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The Interior Experience of Being/Socially Constructed —Note on *R-hu*

Atelos Press invited me to write a work 'on commission.' The conception and basis of Atelos, published by Lyn Hejinian and Travis Ortiz, is to commission from poets works that are experiments, hybrids of criticism and poetry. Knowing that I was going to travel in Mongolia (1998), I decided to write my commissioned work while there, beginning writing in the U.S. in order to warm up and be ready when actually traveling, though my intention was to write without plan or foresight.

Before leaving on this trip, I attended the Page Mothers Conference organized by Fanny Howe and Rae Armantrout and held in San Diego. Devoted to women poets, the conference celebrated Bernadette Mayer in particular. One critic, however, a woman insisting on changing her assigned panel to sit on the final, summarizing panel that was titled "The Future," attacked women writers categorically. While asserting the only important literary movement to be Language writing, she claimed that the movement was led by the men in it, who had supposedly created the theory: "the women walked behind." She maintained that the validity and merit of any woman's writing and theory could only be *measured* by her having written essays on the works of *men* and having published these essays in $L=A=N=G=U=A=A=G=E$ *Magazine* (edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews) or in the *Poetics Journal* (edited by Barrett Watten and Lyn Hejinian, the latter sitting in the Page Mothers audience). Both journals had ended long before. Language writer Carla Harryman was in the audience and answered this critic, words to the effect—"those were my ideas too/I was at the same time *doing* those ideas in my writing."

According to the logic of this critic, women meriting recognition as theorists, originators as poets, would literally have to be articulating men's ideas critically (rather than the women proposing as/and writing their own ideas)—in that sense they would have to be in fact *led* by men (if they were to avoid this critic's stigma of their walking behind the men). She punctuated her remarks to us by stating that poets don't know anything about philosophy or theory, and that they should stay away from such and just write the poetry. "I am the critic, you are the poets"—meaning, you cannot think about what you are doing. She repeated this phrase to me in conversation at the conference, adding the explanation: "You don't tell *me* what to think, I tell *you*" (that is, denying the conceptualizing process). However, for poets conception *is* the art.

Shortly before this conference, I'd read an essay given to me by Ron Silliman, written by this particular critic, in which she'd negatively compared one passage from my earliest poetry to the writings of three men (praising Michael Palmer, Barrett Watten, and Silliman whom she celebrated in particular), asserting about me, by identifying the poet with the speaker in

the poem segment, "her mind is not right." Describing my mind as my writing to be "lysteria," her essay also characterized my writing as the seamless transparency of conventional narrative that makes (that is) *no distinction between one's life and form that is one's language*. That is, *she* was not making that distinction (between my life and my form/language).

Her response to me that *she* was the critic, as such should not be told what to think, was in response to my comment to her that the poem-segment she was using to demonstrate my being a paranoid hysteric was simply an account in the poem of a dream, specified as such in a note to the poem: that is, the segment is the dream's occurrence, its action, rather than showing faculties of one's waking process. That dream's action is typical of dreams in general. To this explanation, she replied: "I'm going to publish this essay again, in *Critical Inquiry*, and I'm not going to change a word of it!"

In 1985, this particular critic, Marjorie Perloff, wrote a note to me to let me know she was reviewing my book, *that they were at the beach*. When the review appeared, there was only a paragraph on my book that framed a lengthy review of a new book by Ron Silliman who was described as far more developed than myself. Referring to my sequence, "buildings are at the far end," in *that they were at the beach*, her entire review of my book consisted of saying that the author is so confused she doesn't know where she is. In *that they were at the beach*, the piece that is erotica titled "A Sequence," was my first experiment with writing transparency as single surface that as such, being without depth, is multivalence. Ron Silliman and others were describing a particular view of "transparency," the illusion that life/events *are* and are *in* the writing, rather than the writing revealing itself to be a construction separate from events it delineates. Their idea was that anti-transparency, commentary within a work demonstrating that writing is a separate event, highlights the social construction of reality. My writing transparency as a single surface was a separation (demonstration) of that separation.

Marjorie Perloff was apparently thinking that I'm unaware of any social construction of reality—by one being it being in it. My idea in "A Sequence" (solely erotica genre), for example, was to do writing that is cultural surface as transparency, cultural surface and transparency being *itself* multivalence (in chemistry, "multivalence" means: many charges for a single element). Transparency, when noticeably surface as an event of the writing, highlights one(s) being in the social construction of reality.

Rather than being in conflict with Silliman's idea, this corollary adds to and transforms it, incorporating (imitating)—the interior experiencing of being/socially constructed.

A light detective fiction with characters appearing briefly is laced here and there in *R-hu*. *R-hu* is composed of brief essays—on Bernadette Mayer, Robert Grenier, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Philip Whalen—the interior being that these essays be active making bits as if of a phenomenal surface.

