

Joan Retallack

From *HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS*

THE WOMAN IN THE CHINESE ROOM

Intersperse entries & numerals from notebooks
(back to Chicago (Chinese story in tact (quotes
from assorted pm sages
= Manual text ?

She is captive in China

" " " " a moment in history

" " " to a sense of history

but in the way a wordswerve could turn a century's
prose for a second or two away from history first
from property then ideas then property as idea then
idea as property

creating parallel texts left and right full of opposing
forces in a sad space of alternating dire lexical black
and white squares

the flat degraded feeling in telling the story or describing the passage and/but they are very proud of this Searle says suppose that unknown to you the symbols passed into the room are called questions by the people outside the room and the symbols you pass back out of the room are called answers to the questions

She-?.

how do you know the person locked for all those years in the Chinese room is a woman there are few if any signs if she exists at all she is the content of a thought experiment begun in a man's mind this is nothing new and perhaps more complicated

She-1.

now that we think we know that the world is not all that is the case the case in question the space of the case sad but fierce with light upholds the dark it seems to utter itself must there be subtitles must there be translation she thinks she knows but doesn't want to accept that in order to write or read or speak there must be a division between light and dark

imagine that you are locked in a room and in this room are several baskets full of Chinese characters she is glad they are Chinese of course glad to continue Pound's Orientalism there will be no punctuated vanishing points she is given only rules of syntax not semantic rules she is relieved of the burden of making meaning she need only make

sense for the food to be pushed through the slot in the door it is thought that these are situations more familiar than we would like to think them to be in the new technologies and to men more than to women but it oddly feels quite normal

She-2.

what's to keep her from responding to their cues with syntactically correct non sequiturs in effect surrendering they might ask does the past tense give you vertigo she might reply there's no sense in knowing what day or night it is they're always changing

She-3.

yes it gives me vertigo knowing they've all been locked in that prose for centuries by comparison this makes the Chinese room feel full of breath of fresh air the point has been made that this prose has justified the violence and then it's been made and they can say oh that point has already been made

She-4.

is being too careful not exploring the other possibilities but this could be serious it might not be

the thought experiment he thought it was or it
might be irreversible once set in motion vert-I-go
not abject advert to yes Duchamp turns out all along
to all along have been all along Fred Astaire and
Kate Smith coming over the mountain is Gertrude
Stein

For the Woman in the Chinese Room: assemblage
man enhance silhouette 3 millimeter aperture in
iris relish chalice in ken off shore

vegetables were being smashed hard to find dotted
lines and arrows from aesthetic to ethical to
spiritual to penthouse level the woman with four
shopping bags said I don't want your money I just
want to tell you that I dreamed I went to the Hilton
Hotel because I knew God was there I knew He was
in the penthouse I tried to find the elevator but they
stopped me they wouldn't let me past the lobby

vivid stupefy suffice perturb brance

More Orientalism: the Japanese say *mu* to unask
the question

aqueous tenuous hush tuh

in this story to describe roundness you may have to
think about a square you may have to retreat from
decorum or just spell it out phonetically you may
have to find an Oriental Jesus with a vertical smile
you may have to calculate the rectilinear coordinates
of a blue duskless mountain with the distance of a
female Faust

excessive evil nonsense Agamemnon lemon
mythos ethos logos pathos fauxed yes/no
nothing no thing to be gained do not reach out
do not attempt to grasp let it slip by

mbers shoul ha gn

uides

e

ity

f

ected