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The recourse of hoax: Orthodox modern readings of Araki Yasusada and Alan Sokal

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Abstract

This review essay will examine the issues that have been raised by two controversial publications from different fields: literature and science. They converge on a debate about how contextual factors should be taken into account in the evaluation of both artistic creation and scientific investigation. Over the years, theories of radical social construction have gained significant influence in the humanities and the social sciences, and have been successful in imposing a perspective that questions traditional, “modern,” approaches to rational inquiry shared by scientists and students of art and literature. The following discussion will attend to one aspect of the controversy: authorship and the broader question of context-dependence. It will be proposed that a wide-ranging and critical evaluation of social constructivist assumptions be initiated in both the language-related sciences and literary studies.

Key Words: social constructivism, authorship, decontextualization, cognitive science, poetics

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惡作劇之追索— 荒木安貞與艾倫·索卡的 正統現代讀物

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《中文摘要》

本文將討論文學和科學領域兩部具有爭議性的著作中提出的問題。這兩本著作就情景因素應如何運用到藝術創作和科學調查的評價展開辯論。多年來，基本社會建構的理論已對人文學科和社會科學產生重大影響，並對科學家及藝術和文學工作者均採用的傳統和現代方法提出質疑。本文將討論這一分歧的其中一個方面，即作者和情景依賴的更廣泛議題。本文提出，在語言科學和文學研究中均應採用社會建構主義假定的廣泛及重要評價。

關鍵詞：社會建構主義、作者、去情景化、認知科學、詩學

Introduction

Over the years, two polemical works, both widely alluded to as hoaxes, have followed parallel paths, with little notice of a common underlying thread. *Doubled flowering: The notebooks of Araki Yasusada* (Motokiyu et al. 1997) was published shortly after the cultural studies journal *Social Text* unwittingly printed Alan Sokal's (1996) deception: "The transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity," a mock post-modernist polemic against the scientific method. At first glance a mere coincidence, it doesn't appear that much attention has been given during all this time to any possible connection between the two events. In part, this is surely for good reason. Strictly speaking, "hoax" only applies to the latter, a true parody, revealed immediately upon being consummated by its author. The attribution of "hoax" was made in relation to aspects of how the poems of *Doubled flowering* came to appear in publication, but clearly something else was unfolding in this instance. Completely different purposes motivated each project, and each belongs to a genre distant from the other. Alan Sokal's spoof was about the methods of science; *Doubled flowering*, mainly, and at least in its original moment, according to its caretakers, did not set out to be *about* poetry or any other art form. Nevertheless, as we will see, both works, in parallel and unexpectedly, suggest similar questions about human understanding, especially about how we form new ideas.

It has been the impact each has had outside their respective fields, and the expanding commentaries in each of their domains that have suggested some interesting points of contact, deserving now a reflective assessment. In effect, the first circumstances of publication of the poems of Araki Yasusada and the *Social Text* hoax truly are circumstantial, as the original intentions of the respective authors were truly unrelated. Most fundamentally, the difference between Araki's poems and Sokal's article is one of a work of literary creation and a true parody—a farce, a *moquerie*. The parody of post-modern critique was not a serious discussion of arguments, claims and counter claims, but a simple and outright dismissal. In regard to the collection of poems, on the other hand, and independently of our assessment of its appropriateness in publication, we are likely to recognize it as an important work. In the case of Sokal's farce, again despite one's view on the ethical questions involved, it would be difficult to deny that it was a successful one.

Depending on how one might have aligned him or herself in the respective debates, the idea of looking for a connection between the two alleged “hoaxes” might seem at first to be somewhat far-fetched, an incoherence, even, that smacks of forcing a discussion for some strange and parochial motivation. With this in mind, I ask the reader to concede a measure of forbearance and suspension of previous conception, in part because the proposal to be made in this review will turn out in the end to be an attempt to promote dialogue (see Table 1). In some circles, nonetheless, parts of this attempt might be taken as highly controversial.

Table 1. Comparison/Contrast

Alan Sokal's The transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity	Araki Yasusada's <i>Doubled flowering</i>
True hoax	Can be argued that it is not a true hoax
<i>About</i> science and the methods of science	Strictly speaking, not <i>about</i> literature
<p><u>Both</u> Call attention to the general question of the role of context in human understanding</p> <p>(Secondary) Ethical Issues: Deferred</p>	

Negligence of language in the verbal art of a language learner

The long anticipated letters in English of Araki Yasusada have now been available to the general public for over five years, under the title: *Also, with my throat, I shall swallow ten thousand swords*. In this collection, the editors of translator Tosa Motokiyu's (2005) compilation, Johnson and Alvarez, have now deepened the provocation (in the broad sense) occasioned by their publication of the first collection in 1997.

