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Barthes's Body of Knowledge

Abstract

Roland Barthes invites a reading of his own texts in terms of the same methodologies he employs in his criticism. The «Biographeme»—those few details, preferences, inflections—which Barthes identified in his favorite authors, may be sought in Barthes as well. Barthes's biographeme, for me, consists of a glutinous effect associated with the organs of the mouth and throat as presented in several images, some of which belong to his tutor texts (Poe and Réquichot). An analysis of this biographeme reveals Barthes's strategy for disseminating the subject of knowledge—the author's fantasmatic body—through the signifiers of writing, fusing the heterogeneous singularities of the knower and the object of study. The metaphorical discourse that results opposes normal academic preoccupations in favor of knowledge of/as desire.

Knowledge itself in Barthes becomes a second order signifier caught up in a catachretic process for naming the real. Barthes's procedure for exploring the real affectively, in terms of the body as it is defined in psychoanalysis, imposes on the reader a similar obligation to bring his or her own body into play in the learning experience. Barthes offers a model for a new genre of academic writing, combining science with autobiography, that has important implications for teaching and research in the humanities and social sciences.

Keywords

Roland Barthes, Biographeme, Poe, Réquichot, fantasmatic body, body, catachretic

BARTHES'S BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

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I want to interrogate Roland Barthes's writings with the same question he posed to his «objects» of study. In this way I hope to be able to enter into the new zone of knowledge which he designated—the singular. This zone includes everything that a «positivist» version of knowledge excludes. The most important exclusion of an «objective» science is the subject of the knower. Barthes's principal concern, in the last decade of his career, is with this «subject of knowledge»—the relation of the knower to what is known.

I. The Biographeme.

What interests me about Roland Barthes is why I am interested in him. What is Barthes, for me? This approach to Barthes's knowledge represents the way Barthes, following Nietzsche's lead, posed questions to himself. With this question I would like to determine what there is to be learned from Barthes for me specifically, and, more generally, for a person in my situation (a teacher of the humanities). The «for me» serves to justify what is no doubt a partial reading of Barthes, yet what I am going to describe I will call the «essence» of Barthes.

My point of departure for this reading is a passage from the preface to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, a preface which has itself already been marked as «essential.»' «Were I a writer, and dead, how I would love it if my life, through the pains of some friendly and

detached biographer, were to reduce itself to a few details, a few preferences, a few inflections, let us say: to 'biographemes' whose distinction and mobility might go beyond any fate and come to touch, like Epicurean atoms, some future body, destined to the same dispersion.»⁷ The interest of such an approach to writing Barthes (about Barthes, and in the manner of Barthes) is the inevitably pluralistic results—the predicates that go with the subject «Barthes» will vary according to the lexicon of the reader. When Barthes himself applied the technique to some of his favorite texts, the biographemes that erupted through the conventional surface content included «Sade's white muff, Fourier's flowerpots, Ignatius's Spanish eyes.»

The biographemes of Barthes will consist of elements drawn from the images scattered through his critical writings, images which may or may not be related to the biographical Barthes. In attempting to identify at least one of these biographemes, I will be guided by a question posed by Barthes himself. When one has written a number of books, Barthes asks, «what does one repeat from one text to the next?» (*Prétexte*, 83). He notes that methods and critical procedures are not a source of continuity in a critic's writings, since they are dependent upon, and should arise out of, the particular problem being addressed. In the course of his own career, for example, Barthes worked through a number of tutor systems and authors—existentialism, marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics—finally venturing to write «without support.» Late in his career, that is, Barthes attempted to explore what was his *own*, what repeated in his writings regardless of the system employed or the object of study.

The search for Barthes's biographeme begins by looking away from Barthes's texts, the way «Barthes» turned his glance away from the pages of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*, and from the photographs spread out before him in *La Chambre claire*. This procedure is necessary because the biographeme is the product not of analysis or examination, but of memory.

