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The critical discursive exterior that has partially defined language writing reads very much like a discovery narrative that, once having sighted the "new," seeks to explain its wonders to the citizens back at home. From early sightings such as Lee Bartlett's "What Is 'Language Poetry'" and Marjorie Perloff's "The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the Eighties" -- which updates Bartlett's title with its opening sentence, "But is it poetry?" -- the impulse has been to explain and contextualize this poetic movement and its poetry to a larger, institutional audience in order to make it, literally, readable. These two early readings are not colonizing acts that absorb language writing into existing institutional frames; rather language writing is read as an already articulated challenge to the institutional reception and production of poetry. As the writers associated with the language writing site had already outlined the modes and relations of production of their poetics -- both in terms of the political economy of poetry and in terms of a cultural poetics -- a tension and a lag time existed between the articulation of a politicized community and the discursive outside that was trying to, in a sense, bring them home.

Critical readings of this work often use theories of production and reception that are at odds with the poetics the writers themselves had developed. While the paradigm of the historical avant garde is both the most readily available and tempting frame to use, it is too historically bound to address the fundamental challenges that the language writers presented to the production and social role for poetry in a public sphere that was rapidly changing as a result of social deinvestment and the reorganization of the relations of culture and politics in America. Nonetheless, the relationship of language writing and the historical avant garde's negation of bourgeois aesthetics was grafted onto the language writers' project. This critical placement of the language writers upholds Walter Kalaidjian's view that "...any textual praxis that would lay claims to powers of cultural critique is inescapably tied to the mixed status and fate of the historical avant gardes" (7).

This tension between inside and outside, between the reiterative act of a community (or scene) -- a historically situated site of cultural production -- and a powerful, if mistakenly totalizing, value-defining discursive exterior, provides a useful contradiction through which to read language writing. While this institutional frame can seemingly narrow an impulse for social change to the desire for institutional change, language writing (which Peter Middleton cites as "one of the most exciting cultural developments of the last two decades") did not aim so much at academic revision and canon reformation as it did at the transformation of a social subject. Seizing the homology of language and social order, language writing sought to locate the subjective within the structural by refiguring the reader within a more equitable relation of meaning production.

Without covering again the anxieties over what language writing might be, whether it is radical or complicit, whether it is symptom or reaction, whether the movement constitutes a group and if so then is the group formation a trademarking process to allow a swifter accumulation of cultural capital within the academy, I want to outline the shifting ways that language writing has been imagined by a discursive exterior alongside its formulation by practitioners within the site. Even the naming of this movement (or moment) carries an antagonism between discursive exterior and productive site that resulted first in the equal signs between the materialized letters (adopted from L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine) dropping away to leave the less materialized, more generic name, "language poets." This moniker was further distanced and ironized to the "so-called language poets," or Ron Silliman's inversion, "language poets, so-called." This nervous naming also establishes the connection and influence of the Russian Formalists. Osip Brik's aggressive defense of the Formalists in 1923 was titled "The So-Called Formal Method." Brik as well used his title ironically, designating what he felt the Formalist's project had been reduced to, not what it was in practice and potential. Brik's use of "so-called" drew attention to a discursive outside which was in ideological conflict with the Formalists. In the language writers' case, the qualifying "so-called" blocks the outside imposition of a homogenous group definition and signifies an internal tension where the movement at times presents itself as a loosely structured formation, yet one which guarded its borders through cohesive anthologies where those not included, but perhaps who could be understood to be "so-called" language writers, were banished to exhaustive lists in the introduction.

Past the ambiguity and hesitation in naming, the internal defining process of the language writers was neither singular nor uncontested. It is not a site that presented itself as internally seamless, but as a more loosely connected and collaborative formation of writers who shared similar approaches to language and readerly production due to their reaction to shared social and aesthetic determinants. The internal definitions are not less determined than others and should not be understood as somehow more authentic. Neither have language poetry's institutional interfaces produced a consensus. Rather, both these interlocked processes of articulation are contingent and reflect a web of complexities embedded in the interface of poetics and social determinants, recording how a poetics that moves from and merges the aesthetic to the social can be iterated. The gaps, misconnections and elisions in this articulation reveal the lack of a methodology that can combine the formal level of poetry with social structures. So, while the language writers can be figured, in an institutionally situated reading, as a challenge to canon formation, they can also be read as being in excess of a discourse of poetry that does not adequately relate the text in a larger cultural field -- a field that circulates transnationally.

