

Kathy Acker, Empire of the Senseless. Grove Press, New York, 1988.

just as the dominated classes' ideological structures determine their future political, economic, and moral situations; my own view of my position to my boss determines my relation to my boss. These thoughts in the sailor went round and round like hamsters strung out on dex.

#### A Love Letter<sup>1,2</sup>

This (therefore) will not have been a review.

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1. [Reading-loving, hating]  
The materialists  
Jouissance of being  
The male, polymorphous pervert  
The mystics  
Today I will be elaborating the consequences of the fact that in the case of the writer the relation between the sexes does not take place, since it is only on this basis that what makes up for that relation can be stated.  
The outsidesex  
To write to no purpose  
Psychoanalysis is not a cosmology  
Knowledge of *jouissance*  
After what I have just put up on the board for you, you might think that you know it all. Don't go too fast.
  2. "Don't you fuck with me! You fuck with me and I'll send you a love letter. You don't want to get a love letter from me. You know what a love letter is? It's a bullet. You're fucked if you get a love letter from me; you get a love letter from me and you're dead!"

Still less, despite appearances, will it have been the brilliantly mechanical reproduction -- an almost photographic pastiche -- of so much past writing which is included, and recreated, in the novels of Kathy Acker; whose continuity and underlying laws could now be pointed out; indeed whose overall concept of meaning could at last, with all the insistence required on such occasions, be squarely set forth. I will not feign, according to the code, either premeditation or improvisation. These texts are assembled otherwise; it is not my intention here to *present* them.

We have been in love with Kathy Acker for several years now; a love and a lust.

Kathy is a middle-class, though she has no money, American white girl, twenty-nine years of age, no lovers and no prospects of money, who doesn't believe in anyone or anything.

Or perhaps she once was. Once she wrote,

I would rather be a baby than have sex.  
I would rather write googoo.  
I would rather write: FUCK YOU UP  
YOUR CUNTS THAT'S WHO I AM THE FUCK  
WITH YOUR MONEY I'M NOT CATERING TO  
YOU ANYMORE  
I'M GETTING OUT  
I'M GETTING OUT  
I'M RIPPING UP MY CLOTHES  
I'M RIPPING UP MY SKIN  
I HURT PAIN OH HURT ME  
PAIN AT THIS POINT IS GOOD  
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?  
PAIN AT THIS POINT IS GOOD.  
ME ERICA JONG —  
WHEE WOO WOO  
I am Erica Jong

I am Erica Jong  
fuck me you creep who's going to  
Australia you're leaving me all  
alone you're leaving me without sex  
I've gotten hooked on sex and now  
I'm  
My name is Erica Jong. If there is  
God, God is disjunction and  
madness.

In Empire of the Senseless,

Reason which always homogenizes and reduces, represses and unifies phenomena or actuality into what can be perceived and so controlled. The subjects, us, are now stable and socializable. Reason is always in the service of the political and economic masters. It is here that literature strikes, at this base, where the concepts and actings of order impose themselves. Literature is that which denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine at the level of the signified.

Both of these could be called counter-hegemonic discourses, and we should not even be sanguine in thinking the one more polemic than the other -- it would be less than obvious which is which.

### Politics

Sometimes, the skin comes off in sex. The people merge, skinless. The body loses its boundaries. We are each in these separate bodies; and then, with someone and not with someone else, the skin dissolves altogether; and what touches is unspeakably, grotesquely visceral, not inside language or

conceptualization, not inside time; raw, blood and fat and muscle and bone, unmediated by form or formal limits. There is no physical distance, no self-consciousness, nothing withdrawn or private or alienated, no existence outside physical touch. The skin collapses as a boundary.

When did I start to fuck? Oh, I started to fuck, Thivai, when I was fourteen. At that age I didn't give a damn who I fucked cause any boy who fucked me loved me. Fucking was love.

Sometimes the language comes off. The voices merge, skinless. The text loses its boundaries. We are each in these separate texts; and then, with someone and not with someone else, the skin dissolves altogether; and what touches is unspeakably, grotesquely visceral, outside the margins of the book.

When I want to feel someone's weight pounding into me, bruising me, naked flesh streaming against naked flesh, I . . . When I ache and ache and ache; I always ache; every day I ache; I . . . I need a man because I love men. I love their thick rough skins. I love the ways they totally know about everything. They don't really know everything, but we'll forget about that.

### Writing<sup>3</sup>

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3. Compare the excerpts in this section with the following. "He spits out the lemon strips off his racoon coat and stands naked with a hard-on. A cry of strangled rage

(continued...)

While the cockroaches who had become Kamakaze pilots in their frenzy for Jap fashions, humanoid, were banging themselves to smithereens against blue windows in the buildings under the covered arches made out of dead people's bodies, the intelligentsia of the city's rats were throwing over the tops of garbage cans for nuclear waste.

