

SEAMLESS
ANTILANDSCAPE

by *Leslie Scalapino*

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ISBN 0 86523 444

Seamless Antilandscape is a selection
of a longer work entitled *Seamless Antilandscape*
Andhra Press, Berkeley, CA

Covers printed by David Lopez and Beth Murray in San Jose, CA

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hysteria is related to terror here there
is no terror so it has no relation to anything here
Warhol's coke bottles are there is no relation here

obscurity

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sense that death isn't there moon moon moon moon
sense moon death that moon isn't there moon moon
death isn't that sense moon moon there moon moon
moon moon sense that death isn't there moon moon
moon there was way in which death isn't there can't
remember how it came into that a middle place

it can't be neutral it isn't either one of those it's that it isn't
death not on the sides or middle either it's that it isn't
but I can't remember how that occurred, death isn't occurring

early death — did Dante freak out? modifying
early death by adhering to the program? any
way you can do it

seamless

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some older poets say they are finished and say
the younger poets are finished as the older poets
have finished it the older poets have finished the
younger poets are finished say the older poets
is it the older poets have received too many
compliments?

they made fun of a younger one for being original
original is illusionary they were younger saying to
younger ones original is oneself they are older now
saying younger ones are not original they finished it
now the younger ones are not original this is like it
now look at original is oneself finished they finished
it original one original finished original fun original
seamless bud fun fun til her daddy took the T-bird
away seamless fun finished the T-bird's seamless bud

grind down original seamless T-bird boat bud

limiting aid internal bud bud limit
antilandscapes one bud boat bud antilandscapes
seamless antilandscapes one bud antilandscapes

aid lost lost lost lost lost lost lost lost lost
one stops fighting bud in boat of antilandscapes
fighting bud stops boat in one in antilandscapes

boat-fighting limiting the bud limiting
antilandscapes bud buds

If critique and writing are not separate.... The writing is a 'collapsing' of the distinction between real events and dreams, because my intention was to look at what's happening in the mind *then* ('real time?') — also I was looking at mind in its relation to the real outside (*not* that the outside has created the mind — your quoting of Marx — *or* that the mind has created the outside). That is, not discriminating as to the cause. (In *hmmmm*)¹

The outside 'demonstrating cruelty' then, the writing does not change or talk about the past of the outside — it marks motions by the writing's sound, people making small motions such as walking on the street. There, they aren't 'expression' of oneself.

By characterizing me as having something wrong with my mind, "her mind's not right" (in supposedly projecting malignancy onto a 'neutral' landscape) — and describing 'what is wrong' as "hysteria" you remove the view of the outside (you take the view that what is occurring is not related to the outside, to anything real). A sense of the world being fine but not the one noticing it?

As if one only wrote an "emblem" of the "postmodernist metropolis" rather than engaging being in Calcutta (or New York — or Berkeley).

In this, I am responding to Marjorie Perloff's essay "The Language Poet as Autobiographer, Ron Silliman's *Under Albany*" in which choosing one segment from a multi-segmented piece, which I wrote in 1974, in one passage she compares me to Ron Silliman's mature writing (as well as that of Michael Palmer and Barrett Watten):

But of course the real focus of this paragraph is not on the stranger but on the "I," who reads these sinister motives into the most ordinary of incidents. Somehow — how? — her mind's not right, or is it that her suspicion is merely the emblem of the larger, depersonalized, tooth-and-claw survival of the fittest that characterizes the postmodern metropolis?

Scalapino's prose, in any case, far from being disjointed like Silliman's, moves seamlessly from beginning to end....His jaunty

utterances, upbeat despite the constant difficulties he faces, are quite unlike the just barely controlled hysteria of *hmmmm*.²

The segment from *hmmmm* was a dream which I did not distinguish in that writing from event, is only an event as any other in real time.

The 1974 dream has in it an earlier event from childhood. The dream isn't that early event itself. It has a woman with a snout in it. In the real (childhood) event I'd noticed someone wasn't human (a woman pinching me viciously with a gleeful expression in her eyes) and so realized I had a conception of that (what's a human) — the dream indicating to assess the conception *then* (as in the end and aftermath of the Vietnam War, people there, people on the streets here — the overt and thus violent discrimination against all the women, ridiculed as a group in front of my classes, in graduate school — transgression of friendship in love constituting abandoning... these events occurring at the same time). The dream is indicating not concurring with any of these constructions, or *any* constructions.

