

The Work as Will¹

(will to begin)

The Roland Barthes Reading Group

There was the inability to plot—as reader—even a sentence.

‘An event in language is to take one step, and then another.’ I could no longer walk.

When the page is static (not static). Hum.

Is grammar a compass?

Are graphemes?

Read a line then off, tangential, elsewhere, making a note, losing my place.

Preamble

A preliminary or preparatory statement by which someone might make an introduction → leading to an

Outline

Barthes lays out an overview of the beginning of writing a novel. To do this he must first understand the desire to write. ‘I write to satisfy a desire’. And that this desire stems from reading; ‘I write because I have read’. I lose count of the things I have read, but suppose that some of them must have inspired me to write.

A line or set of lines enclosing or indicating the shape of something—a general description showing the essential features, not the detail.

A kind of abstract—a summary that, in all honesty, leaves me temporarily *panic stricken*—unable to classify—to find a phrase, a quote, or poem that might be set at the beginning offering an

Epigraph

A summary of what it is I am trying to evoke—the scent, the odour of something. The panic continues into the

Plan

Of the Work to be written. A detailed proposal for doing or

abstract

(synopsis)

outline underlined

show your edges
reveal the thresholds
trace
a line

=blurb → *classify*
any product

being
unable to classify is
the worst
kind of social unease

panic stricken
does this look right
to you?

what are we doing?

Begin over

achieving something—an intention or decision about what I am going to do.

a) A point of departure →

b) Three chapters, three acts—in my case, three transpositions—‘the obstacles that will have to be overcome’, the knots to be untied.

c) And then, a final suspense rather than conclusion. But how to begin to write a plan when I don’t know how it will turn out, but I do care.

Parabase

The method of exposition—a comprehensive description and explanation of an idea or theory and the action of making something public that, at this moment in time, renders me paralysed.

Polytechnique Presentation – How will I speak—from where? Following Barthes:

‘Unable to classify is *panic stricken*.’ (Where are we?)... and I cannot even type up my notes without straying, ricocheting to a state in which demarcation is subjective, fragile, breaking down when category distance is too narrow, where category loses the solidity of nameable entity, where the ‘interstitial blanks separating all these entities from one another’² (and who the fuck thought I’d ever be quoting Foucault—not me) are the terrifying here-be-monsters of the unmapped where identity crumbles.³

Preamble

He makes a preliminary or preparatory statement; he introduces.

Outline

He shows the main shape or edge of something, without any details.

Epigraph

He selects a short quotation or saying at the beginning of a book or chapter, intended to suggest its theme.

Plan

He produces a diagram or list of steps with details of timing and resources, used to achieve an objective.

Parabase

He makes a direct address to the audience, sung or chanted by the chorus on behalf of the author. He digresses, addressing the reader.

Bibliography

He lists the books referred to in a scholarly work, one that is typically printed as an appendix.

<p>TALLY</p> <p> </p> <p> </p> <p> </p>	<p>→ read them out</p> <p>frequently quoted</p>	<p>Barthes 49</p> <p>Rustle</p> <p>Neutral</p> <p>Novel</p> <p>Lucida</p>
<p>Barad</p> <p>Bergvall</p> <p>Borges</p> <p>Briggs</p>	<p> </p> <p> </p> <p> </p> <p> </p>	<p>Pleasure</p> <p>S/Z</p>
<p>manually counting</p>	<p>mentions in a PDF</p> <p>number of times on a</p>	<p>page</p> <p>Pages</p> <p>in conversation</p>

1. THE DESIRE TO WRITE

Origin and Departure

He is at the point or place where something begins, arises, or is derived, while he leaves, especially to start a journey.

Jubilation

He feels or expresses great happiness and triumph.

bibliographically
referenced

following the gut
versus
a precise
measurement

The Hope of Writing

Hope

He feels expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen.

Voluptia / Pothos

He feels pleasure and longing.

Imitation

He uses someone or something as a model.

Inspiration

He is mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative.

1. A Narcissistic Distortion

The idealised aspects of himself are preserved, and its limitations denied.

He always returns to
inspiration

[...]misrepresentation
story

play
that
harpsichord

sl...ow...ly

press
down with a
hes...it...tation

(Drawing cards from The Papus Tarot)⁴

Preamble

(Ace of Cups)

A very bold colon: an overflowing vessel.

Outline

(Six of Swords)

A meta-text for the purposes of classification that will facilitate dissemination and the transfer of that which is classified.

