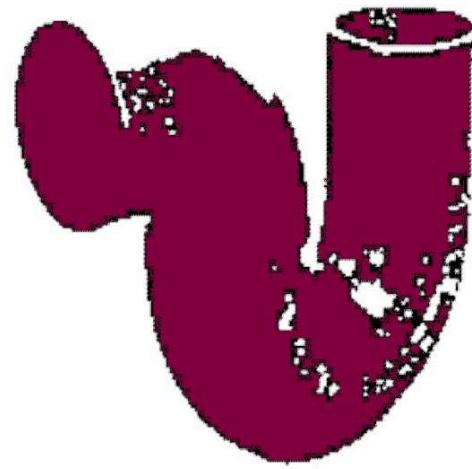


Quote–Text



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FEBRUARY 28, 2020



Quote–Text

Kang Dong Ho. Critic. Analrealist.
Translated by Beth Hong

In 1971, Roland Barthes attempted a systemic approach in outlining the conceptual difference between work and text in a short article “From Work to Text.” His concept of text, described in a total of six categories (methodology, genre, symbol, plurality, genealogy, reading, and pleasure), was to suggest that it could act as a new paradigm of the writing-reading theory at the time. Nevertheless, his notion of text should be examined more carefully as it has produced many unnecessary misunderstandings.

For example, if you read a passage that describes text with the keyword “pluriels,” you can see that there are some statements that are rather difficult to comprehend.

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the “sources,” the “influences” of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas.¹

By today’s standards, no one would interpret this definition, which corresponds exactly to the rules around plagiarism, as advocating for it. In fact, it is more like a rhetorical sentence, condensing concepts that have already been regarded as basic common sense in postmodern text theory, such as “intertextuality,” “death of the author” and “expectant plagiarism.” If one reads this statement in a somewhat convenient way, Barthes seems to argue that we can imagine the free interrelationships of text and, at the same time, the more fruitful writing of text when we are not obsessed with the pressure of the influential relationship or the authority of the source text.

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However, if one takes advantage of Barthes’ term and use it to support a view that admits all writers are anxious about being influenced by others, if not the inevitability of plagiarism, it is not only childish but also makes the concept of text infinitely ridiculous. The recent debate over plagiarism, for example, clearly shows how disingenuous concepts like intertextuality, which have become critical common sense, can be grossly wasted. This carelessness, in particular, is more blatant when it relies on the vast textism of the logic of defending the writer. For example, Eliot’s quote, “Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal,” suggests that all literature is essentially plagiarism, or that we can point out “textual similarities” with the presumption of the author’s innocence. However, we should not hastily assume the author’s intentions. When agnosticism about the author’s intentions is mobilized like an alibi, and there is the notion that “all literature is essentially plagiarism” (though this is an empty concept without any substance), what it actually does to cover up is the persistent conventional wisdom—a rigid conservatism—that the writer’s presence and intent in writing should be regarded as a kind of final verdict. This perception is largely religious and mythical in that it is dependent on the kind of transcendental compulsion I want to call “the metaphysics of intent.” As Jang Jung-il correctly pointed out, this is no different from the regressive manifestation of idol worship Romanticism, which “is to wipe away the traces of chaos from creative and writing spaces.”

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The saying that text is made up of quotations needs to be understood as saying that it cannot help but internalize otherness. In other words, it needs to be understood as an inevitable confession—an “area beyond the limits of intent.” In her book, “Stupidity,” Avital Ronnell once said that the elements that hinder the unity and completeness of writing are not just atypical aberrations. In fact, it’s the “indelible tag of modernity”—the ghostlike otherness which is the origin of writing. Contrary to what seems to be, this is not such a pedantic idea. It is here that the texts we often refer to as great literature can give rise to a variety of later interpretations. This does not mean that writers are not responsible for the disorderly interpretation of their books, nor that they intentionally use tricks in order to trigger various interpretations. It is not untrue that many writers often resort to coincidental experience whenever they fail to explain their work or explain the process they have come to write. Something that they cannot explain in their writing—to borrow from Barthes—is not unrelated to the quoted traces of otherness, or otherness embodied as quotations.