For my (narrow) purposes, it is Mikhail Epstein's (2005) respective critiques, appended to each edition, and a review by Bill Freind (2004), that I will primarily attend to, as they are pertinent to an important discussion in one of the sub-disciplines within the field of applied

linguistics: the study of the contextual constraints on written expression. We have before us yet another example of how the study of literature helps researchers better frame what in the end, for us, are empirical questions. These questions require the application of a set of prescribed procedures, necessarily different in many ways from the methods of literary studies. Keeping these procedures and methods separate, by the way, is how full advantage is taken of the interdisciplinary framing opportunities. For the most part, in the language sciences we have neglected these opportunities unnecessarily. Fifty years after Roman Jakobson's (1960) challenge to poets and linguists, more recent representative efforts to promote the scientific study of verbal art are studies by Cook (1994), Fabb (2002) and Ross (2009).

For readers unfamiliar with the earlier controversy, greater part of the heated objection to the collection of poems and letters stems from the revelation soon after its initial publication that the author was actually the translator/poet himself (Tosa Motokiyu, in addition, being his pseudonym). The translator's testament, furthermore, stipulates that the true identity of the author be never revealed. Crucially, the portrayal of the poet as a Hiroshima survivor of 1945, for many, crossed a line. What that limit might be is part of what is interesting about both the commentary and the poems and letters themselves; an example of one particularly vehement reaction can be found in Bernstein (2008).

In a 1997 interview, annexed to *Doubled flowering*, Johnson and Alvarez offered an initial reply to those who took offense, pointing out that rather than a "guise," Tosa Motokiyu's portrayal of the *hibakusha* poet should be taken as an attempt at entering into an "identity and voice" for the purpose of facilitating a gesture of transference and empathy. They go on to specify what, for us, here, is the central concept to be considered: "[a] fusion between the fictional personae and the possibility of writing" (p.128). The Araki Yasusada project, together with the public interventions of its detractors, explores the boundaries of this idea. By no means is it a new idea; but perhaps because the questions of hypothetical reader and imagined authorship remain unresolved, the hard cases, like this one, make these questions current again in an unexpected way. Readers are directed to the public record of the various exchanges beginning with *Jacket* magazine's numbers 2, 4, and 5 <<http://jacketmagazine.com/>>.

The reason for this reader's interest in the discussion is how it brings into focus important ancillary issues related to an ongoing work in progress on the origins and development of aesthetic genres. In the evolution of human culture, and from the point of

view of how individuals acquire aesthetic abilities, which aspects of artistic sensibility and its underlying competencies emerge from internal, inherent, human nature? Then, how are these sensibilities conditioned by external social constraints (the "contextual" factors)? Traditionally, these two aspects of artistic creation have been either conflated, or the idea of a universal human nature forcefully denied altogether. In fact, an important problem of human evolution takes us back even further (in prehistory): what might be some of the ancestral (i.e. biological) foundations of language and creativity? This is a difficult and illusive research question, one that still has not been formulated coherently by scientists. Thus, speculation about first origins, undeveloped and immature as it remains today, stands to benefit from the study of contemporary poetic composition and of the reflections and self-study of creative writers themselves.⁽¹⁾

Here is what is at stake in the particular hypothesis of writer and reader that we are considering here, so far most clearly formulated by Mikhail Epstein and Bill Freind. Poetic forms might be, at the same time, the most primitive⁽²⁾ and the most refined of the literary discourses. Developmentally in children, their first emergence precedes the acquisition of language, later to emerge again in adults in the most advanced expressions of verbal art. This may be true as well from an evolutionary point of view, genetically, although this hypothesis will be put aside for now. Araki Yasusada's letters to "Richard" (compiled in the 2005 collection) in second language learner English called forth the pointed assertion that: "Poetry is forgetfulness or negligence of language, either by the one who has achieved perfection in it or by the one who is just a beginner - a child or a foreigner."⁽³⁾ To this day, an interesting question in poetics is still pending regarding the limits of grammatical transgression. For example, how far removed from the syntax and semantics of ordinary language can poetry be taken, under its different categories: traditional, modern, avant-garde, etc.? This appears to be one of the fundamental questions regarding what has been viewed as an essential feature of verbal art form: transgressing the expectations ("rules") of prosaic language for aesthetic purpose. Understanding essential features helps us speculate about origins and first principles.