I call *anamnesis* the action—a mixture of pleasure and effort—performed by the subject in order to recover, without magnifying or sentimentalizing it, a tenuity of memory: it is the haiku itself. The *biographeme* (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*) is nothing but a factitious anamnesis: the one I lend to the other

I love.³

To answer the question—what is Barthes for me?—I have only to consider those elements which survive in my memory, before I consult his texts. What I find in my memory is a kind of collage composed of the following pieces: 1) the evocation of the grain of the voice in terms of an animal (or a human) muzzle—the fleshy, carnal timbre of a vocal writing described at the end of *The Pleasure of the Text*; 2) the «voice of death» scene analyzed by Barthes in his study of Poe's «The Case of M. Valdemar,» the voice being again muscular, viscous, issuing from the body-corpse; 3) the collages by Bernard Réquichot composed from photographs of animals, depicting especially muzzles, tongues, in conglomerations that give a glutinous effect. The biographeme that «arises» out of these sources is an image of an erectile tongue, a tubular esophagus and clacking larynx—in short, the bodily apparatus of speech. The image concerns not the sound of speech, not the phonetic nor phonemic levels, but a throat and tongue at work.

II. Theoretical Art.

What is there to be learned from this biographeme? There are several points with respect to the image that call for comment. The first concerns the fact that Barthes uses images in his critical writing. The second has to do with the fact that two of the sources for the biographeme are not from Barthes directly but from his object of study—Poe and Réquichot. Finally, I will inquire into the specific content of the image itself.

1) Although the biographeme isolates certain «trivial» details, the presence of images in Barthes's writing can hardly be considered trivial. His deliberate use of imagery, ranging from the turnstile in *Mythologies* to the (withheld) photograph of his mother in *La Chambre claire*, is one of the most striking features of Barthes's criticism. That Barthes considers his practice to be a different, even new, kind of criticism may be seen in the explanation which he felt it necessary to provide as recently as the colloquium devoted to his work held at Cerisy-la-Salle (June, 1977). «The major trait of the new intellectual discourse,» he states, «is that it

assumes metaphor,» specifically, the metaphor called catachresis—a manner of speech that produces the effect of metaphor (a common example is «the arm of a chair») although behind the image there is no word in the language with which to denote the referent of the figure. (*Prétexte*, 438-39). Modern intellectual or critical discourse, then, is a kind of poetry, Barthes says, combining images and a denotative void. The new aspect is not the techniques—poets have long exploited imagery, word-play and so forth—but that the techniques of poetry are now appearing in meta-language, in the critical discourse itself. Barthes uses the term «text» to identify this metaphorical approach to commentary, as opposed to «science» which uses definition.⁴

2) It may not be surprising to find that the biographeme of a critic should involve citational elements. What is noteworthy is the special relationship Barthes brings into being between the knower and the thing known. Opposed to the traditional academic or university discourse which applies the laws of mastery through analysis to the signified of the work studied, Barthes advocates a writing which *caresses* its subject matter, which interweaves or braids together several (heterogeneous) texts into a patchwork, thus composing a «writing of readings» (*Prétexte*, 152). The critic in this mode never becomes an «author,» but remains true to his function as a reader even when he writes.

Barthes often complains that French lacks a modality of utterance that could mark this caress, a modality which is neither assertion nor doubt, and which could be pronounced or received «lightly.» Much of his writing is a struggle to supply this lack by inventing a new discourse that allows the critic to come into the vicinity of knowledge in a relationship that is neither ignorance nor domination. Hubert Damisch suggests that Barthes's «light» writing could be classified as *logokleptic* (*Prétexte*, 394), a classification Barthes could accept since he acknowledges being a «thief of language.» The practice Barthes exemplifies, Damisch says, is that of the writer who «catches» language from another text (the way something catches fire, ignites). As Barthes himself describes it, his approach to other texts is esthetic rather than critical. His «constant procedure» is to use a «metaphorical linguistics: not that grammatical concepts seek out images in order to express themselves, but just the contrary, because these concepts come to constitute allegories, a second language, whose abstraction is diverted to fictive ends» (*Barthes*, 124).

