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ENCYCLOPAEDIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN ROLAND BARTHES'S *ROLAND BARTHES* (1975) AND AMY KROUSE ROSENTHAL'S *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AN ORDINARY LIFE* (2004)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines two works of autobiographical literature that are structured in fragmentary form and that engage explicitly with the formal and conceptual model of the encyclopaedia. One of the works, Roland Barthes's *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975) is by a literary theorist, and the other, Amy Krouse Rosenthal's *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* (2004) is by a popular mainstream columnist and broadcaster. Both works, despite a disparity of tone and material, display similar convictions about the utility of what I will call 'encyclopaedic autobiography' as a form. I argue that these autobiographical works allow us to reconceive not only of autobiography but of the question of what 'encyclopaedic literature' might be.

Keywords: fragmentary; encyclopaedia; Roland Barthes; Amy Krouse Rosenthal; encyclopaedic autobiography; encyclopaedic literature

WILLIAM WEST HAS RECENTLY SUGGESTED that 'the encyclopedia may be an especially apt genre, or antigenre, for our cultural moment, stretched between singularities and system, selective curation and nets of relations in which everything seems interwebbed'.¹ West's neat evocation of the encyclopaedia's interweaving of the specific with the general, and the overlapping of frames of reference we find within it, is also, perhaps, a description that could fairly apply to literature generally. Consideration of the relationship between encyclopaedias and literature is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since the middle of the twentieth century, critics of Anglo-American literature have identified 'encyclopaedic literature' as being long – often canonical – works of prose fiction that include allusions to many areas of knowledge or that are explicitly concerned with questions of the ordering of knowledge. I will outline this critical position below. But in this article, instead of considering encyclopaedism in literature as something that equates to 'quantities of information', I wish instead to consider the formal and conceptual influence that encyclopaedic models can have on autobiographical works. In doing this, I hope to

provide a new perspective on the relationship between encyclopaedias and literature.

The comparative literary critic Edward Mendelson provided a definition of encyclopaedic literature in 1976.² Encyclopaedic novels, writes Mendelson, 'attempt to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge' (p. 1269). An encyclopaedic novel is very long and incorporates extensive information about the culture in which it is set. Examples cited by Mendelson include Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Encyclopaedic novels tend to be realist and straightforwardly confident about their exposition of knowledge. This confidence shifted during the twentieth century: as a number of critics have pointed out, the encyclopaedism of major modernist works such as *Ulysses* is seen as impossible from the perspective of postmodernism.³ Thus encyclopaedic novels of the later twentieth century (and some from before then, such as Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881)) display a strong scepticism regarding the possibility of presenting any totality of knowledge. This scepticism is informed both by a distrust of the ideological assumptions underpinning 'grand narratives' and by a sense of powerlessness in the face of ever-increasing data. Some encyclopaedic literary works are, as Ronald Swigger puts it, 'parodies in varying degrees of satirical force, suggesting that encyclopaedic efforts are vain, hopeless, or even dangerous'.⁴ The question of length remains, though: for critics who discuss 'encyclopaedic literature', an encyclopaedic work is, axiomatically, a big novel. Maximalism is something that is taken for granted.⁵

There is an assumption here, notably in Mendelson (and in his predecessor Northrop Frye) that what is encyclopaedic about encyclopaedias is, purely and simply, volume of information; in this viewpoint, encyclopaedias seem to be understood straightforwardly as containers of information rather than as specific, highly-evolved textual forms. For Mendelson, the 'bigness' of encyclopaedic literature necessarily excludes particularity: he refers to 'the intolerance of encyclopaedic form for the small claims of personal expectation and perspective' (p. 1270). The encyclopaedic endeavour is indeed principally characterized by volume. However, encyclopaedism – in the sense in which it has evolved in Europe and the US since the seventeenth century – is also characterized by certain crucial formal and conceptual aspects. Amongst the most important of these are: an overarching classificatory structure (often furnished, *faute de mieux*, by the alphabet); necessary fragmentation, cross-referencing, and the use of images to illustrate the text. Alphabetical order and the use of keywords are particularly important: these were central to the major European encyclopaedias in the printed format in which they existed until the early twenty-first century.⁶

The autobiographical works I examine in this article are interested in the encyclopaedic model, not in terms of volume, but rather in relation to form. They use aspects of classic encyclopaedic form ('print' encyclopaedic form, if you will) in order to investigate the ways in which personal particularity – or Mendelson's 'small claims of personal expectation and perspective' – and their own writerly obsessions

can be displayed. In doing so, they allow us to conceive of ‘encyclopaedic literature’ differently, and in a manner not characterized simply by the criterion of volume.

Roland Barthes’s *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975) and Amy Krouse Rosenthal’s *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* (2004) are both texts that resist linear autobiography.⁷ An increasing subversion of the tenets of autobiography is seen from the late 1970s onwards, particularly in Europe. Its primary articulation is in the form of autofiction, which has become ever-more popular over the decades since Serge Doubrovsky first coined the term ‘autofiction’ in *Fils* in 1977.⁸ Some critics see autofiction as having superseded the postmodern novel, a claim that is warranted by the increasing use and popularity of autofiction in English-language as well as European contexts.⁹ Autofiction seeks to blur the boundaries between fiction and autobiography. Critical views on autofiction tend, at times, to suggest that traditional, chronologically organized autobiography cannot fully incorporate an awareness of the fallibility of memory; Augustine’s *Confessions*, the founding text of European autobiography, shows us that this is not the case.¹⁰ But this view of chronological autobiography as being misleadingly coherent or factual in its narrating of a life is an important one within certain strands of autofiction criticism. Thus the French critic of autofiction Arnaud Schmitt explains that autofiction arose out of the sense that traditional autobiography was inadequate for representing the complexity of lived life and the workings of memory. And so it ‘relies on fiction – runs on fiction, to be exact’ to give it its tension.¹¹

