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Varia

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*A comunidade da escrita: Susan Sontag, Leyla Perrone-Moisés, Beatriz
Sarlo e Roland Barthes*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to present and compare the readings of Roland Barthes by three critics: Susan Sontag in the United States, Leyla Perrone-Moisés in Brazil, and Beatriz Sarlo in Argentina. To this end, we begin with some observations on the international circulation of literary criticism and then offer an overview of each critic's engagement with Barthes, highlighting the texts they wrote shortly after his death in 1980: Sontag's "Remembering Barthes", Perrone-Moisés's "Remembering Barthes, Without Academic Autopsies", and Sarlo's "Roland Barthes: An Impossible Biography". Finally, we discuss the impact of these readings on Barthes's own work, drawing on research in his archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

KEYWORDS: Roland Barthes; Leyla Perrone-Moisés; Susan Sontag; Beatriz Sarlo.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo mostrar e comparar as leituras de Roland Barthes das críticas Susan Sontag, nos Estados Unidos, Leyla Perrone-Moisés, no Brasil e Beatriz Sarlo, na Argentina. Para isso, começamos com algumas observações relativas à circulação internacional da crítica literária e depois, tentamos descrever de forma panorâmica a produção de cada uma das três críticas relativas às leituras de Barthes, destacando os textos que elas escreveram logo após a morte de Barthes, em 1980: "Recordando Barthes", de Sontag, "Relembrando Barthes, sem autópsias acadêmicas", de Perrone-Moisés e "Roland Barthes, uma biografia impossível", de Sarlo. No final, também discutimos o impacto das leituras dessas críticas na obra do próprio Roland Barthes, a partir do estudo do seu arquivo, na Biblioteca Nacional da França.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Roland Barthes; Leyla Perrone-Moisés; Susan Sontag; Beatriz Sarlo.

Most readers of Susan Sontag, Leyla Perrone-Moisés, and Beatriz Sarlo will already have encountered at least a passing reference to Barthes in their works. But how extensively did they actually write about him? What impact do these texts have on their broader intellectual projects? Which phases or theses of Barthes' work were most significant for them? And, conversely, did they ever distance themselves from or reject his ideas? In this paper, I aim to map their engagement with Barthes, examining their position as “Barthesians” and, at the same time, considering why these three remarkable women—each among the most influential critics of her generation in her own country—were drawn to his thought.

At the same time, I want to explore the reverse perspective: how Barthes himself may have been drawn to their ideas. As contemporaries, they could well have encountered one another, and mutual influence is possible. Thus, rather than focusing only on Barthes' impact on Sontag, Perrone-Moisés, and Sarlo, I propose to discuss the broader circulation of critical ideas across national boundaries—particularly between France and their own intellectual contexts—and how this circulation may have shaped Barthes' own writing.

I will start by examining Barthes' role in the global circulation of criticism. I will then analyse the circulation of Barthes in the work of Susan Sontag, Leyla Perrone-Moisés, and Beatriz Sarlo, and conclude with reflections on the traces of their work within Barthes' archives, especially his diaries housed at the National Library of France.

Roland Barthes, a critic without borders

A central question in the study of literary criticism is what enables a critic to gain recognition beyond national borders. Is it their method, the texts they analyse, or the networks in which they participate? These questions acquired new urgency with the emergence of Roland Barthes and contemporaries such as Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov.

Literary criticism is, until today, largely a national enterprise. The word “literature” is understood since the XIX century primarily as an expression of national identity (“there is no nation without literature” and “there is no literature that is not national”), a perspective reflected in the way it was taught through courses such as “French

Literature,” “Brazilian Literature,” or “Argentinian Literature” (Thiesse, 2009, p. 24-25). This framing can be traced back to German Romanticism, which rejected universal rules—often associated with France—and argued that each people should develop their own literary forms. Academic institutions reinforced this logic: professors were trained within specific national traditions and were expected to teach and research within them. A French literature professor, for instance, was presumed to engage primarily with debates internal to French criticism, even if personally interested in Argentine or other literatures. In this sense, criticism was conceived as knowledge devoted to explaining national literatures rather than to crossing borders.