Any commentator's speech is animated by what he chooses to write about. The difference here is that Barthes invests the object with sense, rather than deriving sense from the object; he becomes «active,» using the language or concepts of science to carry his desire. One of the consequences of his «allegorical» mode of expression is that he frequently writes prefaces for the works of other authors or artists. The topics he chooses to write about—Erté's (the fashion designer) alphabet made up of women posed as letters, the cookbook by Brillat-Savarin, Arcimboldo's portraits—are in a sense (or function as) intellectual readymades. To take one example, Barthes describes the allegorical method of Arcimboldo as an embodiment of the very process by which language builds meaning through connotation. An Arcimboldo portrait will be composed of various fruits, flowers, vegetables or animals, to produce the signified «head.» But beyond this figurative sense lies a third meaning, an allegory of Summer, or Flora, or Water, and so forth. To this point only the normal phenomenon of connotation is involved. However, «connotation opens a process of meaning; beginning from the allegorical sense, other meanings are possible, not only 'cultural,' these, but arising from movements (attraction or repulsion) of the body. Beyond perception and signification (itself lexical or cultural), develops a whole world of value.»⁵ Inevitably, the value he mentions is that which repeats in the evaluator; for what Barthes finds in Arcimboldo, or rather, what he invests in Arcimboldo, is his own biographeme: «Arcimboldo's heads are monstrous because they return everything, whatever the charm of the allegorical subject (Summer, Spring, Flora, Water) to a malaise of substance: a swarming...a whole larval life, the embroilment of vegetative beings, worms, foetuses, viscera, which are at the limit of life, not yet born, and nevertheless already liable to putrefaction» (*Arcimboldo*, 64-65).

The critical metaphor may have no denoted sense, but it does produce a global meaning which Barthes calls the *signifiance* of the subject who speaks, «his affect, his deep pathos» (*Prétexte*, 439). In other words, Barthes's writing implicates himself as the subject of knowledge, or, to put it another way, Barthes's alternative to the ponderousness of normal academic writing is to interrogate his own pleasure.⁶ The metaphorical discourse that results is one that not only recognizes, but takes pleasure in, the metaphorical nature of language, rather than trying to reduce it to the «propriety» of a science. This «impropriety» is necessary in any case because Bar-

thes addresses a level of reality that exists at the limits of knowledge excluded from the extant codes of both opinion and science. This is the level of the «third meaning»—the obtuse, the oblique, the novelesque, the filmic, the biographeme. He explicitly identifies this zone of knowledge as the existentially unique, the absolutely particular event, which Lacan calls the Real.⁷

As Barthes noted with regard to the catachretic metaphor, the Real is not describable. But it is «theoretically locatable.»⁸ Much of Barthes's work in the last decade of his life consisted of the development of a methodology—a procedure or operation—that would provide access to the «third meaning.» The nature of his procedure is stated in the *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*. In that book, which explores the ancient relationship between loving and knowing, the lover confronts the mystic experience of knowing that (but also what) one does not know—the other: «instead of trying to define the other ('what is he?'), I turn to myself: 'What do I want, wanting to know you?」⁹ The unknown becomes accessible through the language of pleasure, of attraction and repulsion (*especially* repulsion, considering his biographeme).

A major development in this turn to the subject (of knowledge) is the notion of the *punctum* in *La Chambre claire*. Barthes sets out to identify the «ontology» or the essence of photography (remember his taste for doing the unfashionable, or unexpected) by interrogating his own responses to certain photographs. When a photo «stings» him, when he «tilts,» is marked by a wound or lesion, he knows he is in the presence of the Real.

By whatever name Barthes identifies this notion, it represents an alternative to the conception of knowledge that underlies normal academic writing. Indeed, in many respects Barthes's relationship to knowledge is the most innovative, liberating aspect of his criticism. The «third way» he develops to get at the «third meaning» provides an alternative to the choice dividing knowledge into science and art, a hybrid that could be described as «theoretical art.» The primary quality of his approach is its renunciation of the notion of knowledge as a mastery over the object known («truth»), preferring instead to simulate the mode of knowledge contained in literature. Barthes continually is in the process of theorizing this alternative relation to knowledge, with one of the best examples being his inaugural address delivered upon his appointment to the Collège de France. What he describes in the address as the three forces of literature (the kind of knowledge accomodated in

literature broadly defined as the practice of writing)—Mathesis, Mimesis, Semiosis—he puts into practice in his own essays. All three of the forces could be summed up by his phrase, «writing makes knowledge festive.» His is a knowledge that «does not say it knows something, but that it knows *of* something» (Mathesis); writing (text) contains the utopian desire to represent the impossible real, using therefore dramatic rather than epistemological means (Mimesis); and, rather than interpret, writing *plays* with signs, to elude the dogmatism of truth (Semiosis) (*October*, 7). In short, the principal lesson of Barthes's writing may be summarized as the radical introduction of pleasure into the academic discourse.

