

Statement

- TENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE

1st, I am NOT an expert on Bruce Stater's work. 2nd, unfortunately, I doubt that there ARE any experts on Bruce's work other than himself. Therefore, consider this modest attempt to write about Bruce's "A Labyrinth of Visions" & the greater context of his writing in general as indicating that the lack of scholarly attn to this body is a lack I hope will be corrected - preferably w/in Bruce's lifetime!

Starting w/ a simple chronology might help get this rolling:

Sometime, probably in 1998, my collaborator etta cetera & I founded the S.P.C.S.M.E.F. (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Sea Monkeys by Experimental Filmmakers). This was done to take a jab at that over-rated pomposity Stan Brakhage. Our announcement of founding this society was presented to the participants in the FRAMEWORKS list-serv. A few people responded, but Bruce took things a great leap forward by writing as a representative of the K.E.S. (Kino-Ethics Society). His text was perfectly in the spirit of things & remarkably scholarly, subtle, & elaborate. It became incorporated into the main S.P.C.S.M.E.F. statement both online & off. He concluded w/:

"A Note on KES Terminology

K.E.S. utilizes both the terms "brine shrimp" and the affectionate "sea-monkey" in reference to the members of this particular species. "Sea-monkey" is in no way intended as a derogatory or condescending term, but recently a faction of the K.E.S. has argued that it is in fact both paternalistic and primatocentric. K.E.S. remains divided on this issue. Members in favor of retaining the brine shrimp's familiar designation argue that the term inspires the affection of children and adults alike, while the radical opposition notes that historically the term has been utilized to support the enslavement and domestication of millions of brine shrimp by thousands of American and Canadian youngsters in the post WWII period of late Capitalism."

etta & I were delighted to've been contacted by such an articulate kindred spirit. Our long relationship had begun. We met at MoMA in NYC when I was screening a film there on May 28, 1998 as part of the "Big As Life" series presenting small-gauge cinema; we met again at the Robert Beck Memorial Cinema in NYC on September 29, 1998. For both occasions, Bruce wrote critical masterpieces for FRAMEWORKS. No-one had ever written so intricately about my movies before.

It was then that I realized that Bruce cd take the slightest nugget that he was

inspired by & turn it into a gigantic intellectual maze - the 'upside' of what is sometimes called 'schizophrenia'. Just as a paranoid can read the greatest conspiracy into the smallest event, so cd Bruce, as a critic, read the greatest significance into works that other people might find to be completely opaque. Thusly, his critical writings, while brilliantly incisive, are also 'master'pieces of creative inspiration.

"AhHa!", the probably non-existent reader of this who's also familiar w/ the S.P.C.S.M.E.F. critiques of Brakhage might exclaim, "Aren't you liking Bruce's extrapolations on YOUR movies because they make YOU look good &, at the same time, criticizing Brakhage's similar self-promotions as 'The Emperor's New Clothes?!' No. Because Bruce's use of my movies as springboards for critical tangents are actually rooted in substance whereas Brakhage's are mired in pure megalomaniacal bullshit. But lest I become megalomaniacal here, myself, let's return to this STATEMENT because it's Bruce's writings here that're what's important.

etta & I were so impressed by Bruce's exacting writing that we proceeded to publish it whenever we got the chance. The 1st of these was probably "The Dream Portraits" in etta's compilation entitled "Time Lapse Emotional Study" (published March, 1999). For this project, etta solicited daily portraits of people for a mnth as a way of studying emotional cycles. Bruce's contribution went over-the-top - as usual for him! He produced a 16pp document w/ an introductory explanation followed by accounts of dreams followed by photobooth flip-book 'movies' symbolizing the dreams. These flip-books were made using the American Museum of the Moving Image's special photobooth & they were always made the day after the night of the dream. The degree of EFFORT that went into "The Dream Portraits" & the multi-leveling was classic Stater.