Epigraph

(Queen of Coins)

Bringing the familiar to the far-away. Creating the conditions for memory. Scent.

Plan

(Justice)

A tripartite structure: a point of departure, three trials, suspension.

Parabase

(King of Coins)

The heavy stuff that has been carried for a long time.

1. The desire to write

(Ten of Swords)

A blind subject buried in the imaginary. The death of contingency.

Jubilation

(Two of Swords)

Sets up the dialectic between reading and writing in order to get from one to another.

The hope of writing

(The Hanged Man)

Time stops.

Hope

(Eight of Swords)

In adolescence and the life of the writer 'desire is constantly reborn'. Filipendulous, hope hangs on the end of a string. To write is to want to rewrite.

Volupia / Pothos

(Judgement)

This whole set up of desire fulfilled distinguished from lack must be held to account. The constant setting up of hierarchies and privilege to terms.

He goes on to discuss the type of writing that is inspired by reading; when it is valid or ‘true’, and when it is non-existent. Readers that read for the ‘joy of reading’ (an insipid term), are readers that shall remain readers only. Something more sensual should be experienced from a text that forces the desire to write—‘it caresses me’. The reading of such a text, or this response to the reading of a text produces ‘hope’—and it is this hope that produces writing. ‘To write is to want to re-write.’ I read somewhere once that Hunter S. Thompson taught himself to write by copying out *The Great Gatsby* and *A Farewell to Arms* over and over again. I once copied out *Bartleby, the Scrivener* until the point where Bartleby refuses to copy—‘I would prefer not to’.

2. A Semiotics
He studies signs and symbols and their use or interpretation.
3. A Copy of a Copy
He makes an imitation, transcript, or reproduction of a copied work.
4. An Unconscious Filiation
He relates one thing to another from which it is derived or descended in some respect. It is done or exists without his realising.
5. A Simulation
He imitates a situation or process; he pretends; he deceives.

The Desire to Write

He longs one day to turn out a book.
Mania
He shows an excessive enthusiasm or desire; an obsession. His mental illness is marked by periods of great excitement or euphoria, delusions, and overactivity.

Think of it like a book or a film—a narrative. I am the narrator—listen to my voice—for twenty hours. The outline, or the ‘blurb’ is a means of *classification*. That we can have such a thing indicates a certain social homogeneity or agreement, the lack thereof would bring unease. This outline for the year-long frontal presentation I have engaged you in lays out ‘preparatory conditions’.

With me, *via* the haiku, you travel from desire to ability—my presentation empowers you.

I insist that you can smell a novel but not a film. Words evoke aroma whereas the visual image fails to do this.

But imitation is not writing—Barthes is clear on this. To imitate a book produces two kinds of writing, both of which are caricatures of real writing—writing proper. Both are found in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, but there is no doubt that Flaubert is not a ‘real’ writer. Flaubert’s *Dictionary of Received Ideas* is assumed to be intended as a second volume to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*:

WRITING—*Currente Calamo*:* that’s the excuse for poor style and faulty grammar.

WRITTEN, WELL-WRITTEN—Words for porters to describe the serialised novels that entertain them.

*With a hasty pen; offhand.⁵

- Imitation
(Nine of Swords)

To get through the door you have to at least pretend to pretend. Enter the space you have constructed. Throw away the mask of perfectionism to combat anxiety, pick it up again to make yourself believe.

- Inspiration
(Five of Cups)

The beloved pretence flows away, out of the vessel, is lost in the ground, new possibilities grow instead. The passage from reading to writing.

The author must possess the desire to write and inhabit it. The author does not create the world: s/he enunciates it. There is a maniacal aspect to writing—it cannot be helped or stopped or postponed—the true author must give in to the desire of it. Anxious=Desirous. Madness drives me to get out my pen in public. I am a man-pen. Flaubert is quoted—‘It is so personal and private, almost like an animal function’. Animal function=base desire, a natural disposition, instinct, an organic function. Can one ever be a true writer without this consuming desire? Can the rest of us only imitate, or simulate? Flaubert, again—‘I write solely for myself as I sleep or smoke’.

1. A narcissistic distortion
(Eight of Cups)
He says he wants something to happen but he doesn’t want to relinquish control over the desired as object.

I will not attempt to justify this—it is a statement.

2. A semiotics
(Ace of Wands)
Is this why C. K. had to write *I Love Dick*?⁶
‘[...]who counts (or even: who’s loved) [...]’