There is the tension of nationalism as well as methodology in both the internal and external defining of the language poets. While they were framed within the accepted paradigm of the avant garde in terms of cultural critique and as being a metropolitan movement, they were not linked to the internationalism of the historical avant garde. An analysis of the reception of language writing in Canada, both institutionally and within writing communities, foregrounds the effect of cultural nationalism on the reception of poetry as well as the antagonism created by language writing's self-definition as an "American" poetic movement emerging in reaction to changes in public meaning in the US. Positioned in this way, language writing does not circulate across national borders as a transnational avant garde; instead it becomes a situated response to a particular national crisis. Yet, the circulation of culture opens culture production up to other situated uses, other recontextualizations and rearticulations.

One such rearticulation of the language writers -- where similar devices and tactics of language writing were redeployed by a group of emerging poets in the mid-eighties in Vancouver -- exceeds both their internal and external definitions. Within this emerging cultural formation, the language writers figured not only as a response to either a crisis in the production of American poetry nor as a uniquely American articulation, but as a politicized poetic methodology adaptable to the particular crisis in the public sphere in Vancouver. This recirculation of the politics and tactics of the language writers opens the problematic of the circulation of culture and of the narrowness of the imagined influence and effects of language writing. There is an acknowledged signpost from which to follow this process and movement of these competing, entwined and differently situated constitutive discourses and rearticulations which circulate around and inside the language writers' site: ironically it is figured as the classic moment of rupture from a manifesto-like statement.

Robert Grenier's statement, "I HATE SPEECH," in the premier issue of *This* magazine (1971), is signposted as the originary statement for the language writers. However, at this moment, this upper-cased challenge (sharing that typographical similarity with Charles Olson's exclamations throughout "Projective Verse,") serves more as a departure point than a point of origin. Grenier's pronouncement was used to establish the language writers as a classic avant garde, gaining its originality in splitting from the poetics of the previous avant-garde, the New American poetry. Yet breaks from a previous avant garde formations are not without entanglements. New American poetry can not be reduced merely to a speech-based poetics and language writing's relation to it is not only an antagonistic struggle over cultural capital and positions in the field of cultural production as a reading through Pierre Bourdieu's methodology suggests. Read through Bourdieu, Grenier's statement initiates not a breach, but a struggle over positions and a "space of possibilities": "But through the stakes of the struggle between the dominants and the challengers...these strategies also depend on the state of the legitimate problematic, that is, the space of possibilities inherited from previous struggles, which tends to define the space of possible position-takings and thus orient the search for solutions and, as a result, the evolution of production" (183-84). Through, as Ron Silliman has written, "a foregrounding of concerns already active within New American poetry" (1988, 173), language writing could be seen as a partial continuation of the problematic of poetry and the social sphere, poetry and the institution, and of poetry's address to the nation at a time of national and international shifts in the production of meaning brought on by new relations of production and technological change. As Kalaidjian suggests, advanced capitalism's mode of consumption, linked to Fordist modes of production, required a shift in the production of oppositional culture as well; a shift whose strategies would not fit into definitions of the function of

the historical avant garde. The language writing project is more usefully analyzed in this relationship rather than a positions war with a previous avant garde.

To critique modes of cultural consumption, the language writers began with a marxist homology of language and social structure and the role of cultural consumption in the reproduction of the relations of production. In this homology, culture is moved out of a productivist view where culture is seen as overdetermined, as a structured structure and not a structuring agent itself. The texts most frequently cited as laying the foundation of this ideological/aesthetic stance toward language are Charles Bernstein's "The Dollar Value of Poetry" and Silliman's "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World." Both texts use Marx's construct of commodity fetishism to illuminate how the production of social meaning is separated from its "human makers." For Silliman "[w]ords not only find themselves attached to commodities, they become commodities..." (1987, 8). For Bernstein, experience is eclipsed by the commodity: "What purports to be an experience is transformed into the blank stare of the commodity..." (59). This reading of Marx politicizes Viktor Shklovsky's famous purpose of art where "in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make the stone stony, man [sic] has been given the tool of art" (6), but with an emphasis on meaning's place within ideology and without Shklovsky's ocularcentrism -- his emphasis on vision as the sense through which to return to the "real." A key difference is that Shklovsky sought to make the "world" visible and tangible while the language writers seek to make ideology visible. Following Althusser, Bernstein and Silliman emphasize the materiality and material effects of ideology rather than invoking ideology as imaginary relations to real conditions. Through this emphasis on ideological mapping, "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" is initiated, an aesthetic linked to "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (Jameson 54).

