



## Disbelief

by Leslie Scalapino

History/Memory/Body: Language is the Trace of Being. Written for the Segue Panel "Language Poetry and the Body" (May 12, 2007). *Patients with hippocampal amnesia cannot imagine new experiences. The hippocampus is thought to have a role in recall of episodic memories, recall of experience of rich spatial setting or context rather than 'simple' visual imagery (for faces or single objects). Patients with hippocampal damage could not 'see' detail and as such could not construct future contexts or events. Cued to create fictitious situations, their imagined experiences lacked spatial coherence, consisting instead of fragmented images in the absence of a holistic representation of the environmental setting. "The hippocampus, therefore, may make a critical contribution to the creation of new experiences by providing the spatial context into which the disparate elements of an experience can be bound."*(1)

I'm not juxtaposing 'healthy' as convention of sequence in poetry. Nor does the poet have a damaged hippocampus presumably. The mind's recall is tied to the making of the future (as our physical, factual capacity). I'm suggesting one can intentionally recall-as-simultaneously-obliterate past events *as* creating their future.

Taking the view that "the self is a guinea pig"(2) (and herein I'm creating a foil) in considering presentation of 'one's/other's bodies' in writing, I will try to see the relations between 'our bodies' and 'future' in an example from my early writing, *that they were at the beach*, not because I'm so attached to that early work but because it was written in the period of radical as 'communal' language writing(3)). I'm only speaking of the San Francisco Language scene; I think New York Language scene was very different. A description of that writing *of mine* is only possible in hindsight, though when writing it I had a *sense* (a 'feeling') of what I'll here describe. As writing, one can't conceive of a future without changing the past and present. Corporal body and the future are separated, detached, though the body must be there for there to *be* an individual's future (maybe there can't be sense of body *without* sense of future?). The body must happen simultaneous in order to invent the future.

To show duration (one's body's sense of continuance, and my order of placement of 'body' in such a duration) within one book, I'll consider future/past in the order of the sequences in *that they were at the beach*. The first of the four sequences is "Buildings are at the far end."

The ship (so it's in the foreground) – with the man who's the beggar in back of it, the soil is in back of him – is active. So it's mechanical – there aren't other people's actions – I don't know how old the man in back is. Who's older than I, desire'd been had by him for something else. I'm not old.

And with him being inactive back then.(4)

It took intense concentration to 'find' the linkage of elements in space so as to 'allow' these not to be linked, the distance to be widened between instigation and any aftereffect so we can *see* in reading there being no cause and effect. I only see now I was basing this on visual illusion, the sense that cause and effect occur from interaction between the immediate elements of present-time location, though I *know* it doesn't: Only interaction as a present, rather than recognized-past impinging on or affecting the present there – even the beggar, who was in the past in fact, is only locational 'there.' No elements of the space inactive, we're seeing after and before any actions happen and at once. So 'we're' (as if there is optical sight of plural viewers, not solitary reader) as viewers/'just seeing' freed from the making of events even – even single events; and instigations as chains of history are removed. We're seeing the open area between any happening, thus death ceases there, as in the beggar lying between the ship and the area behind the beggar (who in real-time as my childhood memory was dying, starving, seen lying in garbage on a dock of a port; but my responses or memory are not the issue, only his action/inaction relative to the real-time-space).

The ship being mechanical (its movement is motorized) is not caused by us (as an event is, when we act – what's *now*, that's not caused by us either) and the mechanical ship is also 'caused' (in the sense of machine production). Thus the writing is a state in which one can see the ship is both static and not static. There is no build up or plot; therefore in the text when I lose my job as a result of emotion (which removed from action had been seen, and is regarded in the poem, as only 'for itself'), that the emotion had an effect is a shock (in the text). In real-time a man had been bullying me in public actions that were misogyny also fostered by the context (San Francisco Grand Piano setting). After his writing was reviewed, praised by a leader for having "gone beyond self," I answered the poet satirically in a private letter; he responded publicly by sending out letters across the country. (Amidst his negative comments about my writing, one of his minor comments was that the purpose of my writing was to seduce men.) Though he was not in the place of my new employment, I lost my new job, leaving me destitute – I'm let go by

