Augmentation infinie de la mayonnaise: On the New Edition of Roland Barthes's *La Préparation du roman*

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(An earlier version of this essay was edited by Callie Gardner; it is dedicated to their memory.)

Scanning the bookshelves closest to my desk for Roland Barthes's *La Préparation du roman* (full title: *La Préparation du roman I et II. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978-1979 et 1979-1980)*) it takes me a little while to find it. The reason being, I eventually realise: I am looking for a deep red spine. The transcription of lecture and seminar notes was first published in 2003, and formed the basis of my English translation published in 2011. When I think of it, I think of a deep red spine. Then, of the angled paper which forms the cover image: a page, off-white, apparently torn from a ring-bound note book, A4-size, its edge realistically ragged. But I'd shelved it close to the window. Consequently, the spine had been bleached by the sun, turning its original deep red into something closer to mud-pink, the colour of unbaked clay. These visual features of the original edition are relevant because in 2015, in French, an alternative version of Barthes's last lecture course was made available for reading – and the first thing to say about it is that it looks very different. The plain-cover, deep red one was published by Seuil/IMEC as part of the *Traces écrites* series, following soon after the lecture courses *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le Neutre*, which both appeared in 2002. It shares with them a common visual identity (only the spine of the first course is light grey, the second lilac).[1] The three books present as being part of the same project, as indeed they were: forming three volumes of lecture and seminar notes prepared by Barthes between 1976 and 1980 for his just over three years of teaching at the Collège de France. They ask to be read together, to be shelved together. The more recent *nouvelle édition* of the last lecture course, on the other hand (also published by Seuil), is a bit squatter and much thicker.[2] With its full-cover black and white photograph of the author (holding a sheaf of

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papers in one hand and gesticulating with the other, his head turned to an unseen addressee, caught in mid-sentence), in cover design it claims more affinity with the recent Barthes biographies.[3] Indeed, though the full title of the new edition (*La Préparation du roman: Cours au Collège de France 1978-79 et 1979-80*) still references the institutional context, the way it looks and feels suggests that it can, even that it wants to be, read separately from the other teachings, as well as from the previous version; on its own (different) terms.

The 2003 edition of *La Préparation du roman I et II*, published under the general editorship of Éric Marty and the specific editorship of Nathalie Léger, was based on Barthes's written lecture notes, drafted in anticipation of their delivery over two years at the Collège de France. (In her preface to the 2003 edition, Léger describes the blue and black ink of the original manuscripts, the consistency of Barthes's hand-writing, interrupted only by the odd crossing-out; bits of sellotape or stapled attached some additional materials, the places where they were to be included marked by stars in coloured felt-tip.) The new version, also published under the general editorship of Éric Marty, is a transcription by Nathalie Lacroix of the audio recordings of the lectures themselves, which were released by Seuil in CD format in 2004. In his *avant-propos*, translator and novelist Bernard Comment describes the text as 'une retranscription littérale de la parole de Barthes, ensuite allégée de quelques redondances qui auraient par trop alourdi la lecture […]' (p. 8). ['a literal retranscription of Barthes's speech, alleviated of a few redundancies that would have over-burdened the reading […]']. The first edition presented lecture notes drafted ahead of time for a two-part lecture course, interspersed with notes for two seminars; the second, which omits the notes for the seminars but reproduces Léger's footnotes, transcribes, on the basis of the audio recordings, what Barthes actually said before the packed auditorium. A script or score for a performance as distinct from the documentation of said performance; a written prompt for live delivery as distinct from the speech itself; the private preparation for a lecture course as distinct from the transcription of its live, embodied and very public actualization. This basic variance in status between the materials producing the two book-objects is fundamental, and initiates two quite different reading experiences. What is interesting is how all the further decisions regarding the material presentation of these books – size, cover design, paratextual information, even the font choice – play into and play out this difference,

raising important questions about how to approach Barthes's last lecture course: what kind of a thing it is (what kind of writing, what kind of speech, what kind of teaching, what kind of production), especially in relation to the grand category of 'the Novel' that it invokes and, more especially still, in relation to Barthes's own particular (his unrealized, part-realized or exhausted?) novel-writing project.

