

# THE PREPARATION OF THE NOVEL

**Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège  
de France (1978–1979 and 1979–1980)**

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## THE PREPARATION OF THE NOVEL

### 1. From Life to the Work

*Notes for a Lecture Course at  
the Collège de France (1978–1979)*

## Introduction

## The "Middle" of Life

Subject not to be  
repressed

Each year, when beginning a new course, I think it apt to recall the pedagogical principle stated programmatically in the "Inaugural Lecture": "I sincerely believe that at the origin of teaching such as this we must always locate a fantasy, which can vary from year to year."<sup>1</sup> I'll come back in a moment to the "fantasy" for this year (and I hope for years to come, for this one promises to be, if not tenacious (who can say?), then at least broad in scope (ambitious)). The principle is a general one: the subject is not to be repressed—whatever the risks of subjectivity. I belong to a generation that has suffered too much from the censorship of the subject, whether following the positivist route (the objectivity required by literary history, the triumph of philology) or the Marxist (very important—even if it no longer seems so—in my life) → Better the illusions of subjectivity than the impostures of objectivity. Better the Imaginary of the Subject than its censorship.

Dante, age

Dante: "*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*."<sup>2</sup> Dante was thirty-five. I'm much older and have gone far beyond the mathematical "middle" of my life's journey<sup>3</sup> (and I'm not Dante! Take note: the great writer isn't someone you can compare yourself to but someone whom you can, whom you want to, identify with, to a greater or lesser extent).—But the line, so magnificently *direct*, inaugurates one of the greatest works in the world with a *declaration of subjecthood* (Writer="I do not repress the subject that I am"). → That declaration says: (a) Age is a constituent part of the subject who writes; (b) that midway point clearly isn't mathematical: for who could calculate it in advance? It relates to an event, a moment, a change experienced as meaningful, solemn: a sort of "total" realization of precisely the kind that can determine and consecrate a journey, a peregrination in a new continent (*la selva oscura*),<sup>4</sup> an initiation (there's an initiator: Virgil—we'll have ours). Now, for my part, although I've gone far beyond the arithmetical middle of my life, it's today that I'm experiencing the sensation-certainty of living out the *middle-of-the-journey*, of finding myself at the kind of juncture

### Numbered days

(Proust: "the apogee of the particular")<sup>5</sup> beyond which the waters divide, taking two divergent ways (*côtés*). This occurred under the effect of two "consciousnesses" (self-evident truths) and an event:

1. First, consciousness of this: that, having reached a certain age, our "days are numbered"; counting against the tide, but its irreversible character is still more apparent than in youth. Mortality is not a "natural" feeling (which is why so many people drive headlong into trees, convinced of their immortality). The self-evident truth "I am mortal" comes with age. This reference to age is often taken the wrong way, misunderstood—it's seen as coquetry: "But you're not old!" or the sign of an obsession. The imperious need to fit the work still to be done into the confines of a ready-made box: the last box. Or rather: because the box is outlined, because there's no longer any outside-box → the work you plan to put in it=a sort of solemnity—to look *the use of Time before Death* in the face. Cf. Proust, threatened by illness (*Against Sainte-Beuve*). "Work while you have the light"<sup>6</sup> (probably John 12:35: "The light is among you still, but not for long. Go on your way while you have the light, so that darkness may not overtake you."), which we'll interpret in a secular sense.

### Humdrum

2. Then, consciousness of this: there comes a time when what you've done, written (past labors and practices) looks like repeated material, doomed to repetition, to the lassitude of repetition. "What? From now on until I die I'll be writing articles, preparing my teaching, giving lectures—or, at best, writing books—on subjects, which are all that'll vary (and so little!)" Foreclosure of anything New (=the definition of "Doing Time")? Foreclosure of Adventure (ad-venture: that which *ad-venes*, *befalls me* → Adventure = the exaltation of the subject)? Condemned to repetition? To seeing the future, until death, as *humdrum*? What? When this text, this lecture course is over, there'll be nothing else for it but to start over again, to begin another one?—No, Sisyphus is not happy: he's alienated, not by the futility of his work, but by its *repetition*.

### Bereavement

3. Last, an event, sent by Destiny, can occur to painfully or dramatically mark, cut into, incise, break up that slow running aground, triggering the transformation of that all-too-familiar landscape—what I called the "middle of the journey of life": it is, alas, pain's *asset*. For example: Rancé, a dandy on horseback, rebellious, worldly, returns from his travels to find that his mistress has been decapitated in an accident!: he withdraws from society and founds the Trappist order.<sup>7</sup>—For Proust: the death of his mother (1905), even

if the traumatic action, insofar as it produces an active mutation, occurred later (1909, cf. *infra*).<sup>8</sup>—More recently: Brel, terminally ill, changed his life, his “middle of life,” just a few years before he died<sup>9</sup> → This “apogee of the particular” can be constituted by a cruel and seemingly unique bereavement; to mark the decisive fold: bereavement will be the best of my life, that which divides it irreparably into two halves, *before / after*. Because, whatever the nature of the incident, the middle of my life is nothing other than the moment when one realizes that death is real (to go back to Dante: *The Divine Comedy* is the very *panorama* of that reality).