another man who's his friend. Referencing that man with whom I argued (who himself in the future healed the rift between us), the man who fired me said "you cannot come now" to the teaching job, after having a negative exchange with his friend. [I asked Suzanne Stein to comment on my talk as I was writing it. I've retained a few of her remarks. **Suzanne Stein: Leslie as I'm in the middle of this paragraph I'm going back to beginning to remind myself what is the panel title, wanting to understand why you're taking this side-route, I think there's a need to directly reference that these actions/emotional situations are effecting the [your] body. I mean, be specific about that, about these things happening to real time to your real body/person, isn't that part of the discussion of 'language poetry and the body'? I think I'm just wanting you to name it directly here.**] The effect on my body (after the removal of the job following the letter-'attacks') was a sense of no distinction between body and mind in their utter cessation, of my having been *blasted*; body-mind suspended in a sensation of obliteration. (The poem thus corresponded with and then altered that physical state.) The poem is not expression of shock regarding either the dying of the beggar (past) or the losing of the job (present then): it's doing the action of seeing in a space *there not being cause and effect*. Even though there *is* (death, and consequences of actions – the consequence there being personalized, as such illegal labor practice; death, the beggar's future-past is tactilely attached to these also). By the writing's action being apprehending not doing the links forming events, so they do not form, *though the events are there*, the future without any of these effects is possible as apprehension (in the sense that it's possible for *one* to change the immediate past and present – in the text, when seeing that space tactilely). So one can 'see' (mind's eye as knowledge about it (5)) how to act throughout real-time.

I had not read any Buddhist texts by this time – or any I remember. On a panel at UC Berkeley several years ago (it was on the subject of Buddhism and poetry) when I described doing writing that does not form events solidly, events potentially occurring multiply spurring forming each other (so there wouldn't be any independent events, nor therefore hierarchy of perception though there are consecutive actions; and as such there couldn't be social hierarchy represented or occurring there either), Kevin Davies remarked "I don't think Leslie's doing what she thinks/says she's doing." Rereading "Buildings are at the far end" now, as a different person than I was as the writer of the poem, I 'got' that idea of the text allowing lapsing of cause and effect, the lapsing there tactilely. At any rate, the act of disbelief (that one's capacity and experiencing as one's nature also are only *within* events and not valid (seen by others as not even understood by one) – so one can *not* align actions of actual historical events, *is not doing so as writing or apprehending, is hierarchical polarization forming conception/action there*. He may have been implying a conclusion I used to hear in my context about my writing, that it's only *that* event (or as was said to me a number of times in the '80s, "That's just narrative!" solidified

presentation or reconstruction of a story, so it's past, as if an event was the *subject* when the writing was attempting to undo past). Responding to a student's comparing my writing to Gertrude Stein's, a man scoffed: "Gertrude Stein is the human mind! Leslie's is just human nature! A man *having AIDS!*" His scoffing reference—as if a man having AIDS is merely 'emotional' content, rather than elevated/'mind'—is to "Delay Series" in *way*, which I'd just read, giving a reading with that man. The division is between mind and living (experiencing): *being in events is one's body, one's impermanence.*

Disbelief is an operation of (the) writing, one being formed in it before the writing, however free one may be (or not) from the effect of being disbelieved (one being created by social pressure).

The early and mid '80s was the height of San Francisco Language writing as a communal movement when the idea was articulated of a 'collective' syntax eschewing the identity of the individual writer. I can remember Ron Silliman commenting that you *could* still actually identify individual Language poets in their works by their style or quirks, they had not fully merged—implying that the political experiment was still: that one/they practice a writing eschewing individualism. Interest in collaborations, as almost procedures (perhaps Lyn Hejinian's interest in collaborations?) arose from this radical concept. In the context of critiquing predecessors, such as Olson poetics, to say nothing of confessional poetry, 'There is no self in this writing' is/was a common woven aside or positive assertion occurring within a Language poem (say, by Lyn Hejinian). The transgression of individualism also as such entailed erasing the conventional formal distinction between thought-(critique) and 'poetry.' A communal objective combined with group resistance to outsider-poets' definitions or analysis of Language group's processes or ideas continually displaced the outsider-participant, the rejection of analysis being transformative to *others* by producing the sense (in them) of 'not-this not-that.' At this time, I had the concept that one had to make a new language outside of any social syntax, sound, and (thus) 'social seeing' in order to break the continual social ordering that's framing and defining one. Sound/syntax as a thought-shape is the struggle (motion) to apprehend (and *is*) one's actual mind-shape, its physical-*as*-conceptual phenomena, separate from social programming which is exterior and becomes deterministic. I was aware then that my attempt of language as thought-shape was in dialogue with—as if the other side of the coin of—purposes of a 'collective' syntax.

I would like to redo in writing that idea of: events there which, as *not done* there, can be seen simultaneously 'undone,' that are history in the outside world *now* in the sense of regardless of my/one's presence in the events (to change 'actual' 'outside,' *but one is that*, the seeing of it that is

outside oneself). Yet one's corporal body has to be there as memory to imitate sensory links as future, which are then not being linked, to have the sense of that ghost-apprehension.