This homology of language and social structure has not been uniformly described and enacted or even shared by writers identified as language writers. For instance, for Silliman and P. Inman, social order is sedimented in literary forms, and for Inman, the text becomes a site of struggle for the articulation of the subject. Through Althusser, Inman argues "[s]ubjectivity -- once the sole privilege of the boss... -- [is] gradually democratized" (224). His texts refuse to construct a subject that can be ideologically hailed; so through language there is a tactical refusal to be materialized under, or into, oppressive conditions. However, in Silliman's project, the ocularcentric subject is intact and the site of struggle is shifted to a contextually defined reader producing meaning through a text opened by structural means.

This refigured reading subject, and the opened text (notably defined in Lyn Hejinian's "The Rejection of Closure") is the structural shift that allows the model of the productive reader to counter the alienating effect of commodified language. Briefly put, structurally opened texts allow the reader to construct meaning as an nonalienated producer on an equal level to the writer: as with the cultural studies' project, subjective agency is located in the reader as producer. Once freed from the repressive mode of meaning production and given access to what George Hartley refers to as "egalitarian modes of production," the reader is able, through the effectivity of devices, to read ideology, to see it materialized both within language and within the text as a cultural ideological apparatus. However, unlike cultural studies, where this shift to readerly agency can merely result in the theoretical expansion of the sites of consumption, in language writing, it was not the text itself that was recoded as subversive but rather a radical or liberating model of production was proposed.

Yet, Steve McCaffery, critiques this "shift from sign consumption to sign production" (14) , implying that the productive model of consumption is overly prescriptive by asking, "[i]f semantic productivity sees a complete freedom in relating to texts, one would be forced to ask why freedom in relating to texts here must be by a need to produce" (157). In the place of productive consumption, McCaffery proposes a model of general economy: "The text returns a use-value by offering itself as unexchangeable, outside the logic of the commodity, thereby opening ambivalently to both semantic loss and productional recovery" (20). This line of inquiry is not followed up within language writing, perhaps not because it alters the triad of production, subjectivity and agency, but because it challenges the pedagogical nature of the productive reader and looks outside of a productive model of oppositional culture.

The homology of language and social order -- or more specifically, of the modes of textual consumption and dominant relations of production -- and its entanglement with commodity fetishism as applied to language was largely met with a skepticism from the discursive exterior, yet this skepticism was tempered by some endorsement. What both critique and endorsement fail to

emphasize is that the relationship of the text, the writer, and the reader to ideology shifts from an instrumental base to a speculative model where, as Hartley writes, "literary practice may serve as a mode of ideology critique on a par with theoretical practice" (27). In order to retract this aspect of the language writers' project from the frame of the literary avant garde where "formalism" is depoliticized, this speculative impulse could be defined on a parallel with conceptual art. (However it is crucial to recognize the different economies and fields that these art forms circulate within.) Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth argues that the "why" of art is "fundamentally philosophical" in contrast to the "how" and that the questioning of the nature of art (which can be seen in the conceptualists' institutional and market critique) is itself political. Watten, moving beyond Kosuth's proposition, cites the difference in the economies of poetry and art to assert that poetry "need not see its critique as limited to the ironic reversal of marketplace support," but rather that "[a] kind of liminal ground between commodity and experience, between public and private values...exists to define a social position for literature that is both 'in but not of' the market" (196). The utopian extension of the text into social consciousness and then to praxis is not verifiable by sociological means and is thus dismissed as merely avant garde or as merely formal; yet, both Kosuth and Watten attempt to cleave the bind of the reception of art that fails to examine the social effects of an aesthetic.