3) What about the content of the biographeme? Why that particular image? The question has two parts—why that image for Barthes? and why for me? The answer with respect to Barthes is, at one level at least, simple enough, since the image represents what Barthes declared to be the «mana-word» of his entire corpus—*the body* (*Barthes*, 130). The obsessive image of the body which recurs throughout Barthes's texts (signifying the level of «self» which concerns him), may be localized quite specifically in the vocal apparatus that makes speech possible. Once noticed, the biographeme turns up everywhere. That is, it frequently provides the descriptive terms for whatever Barthes is discussing. The use of the voice in *Bunraku*, to give just one example of this thematic, is elaborated openly, Barthes says, «at the level of the internal body, visceral, for which the larynx is the mediating muscle.»¹⁰

During the early stages of his exploration of pleasure, Barthes found the cinema to be the best manifestation of this «grain of the voice» in the contemporary world, particularly the close-up technique (face and throat) which he cited as an image of what he meant by «writing aloud.» Barthes's book on photography, then, is a natural extension of his fascination with the body image. The camera, especially the click of the shutter, had functioned previously for him as an image of the event of meaning (or articulation). The meaning—the zone of knowledge—that interests Barthes is in the neighborhood of haiku, a sheer designation that he compares to «a photograph which one takes very carefully (*à la japonaise*), but while having omitted to put film in the camera» (*Empire*, 113). He noted previously, also, that to grasp the filmic (the obtuse aspect of film) required the study of «stills» (*Image*, 66). Photography is superior to the cinema «still» because of the way in which the pose struck by the person photographed doubles the way the

photographic instant immobilizes the person or object for the eye (*Chambre*, 122). The posed attitude of the body is a central part of Barthes's image which accounts for his interest in the alphabet of women posed as letters drawn by Erté. A pose is found also in the special definition of «figure» used as an organizing device in the *Fragments*. The term is to be understood not in its rhetorical sense, but as «the body's gesture caught in action...what in the straining body can be immobilized» (*Fragments*, 4).

As I mentioned earlier, the referent for these images cannot be denoted, but it can be located theoretically, which is to say «fictively.» The discourse that gives access to the erotic body (as distinct from the physical body) is psychoanalysis. The body, Barthes notes, is the place in which the unconscious is founded.¹⁷ The reality Barthes explores using the unconscious as an instrument of criticism is, as Freud theorized it, a dual phenomenon, containing both life and death drives, both desire and mourning. The body is a place of pain, suffering, and death, as well as of pleasure (a point anyone who considers following Barthes's model must keep in mind). If Barthes's earlier projects tended to favor the life principle, his more recent work deals with the death drive. His «hedonist project» of dealing only with his desire, he says, is too reduced to recognize the universal (essential) nature of photography. «I understood that it was necessary from now on to interrogate the evidence of photography not from the point of view of pleasure, but in relation to what one romantically calls love and death» (*Chambre*, 115). The results of this research carry him away from written texts through the photographic image to the referent, the real itself. The photograph, which Barthes insists functions as an *analogon*, makes possible a «science of the unsayable,» a new realism from which writing is barred by its fundamentally fictional nature (*Chambre*, 134). In the book on love Barthes explained the problem of writing, a feeling of futility because writing «is precisely *there where you are not.*» The word «suffering» expresses no suffering, after all, and therefore compensates for nothing, sublimates nothing (*Fragments*, 98-100). But the photograph carries one to the very root of reality. Hence Barthes shifts his tutor text from the literary to the photographic image.