All of a sudden, then, this self-evident truth presents itself: on the one hand, I have no time left to try out several different lives: I have to choose my last life, my new life, *Vita Nova* (Dante)<sup>10</sup> or *Vita Nuova* (Michelet).<sup>11</sup> And, on the other, I have to get out of this gloomy state of mind that the wearing effects of repetitive work and mourning have disposed me to → This running aground, this slow entrenchment in the quicksand (= which isn’t quick!), this drawn-out death of staying in the same place, this fate that makes it impossible to “enter death alive” can be diagnosed in the following way: a generalized and overwhelming accumulation of “disinvestments,” the inability to invest anew → In the Middle Ages, a word: *acedy*.<sup>12</sup> It can immediately be clarified that, if said and conceived of in a certain way, and despite the overuse of the word, *acedy* (a theme we’ll encounter again) is irreplaceable: the inability to love (someone, other people, the world) → Unhappiness often translates as the impossibility of giving to others.

### To Change

So, to change, that is, to give a content to the “jolt” of the middle of life—that is, in a sense, a life “plan” (a *vita nova*). Now, for someone who writes, who has chosen to write, that is to say, for someone who has *experienced the jouissance, the joy of writing* (not unlike the “first pleasure”), there can be no other *Vita Nova* (or so it seems to me) than the discovery of a new writing practice. Of course, one can imagine changing topic, doctrine, theory, philosophy, method, belief (and some people do: major doctrinal mutations occur as the result of an event, a trauma). But to change ideas is banal; it’s as natural as breathing. To invest / disinvest / reinvest, there you have the very drive of intelligence in that it *desires*; Intelligence (a Proustian notion, what’s more) has no other means of displaying its

*Acedy*

*Intelligence*

Blanchot

Petite bourgeoisie

desire than by bestowing / withdrawing love, because its object isn't a form and therefore isn't fetishizable; even inveterate militants are hard to come by (more and more so): they always get cited as examples ≠ "faith" is different: there are those who turn to it, those who withdraw from it, but, as a general rule, it's tough, because it's linked to death. Therefore, for someone who has written, the domain of the *Vita Nova* can only be that of writing: the discovery of a new writing practice. The New expectation is only this: that the writing practice should *break* with previous intellectual practices; that writing should be detached from the *management* of the earlier movement: the writing subject is under a social pressure to become (to be reduced to) *his own manager*, to manage his work by repeating it: it's this *daily grind* that must be interrupted.

Blanchot (him, once again) describes this change of direction in writing in his own way, one that's both resigned and desperate: "There is a moment in the life of a man—consequently, in the life of men—when everything is completed, the books written, the universe silent, the beings at rest. There is left only the task of announcing it: this is easy. But as this supplementary word threatens to upset the equilibrium—and where to find the force to say it? where to find another place for it?—it is not pronounced, and the task remains unfinished."<sup>13</sup> I have experienced, still recurrently experience, and am sure to experience again, the temptation, or the *image of decision*, that Blanchot describes: last year's course bears the trace of this temptation: the dilection of the Neutral, of the Retreat.<sup>14</sup> Because, faced with the "daily grind" of management, two paths open up before us: (1) either to retreat into silence, rest, retreat ("Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes and the grass grows of its own accord.");<sup>15</sup> (2) or to start walking in another direction, that is, to battle, to invest, to *plant*, with the well-known paradox: "Building a house makes sense, but to start planting at that age is downright odd!"<sup>16</sup> Why? On this level, any explanation of the decision will be vague because we don't know what part is played by the unconscious—or: the true nature of the desire involved. I'll say, in all consciousness: because of a sense of danger → contemporary French society: ideologically, the powerful rise of the petite bourgeoisie: it has taken over, it reigns over the media: what would be required here is an *aesthetic* analysis of the radio, TV, the popular press, to show which implicit values it promotes and which ones it rejects (aristocratic values, as a general rule). Danger that I think has become more apparent in recent times: the corroborating signs of a rise in *anti-intellectualism* (always closely related to rac-

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Neutral

The Course

April 15, 1978

ism, fascism), of attacks on the mass-mediatization of "jargon" (lan- guage), on art-house cinema, etc. → Sense that we have to defend ourselves, that it's a question of survival. Sollers: if he wants to sur- vive, the writer, the intellectual, will have to be ready to administer himself with a dose of paranoia: "No favors!" → The necessity of defending the Artist. (Nietzsche)

So this is the path I've chosen. Before stating what form it will take, how it appears to me, and to you (because this Course, which is just beginning—and that will in theory go on for several years— will be my seasonal traveling companion along this writing path), I should say that the first act of this "adventure" was (and this con- cerns those of you who attended last year): the decision not (or at least not for the moment) to publish the course on the Neutral. Of course, I hesitated—but in the end I gave up the idea for two reasons:

1. On the one hand, I think that part of a life's activity should always be set aside for the Ephemeral: what happens only once and vanishes, it's the necessary share of the Rejected Monument, and therein lies the vocation of the Course (clearly there are some exceptions: Saussure, and even then! the loss didn't matter to him!): to my mind, a lecture is a specific production: not entirely writing nor entirely oration, it's marked by an implicit interlocution (a si- lent complicity). It's something that, *ab ovo*, must, wants to die—to leave no more substantial a memory than of speech → What is pres- ent but *will* nevertheless die: this is the nuance of the Japanese *Ma*, *Utsuroi*,<sup>17</sup> the flower (if I dare flatter myself in this way!) that will wilt.

2. On the other hand, to have published the Course would have been to manage the past. Now, one must move forward, time is pressing (*to write* a course takes up a lot of time); one must *walk* while there's still light, and this Proustian saying is very much like another one from the Gospels (invoked here in a very secular fash- ion): one has to let the dead bury the dead (Matthew 8:21–22). Let the course bury itself—the Neutral *suspend* its expression.