Beyond this discursive bind established in the depoliticized paradigm of the historical avant garde's aesthetic ruptures, is a cultural poetics that can accommodate both the text and its relationship with material determinants without reducing historical particulars to a mere backdrop for the production of literature. This poetics would have to avoid a simplistic determinism and reconcile the New Historicist tendency to privilege the semantic level in addressing the relationship of text to context and likewise avoid a cultural studies methodology that disregards formal tactics and sees oppositional gestures in containable content by making reception synonymous for production. This poetics would not look for a universal poetic function but rather for a tactical function that exists in a field of relations. The language writers, by moving poetics into the problematic of culture, make linkages between the materiality of language (that is, language as a site where ideology is materialized and not language as materially plastic) and the material conditions of its production. The next step is to define a poetics that has the ability to move from the material condition of poetry's production on a localized level to a geopolitical and geocultural level.

In this direction, a more recent internal definition on the part of some language writers establishes a relationship between their poetics and the crisis in public meaning caused in America by the Vietnam war. This is a movement in the internal definition of the language writers from the materiality of language -- "from writing as meta-sign to writing as writing," as McCaffery designates it -- to the production of meaning via the productive reader, to an exteriorization of a politicized aesthetics in a dialectical relationship with social conditions. In the collaboratively written *Leningrad* (along with Michael Davidson and Lyn Hejinian), Watten and Silliman specify that, with a crisis in the national culture, a parallel crisis of public meaning arose as the galvanizing aspect of this community. "There was," as Watten says elsewhere, "a denial of 'national' culture in all aspects" (197) which resulted in a "refusal of the given larger context, but at the same time was a response to the crisis of meaning at that level" (198). A more general crisis in the economic mode of production occurs around the same time, through the consolidation of multinational capitalism, the effects of technology, and mobile capital. Reading Jameson's "logic of late capitalism" in reverse would show that the "unthinkable totality of the contemporary world system" (38) is conceived of in this relationship of poetry to a breakdown of a national "mattering map" as a chain of effects that circulate between world system, nation state, articulated community, and cultural production; that is, the fragmentation attached to postmodernism does not negate the ability to locate effects at multiple levels.

This framing of the aesthetics of the language writers as an articulated response to an internal crisis caused by American foreign policy (and the function of the U.S. within the world system) foregrounds the role of the nation in cultural production. The linking of Fanon's stages of an anti-systemic cultural nationalism to Bakhtin's privileging of the novel as the form most readily attached to the present (and a national literature) has combined with a poststructuralist problematic that does not distinguish, as Aijaz Ahmad argues, between retrograde and progressive nationalisms to imagine the nation as a text that is narrated both in spite of and for its citizens. The extremes of this position are illustrated by Benedict Anderson's uncritical celebration of "the cultural products of nationalism" that "show [the love of nations] in thousands of different forms and styles (141), on the one hand, and Etienne Balibar's suggestion that these imagined communities are more properly "fictive ethnicities" which suture a nation together through a chronotope of racism. Within this

discursive problematic the nation emerges as the most locatable site of both cultural resistance and of hegemonic domination. Do these gestures of resistance by the language writers then get read as a more progressive form of cultural nationalism to counter the retrograde nationalism of imperialism? Is there a sense of national address, such as Olson's Miltonic project of "the initiation / of another kind of nation" or can the poetics of the language writers be read outside of the frame of national narration as a non-narrative site of resistance within the teleology of a nation? The language writers' rejection of, as Barrett Watten states in his essay in this volume, "a transparent internationalism" in order to order to challenge an American national narration does not have to preclude a critique of the effects of a world system.

From a Canadian perspective, locating the language writers within American literature and nation state induces both a Canadian cultural nationalism and an American cultural nationalism. Canadian cultural nationalism would point out the influence of McCaffery on the language poetics, or claim "Canadian" status for other writers, such as Alan Davies; in other words, to counter what is seen as American cultural nationalism, the international constitution, circulation and effect of the language writers would be emphasized. However, avoiding a transparent internationalism but locating language writing in a transnational field of relations, language writing could be seen as both specific to a crisis in the production of meaning in North America (created by the waning of America's hegemonic world position) and as an address to the effects of a world system. Here I am echoing E. San Juan Jr.'s claim that "there can be no worthwhile exchange in culture and art today without a sense of the capitalist world system as its condition of possibility, its enabling complex of presuppositions and theorems" (2).