3. A copy of a copy
(Queen of Wands)
Unlike that copying I criticised before, this one is a real copy. Ardent reiteration. Proust on Balzac’s ekphrasis and proceduralism.

This is how a generative practice is sparked.

Those Who Don’t Write

He has heard it said that he is writing a novel, which isn’t true; if it were, he clearly wouldn’t be in a position to propose a lecture course on its preparation.

Anxious Desire

He remains undecided about his positioning in his own discourse, which demonstrates the necessary interpenetration of theories of alterity with the contradictory subjective and affective desires of the writing self.

Writing as a Tendency

He has long had a taste for discontinuous writing.

Tendency

He has an inclination towards a particular characteristic or type of behaviour.

4. An unconscious filiation
(King of Swords)
Actually, fuck off (with patrilineal recognition by the nuclear family as a metaphor).

5. A simulation
(The Magician)
The mastery of alienation as intra-relation, begets writing, distinguished from mere reading. ‘A step up’: a platform.

The desire to write

(The High Priestess)

To be touched by the hope to write, and live inside writing.

- Mania
(Page of Wands)
Give up not writing, discipline yourself to the demands of the text only (but where does the text end?).
Ardent hero-worship leads to sophomoric bullshit, but it is okay. Publishing is a relief to the writer as it dilutes the intensity.

- Those who don’t write
(The Tower)
‘For me, the opposite of writing would never be a mere contingency.’

Someone you love says they can't imagine something beyond a certain line and you know everything you know is on the wrong side of that line. There are more readers than writers because of unequal power relations.

- Anxious desire
(Seven of Cups)
More marriage shit.

Literature always seems like it is about to wither away, just like the beauty of young girls in bloom or whatever. He's being precious about time, procrastination. Wanting to be a star in a sick machine.

Writing as tendency

(The Wheel of Fortune)

Orientation toward writing. A change of luck.

- Tendency
(Page of Cups)
Learning to be satisfied with writing not as an object but as a fulfilling practice, overflowing.

I hear myself speak
words
tumble
and
clatter

Introduction for a new course, 'The Work as Will' (1979–80).

Suggests the course be thought of as a film or book and supplies the blurb, epigraph, plan, parabase (in which the author speaks directly to the audience), and brief bibliography of 'metaliterature'.

they are broken glass in
my mouth

If he means an epigraph to be associative then I will fail because for me all language is dissociative. My tongue is a stranger to me. I can hear myself speak but it is as if from another room.

There is the parabase by which he means the literature the meta-literature (does he?) and also meant by her, she who translated (did she?) by which I mean *via* trying to understand what they mean a parabase of dreadful wailing as all the books I have not cannot read crack their spines and scream at me.

Exploring the desire to write, offers a series of conceptions, linking reading with writing. Jubilation, hope, inspiration. Across these examples, the position of the lover changes. Describes an embodied desire.

Desire to write =
jubilation

Joy of reading (sex)
*fantasies of
the library*

SATORI! (again)

cf. Neutral

Mania
obsessive tendency
drives
on and on and on

and...and...and

Jubilation: the text one is reading is the lover's, positioned as lover, and describing the necessary particularity in a relation between reading and writing. Reading a particular text produces the desire to write—it is not reading as such.

Hope: the lover formulates a mode of propulsive loss. Not having written it himself, the desired work is lost. Various practices of rewriting, passing through imitations. Rewriting as a process of writing not its desire.

Desire not a subject.

There is the DESIRE TO WRITE (pain)

There is origin and departure by which he means by which I *think* he means the... now I am lost—somewhere between the stasis and the movement I have wandered. By which he means the cause the prod the prompt to write which is also the prompt of reading but which for me is the prompt of *not-being-able-to-read* and which is the prompt that is forgotten that is erased at the moment of departure. Is my departure into writing into language an effort to remember its origin? Do I believe that there was / will be a time when I could speak the language I forget?

Inspiration: the lover defines the dialectical relation between reading and writing. The desired work has to be defined both as writing for oneself and made lover through a process of love. A sign isn't an analogy. I am, not without quotation marks, a semiologist.

Reviews this desire to write again, this time through mania, through those who have no such desire and through anxious desire.

Mania is the excessive desire to write. What remains of this excessive desire is the prospect of being mocked, for minor things—a triviality.

There is the HOPE OF WRITING (despair)

There is hope by which he means by which I think he means—(I cannot answer)

I know that it is at least a plan. To follow this plan you must move from wanting to write to actually writing.