The works that I explore in this article explicitly mix one conceptual model with another in their presentation of autobiographical fact. Like autofictional authors, these authors are to some degree interested in the necessary imbrication of fiction with autobiography. *Roland Barthes* famously presents a handwritten note on its fly-leaf, stating that ‘tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman’. The authors of encyclopaedic autobiography tend to foreground the fabulistic quality that is inherent in memory. Jonathan Meades, for example, in his recent memoir *Encyclopaedia of Myself*, asserts pointedly that his ‘recall of childhood from a distance – as though peering into a glass cabinet whilst wearing a sterilised mask and surgically scrubbed gloves [...] [does not] imply that what is recalled was actual and enjoyed an existence beyond the laboratory of our imaginings’. At one point, he provides seven examples of his ‘earliest memory’, all of them entirely different.¹² These memoirists’ more insistent focus, however, is upon the generic interplay between autobiography and non-fiction. Specifically, these works are interested in what Amy Krouse Rosenthal describes as ‘the ultimate non-fiction entity’, the encyclopaedia.¹³ To use Schmitt’s phrase, the two texts I examine in this article ‘run on’ the encyclopaedic. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life*, memory, personal information and reflections on writing practice are presented in small titled fragments, presented in alphabetical order and punctuated with illustrations, as if in an encyclopaedia. The respective profiles and intellectual profiles of the two authors place the works at a distance from each other, as I shall discuss below. However, despite the gulf between them, these texts use the same formal conceit and display the same conviction that encyclopaedic classifying is a means of opening

autobiography up to the minutiae of the self in a way that registers the singularity of one's own response to the world more fully than is possible in other forms, whether fictional or non-fictional.

Encyclopaedic autobiography 1: Barthes

Barthes's work is difficult to classify due to its varied nature and the wide range of his interests. Claire de Obaldia has pointed out that 'every aspect of Barthes's work, in fact, seems to have an encyclopaedic orientation. [. . .] [His] work resembles an exhaustive repertoire, a sort of encyclopaedia of cultural myths.'¹⁴ In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, he opts to treat his own tastes and the themes of his work in an encyclopaedic, fragmented manner. This discontinuous, anti-narrative version of autobiography was to some degree ahead of its time; as Arnaud Schmitt puts it in his recent study of autobiography, 'Barthes was, in a striking manner, not interested in any form of narrative coalescence at a time when postmodernism had not yet started to systematically deconstruct traditional narratives.'¹⁵ For this reason amongst others, *Barthes par Barthes* has been received as an important reflection on autobiographical and theoretical practice.¹⁶ The work arose from a commission: Barthes's Parisian publisher, Éditions du Seuil, asked him to write a guide to his own work for its 'Écrivains de toujours' series.¹⁷ Works produced for this series typically provided biographical material on the writer under study, along with quotations from their works and a selection of images; Barthes's second book was his 1954 volume for the series on the nineteenth-century historian Jules Michelet, *Michelet par lui-même*. Each of the texts in the series had the 'par lui-même' subtitle as a nod to the use of selections from the author's works. Twenty years later, when Barthes was asked to write the volume on himself, the subtitle became more literal and playful.

By this point, Barthes was well known as a public intellectual and as the author of densely-argued works of cultural criticism – notably his *Mythologies* of 1957 – and of literary theory. When he wrote *Barthes par Barthes*, he was moving away from his high theoretical writings into explorations of literature and of the writing and reading processes that were more firmly centred on his own personal experiences. This would continue after *Barthes par Barthes* with his biggest-selling final books, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977), on the language and obsessions of lovers, and *La Chambre claire* (1980), a study of the emotional effects of photographs. All three of these final books by Barthes, though they deploy a good deal of autobiographical material, do so in a veiled, choppy and essayistic manner which is indicative of Barthes's absolute unwillingness to present a linear autobiography. Johnnie Gratton has discussed how *Barthes par Barthes* articulates a resistance to the idea of the 'anterior' (one's origin and past) in a manner that is fundamentally antithetical to traditional conceptions of autobiography as the privileged site of memory.¹⁸ The text is much more a reflection on Barthes's current writing practice and thematic obsessions than it is a revelation of individual specificity or development over time. Indeed, the only really straightforwardly autobiographical material in the book is the family and childhood photographs with which it opens.¹⁹ Barthes includes very few images of himself once

he has become a published writer, saying that he wishes text to speak for him instead of photographic images that provide 'la représentation d'un individu civil'.²⁰ When Barthes does reveal current personal details, as for example when he lists the timetable of his days at his summer house in the southwest of France (feeding the birds, having breakfast, going to buy the paper, and so on), he presents the material (delicately, mockingly?) in quotation marks, and then immediately undercuts it by concluding that this information is pointless: 'Tout cela n'a aucun intérêt' (p. 79).

The text seems evasive because of how it is structured. The work was written in fragments which were given titles (the 'keywords' so necessary to any encyclopaedia) and then put in alphabetical order. The structuring is thus aesthetic or formal rather than conceptual; this is also true of the encyclopaedia. Barthes explains his interest in this structuring principle:

L'ordre alphabétique efface tout, refoule toute origine. Peut-être, par endroits, certains fragments ont l'air de se suivre par affinité, mais l'important, c'est que ces petits réseaux ne soient pas raccordés, c'est qu'ils ne glissent pas à un seul et grand réseau qui serait la structure du livre, son sens. C'est pour arrêter, dévier, diviser cette descente du discours vers un destin du sujet, qu'à certains moments l'alphabet vous rappelle à l'ordre (du désordre) et vous dit: *Coupez! Reprenez l'histoire d'une autre manière.* (p. 131)

In other words, alphabetical order is useful insofar as it introduces disorganization as a principle. In displaying this resistance to order, Barthes is typical of his generation. As Edward Said shows in his 1972 article 'Abecedarium Culturae', Barthes and his fellow big-name French theorists (notably Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida) share the conviction that, in the modern era, 'the authority of a privileged Origin that commands, guarantees and perpetuates meaning has been removed'.²¹ In Said's compelling argument, these thinkers replace the idea of Origin and order with what Said calls 'linguicity' or a focus on the operations of language; in explanation of his point he cites Derrida's statement that 'language emerges as a new center destined to replace the philosophic and/or epistemological center, or Origin, it has criticized and chased away. One myth cedes to another'.²² The encyclopaedia, by using alphabetical order, foregrounds 'linguicity': as de Obaldia has pointed out, 'the encyclopaedia shows more clearly than any essay that the logic of discourse (whether autobiographical or critical) depends upon linguistic associations which are epitomized by the alphabet as the system of classification of the list'.²³