By the mid-twentieth century, however, figures such as Walter Benjamin had already gestured toward more transnational approaches, but it was in Barthes’s era that the project of establishing comprehensive, cross-national frameworks became explicit. An illustrative example appears in the first issue of *Poétique*, founded in 1970 by Todorov, Genette, and Hélène Cixous:

Published in France and written in French, *Poétique* will not be a journal of French literature. While theoretical openness implies a decisive break with the traditional isolationism of literary research in France, it also presupposes the removal of barriers that have hitherto divided the very object of research: no thinking about literature can confine itself within national boundaries without exposing itself to the most serious errors of perspective. Therefore, without resorting to the remedies of the defunct ‘comparatism,’ *Poétique* will be, in its purpose as well as in its practice, a journal without borders”¹ (cited in Dumont, 2018).

This collective sought to elaborate methods applicable to all literatures², rather than remaining bound to a single national canon.

¹ In French: “Éditée en France et rédigée en français, *Poétique* ne sera pas une revue de littérature française. Si l’ouverture théorique implique une rupture décisive avec l’isolationnisme traditionnel de la recherche littéraire en France, elle suppose également une levée des barrières qui divisaient jusqu’ici l’objet même de cette recherche : aucune pensée de la littérature ne peut s’enfermer dans des limites nationales sans s’exposer aux plus graves erreurs de perspective. Aussi, et sans s’arrêter aux remèdes du défunt « comparatisme », *Poétique* sera-t-elle, dans son objet comme dans sa pratique, une revue sans frontières”.

² Or at least to some literatures. As Lucile Dumont argues, not all intellectual traditions were considered: literature translated in French becomes the equivalent of “literature without borders” (2018, p. 59-60)

Another factor shaping international recognition was the presumed universality of the works selected for analysis. Barthes, Genette, and their peers concentrated on authors such as Proust and Balzac—figures firmly situated within the French literary tradition but widely legible to international audiences. As Pascale Casanova has argued, French literature, supported by Paris’s symbolic centrality, a dense network of libraries and publishers, and sustained cultural investment, long occupied a privileged position in the “world republic of letters” (2004, p.25-26). Critics writing on canonical French texts thus encountered fewer obstacles to global visibility than if they had focused on peripheral literatures such as Brazilian or Argentinian.

Equally crucial were the international networks cultivated by Barthes. His career trajectory was shaped by contingencies: tuberculosis prevented him from completing a thesis and pursuing a professorship at the Sorbonne, and before securing a position at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, he taught abroad in Bucharest, Alexandria, and at Middlebury College in the United States (Samoyault, 2015, p. 321). His time in New York in 1958 proved decisive, as he met Richard Howard, who would later translate much of his work into English and become a close friend. As Wayne Booth later observed, Barthes might never have become “the man who had the most influence on American criticism” (Booth apud Culler, 2025, p. 676) without this encounter (Howard, 1989, p. 32).

Barthes also drew upon an international bibliography. In his early seminars at the EPHE, he cited scholars such as Vladimir Propp, John Austin, and Noam Chomsky—figures little known in France at the time and not yet translated (Dumont, 2018) (Pino, 2022). As has often been noted, intellectual export requires prior import. His influence was further amplified through artistic networks: he engaged with figures such as Severo Sarduy and André Téchiné, who introduced his work to collaborators abroad. These cross-disciplinary exchanges facilitated the wider dissemination of his writings and shaped publishers’ interest in his books.