The second series in *that they were at the beach* is the title piece, "that they were at the beach – aeolotropic series," intended as randomly-generated past or past-present events as such 'punched out' of space (of reality), so one is to be without any memory at all as the means of one being only in future. My sense of it being on its own was random arising, impermanence driving the writing of segments. 'Punching these out,' however, occurs by recalling episodic memories, which different as they are, are all subjected to a single sound scheme throughout (which happened to 'come up' unknown): Paired within itself (as if somehow in internal conflict which was not yet understood by me), each segment is (same sound as) a double paragraph as whatever that single event is/was, which creates the sense of it being duplicated, motions in space of writing. Now it occurs to me that this syntax (sound as double-pairing) gives one/the reader the conceptual implication – as the corporal sense – of other events at once (any, present or future there) that are occurring or could occur. With only present memories, the syntax as sound (as if one's body in space) and its repetition makes the sense of future (there but unknown)?

In "that they were at the beach – aeolotropic series," the episodic stream was associational, especially memories of racism that was at the basis of or 'causing' altercations in my junior high school and high school. At the time of these events I had the sense that we, the girls in the poem-segments (it was public, Berkeley High School, but the gym class had only girls) who collided or beat each other, sometimes a group on one, were not producing the events (which I felt as 'context,' chain of events, all events being interdependent) in which we were acting. Though we were in the midst of it, and all were suffering, it had been formed by others (the adults) before us in time. This is why we were as negative space of writing [not] *as [in]* paradise [by there being a sense of it], we were innocent at once pre-social construction, not forming our then present context or actions; so there is an opening for the future though (and because) the present has been formed by others (at the same time we're *not doing* it). That is: Inversely, since we are only 'there' (present), we are not socially constructed. By *being* so (constructed). I had the sense then and later that the kids there (in Berkeley) were forming a new way of being (they/we *were* doing so) that exists now (after, in the effect of the civil rights movement). I'd have to grasp it was '*we*' forming (not just a 'they,' outside) in order to change (the writing's relation of, as) the *actual* relation of past/present to future.

Girls playing games on the shore (the photograph I chose for the cover was young men and women playing tug-of-war on a beach) as if 'our' collective memory. My mother used to sing a song about children playing on the shores of eternity.

Some people disliked "that they were at the beach—aeolotropic series" on the basis of its being "nostalgia;" others admired it apparently for that very reason, being nostalgia and autobiography, neither of which were my intention: which was to eliminate memory as basis or vehicle, liquidationist, thus to eliminate the social constructions that had deformed 'our' present and that became part of us. The effort again is also to thereby actually change the past. **[Suzanne Stein: to change the body's past/or the single body's past is one thing, to change the historical past [which doesn't exist anyway] is an undertaking with terrible implications. I don't disagree with you, I'm just frightened by it.]** [Answering Stein: While the implications of my thought here is to change *one's* historical events by, in the poem's syntax and structure, altering *one's* 'seeing' enabling change of actions to allow a future-space (possibility) free of the suffering produced from past actions of one-with-others — (yet) a terrible implication which I *don't* intend, but which is occurring in some writing, similar to tactics of current political regimes, is the rewriting of history, supplanting what *did* occur with what did not occur. Substituting oneself (one's corporal-as-actual actions altered, re-imagined), there *is* no history whatsoever. I think, considering your point, that the implications of changing one's own actual historical events are *also* terrifying whether or not introducing mere rewriting, as having no history and therefore no bounds or 'life.']

A man—I was immature in age—was a stowaway so not having been active, taken from the ship we're on in a row boat.

(A sailor had fallen out of the row boat then, was embarrassed. So it's like paradise—the embarrassment, therefore it's depressed—seen by his waving at us as the other sailors are coming to him).(6)

"I don't like that because it's too nostalgic." It seems like "beautiful semblance"? but I think it has to in order to be a past event at once distanced as 'decal' and also not 'personal' as subject matter of pain, rather than random events: that is, if all of the memories are painful/charged that skews it). The senses/corporal memory *as* the past was necessary to that past being 'punched out' (and thus 'not being' at all), by that past actually having motion that as a series (not single segments) seems, if a poem can have a sense of unbounded sound/motion, to also create a future (tactilely sensed—[future] only *heard* in the present).

The next to last sequence of *that they were at the beach*, "A Sequence," is a prose poem composed of continual same-scene of sexual encounters in which 'she' comes as a result of her thought of seeing some partners are men with leopard's parts when she has no leopard's parts and some are men without leopard's parts. It's in the middle of the book in order to be removing hierarchical structure. The parts of creatures (whether leopard's or people's), both, as *our* collective physicality as such the closest one can be to invisibility (in apprehension and in writing): Up close invisible, one can't identify the leopard parts as oneself though erotic response is felt in thought; not reassembled, *can't* be. In my view, since sensual/sexual *actions* are the furthest separated from writing (because writing is not physical action), *as such* these gestures written can 'pick up' trace of monumental history. *As a fine line* between only event-mimicry in syntax rather than writing that's narration of events, material sensual-sexual *action* diverges far from writing; invisibility (disbelief) is their link.