The poststructuralist rebellion against system and valorization of the infinite plurality of text is well-documented²⁴ and to some degree tediously predictable. Barthes's use of decentralization and fragmentation in *Barthes par Barthes* is interesting, however, because of the productive tension between his promotion of a principle of disorganization within a model that alludes to the encyclopaedia – a supremely systematized form. Encyclopaedic order is premised upon a confidence in classification and epistemology, and upon a desire for a totalized representation of knowledge. Encyclopaedias, from the medieval period onwards, were understood by their makers as works which sought to master reality by systematically presenting all available knowledge. For Barthes, a writer whose literary and cultural points of

reference were overwhelmingly those of his own country, 'encyclopaedia' means *the* French encyclopaedia, i.e. Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–72). It is worth noting a certain tension between d'Alembert's and Diderot's conceptions of the work's value: where d'Alembert proposes quite a static account of knowledge in his 'Discours préliminaire', Diderot, in the article 'Encyclopédie', offers an account of the encyclopaedic venture that is more fluid and potentially disruptive.²⁵ In particular, Diderot is aware of the subversive potential of 'renvois': one entry can, simply in being linked to another, subvert or question orthodox thinking. Eighteenth-century encyclopaedism is preoccupied, as Barthes is, by the relationship between naming and ordering. The underlying aim for the encyclopaedists was to establish continuity between lived experience and the systematization of knowledge. As Said puts it, 'the representative space of language has become, by the eighteenth century, an ordered film, a transparency through which the continuity of Being can shine. [...] The essential problem for [eighteenth-century] thought is [...] to discover a nomenclature that was also a taxonomy, or to establish a system of signs that were transparent to the continuity of Being' (pp. 345–46). The *Encyclopédie* uses alphabetical order, but this was chosen for practical reasons and not valued for what Barthes would see as its disruptiveness. In his study of eighteenth-century classificatory works, Richard Yeo explains that using the alphabet 'gave scientific dictionaries the flexibility to absorb the new findings of the Scientific Revolution without having to assess the implications for traditional doctrines in long treatises. But eighteenth-century encyclopaedists rarely linked the choice of alphabetical order with an attack on systematic organisation'.²⁶

Like an Enlightenment encyclopaedist, Barthes loves naming: 'nommer c'est apaiser' he points out in *Barthes par Barthes* (p. 156). He is a thinker obsessed with demarcating ideas using nouns – often capitalized – or nominalized adjectives ('le démodé', 'le naturel', 'le neutre'). But his approach towards the naming and ordering of his fragments is far removed from that of the encyclopaedists. Where the named articles of an eighteenth-century encyclopaedia are marshalled under an over-arching schema – a goal of coherence adhered to even when the encyclopaedists know their goal is impossible²⁷ – Barthes's fragments remain deliberately scattered, coherence rejected. Indeed, he goes so far as to imagine conceptualizing all works in this way, by using a 'critique antistructurale': 'elle ne rechercherait pas l'ordre, mais le désordre de l'œuvre; il lui suffirait pour cela de considérer toute œuvre comme *encyclopédie*: chaque texte ne peut-il se définir par le nombre des objets disparates (de savoir, de sensualité) qu'il met en scène à l'aide de simples figures de contiguïté?' (*Barthes*, p. 131). The naming of 'objets disparates (de savoir, de sensualité)' is, in summary, what *Barthes par Barthes* is all about. It is in this respect that Barthes's approach in this text resembles a Montaignian *essai*: Montaigne's essayism is notable for its bodily, sensuous quality. As we shall see below, Krouse Rosenthal is also struck by the Montaignian approach to knowledge.²⁸

In a fragment entitled 'Détacher', Barthes explains his method by alluding to visual art. He aligns his work with the static nature of a picture rather than the dynamic, integrationist method of written knowledge: 'Détacher est le geste essentiel

de l'art classique. [...] En cela, l'art est à l'opposé des sciences sociologiques, philologiques, politiques, qui n'ont de cesse *d'intégrer* ce qu'elles ont distingué (elles ne le distinguent que pour mieux l'intégrer)' (p. 69). Similarly, Barthes tells us a few pages later, he loves thinking about concepts and ideas under the label of a single word: he explains that he uses these words like emblems, and doing this frees him from having to delve deeper into understanding the system from which these chosen words have emerged: 'il *invoque* les notions, il les répète sous un nom; il se sert de ce nom comme d'un emblème [...] et cet emblème le dispense d'approfondir le système dont il est le signifiant' (p. 74).

The allusions to visual details (detached element, emblem, discrete objects) in his description of his fragmented method also resonate with Barthes's particular take on the *Encyclopédie* itself. In his 1964 essay 'Les Planches de *Encyclopédie*', Barthes pursues a decidedly non-integrationist agenda in his discussion of the *Encyclopédie*'s illustrations. He is specifically interested in the illustrations of humans' relationships to objects (depictions of how a tool is used, for example). Barthes provides an account of these images which prioritizes the processes of selection and division which inform both the choice of what needs illustrating, and the illustrations themselves. '*L'Encyclopédie* ne cesse de procéder à une fragmentation impie du monde,' he writes; 'mais ce qu'elle trouve au terme de cette cassure n'est pas l'état fondamental des causes toutes pures; l'image l'oblige la plupart du temps à recomposer un objet proprement *déraisonnable*.'²⁹ When you isolate details and take them out of their context, as in the encyclopaedic image, they begin to seem unnatural, or surreal. Thus 'la poétique encyclopédique se définit toujours comme un certain irréalisme' (p. 102), and the verifiable reality of the encyclopaedic image is constantly 'débord[ée] par *autre chose* (*l'autre* est le signe de tous les mystères)' (p. 102). To illustrate this, he uses the image of the human vascular system:

Voyez l'étonnante image de l'homme réduit à son réseau de veines; l'audace anatomique rejoint ici la grande interrogation poétique et philosophique: *Qu'est-ce que c'est?* Quel nom donner? Comment donner un nom? Mille noms surgissent, se délogent les uns les autres: un arbre, un ours, un monstre, une chevelure, une étoffe, tout ce qui déborde la silhouette humaine, la distend, l'attire vers des régions lointaines d'elle-même, lui fait franchir le partage de la nature. (p. 100)

The image, in this explanation, conjures up imagined, unnameable, *unclassifiable* marvels – and also reminds us of the cross-referential structure of the *Encyclopédie* itself. One thing reminds us of another: the analytical spirit of the plates, as well as of encyclopaedic discourse, means explaining something by having recourse to another thing that also needs explaining, 'selon un procès de circularité infinie qui est celui-là même du dictionnaire où le mot ne peut être défini que par d'autres mots' (p. 103). This account of the dictionary to some degree prefigures the Derridean account, in *De la grammatologie* (1967), of signification having always to proceed by means of signifiers referring to other signifiers: this is 'différance'.