Against this backdrop, it is significant that Susan Sontag, Leyla Perrone-Moisés, and Beatriz Sarlo also meet the principal conditions for international recognition. All three regarded Barthes and other French critics as models for methods capable of transcending national boundaries. Sontag and Perrone-Moisés in particular cultivated a sustained engagement with French literature, extending beyond Barthes to authors such

as the Nouveau Roman novelists. Each also lived abroad—Sontag and Perrone-Moisés in France, where they encountered Barthes personally, and Sarlo in the United States—developing international networks that encompassed artists, publishers, and journalists. In this sense, their trajectories parallel and illuminate the broader dynamics of the international circulation of criticism.

Barthesians for life

Susan Sontag (1933–2004) was born in New York and pursued studies at Berkeley, the University of Chicago, Harvard, Oxford, and the Sorbonne. Despite this extensive academic training, she never completed a thesis and deliberately chose not to pursue a conventional academic career. Instead, she supported herself through publication in leading cultural magazines such as *Partisan Review* and *The New York Review of Books*. These essays soon gained wide recognition, and a Rockefeller Fellowship enabled the publication of her first collection, *Against Interpretation* (1966) (Moser, 2019).

The book emerged in close collaboration with one of her closest friends at the time, Richard Howard—the same Richard Howard who had met Roland Barthes in 1958 and would later become his translator into English. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Sontag and Howard worked in tandem to introduce French writers to American audiences: Howard provided the translations, while Sontag produced critical essays about them (Kaplan, 2012, s/d). Among the French authors to whom they devoted particular attention, Barthes soon became a central figure.

Barthes appears in several essays in *Against Interpretation*. In the title essay, Sontag criticizes the prevailing model of interpretation, which she describes as extracting “X, Y, Z” from a work and reassigning them abstract meanings: The interpreter says, Look, don’t you see that X is really—or, really means—A? That Y is really B? That Z is really C? (Sontag, 2013, p. 12). Such practices, she argues, displace attention from the artwork itself and substitute the interpreter’s agenda, usually with reference to content—politics, sociology, or philosophy. Her call for renewed attention to form, and her invocation of Barthes as an exemplar of this orientation, underscores their shared conviction that criticism should not reduce artworks to content.

The resonance between Sontag and Barthes is equally evident in the preface to Barthes's *Critical Essays*. There, Barthes maintains that writers do not necessarily aim to express a determinate idea; rather, they undertake a task whose content cannot be prescribed in advance. This perspective closely parallels Sontag's contention that interpretation which privileges content fails to grasp the work itself.

Another striking connection appears in Sontag's essay "One Culture and the New Sensibility", originally published in 1965. Here she revisits the division, dating from the Industrial Revolution, between two distinct cultures—one scientific, the other literary and artistic. She argues, however, that in contemporary society art is no longer limited to the production of beautiful objects; it functions instead as a means of transforming consciousness and creating a new sensibility. Within this expanded conception, the artist is not merely a craftsman but also a critic of society. Thus, Duchamp's urinal may be considered art not for its fabrication but for its power to reorient perception. In this broader sense, intellectual figures such as philosophers, anthropologists, and critics—including Nietzsche, Lévi-Strauss, and Barthes (Sontag, 2013, p. 279)—also belong to this artistic landscape.

This argument closely recalls Barthes's essay "Authors and Writers", originally published in 1960, in which he distinguishes between literary and scientific modes of writing before introducing a hybrid third category: the "author-writer" (Barthes, 1972, p.149) Sontag's essay was published five years later, raising the possibility of a silent influence. Whether direct or indirect, her formulation is strikingly close to Barthes's, and the parallel suggests a shared intellectual project.

Beyond these early references, Sontag wrote three major essays devoted to Barthes: the preface to *Writing Degree Zero* (1968), "Remembering Barthes" in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (1981), and "Writing Itself," published as the introduction to *A Barthes Reader* (1982) and later collected in *Where the Stress Falls* (2000). Among these, "Remembering Barthes" is particularly revealing. Published in *The New York Review of Books* only a week after his death in 1980, it engages with his entire oeuvre, including his most recent work, *Camera Lucida*, released just two months earlier.

