only pushes the referential function to the limits of language, but also serves the conative function. Its arrangement of the weather has a certain effect on the reader that can be understood as a kind of address. By combining strong referentialization with the destabilization of the reference between word and thing, the haiku guides the reader to the same epistemic openness that Barthes experienced on holiday. This results in the strong affective quality of this poetry. By virtue of its typographical form, it already corresponds to the emptiness of the subject. When a reader engages deeply with a haiku, the poem will not only awaken his or her feeling of being, but change it such that this feeling dances on the narrow border between uncertainty and freedom.

## Conclusion

In the autumn of 1978, when Barthes gave the parts of his lecture series discussed here, his students complained at the secretariat of the Collège de France that what he was talking about was banal (Samoyault 667). When the lecture notes of *La Préparation du Roman* were published some 25 years later, the main question of interest was whether Barthes really wanted to write the novel referred to in the title or not (O’Meara 163-199). Today, another 15 years later, Barthes’ reflections on weather and climate can also be appreciated (only Sheringham has briefly mentioned them so far).

Barthes' considerations were then, as now, untimely. While Barthes' listeners at the Collège de France were perhaps therefore not able to gain great benefit from his lectures, today it is precisely the distance in time that makes his thoughts a stimulating contribution to ongoing debates. In an age of global warming, numerous writers (Fleming, Jankovic; Horn, Schnyder; Hulme, Schneider) have stressed that even if climate were a theoretical construct of averages, which cannot be experienced in itself, climate change can be experienced. The change will not be limited to the increase of weather extremes and increasing temperatures. The consequences will become apparent in everyday routines and the way the majority of people live their lives will change fundamentally. For this reason, these writers advocate an understanding of climate that also covers a life-world understanding. In the life-world, habits function as a kind of correlate to the averages in science. They form the background of the perception of the weather and its changes. This background can only appear in the resistance of its abstraction and generality against the impressions of the unique weather conditions. Therefore, a concept of climate founded in sensory perception inevitably leads to the perception routines of everyday life.

Roland Barthes' considerations can provide important systematic insights into developing such a conception of climate. His analyses offer a meticulous phenomenology, ranging from physical affection by the weather to its influence on mood, sensory perception and, ultimately, reflective cognition. As such, he develops the holistic concept of feelings of being in order to take into account the multiplicity of modes of perception. Based on this concept, it seems almost inevitable that Barthes anticipated in his lecture a thought that Tim Ingold has recently elaborated upon. Ingold (72–78) turns against the splitting and doubling of the atmosphere into a realm in which only weather happens and another realm which is reserved solely for sensations, feelings and moods. In contrast to science and art, the two cannot be separated in everyday life. There is only one atmosphere.

The concept of climate, which Barthes subsequently develops, is based on the accustomed patterns of a place in the annual cycle. Barthes makes a central contribution to understanding the hermeneutics of everyday life. They are founded in their comparison with these narrative patterns, but also have an effect on them. These climatic narratives, however, not only preform the perception of present weather, but also of memory and expectation, and are in many ways associatively linked with other narratives.

Barthes' thoughts also open up new perspectives for literary analysis precisely because he did not develop them with climate change in mind. They provide a view on the variety of ways in which weather and climate are presented in literature. In order to structure this diversity typologically, Barthes' classification of Jakobson's linguistic functions into two polarities, between the referentiality and intrinsic logic of language and, transversely, between different moments of communicative functions, can be further elaborated into a distinction between three modes of literary depiction of weather: *literary meteorology, meteopoetology and meteopoetics* (Büttner, Gamper).