Barthes reproduces the image of the vascular system on the page facing the final fragments of *Barthes par Barthes*. Here, the caption reads 'Écrire le corps. Ni la peau,

ni les muscles, ni les os, ni les nerfs, mais le reste: un ça balourd, fibreux, pelucheux, effiloché, la houppelande d'un clown' (p. 157). The image of the shaggy vein-figure is used to gesture towards the idea of the corporeal, mysterious real ('le corps') that evades description and classification. Beyond those categories is 'le reste'. The image's invocation of an un-representable, bodily, lived reality may also remind us of Barthes's insistence, earlier in the text in a section entitled 'Patch-work', that his collection of fragments is superficial only: 'loin d'approfondir, je reste à la surface, parce qu'il s'agit cette fois de "moi" [...] et que la profondeur appartient aux autres' (p. 127). A study of his own life and work conducted through fragments, in deliberate disorder – 'tout mon petit univers en miettes; au centre, quoi?' (p. 89) – *Barthes par Barthes* uses the model of the encyclopaedia to articulate an approach to the writing of a life's work that opposes existing models of autobiography premised on sequentiality, frank confession and depth.

Barthes's version of encyclopaedic autobiography, insofar as it is expressive of a distrust of order that is commonly shared in the theoretical moment which he helped to shape, is very typical of its time. I will now turn to an encyclopaedic autobiography written in English in the United States thirty years after Barthes's text. Its author, Amy Krouse Rosenthal, has, to my knowledge, no documented interest in French poststructuralist theory, and nor does she share these theorists' ideological bugbears or cultural reference points. However, her autobiography strikingly mobilizes many of the same preoccupations as Barthes's.

Encyclopaedic autobiography 2: Krouse Rosenthal

Krouse Rosenthal's *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* was published in 2004. Krouse Rosenthal, who died in 2017, had large popular appeal and public presence in the US. She was a prolific children's author whose work regularly featured in *The New York Times* bestseller lists. She was also a regular radio contributor, TED-talker and columnist for several publications, including *McSweeney's* and *The New York Times*. Krouse Rosenthal, unlike Barthes, is a writer of the internet age. Her book was conceived and published in the early days of Wikipedia (launched in 2001). She subsequently went on to write another semi-autobiographical text, *Textbook Amy Krouse Rosenthal*, published in 2016, that is very experimental in format and embraces the concept of instant messaging. Krouse Rosenthal encouraged readers (both online and in her printed books) to get in touch with her through email, post, Facebook and, latterly, by text message, and also facilitated ways in which her readers could get in touch with each other. Arguably, Krouse Rosenthal is a writer who exemplifies the new age of information, in which information (and encyclopaedic knowledge, as typified by Wikipedia) is seen as the product of consensus and collaboration rather than as edicts issued by authoritative sources.³⁰ In the twelve years between Krouse Rosenthal's two autobiographical texts, social media and the use of Wikipedia became massified – this is reflected in the form, discussions and add-ons to the later autobiography.³¹ The chronological gap between Barthes's text and Krouse Rosenthal's is significant in relation to both authors' attitudes towards

encyclopaedic form, given that, in this gap, the advent of the internet inaugurated a shift in conceptions of information and its production and availability that is comparable in scale only to the advent of print culture several centuries earlier.

The two texts occupy very different cultural places. Where Barthes's text has a large academic readership, Krouse Rosenthal's text is used in school creative writing curricula in the US. The use of an encyclopaedic format is less tricky in Krouse Rosenthal than in Barthes. Barthes's table of contents and fragment titles are frequently opaque and confusing: the appearance of an encyclopaedic taxonomy is provided, but this taxonomy is in fact only loosely applied. Krouse Rosenthal on the other hand adheres to a more straightforward, breezy nominalism – starting with her own name (Amy, at the start of the alphabet). Her topics in the main body of the book, entitled 'Alphabetized Existence', relate for the most part to quotidian experiences, both concrete (driving, going shopping, following a recipe) and emotional (interactions with her family, encounters with strangers). The potential utility of her text to would-be writers is signalled in the text by frequent invocations of the reader and invitations to her to fill out tables and questionnaires. (This is even more so the case in the later *Textbook*, which is partly modelled on a student's workbook.) At the outset of *Encyclopedia* the reader is invited to complete a 'reader's agreement' and to go online to 'add your name to the list of people who have ever read this book and who were personally thanked (by e-mail) by the author' (p. xiv). This text is more frank than Barthes's in its use of the second-person address, and this from the off: the book's acknowledgements simply read 'I would like to thank you for reading this book' (p. xiii). By contrast, where Barthes uses 'vous', the focus of the pronoun shifts more coyly between the writer (Barthes, also referred to in the text as 'R.B.' and 'il/lui') and the reader. Near the start of the volume, after the selection of photographs of himself, Barthes comments on the desire to exclaim 'Mais je n'ai jamais ressemblé à cela!' when looking at a photograph of oneself: 'Comment le savez-vous? Qu'est-ce que ce "vous" auquel vous ressembleriez ou ne ressembleriez pas? [...] Vous êtes le seul à ne pouvoir jamais vous voir qu'en image' (p. 42). The 'vous' here is both himself, and us. The individual's surprised response to an image of herself is *everyone's* surprised response to an image of themselves; this is one of Barthes's Montaignian, or even Diderotian, moments, in which what seems to be merely personal is revealed to be fully social. Krouse Rosenthal is similarly fascinated by this overlapping of the idiosyncratic and the general.