In Araki's letters, the author even seems to be utilizing the resource of his "negligent" second language grammar for aesthetic purpose, perhaps as an integral part of the poetic intention from the start. This suggestion is not as far-fetched as it might seem, for it corresponds to another interesting parallel between linguistic science and verbal art. On the one hand,

research has shown that the errors of second language learners, like Araki, are also to a large extent systematic, “grammatical” at a more abstract level; in other words, they are not random deviations. Likewise in poetry (some avant-garde examples aside), grammatical deviations tend strongly to conform to more general linguistic constraints, not specific to the prescriptive grammar of the language of the poem, but to underlying structures, again at a more abstract level (see Notes 3 and 4).

Both the mature native speaker poet and the language learner will take their privileges with the syntax of phrases and sentences. Exemplified we see in the letters how "license" applies intersectingly (surprisingly so, we might add) to both the agrammatical constructions of the young child or the second language learner and those of the linguistically competent speaker/poet. In modern times, the idea can be traced back to Vygotsky (among others): man's dissociative and (re)creative capacity implies "deformation and reelaboration." Isolable features are broken down to be then recombined. To be able to recreate them [the child] must... "first break the natural association of elements in which they were initially perceived," this in turn serving as the foundation of abstract thought, figurative understanding and all creative work (2004: 25). Students of the seminal work of the Russian Formalists will find close parallels here to Shklovosky's (1917/1965) concept of *defamiliarization*, how "the language of poetry is...a difficult, roughed, impeded language" (p. 22). Keeping the proposals by Vygotsky and Shklovosky in mind, it will occur to the reader of the letters the same "blissful disorder" that Epstein calls to our attention. This observation is made, happily, in the postscript so that we may discover the disorder for ourselves ("each word [of the letters to Richard] is weird"). Araki Yasusada, in an apparently unsent draft of a letter to literary critic Kobayashi Hideo, remarks:

My letters to ~~pal-pen~~ Richard as a kind of epistolary shishosetu quite complicated immensely by the ~~vaudevillian nature~~ fact of their English.⁽⁴⁾ I see each letter as a "scene," so to speak, a ~~making~~ shaping of an abstract form out of strokes of color. ~~Cezanne the foreign tongue~~ But it English is like painting with ~~the beak of~~ a living bird, ~~dipped~~ its beak wing dipped in the paint of words. In this way, you see, I don't have to worry too much about the "homogenizing funnel of perspective": ~~Language is a wind which that tosses the leaves I ...~~

I propose this: Language When languages cross (as I am crossing or passing into Richard) they ~~ease to become~~ leap outside the ideology landscapes' ideology [.] ~~And by the way, I have a bone to pick with you on your discussion views of~~ If the "I" is not a product of innate psychology but of specific economies of visual and linguistic configuration [sic] then here, where there is no configuration ~~save~~ save the ancientness of difference, there can be no homogenous gazing (though, of course, in a ~~sweet~~ delicious irony of dialects, [sic] I gaze upon that unconfigured space)...But I never get out of that *real weather* I mentioned earlier (Motokiyu 2005: 32).

Questions of authorship and other problems of context

All this leads Epstein to a theme previously developed in the 1997 collection: hyper-authorship.⁽⁵⁾ Space precludes even the most summary treatment of this concept on this occasion. Rather, it will be exploited for the narrow purposes alluded to earlier. The question, for both researchers and artists, is about the relationship between the context of the writing-act (more broadly, to also include the speech-act) and the text itself. Context takes in the following:

- communicative or expressive purpose,
- distinctive features and peculiarities of the author (now, not necessarily the same as writer),
- intended audience,
- the experiences, understandings and background knowledge of each, and
- how each one perceives and understands the other and the other's understandings and misunderstandings.