III. The Sting.

Now I come to the more difficult question—the *for me*. What is Barthes, and his biographeme, for me? Of course, it is a question only if I choose to take Barthes seriously not only as an object of study, but as a model for my own practice (or, as some would have it, if I allow myself to be *taken in* by Barthes, reading «sting» as a ruse). I will in fact attempt only the barest beginning of an answer to the question, while keeping in mind the lightness, the non-assertive quality of Barthes's model (what I have to say should be received in the spirit of that lightness).

First I should clarify what I think Barthes's practice entails for the critic. There is, to begin with, the turn to the real (with a small «r,» because something other than Lacan's theory is at stake), which repeats at another level Barthes's original turn to «himself.» His turn has two implications for me. One is that Barthes's example is there to be built upon, that it is probably not possible to continue working as an *écrivain* (treating language as a transparent medium to be manipulated for the efficient reporting of research results) given the way Barthes (not to mention a number of other contemporary theorists) has undermined the epistemological foundations of traditional critical writing. Barthes mapped out the passage from *écrivain* to *écrivain*, from scholar to writer, which should make it easier for those academics who wish to «write» (to be theoretical artists). He labored his entire career (or played) to free himself from his dependency on the intellectual systems of others and to speak in his own voice (which he discovered to be the voice of the body epitomized by the act of swallowing). To some extent, then, others can begin where he left off—to transform, for better or worse, his experiment into a «normal science.»

At the same time (the second implication), the «origin» of Barthes's discovery must be re-experienced, reactivated by each practitioner. The procedure resists any mechanical, external transmission which «forgets» the initiating insight. Thus, to become a writer is a process, involves a development. One does not begin at the depth Barthes reached in *La Chambre claire* (although one could *simulate* the language used easily enough), which is why I cannot in this paper deal with why I chose to write about Barthes's biographeme rather than something else. The point of these two implications taken together is that other critics need not wait to «earn» the right

to practice the mode of critical pleasure by first doing some «heavy» scholarship. One may begin immediately to «write,» realizing that the requirements of this mode are as rigorous in their own way as those of scholarship. (The fact that I need to say this at all shows how much of a normal critic I am).

Let me consider, then, the lesson of Barthes's turn to himself, which I define as his entry into the real. The lesson is that when I ask what Barthes is for me, I am opening the question Barthes posed to himself—the desire to know how and why a body adhered to a particular idea (*Prétexte*, 301). The question «why Barthes?» opens onto the question of all my choices and interests, onto the realization that all my choices are «interested,» are «investments» and embody projections. If I agree to assume the question I have already begun the experiment Barthes himself undertook. In any case, the question of the subject of knowledge can only be explored meaningfully from my own position. Nor is the answer predetermined, for the question of the subject of knowledge is the question that leads to a «science» of the singular, just the opposite of the monotheism of positivist truth that I absorbed by osmosis throughout my schooling. When I say that the answer is not predetermined I am referring to the feeling I have as I entertain this (entertaining) question that it is a *real* question—I do not already know the answer, not even in the sense of having the rhetorical template with which to fabricate a response. The effect, in short, is of a self-consciousness in which I begin to take note of that which repeats *in me*, rather than in some «object of study»; my interest shifts from other writers' patterns to my own. The first step in this shift is to identify some of the qualities of this pattern, and then to take account of the *punctum* related to academic reading—I will interrogate the central genre of my professional life (academic writing) by identifying a few of those works which are events for me, which sting me into an awareness of reality. I should emphasize that at this stage of my development as writer I am curious about the nature of my intellect. I have nothing to say about love and death.

1) The pattern generated by my writing will not take very long to deal with, given the limited amount of material there is to work with. Nonetheless, enough has been published so that when I list the «figures» upon whose works I have written there forms a definite group of shared characteristics, to the point that one could predict the kind of artists I will most likely choose to work on in the

