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ROLAND BARTHES

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of Language

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A Note from the French Editor

The number of texts (the notion of counting would have amused him) written by Roland Barthes since 1964 (when *Critical Essays* appeared in France) is remarkable: 152 articles, 55 prefaces and contributions to miscellanies, 11 books. Throughout, as in the texts already published in *New Critical Essays* and *The Responsibility of Forms* (those in the latter devoted to photography, cinema, painting, and music), R.B.'s work was articulated around writing and the sign.

It can be specified on three levels. The semiologist's research, which has oriented several generations: texts still to be collected under the title *The Semiological Adventure*. At the other extreme, a number of writings which no longer interrogate texts but (according to the title R.B. gave one of them) *incidents* of everyday life; these pages will constitute another—brief—book.

Between these two types of textuality, *The Rustle of Language*: almost all the essays in this collection deal with language and with literary writing, or, better still, with the pleasure owed to the text. It is easy enough to recognize, in the course of these pages, the shifts in concept and procedure which over fifteen years lead to this term *text* and perhaps transcend it, with R.B.'s accession to the method of the fragment and to a project of joining writing ever more emphatically to the body.

François Wahl

To the Seminar

Is this a real site or an imaginary one? Neither. An institution is treated in the utopian mode: I outline a space and call it: *seminar*. It is quite true that the gathering in question is held weekly in Paris, i.e., *here and now*; but these adverbs are also those of fantasy. Thus, no guarantee of reality, but also nothing gratuitous about the anecdote. One might put things differently: that the (real) seminar is for me the object of a (minor) delirium, and that my relations with this object are, literally, *amorous*.

The three spaces

Our gathering is small, to safeguard not its intimacy but its complexity: it is necessary that the crude geometry of big public lectures give way to a subtle topology of corporeal relations, of which knowledge is only the *pre-text*. Thus, three spaces are present in our seminar.

The first is institutional. The institution determines a frequency, a schedule, a site, sometimes a *cursus*. Does it compel us to recognize levels, a hierarchy? Certainly not—at least here; elsewhere, knowledge is cumulative: one knows Hittite *more or less*, one knows demographic science *more or less*. But the text? Does one possess the language of the Text *more or less well*? The seminar—this seminar, ours—is not based on a community of science but on a complicity of language, i.e., of desire. It is a matter of desiring the Text, of putting in circulation a desire for the Text.

The second space is transferential (this word is given with no psychoanalytic rigor). Where is the transferential relation? Classically, it is established between the director (of the seminar)

and its members. Even in this sense, however, this relation is not certain: I do not say what I know, I set forth what I am doing; I am not draped in the interminable discourse of absolute knowledge, I am not lurking in the terrifying silence of the Examiner (every teacher—and this is the vice of the system—is a potential examiner); I am neither a sacred (consecrated) subject nor a buddy, only a manager, an operator, a regulator: the one who gives rules, protocols, not laws. My role (if I have one) is to clear the stage on which horizontal transferences will be established: what matters, in such a seminar (the site of its success), is not the relation of the members to the director but the relation of the members to each other. That is what must be said (as I have learned by dint of discovering the discomfort of overcrowded groups, where each member complained of knowing nobody else): the famous “teaching relation” is not the relation of teacher to taught, but the relation of those taught to each other. The space of the seminar is not Oedipal but Phalansterial, i.e., in a sense, *novelistic* (an offshoot of the novel: in Fourier’s work, *harmonian discourse* ends in *snatches* of a novel: this is the *amorous New World*); the novelistic is neither the false nor the sentimental; it is merely the circulatory space of subtle, flexible desires; within the very artifice of a “sociality” whose opacity is miraculously reduced, it is the web of amorous relations.

The third space is textual: either because the seminar assumes responsibility for producing a text, for writing a book (by a *montage* of writings); or because, on the contrary, it regards its own—non-functional—practice as already constituting a text: the rarest text, one which does not appear in writing. A certain way of being together can fulfill the inscription of significance: there are writers *sans* book (I know some), there are texts which are not products but practices; it might even be said that the “glorious” text will someday be a pure practice.

Of these three spaces, none is judged (disparaged, praised), none prevails over its neighbors. Each space is, in its turn, the

supplement, the surprise of the other two, everything is *indirect*. (Orpheus does not turn back to look at his delight; when he turns back, he loses it; if we turn back to look at knowledge, or method, or friendship, or the very theater of our community, this whole plurality vanishes: nothing is left but the institution, or the task, or the psychodrama. *The indirect* is precisely what we walk ahead of without turning back to look back at it.)

As phalanstery, the seminar's work is the *production of differences*.