In (my) leopard sequence, there is no hierarchy, no domination (of either men or women over anyone), not heightened imagination, only subordination of all in the flattened surface. [**Suzanne Stein: yes. I experience that to be true.**] It is not 'inner,' being only its surface, it is dependent on duration in which there is neither past nor future. The continual scenes are without supplying culmination, only continuous acts where many people may come but the sexual acts in a scene of various people coming don't stop as a result. Seamless as wallpaper or fresco at the same time that as idea it is anti-seamless, everyone is on an equal level as interchangeable actions. In the context of the book in which it is published, *that they were at the beach*, whose concept was to void both memory and historical, real-time events by writing these as an individual's thought-shape as syntax, I intended "A Sequence" both as erotica (that is, subject 'only' of sex) and as a deconstruction of the social creation of the erotic from *within* its genre only, *it is* (within) – it can't *do* an action that's an absent action of no hierarchy, no domination; only we can do that (if we do). So the writing itself can't be representation even of idea of lack of hierarchy there because *that* (theory acting is outside of the writing) would be domination. The poem is neither utopia nor doctrine, not prescribing or describing people's behavior or feelings (it is looking at these).

At that time (early '80s), poets in my San Francisco context advocated in talks and conversation eradication of eroticism in writing, regarded as expression of personal ego. Several years ago in conversation with Bob Perelman he noted that he did not recall this phenomenon and would not have such a view now. Yet Michael Palmer and Robert Gluck said that the concept of eroticism being eradicated was commonly uttered, that they'd heard this frequently.

The last sequence of *that they were at the beach*: “Chameleon Series” is wobbly sound-syntax spurts not on a timer but not random, subconscious/warped series using repetition of subject (having to do with the “bourgeoisie” in locations, people pleurably urinating or vomiting pleurably or at least with curiosity, bodily functions that are occasionally in the space) as offbeat without that subject matter determining sound or direction; it’s just squirted as if one had stepped on the physical middle here and there. It’s not adequate as a poem by itself: it turns out it’s the future of the other pieces – in the sense that the book may be read throughout, coming to “Chameleon Series” at the end, before the sense of *that* poem’s haphazard spurts is evident; because reading “Chameleon Series” by itself it doesn’t form or proceed. In that sense *it* doesn’t have a present, is empty, and is only future outside of its self (if not read as part of as attached to its past, the preceding sequences). Some men who were leaders in my context stated “No, not that!” simply, in regard to the poem; some specifically rejecting the word “bourgeoisie” as if mine were a literal, failed social analysis; whereas the word “bourgeoisie” in the poem is a decal (disbelief), throws it off as there not being only single trajectory; deform by using words out of place makes it wobble only, but in the presence of some actual setting. The present of “Chameleon Series” *being* warping of reading, the poem’s progress is ‘*intentionally*’ (also subconsciously) deformed as it’s movement/sound or modality.

The middle piece, “A Sequence,” considered as solely erotica (my poetic definition of which is: being within its self) the poem is *to be* without social credibility; it can only be free outside that (disbelief/not conferred credibility). Even given respecting readers for taking the time and care to read the book, which is a form of their bestowing credibility on the book, I had the overt intention of taking away possibility of the mode (use of genre) of the poem being regarded as ‘high.’ Apparently meaning the entire book, at its publication, one liquidationist man/a leader of my context phoned to say: “There’s too much sex in it [the book]! How can you stand it! All that sex! Aghh!”

Social disbelief of one leads one, in a dialectical relation, to do other ‘erotic’ writings, with a sense of these as an opening of freedom because these have been opposed, are ‘senses as such, and thus knowledge’ of people, rather than gender-determined-curtailed. Erasure of self as basis of poetics – and the poetics of applying this erasure to others – resembles American fundamentalist moralist negative condemnation of phenomenal being regarded as if outside oneself. In the early ‘80s Kathy Acker did a residency at Langton Arts in San Francisco and was put under strong attack, particularly by a panel held during her residency, the Language poets who were panel-members citing her for anti-social violence linked with content of sexuality, the conception being that representation of anti-social content reproduces that violence in society (rather than

inclusion of transformative content transforming our perception). The panel was advocating positive, morally appropriate subject matter as poetic writing, a position that is opposed to realism. I thought that the problem raised was that sanitized (or utopian) writing would not allow what *is*: without realism there can be no change.