A crucial feature of the Collège de France lectures is that they are not books. At least in the sense that they were never intended to be books, as Barthes makes clear in the one of the first sessions of the lecture course, and as both Marty and Comment stress in their respective *avant-propos*. It was Barthes's beautiful proposition that some share of a life's activities should be set aside for the ephemeral, for what lives once and then dies. A lecture course, he noted, 'c'est dans mon esprit une production spécifique, ni tout à fait écriture, ni tout à fait parole, marquée par une interlocution implicite (une complicité siliencieuse). C'est quelque chose qui, *ab ovo* […] doit et veut mourir – et ne pas laisser un souvenir plus consistant que la parole' ['To my mind, a lecture is a specific production: not entirely writing nor entirely speech, it's marked by an implicit interlocution (a silent complicity). It's something that, *ab ovo*, must and wants to die – to leave no more substantial a memory than that of speech']. Elaborating: 'Le cours', he said, 'c'est comme une fleur, vous permettez, mais qui va passer.' [The lecture course, if you'll allow me this, is like a flower, but that will fade.'] He noted. He said. This last line is something Barthes did indeed say out loud on December 2, 1978. I can read it on p. 25 of the new 2015 edition (and have spent some time worrying over how one might translate it).[4] In the 2003 preparatory notes, however, the sentence does not appear. The relation between the life-span of a public lecture course and a flower is suggested (on p. 7 of the 2011 translation) but in note-form; it has not yet been expanded, developed, with the addition of a further, spoken (improvised) sentence.

In her introduction to the 2003 edition, Léger describes the experience of attending the course as recalled by those who were there in 1978, 1979 and the early months of 1980: the crowds, the rush for seats the moment the doors opened. Many of those in the auditorium remember how effortlessly Barthes would appear to extemporize, remarking on his capacity to speak live in a regular, steady manner. Few, Léger notes, recall him reading from a manuscript. And yet, she goes on, a comparison between the drafted notes and the audio recordings of the delivered lectures shows that there were in fact very

few variances: Barthes *was* reading aloud. She writes: for the most part 'Barthes lisait, et même scrupuleusement, le manuscript qui est ici transcript et contient donc, *sans restes*, les enjeux du cours' (p. 19). ['Barthes was reading, very scrupulously, the manuscript transcribed here; it therefore contains, *without omission*, the chief concerns of the course.'] Which has to be true; and which, indeed, as the full published transcription of the spoken lectures confirms, is true. Barthes's speech adhered very closely to the progress of his written script: the movement through ideas, in and out of examples, citations and anecdotes, the unfolding of his narrative of the would-be novelist, appealing to the experiences of his writer-heroes, the thinking and setting out of the three trials that he saw lying ahead. Between the lecture notes and the transcription of the lectures themselves, basic material, the ground covered, is approximately the same.

And yet, as the example of the flower also shows, there is difference. At the micro-level of the sentences, there are many subtle differences in the form of small expansions, elaborations, developments. In some places, for instance at the close of the lecture on 'Individuation', there are whole new passages (containing, in my view, new and important thoughts):

> Au fond, ce qu'il y a de très difficile aujourd'hui c'est de tenir un discours vrai, c'est-à-dire un discours qui reproduise clairement les différentes voix dont est fait un sujet, dont est fait le sujet qui parle. C'est un problème pour moi très aigu dans la mesure où je voudrais écrire des textes qui fassent entendre la pluralité, la diversité des sujets qui sont en moi, mais en essayant de le faire, pour des raisons que l'on pourra peut-être analyser un jour ou lors d'une autre digression, je n'arrive pas bien à le faire entendre, et finalement, je produis un tout de même un discours unitaire. Je n'arrive pas à produire un discours dans lequel les autres entendent la pluralité des voix, parce que le pluriel est toujours la chose la plus fatiguante du monde. (p. 106, 2015 edition)

> The fact is, what is of great difficulty today is holding to an authentic discourse, which is to say, a discourse that clearly reproduces the differences which make up a subject, of which a subject is composed. It's a very live problem for me in the sense that I would like to write texts that make the plurality, the diversity of the subjects that are inside me heard, but when I try to achieve this, for reasons that we will perhaps analyse one day or will take the form of another digression, I don't

> manage to truly make them heard, and in the end, the discourse I produce is still a unitary one. I don't manage to produce a discourse in which others hear the plurality of voices, because the plural is always the most tiring thing in the world.