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However, the meaning contained in the argument that “all text is quotations without quotation marks” or “all literature is plagiarism” is not limited to identifying the fundamental origin of the text empirically or philosophically. While the reason for a particular emphasis on quotations in relation to text is to criticize the fictional nature of the myth of “pure creation,” I understand that the purpose lies in acknowledging the finitude that all writing-reading activities are in. Furthermore, making this finitude a political condition allows certain conversations to be possible. So text is not a substance, but an active space in which writing and reading simultaneously participate, and quotations may be a concept that bears witness to the historicity of the activity. The horizon of historicity in text is, in the words of Kracauer, the realm between the world of metaphysical essentialism and the unquantifiable realm of subjective psychology. In other words, it belongs to the “middle field.” This middle field is the realm of history, and that is why it is also the realm of politics. This is clearly and simply articulated by Barthes: “The I which writes the text, it too, is never more than a paper-I.”² It is not only unnecessary to presume that I am outside the text, a transcendental “I” who retains the “abyss of intent,” but also non-historical, and non-political. Can’t this be read as factual propositions and declarations, and as a political critique of all conservative attitudes that take refuge outside the text at the same time? If so, Barthes’ thesis could be cited in a variation as follows: “The I which quotes the text, it too, is never more than the I who is quoted in the text.” This so-called “text as quotation” testifies to the simultaneity and indistinguishability of reading-writing and writing-reading, and is like a practical concept that actively mediates between them.

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If we look at it from the lens of historical horizons, we may take the possibility of quoting these texts as one of the natural phenomena of writing-reading, and a metaphor for the political-strategic practice of art. That is because whenever art is declared politically, we can find numerous historical traces of quotations. The geniuses of declaration are also geniuses of quotation.

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In a famous lecture in Zurich, Switzerland in 1922, Paul Valéry described the fundamental crisis facing Europe at the time as follows.

Almost all the affairs of men remain in terrible uncertainty. We think of what has disappeared, we are almost destroyed by what has been destroyed; we do not know what will be born, and we fear the future, not without reason. We hope vaguely, we dread precisely.³

Valéry’s dread was one of the first fears to be quoted by intellectuals beyond Europe all over the world at the turn of the century. Of course, it was caused by the terrible shock of World War I, but it was not just a temporary pessimism of a political situation or a particular realistic state. For Valéry, the crisis seemed to have been more fundamental. The great confusion experienced by the European society at the time was betraying the “the abyss of history” (*l'abîme de l'histoire*) as he described in “The Crisis of the Mind” three years prior. The chasm between subjective and objective worlds, or the phenomenon called the “crisis of fact,” is ultimately associated with a fundamental distrust of “reality.”

André Breton, who inherited Valéry’s epithet, declared in the first manifesto of 1924 that human imagination was subordinate to the law of dogmatic utility and diagnosed the current crisis of art as “the fundamental crisis of the *objet*” (from “What Is Surrealism?”). In this prognosis is the liberation of art along with the belief that one can pursue freedom of truth through new perceptions of things, i.e., Breton’s firm confidence in the new reality that imagination can reveal. What his writings, shrouded in a

religious atmosphere, ultimately urged was a new understanding of reality and a consensus between the subject matter and the object world that was achieved in it. So they obsessed about other parts over this part—what they could not see over what they could see, what didn't exist over what existed, cheap pulp over high art. Surrealists often talk about dreams not to escape to the world beyond reality, but to cite other lives that do not exist here in the midst of a moment of ecstasy that undoes the dichotomy between reality and non-reality. As it is widely known, Breton tweaks Rimbaud's quote and finishes his first manifesto as follows: "Existence is elsewhere."

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On the other hand, Bataille, who was despised by Breton as a "neurotic" and an "*excrément-philosopher*," had been predicting precisely the limitations of surrealism from an early stage. In his view, the surrealists who followed Breton were those who failed to escape the pose of an "immature victim," a sort of false hero elitism. The most decisive of Bataille's many emotional denunciations was that their gesture was nothing more than an "Oedipal dissipation" to get approval from the mainstream symbolic order, which is to point out that they could be easily tempted by the Oedipal sublimation of capitalism that they had so denied. Bataille's curse-like criticism soon proved true, as the failure of surrealism was dramatically declared by Baudrillard, the surrealists' most faithful successor.

The old slogan "truth is stranger than fiction," that still corresponded to the surrealist phase of this aestheticization of life, is obsolete. There is no more fiction that life could possibly confront, even victoriously—it is reality itself that disappears completely in the game of reality-radical disenchantment, the cool and cybernetic phase following the hot stage of fantasy (from *Symbolic Exchange and Death*).⁴

True life is elsewhere, as Breton says. However, there is no elsewhere.