In this text, Sontag emphasizes several distinctive features of Barthes's work: the dramaturgical quality of his thought, with ideas continually set against one another; the joy and passion suffusing his writing; his fascination with mental classification; and his

openness to writing on any subject that others proposed. The essay also includes deeply personal reflections, recalling Barthes's "sensual revelations abroad (Morocco, Japan)" and his social life in cafés and discos. Sontag closes with an intimate recollection of their final meeting: "Ah, Susan. Toujours fidèle," he said, to which she adds, "I was. I am" (Sontag, 1981, p. 176).

This recollection does more than memorialize a personal relationship. It echoes one of the central motifs of Barthes's work: his lifelong pursuit of pleasure. Here, "pleasure" recalls not only *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) but also the texture of an intellectual community sustained by mutual fascination, ritual, and loyalty. In Sontag's account, the experience of reading Barthes becomes inseparable from the experience of belonging—to a sensibility, a mode of thought, and a community.

Taken together, Sontag's early essays and her later memorial reveal the depth of her engagement with Barthes. His ideas did not merely provide her with material to cite but offered her a sense of shared intellectual labour: a joint contribution to what she described as a new sensibility and, implicitly, to a new critical community.

Leyla Perrone-Moisés, born in São Paulo in 1934—just one year after Susan Sontag—began her literary career writing book reviews for the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* immediately after completing a degree in Romance Languages. In 1960, while searching for critical references to better understand contemporary novels, she encountered Maurice Blanchot's *Le livre à venir* (The Book to Come). In that book, Blanchot cites Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*. This discovery proved decisive: from that moment, Barthes became her primary guide to the Nouveau Roman, the literary movement that informed much of her own writing during the 1960s—just as it did for Sontag (Wolff, 2017; Hidalgo, 2016, p. 345).

As in Sontag's case, two moments in her engagement with Barthes are especially illuminating: one early essay and another immediately written after his death. It was only in 1968 that Barthes became the explicit subject of one of her published texts. Entitled "A escrita e o grito" ("The Writing and the Cry"), the piece appeared as a review of Maurice Roche's novel *Compact*. Yet the essay functioned less as a review of Roche than as a reflection on Barthes's ideas, particularly those developed in his essay

“Authors and Writers.” Notably, the article was illustrated with a photograph of Barthes rather than of Roche’s book (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Article "The Writing and the Cry" (1968)

To introduce Roche’s novel—structured around the search for a word or keyword—Perrone-Moisés begins with a meditation on the act of writing. She turns to Barthes for her framing, writing:

This gives rise to two types of people who write: the author and the writer [scribe]. The former operates on the plane of language; the latter intends to act upon the plane of reality... What interests us here is the writing of the author. So what does it mean to write, for the author? To write is to interrogate language itself. (Perrone-Moisés, 1968)

This interpretation extends Barthes’s formulation. In “Authors and Writers,” Barthes emphasizes that the author’s writing is intransitive, noting that the author does not necessarily know in advance what is being written. Perrone-Moisés, however, insists that the author must interrogate language. In doing so, she either develops his thought further or anticipates aspects of his later work—without directly citing him.

Publishing literary-theoretical essays in major Brazilian newspapers was rare in the 1960s. By doing so, Perrone-Moisés carved out a distinctive role for herself. From this starting point, she would go on to publish eighteen articles on Barthes. That same year, while in France conducting doctoral research, she met Barthes in person. At their first meeting she handed him copies of her two essays about him; the next day he responded with a letter and an invitation to meet again under calmer circumstances. This

exchange inaugurated a close professional and intellectual relationship (Perrone-Moisés, 2021, p. 122-128).

Her role as a mediator of Barthes's work in Brazil soon intensified. She translated his first book into Portuguese (Barthes, 1970), combining *Criticism and Truth* with *Critical essays*. Returning to Brazil, she resumed her post as professor of French literature at the University of São Paulo while continuing to write regularly for newspapers. In effect, she combined the roles played elsewhere by Richard Howard and Susan Sontag: she both translated Barthes and introduced him to a wide readership.