What is more, in the 2015 edition, there are sentences. Unlike the notes *for* the lecture courses, the new edition is made from (it is written entirely in) *full sentences*. What is coded or indicative in the notes (represented by a shorthand of symbols standing in for relations and transitions: < = >/≠) is unpacked, loosened, talked more amply and generously around. The notes propose an analogy between the mobility of lectures and flowers, their comparable impermanence; in the delivered lectures, Barthes expands on the meaning of *Utsuroi* in an additional sentence: 'Et c'est ce moment-là, *Utsuroi*. Les Japonais jouissent de la fleur non pas dans sa beauté immobile, mais dans sa beauté en tant qu'ils y lisent déjà le fait qu'elle va passer' (pp. 30-31, 2015 edition) ['And this is the moment of *Usturoi*. The Japanese take pleasure in the flower, not in its unchanging beauty, but in how they can already discern in it the fact that it will die.']

But in a further *spoken*, not a written sentence. A spoken sentence, improvised in the live moment, as distinct from a composed sentence. If, that is, by *composed* we typically mean in the manner of written composition. For Barthes, a constitutive feature of speech is what he calls its irreversibility. In 'Écrivains, intellectuels, professeurs' (1971), he writes:

> La parole est irréversible, soit: on ne peut *reprendre* un mot, sauf à dire précisément qu'on le reprend. Ici, raturer, c'est ajouter ; si je veux gommer ce que je viens d'annoncer, je ne puis le faire qu'en montrant la gomme elle-même (je dois dire: 'ou plutôt…' 'je me suis mal exprimer…') ; paradoxalement, c'est la parole, éphémère, qui est indélébile, non l'écriture, monumentale.[5]

> Speech is irreversible: a word cannot be retraced except precisely by saying that one retracts it. Here, to cancel is to add; if I want to erase what I have just said, I can do so only by showing the eraser itself (I must say: 'or rather…', 'I expressed myself badly…'); paradoxically, it is ephemeral speech which is indelible, not monumental writing.[6]

The written notes for Part I of *La Préparation du roman I et II* were written at relative speed in the summer of 1978. As Léger's visual description of the manuscript indicates, they were clearly composed: bits were crossed out, new parts were added in slightly later, or moved. However small these revisions, the fact that they were being drafted meant that they could be revised. Perhaps this is just what written composition is: the ever-present possibility, at least prior to the moment of publication, of retraction, reworking, reshaping, removal. The sentences spoken aloud on the basis of that written support, however, could only be tacked together, could only *follow on* from each other, with the only chance of undoing what had just been said being to say more, to add more, and then more – in a linear progression, an ongoing procession of words, something like a continuity, a flow at the level of the sentence (after sentence after sentence), irrespective of the interruptions and digressions and retractions at the level of content. The written-ness (the composed-ness, the fullness of the sentences) of the new edition is striking, and certainly makes for a more consistent, more continuous reading experience. But this, surely, is an intervention. It is the result of the labour of transcription: Nathalie Lacroix's careful decision-making as to how and when one sentence should end and the next one begin. When a breath or a pause counts as a comma and when it should have the value of a full stop: what, strictly speaking, is her own (and not Barthes's) use of *written* punctuation. But what is also of note is how the qualities I want, spontaneously, to associate with the transcription are also the ones that, in the lecture course, Barthes will associate with the novel (what he calls the 'Novel'). For Barthes, to engage with the novel, to try actually writing one – which, after all, is the challenge he sets down for himself in the introduction to the lecture course – would involve making 'a complete break' from earlier writing practices. It would mean a deliberate shift away from his previous practice of the fragment, the shorter forms. Now – or in the projected future – there would be linkage, progression, continuousness, consistency, *flow*. Barthes is always ready to point out that his idea of the novel is a fantasy; like all fantasies, it depends on a standard object. In his case, a necessarily loose and imprecise idea of what a novel is. This is not to say that there are no such things as novels in fragments, discontinuous novels, short novels. But that for Barthes, fresh attention would be paid to the achievements of expansion and duration, to the practices of piecing (holding) together and carrying on. The urgency motivating this major shift in writing practice was, for Barthes, a bereavement, a change in life circumstances: the death of his mother. The