Once one could have the sense that Kathy Acker was enclosed in texts, that there was no outside of texts, no semantics, no referents of her words, only a play on the styles of culture, high and low. In Empire of the Senseless, even the cultural texts are under erasure. All there is pure textuality, a continual play on Kathy Acker's own texts. One recognizes neither the world nor literature in the book, but only a triple reflection of the world, past literature, and most closely her own novels. The tropes are borrowed from her past books, and so are the very words. She formulates the politics of

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3. (...continued)

bursts from the crowd screaming clawing slipping on their spit to get at him as he drops on all fours smiling his back teeth bare and ejaculates canines tear through his bleeding gums stretching his face to a snout red hair ripples down his back into a bushy red tail laps his lean flanks leaner crinkles and shrinks his balls squeezing jets of sperm from his red pointed wolf phallus quivering teeth bare his eyes-light up bright lemon yellow and nitrous fumes steam off his body a reek of burning film and animal musk." Little else can even rival the immediacy of Kathy Acker's prose.

isolation, of the impossibility of communication. "Someone may wonder whether in a post-industrial world a revolution can change a city's architecture. Or anything."

Her neck was a Rembrandt made out of filth. Blood the same colour as the nailpolish of the hooker I was about to meet painted her teeth and claws. Her nose had the same red, but crusts of white and brown came out of her eyes. Her mouth was a bruise.

### Terror

'Who? Tell me who. Who controls himself, herself? Who doesn't feel unending pain?'

The terrorist frowned. 'That's not a proper question.'

'What's a proper question? Now?  
'Who can we kill?'

Terrorism is always a place to start because one has to start somewhere.

### Class conflict.

The Caribbean English slave-owners in the nineteenth century had injected a chemical similar to formic acid, taken from two members of the stinging nettle family, into the already broken skins of their

A person who eats even a small amount of the tetrodotoxin of the puffer fish or fungus feels pale, dizzy, and nauseous. Insects seem to be crawling just beneath the skin. The body seems to float. Drool drops out of the mouth while sweat runs out of the pores -- the body is deserting the

recalcitrant  
slaves. Ants  
crawl ceaselessly  
under the top  
layer of skin.  
And forced their  
unwilling servants  
to eat Jamaican  
'dumbcane' whose  
leaves, as if they  
were actually tiny  
slivers of glass,  
irritating the  
larynx and causing  
local swelling,  
made breathing  
difficult and  
speaking  
impossible.  
*Unwilling to speak*  
means *unable to  
speak.*

body -- the head is  
aching and almost no  
temperature exists.  
Material is cold. All  
is ice. Nausea;  
vomiting; diarrhoea; the  
eyes are fixed; it is  
almost not possible to  
breathe; muscles twitch  
then stop, paralyzed.  
Unable to move you.  
Eyes are glass you. The  
soul lies in the eyes.  
The mental faculties  
remain acute until  
shortly before death;  
sometimes death does not  
occur. Many many herbs.  
In time, like ink on a  
blotter, poison seeped  
into the lives of the  
whites. Poison entered  
the apartments of the  
bourgeoisie.

It's wrong for any human to hurt or kill  
another human. Even to reject to the point  
of banishment another human. Corporate  
executives commit atrocities. Must we act  
like them, sexually, in order to fight them  
successfully?

#### Dissappointment

Punk died eleven years ago.

#### Simulcra

Kathy Acker's book is no longer the  
obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the  
obscure, but that of the visible, the all-  
too-visible, the more-visible-than-visible;

it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in information and communication.

This sex show had nothing to do with pornographic voyeurism. None but the most callous of males was unconcerned enough to be voyeuristic. Most humans felt totally disgusted by and repudiated both what they saw, what they felt, and the whole system of values behind the sex show and the pornographic magazines and especially novels sold outside the 'theatre'. In other words, the primal urge of sex had become a revolting phenomenon.

Sex, the actual sexual act, resembles nothing so much as pornography. Often our erotic and pornographic imagery, this array of breasts, asses and genitalia has no other meaning but to express the useless objectivity of things. Nudity is but a desperate attempt to emphasize the existence of something. The genitalia is but a special effect.

Here language was degraded. As daddy plumbmed and plummetted away from the institute of marriage more and more downward deeply into the demimonde of public fake sex, his speech turned from the usual neutral and acceptable journalese most humans use as a stylus mediocris into. . . His language went through an indoctrination of nothingness, for sexuality had no more value in his world, until his language no longer had sense. Lack of meaning appeared as linguistic

degradation.

Hot, sexual obscenity is followed by cool communicational obscenity. The former implied a form of promiscuity, a clutter of objects accumulated in the private universe, or everything that remains unspoken and teeming in the silence of repression. However, this promiscuity is organic, visceral, carnal, while the promiscuity which reigns over the communication networks is one of a superficial saturation, an endless harassment, an extermination of interstitial space.

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