And now, briefly, a little personal anecdote: When was this deci- sion "to change" taken?—April 15, 1978.<sup>18</sup> Casablanca.<sup>19</sup> The slug- gishness of the afternoon. The sky clouds over, a slight chill in the air. A group of us go in two cars to the Waterfall (a pretty little val- ley on the way to Rabat). *The same, uninterrupted* sadness, a kind of listlessness that (since a recent bereavement)<sup>20</sup> bears upon every- thing I do, everything I think (lack of investment). Return, an empty

apartment; a difficult time: the afternoon (I'll speak it of again). Alone, sad → Marinade;<sup>21</sup> I reflect with enough intensity. The beginnings of an idea: something like a "literary" conversion—it's those two very old words that occur to me: to enter into literature, into writing; *to write*, as if I'd never written before: to do only that — First, all of a sudden, the idea of resigning from the Collège in order to settle into a life of writing (for the lecture course often comes into conflict with writing). Then, the idea of investing the Course and Work in the same (literary) enterprise, of putting a stop to the division of the subject, in favor of a single Project, the Grand Project: a joyous image: what if I were to assign myself a single task, such that I'd no longer have to keep up with all the work to be done (lectures, demands, commissions, constraints), and that each moment of my life would henceforth be integrated into the Grand Project? → That April 15: basically a kind of *Satori*, a kind of bedazzlement, analogous to (no matter if the analogy is naive) the sudden realization that Proust's narrator experiences at the end of *Time Regained* (although *his book is already written!*).

### Writing Fantasy

All the same, I don't want to make too much of that April 15!—and so will repeat certain elements of that "decision" in a more detached, theoretical, critical manner.

"To Want-to-Write" {*Vouloir-Écrire*} = attitude, drive, desire, I don't know what: insufficiently studied, defined, situated. This is clearly indicated by the fact that there's no word for this "wanting to"—or, rather, one exists, a delightful exception, but in decadent, late Latin: *scripturire*, used just once (in the fifth century) by Sidoine Apollinaire,<sup>22</sup> the bishop of Clermont-Ferrand who defended Clermont against the Visigoths (major poetic work). What I mean to say is: since a word exists in one language, albeit only once, it is wanting in all the others ( . . . "Fascism" . . . ).<sup>23</sup>

Why? Probably because underrepresented, or perhaps, in a more complex manner, because here the relationship between the drive and the activity is autonymical:<sup>24</sup> wanting-to-write is only a matter of the discourse of someone who has written—or is only received as discourse from someone who has managed to write. To say that you want to write—there, in fact, you have the very material of writing; thus only literary works attest to Wanting-to-Write—not scientific discourses. This could even serve as an apposite definition of writing (of literature) as opposed to Science: an order of knowl-

*Scripturire*

To Want-to-Write  
{*Vouloir-Écrire*}



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edge where the product is indistinguishable from the production, the practice from the drive (and, in that case, belongs to an erotics)—Or, put differently again: *writing* is not fully writing unless there's a renunciation of metalanguage; Wanting-to-Write can only be articulated in the language of Writing: this is the *autonymy* I referred to.

It would be good, one day, to make an inventory of the works in which this Desire-to-Write is explicit (of the *scripturire*): I'm thinking, among others, of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*. I'm thinking—but is that the right word?—of Proust, for the *Scripturire* has its Comprehensive Treatise, its Monument: *In Search of Lost Time*. Proust wrote the epic—as well as the epic of the Desire-to-Write. I'll probably come back to the structure of this epic, for it's a question of a veritable Narrative—the single grand Narrative that *In Search of Lost Time* follows from start to finish—or even of a Myth: a quest, with a series of setbacks, trials (the world, love), which culminates in a final victory. Let's not forget: the *proof* that *In Search of Lost Time* is the narrative of Wanting-to-Write resides in this paradox: the book is supposed to begin at the point when it's already written—brilliant demonstration of the *autonymy* that defines Wanting-to-Write and the Act of Writing. We can go further: all mythical narratives *rehearse* (set to narrative) the idea that death serves some purpose. For Proust: writing serves as a salvation, as a means to vanquish Death: not his own, but the death of loved ones; a way of bearing witness for them, of perpetuating them by drawing them out of non-Memory. Which is why, although there are a great many "characters" in *In Search of Lost Time* (Narrative order), there's only one Figure (who isn't a character): the Mother-Grand-Mother, the one who justifies the writing because the writing justifies her. Proust is a special case in the literary world: a kind of unheroic Hero, in whom *would-be writers* recognize themselves.

## SESSION OF DECEMBER 9, 1978

A lecture isn't a performance, and, as far as possible, you should come here expecting a show that will either enchant or disappoint or even—because such perversity exists!—that will enchant because it disappoints.

There's a "design" (dessein) to this course that I'm trying to keep to and an "outline" (dessin) that I'm trying to fill in, week by week—and perhaps year after year. In the first two sessions (Saturday and today), I want to acknowledge the personal—even fantasmatic—origins of this Course.

Last time I explained that, at a certain point in a life—which gave the mythical name "the middle of the journey"—as a result of certain circumstances, certain devastations, the Desire-to-Write (scripturire) can present itself as the obvious Recourse, the Practice whose fantasmatic force would enable a new beginning, a Nuova.