And now we can add that audience is not necessarily the same as the current material *reader*, potential or hypothetical reader, or otherwise. As a sub-discipline of literacy studies, it might belong to the field of the meta-pragmatics of writing.⁽⁶⁾

What are the limits of decontextualization;⁽⁷⁾ or rather, which aspects of recontextualizing a product of written expression are appropriate and permissible, and under what circumstances? How is understanding affected when readers' expectations about the interfaces between text and context are violated, made vulnerable (Vygotsky) or broken outright? What are the limits of this transgression? None of this, as most readers will recognize, is new. Years ago,

Foucault (1969/1998) intervened in an already wide-ranging discussion initiated by Barthes and Derrida on the “death of the author” with his concept of the “author-function.” Of special interest to us here is how literary and scientific texts seem to have crossed paths, so to speak, in regard to how they are to be properly judged:

A switch takes place in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Scientific discourses began to be received for themselves, in the anonymity of an established or always redemonstrable truth; their membership in a systematic ensemble, and not the reference to the individual who produced them, stood as their guarantee. The author function faded away...By the same token, literary discourse came to be accepted only when endowed with the author-function. We now ask of each poetic or fictional text: from where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meaning ascribed to it and the status or value accorded it depend on the manner in which we answer these questions...Since literary anonymity is not tolerable, we can accept it only in the guise of an enigma (Foucault 1969/1998: 212-213).

We have before us here an illustrative example of how the study of art, in this case a question from literary criticism, helps us get a handle on a hard problem in the language sciences. The interesting aspect of this cross-discipline exchange is that theoretical proposals formulated along what appear to be postmodern lines can be assimilated by a discussion marked off by the standard methods of modern empirical investigation. The problems of context and speaker/author intention, and how these factors affect understanding continue to be debated among researchers. And it should be recognized that these problems are well served by the discussion of how the idea of hyper-authorship is counterposed to traditional conceptions of authorship in poetry and narrative (see Note 5). To what degree or in what circumstances does the identity of an author inform and illuminate a text, and how might different kinds of shift toward self-sufficiency and autonomy in reading, in particular, enrich or redirect understanding and aesthetic apperception?

Implicit in this question, one could say, is the idea that not all abstractions away from context, author identity and author intention result in an impoverished or less meaningful reading, or necessarily degrade understanding. Perhaps, this is one way of appreciating Epstein's

(1997, 2005) proposal for a “deconstruction of authorship,” to which we can now add, a deconstruction of:

- the constraints of shared background assumption (e.g., by whom are assumptions determined?),
- highly context-dependent interpretation (whose context?),
- all types of prejudice and preconception, and
- extra-textual imposition of various kinds (cultural, ideological etc.).

Parenthetically, some of this might sound eerily familiar to readers who have attended to the rise and fall of Socialist Realism in art and science, in its official versions in Europe and the Orient. In the “West” it might ring a bell among readers nostalgic for an aesthetic that is grounded, necessarily, in some variety of critical orientation, that should serve another purpose, that *should* contribute to or inspire something or other. More than twenty years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and from unexpected quarters sometimes, such prescriptions are still given on occasion to young writers. As if they were obligatory considerations, these days one might still be asked: Which of the “hegemonic influences” controls the discourse of a work of verbal art, a critique, or an analysis? What is its pedigree and provenance?

Summing things up for now, there appears to be a renewed interest in the proposals that Epstein (2000), among others, has called attention to: that among the basic principles of writing, there is the possibility of an “excess” of forms over meanings, and its complement, the “excess” of interpretations over primary text. What has yet to be considered seriously, despite important attempts in the past, is an “excess of authorial personalities.” Many of us who work in research projects related to one or another aspect of written expression will find the first two principles formulated in terms that are certainly conventional and tractable (for this, no less interesting and difficult to define precisely in all aspects). Hyper-authorship, on the other hand, might still be taken as somewhat obscure. But as it is considered within the concrete circumstances that Epstein has discussed in appendices to *Doubled flowering* and *Also with my throat*, the concept comes to be somewhat less mysterious.

Freind picks up the thread of this idea in “Deferral of the author.” The claim that we are being asked to evaluate seems to be the following: heteronyms (as in the case of Araki Yasusada) serve a number of important functions, first among them being the need on the

part of the reader to assemble an authorial entity, for example if one is not explicitly presented. Crucially, under some circumstances, a deferred authorial entity may correspond to this necessity more effectively or more completely. An example might be a testimony of events that could not have been (eye)witnessed and integrated into a given artistic framework by anyone. Thus, certain creative works may only be possible by means of recourse to a special kind of transcription and recontextualization. This might therefore include the appropriation of voices without prior authorization, without prior authorization even from those who would testify to or would have spoken under different circumstances (historical, for example) to the most conflictive, sensitive and onerous human encounters of our times.