Krouse Rosenthal's text was not commissioned. It arose initially from her own desire to compile and classify her previous writings and columns, a task she found difficult. This is documented in the 'chronology of this moment' section at the start of the text which explains how and why she got to the stage of writing the book in the way she did. As she describes it, Krouse Rosenthal had been throughout her writing career and from an early age resistant to continuous forms of writing. Like Barthes, she explains this particular taste or failing by an anecdote about painting. Barthes describes himself as setting himself the task of becoming more proficient in figurative art by trying to exactly copy a seventeenth-century painting of a hunting nobleman. He cannot do it, ending up with a ludicrously distorted version of the

rider and steed; in this 'inhabilité à reproduire "les masses"' (*Barthes*, p. 89), we are encouraged to see his affinity with brief written forms. Krouse Rosenthal's lack of taste for cumulative work is explained more pithily with an anecdote about a summer job during her teenage years: 'Summer 1984: Gets job at popcorn shop painting decorative tins as gifts. Boss tells her she is good at coming up with timely, sellable ideas [...] but that her work is messy, poorly painted. She agrees, but doesn't like the executing, just the idea part of it' (p. 14). The text also indicates in several instances Krouse Rosenthal's pleasure in getting things done and moving onto the next thing: the section 'Completion' provides examples of this:

I finish the meal so I can get to dessert. I finish the dessert so I can get up from the table. [...] I like it when we finish one of our half-gallons of milk, so I can rinse it out and put the glass bottle out back for the milkman. [...] I enjoy cooking because recipes offer a very manageable list of instructions to continuously complete, not to mention the joy I get from using up the ingredients. The concept of infinity makes me nuts. (pp. 79–80)

Conversely, she tells us that she 'always hated the game Monopoly – the end was invariably nowhere in sight' (p. 80). In this regard her approach to fragmentation is differently oriented to Barthes's. Barthes distrusts completion. His love of fragments is informed partly by a delight in starting a process or an idea: 'aimant à trouver, à écrire des débuts, il tend à multiplier ce plaisir: voilà pourquoi il écrit des fragments: autant de fragments, autant de débuts, autant de plaisirs (mais il n'aime pas les fins: [...] crainte de ne savoir résister au *dernier mot*, à la dernière réplique' (pp. 89–90). Krouse Rosenthal, conceptualizing the process the other way around, revels in ever-renewed completions instead. But both authors are purposefully, strategically, choosing a form of writing where the whole is always, explicitly, exceeded by its parts.

Whereas Barthes had been deliberately composing book-length works in fragments for some time, Krouse Rosenthal stumbled upon this form for her book through a happenstance series of readings. In 1999, by this stage a well-established author of 'choppy, random, handwritten, segue-free column[s]' (p. 18), she reads the eleventh-century Japanese author Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book*. Its 'structural confusion' is 'tremendously exciting to her. Enlightening. Reassuring' (p. 21). She subsequently 'begins compiling all the pieces from weekly columns. There are no thematic headings. For organizational purposes, decides to alphabetize material according to first letter of each piece' (p. 23). She then realizes that 'this could make for an interesting format for a book', but is still struggling to work out exactly what the book would be, and 'wonders if she shouldn't just save all this material for a novel down the road, when she finally *gets serious* and tackles fiction' (p. 23); like Barthes, who wrote and lectured at length on the desire to write a novel, Krouse Rosenthal sees the 'book-to-come' as necessarily being a novel.³²

Krouse Rosenthal is interested in presenting autobiographical material, but not as an autobiography; instead, the idea of a 'biography of self' compiled through a collage of materials appeals to her. Reading Montaigne's *Essays* – which she discovers via the work of Alain de Botton – builds upon her experience of Sei Shonagon and helps her to realize that a fragmented, essayistic structure might work. She then

'begins fervent exploration of all forms that non-fiction takes'. This ultimately leads to her 'scrutinizing the ultimate nonfiction entity, the encyclopedia' (p. 27). Perusing this (physical) volume is revelatory:

Comes to entry for the word *encyclopedia* itself. Is immediately intrigued by the history of the encyclopedia, how it evolved, all the different forms it's taken over the years. It occurs to her in a moment she feels she will remember always but perhaps that is just the drama and delusion kicking in: *I am not writing a memoir (I have no story); I am not writing an autobiography (for who really cares). I am writing a personal encyclopedia, a thorough documentation of an ordinary life in the end of the twentieth century/beginning of the twenty first. And in fact, while I didn't know it then, I started this encyclopedia nearly two years ago, when I began gathering my columns/writings and putting them in alphabetical order.* (p. 27, emphasis in original)

Krouse Rosenthal shares with Barthes a scepticism about linear autobiographical form. However, where Barthes's scepticism extends to (at times disingenuously) questioning the value of all snippets of incidental personal information, Krouse Rosenthal is enthusiastic about precisely that – because of the 'documentary' goal she alludes to in the quotation above. At the start of the text, she provides an 'Orientation Almanac' complete with illustrations (commissioned from Jeffrey Middleton, the illustrator of the then most recent American edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*), which provides lists of incidental information about contemporary American life, including the costs of staple food items, common expletives, highest-rated television shows and similar matters (pp. 2–9).³³

Krouse Rosenthal is concerned with the minutiae of cultural and ethnographic specificity, whereas Barthes by contrast is concerned with more ideological, political and intellectual questions; where minutiae are given – as in his summer day's timetable – he makes it clear that he regards its incidental value as null). Instead, Barthes sees its use as inhering in what it reveals about underlying political or social questions, and he mocks the image-burnishing that he diagnoses in his own list of the activities of his typically bourgeois summer day: 'non seulement vous marquez votre appartenance de classe, mais encore vous faites de cette marque une confiance littéraire, dont la futilité n'est plus reçue: vous vous constituez fantasmatiquement en "écrivain", ou pire encore: vous vous constituez' (p. 79). By virtue of his profession, Barthes is more invested than Krouse Rosenthal is in processes of critical reflection. He is also, despite his idiosyncratic use of the template of the *Seuil* 'Écrivains de toujours' series, responding to a commission which requires a full consideration of the writer's life and work. He is aware, and makes his reader aware, that everything he writes about himself is subject to the 'examples' of 'l'Histoire, l'Idéologie, l'Inconscient': 'Ouvrets [...] sur ces différents avènements, mes textes se déboîtent, aucun ne coiffe l'autre; celui-ci n'est rien d'autre qu'un texte en plus, le dernier de la série, non l'ultime du sens' (p. 110). Krouse Rosenthal on the other hand is obeying a brief entirely of her own: to 'thorough[ly] document[ing] an ordinary life'. She both has a confidence that this is entirely feasible, and an interest in making this as accessible as possible to the reader. Undercutting her own discourse or questioning its motives is not her aim. Moreover, she is not concerned to interrogate the specificity of her own

