



BLYTHE ROBERSON

Peer Review

Blythe Roberson, author of How to Date Men When You Hate Men, writes about Roland Barthes.

I don’t know how I can recommend Roland Barthes any more highly than to say that my own book is based on Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse*—other than to say that I often loan *A Lover’s Discourse* to hot men, as a flirt.

Reading the book for the first time felt like a friend flicking me in the head over and over going, “Duh, duh, duh, duh, duh.” Barthes breaks down the experience of being a lover into minute slices, unearthing the type of wriggly thoughts I had experienced but had never seen written about. The kind of thing like: “Are not excess and madness my truth, my strength?” And: “I lived in the complication of supposing myself simultaneously loved and abandoned”—huge for someone who has been single for stretches of time bordering on infinity, but who concurrently believes everyone to be secretly in love with her. I knew vaguely of Barthes before

I read *A Lover’s Discourse*, but only in his capacity as a semiotician. (I have a four-year degree in English and all I can tell you about semiotics is that someone tried to explain it to me in college.) Barthes was a gay French literary theorist and philosopher. He was born in 1915 and died in 1980 and published *A Lover’s Discourse* toward the end, in 1977. I’m pretty sure almost everything else he wrote is considered more serious, but I don’t care. *A Lover’s Discourse* alone makes Barthes, for me, an immortal hero.

Every cool person in the world loves this book, I’ve discovered. I watched Claire Denis’ *Let The Sunshine In*, starring Juliette Binoche as a single woman in Paris. It was beautiful, funny, and made me seriously consider giving up trying to be sane in an “I’m friends with all my exes” way and instead, like Binoche’s character, just start crying all the time. I googled the film: It’s based on *A Lover’s Discourse*.

Photograph: Portrait of Roland Barthes, 1979. © Francois Legarde / Opale / Bridgeman Images

Left Photographs: Courtesy of COS, Mr Porter and Building Block. Right Photograph: Gustav Almestål, Styling: Pernilla Löfberg



CARRIED AWAY

by Harriet Fitch Little

When Gerry Cunningham first added zippers to a backpack design in the 1930s, he envisaged them as practical additions to bags for climbers such as himself. It’s hard to imagine now that it wasn’t until the 1970s—when they were offered for sale at the sports shop attached to the University of Washington bookstore—that students cottoned on that carrying books on their back might be more ergonomic than carrying them by hand or in a shoulder satchel. What was once a practical solution has, with time, become its own burden: Schoolbags are so big that chiropractors complain they’re condemning a generation to chronic back pain. (Top: Tote Backpack by COS. Center: Drawstring Backpack by Balenciaga. Bottom: Mini Rucksack by Building Block.)

KATIE CALAUTTI

Object Matters

A zip through history.



It took almost 100 years after the introduction of the zipper for the contraption’s capabilities and primary purpose to mesh.

Perhaps early zippers suffered from poor branding: Neither the Automatic, Continuous Clothing Closure created by Elias Howe in 1851, nor the Clasp Locker or Unlocker for Shoes unveiled at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair had quite the same catchy ring about them as the onomatopoeic “zipper.” They were also poorly designed—early iterations tore clothing fabric and popped open at inopportune times.

The design of the zipper as we know it came about in the early 1900s, but was still shunned by society as a fleeting curiosity that promoted a swift state of undress. It was relegated to fastening tobacco pouches and money belts for World War I sailors, whose uniforms didn’t have pockets.

It was in the 1930s that savvy salespeople managed to convince the public that zippers could be useful—and perhaps even fashionable. Ads for children’s clothing touted outfits bearing zippers as promoting self-reliance in

youngsters, and haute couture designer Elsa Schiaparelli set her 1935 collection apart by incorporating the device. But the zipper finally had its moment in the spotlight in 1937 when, following rave reviews from French fashion designers, it beat the button in *Esquire* magazine’s “Battle of the Fly.” Zippers soon replaced button flies in upscale men’s trousers, becoming more standard in ready-to-wear items by the 1940s. Womenswear followed, and by the 1950s the zipper was the default fastener on most clothing. Hollywood caught on that decade, as well, using the zipper as a sign of rebellion via leather jackets: Through the 1970s, the zipper symbolized impulsiveness and unbridled sexuality. Over the years, improvements kept being made. Whether they’re waterproof, airtight or rust-proof, zippers are used everywhere from runways to NASA spacesuits. Now a \$13 billion industry, the market is dominated by the Japanese YKK Group, which makes about half of all the zippers in the world. If you’re looking for proof, just look down at the clasps on your clothing.