Bibliography of those most frequently quoted authors presented in the form of a list of the books—a *bibliographie*, one might say. A catalogue or record which, like history, constantly changes when viewed in the light of the present. Some remain constant in their presence, while others take a temporary leave of absence only to return again, and again, to the collection of objects—writings around a subject—that lie—in more or less orderly or chaotic fashion—one on top of the other. Or is it alongside?

There is imitation by which he means, by which I think he means that imitation is the beginning of writing emerging from reading. On one point we can come to a temporary, uneasy, and conditional agreement.

The book that has seduced. Perhaps there has been seduction but it is one that is perverse.

I allude to three act structure and conflict in narrative but do not describe it as such. I intend to have a beginning, a middle, and a suspense although I am aware that you do not care and so the suspense element may fall flat.

In keeping with Greek tragedy I will insert a section where I explain myself much as I am doing now. Novels and films do not have bibliographies however my discussion could not do without.

Those who don't write provide the means to open the question of reading which doesn't produce writing.

Through anxious desire, suggests that the desire to write coincides with a decline in literature's reception, positing the desire to write as archaic.

Interruption is not conclusion. Appearance of desire, as retrograde, not unlike all desire.

Ultimately, demonstrates the way in which writing can be detached from reading. The example of Flaubert. Here writing becomes an 'autonomous function', an 'organic function', 'almost an animal function', to be done like smoking or riding a horse. Not not a perversion; not having the ability needed to attain success.

Most used bibliography authors

Perhaps I am behind—ten years. I can reel off authors (alive and dead) I would have referred to. But it is not me that's out of date, it is Criticism. Recently is not equal to retro. I am discussing books here not media and can tell you Theory of Literature (German and U. S. province) is not the same as History of Literature (France). I am discussing literary theory—my own theory that comes from desire.

with eight books

from desire → to fact

I question if I write for moral or social reasons but this is a justification for the impulse I feel. It is difficult to discuss desire as one desire may stand for another. The impulse to write may stem from the 'jubilation' of reading perhaps (don't get me started on origins). I use the term 'intensity', something Deleuze and Guattari use but I do not mention this. Do they make reference to me?

Deleuze + Guattari
 (logic) Thousand (minor)
 Line
 (post-script)

But you have Derrida on
 your side [...]

Do not mistake my jubilation to be anything so banal as a simple 'Joy of Reading' (like a bookshop name). My joy is superior as it is leading me to write. This strikes me with many words that feel electrical. Although I do not put it in these terms, there is a difference between analytical understanding and emotional understanding. The latter underpins my pleasure in certain texts that affect me in a manner that feels personal. Affect. Feel. Desire. Procreate! I am so moved by certain items I have read that I hope to be equal to some sort of response. Talking of hope and adolescence, jubilation (one cannot help but think of masturbation but perhaps that should be kept to oneself). Balzac: 'hope is a memory that desires'. The writing that follows reading, the reading that moves me, is a desire to add myself, to compensate for the fact that what moved me was not from me but from another. I clarify with Latin and Greek (*Voluptas* and *Pothos*) to better understand my desire. This desire can be torment. There is pleasure in just reading (joy of reading = banal) without the torment.

There is the torment of desire, and there is writing that has pitfalls, anxieties to a seemingly existential degree.

Reading and writing together in unison as a circle of creation and procreation. The writer as God, father. Is the desire to write sexual? Masturbation (again?) I must write before I die. I must ward off death. I must make my life meaningful (as others have done for me), to avoid the void.

How do I do it? Copying? No! What I plan is particular and rebellious.

I reference *Boward et Pécuchet*. Imitation. Madness. Jesus Christ! And I am not talking about copying either. Tiresome. I must get to the point (of the pen). I must get on with it but need Inspiration.

I do not mean enthusiasm.

I am not conceited.

I have Amateur's truth. The professional harpsichord was far too fast. My Bach is better as I clearly feel more. Trapdoor. I want something to happen. I want a love affair. I want to be dazzled by my own brilliance. I want it to transform me.

Nietzsche imitated Wagner and Schopenhauer. I should know I am a Nietzschean semiologist. Nietzsche wanted to write—like me. A sign. (I see myself in him? Only up to a point as Lévi-Straussian resemblance.)

Proust gets it.

Proust believes Balzac gets it.

He substitutes one art form for another, one feeling for another. It is always an idea. But what is an idea if not a feeling? A feeling with the capacity for expression or an idea that can be contained in a work. The work as containers for ideas. The idea must come first.

I must feel (ready?).

I desire to write (something) that I must first feel. The feeling of being (a cormorant).