Again, these resources of literary creation should not appear foreign to analysts who apply scientific methods to the study of written expression, including how the relevant component abilities develop in children. In a similar way in which we examine how the development of higher-order expressive abilities begin to show evidence of the conception of hypothetical audience, we also recognize a more advanced stage of comprehension when a reader or listener is capable of abstracting the text and effecting a separation from the author's identity and intentions. Students of developmental psychology are familiar with David Olson's Theory of Mind experiments (see Note 6). The young child is presented with the following problem:

Charlie Brown attempts to comply with a request from Lucy ("Charlie Brown, bring me my shoes"), presenting her with a pair of red shoes. Having been previously informed by Lucy (off screen) of her intention, that he retrieve her blue ones, only the older more mature children consistently give Charlie Brown credit for complying with Lucy's actual petition (Did Charlie Brown bring what Lucy wanted? –all children agree: no. Did Charlie Brown do what he was asked to do? –only the younger children declare, erroneously: no)

In this regard, Epstein recalls for us the Russian novelist Nabokov's identification of the stage in development when humans begin to be capable, cognitively, of creating literature: the emergence of the ability to tell a lie, then to reflect on one's own false beliefs and those of others. On the other hand, the option of suspending context is not completely about elementary and more advanced stages of development. In all kind and manner of

understanding and reading of texts, expository, narrative and poetic, we cannot but alternate constantly between:

1. submitting to author(ity)(ship) and other kinds of contextual constraint, including our own preconceptions and prejudices, and
2. a decontextualized posture, stripping away as much as is possible or reasonable from the words themselves, and suspending all but the most essential frames of previous knowledge and predisposition.

As should be perfectly clear by now, the aspect of context-embedding that author identity provides is a complex matter, an empirical question for some of us, an aesthetic problem for others, but in any case not the exclusive domain of one methodological approach or another, “modern” or otherwise. Returning to Freind’s review, which by all accounts ranks among the most insightful analyses of this project, another kind of reading mode or pathway is suggested, similar to the one just mentioned. For example, why is it that, even knowing of the full extent of the invention of Tosa Motokiyu, one still finds something compelling in the poems of *Doubled flowering* and in the letters of *Also with my throat*? Part of the answer is in a hypothetical response given to critics who have alleged an illegitimate hoax: if there was literary merit in the work prior to the invention being revealed (for example, to oneself upon detecting the hand of a hyper-author), then this assessment should still be cause for a moment’s thoughtful reflection, at least.

However, Freind hints at a reason more inherent in, or internal to, the work itself, taking as an example Tosa Motokiyu’s “From the diary of Rita Hayworth.” Looking back on the passage, how it unfolds interactively (text <--> reader’s interpretation), one is drawn alternately between a foreground, Araki Yasusada as the authentic voice, and “different voices and identities” as he retreats to a background, fades, and is almost dissolved completely. In the latter case, this is inevitable given that a poet with his biography is unlikely to have composed a good number of verses in *Doubled flowering*, and is unlikely to have had access to cultural and historical references such as the pin-up image of Hayworth, painted on “Little Boy” before it was dropped on his city. In the case of Araki in the foreground, even with full knowledge of the actual circumstances of the double Japanese heteronyms, one cannot (the reader is invited to try) detach him or herself from the authorial voice in the poems and letters. The reader attends to this voice for significant

fragments of continuous passage, fulfilling this reader/interpreter necessity. Freind's analysis here of Araki's attempt to empathize and identify with the figure of Rita Hayworth is especially convincing. It provides a clear example of how voices and identities in the poems and letters come to be multiplied, at the same time, creating the author and then dispersing him, alternatingly, throughout both collections:

Hayworth's pinup was enormously popular with American servicemen, but this is another thing entirely: her body is absurdly caricatured, hypersexualized in a drawing scrawled on the bomb. This reluctant glamour girl feels parodied, imprisoned, whored...One could argue that just as the cartoon of a pinup of an actress is used to hide the destruction of a bomb called Little Boy that was dropped from a plane named after the pilot's mother, so the figure of Araki Yasusada has been used by an American writer to produce an aestheticized caricature of Japanese suffering in the wake of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I would argue, however, that the holes, anachronisms, and self-conscious orientalisms attempt to do the exact opposite: they work to prevent us from subsuming this atrocity under the writing or persona of any one figure (Freind 2004: 151).