'ordinary life': she has by her own admission very little interest in politics and spends no time questioning her own status and privileges. She discusses instead, in a witty and self-aware manner, the mundanity of her family life, tastes in shopping and so forth. She is interested in the tangibility of detail. Reading Montaigne, what she likes is how he 'offer[s] so much information on exactly how commonplace and private his own life had been' (p. 26): Montaigne reveals his dislike for apples, for example, and his habit of eating too quickly. Krouse Rosenthal tells us that she ends up biting her nails whenever she has a glass of wine, that she dislikes lukewarm coffee. Her pleasure in the encyclopaedic structuring of autobiographical material is the free rein it gives her for the revelation of fragments of temporal, contingent specificity, usually object-based – illustratable, like the nouns and objects that are awarded a picture in an encyclopaedia or dictionary. Her concern, ultimately, is with the contingency of her own bodily reality, as the final section of the text, 'You',³⁴ reveals:

Perhaps you think I didn't matter because I lived _____ years ago, and back then life wasn't as lifelike as it is to you now; that I didn't truly, fully, with all my senses, experience life as you are presently experiencing it, or think about _____ as you do, with such intensity and frequency. But I was here. And I did things. [...] I cried to exhaustion. [...] I was rude when I shouldn't have been. I watched the cellist's bow go up and down, and adored the music he made. I picked at a scab. I wished I was older. I wished I was younger. I loved my children. I loved mayonnaise. I chewed on a blade of grass. I was here, you see. I was. (p. 219)

The close of Krouse Rosenthal's text is, in its insistence on sensual experience and situatedness, remarkably similar to the end of Barthes's. The final fragment in his sequence (which appears with the *Encyclopédie* anatomy plate on the facing page) describes an ephemeral moment: 'ce 6 août, [...] c'est le matin d'un jour splendide: soleil, chaleur, fleurs, silence, calme, rayonnement. Rien ne rôde, ni le désir, ni l'agression; seul le travail est là, devant moi, comme une sorte d'être universel: tout est plein' (p. 156). Not the last fragment written, it nonetheless appears, full of promise and future-orientedness, at the end: again we see Barthes's interest in projection forward ('devant moi'), where Krouse Rosenthal insists on completion ('I was here. And I did things').³⁵

The endings of both texts gesture towards the bodily reality that the text cannot capture. Both texts demonstrate the conviction that a workable strategy, in the face of this uncapturability, is to resort to fragmentation. Fragments give the air of immediacy; they imply the life that comes before and after them without obliging the author to set out antecedence or linear narrative. Beyond simply employing fragmentation, though, both of these authors also clothe their texts in a version of encyclopaedic form. In an encyclopaedia as traditionally conceived, a form composed of fragments which are both heterogeneous and interrelated, it is clear that reality always exceeds the sum of the parts. Encyclopaedic form, as William West puts it, is in this way 'nostalgic': 'the encyclopedia is not so much a conservative form as a nostalgic one: it does not try to preserve something that it already holds, but reaches out toward what it recalls or imagines that escapes it'.³⁶

Conclusion

It is not clear that Barthes and Krouse Rosenthal share West's understanding of the encyclopaedic form as being inherently 'nostalgic'. Their fellow encyclopaedic autobiographer, Jonathan Meades, explicitly resists the notion of nostalgia:

Nostalgia is [...] primitive, pre-rational, pre-learning. It quashes developed taste, aesthetic preference, learnt refinements. It insists that the chance associations of infancy are more obstinately enduring than the chosen positions of our subsequent sentence. It tells us that we are lifers in a mnemonic prison from which there is no reprieve.³⁷

These three authors are, perhaps, less swayed by nostalgia than by the pull towards parody: recall Swigger's evocation of those encyclopaedic literary works that are 'parodies in varying degrees of satirical force, suggesting that encyclopaedic efforts are vain'.³⁸ Barthes, Krouse Rosenthal and Meades all use a keyword-dominated, alphabetical encyclopaedic model that allows them to gesture towards a whole that they are unwilling to otherwise try to reconstruct textually – or the reconstruction of which they deem to be impossible. The encyclopaedic fragment is constantly 'débord[ée] par *autre chose* (l'*autre* est le signe de tous les mystères)',³⁹ or in West's words, the fragment is always 'reach[ing] out toward what it recalls or imagines that escapes it'.

Krouse Rosenthal takes structural inspiration for her text from the entry 'Encyclopedia' in 'volume E' of the printed encyclopaedia she has in her office. It will have been a late twentieth century edition. Since 2012, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is no longer printed in hard copy. In *Textbook Amy Krouse Rosenthal*, when the author wants to look something up, she does it online. Barthes, writing before the internet, feels that the encyclopaedic goal of presenting all knowledge is no longer possible. In a lecture at the Collège de France in 1977, he set out his view that, unlike Diderot, who 'a ouvert tous les dossiers de son époque', we, in the contemporary age, cannot 'maîtrise[r]' all knowledge, because 'aujourd'hui: plus d'exhaustivité possible du savoir, entièrement pluralisé, diffracté en langages incommunicants. L'acte encyclopédique n'est plus possible'.⁴⁰ He demonstrates a surprisingly naïve lack of awareness that this sense of the ungraspability of all knowledge is common to all generations since the early modern period.⁴¹ The idea of encyclopaedic acts and epistemological confidence as belonging, always, to an earlier age informs both of the texts I have examined here. The authors know that encyclopaedias are always incomplete, contingent, destined to become obsolete; this knowledge informs the presentation of their own writings, habits and tastes. Where writers such as Flaubert (in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*) or Borges (in short stories such as 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940)) call the encyclopaedic enterprise into question within fictional frameworks, Barthes and Krouse Rosenthal use the idea of the encyclopaedia in order to reconceive the function and modalities of autobiographical writing.