To continue:

For a long time I thought that there was a Wanting-to-Write in itself: To Write, intransitive verb<sup>1</sup>—now I'm less sure. Perhaps to want to write=to want to write something → To Want-to-Write. Object. There would be *Writing Fantasies*: note the desirous force of the expression, that is to say, think of it on the same footing as so-called sexual fantasies. A sexual fantasy=a scenario with a subject (me) and a typical object (a part of the body, a practice, a situation), where pleasure is produced by that conjunction → Writing Fantasy=me producing a "literary object," that is to say, writing it (here, as always, the fantasy erases the difficulties, the failures), or, rather, being on the point of finishing it. What kind of "object"? Clearly that depends on the subject, on countless individual factors: following a crude typology, it could be a poem, a play, a novel (note that I'm saying: *fantasy* of a poem, *fantasy* of a novel); by the way, just as the sexual fantasy is coded, the fantasy may itself remain *crude*, subject to a very crude typology (literary "genres"); actually a major problem: it depends on the society; USA, gay small ads: an implacable code ("Handsome, Muscular, Affectionate, Versatile, Chubby, etc. ≠ No Fads, Drugs, S/M, Fems.")<sup>2</sup>

Writing Fantasy

Chubby

## Code and Fantasy

→ On the subject of this "scripted" writing fantasy (Poem, Novel), I note:

Code and Fantasy: important problem. A society can be defined by the rigidity of its fantasmatic code; for example, the USA and its sexual world: catalogue of images (Images=consumer objects); code that's all the more apparent in that it bears upon so-called unconventional desires → A key feature of Homosexuality: constant recuperation through an inner code. In a sense, the Code is superior, an extension of the Law: the constraints of the "type" prevail over the Forbidden (we read a second-order, distorted form of the recreated Forbidden). "Subtle," "original" fantasies: can exist, but only in the form of an almost unspeakable marginality; they cannot make themselves heard, other than by entering the literary order=Sade: extremely, persistently aware of this problem; the meticulous elaboration of catalogues of uncoded fantasies (*One Hundred and Twenty Days*) or rather: of variations on fantasies within a strictly coded category (necrophilia, scatophilia, sadism, etc.) → Probably the same dialectic of Code / Message for the Writing Fantasy: in order to function, the fantasy (of a Poem, a Novel) must remain at the level of a crude, coded Image: *the Poem, the Novel* → It's only by coming into conflict with reality (with the reality of poetic, novelistic *practice*) that the fantasy ceases to be a fantasy and attains to the Subtle, the Unprecedented → Proust fantasized the Essay, the Novel (we'll come back to this), but wrote a *Third Form*; in order to begin writing his work, he was obliged to leave the rigidity of the Fantasy behind. The Fantasy as an energy, a motor that gets things going, but what it *then* goes on to produce *in real terms* no longer has to do with the Code.

In this way, the writing fantasy serves as a guide to Writing: the fantasy as initiatory guide (cf. Virgil and Dante).

## The Novel

You'll have grasped—or, rather, as you already know because I've said and written it (Cerisy):<sup>3</sup> that here Wanting-to-Write relates to the Novel, the Form fantasized is that of the Novel → I've even heard it said (the path rumors usually take) that I'm writing one, which isn't true; if it were, I clearly wouldn't be in a position to propose a lecture course on its preparation: writing requires secrecy. No, I'm at the Fantasy-of-the-novel stage, but I've decided to push that fantasy as far as it will go, to the point where: either the desire will fade away, or it will encounter the reality of writing and what gets

Guide, model

To Write a Novel

Epoché

Goldmann

E.U. [Encyclopaedia  
Universalis]

Modern

Science / Techné

written won't be the Fantasized Novel. For the moment, then, we're still at the level of Fantasy—and obviously this completely alters the way in which (the “method” according to which) we can use the word “Novel.”

What I call a Novel is therefore—for the moment—a fantastic object that *doesn't want* to be absorbed by a metalanguage (scientific, historical, sociological) → hence a wild, blind suspension, an *epoché*, of any commentary *on* the Novel in general → no Metanovel, which means:

a. I'll not be discussing, I'll not be taking account of the historical sociology of the Novel, of the “Novel as the destiny of a civilization” (Lukács, Goldmann, Girard)<sup>4</sup> → That the Novel is “the transposition of everyday life in an individualistic society created by market forces to the literary plane” shan't intimidate me. That the mission of the Novel is (has been) to “set a universe of values (love, justice, freedom) and a social system determined by economic laws in opposition to one another,” that the novelistic hero should be “a lucid and blind victim of the antagonism between a *real* story and a true ethics”—I'll not dispute any of this, but the Fantasy shan't be paralyzed by it. The Fantasy = irreducible “remainder” of any meta-novelistic reductivism.

b. Nor shall I let myself be daunted—at least not for the moment (=“Preparation”)—by the question as to whether it's possible to write a novel *today* (that is, in historical and literary terms): novels do get written, of course, but on the one hand they don't sell well (supplanted by “testimonies,” by “studies”), and on the other, truth be told, not one of them (broadly speaking since Proust)<sup>5</sup> seems to have “penetrated,” attained the category of the Great Novel, the novelistic Monument. In the same way, it can be said that: there have been a great many tragedies since Racine and, equally: there haven't been any tragedies since Racine. *Historically*, then, the question: Is the Novel possible today? is legitimate. But, *naively* (the naivety of the Fantasy), I'm not going to ask it of myself. *For the moment*, I shan't think of the Novel—of “my” Novel—*tactically*.