One of the points that thoughtful critics and the caretakers of Tosa Motokiyu's manuscripts are making, it seems, is that there is a curious asymmetry of late in regard to the reasonable considerations outlined in this section. The claim isn't that there are no limits to abstraction and context-independence, but rather that the relevant boundaries can be the object of rational inquiry. And it happens that from the largely one-sided discussion over the years, one gets the impression that at the context-dependent end of possibilities, there is no limit, a view that appears to represent a growing consensus among scholars in the fields of multiculturalism, cultural and ethnic studies and allied disciplines in the social sciences. The idea that context, ideology and cultural knowledge deeply penetrate all aspects of interpretation and understanding of texts goes largely unchallenged these days. A welcome exception, not surprisingly as a commentary on the Araki Yasusada controversy, is Weinberger's (1998) critique of "witness poetry":

For most of this century, the image of political poetry was restricted to that which was plainly written to further a specific movement or goal...Then, as

the ideologies unraveled, academic theory began insisting on an amorphous “political” reading of everything: the silences implicit in the poem about a daffodil. Like much of what is called ‘theory,’ it was both perfectly true and a self-evident generality that was all too easy to reiterate in complex ways. Lately, a new subgenre has been invented to stand for the whole in this ideological interregnum: the poetry of ‘witness.’ Anti-New Critical with a vengeance, witness poetry is entirely dependent on biographical background, and is ultra-empirical in a way perhaps unprecedented in literary history. It is poetry where you had to have been there.

Before concluding this section, a brief note regarding the concept of interpretation is in order. Unlike in scientific investigation, where we strive to narrow the field of plausible conclusions drawn from a set of research findings, in the study of literature the problems of interpretation are more complex. On the one hand, it may be important, for some purposes, to understand precisely, more or less, what an author’s intention(s) was, or were. In other circumstances (most others probably), there is no requirement for narrowing the field of possible meanings, even where the author’s intention is not in question - just the opposite. Especially in the case of written works, broader and alternative interpretations are generated as texts are understood and evaluated, effectively undermining the writer’s *authority*. A text comes to be emancipated from its creator, even appropriated in some ways by others. In addition, meaning is not the only dimension of interpretation, leading to a true pluralism of understandings and perspectives. At present, there is no reason to suppose that either the study of artistic creation or the creative process itself would be well served by restricting this pluralism.

One thing that the project has helped to revive, maybe, is the possibility of a serious rethinking about the limits of context-saturated "reading of the world," an idea desperately in need, by the way, of a good measure of critical assessment itself.⁽⁸⁾ This appears to apply, interestingly, to both the understandings of prosaic discourse and the apperception of verbal art, and even to musical cognition, to put the proverbial cards on the table.

Artistic creation and scientific investigation

For millennia artists and scientists have shared what we could describe as a common vision, concurring in parallel and often converging. In modern times, not coincidentally, it was both art and science that met similar fates during the long years of the Stalinist period, and elsewhere under other types of dictatorial regime. It is the former that today seems particularly obscene (for anyone before who hadn't noticed or chose not to notice) because it was imposed in the name of the working class, the dispossessed peasants, the colonized peoples, and for a "new democracy."

Both artistic creation and scientific inquiry themselves can be the object of study, here being where Sokal's hoax enters the picture. But first, before we begin, for both the Araki Yasusada invention and the *Social text* parody, it is necessary to set aside what should be a separate debate about ethics as it is applied to the professional norms involved in the *submission and publication of manuscripts*. This is a complex discussion on to itself that we have to set apart for now from the substantive content at hand in each case. In both literature and in the language sciences there is a need to fix or estimate the extent to which context plays a role, or alternatively, determine what kind of context should be (re)assigned to a creative endeavor (as, for example, in conceiving of one for a work like *Doubled flowering*) or to a research task in the sciences. In writing, perhaps, "witness poetry" occupies a point inclined toward a highly context-embedded stance. In music, in the realm of instrumental composition, what is sometimes called "program music" might also fall toward this end of the continuum.

A research project, for example a problem of discourse analysis in the field of anthropology, might call for a deep-going contextualization everywhere from the elaboration of the initial conceptual framework, collection of data, to the final interpretation of findings. In contrast, other scientific problems require the most complete and rigorous isolation of the object of study under investigation. We are not going to say "similarly," but in creative writing, hypothetically, the recourse to successive deferrals and manipulations of context constraint presents itself as a necessary and sometimes unavoidable option. In this instance, as well, we cannot discard or exclude the possibility of progressively greater degrees of suspension and separation. In the experimental genres, the exploration of the

limits of this kind of disjunction and abstraction should clearly be given the widest latitude. What Epstein and Freind have asked about in their analyses, we might speculate, is the viability of methods that imply a deep-going *recontextualization*, to include the continued critical assessment of the author-function, by all appearances, after many years, still a pending issue and an interesting idea. The editors of Tosa Motokiyu's manuscripts seem to be proposing for our consideration that such methods are timely in regard to other aspects of creative writing as well.