If the events of *hmmmm* were referencing these occurrences descriptively, these would not be the simplest physical motions deconstructed (such as only people's motion walking) — it would be events 'already constructed' 'in memory.'

As they *are* that as "events" (at all).

This early writing is motions in space and commentary on these (as if even physical motions are social and interior constructions).

The 'pieces' 'segments' were not "emblems" ("an object or a depiction of an object that comes to represent something else, usually by suggesting its nature or history") — they were intended to be breakdowns of prior constructions of events — in so far as we were being crushed out, and 'we' were interiorly, one could be in small motions that are 'taken out of thought' — a motion that is not denying thought or as it.

Then *hmmmm* is a feminist work, by not proceeding as doctrine — it does not accept social custom. Doctrine would integrate social description as acceptable, rationalized exchange (even integrating articulating sexism into acceptable 'dialogue' *about* sexism). I wanted experience as 'reading' that is 'outside.' And cannot be anywhere else but outside that. (That is, the intention is that it could never be within acceptability.)

Tone in *hmmmm* was actually very intentional — what is laughing? The tone gives the reader a surface that is non-readable — disingenuous and facetious and sincerity-as-vulnerable *really being exactly the same*. So it takes 'one' outside of socially controlled exchange. In other words, to call this surface "hysteria" is to limit it by regarding it as non-intentional, which intention was to cut past that limiting itself, that barrier of social definition (that is acting as a lid of violence) itself.

If it's seen as unintentional that isn't having the view that perspective itself is impermanence. Or that view (or perspective) is harder to see.

Methods of 'examination:' Say creating (a view of one [in]) a seamless reality in order to punch pin-holes in it. Here and there there's only light funneling through a pin-hole. No substance, just tiny pinpricks of light that show up, then don't. Like the vision exam testing the periphery of one's eyesight, the pin-prick showing for an instant in different places on the periphery or elsewhere, then dark in those spots on the dome, only one person's eyesight is being tested. (Whoever's looking.)

To say that "this is seamless narrative" is beside the point. As it is precisely there only being one encountering this seamless reality *then* — that *is* the critique itself. And critiquing this notion I just proposed of apprehension as a 'test:' it's occurrence, yet as its process very competitively based (competitive with oneself, apprehension itself seen as fighting), limiting. Apprehension is not a 'test.'

To *socially* transform 'something' (phenomena/ landscape, 'one's own manifestation') — in oneself. (That one is doing that in the act of 'apprehension as itself a test.')

In other words, *not* to do this. To be able *not* to do this, apprehension.

That (occurrence) — 'socially transforming' — oneself is the (dis-)placement into (or back into) "outside," or fixed, or prior, or 'defined' state or condition.

That one could 'reach the point' (in itself those words imply 'make something a test') of oneself *not* being that, or not doing that (not to socially transform something).

The action — that apprehension is a test — is continual spotting and eradicating of one's former sight/site. ("To pull up by the roots.") It's (the action is the same as the subject) irradicable?

Considering writing '*not* being seamless' as a certain technique, as a technique of 'postmodernist writing' — it is not being process of critique as apprehension?

That is, that 'critique' might be 'procedures' as structuring, for example, that call into question narratives as 'whole' — so if one views that critique as a necessity (which I do) to be "seamless" is to have failed.

So it becomes an entity. Oneself (or the writing?) is seen to be only rendering a 'whole narrative' which one is in.

There is a difference between critical writing and poetic writing which is on the same tenuous ground and creates a mindscape. They cross over, referring to 'the self' and to 'writing' — which are at times different, at times supposedly or apparently the same.

I respond to a sense of a *social* 'given.' I interpreted one critical essay as dismantling 'the *critique* of that seamless reality' by describing that critique itself as seamless. Yet she may be referring to a *literary* 'given' — and I don't make such a distinction.

One segment of the multi-segmented *hmmmm*, it's said, "moves seamlessly from beginning to end."

Referring to Ron Silliman: "His jaunty utterances, upbeat despite the constant difficulties he faces.... his optimism, his ability to find some trivial emblem of the good life..."

What is meant by "the good life"? — it having an emotional, social meaning, even similar to Dante's the "New Life," which was the life into which the soul comes as being liberated.