Difference is not conflict. In these small intellectual spaces, conflict is merely the realistic decor, the crude parody of difference, a phantasmagoria.

Difference means—what? That each relation, gradually (it takes time), is *made original*: discovers the originality of bodies taken one by one, breaks off the reproduction of roles, the repetition of discourses, counters any staging of prestige, of rivalry.

Disappointment

Since this gathering has some relation to gratification [*jouissance*], inevitably it will also be a space of disappointment.

Disappointment sets in at the end of two negations, the second of which does not destroy the first. If I observe that X . . . (teacher, manager, commentator) has not explained to me *why*, *how*, etc., this observation remains acceptable, more or less inconsequential: nothing is separated, because nothing has "set"; but if I intensify the negative moment, I produce the figure of the *climax*, I turn aggressively against an aggressive destiny; I then resort to the formula of disappointment par excellence, the "*not even*" which registers in a single phrase intellectual indignation and sexual fiasco: "X . . . has *not even* told us, explained, shown . . . gratified us." When disappointment is generalized, there is a *chaos* in the gathering.

Morality

Let us speak of *eroticism* wherever desire has an object. Here, the objects are many, flexible, or, better still, *passing*, caught up in a movement of appearance / disappearance: they are fragments of knowledge, dreams of method, snatches of sentences; they are the inflection of a voice, the look of a garment, in short whatever forms the *finery* of a community. This disperses, circulates. Similar perhaps to the mere scent of (say) marijuana, this minor erethism relaxes, releases knowledge, relieves it of its burden of utterances; makes it, precisely, a *speech-act* and functions as the textual guarantee of our work.

All of which is said only because it is usually never said. We start from so far back that it appears incongruous for a site of teaching to have as its function the *consideration* of the bodies represented here; nothing more transgressive than to insist on reading the *corporeal expression* of the group. Put the body back where it has been taken from, and a whole *slippage* of civilization may be perceived: "I consider Greek morality [*might we not say today: Eastern morality?*] as the highest that has ever existed; what proves this to me is that it has taken *corporeal* expression to its zenith. But the morality I am thinking of is the effective morality of the people, not that of the philosophers. With Socrates begins *the decline of morality . . .*" Hatred of all Socratism.

Conversation

Writing supervenes when a certain (contradictory) effect is produced: when the text is both an irrational expenditure and an inflexible reserve—as if, at the extreme term of loss, there still remained, inexhaustibly, something held back with regard to the text to come.

Perhaps Mallarmé suggested such a thing when he proposed that the Book be analogous to a *conversation*. For in conversation there is also a reserve, and this reserve is the body. The body is always the future of what is said "*entre nous*." A few tenths—

the beginning of a dislocation—separate discourse from the body: precisely those three-tenths whose fall defines style, according to the actor Zeami (Japan, fourteenth century): “Move your mind to the ten-tenths, move your body to the seven-tenths.”

Giddiness

The etymology of *giddiness* is uncertain, but it seems to derive from the presence of the *god* in wine. We should not be surprised, then, if the seminar is somewhat “giddy,” too: displaced beyond meaning, beyond the Law, abandoned to a certain minor euphoria, ideas being generated as though by chance, indirectly, from a flexible listening, from a sort of *swing* of the attention (they want to “speak up,” but it is “listening up” which intoxicates, displaces, subverts; it is in listening that the Law’s defect is to be found).

In the seminar, there is nothing to represent, to imitate; “grades,” massive instrument of record, are out of place here; what is recorded, at an unpredictable rhythm, is only whatever traverses our listening, what is generated by a “giddy” listening. “Grades” are detached from knowledge as a model (a thing to copy); what is recorded is writing, not memory; grades are in production, not in representation (*showing the grade*).

Practices

Let us imagine—or remember—three educational practices.

The first is *teaching*. A (previous) knowledge is transmitted by oral or written discourse, swathed in the flux of statements (books, manuals, lectures).

The second is *apprenticeship*. The “master” (no connotation of authority: instead, the reference is Oriental) works *for himself* in the apprentice’s presence; he does not speak, or at least he sustains no discourse; his remarks are purely deictic: “Here,” he says, “I do *this* in order to avoid *that* . . .” A proficiency is

transmitted in silence, a spectacle is put on (that of *praxis*), to which the apprentice, taking the stage, is gradually introduced.

The third is *mothering*. When the child learns to walk, the mother neither speaks nor demonstrates; she does not teach walking, she does not represent it (she does not walk before the child): she supports, encourages, calls (steps back and calls); she incites and surrounds: the child demands the mother and the mother desires the child’s walking . . .