composition-problem he sets himself in the lecture course ('My problem: how to pass from the Notation (of the Present) to the Novel, from a short fragmented form ("notes") to a long, continuous form' [p. 23, 2011 translation]) is a transposition of a life problem. It is presented like this. In the aftermath of such a present-tense loss, such a devastating break, the course initiates a new writing interest into how to keep (a work) going, how to achieve ongoingness; how to carry on.

Like mayonnaise. The making of a novel (in Barthes's fantasy of it) like the making of a mayonnaise. It is an image he repeatedly uses to describe the compositional discoveries of Marcel Proust. In the long process of coming to write *A la recherche du temps perdu*, there was, Barthes maintains, a key moment. A moment – Barthes is aware of but relatively unconcerned by the risks of simplification – linked to Proust's discovery of what Barthes calls *marcottage*, not unrelated to Balzac's use of recurring characters. (*Marcottage* is a horticultural phenomenon whereby a mother-plant throws out a runner that then takes root – or can be encouraged to take root – in the ground, forming a new, connected plant: strawberry plants do this). A date-able moment ('September 1909') when its diverse materials started to *bind*, that is: *to come together.* '*Ça prend*' is the title of an article that Barthes wrote about this in January 1979 for the *Magazine Littéraire*. The wonder of this process. Once it starts to happen (binding, taking), the maker is then in a position to simply *keep on* adding in more material. More oil. Or, as in the case of Proust, more and more *paperoles*.[7]

A lecture course is a specific production. As written notes it is composed and for this reason, at least at while still at the drafting stage, it is open to revision. As continuous, public speech it is both ephemeral and un-retractable. My suggestion is that the *delivered* spoken-aloud lecture course (and therefore its transcription made available in the newest edition) shares qualities with Barthes's fantasy of what a Novel is, and his idea of mayonnaise. But it is worth bearing in mind, I think, that *both* editions of the lecture course are composed from *both* of these things: both are combined from writing and speech (whether in the form of writing written with a future as speech; or of speech based on and returned to writing); or rather, neither is quite one nor the other. For this reason, I am not wholly convinced by one of the claims that Comment makes for the transcription. Because the new edition is a literal transcription of Barthes's speech, he writes:

> On est ainsi au plus près d'une pensée qui se déroule au fil de la voix, et dont le présent volume restitue les inflexions, les hésitations, les précisions et resserrements, les modalisations et précautions, les précisions et affinements, bref, la vie de la parole, la parole vivante. (p. 8)
>
> We are therefore closer to a thinking that unfolds along with the voice; the present volume reinstates its inflections, hesitations, precisions and compactions, its modalisations and precautions, precisions and refinements, in short: the life of the speech, living speech.

The new edition does indeed expand significantly (and, to my mind, wonderfully, engagingly) on the notes in the ways described. But I do not agree with the implication that the transcription introduces ('re-instates'), Barthes's hesitations, inflections, precautions. The notes were written *in view of speech*, that is to say in view of testing Barthes's unprecedented project before its intended audience (the idea, occurring to him suddenly, in a moment of illumination one April afternoon: to combine his teaching requirements at the Collège de France with the project of writing a novel, to somehow make both into the *same literary-pedagogical enterprise* – Would it work? Would they take?).[8] They read to me as characterized even in note-form by tact (a scope for responsivity and adjustment), warmth and the risk of humour (I'm thinking, for instance, of the embedded jokes, drafted ahead of time to be activated before an audience).