Literary meteorology describes a mode of weather representation that aims at a strong referentiality. Using aesthetic techniques, these texts attempt to convey the weather in the greatest possible detail, thereby approximating the conditions in their uniqueness. These texts struggle against the climatic preformed language. They use various ways to overcome them. Sometimes they comment on their approach poetologically. Explicitly or implicitly, they relate to scientific methods of weather recording. In contrast, meteopoetological texts orient themselves towards the pole of linguistic autonomy. They strive for independence from predetermined weather conditions. To achieve this, they transcend the climatically preformed language towards an intensification of its own logic. This leads to an increase in the self-referentiality of language up to poetological self-reflection. Although Barthes does not use these two terms, he has already considered these two textual strategies in his discussions. The haiku aspires to literary meteorology, however, meteopoetological moments are not entirely absent there either. For the two categories can never be separated in principle, since an accentuation on the reference does not remove the logic of language, but rather increases the tension to this pole and vice versa. Barthes' lecture reflects in detail on the poetological implications of this tension. In Barthes' interpretation, the haiku itself poetically points to his struggle to create a strong referentiality. It makes this struggle with language within language explicit, but does not reflect it poetologically. This cannot be explained by genre conventions and the brevity of form alone. Moving beyond climatically preformed language, the poetic function emerges in its alliance with the referential. Not only making poeticity more explicit, but also reflecting on it and thus making it thematic would, however, already pull it away from the pole of reference. For reflection would refer to the inherent logic of language. In the interest of a strong referentiality, literary meteorology in its extreme forms therefore refrains from a reflected poetology. Conversely, this also explains why meteopoetology not only tends towards reflection but cannot avoid self-reflexive gestures at all. If the reference of language use to itself is to be further increased beyond its expressiveness, language use itself must become the subject. In this sense, the reflected poetology of meteopoetology proves to be a potentization of the poetic function of language.

Barthes also addresses the communicative dimension of the talk about the weather in two parts of his lecture. He focuses on the functions of climatically preformed language under living conditions, which are today largely independent from climatic conditions. Barthes comments on his small talk with the villagers in Urt and he confesses to the audience his own sensitivity to the weather. In the lecture, Barthes characterizes the small talk about the weather only shortly after interlocutors - the dialogue between strangers, the dialogue between people of different status, the dialogue in the greatest intimacy, where every word is actually superfluous. In his autobiography, however, he describes his morning conversation in the village shop or with the postman in detail. The will to stylize, which is evident at every point in the artistic arrangement of his autobiography, also draws the reader's attention to the poetic moments of this way of speaking, and Barthes

demonstrates how it works. But then, with an abrupt turn, he breaks the illusionism. With a revealing gesture, he deconstructs small talk as a power relationship in which different habitus find expression. The description immediately fades into mere quotation, while reflection becomes the defining moment of communication. Since the reflective gesture deactivates the poetic moments of small talk, it cannot itself become poetology. But when Barthes interrupts his theoretical discourse and addresses his weather sensitivity, this confession has unmistakably theatrical traits. At the same time, the audience of his lecture is already sensitized to the communicative dimensions of talking about the weather, so that they will immediately recognize the theatricality of the pose and pay special attention to it. Comparable to an artistic autobiography, the performance activates the poetic function. Following on from what was said earlier in the lecture, it is quite obvious that Barthes cannot unquestionably claim for himself the almost clichéd weather sensitivity that is part of the urban habitus. The poetic marking of the cliché as a cliché, however, only distances itself from the statement to the effect that the pose is not very original and expectable, but it does not take anything away from its claim of validity.

Meteopoetics, as this literary technique can be called, simulates the talk about the weather and exposes its communicative dimensions. Through stylization, exaggeration, or contextual marking, as Barthes would say, it accentuates the poetic function of language and not only allows the speech to unfold its effect, but even intensifies it. This makes the communicative effects more explicit. Gestures of reflection, however, rob them of this effect and push themselves in front of it with their own power, which, as Barthes demonstrated, can itself be used as a poetic effect. When reflection becomes the central moment of communication, it is able to reveal the social pragmatics of even poeticized speech, but does not become poetology. The climatically preformed language appears in communicative references dissolved from the climatic conditions. Social alienation generates aesthetic alienation. Through the absence of a reference to the real climate, the language refers back to it.

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