future. My list of (principal) tutor authors consists of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, D. H. Lawrence, Miguel de Unamuno, and Roland Barthes. The first thing that comes to mind about this group (at least to my mind) is that they are all explicitly «confessional» or at least autobiographical writers. The very fact that I am discussing myself in this article is a symptom of my sympathy for this quality. Another quality shared by the group is «interdisciplinarity.» Each one writes in more than one genre, and cuts across the science-art opposition. In fact, they may all be categorized as «theoretical artists»—they explore the realm of knowledge using the instruments of art, a practice which is inherently anti-specialist. «A writer,» Barthes states, «must have the persistence of the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourses, in a position that is *trivial* in relation to purity of doctrine» (*October*, 9). The recognition of this autobiographical, interdisciplinary pattern raises my practice from contingency to necessity and enables (requires) me to begin practicing what I preach (A Rousseauistic compulsion)—to begin doing what I insist on talking about (I cannot keep insisting that the observer is part of his observation without becoming responsible for my own presence in my writing). Barthes early on marked his desire for authenticity in criticism by declaring that the only valid critical position is one that openly acknowledges its ideological interests (in *Critique et vérité*); later in the same vein he noted that the only way to «comment» on a text is to produce another text.

2) To guide his search for the essence of photography, Barthes used a procedure involving the *punctum*. As I noted earlier, the *punctum* is the sting experienced in the presence of certain photographs, a response of the body to certain details in the pictures, and to a certain experience of time. The effect, Barthes says, often is not felt until later—it remains latent, emerging as an after-effect (the quality of being «unforgettable»). In adapting the *punctum* to help me get the bearings of my intellectual development, then, I will rely upon the same operation of anamnesis associated with the biographeme. The essence I would like to isolate by means of this memory technique pertains to a genre loosely identifiable as academic writing. Keeping in mind that Barthes drew the essence of photography out of a photograph of his mother (and not from a professional or «art» photograph), I will not apologize for the «unrepresentative» nature of the materials that insist in my thoughts. In any case, the four writers I will mention are all

teachers, even academics (with one exception). And, just as Barthes described it, I find that the *punctum* functions by means of the detail. Here, then, are the four «points.»

a) An elephant figurine. According to Book 1 of the published proceedings of Jacques Lacan's seminars, figurines in the shape of elephants were distributed at the conclusion of the final meeting of the group. The figurines serve as a memory vehicle for the theory of language described by Lacan during the seminars. The actions of distributing the figurines summarizes the principal lesson Lacan has for me as a teacher—the need for a more «concrete» presentation of materials in the humanities disciplines. Lacan's use of models from a variety of fields in his discussion of the psyche is an extremely suggestive device. It may be, as Sherry Turkle reported in *Psychoanalytic Politics*, that when Lacan lectured at M.I.T. using blackboard drawings of knots no one understood what he was driving at. And yet, at one level at least, the lesson is clear enough. A metaphor is often described as a knot in language, and, as is well known, Lacan professes that the unconscious is structured like a language, therefore functioning according to the principles of metaphor, metonymy, and so forth. The knots are a metaphor of metaphor to which Lacan must have recourse since, like Barthes, he rejects the possibility of a meta-language. The humanities, for all of the ways they have imitated the sciences, have failed to learn perhaps the most valuable lesson science teaching has for us—to provide in the class room concrete demonstrations and models of what is being abstractly, intellectually, verbally treated. We seem to imagine that our object of study is its own model. But, as Borges pointed out, a map that is on the same scale as the country it depicts is useless.

b) Patience. Also from a set of lectures published in book form, this detail I encountered in Heidegger's *What is called thinking?* I was impressed by the patience with which Heidegger approached his topic—truly an example of «lightness» or of a caressing of the idea. I recall not the passage from Nietzsche which is the object of study, but the statement that the most thought provoking thing is that we are still not thinking. Instead, we are on our way (at least when we are with Heidegger) toward thinking, a journey that the lectures simulate. His gradual, luxurious circling of the problem being posed releases me from the expectation that the starting point of «thought» (research) is to be already thinking, that is, to already «know,» and from the notion that the nature of thinking is to hurry

directly, by the shortest linear (logical) route, to *results* (truth, utility). Heidegger achieves a poetic or aesthetic relationship with ideas. He gives me a taste of a delicious alternative to information, a savouring of a problem. The way he keeps putting off answering the question he has posed exemplifies the digressive technique which Barthes identifies as the technique of subversive teaching. The measure of the truth of Barthes's view is the degree to which the digressive approach violates my students' expectations and assumptions, prompting them to write (whenever I try this technique) on the course evaluation: «hard to take notes from.»