I missed the last part of Acker's residency as I drove to Canada where I happened to stay with a friend of Acker's who greeted me by saying "Kathy Acker is being attacked by the Language poets in San Francisco." Acker had been calling her Canadian friend daily in a state of great distress. (Barrett Watten remarked to me after her residency that Acker treated the circumstance as "just to get through it" rather than to engage the criticisms as put to her.) (7)

The line-up of the panel (in my memory) aggressively interrogating visiting artist Acker, similar to the critique of erotic though non-violent material in my writing, occurred at the time alongside articulated emphasis on "realism," the two contraries posited at once from the same poets. Carla Harryman's oeuvre, in particular, demonstrates thorough knowledge of and fascination with the literary history of utopias and is creating a dialectic in present writings that are forms of utopias. The issue itself is Harryman's content, the tension between her construction of a utopia as the writing and the pull or force (and contradiction) of the actual world outside that. In Harryman's writing there is also I think a passionate tension between the speaker being a director *directed by* their (own) theory/ doctrine at all times – the use of the word 'we' as communal (the title of one of her early plays is "There is Nothing Better Than a Theory") as opposed to their (person's, as if) consciously subconscious sensuality-sexuality seeming in fierce rebellion hurling itself against 'their' doctrinal (seen as social) obduracy. Thus apparently stymied, 'her' eroticism is a positive, altering 'force.' Hidden but displayed as energy.

Explicit and fine in Harryman's work, the contradictions of narrative versus 'no content' – the phrase used for a time by many San Francisco Language poets in the early-mid '80s, indicating, I think, inclusion 'at random' as a factor of energy and choice-in-process rather than intentional selection crafted that as such determines the future of a piece of writing in advance – and contradictions of determination of content (in crafted writing, for example) versus realism, were and are issues of writing as the very nature of Language poetics.

A recent demonstration of the dichotomy in this issue was a collaborative presentation of a leading Language poet and myself where the other poet vying (vying is fine, the familiar mode of poets with each other) defined in written notes (to which I also wrote notes as my colleague spoke, anticipating a question and answer) the basis of that individual's poetry, as pleasure

(probably intellectual pleasure), maintaining “Pain is merely depersonalizing, pleasure is liberating” (two weeks later this poet introducing my writing, seemingly all of it, at a reading characterized it: “The subject of Leslie Scalapino’s writing is suffering” – that is, mine is depersonalized, theirs is liberated). As vying, my collaborator in referencing the subject of pain in mine as comparison to my writing may have had in mind my poem-piece, which we’d discussed earlier, *As: All Occurrence in Structure, Unseen – Deer Night* (8), the text/syntax of which itself is to be sensational as if cells, tissues filled with nerve-endings that *are* sight and feeling (and are perceived as if by sight and feeling, mind’s eye).(9) I was investigating physical sensation (because pain was what was happening to me then and I wanted to see it). The writing, however, does not hurt either reader or writer, nor is it or one depersonalized by pain, one is alert as writing. I was considering that we physically prolong pain after its cause has been removed as the phenomenon of the spine’s memory [continuing – *is* memory] (“the spine’s dream”); there’s no difference between pleasure and pain in the sense that they’re both sensations. Evolution is creating, or making manifest, sensations. Writing that’s examining as mimicking motions/events producing sensation may undertake *the future* by undertaking unknown limitless sensations, which our bodies invent by experiencing. The significance for me of the speaker’s polemic (“Pain is merely depersonalizing, pleasure is liberating”) was that at the very instant of my collaborator’s defining of poetics, the US was in the act of the first bombings (later invasion) of Afghanistan which was at that instant keenly suffering. Distinct from physical pain, the definition of the word “suffering” is: “to undergo or experience.” If “Pain is merely depersonalizing,” one is/they (bombed) are not even allowed one’s/their ‘actual’ being – (though the contrary is true, pain may illumine one’s being); “pleasure is liberating” sounds like “Let them eat cake.” The poetic issue is akin to the Kathy Acker residency, as if the “representation” of suffering is merely its reproduction, the writer seen by such critique as embedded in the pain rather than altering all seeing by seeing being it. Any articulation except socially proper is regarded as confessional, as ego. The day after our presentation the other speaker called to say they had not intended a reference to my chronic spine pain from injury; any possible reference to this did not disturb me, however, physical pain being simply objective – it was the political meaning of the poetics that I found disturbing, a meaning the speaker did not intend in the sense that they did not see political manifestation and physical pain as connected. Yet they meant social, psychological as also physical pain depersonalizes. Their meaning is that detached from physicality and suffering (as: to undergo or experience), pleasure (as if objective vehicle of poetry, rather than swayed as emotion is) is superior. The two sides of the issue of utopia are: ‘individual experience/everyone’s/intrusion of pain/as realism’ versus ‘utopia/as ideal of a collective/pleasure/ liberated /separated from physicality’).