But then there came Bruce's contribution to etta's phenomenal "Pandora's Box" assembling (published August, 1999). Picture a box made from folded cardstock w/ printing on it. Then picture the Stater contribution: 6 pieces of paper intricately folded origami style & tied together w/ fine thread. On the flat side of each of these is a pattern of 5 letters: one letter at each corner & one in the middle - going clockwise from the top & ending in the middle: one square has: T, H, O, S, I; another has: P, H, O, S, T; the next has: P, I, O, H, S; then: P, I, T, S, O; P, I, T, H, S; O, I, T, H, P. What might this mean? If anything? One wd hope for a depth of reading on the schizophrenic/ scholarly level to be able to fully appreciate where this might lead.

On the other side of each square there were 4 triangular folds. Peeling back the "T, H, O, S, I" square's triangles produces a larger square w/ 4 more triangle folds - each w/ a slit down the middle. Unfolding these produces a larger square. This time, the initial lettered side is surrounded by 4 more folds w/ 45 degree corners but flat tops that surround the initial side's mysterious text. Unfolding 2 more times & the paper is fully opened to a 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " per side square surface not printed on one side & w/ a tiny neatly arranged text on the other side.

In the middle of this is the initial 5 letters. On the upper left side are 3 columns of fully justified squares of text. The 1st column has 5 blocks, the 2nd has 2 - w/ a space the size of a block between them, the 3rd has 2 blocks w/o the 'blank' between them. The bottom right reverses this sequence (w/ some slight variation). The upper left-most paragraph:

The responsible life itself
bears the character of
the gift
And in the final
analysis, while retaining
the characteristic of
the good--the Platonic
agathon, it also reveals
traces of something
inaccessible

Since I can't get my text program to justify the above into a square (& since that might not translate online anyway), we'll have to settle here for its being centered. Pandora's importance as the myth that establishes ethics. Later elements of the text refer to Freud & Dora. Bruce explained it to me somewhat when he made it. Alas, I've forgotten it all these 8 yrs later.

There's a pattern to the initial 5 letters: there're 6 sides to a cube, there're 5 letters on each side, there're 6 letters total used amongst the 6 sides - therefore, each side has ONE of the 6 letters missing - the missing letter on the "T, H, O, S, I" side is "P" & THAT'S THE LETTER THAT THE SQUARES OF TEXT ARE ARRANGED IN. Nice, nice. These 6 squares are meant to be partially unfolded & then inserted into each other to make a cube. I was so impressed by the elaborateness of this work that I photographed 4 of these cubes assembled & inserted a slide of the result in each of the 100 (?) boxes so that recipients of it cd get a clue of how they shd ultimately look in their more complex spatial phase before being disassembled into a differently complex phase. 2 of these cubes still adorn a shelf overtop my computer. This work, alone, deserves its very own skeleton key.

etta & I were astounded by this Pandora's Box. This was no mere attempt to just be published w/ a half-hearted (or non-existent) relation to the theme. This was a full-on work functioning at both textual & sculptural levels. The degree of passion & concentration that was required to create such a work was practically super-human. Bruce collapsed, not long thereafter, imploding perhaps - like a black hole that's sucked in more information than might seem ordinarily possible.

For etta's & my anarchist magazine, "Street Rat" no. 2 (December, 1999), Bruce designed a back cover take-off on a dadaist work. Inside, under the name of A. RATchenko he submitted a diagram "*In memory of our fallen brother & sisters at Cold Spring Harbor.*" RATchenko, of course, being a reference to revolutionary Russian artist Rodchenko. Cold Spring Harbor being a place where neuro-physiological research is done - w/ the subjects presumably being both rats & human patients.

Jump to February, 2003 when the San Francisco Cinematheque published a small bk by & about me as a film & video maker: "Not Necessarily NOT Very Important". For it, I asked Bruce to write an account of an experience he had when he had his breakdown in 1999. During this time, he was hospitalized & imagined that I was making a movie w/ hidden cameras of his hospitalization. Such imaginings exemplified the more paranoid side of Bruce's remarkable ability to READ INTO. To WRITE INTO.