In the seminar (and this is its definition), all teaching is foreclosed: no knowledge is transmitted (but a knowledge can be created), no discourse is sustained (but a text is sought): teaching is *disappointed*. Either someone works, seeks, produces, gathers, writes in the others’ presence; or else all incite each other, call to each other, put into circulation the object to be produced, the procedure to compose, which thus passes from hand to hand, suspended from the thread of desire like the ring in round games.

The chain

At either extremity of the metaphor, two images of the chain: one, abhorred, suggests the assembly line; the other, voluptuous, refers to the Sadean figure, the ring of pleasure. In the alienated chain, *objects are transformed* (an automobile motor), *subjects repeated*: the subject’s repetition is the price of the merchandise produced. In the chain of gratification, of knowledge, the object is indifferent, but the subjects “pass.”

Such would be, more or less, the movement of the seminar: to pass from one chain to the other. Along the first (classical, institutional) chain, knowledge is constituted, increased, assumes the form of a specialty, i.e., of merchandise, while the subjects persist, each in his place (in the place of his origin, of his capacity, of his labor); but along the other chain, the object (the theme, the question), being indirect or insignificant or abandoned, in any case severed from knowledge, is the stake of no pursuit, of no market: non-functional, perverse, it is never

anything but *tossed out, thrown overboard, lost*; during its gradual dispersion, the subjects make desires circulate (in the same way, in round games, the object is to pass the ring, but the goal is to touch each other's hands).

The space of the seminar has its rules (a game always does) but is not regulated; no one in it is the "foreman" of the others, no one is there to supervise, keep accounts, amass; each member, in turn, can become the master of ceremonies; the only distinction is initial—there is only an initiating figure, whose role—it is only a gesture—is to put the ring into circulation. Then the metaphor of the round game ceases to apply; for henceforth it is no longer a chain we are concerned with but an order of ramifications, a tree of desires: an extended, broken chain which Freud has described: "The scenes . . . form, not simple strings as in a pearl necklace, but groups which ramify in the fashion of genealogical trees . . ."

Knowledge, death

In the seminar, what is involved are relations of knowledge and the body. When we say that knowledge must be shared, it is against death that this frontier is traced. *All for all*: let the seminar be that site where the demands of knowledge are geared down, where my body is not obliged each time to begin again the knowledge which has just died in another body (as a student, the only teacher I loved and admired was the Hellenist Paul Mazon; when he died, I never stopped regretting that so much knowledge of the Greek language would vanish with him, that another body should have to begin again the interminable trajectory of grammar, starting from the conjugation of *deiknumi*). Knowledge, like delight, dies with each body. Whence the vital idea of a knowledge which circulates, which "mounts up" through different bodies, outside of books; *learn this for me, I'll learn that for you*: economy of the *turn*, of requital, illustrated by Sade in the order of pleasure ("Now the victim of a particular

moment, my lovely angel, and at the next moment my persecutrix . . .")

How to change hands?

When the "master" shows (or demonstrates) something, he cannot help manifesting a certain superiority (magister: one who is above). This superiority can derive from a status (that of "professor"), from a technical proficiency (for instance, that of a piano teacher), or from an exceptional mastery of the body (in the case of the guru). In any case, the occasion of superiority turns into a relation of superiority. How to stop (deflect) this movement? How to elude mastery?

This question depends on another: What is, in fact, my place in our seminar? Teacher? Technician? Guru? I am none of these. Yet (to deny it would be pure demagoguery) something, which I cannot control (and which is therefore anterior), establishes me as different. Or rather I am the one whose role is the first to *become original* (supposing, as has been said, that in the seminar, a space of differences, each relation tends toward originality). My difference comes from this (and from nothing else): *I have written*. Hence I have some chance of being situated in the field of gratification, not in that of authority.

However, the Law resists, mastery continues to weigh upon me, difference risks being perceived by fits and starts as vaguely repressive: I am the one who talks *more* than the others, I am the one who contains, measures, or retards the irrepressible rise of speech. The personal effort to *change hands* (in this case, speech) cannot overcome the structural situation which here establishes a plus-value of discourse and there, consequently, a ban on gratification. Each time I want to hand the seminar over to the others, it comes back to me: I cannot evade a kind of "presidence," under whose gaze speech is blocked, hampered, embarrassed . . . Therefore, let us risk more: let us write in the present, let us produce in the others' presence and sometimes

with them a book *in process*; let us show ourselves *in the speech-act*.