In sum, I'll be proposing (on a provisional, initiatory basis) a distinction between: (1) wanting to know how something is made, *in itself*, on the basis of an essence of knowledge (=Science); (2) wanting to know how something is made with a view to making it again, to producing something of the same order (=Technology);

### Giant, waste Novel

### First Pleasure

here, bizarrely, we'll be setting ourselves a "technical" problem, we'll be regressing from Science to *Techné*.

Replacing "How something is made, with a view to finding out what it is" with "How something is made, with a view to making it again"—the Essence with the Preparation—is linked to an option that's completely antiscientific: in reality, the starting point of the Fantasy isn't the Novel (in general, as a genre) but one or two novels out of thousands. For me, for example: *In Search of Lost Time*, *War and Peace*; but as soon as I start trying to read their other novels (*Jean Santeuil*, *Anna Karenina*) I want to put them down. In sum:

a. The fantasy seizes upon the "Novel unlike any other": the giant Novel, but also the "waste" Novel. As if the unscientific "essence" of the novel (I'll admit: the idea of an unscientific essence is bizarre! Perhaps it's a kind of existential essence? Whatever prompts the exclamation: "That's it!" Cf. *infra*)<sup>6</sup> were to be found in the *denial* of the genre "Novel." This is certainly the case for *In Search of Lost Time* and even for *War and Peace*, that "historical poem"—this enquiry isn't "scientific" because it isn't looking at an *average* of novels (but perhaps: *Scienza Nuova*?<sup>7</sup> not a science of genres, averages, majorities, but of differences?)

b. On the level of the Fantasy, it is as if it were physically impossible to conceive of (to desire) a mediocre work, that is, one that belongs to an "average" → the novels sent to me for review: OK, but why *this particular* story rather than any other? In my view, the most important factor when it comes to *recognizing* a work (which is to say, quite simply and materially, to *reading* it): that it should emit a sense of *necessity*, that it should release us from skepticism: "Why? Why not?" ("Necessity"?—Perhaps what makes meaning proliferate: so that *after* reading is different from before). A curious thing: "blurbs,"<sup>8</sup> by telling the story so emphatically, efface any possibility of it being necessary; never make me want to read the book; they're even a bit off-putting → Rule: never tell the story; story: only to be *written*.)

The Novel Fantasy: starts out from a *few* novels and to that extent rests on (takes as its starting point) something like the First Pleasure (of reading) → and, from our knowledge of erotic pleasure, we recognize the force of that First Pleasure, which traverses a lifetime.

However: the Fantasy (and the fervor of its desire) is called upon to outgrow, to overstep, to sublimate itself → The Dialectic

Eros / Agapé

Novel-Recourse

Sovereign Good

Act of Love

Whom you love

To embrace the world

Gardet

Mysticism, 9

of Desire and Love, of *Eros* and *Agapé* (very familiar to the Mystics; Dionysius the Areopagite). The wounds of Desire can be healed, transcended by the idea of "writing a Novel," of moving beyond the contingencies of failure in the undertaking of a great task, a General Desire, whose object is the whole world. Novel: sort of grand Recourse → the feeling of not belonging anywhere. Would writing be my only *homeland* then? Novel (as something "to get done, to be written," *agendum*): emerges as the Sovereign Good (Saint Augustine, Dante: *Il Sommo Bene*, Saint Thomas, then psychoanalysis).

Thus, in a sense, the Novel is fantasized as an "act of love" (the expression is unfortunate, it leaves me open to accusations of sentimentality and triteness, but it's the only one we have; after all, we have to accept language's limitations). It's not (not any longer) a question of an amorous love, but an *Agapé*-love (even if there's a constant remainder of *Eros*). An amorous love = to speak of yourself in love = lyrical; while *Agapé*-Love: to speak of the people you love (Novel). Indeed:

a. "To say *whom you love*." To love + to write = to do justice to those whom you've known and loved: to testify for them (in the religious sense), that is, to immortalize them. "To depict whom you love." Sade, in the preface to *Crimes of Love* (*Oeuvres complètes*, vol. IX-X, p. 6. "Ideas on Novels"): "Man is subject to two failings inseparable from his very existence which is defined by them. Everywhere he must *pray* and he must also *love*—and there you have the basic stuff of all novels. Men wrote novels in order to show beings whom they *petitioned*; and they wrote novels to celebrate those whom they *loved*."<sup>10</sup> Proust and the Mother / Grandmother (the only love objects in *In Search of Lost Time*); Tolstoy, his mother (Marie), his grandfather (that is not to say they occupy center stage: they are zones of love that *magnetize*. Novel: mediating structure).

b. The Novel loves the world because it stirs up (*il le brasse*) and *embraces* it (*l'embrasse*). There's a generosity to the Novel (which Goldmannian sociology, in its language, clearly doesn't dispute), an *effusiveness*, unsentimental because mediated (think of *War and Peace*). I'm thinking of a distinction present in mystical love (Gardet):<sup>11</sup> (1) Either a love for someone Other than yourself, which aspires to a union with that Other (Monotheistic mystics, Lyrical poetry, the Lover's discourse). (2) Or a fundamental, obscure, ineluctable love, "ontological love" (Indian Mysticism, Novel): Novel: A means of combating the hardness of the heart, acedy.