He was shown the layers of the eternal landscape by Virgil. Dante modified early death by adhering to the program? (Dante's perspective) *not* like either Tibetan Buddhist visual tiered 'antilandscapes,' the same multiple figure in them, or Warhol's coke bottles, their multiple reproduced images being an antilandscape (?)

"The words are never our own. Rather they are our own usages of a determinate coding passed down to us like all other products of civilization, organized into a single, capitalist, world economy." [Ron Silliman]

"I dislike the word 'capitalist' here, implying, as it does, that in the alternative modern 'socialist' world economy there is no 'determinate coding' of the linguistic field." (Marjorie Perloff's 1986 essay "Books: Soundings — *Zaum*, Seriality, and The Recovery of the 'Sacred' ")³

Silliman's words are intended to question a "single, capitalist, world economy," regardless of whether there is also a determinate coding in socialist economies. Calling Silliman a "*technician* of the sacred," Perloff praises his inventive patterns and sound, words that are used "not as the purveyors of 'private' insights, psychological truths, or unique confessions." She doesn't consider his use of words in their intentionality (such as questioning capitalism) — that is, the intention to change reality that is social. The underlying view:

it is 'as if' linguistic code and 'social' and 'private' were *not* related.

If one is not looking at that which is experienced as 'private' as 'social' — what is the function (in an agnostic, anti-mythos view, which hers is) of a "technician of the sacred"? (She refers to Jerome Rothenberg's anthology of that title, and is giving examples of technicians as word-workers.)

Critical writing embracing a type of contemporary poetry (much of) which has a radical conceptual and social-political intention, sometimes de-emphasizes or 'changes' the poets' intentions by stressing formal aspects as if these were valuable for their 'form' (in itself) rather than their form being that of a social/conceptual deconstruction taking place. This tends to bring the poet into a lineage as socially 'understandable' and understandable in that it is literary tradition:

"Is Silliman's then, as Jed Rasula posits, a "*grand refusal of the chronic strategies of authorial domination*"? Yes, if by "chronic" we are referring to the confessional mode of the sixties and seventies, in which verbal material is all but subsumed under the presence of a commanding 'I.' But if we look further afield and read Silliman against Blaise Cendrars or Apollinaire, against the early Eliot or the late Stevens, not to mention Williams and Stein, we learn that it's perfectly reasonable to think of Silliman as an individual lyric poet, a poet whose main-spring, however bound to the theorems of early Language Poetics, has always been essentially autobiographical."⁴

That is, that they'd be told it really is the particular way of looking at emotion that is apparently familiar to them (lyric) (except that that would be to assume that people have that common assumption and experience)? — But he was trying to place it slightly (or radically) *unfamiliar* etc. so (his intention was) the reader would read it that way that's unfamiliar?

"If the function of writing is to express the world..." [Ron Silliman]. He maintained, speaking in different instances, it was *not* to express the world. Neither to 'render' the world nor to make conclusions that explain it. Perloff, however, says here that all along, despite holding onto poetic "theorems," he actually was expressing *himself*.

The particularity of his writing can't be seen if seen as tradition of lyric poetry, if 'described as' something else.

The academic prescription of *lineage* as basis of critique is a structural transformation of the individual's oeuvre. That is, lineage *is* "chronic strategies of authorial domination."

'Undoing one's mind, constructions, not being in them' 'outside one's mind — by it' has to occur, or one isn't doing that — it is not social prescriptions (and certainly not academic prescriptions. That would be dependent only and irrelevant) that are the frame of reference. It's making the constructions at all — to have these occur to apply pressure, increasing the times of occurrence of these.

In Mongolian (Tantric) Buddhist tankas (some so large as to cover an entire wall), multiple images of the same figure dispersed evenly — or different figures on multiple vertical-horizontal landscapes — are not deities, they are figures 'repeated' 'as' (to be) mind projections. As those repeat.

The repeated figures neither 'resolve' nor 'reorder' them ('itself as repetition), but 'it' changes them.

There's no depth, it's thin, always separate. As repeated figure, there is no hierarchy.

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In our particular cultural dichotomy — primary attraction — in which apprehension cannot be 'approached' either

'emotionally' or by 'intellect' — they can be a flimsy word on the surface that does not scrutinize, conclude, pursue, perceive, or analyze.