This ultimately social definition is more expansive than external definitions of language writing and thus counters the institutional reception I outlined earlier in which language writing is figured first as an aesthetic breach and then as a challenge to canon formation. At this point, there is an odd convergence of internal configuring and external definitions initiated by Silliman's view of the role of the institution in the reception of poetry and in canon formation. He sees this process fundamentally as an act of colonization: "Academic colonization is poetry's fundamental social problem precisely because it incorporates the politics of culture into a process than can be determined institutionally" (1988, 175). (The discourse of colonization is troubling applied to the relationship of poetry to the academy for it implies a homology between how poetry is received institutionally and how nations are dominated.) Staking a more rearticulatory role for poetry, Alan Golding has persuasively written that the movement of language writing into the academy may in fact lead to an alteration of the academy, that the poetics of the language writers might not be so readily absorbed or neutralized. "Language poetry," Golding writes, "seeks to affect how the ideological state apparatuses mediating American poetry shape poetry readers as social subjects; it seeks to broaden the range and nature of subject positions the American poetry 'establishment' makes available" (170). This institutional strategy involves, in Golding's terms, a complicit resistance from inside the institution.

Golding is able to reconcile both an institutional and social function for poetry by designating the academy as an ideological state apparatus. This slide into institutional sites then is not a matter-of-fact defeat and complacent positioning. For the effects of cultural production, of poetry, is not wholly determined by its institutional placement. Again it is instructive to return to the model of conceptual art's interventions into institutions in order to frame how cultural production circulates within and rearticulates sites. Kosuth pushed for art's ability "to critique the institution while simultaneously provid[ing] an alternative to it" (253). Yet, it could be argued (as Kosuth later does) that the institutional critique in conceptual art, even when the institution is figured as an ideological state apparatus, turned conceptual art interventions too inward, resulting in an art that has merely opened the market to conceptual art. Here intervention meets with accommodation and the "oppositional" art form gains cultural capital from the very institution that was the focus of intervention.

Is language writings' institutional intervention belatedly following the taming of conceptual art? Or can the institutional interface of the language writers be rethought in a set of overdetermined and complex relations? In such relations, the institution as a site does effectively limit an anti-institutional practice, a practice aimed at expanding the boundaries of texts that matter. Even if access to such ideological sites can be gained, institutional interventions and canon reformation may not be easily accomplished because the canon, as John Guillory argues, is both "the inevitable embodiment of hegemonic values" and a record that relies on the "history of consumption, the history of judgment of cultural products" (20). This history of consumption and judgment is ultimately based on representation. Curiously, what is defined as the nonrepresentational aspect of

language writing -- but what could perhaps be better termed hyper-referentiality -- may also work to narrow access to institutions. The process I am describing is both a limiting of access and a stripping away of the social relations embedded in and presented by the text: it is through this movement of rejection and absorption that the academy reproduces itself and hegemonic cultural values. Thus "academic colonization" is not so much a colonizing act but a process of mimesis through which relations are reproduced.

In Canada, the relationship of theory to so-called radical texts defines an outer horizon of intelligibility that language writing and others with shared textual tactics fall outside of; in effect, alternative canon formation or canon revision appropriates a discourse of radicality while narrowly limiting what is deemed meaningful. As Bourdieu writes, "[t]he work of art is an object which exists only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art" (35), and as works of art are manifestations of its field of production, it is at the boundary of the field where struggle for entry and the delimiting of territory takes place (42-3). Politicized texts that contest normative representation within language and within a politics of recognition, or texts that look for effects outside of a subscribed agency, are refigured as "difficult" -- which shifts them to language puzzles to be decoded by an individuated reader. Or such texts are designated "experimental," leaving them within an aesthetic realm unaffected by social determinants. This depoliticizing of texts enacts a national boundary of intelligibility by failing to engage with the material determinations of these texts. An official national literature thus tends to elide history (as a determinant) from its readings in order to form an archive of texts which can be recognized under the sign of a nation.