I refer to Rimbaud, a father of the 'modern text', and *matrix* who has influenced writing and writers who are not even aware. The is no original only a stream of influenced material, mutations of what proceeded them.

Under authorisation.

Author.

I desire.

Simulation.

Perhaps a better word for the relation between the book read and the book to be written is:	HOSTILITY	
	in that having read the book I love I now hate it as it is not the book as it might have been written by me	in that it is allegedly difference that produces systems in that reflections

speaking tentatively
into the pixelated fog

wait
for a reply

proliferate
in that I am
thoroughly sick of
the brotherhood of
important men

CAN YOU HEAR
ME?

[...]
connecting
to audio

the smell of dust and
oil
a sewing machine

text(ile)

flickering screen
projections offer the
same scent

There is mania (of which I know something) but by which I think he means obsession—non-pathologised.

There is...

I mean an injection of something by something else. Not to be another but to be other. The (beloved) author has *put something in me*. This new thing (not his dead-end originality) is the strange in me.

A new me or another me.

Other.

From him.

Parent / Father.

Barthes introduces the session by likening its delivery to the treatment for a film or a book outline (which he will narrate). He explains that the session will have an Epigraph (which he insists is a scent); a plan (with prologue, three chapters and a conclusion) and a parabase, that allows interjections on his behalf, as the author.

He goes on to consider the question
'Why do I write?'

and notes that,

'I write because I have read'.

He observes that not *all* readers become writers, however.

Expressing the joy that he experiences from the production of a text, 'a jubilation, an ex-stasy, a mutation, an illumination',

he explains that from a handful of his most beloved texts; ‘Hope to write is born’. This hope also leads Barthes to the desire to rewrite his most beloved texts. The relation between reading and writing for him, is reciprocal, and one of imitation. Two types of imitation are identified as distinct, the first of which is a kind of following of a book in real life.⁶ The second is a more literal kind of copying. The examples Barthes gives are copied by hand, no less, which he equates with an act of love.

I do not mean
imitation
(we’ve been there).

Creative influence as a form of copulation.
Like many other brilliant writers,
I sometimes have to take out my notebook as a matter of urgency;
‘disregarding the protocols of good manners’!
The writer (myself although I describe a third party who desires
to write) is ridiculous. But I love it! Something happens in the act
of writing. We cannot communicate with the desire of another.
Something in the process removes the writer from the work. Like an
outing. An outing of the other.
How can other not be obsessed with writing as I am?
What’s wrong with them! How do they spend their time?
I am uncomprehending.
‘How can anyone be content to read?’
Is this about how we understand the desire of another?

*it’s boring,
it bores me;
you’re boring*

—speak to the audience as the
author

we’re listening [...]

it is just so

[...]

one

sided

STOP

Following this, he explores the relation between the terms *Imitation* and *Inspiration*. Inspiration is defined by a conviction that Barthes writes for himself only, while at the same time making the text Other.

A transformation must occur.

As in a love union, this changes both parties,
what results is a third thing,
a new work.

Filiation

a text never falls far
from the tree

Reading \longleftrightarrow Writing

Using an extract from Proust, Barthes further distinguishes between types of imitation that inform the writing process. What separates inspiration from imitation is a pre-conceived idea that precedes the writing, and this manages to enunciate real-life, in a successful text. The unconscious imitation of an author, he calls filiation.

He notes that the move from pleasure in reading to the act of writing is one place on from imitation; it is simulation. Here, the writer seeks to free an Other within themselves, to find the 'stranger I am to myself'.⁷

'I'll be dealing with this point subjectively. I'll be speaking for myself and not in the place of science, I'll be asking questions of myself.'

The Desire to Write

Origin and Departure

My desire hangs by a thread although I cling to it for fear of letting go. Why do I write? What desire do I want to satisfy? Is it a desire that originates in an ethical attitude, or just to please myself?

Jubilation

There is no jubilation or joy in what I currently write (with the exception of this), yet I continue to write—to attempt to articulate my thoughts—because I want to say something. Perhaps I have something to say?

The Hope of Writing

Hope

Of keeping something alive. In order to keep it alive I have to remake it—to make is to want to remake. 'To write is to want to rewrite', but to what end?

Voluptia / Pothos

'Poignant desire for the absent thing.'

An anxiety of producing—an anxiety, not anxiety, and yet one appears to produce the other. 'Reading and writing: they each start the other off.'

Imitation

A thing intended to simulate or copy something else. Who am I imitating—copying—using as a model?

