LINKING WORDS WITH THE WORLD: THE LANGUAGE POETRY MISSION

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ABSTRACT

The poets associated with the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E School have remarkably borrowed from the Pound-Olson tradition of political poetry and poetics. But, they have also experimented with newer methods and matters that deviate from the tradition. Such continuation and departure from the tradition of the socio-cultural oriented language poets has been investigated here. Their poetic tenets have been examined through the ideas formulated by the outstanding cultural critics; Adorno, Jameson, Bakhtin, Foucault, Lukács, and Benjamin. Based on the thorough examination it has been found out that besides many other socio-cultural demands the language poets want to connect the words of art the world people live. Such connection, as they perform, has been disturbed for long time.

Key Words: Prose-poetry, space and form, ideological literature, textual politics, disruptions, praxis.

Among numerous schools, tendencies, and groups of contemporary American poetry a sharp division between traditional and experimental is noteworthy. The cooked and the raw poetry, closed and open form, new formalist and language poetry are further chains of this division (Caplan, 123). Language poetry—a significant wing of the second type—is innovative, creative and challenging. It is a school of radicalism in American poetics. Not only linguistically innovative this school of avant-garde school writers is fully committed to emerging alternative values of taste. These poets do maintain a unique affinity and departure with the established tradition of Pound-Olson poetics.

Language poetry refers to all the different writing practices demonstrated by a rather loose group of writing communities, mostly printed in magazines such as *This, Tottel's, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* and *Poetics Journal*. Some of the leading writers of this school are Barrett Watten, Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Bruce Andrews, Ray DiPalma, Lyn Hejinian, and Clara Harryman. Having a general fascination with the idea of space and form these writers play with language. Language poetry goes beyond the traditional boundaries of language use regarding the production of meaning. It has remarkably

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produced prose-poems, especially in long formats. All these poets take theory seriously. Highly critical of the contemporary poetic practice, this school exists by questioning the ideological character of literary language. Furthermore, it keeps a mocking gaze at writer-oriented writing. With their own presses, magazines, and circulatory system, and reviewing apparatus, this school of poets is at times theoretically militant.

THEORIZING LANGUAGE POETRY

Individual, society, and art, for language poets, are strongly tied-up. So, it contains a mixture of the textual politics of two diverse and internally contested theories—Marxist criticism and post-structuralism. It shares its process or productivity with post-structuralism, while it attempts to expose the traces of history and politics in the texts that intend to repress them with Marxism. In this sense, the project of language poetry is political and formal at the same time. However, it follows Adorno much as it is interested in the politics of form more than of content unlike many other innovative schools whose focus does not often fall upon form.

Language poetry advocates as well as serves the social function of art as highlighted by Jameson. The poetic practice is in agreement with Bakhtin that language itself is always ideological as well as dialogical. "Language poetry might indeed be regarded as a realization by more drastic means of the dialogic project Mikhail Bakhtin assigns to the novel; rapid collage, answer as more disconcerting strategies of interruption, exhibit a multitude of received discourses and dialogize their hegemonic claims," (304) observes Nathanson. Language school has produced ideological literature. It largely maintains relation between the poetry world and the real world. It contains the bounded-ness, historicity and social determination that Bakhtin wanted to see in literary works. It is poetry of use like his idea of kitchen utensil. This oppositional school of writing alienates itself with the power that is repressed by the state. Like Foucault's intellectuals language writers favor proletariats and the masses as one of their governing ideologies. They have always felt threats of multinational corporations, media commercials, and the economy centered society.

Frankly going against the harmony of man and art the school presents social problems as the significant business of writing. Though basically dedicated to the present, the language poets like Lukács' dreamers keep passionate visions for the future. Maintaining a resistance against the crippling capitalist environment, it defends human integrity that Lukács wanted to see. Another very important aspect where Lukács and the language poets overlap is the focus on collective project. They too believe that individual attempt of resistance is sure to collapse. So, they have got actively

engaged in collective oppositional movement. Like Benjamin's progressive writer, the language poets have opted to write in favor of the working class. Expressing open sympathies for the workers their poems fall in his category of politically correct literature. The support these poets express in the interest of the repressed group goes to the readers as their message. In principle language poets do not intend to teach, but the message automatically reaches the readers as some form of instruction for affirmative action. Being discontented with the civilization these poets project themselves as Adorno's cultural critics. They deal with the economic factors as the cardinal players of cultural matters. To sum up, as Bakhtin emphasized language poetry attempts on bringing literature closer to human life and experiences.