The resultant article is entitled "F/actions & Collaberrations, Unmad/e Movie Screams in the Tentative Anarchist Zone". Factions & actions? Collaborations & aberrations? Unmad & Unmade? Movie Screams & Movie Screens? Tentative Anarchist Zone or Temporary Autonomous Zones? Perhaps what's most remarkable about this text is what Stater Meant: the delicate tightrope walk thru various levels of 'reality' - both while hospitalized & while trying to write about it later. I quote:

"The point of such overwhelming complexity was not to produce an (an)aesthetic experience, but to undermine the habits of the differentiated thinking function, to transform the mind and the self into something else. I realized as I watched the action that my impulse was to sort the real from the unreal, actuality from fantasy, event from representation, accident from purpose, the literal from the allegorical, present from future and past. When this task became impossible, I entered into a different dimension. I began to comprehend the function of ratical magik."

This brings me to what might be the last of the "Street Ratbag"s (no. 1/7 - June, 2004) & Bruce Stater's "Midnight's Well" written under the name of Laurantade Cyphere. In 6pp of text & drawing, "Laurantade" attempts to write about some of the more elusive, painful, & difficult states of mind:

"Words fail me. It is said that the poet Orpheus could charm stones with the music of his lyre. For me, language itself has turned to stone. I lie in a vast frozen empty space covered with stones. The nearer I draw to each of the stones the larger they appear. The more resistant to thought. The flatter, sharper, heavier they become. Glacial stones embedded in the earth from which they cannot be undone. The act of thinking is the act of uncovering stones. A stone cannot be a thought. I have no thoughts. I am surrounded by stones. I think I can make thought come into being. To conceive an action is to bring a thought into being. If I could unearth just one stone I could bring a thought into this world. I could write a word. I could carve a name on its surface. I could inscribe a meaning. No, that would take at least two stones. One providing a surface on which to write and another providing a tool with which to inscribe a line. I dig at the stones with my fingers, hoping to unbury one small enough to provide a tool. With just one stone free I would have a tool, a shovel, for unburying these other stones. Glacial stones. I delude myself with false hope. I could never dig far enough to uncover one of these stones. My fingers tear at the earth. My nails splinter into the ground. It is bitter, painful work. On all sides I am surrounded by doubt. What if the stone I choose to uncover turns out to be an ineffectual tool? What if I discover it lends no pointed edge with which I can begin to carve or unbury other stones? What message would I carve even if I succeeded in unburying a stone with which I could work? What does it matter? Better to attempt this impossible task than to sit in silence in the circle of stones. Is it better? Is it really? Why am I haunted by the silence of these stones? Glacial Stones. I have a vague memory of a time in which we conversed. These stones were not always silent, though now I can no longer remember or even imagine what they said. I must miss their words. I seem to long for the language of stones. Was it the sound they made? Was the hiss of a stone like music to my ears? Was the company of stones a means of dispelling the loneliness the soul feels in the face of itself alone? Or was it the content of their dialog, the discourse of stones that I miss and long for? I cannot remember. Perhaps these stones cannot speak. They have never spoken. Through the years I have spent beside them I have imagined them speaking in the nights of my despair. The

absence of their speech instilled a dream of life in place of which there was only silence."

Poignant? I think so. & yet, contrary to what he's written above, have words ever failed Bruce? I think not. Not judging by his telling of the stones. Such description is monolithic. While there may be places that words will never touch, Stater's writing gets closer than most to creating a mold that one can at least open to perceive the wordless cast.

Then there's the "Golden Handcuffs Review" (Winter-Spring 2005-2006; Vol. 1, No. 6). They published "The Vision of the Seeker". Were they the 1st people other than etta & myself to publish Bruce Stater?! On-line I find the "offcourse literary journal" (issue 24 - fall, 2005) featuring 3 of his poems; "PoetrySz - demystifying mental illness" (issues 8 & 16 - 2002 & 2005) - each featuring one poem; & various list-serv type presences. & yet I know Bruce has written much poetry. He's sent me many of these poems in emails. One of these being the 50pp "Shaman-Machine".