The result of this delimiting -- of effect and of positions -- has dampened and depoliticized the effect of language writing within Canadian institutions. Aside from the barriers inherent to institutional interventions, there is, for a poetic movement that has defined itself as "American," particularly in its anthologies, the still-strong veil of Canadian cultural nationalism to pierce. In terms of Canada's place within the world system it may appear that cultural nationalism has been disrupted or renegotiated through international trade pacts such as NAFTA and the eroding of barriers to transnational economic and cultural trade, even in the face of U.S. protectionism. However, in the arts, there was a strong lobby against NAFTA and to take culture "off the table" as a negotiable commodity, recognizing that the American culture industry would override its smaller Canadian counterpart. Despite the remapping of culture and nation by challenges to official multiculturalism in Canada and despite the withdrawal of state cultural funding, cultural nationalism remains a primary frame for not only the production of culture in Canada, but also in the reception of culture. To see a presence and an effect of language writing in Canada, focus must shift from official sites to communities of writers and little magazines. This shift sidesteps the invocation of the institution as the primary site for the effect of poetry.

The materialization and rearticulation of the language writers is most readable in the community of Vancouver writers who emerged through self-produced magazines and chapbooks around the mid-eighties. This then-emergent cultural formation had its own "institutional" or supplemental site in the artist-run Kootenay School of Writing (KSW). By organizing the well-publicized New Poetics Colloquium in 1985 (perhaps the first large-scale gathering of the language writers), KSW was associated with and made nearly synonymous with language poetry by a discursive exterior that used cultural nationalism to frame the poetics. This frame had already been utilized in the reception of the early-sixties TISH poets as they took up and modified New American poetry for their own investigations of place, history and poetic practice.

For the emergent formation of poets in Vancouver -- whose poetics are hybrids of at least the more innovative and rearticulatory aspects of Canadian literature, the language writers and contemporary visual arts -- this prefabricated frame produced predictable external discursive definitions. From accusations that "language-centred writers" were "retreat[ing] into expressive Kabbalas [that] killed New American poetry" and that will now "probably destroy what little audience poetry has left" (Fawcett 101) to more nuanced readings recognized a paradigm of a Canadian avant garde in TISH (Bowering), these external definitions have failed to link these poetics to present structures of feeling in Vancouver that would provide a more social field for this work to be situated in. To do so would move past defining this community of writers -- who have been producing work for a decade now -- as a formation that is more than a continuation and opposition to a sixties avant garde, as a breach of cultural nationalism, or as an extension (or branch plant) of language writing. A cultural poetics would enable these poetics -- which Miriam Nichols writes of in more detail in this volume -- to be placed in a field of relations that takes into account the changes in the public sphere in Vancouver in the mid-eighties (precipitated by the hosting of Expo 86); the high unemployment

level which created an economics of the community (and made time for literary production and a bar scene); and a homology of poetics to economics. This homology would expand on a poetics that utilized the general economic aspects of language, the excess of language, at a time when governmental restraint was radically altering the relationship of the social sphere to education, union organization, and culture. That is, these determinations in the cultural and political sphere resulted in a poetics of excess during a time of restraint. As well, the writers and artists around KSW and other artist-run centres in Vancouver could be seen as a moment of collectivity at a time when the individual and individual interest was being promoted and enacted by the federal and provincial governments.

By turning lastly to other writing communities as a value-granting discursive exterior for language writing, I am emphasizing that institutions should not be privileged as a dominant site or set of discourses. The academy, along with other social institutions that give an official shape to poetic production, is not buffered from its own discursive outside. A discursive exterior is felt not only in how it articulates a poetic movement, but also in how poetry's social effect might be registered. There is a discursive impasse as poetics move into the social sphere; narratives and critiques of cultural production tend to hinge on the massification of effects and as a result, poetry's cultural capital has not been bullish. However, a cultural poetics that could move from the micro-aesthetics of the text to the macro-ideology of nation states and of a geoculture could locate the effects of poetry at the field of its own production, at an institutional level, and in the social sphere.

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