This school is concerned with the relationship between poetics and the truth. It conveys the way how discursive practices produce the reality. Through the disruptions of discourse and syntax, the school hinders references or smooth projection. It promotes the Bakhtinian inter-textual force of dispersion within language. As Bakhtin advocates, this poetry maintains a dialogic openness by communal production and collaboration of the reader. Theoretically, language poetry vehemently demurs with Foucault's idea of author function. The collective writing of language poetry is opposed to the idea of author function. But it is closer to his proposition "fellowship of discourse" (Foucault, "Discourse" 156). Obviously, there are instances of personal life to some extent in these poems. Language poetry's critique of personal lyricism shares much with the ideas of Adorno. Its minimization of writer and maximization of reader is also in harmony with Jameson's idea. About Jameson's observations on language writing Perelman states "Fredric Jameson, in the course of his mini discussion of language writing in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, identifies language writing not only with the new sentence—a reductive move, as we will see—but also with depthlessness, simulacra, Lacanian schizophrenia, and the end of personal identity" (314). Indeed, this school deliberately puts the authorial dominance under shadow. It is dedicated to eliminate the distinction between author and public. As Benjamin opines the reader in this poetry turns into a writer. Though language poets attempt to shadow their personal identities as authors they have propounded a theory as an endless highway of discussion. Thus, the cultural philosophy and poetic works by these writers are much compatible and deserves a closer examination.

THE ESSENCE

Surprisingly, language poetry is a reaction to as well as an extension of some experimental schools of contemporary American poetry specifically represented by the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, and the

Beats. Possibly begun in 1971 with the magazine *This*, its spiritual forefathers are Pound, Stein, and Zukofsky. This body of writing has been approached from different perspectives and taken to extreme points—idealized and marginalized. These poets seek to challenge, question, and rewrite some fundamental notions about poetry and its cultural values. Though they do not bear a self-conscious identity as a movement, the trend has been well-identified as a school. But, some scholars still regard it as a movement. Interestingly, like Pound's Chinese Written characters these poets, being attentive to the material of language itself, use words for things.

The corpus sometimes looks like a broad historical trend of writing rather than a movement. Indeed, several features of language poetry have been central to contemporary American poetry. Greer opines that the name "language poetry" is a misnomer because "writing" rather than "language" is the central term in this field of work. Poetry, poetics, or theory are taken not as distinct field of discourse, but writing as a space where distinct genres, forms, and modes can intersect, undermine, reinforce, echo, contradict, transform or restate one another (Greer 351). In this sense, a language poem is a typical poststructuralist work of art.

Even a school different language poets practice their poetics in their own distinct ways making themselves stand out. It is hard to trace a single doctrine that guides their poetries. The naming of this school itself has been at times controversial and unspecific; L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Language, and language-centered writing. Silliman opines that there are a million ways of defining language poetry but none of them is adequate. Indeed, language poetry resists a precise definition. It is a broad community of poets with a concern for language. It is very hard to trace a single, monolithic definition as the poets associated with this movement have produced multifaceted bodies of works. Likewise, there is much difficulty in assigning stable generic classifications to these works. It is even difficult to form a single manifesto of language poetry. The poets display broadly shared aesthetic, theoretical, and political concerns which in general divert away from mainstream tendency. However, as Bernstein indicated, it does not assume syntax, a subject matter, a vocabulary, a structure, a form, or a style but all these are explored in the writing forming a unified whole.

Perelman notes the primary writing techniques of the movement as:

1) a high degree of syntactic and verbal fracturing, often treating the page as a structural frame; 2) use of found materials, cutting-up borrowed texts; 3) a focus on rhythmic noun phrase, bop rather than incantatory, with semantics definitely soft-pedaled but not inaudible; 4) a hyperextension of syntactic possibilities, more Steinian than surreal; and 5) philosophic lyrics. (315)

Some language writers, afterwards, took these points of departure and connected them with theories. The multiple features mean that the movement contains a great diversity within. It is even hard to locate a typical language poem. But, it challenges the concept of the natural presence of a speaker behind a poem, emphasizes the disjunction and the materiality of the signifier, follows longer prose poem method, and maintains a non-narrative form. It shares such convictions and practices as the rejection of referentiality, dismissal of voice-lyric, theory being inseparable from poetry writing, reader's participation in the production of meaning, search for new socio-political space for poetry and so on. In addition, this movement ideologically opposed five things; narrative, personal expression, organization, control, and the bourgeoisie values. Thus, the school carried out the principles of for and against at the same step.