Following Barthes's death in 1980, Perrone-Moisés published *Roland Barthes: o saber com sabor* [Roland Barthes: Knowledge with Flavor] (1983), a concise introduction to his entire oeuvre that functioned as a Brazilian equivalent of Sontag's *Barthes Reader*. In the early 2000s, she revisited his work with renewed intensity. As editor of the "Roland Barthes" collection at Martins Fontes publishing house, she translated and edited twenty volumes, including *The preparation of the novel*, *The empire of signs*, and *Mourning diary*.

In 2012, she published *Com Roland Barthes* (With Roland Barthes), a compilation of her essays and correspondence with him. This book documented her sustained engagement with his career, covering his major works as they appeared—from *Criticism and Truth* and its polemic with Raymond Picard, to *S/Z, A lover's discourse: fragments*, and *La Leçon*. Her essays addressed Barthes's rhetorical style, intellectual contributions, relations with contemporaries such as Sartre, Blanchot, and Derrida, and above all the emotional and intellectual force of his writing.

In her text "Remembering Barthes, without academic autopsies," published shortly after his death (and at the same time Sontag issued her own "Remembering Barthes"), Perrone-Moisés wrote:

As a critic, all I can add to what I've already written about Barthes is this: without him, the world became a little less intelligent, and a little less kind. Nothing dramatic. His death wasn't a catastrophe for French letters—still less for world literature. Because Barthes, whose hallmark was discretion, never imposed himself with force or controversy. He always entered the literary landscape in his own way: subtle, insinuating, more subversive than revolutionary. (2012, p. 124)

Here, the contrast with Sontag is instructive. Sontag emphasized the dramatic quality of Barthes's thought—his staging of ideas in tension with one another—while Perrone-Moisés underscored his discretion and aversion to open confrontation. Even when embroiled in controversies, Barthes, she argued, did not enjoy conflict. Ultimately, both critics engaged in similar acts of intellectual portraiture: they drew on Barthes's personality—his kindness, discretion, subtlety, and loyalty—to construct a sense of intellectual community and friendship.

To summarize, Leyla Perrone-Moisés and Susan Sontag occupied parallel positions in their respective contexts. Each introduced Barthes to a wider public and shaped his reception, though with differing tones and emphases. Perrone-Moisés is recognized as a Barthes specialist, a critic of Barthes, while Sontag is regarded more as an author in her own right. Both were deeply inspired by Barthes, but neither simply echoed him: they absorbed, transformed, and rearticulated his ideas in order to fashion their own forms of criticism.

Beatriz Sarlo (1942–2024) was born in Buenos Aires and passed away in December 2024. She first encountered the work of Roland Barthes as a student of literature, though not within the formal university setting. At that time, the university curriculum remained focused on classical authors; engagement with contemporary thinkers took place instead in bookstores and publishing houses, where Sarlo was already employed. In her autobiography she recalls this discovery as a formative intellectual event:

At [the bookstore] Galatea I bought the first edition of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. The final chapter, 'Le mythe, aujourd'hui,' was the first theoretical text I read, fully aware that everything I had read before belonged to the past. I became a fanatic of Barthes, whom I couldn't even imitate. I simply admired him, waiting for the moment I might be able to follow in his footsteps." (2025, p. 142)

Before she could *follow in those footsteps*, Sarlo engaged with Barthes in more mediated ways. Upon finishing her degree in literature, she began working at Centro Editor, where she organized and wrote prologues for collections devoted to formalist and structuralist criticism. In the early 1970s, she also served as a columnist and editor for the journal *Los Libros*, founded by her friend Héctor Schmucler upon his return from

Paris. Barthes was a central reference point for the journal's critics, who valued his capacity to link formal analysis with political—and particularly Marxist—concerns.