Inspiration

Who has inspired me—stimulated me to do or feel something—to do something creative?

Flaubert cursed the damned obsession profession. Kafka was afraid. Is writing a withering away? An approach to death? The legacy? Is the fear of writing the fear of being rubbish right there in front of you as though it defines you? Undeniable rubbish on the page that is all that's come out of you after all this desire and anguish... this rubbish. The stark fear of facing your own failure absolutely and alone is enough to stop anyone writing.

Imitation
apply / copy
realise the book
pastiche as metaphoric
copying out

Barthes identifies a type of mania in writers, when they are compelled to interrupt ordinary life in order to capture their desire on paper. Some of this desire must be mediated, however, in order for a manuscript to made palatable to the reader. It is almost too much, in translation. Barthes marvels at those who manage everyday life without writing—those who remain readers only. He lists the anxieties around writing voiced by his favoured authors; Flaubert, Kafka, and Proust, who are tormented by writing/not writing. He wonders if there is something archaic about his desire to write.

what of the modern
scriptor?

There is inevitably a

1. Narcissistic Distortion

'For the other's work to pass in me I have to define it within myself' rendering us both altered—distorted through the process.

What I desire is for something to happen—for a new work to be *inspired* by the old.

2. *A semiotics*

Interpretation of signs—to find the author who is present to me as the person who wants to write, as a *sign* of myself. 'Not an analogy—yet still a relation of differences that resemble one another.'

3. A copy of a copy?

Surely there is always

4. Unconscious filiation

'There's no such thing as spontaneous generation; and yet', they come from somewhere, '*authorised* by the writing mutations that preceded them.'

5. *A simulation* of something—someone—perhaps? Who is it I want to liberate from within myself? Will I be able to draw out what is in me that is *different* from myself—'the stranger I am to myself'?

imitation is the
sincerest form of flattery

The Desire to Write

And there I have it—the subject who is first touched by, fascinated by, the hope of writing

STOP

brought alive again through inhabiting Roland Barthes for a moment.

I can't be bothered to trawl through Freud but he talked about something once, to do with sex. Greek gay sex. Hmm. Libidinal energy? Is my desire to write masking a desire to fuck that would likewise leave me naked in my self-judgement? Catharsis.

I am inclined to stop here as I feel my *anxious desire* threatening to interrupt in passing from the 'desire to write to the work: a whole series of *operations*: organization (= protection) of the hours in the day, planning, overcoming difficulties, doubts, stallings' (cf. my thesis). I cannot ignore it—how powerful 'it' is, it being the 'sometimes painful, sometimes vertiginous confrontation between my desire to write [...] and the sociocultural mechanism that it must be integrated into'.

I see a move from a desire to write 'something / something specific, to a desire to write something / anything'.

Does this mean I have moved away from the point of impulse in response to reading?

Since I started being a writer—that is having the desire to write—note book obsession—I must write—because I am a writer—it is a physiological need—like smoking—on my own. Horseback.

Although he is unable to reference the essay specifically, Barthes refers to Freud's writing on sexuality and transposes these ideas onto the act of writing. Barthes posits the activity of writing as a need, akin to the needs of the body, and these are independent of any external markers of success, such as publication.

stuttering
error as a glitch

And so, we see—the object of writing (the Novel) disappear.

break
information

begin over [...]

How can anyone be
content [...] ?



A Collective Bibliography of the Most Frequently Quoted Authors, Compiled by the Contributors.

BENJAMIN

—, (1934) *Berlin Childhood Around 1900: Hope in the Past*, trans. by Howard Eiland, Harvard University Press, 2006.

DELLUC

—, (1923) ‘Le Silence’, in *Écrits cinématographiques III: Dramas de Cinéma, scénarios et projets de films*, Cinémathèque Française Cahiers du Cinéma, 1990.

DERRIDA

—, (1993) *Specters of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, 1994.

DIDI-HUBERMAN

—, (2011) *Bark*, trans. by Samuel E. Martin, The MIT Press, 2017.

MOBERLEY & JOURDAIN

—, *Ghosts of the Trianon*, self-published, 2016.

SHAH

—, *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*, Octagon Press, 1989.

TOWNSEND

—, *Creative States of Mind: Psychoanalysis and the Artist's Process*, Routledge, 2019.

WITTIG

—, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, 1992.

WOOD

—, *Without Mastery: Reading and Other Forces*, Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Notes.