These poets generally acted out of the economic and institutional academy. Emerged during the time poetry was being synonymous with university-based writers, most of these poets juxtapose creative writing, critical work, and political engagement. Their critical works explain the formal strategies used in their poetic works. These poets differ from earlier tradition with a practice that creative and critical writing are community works. The language writing is very closely linked with marginal small presses and magazines. It was almost ignored and forgotten by the mainstream magazines and huge publication industry.

Politically charged, intellectually grave and formally radical, language poetry attempts to join words with the world. Language poets claim their works to be experimental, oppositional, and dedicated to social justice and freedom of the reader. Openly and aggressively oppositional in their political stance these poets are, indeed, engaged in a social enterprise. Some significant contributions of language poetry to postmodern poetics are participatory readership, the commodity form, and decentering of political subject (Nealon 585). Talking about the political motivations of the language poets, McGann divides such writing into two types; oppositional and accomodational. Based on Watten's statement "The test of a 'politics of poetry' is in the entry of poetry into the world in a political way," McGann concludes that politics means "opposition" rather than "accommodation" (626). He prefers the latter type to the former because it is of paramount concern for the majority. Likewise, Bernstein opines that "language control = thought control = reality control: it must be decentered, community controlled, taken out of the *service* of the capitalist project" (*Content's* 60). Thus, he shows thought and language as the two integral things and they are equivalent to reality. Bernstein claims language poetry to be closest to a mass or popular

culture among the literary works ever created after the printing press. Moreover, they are generally anti-capitalist and at times reveal Marxist inclination. They may not be political; but they do affect politics.

THE FOUNTAINHEADS AND BEDROCKS

This movement has more than one specific origin and consequently it is highly decentered. To look at the distant origin, Gertrude Stein and particularly her work *Tender Buttons* is a precursor. Language school has inherited the abstractness of her prose. It also owes immensely to Pound and Zukofsky. It has also derived largely from Olson, Creeley, and Ashbery. It is often viewed as a movement running on the heels of Black Mountain and New York School. Language poetry has contradictory roots in Objectivism and French Surrealism that focused on linguistic indeterminacy. Both of them refuse the conservative ideas about the nature of language and its relationship with the producer and both deny the stable self-subject. It is also associated with French academy. About its overlapping with these schools Arnold writes that "…in some specific instances, Language writers, Objectivists and Surrealists are linked by the ways in which they map 'the murky realms' between subject and object" (165). Likewise, Russian Futurism is a direct predecessor of language-centered writing. Silliman opines that both of them place language at the center of their work and they deal with a program of conscious and active class-struggle and believe that every creative act is revolutionary (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Sup. No. 1* 33). Thus, the formation of the school itself is collagist in nature.

Some other previous larger aesthetic contexts have also significantly contributed for emergence and development. For instance, the emphasis on the repressed signifier was highlighted in the aesthetic philosophy of John Cage's music a decade earlier. Cage spoke for a poetics of non-intentionality that a work should not be a self-expression. His aesthetic beliefs like "poetry focused on process instead of object," and "activity instead of communication" became the bedrocks of language poetry (Delville, 190). It is also enhanced by 1960s' Minimal art movement of painting and sculpture which questioned the very borderline of art and non-art. It is influenced by the Frankfurt School in the conviction that literature must reveal some truth in order to be effective (Hartley 314). Minimized self expression and process-orientation are always integral with this method of writing.

It also bears influences from politico-intellectual movements. Several issues of cultural poetics that took place in the 1960s created space for the formation and growth of language poetry in the 70s. According to Watten, the Free Speech Movement (FSM) at the University of California, Berkeley in

1964 is one of them ("Turn" 156). Both of these movements used language as a tool for power exercise. The prohibition of free speech and FSM members' struggles for speaking their resistance inspired a track to the writers for thinking of poetry as an alternative way of expression.

What the language poetry has done was earlier indicated in Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* (1970). In this work he indicated the need of language-centered writing though he himself was already late in demonstrating such an experiment. Yet, he kept dream records, automatic images, lists, news quotations, argument in the text (Watten, "Turn" 165). The work also hinted at a dialectic of identity between the "I" and the "not-I."