It is significant, however, that Sarlo was then affiliated with the Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR). For her and her colleagues, formal analysis appeared insufficient for revolutionary critique. After the publication of *The pleasure of the text*, the editorial board distanced itself from Barthes, dismissed Schmucler, and pushed the journal in a more radical direction.

Sarlo re-engaged with Barthes only after his death in 1980, when she was commissioned to write a volume for the “*El mundo de...*” [“The world of...”] collection, which featured selected excerpts from writers, organized by theme and accompanied by an introductory essay—like *A Barthes Reader*, by Sontag. *El mundo de Roland Barthes* went beyond the structuralist texts or the ideological critique of *Mythologies*, including works from his later period, such as *The Lesson* and *The Pleasure of the Text*. Her introduction—“*Roland Barthes, an Impossible Biography*”—was a powerful defence of the intellectual's work, including texts that had been disregarded by Argentinian Marxist critics.

In this framing, Sarlo positioned Barthes differently than Perrone-Moisés. While Perrone-Moisés emphasized Barthes's subtlety and aversion to controversy, Sarlo described in a radically different way:

‘Marxist and Sartrean,’ Barthes compromises form in the sense that he endangers it: he speaks of the bourgeoisie when he discusses the novel, arguing that ‘the tearing apart of languages is inseparable from the tearing apart of classes.’ His criticism, as radical as the judgement of the literary avant-garde, takes from them their insolent and confident form. (Sarlo, 2021, p. 25).

Following the dictatorship, Sarlo became professor of Argentine literature at the University of Buenos Aires while continuing her editorial and critical activities. The published versions of her courses reveal her use of Barthes's *S/Z* alongside Benjamin, Said, and Williams. Only after leaving the university, she began to emulate Barthes more directly. *La ciudad vista* (2009), for example, interprets everyday aspects of Buenos Aires urban culture—shopping centres, street markets, fences, posters, murals—through a hybrid optic that combines Benjamin's *flâneur* with Barthes's mythologist (Brandini, 2023).

This phase of “imitation” coincided with the publication of her collected essays on Barthes in *Escritos sobre Roland Barthes* (2021). In addition to the introduction to “El mundo de Roland Barthes”, the volume includes essays published in newspapers and journals during the 2000s and 2010s. These writings address not only Barthes’s published books but also his *Collège de France* lectures and his novel.

Taken together, these works position Sarlo as a mediator of Barthes’s reception in Argentina—whether as publisher, columnist, editor, or professor—despite the fact that she never met him (Sarlo, 2021, p. 9). Barthes also played a formative role in her intellectual trajectory, shaping what she herself called her “sensibility,” a term she shared with Sontag. The following passage, which inspired the title of this part, encapsulates her relationship with Barthes’s work:

From literature, his work received the power of enchantment. Barthes turns his readers into Barthesians, just as Proust turns them into Proustians. It is not a matter of taste, nor is it even a matter of ideas or style. It is, in fact, the discovery of a sensibility and its reflections, where to place the emphasis, what details matter. Those of us who continue to read Barthes are Barthesians for life. It is simply a conversion. (Sarlo, 2021, p. 74)

The community of writing

In concluding this study, I turn to Barthes’s diaries, which I recently consulted at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. These notebooks, which he called agendas, cover the years from 1960 to 1980. They do not function as conventional diaries: rather than recording future appointments, Barthes used them retrospectively, noting the events of each previous day.

The entries encompass a wide range of details: weather, current projects, anxieties, work meetings, late-night outings, and sexual encounters. Although the notebooks could be studied from many perspectives, here I concentrate on the international and social dimensions of Barthes’s life—especially encounters related to the United States, Brazil, and Argentina. Three points stand out.