For his part, Alan Sokal struggled with a related problem. Among other interlocutors, his mock treatise on physics and mathematics was directed at the growing influence in the social sciences of a strong version of social constructivism, which applies the requirement of context-boundedness to all domains of research, without distinction. While standard, modern, approaches to research are open to setting the degree of context-dependence according to the kind of problem at hand, strong social constructivism appears to categorically reject all investigation that does not present itself as properly contextualized. One of Sokal's examples is related to the theory of evolution: if the overwhelming preponderance of empirical evidence suggests that theories of creationism should be strongly disfavored, then this conclusion is independent of different traditional cultural knowledge systems, religious beliefs, indigenous or otherwise, and social/political circumstance. That this elementary procedural norm has come to be controversial among a growing number of scholars in academia represents a shift in thinking that truly calls into question the methods of science as we know it (Bricmont & Sokal 2004). In North American universities, for example, a variety of post-modern relativism has gained considerable influence, such that scientific discoveries regarding the origin of humans and our common genetic endowment are considered as just one more "belief system" among others. According to this view, findings of empirical investigation and all variety of context-dependent cultural beliefs are taken as equivalent, of equal status. According to Sokal, supporting this notion of equivalence is the radical post-modern approach to understanding and truth, based on an extreme epistemological skepticism.

Despite how the sides usually line up in the often confusing exchanges between ill-defined "positivist" and "interpretative" positions on equally elusive controversies, writers and artists should at least give a fair hearing to the defense of the standard epistemology of

science - sociologists and anthropologists should do the same. Radical social constructivism⁽⁹⁾ implicitly restricts the range of inquiry that linguists and cognitive scientists, for example, have at their disposal; and there is no reason that its peculiar way of prescribing properly grounded research wouldn't also be extended to philology and literary criticism. A small logical step, in fact, it would be to apply the methods of context dependent philosophy and strong versions of social constructivism to all empirical research. Of course, only the most daring and extreme among its ranks today would take the big step and extend these prescriptions to literary and artistic creation itself.

Art and science share a common vision and a fundamentally common impulse, humanist in its historical roots, deep roots that can be traced to the Renaissance and the great democratic revolutions of the modern era, no less. In the case of philology and literary criticism, a common ground is shared with science in a general orientation to certain ways of conducting scholarship even though discipline-specific procedures, how each goes about its work, differ. This general orientation is incompatible with arbitrary restrictions imposed upon scholarly inquiry from outside the disciplines in question. As Sokal points out, the methods of science are not fundamentally “different from the rational attitude in everyday life or in other domains of human knowledge. Historians, detectives and plumbers – indeed all human beings – use the same basic methods of induction, deduction and assessment of evidence as do physicists or biochemists” (Sokal 2008: 178).

Another potential advance in the literature-cognitive science⁽¹⁰⁾ dialogue that would fail to bear fruit under the influence of social constructivist relativism is the recent work on the universal foundations of aesthetic genres, including musical ability, and how it is related to the development of language (Rebuschat et al. 2009). The specific procedures for investigating the human cognitive capabilities that subserve music and poetry (which are likely to be context-free and independent of particular cultures) are different from the work of musicology and literary analysis, and of the creative process itself. The problems to be posed for solution and reflection and the questions that need to be formulated are different. But each discipline stands to gain important insights from the work of the other. And most importantly, it will be in an open-ended and open-minded mutual assessment of the contributions of each partner in the dialogue that we will find the most fertile ground. Ideally, this should be free from *a priori* methodological restrictions that require holistic

interpretation and socio-cultural embedding. For clarity in this discussion, Sokal's critique of the influence of post-modernism in the philosophy of science should be evaluated as it bears on the debate about how we should understand research in the *sciences*, the social sciences especially. However, the concepts and guiding principles of post-modernism are not monolithic or uniform; and how they are applied to literature (both to its creation and even to some aspects of its study) should be evaluated separately. A different kind of discussion is called for in this case.

None of the above-cited authors, or any reader who has found the compilation of poems and letters of Araki Yasusada evocative in some way, may concur with this way of characterizing the different points of view. But this is how his papers have resonated with one reader, at least. Maybe another way of thinking about these controversies would be to concern ourselves less with what different theories are called, especially when it comes to concepts and ideas that seem to fall too easily into categories. One thing that this review has called attention to, it seems to me, is that how new ideas, and even some old ones, are grouped together is not as reliable as we may have thought. This way of approaching some of the problems of creative writing may turn out to serve the promotion of dialogue on the most difficult questions in the study of literary creation overall. The reader will recall that this was the purpose proposed in the Introduction to this essay.

