



CONSTRUCTION OF A DISTANCE

MATT TURNER

The word Essay comes from
the academic word Essay
which means to follow instructions—
a rhetorical duty laid out with a grudge
in the edifice of constraint
(of institution).

Bodies of knowledge impose themselves
on a student body
(a student's body bent
over in a bracket of time
Essays through the night)
and are processed through those who practice
the production of language, the production
of meaning to represent all they've learned.

If knowledge is the framing of experience
it can be used to discuss experience directly
(to avoid the strain
metaphor laces
into language,
an outline to observe
the image it contains,

discarding the simulacra
metaphor assumes)
and eliminate a level of mediation between
the writer and the reader.

(The compaction
of expression
burdens the writer
more acutely
with the materials
of language.)

Contained in the burden of expression however
is a form of liberation

(to unhinge what's been
received and resift it
in the untested voice,
in the artifice of Essay)

formulated in the machinations of academia.

If language is the experience of experience

(Lyn Hejinian)

the Academic Essay is the language of knowledge.

(If language is
the experience
of experience
the Poem is
the language
of language.)

And so discrete genres of literature
appropriate dissimilar distances from experience:

(this allows for
varying modes
and depths of

reflection to
occur depending
on what's being
read, written)
the Poem a commodious enterprise;
the Essay a claustrophobic operation.

But these words assume a scale
that Poem and Essay do not exist on,
(the poles being
pure creative
endeavor and
onerous
intellectual toil,
two things that
are conflated
in all writing
if done correctly)
which brings me to my point
(or one of them).

All writing is creative writing because
all writing necessitates artistry,
(all writing is
academic writing
because the production
of language requires
a prompt
in the first place)
but no matter what
all writing is some frail reflection of experience
(the frailty itself
a quality to admire)

begging the question Why?

(Why?)

In response, we could say

the construction of a distance

(a variety of
distances)

from experience itself

attenuates life,

(tempers what can be
hard to live through)

and while the Essay

(the experience
of the experience
of the framing
of experience)

and the Poem

(the experience
of the experience
of the experience
of experience)

offer frail reflections from

different distances they are

nonetheless coplanar

(but not always
ancillary to each
other the way I
am doing here).

And though the form disagrees with the content

(and vice-versa)

fusing the two forces

an important question:

(like how
form effects the
production of
meaning)
as a commodious enterprise, the Poem
resists making an argument,

(resists even
deductive
reasoning as
a way to move
forward)

but the Essay, a claustrophobic operation,
demands a thesis,

(demands
demanding)

confidence, something like a resolution.

So maybe the thesis of the Poem-Essay hybrid
is a question, one that asks

(as innocently
as the writer)

where it came from, why it is happening.

(Maybe the point
of the hybrid
is to ask a question
in the form
of a statement.)

And maybe this frail reflection itself
is not actually about writing,

(about
anything
at all)

but something like
the experience of anything at all
 (and the capacity
 of language
 to address it).