First, Barthes travelled far more frequently than his major biographies suggest. In addition to his well-known stay at Middlebury College in 1958, he visited New York in 1961 while filming in Canada; in 1966, when he lectured at Johns Hopkins,

Wesleyan, Bryn Mawr, Yale, and Princeton; in 1967, when he embarked on a two-and-a-half-month tour including these and other universities; and again in 1979, when he visited New York as a great celebrity. He had even planned a visit to Berkeley in 1980. On these occasions he was often welcomed by Richard Howard, who hosted him and even organized a Thanksgiving dinner for Barthes and his family in 1967. Although Barthes's diaries record no direct encounters with Susan Sontag during these trips, it is plausible that they met in Howard's home, which both frequented. Notably, despite repeated invitations, Barthes never travelled to Latin America.

Second, Barthes was much more deeply embedded in American academic life than is generally acknowledged. Beyond his official positions at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and later the *Collège de France*, he taught regularly in American programs in Paris. Between 1967 and 1969 he lectured in Wesleyan's Paris program; from 1968 to 1973 at the Paris American Academy; from 1972 to 1974 with SUNY Buffalo; and in 1972 at New York University's Paris program. In one agenda entry, after delivering a lecture at the Paris Academy, he noted simply: "saw Susan Sontag" (24 March 1971). This suggests that the two were personally acquainted and that these Paris-based programs created concrete spaces of exchange between French and American intellectuals.

Third, Barthes was exceptionally socially active, particularly with international visitors. His diaries record an astonishing number of meetings—often four or five in a single day—with students and scholars from across the world. During the Latin American dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, he received numerous visitors from the region. Perrone-Moisés appears in the diaries five times—more than Sontag, who is mentioned three times. Among Argentines, he often met with Héctor Schmucler, who after returning to Buenos Aires founded *Los Libros*, the journal where Beatriz Sarlo would later serve as editor and columnist.

Evenings were typically spent in restaurants, cafés, bars, or discos, often with François Wahl (his publisher) and Wahl's partner, Severo Sarduy, a Cuban writer closely connected to Latin American networks. Through these circles, Barthes came into contact with writers and artists such as the Argentine author Raúl Escari, the Mexican painter Ramón Alejandro, the Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos, and the Mexican poet Octavio Paz.

These records naturally raise the question: when did Barthes actually write, and when did he sleep? The evidence suggests that he possessed an extraordinary ability to concentrate in the mornings, working efficiently despite short rest. More importantly, his intellectual production was inseparable from his social life. Many of his ideas appear to have been generated in conversations—in cafés, seminars, and nightclubs. While Barthes often remarked that he wrote only on commission, the diaries suggest that he also responded to what might be called affective commissions: prompts and provocations emerging from his intellectual and personal encounters.

He may have developed an idea overheard in Richard Howard's living room, with Sontag present. He might have been responding to a question from Leyla Perrone-Moisés, or offering an informal challenge to Héctor Schmucler—one that Schmucler later passed on to Sarlo back in Argentina.

That's why certain texts by Barthes—like *The Pleasure of the Text* - can feel as if they were inspired by essays from Sontag's *Against Interpretation*, even though he never quoted these texts. Or why Leyla Perrone-Moisés seems to comment on parts of "Authors and Writers" that Barthes never actually wrote. Or why Sarlo found ways to use Barthes's ideas in highly militant, politically charged contexts. His work was never entirely his own.

One telling entry records that Barthes saw Sontag at a lecture he delivered on Bataille at the Paris Academy. At that time, both critics published texts on Bataille: "The pornographic imagination" (Sontag, 1969) and "Les sorties du texte" (Barthes, 1973). Did Barthes respond to a subsequent conversation with her? The diaries do not provide definitive answers, but they highlight the porous, reciprocal nature of these exchanges.

To conclude: this study has examined the international circulation of criticism, the readings of Barthes by Sontag, Perrone-Moisés, and Sarlo, and the broader networks that sustained his intellectual life. In the end, it becomes difficult to say who exactly is the author and who is the writer, the one who writes "on" someone. Instead, Barthes and his interlocutors appear as participants in a transnational community of writing—one in which ideas circulated, transformed, and returned in new forms.

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