A lecture course is a specific production, marked by 'an implicit interlocution': drafting one is a different thing from drafting something else (an article, an essay), just as delivering one on the basis of substantive notes is a different thing from writing the notes themselves. Thinking still of how to make mayonnaise, I would also query Comment's characterization of Barthes's thinking as, in this instance, 'une pensée qui se déroule au fil de la voix' – a thinking that unfolds *with*, *in the same moment as*, *along the thread of* the voice. This seems wrong, for Barthes's live additions could not have happened (or, at least, they did not happen) without the written support, the close and careful structuring (or scoring) of that unfolding. In fact, the new edition makes clear the degree to which Barthes's written notes *did* offer a substantial support, a kind of base mixture that had already to an important extent *taken* to the extent that, when it came to the oral delivery, he was able, if not wholly comfortably – Léger reports also on the embarrassment that

Barthes was observed to have felt in the large-scale amphitheater, speaking before such an ample, anonymous crowd – then at least relatively easily and certainly steadily, to *add in more*.[9]

The transcription of the audio recordings do, however, let us hear Barthes the speaker, the orator, speaking and adjusting to the room, in ways the notes do not. (On January 13, 1979: 'Je voudrais m'excuser, j'ai un petit problème aujourd'hui, c'est que, par la suite d'une rhinite tenace, je suis à peu près sourd. Vous me direz que cela n'a pas d'importance puisque c'est moi qui parle.' ['I'd like to apologise, I have a small issue today, it's that, after a persistent cold, I'm more or less deaf. You'll tell me it's of no consequence since I'm the one speaking.']). But even so, the transcribed voice never feels entirely *detached* from the writing.[10] Just as, reading the 2003 edition of the notes, I can hear in them the anticipation of speech, in the new edition I can read the live voice not as somehow released from the notes that supported it but mixed with it: in both editions, I would suggest, there is both speech and writing (written speech, and spoken, augmented writing) only in different portions; in each of them there is a differently proportioned combining of both.

In her 2012 book on Barthes's Collège de France teachings, Lucy O'Meara writes that over the last fifteen years or so there 'has been a general trend in French publishing […] whereby the pedagogical work of post-war French thinkers in the human sciences has become available on a larger scale'.[11] O'Meara cites, among others, the publications of Collège de France lecture notes by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, of the transcriptions of Michel Foucault's lectures, as well as Jacques Derrida's seminar notes at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales. The 2003 edition was certainly an early contributor to this trend, appearing in the *Traces écrites* collection, an editorial space especially conceived by general editors Thierry Marchaisse and Dominique Séglard to attend to the particular nature of these productions. All of the decisions pertaining to the material presentation of the *Traces écrites* stress the provisional and what O'Meara calls the 'contingent' status of the material: here we have the trace of an oral event that had, at the time of publication, already taken place, not writing in and of and finalized for itself. The cahier-like size of all the books, the wide-margins with margin notes, even the relatively large type-writer style font speak to the suggestion that this is something of quite a different order to, say, *La Chambre claire* (1980). These books contain works in progress, materials that were still being worked on –

they also present as books *to be* worked on by their readers. Readers envisaged as students, coming late to the lectures and seminars: they are (or at least present as) working books, as course books. As Éric Marty explains in his Notice, the editorial strategy for all three of the published courses was to intervene in the manner Barthes wrote his lecture notes as little as possible (hence, all the logical symbols as well as the often telegrammatical quality of the not-quite-sentences). In the places where Barthes's notes were simply too elliptical for a reader to follow, editor Nathalie Léger offered a footnoted clarification, or further elaboration of a point, transcribed from the audio recordings. Clearly, then, the audio recordings were available to the editors at the time of producing the 2003 edition. But the idea of transcribing and publishing the transcriptions then was rejected for reasons that, in Marty's words, 'were furnished by Barthes himself and that pertain to the relation between the spoken and the written; in other words, that touch on the very question of the *ethos* of the work'.[12] To explain further, Marty cites an early text by Barthes on the proposed publication of a round-table discussion:

> It is still possible to hear a writer speak (on the Radio, for example): his breath, the manner of his voice always has something to teach us, but then to convert that speech into writing, as if the order and the nature of languages were of no importance…, is nothing other than to produce a bastard and meaningless writing that possesses neither the arresting distance of the written thing, nor the poetic pressure of the spoken thing. In short, the sole purpose of the round table is to extract the worst of speech from the best of writers: discourse. Now, writing and speech cannot be interchanged and nor can they be conjoined because between them there is quite simply something like a challenge: writing is constituted by a rejection of all other kinds of language.[13]

Marty is careful to note that 'an oral lecture course is not as vacuous as a round-table discussion'. But, he goes on, it does bring with it the risks already invoked above: 'the very fatality of speech: its contingency, its ephemeral and transitory nature, its irreversible continuity […]' (p. x). The order and nature of languages is important: a round table is not a lecture course, and nor is a seminar. Whereas the round-table format, with its demand for the off-the-cuff intelligent remark, may well always increase the chances of the kinds of glib, over-general (the too quick or overly dogmatic, pedantic answers to impossibly over-general questions) that Barthes despairs of in *Le Neutre*, my sense is that,

some twenty years after the essay on round tables was published, Barthes had become invested in the chance of the lecture course being and doing – something different.[14] A workable form in which a personal fantasy could be transmuted into a shared public inquiry, in which the contradiction between the demands of a public teaching appointment and the privately held desire to write a novel might have a chance, if not of being fully resolved, then at least interestingly and provocatively played out. What animates the transcription, I think, is precisely its non-rejection of speech. It is writing (it retains the arresting distance of writing) but it is writing imprinted by the poetic pressure of speech; the two things *have* conjoined here, but in a binding that to my mind manages still to remember rather than collapse the important differences between the order and the nature of languages.

In the *avant-propos* to the new edition, Comment sets out the rationale for going back on that earlier decision and publishing the transcription of the lectures in 2015:

> Une première version de ce cours a été publié il y a une quinzaine d'années, sur la base des notes préparatoires, certes beaucoup plus rédigées qu'on ne l'avait longtemps pensé, mais tout de même elliptiques parfois, et assez abruptes à la lecture… (p. 7)
>
> A first version of this course was published around fifteen years ago, based on preparatory notes that, while far more elaborated than was long believed, are still elliptical at times, and somewhat abrupt to read…[15]

He also writes : '[c]et enseignement d'un intéret majeur, n'a pas encore véritablement trouvé son public' ['this teaching, of major interest, is yet to truly find its readership'] (p. 10). The suggestion being: in its new form, with its different qualities – readability, development, flow – published in a glossier book (black and white, Barthes's name picked out in electric blue) which certainly looks and feels more finished, more achieved, like something closer to a biography, or a novel – the teaching will reach a broader readership than the earlier, more provisional-looking and workbook-like edition ever managed to. The difference in status is supported by decisions at the level of typesetting and layout: the sessions look like chapters now (in fact, we can now read Barthes, in the new edition, calling them chapters: 'Dernier chapitre ou petit chapitre sur le haiku' on p. 175), the print is smaller and denser; even the

footnotes are more discreetly presented on the page. With all this, it might seem that the new edition wants to bring readers somehow closer to – even that it wants to be read as *standing in for* – the novel Barthes planned. Barthes invokes this possibility himself, of course, when he wonders if the novel he is projecting will be exhausted and accomplished by its preparation.[16] (Expanding on this, in the new edition: 'il se pourra que le Roman en reste à sa Préparation – qu'il soit épuisé et accompli par elle. Peut-être ne ferai-je pas de Roman, et ce qui restera, ce sera seulement la Préparation du Roman' (p. 55). ['It is possible that the Novel shall remain at its Preparation – that it'll be exhausted and accomplished by it. Perhaps I won't make a Novel, and what remains will be only the Preparation of / for the Novel'.]) But it is not a claim that Comment is interested in making. If there is a novel to be found in Barthes's oeuvre, he argues, it is elsewhere:

> […] c'est l'écriture du livre sur la photographie, *La Chambre claire*, qui est probablement le roman de Barthes, un roman inouï, totalement novateur […] Barthes emprunte à certains codes du roman (passé simple, marqueurs temporels, dramatisation de la quête et de la découverte) pour en écrire une version magnifiquement réinventée […] Le roman d'inspiration proustienne qui se cherchait au Collège s'est miraculeusement trouvé ailleurs, dans un livre initialement de commande… (pp. 9-10)

> […] it is the writing of the book on photography, *La Chambre Claire*, that is likely to be Barthes's novel, an unprecedented novel, totally innovative […] Barthes is drawing on certain codes of the novel (passé simple, temporal markers, dramatisation of the quest and the discovery) to write a magnificently reinvented version […] The Proust-inspired novel sought at the Collège miraculously presented itself elsewhere, in a book that was originally a commission…

There is, writes O'Meara, 'an endemic strain within the French reception of Barthes which advocates categorizing him as a novelist'. She goes on: 'While it is clear that certain elements of *La Chambre claire* – often referred to as a 'roman' – are indeed novelistic, its innovation inheres precisely in its utilization of "romanesque" elements within theoretical and non-fictional discourse.'[17] Citing a key article by Alec McHoul and David Wills on this bid to canonize Barthes retroactively as a novelist, O'Meara's point is this: to call

La Chambre claire (or *La Préparation du roman*) 'a novel' risks passing too quickly over, or simply dissipating, the productive tension it stages between different orders of discourse.[18] In the case of the lecture course, what is interesting, what is innovative and exciting, is not so much how well it reads as a possible, almost-novel, but the fact that it is, once again, its own specific production. An active effort has been made to treat the form of the lecture course as something different from an occasion for *holding forth*, for lecturing *at* others.[19] As such, *La Préparation du roman* can be read as part of a small, diverse tradition of innovations on the lecture-form (the subject of a recent book by Mary Cappello).[20] It is a project which, in all senses, is still *teaching*. And the point is, writes Comment, the 2015 edition invites readers to 'découvre […], pour la première fois, toute la substance de l'enseignement de Barthes' (p. 8). ['discover […], for the first time, all the substance of Barthes's teaching.']. He goes on: 'L'enrichissement du texte est décisif, et constitue à sa façon un inédit, puisque le volume en est presque doublé. Et la magie opère.' [The enrichment of the text is decisive, and constitutes in its way a whole new publication, since the volume has almost doubled. And there's magic at work.'] (p. 8) Again, the wonder of making mayonnaise: with the slow and steady speaking aloud and talking around of the notes the lecture course doubled in volume. And he's right, I think: such a thing is magic. Reading the new edition is magic: it is impossible not to be captivated and enriched by the expansions to the course. (The reason why the cover of my 2003 edition had a chance to fade is because when I want to consult *La Préparation du roman*, which I often do, I now reach for the 2015 transcription. I always want to know *what more, what else* Barthes said.)

But what, then, of the older one? Is it fair to say that the new edition supplants it? Do we indeed find in the transcription, as Comment put it, 'toute la substance de l'enseignement de Barthes' – rendering the 2003 *Traces écrites* edition obsolete? I would love to see the new edition translated into English, but: no, I don't think so. Crucially, what we don't have in the new edition, what is missing, along with Léger's original editor's introduction and the materials for the seminars, are precisely the notes. We no longer have Barthes's notes *qua* preparatory notes. Which seems to me to be a vital consideration, a vital absence, given Barthes's interest in the note (or notation) as its *own* specific thing. A form different from and perhaps even fundamentally incompatible with 'the long form' (Barthes's alternative name for the novel). The first half of the lecture course consists in a study of haiku.

