

Why Write?

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The goal here is to begin making a list of reasons why *a specific text* might be written (as opposed to, say, why take up the habit or profession of writing). I will appreciate the suggestions of writers and non-writers for additions to or amendments of this preliminary list.

My reasons for making such a list are:

- To be clearer about why I am or might be writing a given text. What do I wish to get from the product or the process?
- As the Executive Editor of *Zeteo*, and with my fellow *Zeteo* colleagues, to focus and organize our thinking about one aspect of the pieces that are submitted to us: i.e. why were they written?

By “why” I have in mind what Aristotle classified as the final cause: the end of the piece, what the writer is seeking to accomplish. I am assuming, too, that this, my first effort at developing such a list, will be primitive: incomplete and lacking in understanding of the relations between the various items. (A discussion of the use of the word “primitive” in this context appears at the end of the French version of this text. See *Montaigbakhtinian.com*, *Pourquoi écrire ?*)

And so, diving in, and in no particular order:

- To try to impress other people, e.g. with one’s brilliance, erudition or writing style. (We should not ignore here that often the primary people to impress are

one's parents, even deceased parents, or parental expectations that have taken up residence in one's super-ego.)

- To earn money or celebrity (or, say, to get tenure).
- Out of what R.D. Laing named as “ontological anxiety.” That is, at times one may hope or imagine that a text, or the setting down of words in some semi-permanent medium, can serve as proof to “me” (any given me) and to others, to the world, that I exist or have existed. We might call this the literary version of a “selfie.”

I note that in seeking to impress, gain celebrity, announce or prove one's existence one may be drawn toward exaggeration or to saying shocking, iconoclastic things. Put another way: These kinds of writing involve trying to get attention. Writing that is focused on getting something from others—publication, tenure, money, praise—will likely tend to be other-directed, seeking to conform to the explicit or implicit demands of those in a position to give the writer what she is after.

Returning to the primary, list-making task:

- To explore an idea or set of ideas. This could be in preparation for another, more polished piece, or for a lecture, etc. (The present effort—this list—might best be classified here.)
- To record something that happened, or a thought, as for future consultation, for one's children or posterity.

This may be the place to note the anal aspect of arts and crafts. (See Freud and his successors' explorations of the anal-retentive and anal-expulsive personality types.) A writer or other artist or artisan makes something that comes from the inside to the outside, and this something, while assembled inside, is an amalgam of things—influences, ideas, expectations, encouragement—that have come from the outside, been internalized. It might be asked if it is typical of artists, and not of many non-artists (or not of many people who don't make things), to take pride in and at times admire the forms of their crotches, what they drop in the toilet?

Undaunted, list and list-maker persist:

- As an exercise, a workout, be this above all strenuous or pleasurable. (One might imagine that the exercise of writing produces enjoyable hormones just like a good workout at the gym or yoga session.)
- To stake a claim for being a certain type of person, a person (however obnoxious) that one would like to be. E.g. I might wish to suggest, to myself above all, that I am indeed a genius or indeed a good person (e.g. caring about the less fortunate).

- Because one has to: a teacher or boss has assigned one to write something.
- To reach out to or chat with a friend (or as to a friend), sharing news, thoughts and feelings.
- To express rage, get something off one's chest. "Maybe I can't do anything about what's happening to me or other people, but goddammit, I'm going to say what I think and feel!" (Cf., Kierkegaard, *Gjentagelsen* (Repetition): "Who tricked me into this whole thing and leaves me standing here? . . . How did I get into the world? Why was I not asked about it, . . . but just thrust into the ranks?"

The end for now—except for one endnote:

As regards Freud, note that the German verb *drücken* is used to speak of printing a book, of expressing oneself, and of pushing from within when constipated. In *Quand Freud voit la mer: Freud et la langue allemande* (Freud and the German language), Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt proposes that the "Rat Man" in Freud's case study of obsessional neurosis was, as it were, caught between the dual meanings of expressing oneself.