Devastation by war and development of critical theories coincidentally happened together. The emergence of language poetry has many affiliations with such other contemporary events—the Vietnam War and the development of literary theories in American universities. McGann expresses that language writing developed in a climate where the hegemony of the American military and multinational capitalism was manifest (640). In the initial months, it was a dominant propaganda that Vietnam War was being fought on national consensus. And a handful of people who opposed the war were unimportant. But gradually the protest voices increased, and there appeared thousands of anti-war banners. Vietnam Day Committee march, October-November 1965 turned into a big series of demonstrations. Ginsberg's method of protest turned the student movement to counterculture. And his reading of incomprehensible mantras "*Hare om namo shiva*" at the back of the truck became an icon of counterculture. These events responded to politics by developing a certain concept of language. They paved the ways for writing poetry with an idea of language as a politically motivated text of representation. Thus, the roots of language poetry are varied, but political in almost every care. And the politics is not only confined to the content but the way things are expressed too.

MARXIST ORIENTATION AND CRITICAL OBSERVATION

A society's dominant ideology where the writings are created, according to sociolinguistic claims, always influences the products. Writing, therefore, manifests and conserves the values and ideologies of that culture. However, it can also be used to invalidate the status quo and challenge the dominant social discourse. Language poetry is one of such politically sophisticated radical writing. Language poets have an acute desire of change; the world, language, and the writing (Brill 57). Some of these poets are even committed to a socialist politics. Like left-wing writers, they view language as a social product. They believe that, in order to revision the world it is necessary to revision the language.

Crossing the boundary of the "self-sufficient world," language poetry moves to explicitly social and political issues. This poetics endeavors to formulate a social reconstitution that primarily society is the business of poetry. In this sense language poetry is political in carrying the social responsibilities. The failure of traditional communism strengthened the idea that a political system that disregards the prime value of individual self-esteem cannot exist with honor. A system that places community at the apex cannot honor individual's self-esteem has already remained another conviction. Amid such situations of diminishing individual status through the disregard of voice language poetry has come as a challenge by paying due honor to community.

The mission of the language poets is to create the useful texts. They perceive writing fundamentally as a social act and advocate a transformation of art into a social praxis. For these poets, writing seems to be an engine of social change. So, they work against creating an illusion of life. The political content language poetry uses is consciously antithetical. However, it normally does not celebrate the immediate social and political circumstances. "And though it does not talk directly of a politics of poetry," comments McGann on the politics of language poetry, "the politics of such writing—the theory and the practice of it alike—are plain for anyone to see" (647). This school also encourages the reader to reconsider the political dimensions of literary works.

Language poets felt themselves marginalized by hegemonic poetry establishment of the power elite. Therefore, they felt committed to "giving poetry backs its appeal to the masses and so breaking down the elitism bred by modernism" (Gilbert, "Textual" 254). Socio-political comments are nestled among sentences without any clear political job. The poems contain momentary political flashes. To illustrate, an extract from Hejinian's *My Life* reads, "The yellow of that sad room/ was again the yellow of naps, where she waited, restless, faithless, for/ more days. They say that the alternative for the bourgeoisie was gulli-/ bility. Call it water and dogs" (Hoover 389). Here, the first sentence deals with a sad woman hopelessly waiting in her room. The third sentence creates an uncertainty between two disparate things. But, the middle sentence like a flash makes a serious political comment about the credulous nature of the bourgeoisie. Thus, politics is inseparably interwoven with the ordinary. Here, poetry and politics maintain the oil-and-water separation or a seamless weaving. Moreover, its politics is not much the declaration of a position or an agenda as it is an effort to alter the way texts are approached.

Language poetry has made the connection between ideology and form apparent. It has theorized the relationship of form and politics.

Language is fractured to rebel against the dominant socio-political structure. Such explicit convergence of aesthetics and politics is a rare moment in American poetry. About the type of politics language poets are engaged with, Middleton writes:

> Political projects on which the poets are engaged are then no more than linguistic inflammations determined by the body of an alienated society. We are indeed back with Lukács' repudiation of the argument that a fragmented society demands aesthetics of fragmentation as no more than acquiescence in the ideological inversions of the deep structure of a unifying capitalism which foments such illusions. (246)

Though these experimental poets have noticeable varieties between and among them regarding the poetry-politics connection, they have some significant commonalities. They view writing and criticism through the lens of political work. Indeed, the language poets envision a new reality by means of offering new linguistic forms (Brill 60). The basic instrumental function of language is, thus, diminished. Questioning the nature of language it tries to remove the notions existing with language such as the transcendental ego, the authentic self, poet as a lonely genius, and a unique artistic style. Instead, an anatomy of the dominant society and class discourses in order to subvert itself comes to the prime concern.