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Coloration

Non-arrogance

My weakness: Memory

Anamnestic Novels

That might seem abstract: what form can it take on the level of  
discourse (of the novelistic text)?

a. Already said: the Novel is a structure—or an operation of *me-  
diatization*. Sentimentality (unrepressed in that unbearable expres-  
sion "act of love") is mediatized: induced, not declared, not prof-  
fered → cf. Freud (I can't remember where)<sup>12</sup> saying that the death  
drive is only ever perceived when colored (tinged) by libido; in the  
same way, the love drive *colors* the Novel: that's all.

b. The novel (always —what I'm calling "Novel": "my" Novel)  
needs to be situated in relation to the great logical categories of  
enunciation. I'm thinking of another Zen anecdote: Chou-chan  
(tenth century) brandished his staff before a group of disciples and  
said : "Call it not a *shippé* (*chu-pi*); if you do, you assert. Nor do  
you deny its being a *shippé* (*chu-pi*); if you do, you negate. Apart  
from affirmation and negation, speak, speak!"<sup>13</sup> Or this, from Alci-  
damas (the *Sophists*):<sup>14</sup> there are four forms of discourse: affirma-  
tion (*phrasis*), negation (*apophasis*), interrogation (*erotesis*), and  
*prosagoreusis* (declaration, *appellatio*, salutation). Indeed, the novel  
would be neither affirmation, nor negation, nor interrogation, and  
yet: (a) it speaks, it speaks; (b) it addresses, it interpolates (this is  
what *In Search of Lost Time* and *War and Peace* do to me). As to  
my idea of the Neutral, I'd say: the Novel is a discourse without  
arrogance, it doesn't intimidate me; a discourse that puts no pres-  
sure on me—hence my desire to arrive at a discursive practice that  
puts no pressure on anyone else: preoccupation of the course on  
the Neutral → Novel: the writing of the Neutral?

However, in order to go a little further into the Fantasy (that is,  
in order to be able to envisage coming out the other side, into Real-  
ity), I need to try to look candidly at my aptitude for writing a  
Novel (my "faculties"); my only strength (at the moment) is my  
desire, the obstinacy of my desire (even if I've often "flirted" with  
the Novelistic; but the Novelistic is not the Novel, and this is pre-  
cisely the threshold that I want to cross). At any rate, I can immedi-  
ately see that there's a certain constitutive weakness within me, a  
certain incapacity to write a novel (cf. a subject whose constitution  
prevents them from playing sport, who can't play the piano because  
their hands are too small, etc.)=weakness of an organ → I'll tell  
you which one: Memory, the ability to remember.

Rightly or wrongly (I mean: subject to examination and the pos-  
sibility that my opinion might change): the novels I love= novels of  
Memory=made out of material (of "memories") *recalled* from



### My lack of Memory

childhood, from the life of the writing subject. Proust made this the theory of his work (to be examined in detail, and we shall: we have the time). *In Search of Lost Time* = an *Anamnestic* Novel (culminating in Combray). Tolstoy: not so well known, not so intense, but *War and Peace*: interweaving of memories (he also wrote an anamnestic biography: *Souvenirs* (Pléiade), lots in *Childhood* and *Boyhood*).<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the facts of the matter: the conviction that I have no Memory and as a result that the anamnestic Novel is denied me → Note that Memory “disturbance” can take different forms: there’s no such thing as pure, simple, literal Memory, all memory is already *meaning*. In reality, it’s not memory that creates (the Novel) but its *deformation* (cf. Bachelard: imagination is that which *deforms* images).<sup>16</sup> Now, different types of mnestic deformation can be more or less productive → Proustian memory: recollection by way of sharp, discontinuous shocks, *unconnected by Time* (subversion of the chronological order) (cf. *infra*):<sup>17</sup> what’s subverted is not the *sharpness* of the memory, it’s the *order*; but when it comes, the memory intensely felt, torrential, that’s what hypermnnesia is. My weakness of memory is of a different order: it’s a true weakness = an *incapacity*: “Mist-upon-Memory”;<sup>18</sup> for example, I have great difficulty recalling the dates of my life; I’d be incapable of writing my own biography, a dated *curriculum vitae*. I probably do experience a few memory-flashes, flashes of memory, but they don’t proliferate, they’re not associative (“torrential”) ≠ Proust. They’re instantly exhausted by the short form (cf. the *Anamneses* in Roland Barthes),<sup>19</sup> whence the “novelistic” impression they can create, but also, precisely, what separates them from the Novel.



## SESSION OF DECEMBER 16, 1978

### Past / Present

In the *current* state of my reflection, then, my feeling is that, as far as I'm concerned, the fantasized Novel cannot be of the anamnestic kind. The novelistic "drive" (the love of the material) is not directed toward my past. It's not that I don't like my past; it's rather that I don't like *the* past (perhaps because it rends the heart), and my resistance takes the form of the mist I spoke of → a kind of general resistance to rehearsing, to narrating *what will never happen again* (the dreaming, the cruising, the life of the past). The affective link is with the *present*, my present, in its affective, relational, intellectual dimensions = the material I'm hoping for (cf. "to depict whom I love").<sup>1</sup>

### Writing and the Present

Here we immediately encounter a problem that will orient this year's course. Is it possible to make a Narrative (a Novel) out of the Present? How to reconcile—dialecticize—the *distance* implied by the *enunciation of writing* and the *proximity*, the transportation of the present experienced as it happens? (The present is what *adheres*, as if your eyes were glued to a mirror). Present: to have your eyes glued to the page; how to write *at length, fluently* (in a fluent, flowing, fluid manner) with one eye on the page and the other on "what's happening to me"?