c) A logic textbook. Walter Ong's *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue*, traces the historical context for the appearance in the sixteenth century of Peter Ramus's extraordinarily influential textbook on logic. Ong shows that Ramism emerged out of the necessity in the circumstances of scholastic education to teach the principles of logic to very young pupils, so young that it was not uncommon to have a Master of Arts degree by the age of fifteen. Because the pupils in the Arts course were unprepared for the epistemological and metaphysical complexities of the methods and problems of Scholasticism proper, a textbook was developed for them which taught a quantified logic drastically simplified and systematized. The unintended consequence was that the «short-cuts» were so persuasive that the primer ultimately replaced Scholasticism itself and contributed to the development of modern scientific thinking. In other words, the notion of knowledge that played a major role in the paradigm shift during the Renaissance was shaped by the pedagogical circumstances of the period. Knowledge is based on what it seems expedient or convenient to teach rather than on some abstract correspondence with «truth.» The merger, or rather the priority of pedagogy over philosophy noted in Ong's account provides a subversive lesson about the material (situated) character of knowledge and truth, a lesson that has been taken up in our own time by the French «groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement philosophique» (GREPH). Ong's book provides an historical verification of the contemporary theories of «writing» which stress that no medium (whether a university course, scientific text, television report) is transparent. Every detail of the real, practical conditions in which we teach constitutes knowledge, although, until recently, I tended to consider the institutional circumstances of the teaching situation to be obstacles to real knowledge. The attempt to escape the idealist-

materialist opposition—the traditional scene of the debate about knowledge—is represented in Barthes's pedagogy, a topic which I will treat at another time.

d) A prison library. Malcolm X, whose formal schooling ended after the eighth grade, became an autodidact while in prison, an experience which transformed him from a petty criminal to a political activist. He explains in his autobiography that he discovered the «monstrosity» of black slavery—the full history of this terrible institution—preserved in all its detail in the scholarship written by white intellectuals. The «betrayal of the intellectuals» has nothing to do with their competence or their devotion to truth, but with their indifference to the «fate» of their knowledge. Their betrayal is in their failure to make available—to popularize—the fruits of their research. The major challenge he poses to the academic profession is to find some way to introduce (unpopular) «real knowledge» directly into the popular media. His point finds theoretical support in the work of Jürgen Habermas who stresses the importance of the exchange of real knowledge through the mass media for the survival of democratic society. Bertolt Brecht's ideas—especially his interest in fusing entertainment and learning—have been the point of departure for recent attempts to meet this challenge in the film medium.

IV. For a New Academic Writing.

As Barthes defined it, the *punctum* is a supplement, existing in what I add to the object, the thoughts that arise in association with the object. To be consistent with Barthes's model, I must now go on to draw from these four anamneses a conclusion, however provisional, about the essence of academic writing. I intended by means of the after-effect of the *punctum* to construct an «academeme» of the academic text—writing done by scholars, critics, professors. The four details meet the criterion of the *punctum*—the effect of a sting that leaves a mark in the memory—for, of all the «professional» reading I have done, these four works, and the ideas associated with them, have somehow stayed with me. Surprisingly, all four details, it turns out, are related to a certain theory of teaching, rather than to what might be described as nor-

mal academic research. The evidence of the *punctum* (by virtue of its sheer reality for me) requires me to conclude that the teaching performance is closer to the noema of academic writing than is the genre of «pure» research (which, in the language and literature disciplines usually means a formalist or historical reading of a work of literature in the fine arts sense of the term). My conclusion, inverting the teacher-scholar hierarchy of our profession, echoes, in a sense, Barthes's conclusion that the amateur photographer is closer to the noema of photography than is the professional.

It seems likely that a full realization that the essence of academic writing is the teaching performance could open the way to the development of an alternative means of conducting academic research and communicating the results of this research, an alternative that might substantially alter the concept of academic speculation. And yet the growth of knowledge in the academic disciplines in several key instances—the example of Saussure comes to mind—has been stimulated by the description of non-existent sciences, a fact that encourages me to proceed. Such speculation, in any case, fits nicely within the genre of theoretical art.