A change of the society through changing the language is a remarkable politics of language poetry. The poets desire to change the society by changing the mind, which is a change in poetics. Thus, it is poetry for use. Language poets are for "opposition," whereas mainstream academic poets are for "accommodation," if the terms of McGann are borrowed. The former are objective whereas the latter are subjective. For the language poets subjectivity hinders their desire to change social life. It is difficult for a change-seeking poem to be subjective and social at the same time. Thus, language poetry rejects the totalizing methods that consequently enhance totalitarianism, though it happens in a minor level compared to the real politics for the governance.

Post-war American poetry is fundamentally a writing of revolt. More specifically, language writing is a Marxism-inclined critique of contemporary American capitalist system. Its oppositional poetics is based on a Marxist analysis of reification. Middleton perceives it as a cultural formation developed from a long-silenced pre-war socialist culture and Marxist theory (247). The poets struggle against capitalist reification on the terrain of textuality. Highlighting the political determinations and their causes, Perloff mentions, "Both in San Francisco and New York, the Language movement arose as an essentially Marxist critique of contemporary American capitalist society on behalf of young

poets who came of age in the wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate" ("Word" 7). Indeed, language schools' resistances to the official verse culture, capitalist market system, dominant consumerist culture, and hegemonic ideologies are obviously of Marxist-orientation. For example, "Stalin's Genius" by Bruce Andrews reads:

> Stalin's Genius
> Little more than words; self makes meaning —
> fatter than margarine. I gave you an F — violations appear to invert the
> power of the king; examples are there to deter —
> nationalism just means delegate somebody else's self-importance.
> (Hoover 532)

Here, Andrews is linking Stalin with the removal of monarchy and nationality. Linking language writing and Marxist theory Chakroborty writes, "Thus post-war America with its Avant-garde aesthetics has been seen by the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Writers as a pure capitalistic society where everything is judged by its market value – even the very fact of reading is also a subject for commodification. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Writing negates the idea of commodity fetishism…" (21).

Language poetry actively critiques the bourgeois society. Woznicki rightly remarks that it believes capitalism to have been built on a system of exchange which universalizes the individual and stays attached to capitalist ideology. Under the capitalistic system the poet is obliged to look for the lyrical form of individualistic domination. So, these poets are against the bourgeois myth of the sovereign subject. This school's belief on the equal value of each word is also in agreement with the Marxist orientation. The capitalistic approach of commodification is challenged by the practice of each sentence acting as a unit of meaning. They have a great fear of the risk of language becoming a mere commodity. Likewise, the emphasis on the reader's active participation in the meaning production proposes a social engagement and breaks down the commodity fetishism. Such practice enfolds language into an act of socio-political engagement and ultimately uplifts the status of language used in art works.

PRAXIS OF METALANGUAGE

Obviously, for these poets language is a political act because of its integral relationship with all other political activities. If Silliman's statement "Language is, first of all, a political question," is accepted then language movement can be designated as a metaphysical politics (Lavender 200). It tries to develop non-authorial poetic vocabularies for literary composition. Unlike the Coleridgean concept of poetic diction that creates a hierarchy of appropriate and inappropriate lexicons,

language poetry's proposition of poetic vocabulary is open-ended and critical. They claim that language should not be judged in terms of its appropriateness for poetic diction, rather for its relationship to language (Watten, "New" 149). It promotes the use of jargons, dialects, idioms, and technical senses. A language poem is precisely equivalent to language. So, it is a shift from poetic diction to poetic vocabulary. In fact, it is based upon a rejection of Chomskyan linguistics and generative grammar. Silliman's *The New Sentence* and Watten's *Total Syntax*, for instance, openly refute Chomsky. Maintaining a criticality of the poetic language these poems treat the objects of their art. Avoiding a unifying aesthetic or style, they are similar to the "series of series," as explained by Foucault. A poem is not merely a poem but a part of a larger system.

Language poets are interested in writing that places its attention largely on language and the ways of making meaning. They dislike taking for granted the language elements such as vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, or subject matter. Language is used not only as a medium of communication but also as a material for poetic construction. More than a vehicle to carry preexisting meanings, language is seen as a system with its own operational rules.