Now this is where it gets embarrassing. I'm probably one of Bruce Stater's most enthusiastic supporters &, YET, I probably haven't read "Shaman-Machine" or some of his other 'longer' work. WHY?!

WHY?! Because I HATE poetry. Ok, I exaggerate for drama. I've actually been in the process of slogging thru the Norton Postmodern American Poetry Anthology for the past half'a'yr or so & I like some of it. & I've read a fair amt of poetry. I've even been labeled a poet by those poor souls who just don't get it. When I HAVE been interested in poetry it's usually been poetry less on the expressive & symbolic end & more on the end of explorations of radical non-referentiality or highly concretized referentiality.

Then there's Bruce Stater's poetry: in some ways it exemplifies what I've always been repulsed by in poetry: expressiveness & references to such things as ancient Greek mythology. To clarify: when I was very young I had a bk of Greek mythology that I loved. The myths were like the precursors to super-hero comics. But then I started to feel like ancient Greek culture in particular & 'classical' culture in general were an oppressive impediment to creating work maximally relevant to the NOW. & much of the more 'conservative' poetry wallowed in such reference.

Lest you think that I'm about to completely diss Bruce's poetry here: Stater IS AN EXCEPTION. He doesn't reference the past as an act of hostility against the present, HE INCORPORATES EVERYTHING IN HIS VAST SCHOLARLINESS INTO TRYING TO MAKE AS ENCOMPASSING A REFERENCE AS HE CAN MANAGE - or at least that's my take on it. & he does a wonderful job of it. But I still hate poetry. Maybe Bruce's writing will change that.

Bruce writes of the classic Shaman voyage thru turmoil & vision - using richly resonant imagery & puns to their fullest capacity as multiple-meanings generators to try to describe the undescrivable. & that may just be what poetry's mainly been used for forever. But perhaps many poets just fake it or just don't go deeply enough. Some write more to put on the sham to appease their ego. I think of Aleister Crowley. As I recall, in his remarkably megalomaniacal "Autohagiography", Crowley lauds himself as the greatest poet alive (or some-such). Crowley's very entertaining in his own trumpet-blowing. At least he doesn't restrain himself there. But the poetry's totally restrained by metrical mediocrity - even though Crowley is most likely a genuine visionary, he sabotaged his poetry w/ a mediocre formal imagination. Bruce makes no

such mistake. The writing in general goes thru a variety of formal strategies - as manifested most thoroughly in his "Pandora's Box" contribution. The more the merrier. & the more the mirrorier. Take the beginning of the end page of "Shaman-Machine":

"emptiness of stars the places around
pen crews legitimate our maps do not fuse the width of touch
where time does not have men
a head is set for compromise how Chiron will vegetate
an alley an alley spins to remember in the snow because
darkness easily rewrites the refrain cannot bet on its hat its soot
some airplane in space are situations canceled? they say they are easy to recognize
or you are limpid a solution of our glance taking tours in the rain"

This isn't a formal breakthrough by any means but it at least shows an OPENNESS to increased expressiveness(/non-expressiveness) through more concrete means than the sometimes simple left-justification that characterizes most of the rest of the work.

Back to "The Vision of the Seeker" in "Golden Handcuffs Review". It begins w/:

"I will praise the poikilotherm
which lets the inside in."

He'll praise the cold-blooded creature, a snake perhaps?, for relying on external sources of heat to keep warm? Later:

"I recall the secret pleasures
of the quiet chameleon."

Shape-shifting & adaption to the environment - 2 classic Shaman concepts of finding one's spirit w/in other spirits - of being non-humano-centric.

"I am an offspring of the race of in-betweens,
neither horse nor rider,
neither animal nor man,
neither human nor divine,
neither either nor or."