As much as Barthes was interested in achieving length, in the steadying rhythms of continuity, consistency, and flow, as much as the powerful motivation for and the ambition of the lecture course was phrased in terms of passage (of finding a way *to pass* from one form to the other, from what starts and stops to what carries on), there was a serious and abiding interest in ellipsis, compaction, breaks. In forms that refuse expansion, explanation, elaboration – that *can't* be stretched any further, and that can't simply be connected, because they have already found their mode of being, their proper length, their own necessary, brief, un-extendable durations. The 2015 transcription of the lectures as they were delivered gives the reader *more*. As a reading experience, it is far more sustained. But the notes remain interesting for the reason that they are notes. They provide a sustained example of Barthes's own idiosyncratic practice of notation: his techniques of making provisional records *right now* for a speech still in the future. Reading the two editions of the lecture course together – or, more accurately, skipping from the one to the other and back again – I am struck that while Barthes did indeed speak of *a passage* from 'the short form' to 'the long form', and while the negotiation of such a passage was identified as the whole hinging problem (for Barthes, at a particular juncture of his writing life), length is never presented as the progress out of – that is, the inevitable *telos* of the shorter forms. It is not always achievable. It is not always desirable. Session after session of the first year of the course was devoted to showing how the short forms do their own different, pointed, fleeting, precious things. The 2003 edition of the notes for the lecture course remains important because formally it recognizes this.

Notes

[1] 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); *Le Neutre. Notes de cours au Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Thomas Clerc (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2003); *La Préparation du roman I et II. Notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France 1978-1979 et 1979-1980,* ed. by Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2003).

[2] Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du roman. Cours au Collège de France (1978-1979 et 1979-80)* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

[3] Marie Gil, *Roland Barthes: Au lieu de la vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012) and Tiphaine Samoyault, *Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 2015) – both biographies feature a black and white portrait of Barthes on the cover.

[4] I test out a number of possible translations of this line in *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017).

[5] Roland Barthes, 'Écrivains, intellectuelles, professeurs', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), vol. III, p. 887.

[6] Roland Barthes, 'Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers', in *The Rustle of Language,* trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 309.

[7] Barthes, *La Préparation du roman* (2003 edition), p. 209.

[8] Barthes, *La Préparation du roman* (2015 edition), pp. 26-27.

[9] Barthes, *La Préparation du roman* (2003 edition), p. 19.

[10] Barthes, *La Préparation du roman* (2015 edition), p. 75.

[11] Lucy O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 6.

[12] Éric Marty, 'Foreword', in Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, ed. by Claude Coste, trans. by Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. x.

[13] Barthes, quoted in Marty, 'Foreword', p. x

[14] Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977-1978)*, ed. by Thomas Clerc, trans. by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 109.

[15] On the publication history of the lecture courses, see O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France*, p. 4.

[16] Barthes, *La Préparation du roman* (2003 edition), p. 49.

[17] O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France*, p. 168.

[18] O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France*, p. 168, citing Alec McHoul and David Wills, 'Bar S B R H S Barthes and the Late(r) Barthes Constituting Fragmenting Subjects', *Boundary 2,* 14.1/2 (1985-86): 261-78.
[19] On lecturing at, see the seminar 'Qu'est-ce que tenir un discourse?' ('What is it to Hold Forth?'), which followed the lecture course *How to Live Together*.
[20] Mary Cappello, *Lecture* (Oakland, CA: Transit Books, 2020).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Briggs is a writer, educator and French-to-English translator. She is currently working on *The Long Form*, a book about co-living, enrhythment and the novel, forthcoming with Fitzcarraldo Editions, and a translation of Hélène Bessette's *Lili pleure,* first published in 1953. Previous translations include two volumes of Roland Barthes's lecture notes: *How to Live Together* and *The Preparation of the Novel,* both published by Columbia University Press. She is the author of *This Little Art* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), a long essay on the practice of translation, and the 2021 recipient of a Windham-Campbell prize for non-fiction. She lives and works in Rotterdam, NL, where she runs 'Short Pieces That Move!', a co-reading, co-writing and publishing initiative.

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