'Procedural' writing is not transcendent.

'Procedural' is a by-passing, approaching apprehension neither 'emotionally' or by 'intellect' — yet described as "form" it becomes an entity. Then it can't be done any more. If there isn't procedure, and words are seen rather than spoken as their characteristic, its meaning is floating alongside, additional.

'what's the anxiety?': as *not* being in the state of constant change — in which there's no fear — the neck cut out.

split structure — at night — but splitting structure at day too a half-cracked black bud — not as — one's as: weighing, only — it's not redoing struggle, as itself which occurs itself

have to approach people — what's it existing with people only?
*for Aaron Shurin*⁵

Perloff writing on my book *that they were at the beach* (North Point Press, 1985) in 'Books: Soundings — *Zaum*, Seriality, and The Recovery of the 'Sacred,' describing the first sequence or series of that book, "buildings are at the far end," said purely its form characteristic, that it is: "a landscape of extreme dislocation. The speaker keeps trying to get her bearings, define her place in relation to the 'buildings...at the far end' (of what?), but her definitions and explanations keep breaking down."

This is accurate. The sentences in *that they were at the beach* are all relational, change of location and perspective in space only — no time even. My intention was to change *location's relation* to construction of meaning that one would not reproduce construction of self as context, in that, *ground itself is altered first* and occurs as only relational.

Conversely (in "buildings are at the far end"), by time being abandoned, a beggar once seen lying in garbage starving near death, by being in the writing's placement as relational location, is not relegated to time (is not 'in memory' only).

She is reordering the intention. [My intention:]

This deliberate dis-location is not the same as 'expressing the world' (that is, simply *being affected by* urban turmoil and conditions). It is not even to state location in a different way, it is *not* to re-state conditions even.

Critique is contending with/as one's own mind as the outside, moving it outside itself. 'Always one has to leap out of one's skin....' (I thought then).

Frank O'Hara's appropriations of Apollinaire, Mayakovsky, Reverdy, Pound, and Williams are overt as if their forms were 'labels' of experience only. As if paraphrases of Rimbaud are O'Hara ('the man's interior') superimposed as 'only language forms' on New York City's streetscapes O'Hara stressed in his manifesto that "personism" is not personal confessionalism. He commented about the poem "Second Avenue" that the verbal elements are "intended consciously to keep the surface of the poem high and dry, not wet, reflective and self-conscious. Perhaps the obscurity comes in here, in the relation between surface and meaning, but I like it that way since the one is the other (you have to use words) and I hope to *be* the subject, not just about it."⁶

His language-structures in the long poems (such as "Second Avenue") are akin to Morton Feldman's music, about which O'Hara wrote.

O'Hara seems to be inventing a different landscape that's also American by the self and the landscape being 'something else' (appropriated form *as such*, consciously appropriated language, not psychological interior). As Perloff said, his clauses and similes, "are purposely designed as verbal traps, making us look for a logic that doesn't exist. Causality and analogy are consistently subverted; disparate images juxtaposed so as to create an antilandscapes that no longer 'refers' to a recognizable world."⁷

Intellect assesses meaning — that assigns it. Mongolian tankas repeating the same figure on a field of this figure do

not assign meaning. Akin to Warhol? Say the repeated figure is buddha, the field of figures in that space is still the event or action of 'seeing' only.

If there isn't distinguishing of meanings, there isn't history — i.e. language is inherently political. It's its time.

In an essay on Allen Ginsberg, Marjorie Perloff reinterpreted *Howl* as not in fact arising from pain — i.e. not that which is connecting with his time (that's why the present is the most disturbing time, to paraphrase Stein) — but rather as actually being comic, and now in a different time can be *understood* to be comic. Calling Ginsberg a "comic bard," she maintains that in that light his work can (should) now be accepted, implying it could not be accepted if we interpret it as arising from pain. There is a filter used there separating form and occurrence, which changes the sense Ginsberg conveys as being that reality.

It frightened me — so that I had to recover being in a constant dis-location! seeing that as a state in which one could be attentive.

A writing that is a censor 'targeting' one's mindscape sights/sites and zapping them, entails fighting with oneself as being one's 'scrutiny' (*per se*). I'd like to do writing now that is inclusive of sites on the periphery and the spatial center at once. Transmogrification of space.