*Comparison of erotic placement in order in structure of poems, way: "The Floating Series,"* of my poem, *way*, like "A Sequence," is in the middle of its book (*way*, 1988) and repeats in play the action of a couple (different couples) coming or not, and either sticking the lily pad in or not. The series unfolds from within the midst of the extended poem: *as* these points in space (where action takes place, of sticking the lily pad in) coincide with a possible infinite number of actual 'exterior' occurrences (such as a black policeman/collaborator being immolated on a field by a black crowd, which occurred in South Africa *at the time*). Points of coinciding 'cause' movement. Discovery is 'as sound' that occurs (hearing, reading) 'outside' the individual episodes and throughout. My sense of the order in which *way* was written: "The Floating Series" in the middle of the book and continually making and referring to 'middles,' is to *be* the unknown future, there, as gesture that's behind and after and going on at the same time as the apparently infinite numbers of real-time events. That is, unplanned, the series were placed in their chronological order of writing. So, the impression is that 'the future' as a sound-shape has begun before (before wherever one is reading) in the series, and the sense is that even as the future doesn't end it doesn't begin somewhere. Two consecutive segments from "The Floating Series" may or may not demonstrate the production of this space (of the whole poem, *way*, unfolding serially):

a man to  
 come on the woman  
 gently – her  
 having  
 put the lily pad in  
 herself  
 with him not  
 having entered  
 her yet

people who're  
 there  
 already – though  
 the other  
 people aren't  
 aware of that (10)

'This' as connectives is not the representation of the whole of an event (as Kevin Davies' disbelief implies). Some connectives are absent in *this* space, some are *also* in a space that's getting created in the writing throughout and that alters them. It imitates as language languageless phenomena (that *were* what was 'seen' at once, later and 'then' present simultaneously to be one event). Line breaks and words separated by dashes, as sound/motion, are imitating minute actions that occurred in history, incidents possibly *so* minute in an individual's memory that, forgotten, they become as if part of a general past-future.

During the time of my receiving one poet's letter-attacks (previously described), Ron Silliman also participated by sending me several private letters in which he agreed with the man who was sending public letters. In one phrase Ron stated that I "refused to question self," suggesting that my continual being in disorienting-reorienting context, of which he was unaware, was not recognizable to him as questioning the content, but only as content itself. These events were not far separated from the time of the publication of Silliman's *Ketjak*, a work, as all of Silliman's writing, which is characterized by autobiographical, sensual, joyous or aggressive, playful assertion of sensual pleasure and data, reveling in even farting and shitting (as in one poem, filled with the latter bodily expressions, which Silliman recently dedicated to Lyn Hejinian and myself for our collaboration, *Sight*).

Lyn Hejinian and I, collaborating throughout the '90s up to the present to write the five senses, have completed *Sight* and are presently writing *Hearing*. Considering Hejinian's 'writing the senses,' one might examine the play occurring created in exchange itself, hers a social-sensory action becoming a faculty that's being created impacted by the exchange in which her thought is the senses' filter. The senses are not directly visible in her writing but are there, palpable obverse:

Oblivion takes the world in obverse. The colorful world there seen in negative is very colorful. Yellow plums fall into the red grass. There cannot be (in a world susceptible to oblivion) any distinction between inside and outside.

The works of oblivion hang like pictures at an exhibition in a museum abandoned by ghosts (memory).(11)

Still, if oblivion allows the world to be at the same time its obverse, intellect (or "reason," which she celebrates, a version of which, her own invention, just replaces the word "imagination"? [That is, she mistrusts the word "imagination" and relies on her inclusive sense of "reason"]) as the operation of poetry, for Hejinian, retains and imprints a distinction between body and mind: "Before this, science declared that we are physical machines that have somehow learned to think/Now it transpires that we are thoughts that have learned to create a physical machine." Even questioning a mind/body split, she reinforces it, as if weight given to, or inclusion of, the body is pessimistic: "Diderot may have been right/The mind may be nothing without the impulse-ridden body."(12)