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There is no elsewhere. But with the technique of quotations, you can look at the world as a completely different place, a kind of stage, says Benjamin. To provide an instance, in an analysis of Brecht's epics, Benjamin referred to one of the essences of Brecht's plays as "making gestures quotable." The quotation he is talking about is the very rupture of context, the suspension of the situation. "[Interruption] is the basis of quotation. To quote a text involves the interruption of its context."⁵ Though it sounds ordinary at first, Benjamin's idea breaks with the conventional notion of quotations, that is, the general idea that we should surely respect the original text and protect the semantic context that surrounds it. What Benjamin emphasizes through the bold sacrifice of unity and consistency is what destructive effect that the "interruption" itself can cause. Citing gestures also means rejecting typical imitation of behaviors with Platonic odors. In other words, Benjamin regarded reality as a political effect that should not be copied passively, but should be actively discovered and explored.

To Benjamin, that is why quotes could be used as an important image that reminds people of revolution and historical utopia. In "On the Concept of History," Benjamin at last links quotation to the problem of redemption.

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation à l'ordre du jour—and that day is Judgment Day (Thesis III).⁶

Many questions remain, but Benjamin's citation and Barthes' text theories seem to loosely refer to each other, given that they share a denial of the objectivity of chronological history, support for the possibility of quotation, and a dream of utopia.

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If quotation means interruption to Benjamin, the same notion means a full-scale reconstruction of a situation for situationists. They brought Lautréamont's words "ideology advances in plagiarism" to the forefront and actively present a strategic concept known as "détournement," or appropriation. Their main idea is that historically tainted ideologies can be repaired and used with this new and accurate concept through the so-called appropriation of ideology. Therefore, misunderstanding and misinterpretation were inevitable for them. Or, like what Mustapha Khayati says—"the situationists are going to establish the legitimacy of such misinterpretation"—the misinterpretation and misreading that go with quotation are active tools in establishing a revolutionary situation.⁷

The construction of situations begins beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle. It is easy to see how much the very principle of the spectacle—nonintervention—is linked to the alienation of the old world. Conversely, the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity by provoking their capacities to revolutionize their own lives...The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing "public" must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, "livers," must steadily increase (Guy Debord, "Report on the Construction of Situations").⁸

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The suspension of Benjamin and the establishment of situationists may point to two important aspects of the political effects of quotations, respectively. And it may be that quotes are linked to efforts to actively "use" the world, and an undertone of hope that these efforts can create a new reality. Citing the phrase, "recognizing an *objet* is knowing how to use it" in *The School of Spectator*, Anne Ubersfeld said that a consensus between recognition and use is the idea of a theatrical stage. Here, the stage where usage and perception coincide may have to be read as a spatial analogy to the history of the real meaning and a metaphor for the text as a quotation.

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Although I've quoted other people's writings and ideas so far and added these and those words, this article was originally written to be brief footnotes attached to the manifesto of Analrealism. Although I do not usually actively claim it, I sometimes get asked what exactly the identity of Analrealism is because some people suspected me of (or I was quoted as) being an Analrealist.

However, it seems that under these questions, there is basically the idea that there must be a common ideology and a common goal in order for a certain "principle" to be established. Furthermore, through this question, I face cynicism and nihilism about what I can offer in the absence of new prospects and plans to share (which may be a misunderstanding, but we should not be afraid of inevitable misunderstandings). It is not easy to resist such cynicism. There is no such thing as a new ideology and outlook that can be put forward today. All the artistic principles that bind us together have been historically proven to fail, or have long been too worn out. If so, can there be an ideology that has no reliable cause, no prospects, no content to declare? Even if it can exist, can it be maintained?

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Of course, there is no common ideology allowed for us. However, can a joint statement that does not depend on commonality be an ideology? Like something that connects us in various ways without specific concepts or slogans that bring us together, such as “ideology as an existential attitude.” We can quote the same thing without referring to the same thing, and even if we don’t quote the same thing, we can say a similar thing. We can quote each other or be quoted by each other without special quotation marks and essentially become part of a community named “history” without knowing it. Quotation is a kind of historical attitude that mediates the present with past failures and makes us realize that we are interconnected in those failures.

In that sense, there is no Analrealism. However, it is still possible to quote Analrealism. “Analrealist” is a tentative name that refers to those who quote Analrealism, or those quoted by Analrealists. Quoting is not different from being quoted. In other words, Analrealists can quote anything as they like.

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All footnotes are added by the translator.

[1] Quoted the French to English translation of *Image, Musique, Texte*. Translated by Stephen Heath in 1977.

[2] From the same source as above

[3] From Internet Modern History Sourcebook of Fordham University

[4] Translated by Iain Hamilton Grant from French to English

[5] Quote from “What is Epic Theater” in *Illumination*. Translated from German to English by Harry Zohn

[6] From the same source as above

[7] From “Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary,” in Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*

[8] From Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*

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