It is in this way that the texts examined in this article can add to our understanding of 'encyclopaedic literature'. As I mentioned at the start of this article, the working understanding of 'encyclopaedic literature' within literary criticism is that it pertains to lengthy works of fiction which set out large quantities of cultural

information. Barthes and Krouse Rosenthal show us that the idea of encyclopaedism can be used to reinterrogate a form. William West has pointed out that 'fictional representations of encyclopedism help make visible some of the concerns about knowledge and knowability that have made the encyclopedic text an important form in recent literature'.⁴² This is also the case for the adaptation of encyclopaedic features within autobiographical work.

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NOTES

- ¹ William N. West, 'Encircling Knowledge', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 68 (2015), 1327–40 (p. 1328).
- ² Edward Mendelson, 'Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon', *MLN*, 91.6 (1976), 1267–75. Mendelson's critical position, informed partly by a short section of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1957), pp. 315–26, has not been diverged from in subsequent Anglo-American critical accounts of 'encyclopedic literature'; the most recent contributor to have significantly expanded this discussion is Hilary Clark, in her 1990 study *The Fictional Encyclopedia: Joyce, Pound, Sollers* (New York: Garland, 1990) and her article 'Encyclopedic Discourse', *SubStance*, 21.1 (1992), 95–110.
- ³ See in particular Clark, 'Encyclopedic Discourse'; Stephen J. Burn, 'The Collapse of Everything: William Gaddis and the Encyclopedic Novel', in *Paper Empire: William Gaddis and the World System*, ed. by Joseph Tabbi and Rone Shavers (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. 46–62; and Michael André Bernstein, 'Making Modernist Masterpieces', *Modernism/Modernity*, 5.3 (1998), 1–17.
- ⁴ Ronald T. Swigger, 'Fictional Encyclopedism and the Cognitive Value of Literature', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 12.4 (1975), 351–66 (p. 363). Cf. also Clark: 'The encyclopedic impulse toward "a total body of vision", a continuous, unified form summing up the knowledge of a culture at a particular point in history, develops, according to Frye [in *The Anatomy of Criticism*], out of an equal but opposite impulse toward discontinuous and fragmented ("episodic") forms' ('Encyclopedic Discourse', p. 95).
- ⁵ This preoccupation with length is taken up in more recent discussions of post-postmodern Anglo-American literature. Studies are still being written about big books (mainly works of American fiction) whose size warrants their being described as encyclopaedic: see Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's 'Gravity's Rainbow' to Roberto Bolaño's '2666'*, trans. by Albert Sbragia (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), and David Letzler, *The Cruft of Fiction: Mega-Novels and the Science of Paying Attention* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017). See also James Wood's 2005 essay 'Hysterical Realism', in which Wood castigates the 'contemporary "big ambitious novel[s]"' of authors such as Zadie Smith, Salman Rushdie and Jonathan Franzen for having an excess of information at the expense of character ('Hysterical Realism', in *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* (London: Pimlico, 2005), pp. 167–83 (p. 174)). In an essay on Franzen in the same volume, Wood states that '[the] characteristic products [of contemporary American fiction] are books of great self-consciousness with no selves in them; curiously arrested books which know a thousand different things – How to make the best Indonesian fish curry! The sonics of the trombone! The drug market

in Detroit! The history of strip cartoons! – but do not know a single human being’ (Jonathan Franzen and the “social novel”, in *The Irresponsible Self*, pp. 184–97 (p. 190)).

⁶ Jeff Loveland’s recent comprehensive study of encyclopaedias points out that, though ‘the age of alphabetical encyclopedias is almost entirely over’ (given the demise of the print encyclopaedia), the features of alphabetical encyclopaedias ‘enjoy an afterlife in electronic encyclopedias. At a minimum, electronic encyclopedias have borrowed from their content. More subtly, the organizing devices of the European encyclopedia – the keyword, the article, and the cross-reference, above all – were taken up by electronic encyclopedias.’ Jeff Loveland, *The European Encyclopedia: From 1630 to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 2.

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); Amy Krouse Rosenthal, *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* (New York: Three Rivers, 2004).

⁸ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Galilée, 1977).

⁹ See for example Jonathan Sturgeon, ‘2014: The Death of the Postmodern Novel and the Rise of Autofiction’, *Flavorwire*, 31 December 2014, <<https://www.flavorwire.com/496570/2014-the-death-of-the-postmodern-novel-and-the-rise-of-autofiction>> [accessed 28 May 2020].

¹⁰ See in particular ‘Memory’, Book Ten of the *Confessions*. It discusses memory, naming and the subconscious, and is twice the length of the other twelve books. *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008), pp. 179–220.

¹¹ Arnaud Schmitt, ‘David Shields’s Lyrical Essay: The Dream of a Genre-Free Memoir, or Beyond the Paradox’, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 31.1 (2016), 133–46 (p. 141). Schmitt is the most interesting of the commenters on autofiction, certainly in the context of French autofiction, not least because of his scepticism regarding other commenters’ claims that the oscillation between fiction and reality makes autofiction a ‘hybrid’ genre. See his books *Je réel/Je fictif: Au-delà d’une confusion postmoderne* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2010) and *The Phenomenology of Autobiography: Making it Real* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹² Jonathan Meades, *An Encyclopaedia of Myself* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), p. 8, pp. 88–89. Meades’s work does not form a central focus of this article because, unlike Barthes’s and Krouse Rosenthal’s texts, which present an account of life from childhood to current adulthood, Meades’s is an account of childhood only.

¹³ Krouse Rosenthal, *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life*, p. 27. Further references appear in parentheses in the body text.

¹⁴ Claire de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 148.

¹⁵ Schmitt, *The Phenomenology of Autobiography*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Beyond discussion of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* within Barthes criticism, see for example Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Gerald J. Kennedy, ‘Roland Barthes, Autobiography, and the End of Writing’, *The Georgia Review*, 35.2 (1981), 381–98; Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1992), pp. 2–23; Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. xiv and passim.

¹⁷ Seuil published works in this collection, originally edited by Francis Jeanson, between 1954 and 1981 and again from 1994 to 2000; there are 106 volumes in the series.