Language poetry celebrates the "material signifier" by viewing writing as a demonstration of the "materiality of the sign." Andrews writes in "Text and Context" that "Texts are themselves signi*fieds,* not mere signifiers" (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Sup. No. 1* 22). It laments the insignificance being attributed to language by contemporary literary culture. In this sort of poetry the signifier is dismembered from the signified. In this aspect language poetry shares a lot with Derrida's deconstruction. It appeals for a subversion of the dominant poetic and linguistic paradigms for the new ways of thinking. In this aspect, feminism and lesbianism are indebted to language writing.

Like the depolarization of theory and writing, language poets are committed to emphasize the difference between writing and speech. Programmatic focus on writing rather than speech is a typical feature of language poetry. Robert Grenier's celebrated and ironic declaration "I hate speech" inspired the early language-centered writing. Speech in this context especially means expression with a dominant self-presence. The statement came as a questioning attitude to the referentiality of language. Language poetry in the next decades constantly attacks these self-presence and referentiality. In a strong disgust at speech, it reveals a resistance to speech-based poetics. These practitioners believe that writing always loses something while being translated into speech. Though the language poets are opposed to

speech, they are seriously committed to the acts of speaking, performing, and conversation themselves. "Writing/talks" have always been the central feature of this school (Mann 172). And they are seriously dedicated to doing the act they intend. For this they were required to plunge into a long run debate between process and the product.

UPLIFTING THE PROCESS RATHER THAN THE PRODUCT

Challenge the methods of the poetry establishment language poets use a variety of formal techniques in order to enhance the poetic postmodernism. They demonstrate intensive experiments on the page; visual layout, orthography, and typography. The key to this writing is emphasis on process and method. Application of process is done particularly at the level of sentence. Preoccupation with a "contaminated" rather than a "pure" language is its distinguishing feature. These poems have richly used the strategies of the new forms of prose, collaboration, proceduralsim, and collage among many other techniques.

Experimental poetry is normally political as it intends to subvert or disrupt the dominant representative forms. Because of its mission, political poetry should be careful both of content and form. Politics of the poem's form is even more important than that of its content (Mann 175). So, language poetry politicizes the poetic form. It focuses on the arrangement of objects as the basis of syntax. For instance, at the age of 37 Hejinian wrote *My Life* (1980) with 37 paragraphs of 37 sentences each? Grenier's three books appear in special formats; *Sentences* (1978) consists of 500 poems on 5 x 8-inch index cards, *CAMBRIDGE M'ASS* (1979) has 265 poems on a 40 x 48-inch poster, the trilogy *What I Believe Transpiration/Transpiring Minnesota* (1989) contains majority of handwritten poems in 8.5 x 11-inch photocopied pages. *Sentences*, having one poem per card, is intended to be read in any order and rejects a book format. It has a general refusal of closure like capital letter or period that marks a complete thought. The text is similar to the full-length features made of discrete bits (cf. Charlie Chaplin). Likewise, the poems in Coolidge's *Suite V* are composed of two words per 8.5 x 11'' page—placed one at the top and the next on the bottom. The middle is to be worked by the reader.

These poets actively manipulate standard punctuation rules too. For example, a stanza from Perelman's "Cliff Notes" appears without any mark of punctuation:

Because the language are enclosed and heated
each one private a separate way
of undressing in front of the word window
faces squashing up against it
city trees and personal rituals of sanitation
washing the body free of any monetary transaction (Hoover 498)

Linguistic resistance of the language poets occurs in syntax and grammar too. Techniques of fragments, distortion, writing over or under, cut up, splice, collage are widespread. Montage and pastiche are exploited as structural devices. Particularly talking about Bernstein, Perloff generalizes the figurative qualities of language poetry as, "…it playfully exploits such rhetorical figures as pun, anaphora, epiphora, metathesis, epigram, anagram, and neologism to create a seamless web of reconstituted words" ("Word" 5). An extract of Hejenian's *My Life* can be a fine example of fragments, collage, prose-poem and many other strategies of language poetry.

