

past the bright cluster of buildings to the base of a mountain, through the black fir forest, scaling the greyer, more distant peak then up and out into the white sky and the most edge of the book. *The Magic Mountain*, a lecture course, one of a small selection of *textes d'appui* as he calls them. Supporting that brace us, the ones we lean on, testing if they'll support our weight; the texts we do be in conversation with, whether directly; the texts that enable us to say or write. Every discourse, says Barthes, is generated by its own more or less idiosyncratic, remembered selection. This is not so much a principle. 'There is an age at which we do know,' he'd said in the inaugural lecture. 'Another age at which we teach what we do is called research.' In this digressive, exciting ('research, not a lecture,' he'll stress at the first session), the practice was never to be or systematic: to work or walk in a straight line, to set down a fantasy. And then to induce a research project. The fantasy for this form of living together that would accommodate the individual rhythms of its community. Allowing for something like

Mountain, Robinson Crusoe, the texts of the Desert Fathers, Zola's novel set in an apartment building, André Gide's account of the real-life sequestered woman of Poitiers. The inquiry will proceed sketchily, says Barthes. Each lecture will offer just a few lines of approach; open a few possible dossiers, I'll only be marking out the contours of these zones of interest. Like the squares on a checkerboard, he says, which perhaps one day I'll fill in. Marking out the spaces, setting the places. A place for animals. Also for bureaucracy, for flowers and for food. I see it like a table; seating you next to you and you next to you, anticipating the conversations between topics, the arguments. The invitation to his audience was to collaborate actively in the inquiry. To fill in the suggested squares themselves, or to propose new ones. And they did; they spoke with Barthes between the sessions, or left notes, and wrote letters, asking questions, making corrections, providing alternative references, redirecting the path of the research toward their own different concerns, which might be one way of describing to myself what I think I am doing here.

Now I love
this idea