Rejection of feminist gesture (of it's being crucial investigation which unravels social determinism, without which/unraveling there can't be future) reestablishes in the perspective of the-one-rejecting a sense of men *being* universality (hierarchical polarization is authority-infused throughout, the past). An example of the latter is Barrett Watten's definition (in "The Turn To Language") of Language writing: "The textual politics of the Language school are commonly opposed to the expressivist poetics (Black Arts, Chicano, feminist, gay/lesbian) that emerged in the same decade, for good reason. With the former, the self-presence of the expressive subject is put under erasure, while for the latter the formal autonomy of modernist poetics is rejected as a politics." (13) The polarization describing these other poetics as rejecting modernism is a generalization. Further, though Watten wants in his essay "to locate a common ground for such diametrically opposed approaches to poetry," his definition or basis (division of "expressivism" versus 'expressive subject put under erasure') precludes sensation, individual apprehension, and as such, others' conceptions *as being* political change. In "The Turn To Language," Watten praising Allen Ginsberg as a precursor (in the '60s) of the Language movement (though Ginsberg supposedly falls short, his poetry still being based in 'self'), is proposing history is leading to Language writing. Statement itself (establishing history has arrived at its purpose and that Language writing replaces all else) is avant garde gesture. Poetry/text might be merely accompaniment to statement: as if that were *an act*. [That is, statement is the imaginary act of oneself being the culmination of history, history would be 'over,' an example of rewriting history.]

Barrett Watten's definition of Language writing as eliminating "expressivism" is again an example of mind/body split: Critiquing my poem, *way*, (years after its publication) as merely "reification of self," he praised as 'the new' a critic's advocating rewriting passages of *way* to describe its meaning for students: That is, 'the new' in Watten's view in that context is merely the mechanical product or the idea of redoing, rather than poetry being sensory/sound/movement apprehension that's the poem's language (he even described *way* as prose, though prose also is its language!), regarded by him negatively as being 'reification of self.' Singular 'authority' (as: his doctrine dictating exclusion of self-and as an individual critic's new rewrite interpreting passages of an original text) is then the basis of apprehension rather than the senses in reading *as the writing's process*. In Watten's dictum, the poem's language — language is the trace of being — is to be disregarded to the extent of being eliminated, rewritten.(14)

In my poem, *way*, events only as connectives, especially those that are only the memories of the writer (or *are* her events but can't be recalled by her even), are 'felt' by the reader/writer as

having been/are-being inhabited actions: actual history released from memory is unknown active future *there then*.

Conventional mind/body split, as heightening of intellectual faculty over, or removal of oneself from, that which is sensory/'experiencing,' is merely self-as-cerebral; the split makes 'one' distinct from the flow of change and history and creates the concept of the body as a 'subject' rather than its being the 'view' (mind being the senses – both – making phenomena as socially constructed).

*Conclusion: History is the individual's hippocampal episodic memories from which future is imagined? versus "History is bunk" (Henry Ford)*

In the '80s in San Francisco the phrase "Language bashing" or "Language basher" arose (from Ron Silliman?) as a term for those who criticized Language poetry, appropriated from the term "gay bashing" (meaning episodes of beating or even killing people who are gay). That is, critique of Language poetry was equated with a civil rights or human rights violation.

A critic, hearing my (this 2007) talk afterwards commented: Language poetry has been canonized to such a degree that now in creative writing classes any young poets the least bit 'experimental' are called Language poets. No one would be interested in the history of this, what happened or formed it. [That is, my talk is just episodes of things that occurred.]

Rather than academic perspective of the history of a movement and the movement's place in history, I'm speaking about *process of writing*; paraphrasing Pound's view that the function of poetry is *accurate* language, which finds out because its language is doing what's 'of reality' (that is, what's 'true'). In Pound's period accurate language was flowery, sentimental, empty corrosion. In his view accurate language accurate reforms the body politic. The implication of the critic's remark that such formalist younger poets or present poets in creative writing classes, writing unrelated to the original meaning of Language gesture (and as such demonstrating the nature of canonization, that a gesture had to be altered from any radical or extreme intent [not have any teeth in it]), are not interested in Language poetry's original and current content that, rather than contentless and meaningless, was/is a political gesture, may concur with Bruce Andrews' point in his panel talk (2007); he made a distinction between 'actual' Language poets and those not 'actual'. Some poets and critics take the view: If everything is called "Language poetry," everything 'experimental' (or "new") is created-invented by *them*/the particular group, a failure of logic. Also, it may be that for the movement to be canonized the attitudes and assumptions (of body-mind split) had to resemble our mainstream cultural rooted sense that 'self

is wrong and can be rooted out by emotion' – whereas the Language movement changes this to 'self is wrong and can be rooted out by intellect.'