It's in this last line that I find much of what I've looked for in poetry. Language beginning to operate at a meta-level; language looking at language as an attempt to transcend the more obvious for the more deeply structuring - like trying to use mathematics as a way to see the seemingly invisible so that one might have the ability

to CHANGE the seemingly unchangeable - to change the 'laws of nature', to be an outlaw of nature to free one's self from the unwritten laws of 'reality'. The ambiguity of being "an offspring of the race of in-betweens" as an escape hatch from the dead(ness of the) certainty of the ONLY-THISES.

"A butterfly whose metamorphosis is never done.

Ambiguous hemispheres tantalize me with their endorphinic haze of uncertainty."

"[E]ndorphinic haze" as in the haze created by "any of a group of peptides occurring in the brain and other tissues of vertebrates, and resembling opiates, that react with the brain's opiate receptors to raise the pain threshold" (to quote from an on-line dictionary). I, personally, am not tantalized by such a "haze of uncertainty", it runs contrary to my grain (pun intended), but the attraction of eternal metamorphosis is quite a bit more appealing. Onward:

Bruce Stater has sent me 2 manuscripts in the not-so-distant past: the short:

the language of angels:
a noemorphoetic
codex

& a 130pp ms that begins "Sing, O Muse!" This latter is probably Bruce's largest work to date & was sent to me for safe-keeping to try to insure its survival for posterity. I've read the former but not the latter. About the former, Bruce wrote me in an email:

Subject: Coming Soon to a mailbox near you!

Date: August 29, 2005 11:31:57 PM EDT

tHE LANGUAGE OF ANGELS

a NOEMORPHOEITC

cODEX!

(Hopefully in time for
yr birthday)

which is inspired
however obliquely
by Story of a Fructiferous Society

& in some ways
attempts to record
what I have variously
referred to as
"the psychotic semi(di)otic"

"periphrasis at slant-angles"

"babelaboration"

"changelinguistics"

&

"subterfugenius"

now renamed

NOEMORPHOETICS--

a perhaps stealthily

serious & preposterously

theoretical

conglomabrobriation designed

in homage to the largely Greek

neighborhood in which

I currently live.

Some Bells will ring:

dada!

eeCUMmings!

Brion Gyson!

Jackson MacLow!

Others May not:

An Awkward Romantic Irony...

Clumzy Loafing Word Order...

Metaphysical Pretentiousness...

The complete text (with
the exception of the opening

CODEX BRUCIANUS)

was composed (in

one way or another)

[from permutations of](#)

phrases gathered from

poems by Maya Angelou.

The original title was

to have been:

IN LIEU OF ILLUSION'S ANGEL

but that was

scraped for that

given above.

Angels can translate into

anything you like:

chance,

paranormaloia,

semantic overdetermination,
the absurd,
the esoteric
polysemiosis
Adamitic language
etc,
et cet errata

["Story of a Fructiferous Society" is a movie made largely by myself as "The Ballooning One" as inspired largely by Florian Cramer as "the Forked One"]
About the latter he wrote me:

Subject: The Return of The Sub-Genious

Date: February 18, 2006 4:39:46 PM EST

Dear tENT:

I am in the process of engaging Chiron
in a major revision.

It is now to be called:

A Labyrinth

of Visions

& Critical Commentary

Basically, the plan for the revisions follow:

1. It will be rescripted & rewritten as a poem for two voices--

the voices assigned to two separate columns throughout the poem.

2. Footnotes will be added throughout the poem--

somewhat in the manner of Jack Spicer's commentary in
HEADS OF THE TOWN.

Basically pretty simple.

I intend this poem to be my messterpiece.

However, I am very worried that something terrible will happen
either to it or to myself
before I have the opportunity to complete it.

Not because this is likely,
but simply because I have a plan & a vision
for this work for the first time
& it is so dear to me that I don't want anything
to happen to disturb it.

For this reason, I would like to send you
a physical copy of what I have done so far--
so that if something SHOULD happen
either to the poem or the poet,
you would have the artifact of its incompleteness.