At present the humanities disciplines are in a state of transition that is leading them, however gradually, to a complete redefinition, a reapportionment of boundaries. That the question of boundaries is the crucial question is evidenced by the fact that the most controversial philosopher today—Jacques Derrida—is working out a theory of boundaries, borderings, margins, including a theory of translation that concerns the crossing of borders. The consequences of the theories of deconstruction, «écriture,» semiotics, and so forth for academic work are clear, at least in general terms—the dissolution of the boundaries separating the officially recognized educational institution from the culture as a whole: from the mass media and the entertainment industry. In epistemic terms this means that the educational institution is entering the television age. The major adjustment to be made, and made first of all at the level of epistemology, concerns the shift from the book to television as the principal educational medium. It seems likely that the way *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* teach reading will have the same effect on traditional academic knowledge that Ramus's logic text had on Scholasticism. The current mode of most academic teaching exists within the paradigm of the printed book—the mass produced but static, linear book dominates and determines the teaching performance. The availability of printed

books, when they first appeared, drastically altered the Medieval teaching technique, which consisted of dictating from a manuscript. And television will just as drastically alter what currently passes for teaching in the normal classroom.

Under the television episteme, the present hierarchy governing printed article-teaching performance will be inverted. The low professional status of the teaching performance, at least under the present system of values, is due largely to the «unpublishability» of teaching. But television obviously changes the situation with the technology of video tapes. The future of academic writings depends on learning to articulate words with images, verbal with visual knowledge. Roland Barthes, with his metaphorical approach to criticism, holds many clues to what this new academic writing could be like.

Finally, the precritical nature of the points I have presented is all too apparent. I have scarcely engaged the level of pleasure, let alone the levels of love and death. I have not attempted to analyze motives—the desire that guides my choices. Barthes turns to psychoanalysis in order to theorize the desire that underlies intellectual drive. In psychoanalysis, the original theoretical question, the fate of which determines all later questions an individual asks, may be paraphrased as, «Where do I come from?» or, literally, «How are babies made?»—the question of human sexuality. This question, for me, is an allegory of the problem of origins that exists at every level of knowledge. I am not prepared at this point to follow Barthes into psychoanalysis, but I am inclined to ask the question at the social level because I wonder where I come from, intellectually speaking. How did I (how does one) become a «scriptor,» a «writer,» an «intellectual» *in America*? If enough American academics begin to take such a question seriously, that is, to pose it as a part of their professional work, an academic revolution will be underway.

The traditional analytical or descriptive article each of us is trained to produce can still be written, although the struggles to adapt this form to the new theories (structuralist and post-structuralist) seem to me to resemble the efforts of Ptolemaens to appropriate Copernicans. The special logical status of autobiography (special because truth and the real meet in the individual's lived world) makes it the natural genre for the period of transition in which we already find ourselves. Barthes waited until the latter part of his career to give us his «autobiography» (or at

least a critical and theoretical extension of that genre). But the lesson of his career, in the light of our contemporary concern with the problematic nature of the subject of knowledge, is that the «autobiography»—in a form still being worked out—is one of the *first* books an academic worker should write, not the last.

NOTES

1. Hubert Damisch, «La 'prise de langue' et le 'faire signe,'» *Prétexte: Roland Barthes* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 10/18, 1978), p. 395.
2. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), p. 9.
3. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 109.
4. Barthes, «Théorie du texte,» *Encyclopedia Universalis*, vol. 15, p. 1014.
5. Barthes, «Arcimboldo,» in *Arcimboldo* (Milan: Franco-Maria Ricci, 1978), p. 55.
6. Barthes, «Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology,» trans. Richard Howard, *October* 8 (1979); 3.
7. Barthes, *La Chambre claire; Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, Seuil, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1980), p. 13.
8. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 65.
9. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse, Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 135.
10. Barthes, *L'Empire des signes* (Geneva: Skira, 1970), p. 69.
11. Barthes, *Erté*, trans. William Weaver (Parma: Franco-Maria Ricci, 1973), p. 23.