Footnotes

- (1) Francis, N. (2006); Francis, N., & Navarrete Gómez, P. R. (2009); Navarrete Gómez, P. R. (2009). Interested readers are directed to reports from our current project on the development of aesthetic genres and traditional indigenous narrative <<http://www4.nau.edu/seminario/>>.
- (2) "Primitive" here to include the sense of: primary/original/fundamental, not derived from or reducible to something else, closely approximating an early ancestral type.
- (3) Epstein, M. (2005: 40). Translator Tosa Motokiyu draws recourse on this same figure of composition (that of second language learner English), less explicitly, in *Doubled flowering*. Another more extensive discussion should be called on the topic of the interaction between the deformation of grammar in creative writing (in general) and the departures from grammatical well-formedness in second language learner verbal expression,

for example in the same domain of creative writing. Hypothetical authorial identities can in fact exploit this aesthetic device in a number of interesting ways.

- (4) Motokiyu, T. (2005: 30). In an earlier letter to Richard, it closes with a related observation, which should be of certain interest to students of linguistics: "Thank you for reading. I think my English is like fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are parts of a vessel"
- (5) Epstein, M. (2000). "Hyper" is to be taken as combining the sense of both "excess" and "pseudo." "Unlike the prefixes "over-" and "su[pe]r", it ["hyper"] designates not simply a heightened degree of the property it qualifies, but a superlative degree that exceeds a certain limit...This excess of the quality in question is so great that, in crossing the limit, it turns into its own antithesis, reveals its own illusionary nature". <<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue1/misha.html>> According to Epstein, hyper-authorship is a "virtual authorship" that is distributed among different hypothetical personalities. The common practice of writers assuming a pseudonym is an example of hyper-authorship that is generally considered uncontroversial.
- (6) A comprehensive introduction to the pragmatics of writing is Olson (1994).
- (7) Decontextualization implies the building of ideas with less dependence on situational information, preconceived schemata and prior knowledge that constrain this process of mental construction. The term lends itself to misunderstanding because dependence on context is always a matter of degree and can never (normally) be reduced completely. In this way all thinking is constrained, to some degree, by context (broadly conceived). Conversely, the same approach can be taken in defining "context-dependence" and "contextualization."
- (8) The assertion that "all art is political," by Mark Vallen in <www.art-for-a-change.com/content/essays/political.html> (2004), without specifying to which aspect of creative work it might apply, is either patently false or true only in the most trivial sense. Such a vacuous claim can then be filled with anything, including the most absurd of proposals, for example, that it *should*, or that art cannot be understood outside the interpretative framework of one or another ideology, prevailing, required, imposed, etc. Another popular notion is the related theory of context-dependent reading of Freire and Macedo (1987): "Reading the world *ALWAYS* (emphasis added) precedes reading the

word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world... In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world. But by a certain form of writing it or *rewriting* it, that is, transforming it by means of conscious, practical work” (p. 35). Apart from the questions that such a totalizing theory implies, one might be curious about which aspects of reading and comprehension must *always* be conditioned in this way. In both the aesthetic and prosaic domains, might not a more complex relationship obtain among all the different facets of understanding: the author’s words, how one evaluates and understands them at different stages of interpretation, and the wide *diversity* of external (and internal) contextual influences? To be clear, no one is suggesting that poetry should not draw inspiration or thematic content from ideological motivations or that political ideas are not a legitimate domain of verbal art. Such motivations have been present from the earliest recorded works, from the great court poets of the ancient kingdoms and dynasties. Rather, the relevant arguments are very different: they are, quite simply, about pluralism versus prescription.

- (9) While weak versions of social constructivist theory (“knowledge is constructed socially”) are uncontroversial, strong versions have been increasingly questioned as advances in cognitive science have undermined neo-behaviorist models of learning, which include “radical social constructivism.” A theory that claims that *all* knowledge is socially constructed would deny that innately determined cognitive structures that are universally constitutive of human nature play a role in learning and development.
- (10) In this essay cognitive science is taken to include a broad array of fields devoted to the scientific study of the mind. Typically, although not necessarily, it implies interdisciplinary research, including cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, linguistics and subfields of philosophy, anthropology and sociology concerned with the architecture of thinking (mental structure), how it develops, and how it is put to use.

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