



Brenda Iijima's Rabbit Lesson

Geoffrey Olsen

A Review of *Rabbit Lesson*

By Brenda Iijima

Fewer & Further Press, 2009

don't talk without permission

The space *Rabbit Lesson* negotiates, or forces negotiation, via networks, & layers & connectives: the existence of tissue, bound to us & others, tissue, limb & sinew.

kill—a—rich—experience

Where we kill so many of rich experience: we kill rich experiences: we make of the living beings an object to satiate our hunger: we make of hunger a convenience—a dislocation of murder, of understanding. Iijima's work does not evade terror, but confronts it from the start. "shock observation", a poetry of viscera.

a realism that looks steely—really—really

Unflinching in linguistic, observational expression, Iijima writes outside of permission. A questioning of permissible human behavior versus permissible animal behavior moves

through the work. There is an erotic intensity to the language—a conflation of pleasure and violence that is both beautiful and a warning against a lax awareness.

Force is here, “bodily, boding”. A writing here utterly permeable in the actual layering of the text, both in the language itself & in the way that it is visually laid on the page, some text faded gray, seeming to sink into the background. Strong notes from the earlier parts of the book reappear as whispered echoes. “Silence (ing, ing, ing)”.

owner’s manual states shot to kill is a killing field is a duty
for sovereignty is sanctioned indorsed essentiality of democracy to
further such ideals to quell dissonant uprisings socialist elements
other the animal and animalistic mobility as the run away into
the underbrush pursuit to kill as many as the run toward or—

These poems bring forth structures of daily life that are complicit in death. It is a nightmarish saturation. War has become an experience at the distant borders, at the frontier, away from the ordinary. If poetry can be a way of disrupting habitual patterns, of removing veneers of illusion and distance, then *Rabbit Lesson* takes this as essential demand. It takes on this direction without becoming jingoistic. It does not project its goals outwards—the poems take them as body, embodying what in our existence becomes more and more abstract. War is disembodied. Iijima re-sites war on bodies. Iijima revitalizes this information, breaking down linearity to allow for myriad responses.

The book itself is difficult to quote from: the poems are a weave with the page as frame.

nothing happens can nothing not happen language nothing not happening

All that is happening simultaneously. The text is a surround, is evoking events, fragments, language pervasively around. It is not mitigated through a selfhood, not through an individual emotional response, but an emotion divesting itself of the personal into a multiplicity in the poem.

remixing surface dimensions
and raw and gnaw

lack of excess/of meaning/ of meat

There is a definite relationship with this work and Joseph Beuys's performance piece *How to Explain Picture to a Dead Hare*. Beuys, with \$50 worth of Gold leaf wrapped over his face, cradles a dead hare in his arms, shows the animal pictures of his work while whispering explanations. Beuys's performance explores the interconnectedness of bodies. The response of art to the dead, mourning.

mop up meat
mop up that meat!
perceptual inputs
mop meat up
motor outputs

mop mop mop up meat!

Iijima confronts, imagines, analyzes what the soldiers thought, what the animal feels in "the vortex of war." This confrontation generates the molar, expansive qualities of the text, while at the same time generating a molecular awareness of "pulses", of ears "to hear our interiors."

Rabbit Lesson is removing the fence work between the human and the animal, vitally aware of the shared universe of the animal and human. In CAConrad's *The Book of Frank*: "this fence keeps you in your world/ this fence keeps you in your world/ this fence keeps you in your world". Writing that is becoming animal. It is a rearrangement of the human poem not looking for the roots but becoming roots, permeating a soil of perception. This work accepts no separation between beings. The work is elegiac, giving body to the death and pain inflicted on animals, humans, women, ecosystems. Separation between these entities

fails: "war can't be separated from *where* where can't be separated from *what/* what can't be separated from *all...*"

The sheer amount of textual methods deployed, of sound, of form, of text is thrilling. The poems are visual works enacting text as image on the layered page. Response to the poems require many layers of consciousness. Iijima is for the liberation of beings at every level, an approach to the poem that feels both wild and radically committed.