

Ideal Syllabus

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Published in *frieze* magazine, 2009

Dear Reader,

This syllabus nearly broken my back in the writing, for how can I choose between those books that have burrowed into my brain? Here then, begrudgingly, is a small selection, each falling loosely into the following categories: those which are methodology; those which demonstrate teaching is play; those which suggest change may be brought about by process. I'm never doing this again.

MF

Didier Anzieu

*The Skin Ego* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989)

Establishing the epidermis as the primary communicator between our intellectual and social worlds, Anzieu's book interests me not because of its psychoanalytic resolution, but because of its formulation of research. Clinical case-studies, art and literature are set together as equals and presented as empirical investigation.

Roland Barthes

*The Pleasure of the Text* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1975; first published 1973)

The only actual 'theory' on this syllabus. Please ensure you read it carefully.

*The Beano* (Jen, if you are buying a copy of this comic, it should be an edition from about 1980)

I'm sure my weekly fix of *The Beano* comic as young child developed my desire for book as object, my grasp of seriality as continuity, and my dependence on agile language as representation.

*Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (Chambers, Edinburgh, 1999; first published 1870)

Dictionaries and encyclopedias have always been a joyous and comforting source of expression and subjectivity to me. Imagine my delight then, to own a tome that can actually *fix* a fairy.

Elias Canetti

*Auto-da-Fé* (Picador, London, 1978; first published 1946)

Despite Canetti's legendary misanthropy (or perhaps because of it) this book, his only work of fiction, captures the leaky totality of human experience. Civilized, flayed yet above all accurate, there is not one single redeemable character. Featuring the best line of self-analysis that ever wasn't, a forged telegram penned by a chess-playing-hunchback-arsonist dwarf, "Am completely crackers - your brother."

Giacomo Casanova

*The Duel* (London, Hesperus, 2003; first published 1780)

An account of a real-life duel, or is it? A meticulous meditation on machismo and class-obsessed pride, it certainly is.

Marie Darrieussecq

*White* (London, Faber, 2005; first published 2003)

Darrieussecq is a relatively new habit for me. The rights to her first book, *Pig Tales: a Novel of Lust and Transformation*, were bought by Jean-Luc Godard. Unhindered, she continued to produce anxious coils of philosophical fiction that spit at reason. *White* is paean to the liminal, with a small cast of overachievers stuck in Antarctica, dodging ghosts, chopping syntax.

Marguerite Duras

*The Lover* (London, Flamingo 1989; first published 1984)

I bought this book secondhand earlier today for 1 Euro. I've just finished reading it. I'll read it again tomorrow.

Umberto Eco

*Travels in Hyperreality* (London, Picador 1987; Jen, not sure when this was first published, but think it might have been as *Faith in Fakes...*?)

This was the second book I read when I arrived at art college. That first Christmas holiday, whilst visiting my friend's father in the psychiatric ward of Belfast City Hospital, it was stolen and partially eaten by one of his fellow patients. I'd never want to own another copy, I like remembering its essays all chewed up.

Doris Lessing

*The Good Terrorist* (London, Flamingo 2003; first published 1985)

A book in two parts, examining the cynical flexibility of terrorism. The main protagonist, Alice, spends most of the book cleaning, mending and cooking. It ends with almost everything being blown up.

John McGahern

*The Dark* (London, Faber, 1983; first published 1965)

McGahern's work maps the borders between Northern and Southern Ireland. With each successive book, his patch gets smaller and smaller, whilst his enquiry gets sharper and sharper. Although supported by writers such as Samuel Beckett, *The Dark* was banned by the Irish board of censorship, getting McGahern sacked from his job as a teacher, thereby transforming him into a full-time writer.

Moleskine Cahier Large Squared Notebook, Kraft Brown, 5.25 x 8.25 inches

Perhaps I'm being influenced by marketing, but I believe this notebook's exact size, shape and format helps to control erratic impulse and order thought.

Jeff Nuttall

*Bomb Culture* (London, Paladin, 1970)

Almost but not quite unreadable.

*The Paris Review Interviews Vols. 1-3* (London, Picador, 2006-08)

To read an interview is to eavesdrop on someone who knows you're listening. Ranging across the most monumental writers of the twentieth century, the immense scheme of subjects in this series discusses more than you will ever need to know. After all, the future does last a long time.

Flann O'Brien

*The Third Policeman* (Flamingo, London, 1993; first published 1967)

I would gladly have this as the only book on my ideal syllabus, both inside and outside of these pages. Flann O'Brien's best work, the book he kept hidden all his life because it was refused once, the book that drove him to drink. Often cited as the first postmodern novel, *The Third Policeman's* modalities of displaced narration and the over-achieving footnote had already been drafted in O'Brien's student journal *Blather*, but here, find their perfect form.

R.F. Patterson illustrated by Heath Robinson

*Mein Rant: A Summary in Light Verse of Mein Kampf* (Glasgow, Blackie and Son, 1940)

I was once admonished with, "Humour knows no morality."

To which I responded, "Morality knows no humour."