1. All quotations and references that go unnoted throughout this text belong to, or have been appropriated, borrowed, and paraphrased from:

Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978–1979 and 1979–1980)*, trans. by Kate Briggs, ed. by Nathalie Léger, NYC: Columbia University Press, 2010 [*La préparation du roman. I et II, Cours et séminaires au Collège de France, 1978–1979 et 1979–1980*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995].

2. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, p. xvii [*Les Mots et les Choses*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966].

3. This paragraph is drawn, in part, from Emma Bolland, ‘Category Error / Category Terror’, in *The Blue Notebook*, Volume 11, Number 1, Autumn Winter 2016, pp. 45–53.

4. Gerard Encausse, *The Papus Tarot*, U. S. Games Systems, 1982 [Papus, 1909].

5. Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, trans. & ed. by Gregory Norminton, London: One World Classics, 2010 [*Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, 1913].

6. Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*, Cambridge MA: Semiotext(e), 1997.

7. For a re-treading of Walter Benjamin’s *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, see Helen Clarke, *Echoes from a Berlin Childhood*, Sheffield: Gordian Projects, 2016.

8. Compare with Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

The Work as Will¹
(will to begin)

A Response to our Reviewer

'What does it mean to study Barthes, what forms should or could such study take, under what conditions, for what purpose, and with a view to what ends? [...] It seems important to know—I would like to know—whether or not this happened in an institutional setting, for example. I would like to know how the group took shape, what the "hope" was (since hope is such a crucial term in the piece), the degree to which it was formulated collectively (a collective hope?), independently (personal writing ambitions?) and / or under pressure from the institution (in view of a grade? course credit? as a companion process to another kind of practice?) [...] Then there is the further question of what it is to publish a record of someone else's study (which is perhaps one definition of what writing is?): what hopes do the group have for the new reader's experience?'

*images or constructions
that offer a hook for
language*

*The shape of something
that has a consistent core
yet fluctuates in dimension
and state over time*

A collective reading is in itself a Work of Will in that the tension of Barthes's text is variously calibrated, pulled by and between voices.

The Roland Barthes Reading Group has a staggered membership, with some, like me, joining after the reading of the book was already in progress. The framing of the group's origin exists before the furtive and hurried reading I did to catch up to the point at which I entered.

Upon commencing our reading of *The Preparation of the Novel* I am not sure any of us expected it to endure as long as it has. Though all readers and writers, our collective hopes for this undertaking seemed, at the beginning, unclear, if not unknown, yet the book has sustained us for five years.

The group has shifted, changing members and focus over the years, with Sharon Kivland as its constant. This is the nature of part-time Ph.D. research. Originally the group brought chosen texts to share and discuss with the group in the hope of finding connections with each other's research.

We read together in the context of Sheffield Hallam's art and design research community, specifically as Ph.D. students studying with Sharon Kivland. Much of the work we do as a group feeds back into our individual research practices, but we are not assessed in any formal way.

*affective response to a
moment in the text—how
we use texts to work for us*

*what does it mean to
set aside what I think I
know?—to inhabit in
order to translate—to find
oneself in a text, the body
of which disappears*

Reading Barthes—speaking about writing, no, planning to write—
informs our thinking about what constitutes reading, writing, reading
about writing, writing about reading, and doing so collaboratively.

My memory might betray me, but I believe we didn't start at the
beginning of the book or with the intention of reading it all, but
something in the session of December 9, 1978 caught, and as
practice-based researchers, we all brought a work in response to
a hook in the text. After that we just kept reading and the group
became entwined with *The Preparation of the Novel*.

Of course, it happened in an institution, but it is a parasite therein.
No-one wanted it, no-one asked for it, they got it all the same. It is
what I do. I decided, I make them do it, and sometimes they do not.
They think it is collective, and I let them think this.

To have one's individual will (the work of initially individual writing),
'undone' in the cutting, stitching, shaping of a collective text is not
the removal of will. It is not the removal of the capacity to be willing.
The collective reading of one text and the production of another
refashions 'wilful' as 'full-of-will'. In this way, our writing follows the
stitching and reshaping that frames our reading.

Exit from the group is not aligned with individual institutional
timelines. Members of the group stay on after they have completed
their Ph.D. Convened by Sharon Kivland, this has always been extra
and in excess of the institutional frame and exists for those of us who
are supervised by Sharon. The position of the lover changes, moving
slowly, the physical location of the lover and thought of who the
lover is. I wouldn't say this is a form of hope, or the ability needed to
attain success in love. Sharon, Rachel, and Louise have administered,
edited, and proofed, doing the work of making the text, which is
compiled from individual readings, into a published commentary
from the Roland Barthes Reading Group on this particular chapter
that we read and talked about together.