The essay, "Seamless Antilandscape," at the end of *R-hu*, is demonstrating that a so-called "seamless transparency" (language's surface) can be created *newly* aware (in) an antilandscape (as opposed to being Perloff's use of the

word "transparency" to mean unconscious assumptions/by which one is being within socially-determined narratives). That is, erasing the distinction between one's narrative and one's language condensed to be ('on'/to be the illusion of) a single flat syntax surface (imitating visual) is scrutiny. One has to do it from inside, not violating the surface.

I was discouraged by these aforementioned events. Mongolia, compared to U.S. society, was experienced by me as a heaven of illumined indigo or deep purple skies on gold ground, where we (I, my parents, and myself) traveled in jeeps without roads in endless space of horses and occasional nomads, without visible social hierarchy and without the cultural concept of being either lost or found. (The sun setting at 10:30 PM, once we were still hurtling with no compass through the dark roadless Gobi Desert at 1:00 AM. The driver said "Don't worry, if we can't find our destination we will sleep in the 10,000-star motel"). It was a wondrous relief. Titled *R-hu* (because a Chinese woman in Beijing—when we were on the way to the separate country of Mongolia—traced those English letters in the air to make the sound of the name of a musical instrument, though "R-hu" is thus someone's visual estimation of the sound, not the correct spelling), the book I wrote for Atelos compares the real-time Mongolian landscape to the huge wall-hangings seen in the Buddhist monasteries there, hangings duplicating the same landscape seen outside reconfigured as Buddhist life (its *then*-current present, at the time the particular hangings were created). I compared their sense of space to my conception (as spatial syntax) of the space of the U.S., as if placing these 'actual'/as conceptual spaces on each other *as text*.

The text-thangkas of "Seamless Antilandscape" are 'on' U.S. culture as light empty duplications to be simple voidings of lineage. I'm taking social "lineage" to be transparency only narrative of itself, stagnant assertion flipped to be light and airy its description illusory only the supposed 'outside'. Text-thangkas that are *no-image* (voiding by repetition of the same image) are my text-imitation of Buddhist wall-hangings that multiply repeat the same figure; theirs with a Buddhist connotation, yet as present-time daily conceiving—also visually—they're akin (in my essay) to Andy Warhol's multiple portraits of the same person, such as his repetitions of single head (such as Elizabeth Taylor). Obviously this is not the same as the repetition of the figure of Buddha, yet I'm emphasizing 'empty' figure being states of action, *practice* of seeing as voiding. The thangkas may repeat a figure in scenes of the landscape in which the people live. The surface and repetition of my text-thangkas are intended to be transparency devoid of critique and are neither self-conscious perception, nor lineage.

R-hu ends on a note of wonder—What would a text be like if it could drop all framing devices, have none—for there aren't any *such* frames in phenomenal reality?—not even sound-structures or resonance, nothing on which to pin narrative or place, and no place by which it could orient itself or form directions—not a vacuum either, being utter freedom?

In Mongolian (Tantric) Buddhist thangkas (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.

irises, or kali [on Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge]

Four Year Old Girl, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Kelsey St. Press. 1998.

The density is beauty. She calls something “beauty.” They are individual occurrences.

A line of the text (which is ‘by line,’ line-breaks rather than paragraphs) is so long it is entire throughout (in other words, as one’s concentration, one line has the sense of going on ‘throughout’). The lines do not carry over a narrative, from one line to the next; rather, lines are juxtaposed. There is juxtaposition of ‘thoughts’ and ‘images’ on one line. The lines or images don’t build up to something. Pairing of singular beauty is the density.

A thought is connection *per se*? Yet Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, in *Four Year Old Girl*, is making a thought that (cancels itself?) is in the place of that which is around it—because one can’t move from it (as a narrative moving to something else), though a line has also that which is before it. Or any place in the text is also that which is after whatever thought it is. It is utter attention, only—invisible entity as “parallel.”

In Berssenbrugge’s poems, attention and connection are two, and break or wreck one’s mind *then*. One rests or basks and at the same time struggles. As reading.

A beauty completely devoid of thought—*by* that thought (in other words, by that thought occurring there and canceling itself, in the same ‘place’ is beauty. But the two are separate alongside).

They are felt. Perhaps that which is ‘beauty’ is one occurrence being multiple. Something that is ‘beauty’ is there. So is thought, as if throughout (“thought” would be a whole, rather than “a” thought). They aren’t each other and aren’t existing there without each other.

They are unrelated by being at the same time.

They occur as attention

as if paired is the same as pithed.

An instance of ‘beauty’ in the utterly singular, as it ‘comes up’—is in one’s attention. Itself is only attention—an instance is thought also, the same instance but different manifestation ‘there.’

“The more wispy the mind, as at the edge of the greenness/of a dogwood blossom, the more fit to catch sight of such an invisible entity as ‘parallel,’/ its distinct substance capable of having all mountains thought away and still being around” (“Trises” 12).

Even being “parallel”—or space at all—is entity; yet is not the same as one thought it was, or is no longer there, rather than nonexistent (and one’s thought is no longer there) by being present *at once*. The mountains present (and time) not being there.