The man of statements

The Father (let us continue to speculate a little upon this principle of intelligibility) is the Speaker: he who sustains discourse(s) outside of *praxis*, severed from all production; the Father is the Man of statements. Hence, nothing is more transgressive than to surprise the Father in the speech-act; this is to surprise him in intoxication, in gratification, in erection: an intolerable (perhaps *sacred*, in the sense Bataille gave this word) spectacle, which one of the sons attempts to conceal—for otherwise Noah would lose his paternity.

The one who shows, the one who states, the one who shows the statement, is no longer the Father.

To teach

To teach *what occurs only once*—what a contradiction in terms! Is not to teach, invariably, to repeat?

Yet this is what old Michelet believed he had done: "I have always been careful to teach only what I did not know . . . I have transmitted these things as they were then, in my passion—new, lively, blazing (and delightful for me), under love's first spell."

Guelf / Ghibelline

This same Michelet opposed Guelf to Ghibelline. The Guelf is the man of the Law, the man of the Code, the Legist, the Scribe, the Jacobin, the Frenchman (shall we add the Intellectual?). The Ghibelline is the man of the feudal link, of the oath sworn in blood, the man of affective devotion, the German (and also Dante). If we could extend this great symbolics to such minor phenomena, we might say that the seminar has a Ghibelline

orientation, not a Guelf one—implying a superiority of body over law, of contract over code, of text over writing, of speech-act [*énonciation*] over statement [*énoncé*].

Or rather: we must get round this paradigm which Michelet experienced directly—we must rephrase it; we no longer set the dry intelligence in opposition to the warm heart; but we employ the formidable machinery of science, of method, of criticism, in order to express *gently*, *occasionally*, and *somewhere* (these intermittences being the seminar's very justification) what we might call, in antiquated style, the motions of desire. Or again: just as, for Brecht, Reason is never anything but the sum total of reasonable people, for us, seminary people, *research* is never anything but the sum total of people who, in fact, *search* (for themselves?) . . .

Hanging gardens

In the image of the hanging gardens (where in fact does this myth, this image come from?), it is suspension itself which attracts and pleases. A collectivity at peace in a world at war, our seminar is a suspended site; it is held each week, after a fashion, sustained by the world that surrounds it, but also resisting it, gently assuming the immorality of a fissure within the totality which presses in on all sides (rather say: the seminar has its own morality). Such a notion would be scarcely tolerable if one did not grant oneself a momentary right to the non-communication of behavior, of reasons, of responsibilities. In short, in its way, the seminar says *no* to the totality; it achieves, one might say, a *partial utopia* (whence the insistent reference to Fourier).

Yet this suspension is itself historical; it intervenes in a certain apocalypse of culture. The so-called human sciences no longer have much real relation to social *praxis*—except to be identified with and swallowed up by it (as in the case of sociology); and since culture, in its entirety, is no longer sustained by a humanist ideology (or is increasingly reluctant to sustain it), it returns to

our lives only as comedy, farce, masquerade: culture is acceptable, one might say, only *in the second degree*—no longer as a direct value but as an inverted one: kitsch, plagiarism, game, pleasure, shimmer of a parody-language *in which we believe and do not believe* (the characteristic of farce), a fragment of pastiche; we are condemned to the anthology, short of rehearsing a moral philosophy of totality.

To the seminar

To the seminar: this expression must be understood as a locative, as an encomium (like the one the poet von Schober and the composer Schubert addressed "*An die Musik*"), and as a dedication.

L'Arc, 1974

The Indictment Periodically Lodged . . .

The indictment periodically lodged against *intellectuals* (since the Dreyfus Affair, which saw, I believe, the birth of the word and of the notion) is an indictment of magic: the intellectual is treated as a witch doctor might be by a tribe of dealers, businessmen, and jurists: he is the subject who upsets ideological interests. Anti-intellectualism is a historical myth, linked no doubt to the rise of the petite-bourgeoisie. Not long ago, Poujade gave this myth its crudest form ("the fish rots from the head down"). Such an indictment can periodically excite the gallery, like any witch trials; yet its *political* danger must not be overlooked: it is quite simply fascism, whose first objective always and everywhere is to liquidate the intellectual class.

The intellectual's tasks are defined by these very resistances, the site from which they emanate; Brecht formulated them on several occasions: to decompose bourgeois (and petit-bourgeois) ideology, to study the forces which change the world and advance theory. These formulas must of course include many practices of writing and language (since the intellectual is assumed as a being of language, and since language specifically jeopardizes the assurance of a world which arrogantly sets "realities" against "words," as if language were merely the futile decor of humanity's more substantial interests).

The intellectual's historical situation is anything but comfortable, not because of the absurd indictments lodged against him, but because it is a dialectical situation: the intellectual's function is to criticize bourgeois language within the bourgeoisie's very regnum; he must be both an analyst and a utopian, must