The group functions both inside and outside the university institution;
our members have done, or are doing, a Ph.D. at Sheffield Hallam
University, and the group is convened by Sharon Kivland, Reader
in Fine Art, and doctoral supervisor to us all. In 2018 we were
awarded funding as a university 'Guild', after successfully arguing
the pedagogic potential of such a model of rigorous reading in any
academic discipline.

When I joined, the group had already begun so I cannot speak to its
original hope beyond the fact that I read the book to catch up with
my colleagues so fast that I can very much be said to have only

	Perhaps we create our own institution	
	as companion to another,	
	through which a space for writing emerges.	

really begun it in the middle. I look forward to re-reading what I read so hastily to catch up, after the group has come to an end.

The text in question carries our voices in unison across the page and digital space—a rustle of language, as Barthes might say—and it felt necessary to materialise the physical nature of these spaces as the site of our overlapping voices as part of the editorial role.

It seems that in preparing there may be a hope of finishing and not finishing: community is precious and it is hard to let go.

I cannot answer on behalf of the group, but I can say what I hope for the new reader's experience, when reading our text. I hope the new reader can hear our voices when they read our text. I hope they can hear our thoughts as we navigate Barthes's text, because our individual voices interrupt the text, as their own will do.

When reading Roland Barthes in the future, I will likely always feel that these friends are reading it with me. As for the hope of the reader, who may come to read this piece-read-writing, that might be anything from everything to nothing to do with those of us who wrote it—but I have come to think of this, and other collaborative efforts by the reading group, as kaleidoscopic projections, that transmute Barthes's work into new formations and formulations,

*what does the other want
of me?
the minute I underline
something I give it
meaning—experimental
work*

*a remaking—to determine
not to read something
except through accounts*

*a moment when the
attention is seized*

patterns that break open and reconfigure, I hope allowing the reader space to prepare and make ready, inviting an attitude of care and courage in response to Barthes—or any text.

Our publications, however, respond to no institutional pressure or requirement. Barthes suggests that to write, to be a writer, ‘the work must be endowed with Proof’, and further, that this ‘Proof can’t be in the detail [...]; it must be in the total’. This work, and works such as this, are our Proof. A proof that we have read, that we have tried to understand, and that though individually our attempts to understand the words of another may differ, collectively our hope to understand unites us.

What the new reader sees/hears (I hope) is the structure provided for us by Sharon. The structure that framed our voices, and in doing so, showed us the work of collaboration: in writing; in reading; in our individual and collaborative practices. We hear Barthes’s lectures through Kate Briggs’s translation. We also hear them through each other’s writing, scholarship, and friendship. We cherish Barthes’s asides—as they are beginnings.

Sometimes it is, despite me. They think they resist, but for that to be effective, I would have to insist more, say, about not attending. Some may use it independently, speaking over me, but I do not mind that at all. There is no pressure from any other institution, other than that of the superego, with all its attendant prohibitions and inhibitions. It carries no credit, no grade. The only expectation comes from me, and they must assume that I care.

Our reading of Barthes—alone, aloud, silently, together—has generated individual and collective writing about what it is to read, write, and research.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Roland Barthes Reading Group has been parsing Roland Barthes's *The Preparation of the Novel* for four years. His is a text in which the novel is never quite begun; or rather in which the *conditions* for beginning *repeatedly start* to be laid out. Beginning as iteration, as preparation, as speculation. Beginnings—multiple—as metaphors for the work not yet done. Our stuttering synopsis of the chapter 'Session of December 1, 1979' collates our notations, our 'minimal acts of writing' in which we promise, soon, to start.

The members of the group participating here are:

Emma Bolland, Julia Calver, Helen Clarke, Louise Finney, Suzannah Gent, Sharon Kivland, Debbie Michaels, Hestia Peppé, and Rachel Smith.

The group has also included: Daniela Cascella, Bryan Eccleshall, Emma O'Connor, Bernadette O'Toole, Rachel Taylor.

The Roland Barthes Reading Group publications:

— *The Desire for Haiku: Reading Roland Barthes, The Preparation of the Novel*. ed. by Sharon Kivland, London: MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2018

— *Roland Barthes's Party*, ed. by Sharon Kivland, London: MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2020

— *Setting a Bell Ringing: After an Unmaster Class with Anne Boyer*, ed. by Sharon Kivland, London: MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2021

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