### Life

This is actually to go back to that simple and ultimately uncompromising idea that "literature" (because, when it comes down to it, my project is "literary") is always made out of "life." My problem is that I don't think I can access my past life; it's in the *mist*, meaning that its intensity (without which there is no writing) is weak. What is intense is the life of the present, structurally mixed (there's *my* basic idea) with the desire to write it. The "Preparation" of the Novel therefore refers to the capturing of this parallel text, the text of "contemporary," concomitant life.

### To Note

Now, although at first glance making a novel out of present life looks difficult to me, it would be wrong to say that you can't make writing out of the Present. You can write the Present *by noting it*—as it "happens" upon you or under you (under your eyes, your ears) → In this way, we at last come in sight of (I'm nearing the end of my introduction) the double problem, the key to which organizes

## Notation

the Preparation of the Novel (of my Novel)—and so constitutes the first object of the course, the one for this year:

—On the one hand, *Notation*, the practice of “noting”: *notatio*. On what level is it situated? The level of “reality” (what to choose), the level of the “saying” (what’s the form, what’s the product of *Notatio*)? What does this practice involve in terms of meaning, time, the instant, the act of saying? *Notatio* instantly appears at the *problematic* intersection between a river of language, of uninterrupted language—*life*, both a continuous, ongoing, sequenced text and a layered text, a histology of cut-up texts, a palimpsest—and a sacred gesture: *to mark* life (to isolate: sacrifice, scapegoat, etc.). Notation: problematic intersection? Yes: what notation presents is the problem of realism. To consider a practice of notation *possible* (rather than laughable) is already to concede the *possibility* of a return (in a spiral) of literary realism. Take note: this term is not to be taken in its French or political connotations (Zola, social realism) but more generally: as a writing practice that willingly submits to the authority of the Reality-Illusion. From this starting point, how to organize, to sustain *Notatio*?

## Passage to the novel

—On the other hand, how to pass from Notation, and so from the *Note*, to the *Novel*, from the discontinuous to the flowing (to the *continuous*, the *smooth* {*au nappé*})? For me, the problem is psychostructural because it involves making the transition from the fragment to the nonfragment, which involves changing my relationship to writing, which involves my relationship to enunciation, which is to say the subject that I am: fragmented subject (= a certain relationship to castration) or effusive subject (a different relationship)? Or again, the conflict between the short form and the long form.

## The Novel-Fragment?

Even so (I “daydream” over problems): whenever the mind formulates an alternative—loathing the trap it presents and savoring the simplification: for, when it comes down to it, *choosing* is easier than *inventing*—a *third form* should always be considered. Figure: something that seems impossible at first may turn out to be possible after all. In this case: possible to conceive of a *Novel through Fragments*, a *Novel-Fragment*. Such novels probably exist—or some that come close to it: everything hinges on the *dash*, on the site, on the flux, on the page upon which the caesura of the discontinuous is *marked*: here it would be necessary, it will be necessary to examine the visual *devices* of novels: paragraphs, blank *alinea*s=*perigraphy* (cf. book by A. Compagnon, forthcoming with Seuil).<sup>2</sup> I’m thinking of the *cryptofragmentary* aspect of Flaubert (*blanks*)<sup>3</sup> and of *Aziyadé*.<sup>4</sup> There have to be many other examples—and, on a

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Haiku

Proust

deeper, less formal level: there’s of course Proust’s discontinuous,  
the *Rhapsodic* (a problem for the second part of the course).

I’ll naturally be dealing with these problems *indirectly* → I’ll be  
“hooking” them onto two external experiences, onto two tutor texts:

a. *Notation*: I might have chosen a novelist’s notebooks or a  
biographical diary (Notation of the Present). I chose, out of per-  
sonal preference and also to remain as close as possible to the  
problem of the short form, to speak of the short form that I love  
more than any other and that is as it were the very essence of No-  
tation: the haiku. There’ll therefore be a series of sessions on haiku  
(which is to say: on an exemplary type of Notation of the Present).  
Be that as it may:

b. *The Passage from the Fragment to the Novel* (to the long text):  
here I will (or at least I intend to) draw on Proust; more precisely,  
I’ll be investigating that biographical episode over the course of  
which it seems (after agitations, hesitations, indecisions) Proust was  
*at last* able to launch the great river of *In Search of Lost Time*. A  
further point, in passing: I’m finding Proust’s *life* more and more  
“interesting”—that is to say, worthy of investigation—from *the*  
*point of view of writing*: it’s becoming increasingly necessary to  
conceive of a kind of “science” (so to speak) of Proust’s life (the  
business of the film with A. T.)<sup>5</sup>

That, broadly speaking (I think, for I’m not yet able to calibrate  
the different parts), is how this year’s course will be organized = two—  
seemingly disparate—pivots → excentric articulation—of a certain  
circumvolution of the Novel to be written, of the fantasized Novel:  
the *Haiku / Proust* (and I mean *Proust*—not *In Search of Lost Time*).  
I’m convinced of the validity of this opposition but was neverthe-  
less afraid that you’d find it a little abrupt, a little elliptical, a little  
casual—or farfetched [*tirée par les cheveux*]<sup>6</sup> (an enigmatic expres-  
sion: it’s more a question of splitting hairs). Happily, just in time, a  
friend furnished me with a quotation—and it’s from Proust (*Chron-*  
*icles*): “Narrating events is like introducing people to opera via the  
libretto only. Should I write a novel, I’d endeavor to distinguish  
between the differing music of each successive day.”<sup>7</sup> The differing  
music of each successive day → that’s haiku exactly. Hence, when  
it comes down to it: perhaps what’s fantasized is the *Novel as*  
*Opera*.