> Long time lines trail behind every idea, object, person, pet, vehicle, and
> event. The afternoon happens, crowded and therefore endless. Thicker, she agreed. It was a tic, she had the habit, and now she bobbed like my toy plastic bird on the edge of its glass, dipping into and recoiling from the water. But a word is a bottomless pit. It became magically pregnant and one day split open, giving birth to a stone egg, about as big as a football. In May when the lizards emerge from the stones, the stones turn gray, from green. (Hoover 386)

Fragmentation here creates a notion of textual equality. Like this, most of the language poems depart from normal syntax and focus on rapid shift of matters, objectivity and indeterminacy. They take syntax as crucial to displace metaphor as a major poetic tool.

$L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$, the school's first theoretical journal, itself is a form of reflexive engagement. More than the literary works, the journal published articles to announce the poetics. The works featured in the journal differ from conventional literary writing. The coverage of the works ranges from signification, sound and schizophrenia to analysis of the works by Stein, Riding Jackson and Zukofsky. It featured not only the types of language-centered writing but also theoretical articles about the movement.

The typography $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ stops reader's gaze on letters as things. Bernstein's partner and also an artist Susan Bee designed this unique logo by spacing the letters with equal signs from the graphically modified noun "language." Equals signs (=) were used in the magazine title with uppercase print. The uppercase used for each letter indicates the idea of "blocks" carrying heavy meanings. Equal signs mean that letters are harmoniously connected to each other and all of them are equal. Each letter contains the same heaviness and the power of communication. Watten believes that the equal signs unite a series of similar and dissimilar individual letters to perform organized violence on language as Mann's notion of the theory death, and it also constitutes a Foucauldian discursive formation ("Secret" 595). The letter "L" does not have any connection with "A" except both of them are independent

letters. Their projection as equal items means that not only the letters are equal but the individual works in the journal are given equal status. Equal signs are obviously motivated by a politics or aesthetics of equivalence and a disruption of expository conventions. It further shows the equality among writer, text, reader by violating the hierarchy, that is, writer=text=reader. Thus, the title name itself evolves dialectic of theory and practice. These writers have a collectively held set of notions. They exercise Bakhtin's reception for a poetics of intertextuality and dialogism. The notion also shares many values of democratic politics.

A base of language poetry is the rejection of the narrative model which has been identified as a foundation of any literary discourse. Instead, the poets focus on the use of non- and anti-narrative strategies. They urge to compose radically disjunctive non-narrative and non-referential poems. In such non-referential poems language is divorced from reference as Stein has done. Additionally, collage, disjunction, spaces, and silences liberate these poems from conventional narrative structures. Bernstein's "Artifice of Absorption" speaks for a poetics of transparency and opacity. His poetry disfigures the words, opens up syntax, and reduces the signifiers to their sub-verbal elements.

> Absorptive & antiabsorptive works both require artifice, but the former may hide this while the latter may flaunt it. & absorption may dissolve into theater as these distinctions chimerically shift & slide. (Bernstein, *A Poetics* 30)

According to Bernstein the anti-absorptive works flaunt their artifice. Language poetry endeavors to dramatize such artifice.

Language poems use constant back and forth movements. These poems are like a television set tuned to four channels—each quarter featuring one channel. It looks like a kind of stream-of-consciousness text. Watten says that "A poem can be a stretch of thinking" (*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E No. 2* 4). Sussman writes about the techniques:

> …a serpentine poetry of dispersion, wandering about the page, demonstrating the silence and emptiness surrounding its far-flung signifiers; a rigid and erect lyric composed of ultra-short lines, initially explored by Williams, emphasizing the mass of individual words and the arbitrariness of line-breaks; and conventional lyrics, whose seemingly ordinary lines camouflage unmarked deletions. (1202)

Language poems make abundant use of repetition too. For instance, Ray DiPalma in "[Each moment is surrounded]" uses repetition with slight variation as, "Each moment is/ surrounded/ by the correct torrent/ each moment is/ surrounded by/ the correct torment" (Hoover 429). The sentence fragments are used as complete sentences to challenge the

dogmatic rules of grammar. Likewise, the poets use quotation as cultural intervention. Hejinian, for example, uses quotation in *My Life* as ""Everything is a/ question of sleep," says Cocteau, but he forgets the shark, which does/ not" (Hoover 386). The quotation includes the words that are overheard and written down. Quotations sometimes work as report, and enhance resistance. They often suppress the author's voice. The language poems, thus, create a verbal vortex the reader has to work with. In sum, all the unique tactics and strategies the language poetry displays are directly from a treasure of poetics and they apparently provide energy to the mission the school intended to launch.

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