Somehow, I have found the energy to begin working
on this somewhat daunting project
even under the much less than optimal situation
in which I am living.

I feel sustained by it-- with an incredible optimistic energy.

The last bit of text by Bruce that I arranged to be published was an email
reaction to my movie "Ledger of St Dermain" that capped off my description of the
same in the bk that accompanies a DVD published as Encyclopaedia Destructica -
Bumba IV (April 2007). It ends w/:

"Parlez vous sans les mains?
In Chinese characters which tessellate
into infinity?
With the walls of this cave?
If you look & listen,
you will always be amazed."

The title of this movie of mine is a play off of "legerdemain" - obviously a word
from Français that's become a 'Fremdwort' (perhaps it shd be "Freundworten"
instead - excuse my Deutsche) in English meaning "sleight of hand". I wonder here,
though, is Bruce's Français all that he intends it to be? Does he mean "Parlez vous
SANS les mains?" or "Parlez vous AVEC les mains?"? Without or With? I assume he
means what he says but either way seems to fit.. The text above is a fairly literal
reference to the movie, wch takes place in mining tunnels, in a cave. "If you look &
listen, you will always be amazed." &, at the risk of making the obvious etymological
leap, that, & the ms alluded to above, brings us to "A Labyrinth of Visions":

In the version that Bruce emailed me when he asked me to write something in
honor of "ahadada"'s publishing of "A Labyrinth.." online, the maze is an 88pp pdf.
42pp shorter than the hard-copy rough draft I'd rc'vd in ms form. In the ms, the
beginning is a sortof poetic preface that starts w/:

"Sing, O Muse!

of the pages of this book
of its divine mania

& the depths of its depression"

That intro appears to be absent in the pdf. Instead, the pdf begins w/ "The Journey of Metaphor & Remembrance" - instead of the ms' "Book I --The Book of Metaphor & Remembrance". Not such a big difference, perhaps - unlike the paring down by almost a third. In the pdf, the poem begins: "Say the poem is a journey" but in the ms it begins: "Say the poem(1) is a journey" wch leads us to the following footnote:

"(1) Technically, hardly a poem at all, the action of these words takes place in the reader's mind. Depending upon the activity of this mind, the action of the poem varies, like the pangs of transience. The reader must decide for herself whether the poet is singular or plural, more than two or less than one. This is not, however, an imperative, in spite of the poet's apparent insistence to the contrary. If at any time the reader of the poem cares to substitute one or more of its words for those of her own choosing, she may do so with impunity. The same can be said of the topic & tone of the poem which vary only slightly due to the fabric & texture of those cheap materials with which it was made."

There are 82 footnotes in the ms & NONE in the online version sent to me as pdf. Perhaps Bruce deleted them to let the poem "speak for itself", perhaps the "ahadada" editor(s) found them formally inappropriate or otherwise objectionable. I don't 'know'. Let's take the above footnote 'at its word', shall we?, & play a bit w/ the beginning of the last section:

"The Names of the Labyrinth

I called it the labyrinth of stars
the labyrinth that captures us,
fire labyrinth & blooming labyrinth,
spoken labyrinth
the labyrinth that bears witness,
blind labyrinth & dark labyrinth,
the white labyrinth of bone,
labyrinth of visions,"

The Names of the Staterment

I called it the staterment of stars
the staterment that captures us,
fire staterment & blooming staterment,
spoken staterment

the statement that bears witness,
blind statement & dark statement,
the white statement of bone,
statement of visions,

from page 7:

"I questioned the journey
alone & sought out others.
I searched for a word which would drive me mad.
I looked in silence to the whispering palms
& the sand which passed
through my fingers.
But the sand kept falling
& the palms spoke in
broken lies girdled around
dim stones whose silence approached
the intoxication of the prehistoric.
& without names I passed into
the oblivion of the glug-glug
& the labyrglossorinthia."

neolojism