## Two Clarifications

Before beginning (the session on haiku), I feel I should make two things clear—or make two confessions:

### 1. As If

Will I *really* write a Novel? I'll answer this and only this. I'll proceed *as if* I were going to write one → I'll install myself within this *as if*: this lecture course could have been called "As If."

Comments:

a. People will say to me—it's been said to me: by announcing it, you're taking a huge risk, a "magic" risk. To say something out loud, in advance, is to destroy it; to designate too early is to attract bad luck (Don't count your chickens).<sup>8</sup> Ordinarily, I take this kind of risk very seriously; I never allow myself to talk about the book I'm going to write. Why am I risking it this time and *provoking the Gods*, so to speak? Because the risk is bound up with the mutation I spoke of (Middle of Life's Journey): that mutation effectively involves the consideration of a kind of *Nothing left to lose*. That's in no way the motto of a "desperado" but rather of the search for a considered counterpoint to an expression that's so French (which haunts the conduct of the French): "to lose face"—French culture being more a culture of shame than of sin. Whether or not I write a novel, whether or not I fail in my attempt to write one, this isn't a "performance" but a "path." To be in love is to lose face and to accept it, hence there's no face to be lost.—Moreover:

b. *As if*: the motto of *Method* (a particular way of working used by Mathematicians). Method = the methodical exploitation of a hypothesis; here, as you'll have grasped: a hypothesis not of *explanation* (of interpretation) (meta-Novel), but of *production*.

c. Method = path. (Grenier, Tao = Path.<sup>9</sup> Tao is at once the path to be traveled and the end of the journey, the method and the accomplishment. No sooner have you set out on the path than you have already traveled its length). Tao: what matters is the path, following the path, not what you find at the end → The Quest of the Fantasy is already a Narrative → "Begin, even without hope; proceed, even without success."<sup>10</sup> (It's *also* a Sartrean saying).

d. It's therefore possible that the Novel will remain at the level of—or be exhausted and accomplished by—its Preparation. Another title for this course (which will probably go on for several years, circumstances permitting) could be "The Impossible Novel."

Risk

Nothing left to lose

To be in love: is to lose face and to accept it

Method

Path, without end

Grand nostalgic theme

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## Technique

## Aesthetics / Ethics

## Kierkegaard

## Craft and general conversation

In which case, the labor that's beginning=the exploration of a grand nostalgic theme. Something lurks in our History: the Death of literature; it's what roams around us; we have to look that ghost in the face, taking *practice* as our starting point → it's therefore a question of *tense* labor: at once *anxious* and *active* (the Worst is never certain).<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Ethics / Technique

Since this Course will involve investigating a practice, there'll be some *paratechnical* issues to consider (and one technique in particular: literary) → Risk that you'll be disappointed, that some of you won't find it interesting; disappointment that I'm attempting to ward off by naming and anticipating it → At first, the register will seem completely different to last year's: *Neutral*=*ethical* category: there's no "technique" of the Neutral, other than in Tao.

Yet: it seems to me that each thing—every action, operation, intervention, gesture, work—has three aspects to it: technical, ideological, ethical → The ideological aspect of this enterprise isn't for me to decide, it's for others to identify: The Ideological is always Other People.

But it's my hope that this labor will be undertaken at the undecidable point where the Technical and the Ethical meet. And if we consider the fact that, when it comes to writing, a Technique presupposes an Aesthetics, then this labor (this Course): situated at the point where the Aesthetic and the Ethical intersect, overlap.

This is a Kierkegaardian problem. (*Either / Or*). Let's articulate it (and correct it) with Kafka (in conversation with Janouch): "Kierkegaard faces the problem, whether to enjoy life aesthetically or to experience it ethically. But this seems to me a false statement of the problem. The Either-Or exists only in the head of Søren Kierkegaard. In reality one can only achieve an aesthetic enjoyment of life as a result of humble ethical experience."<sup>12</sup>

The "Technical" is basically the moral and humble experience of Writing → not, in the end, very far removed from the Neutral. Will it interest you—even those among you who don't write, or those among you who do but who aren't plagued by the same problems as I am? My hope rests on personal experience: I never tire of hearing people talk about their craft<sup>13</sup> the problems they come up against in their work, *whatever it is they do*. Most of the time, unfortunately, people think they're under an obligation to engage in *general conversation*. How many times have I been irritated and frustrated

### The domestic

by a conversation—that others make “general”—because a specialist whom I’d dearly love to hear discuss his specialism starts making banal cultural or philosophical remarks, when he could be telling me about his craft!—Intellectuals in particular never discuss their craft, as if they didn’t have one: they have “ideas,” “positions,” but no craft! The amused and indulgent irony with which Ram-bures’s survey was received (by him, by the way).<sup>14</sup> What? These writers who pay attention to which pen they use, to the kind of paper or the desk they write on! They’re crazy, etc.

For me, there’s an alliance between the Aesthetic (the Technical) and the Ethical; its privileged field: the minutiae of daily life, the “domestic.” Perhaps wanting to write a novel (*the* Novel? *my* Novel?) is to enter into, to settle into a practice of *domestic* writing. Cf. Proust comparing the novel that’s being written to a dress being cut, assembled, tacked together, in a word: *prepared* by a dressmaker (this is the sense in which “the Preparation of the Novel” should be understood). In Proust’s time—and the time of my childhood: dressmakers working from home would go from house to house (Mademoiselle Sudour)<sup>15</sup> gleaning and relaying bits of news → dream of the Novelist’s domestic labor: to be a Dressmaker working from home.