¹⁸ Johnnie Gratton, ‘Du *Seigneur à la chasse au Seigneur chassé*: Lecture d’un fragment barthésien’, *Littérature*, 97 ‘Le récit médusé’ (1995), 14–27. Barthes’s resistance to chronological autobiography resonates with points in his polemical essay ‘La Mort de l’auteur’ (written in 1967, first published 1968): ‘Le scripteur moderne naît en même temps que son texte; il n’est d’aucune façon pourvu d’un être qui précéderait ou excéderait son écriture, il n’est en rien le sujet dont son livre serait le prédict; il n’y a d’autre temps que celui de l’énonciation, et tout texte est écrit éternellement *ici et maintenant*.’ Barthes, ‘La Mort de l’auteur’, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), III, pp. 40–45 (p. 43).

¹⁹ For a consideration of these photographs, see Lee-Von Kim, 'Autobiographical Revisions: Photography in Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes and Claude Cahun's *Disavowals*', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 29.1 (2014), 107–26.

²⁰ Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, p. 8. Further references appear in parentheses in the body text.

²¹ Edward Said, 'Abecedarium Culturae: Structuralism, Absence, Writing', in *Modern French Criticism: From Proust and Valéry to Structuralism*, ed. by John K. Simon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 341–92 (pp. 350–51).

²² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1967], trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 421, cited by Said, 'Abecedarium Culturae', p. 383.

²³ de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 153.

²⁴ See for example Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987).

²⁵ I thank Francesco Manzini for his comments on this point.

²⁶ Richard Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 27.

²⁷ William N. West stresses that doubt regarding the possibility of encyclopaedic projects is not a uniquely 'modern' attitude: he discusses the irony of encyclopaedic writing, explaining that 'by "irony" in the context of encyclopaedism I mean the self-subverting stance that many early encyclopaedic works express towards the possibility of their projects, calling their efforts into question without abandoning their goals of coherence, comprehensiveness, usefulness, and universality. It is an attitude combining commitment and scepticism, resignation and enthusiasm.' West, 'Irony and encyclopaedic writing before (and after) the Enlightenment', in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. by Jason König and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 482–502 (p. 482).

²⁸ Krouse Rosenthal, *Encyclopedia*, p. 26. On Roland Barthes *par Roland Barthes* as a Montaignian text, see Réda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*, trans. by Pat Fedkiew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). It is also accepted within Montaigne studies that there are key affinities between Montaigne and Barthes: principally, the valorization of introspection and of the creative role of reading. See for example Cathleen M. Bauschatz, 'Montaigne's Conception of Reading in the Context of Renaissance Poetics and Modern Criticism', in *Reading Montaigne: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Dikka Berven, 5 vols (London: Routledge, 1995), v, pp. 96–124, particularly pp. 116–18; John O'Neill, *Essaying Montaigne: A Study of the Renaissance Institution of Writing and Reading* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), pp. 69–70.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, 'Les Planches de l'*Encyclopédie*', in '*Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*' suivi de '*Nouveaux essais critiques*' (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 89–104 (p. 103). Further references appear in parentheses in the body text.

³⁰ See on this point the introduction to Mary Franklin Brown's *Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012). As Franklin-Brown puts it, 'the wager [in relation to Wikipedia's accuracy] is that the online community constitutes its own fund of knowledge and that consensus will, eventually, eliminate errors' (p. 1).

³¹ The website for *Textbook Amy Krouse Rosenthal* contains a 'match me' link allowing each reader, if they wish, to sign up to be matched with two other readers so that they can start an email discussion. I was matched, in August 2016, with a female reader in Chicago and a male reader in Toronto. Our discussion did not take off, however. See <<https://www.textbookamykr.com/match-me>> (accessed 28 May 2020). The website also contains resources such as the searchable 'Readers' stories of serendipity', <<https://www.textbookamykr.com/serendipity>> [accessed 28 May 2020].

³² On Barthes and the desire for the novel, see Chapter 5, '*La Préparation du roman: The Novel and the Fragment*', in Lucy O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 163–98.

³³ Illustrations (often engravings) were used by preference in dictionaries such as Larousse even after the development of photography. See Rory Evans's interview with Jeffrey Middleton on the publication of the new *Merriam-Webster*: 'Middleton says the advantage of the pen-and-ink pictures

over photographs is that “you can emphasize certain aspects; you can get closer to the abstraction of what the item is”. Rory Evans, ‘The Way We Live Now. Close Reading: Picturing a New *Webster’s*’, *The New York Times*, 3 August 2003, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/03/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-8-3-03-close-reading-picturing-a-new-webster-s.html>> [accessed 1 June 2020].

³⁴ The final section, ‘Z’, is struck through and empty. A comment could be made about the resonance between this and the title of Barthes’s *S/Z*, a study of a text concerning castration and blankness. That, however, is merely a coincidence – something Krouse Rosenthal demonstrates an inordinate fondness for in her text.

³⁵ The handwritten text on the back flypage of Barthes’s text underlines this forward projection: entitled ‘Et après?’, the fragment is written as dialogue: ‘– Quoi écrire, maintenant? Pourrez-vous encore écrire quelque chose? – On écrit avec son désir, et je n’en finis pas de désirer.’

³⁶ West, ‘Encircling Knowledge’, p. 1333.

³⁷ Meades, *Encyclopaedia of Myself*, p. 92. Another recent example of a memoir which grapples with questions of knowledge and memory in a manner partly indebted to the idea of the encyclopedia (and the abjuring of it) is Brian Blanchfield’s *Proxies: Twenty-Four Attempts Towards a Memoir* (London: Picador, 2017), published in the US under the title *Proxies: Essays Near Knowing. A Reckoning* (New York: Nightboat, 2016).

³⁸ Swigger, ‘Fictional Encyclopedism’, p. 363.

³⁹ Barthes, ‘Les Planches de l’*Encyclopédie*’, p. 233.

⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble: simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens. Notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France, 1976–77*, ed. by Claude Coste (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002), p. 182. On the topic of Barthes’s understanding of encyclopaedism, see O’Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France*, pp. 61–69.

⁴¹ See Yeo, *Encyclopedic Visions*, p. 78, and Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁴² West, ‘Irony’, p. 484.