In *IFLIFE*, Bob Perelman (who was in the '70s-'90s California poetry scene) accepting Pound's dictum "Make it new" considers 'the new' as both poetry's goal and conclusion (even demise?) since Perelman remarks the possibilities of writing and thought are now derivative, and "personality" (he implies) is a dead-end by being merely repetition (of self). 'The new' being the basis of poetry [just 'new' as such? does that suggest mechanistic view, as if 'formal' is *separated* from 'conceptual'?), Perelman suggests rethinking the present of Language poetics: "That the gestures that Language poetry triumphantly says are still radical are actually super-codified now. And that's my whole point. We need to rethink that equation." (15) That is, he apparently urges change from the codified but bases that in a *particular* view of the new? Personality is mind-imprint simultaneous as one body's imprint, trace of being. If it's seen as a dead-end or mere repetition, this suggests a division between one's inventing, vital mind and one's nature body-related? (Gertrude Stein's distinction between the human mind and human nature, poetry stemming from mind; was Stein saying "mind" is the 'real' self, one's *nature* merely akin to other animals?) While a personality presumably can't ever be 'new' one's knowledge in regard to it could be. Is this dichotomy as rooted in mind-body split a peculiarly American mainstream expression?

Erasure of the self (as this intent) is not an avant garde tactic, the history of the avant garde being to devise tactics which exploded the distance between the self and the recognition that it is (we are) of reality, in the sense that 'it' (reality *as* the self) is impermanent (it is collided upon, it dies), and is other than convention. This is related to the fact that rewriting history stultifies the future.

My thanks to Suzanne Stein for her reading and critique of this essay

Notes:

- (1) D. Hassabis, et al. (2007) "Patients with hippocampal amnesia cannot imagine new experiences." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (USA)*, 104: 1726–1731.
- (2) *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold*, Leslie Scalapino, "My Writing," Potes & Poets, 1989.
- (3) Communal: Poets were urged to drop the use of line breaks, for example, to adopt paratactic syntax in paragraphs. Line breaks apparently denoted subjective sounds? Thus, Ted Pearson described to me in the early '80s giving a reading of poetry with line breaks, during which reading Barrett Watten scribbled by hand, keeping pace with Pearson's voice; at the end presenting Pearson with a rewritten poem devoid of line breaks, to show these weren't necessary. The first time I used paragraphs rather than line breaks was "Considering how exaggerated

music is" in 1982, a sequence in which I was not aware of using a 'required' syntax (because it was what the writing needed to be in that instance, as other poets also were seeing in their various works), that poem being 'on' social subjective-objective alteration of being. In recent years when I mentioned to Lyn Hejinian this communal syntax, which I thought the most radical intervention of Language writing and therefore positive as impermanence transformative (whether rejected or accepted), she apparently did not remember this articulated goal (perhaps because she has changed and become interested in other modes in doing new work?). Strategies, such as describing their own writing as not having content and calling for 'no content' (late '70s-early '80s) had the effect of throwing the outsider-participant off balance by refusing any of the outsider's (others') strategies as plots and of portraying for themselves an intention, a guide. They belied the senses effectively (I thought) as a transformative gesture, a provocative ploy (whether or not intended as such), which if *solidified* as fact (such as asserting the verified, completed Language project is the future-present while writing autobiography) belies our senses by its being false. If you replace the actual event (which doesn't exist anyway) with yourself there is nothing of reality. The assertion that the writing was without content was a radical intervention — 'no content' taken literally by some new imitators erases the earlier intent, which was a political gesture.

- (4) *that they were at the beach*, North Point Press, San Francisco, 1985, page 12
- (5) *Mindsight, Image, Dream, Meaning*, Colin McGinn, Harvard, Boston, 2004.
- (6) *that they were at the beach*, Leslie Scalapino, North Point Press, 1985, page 18.
- (7) After our 2007 panel, I asked Steve Benson what he now recalls of the Acker residency. He said he'd written a documentation of the event for the Langton Arts publication, which Acker regarded as an attack, but which he had thought favorable. He does not recall issues of violence and body in relation to her residency.
- (8) *As: All Occurrence in Structure, Unseen – Deer Night*, Leslie Scalapino, Wesleyan University Press, 1999.
- (9) *Mindsight, Image, Dream, Meaning*, Colin McGinn, Harvard, Boston, 2004.
- (10) *way*, Leslie Scalapino North Point Press, San Francisco, 1988, pages 67-68.
- (11) "The Turn to Language," Barrett Watten, *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Autumn 2002), 2002 by the University of Chicago, page 1.
- (11) *Qui Parle*, Vol. 12, no. 2 Spring/Summer 2001, guest edited by Barrett Watten, Introduction/ "The Poetics of New Meaning" by Barrett Watten.
- (12) *Sight*, Lyn Hejinian & Leslie Scalapino, Edge Books, 1999, pages 40-41.
- (13) *A Border Comedy*, Lyn Hejinian, Granary Books, N.Y. N.Y., pages 99.
- (14) *Ibid.*, page 130.
- (15) *IFLIFE*, Bob Perelman, Roof Books, N.Y. N.Y., 2006, page 52.