I've tried that before but now there's a sense (to work with) of 'attention that's not a test.'

"One interpretation suggests that the sentence advocates the need for humans to thoroughly negate their emotions, which egoistically and self-defeatingly produce the contingent flux of existence by perpetuating volitional bondage to transient entities. The limitation in this reading of this passage, however, is that the emotional response to transiency is seen as the actual cause of impermanence. Emotions do not create the pervasive and perpetual process..." — *The Zen Poetry of Dōgen*, Steven Heine (8)

There is implied in this a fascinating view or possibility of subjectivity/language that is phenomenal yet not causal?

Relation of conflict/transience (self-imposed bondage as fighting with the self, as the writing), impermanence in relation to reactivity.

To blame thought as the cause of impermanency, although thought is impermanency.

To blame emotion as being conflict, though not the cause of it nor transience being so.

Language does not cause subjectivity, although it *is* subjectivity.

It is necessary to be subjectivity/ language to be the landscape, though "to be" is *not* — only *by* that occurring.

Reordering of intention and its relation to form — Robert Storr (Curator of Painting and Sculpture, the Museum of Modern Art in New York), stated (in a lecture at Bard College, July 1997) that theory-based art of the 1970's and '80's was a failure: "There are no issues in art. There are issues in private life and issues in social life, but there are no issues in art." He praised this time now as: "We are living in a neutral time" — commenting that the artists should enjoy this fortunate circumstance.

When Barrett Watten contended that he disagreed with Storr's "argument," Storr replied, "I *have* no argument."

One example Storr gave was the Museum of Modern Art's refusal early-on to buy a Jasper Johns "Flag" painting (painting of an American flag) because they saw it as anti-patriotic. He remarked, referring to the museum members, "But they were wrong" — wrong because the painting is not anti-patriotic when seen now as form only. The implication also being that now it's valuable? I think they were right: the painting was the flag only as painting, an object — therefore 'anti-patriotic' since it retained its meaning as image *and* was painting-only.

And there is no neutral time. Now with sixty or seventy (?) million people to die of AIDS, two million dying of starvation in Korea, girls sold into brothels, the homeless panhandling everywhere — there being no "issues" is a variation on a seamless reality. And one can't be in that.

If one is to move one(self) into the outside location and stay there — there is no time — and no neutrality. This is intentionality.

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NOTES

1. Leslie Scalapino, *The Woman Who Could Read the Minds of Dogs*, Sand Dollar: Berkeley, 1976. Published again in *Considering how exaggerated music is*, North Point Press: San Francisco, 1982.
2. Marjorie Perloff, "The Language Poet as Autobiographer: Ron Silliman's *Under Albany*" in *Ron Silliman and the ALPHABET*, page 173-174; guest editor Thomas A. Vogler, *Quarry West 34*: Santa Cruz, 1998.
3. Marjorie Perloff, "Books: Soundings —Zaum, Seriality, and The Recovery of the 'Sacred,'" *American Poetry Review*. Philadelphia, Jan-Feb 1986.
4. Marjorie Perloff, "The Language Poet as Autobiographer: Ron Silliman's *Under Albany*" in *Ron Silliman and the ALPHABET*, page 180; guest editor Thomas A. Vogler, *Quarry West 34*: Santa Cruz, 1998.
5. Leslie Scalapino, *New Time*, Wesleyan University Press: Hanover, NH, 1999.
6. Marjorie Perloff, *Frank O'Hara, Poet Among Painters*, University of Texas Press: Austin and London, 1979, p. 70 as quoted from *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Editor Donald Allen, Knopf: New York, 1971, 495-97.
7. Marjorie Perloff, *Frank O'Hara, Poet Among Painters*, p. 66.
8. *The Zen Poetry of Dōgen, Verses from the Mountain of Eternal Peace*, Steven Heine, Tuttle, Boston: 1997, p. 29.

hysteria: "the Greek notion that hysteria was peculiar to women and caused by disturbances of the uterus. A psychoneurosis marked by emotional excitability and disturbances of the psychic, sensory, vasomotor, and visceral functions. Behavior exhibiting overwhelming or unmanageable fear or emotional excess."

Of course, one could 'get with' or 'go with' the behavior of "hysteria" as only a force transforming the outside conditions (in some necessary instance), rather than accepting it or viewing it as a negative characterization of one.