©2001 The Institute of Mind and Behavior, Inc.
The Journal of Mind and Behavior
Autumn 2001, Volume 22, Number 4
Pages 479–482
ISSN 0271–0137

**Private Heresies.** Aleksandra Kasuba. Lincoln, Nebraska: Authors Choice Press, 2000, 152 pages, $11.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Scott R. Stalcup, Indiana State University*

---

Sculptor Aleksandra Kasuba presents in her book, *Private Heresies*, "a record of physical and mental sensations, the minute energy events arranged in a progression from the simplest at the core to the most complex in the enveloping layers of movements" (p. 6). Around the time of what we would now consider early adolescence, Kasuba began recording "impressions of . . . inner states" in her notebooks. In her third or fourth entry, Kasuba recounts drawing "Venus de Milo for Beauty, scales for Truth and a heart for myself" (p. 1). Perhaps it goes without saying that an artist sees the world differently from the rest of us. One might argue that only artists see the truth or reality as it is. In turn, the artist attempts to explain the truth to the masses via its representation in works of art. It is then the duty of the public to attempt to understand. Unfortunately, more often that not, the masses fail, retreating into their own interpretations. Kasuba's autobiography of sensations presents the truth. To be sure, it is a challenging work, but whoever accepts the challenge of reading it will not be disappointed.

"Self Portrait as Mirror of Society" sounds like the title of an artwork, albeit a wordy title. Perhaps a similar thought crossed Kasuba's mind when titling her work, thus she decided upon *Private Heresies*. Her title proves problematic in that the text is neither private, nor all that heretical. By sending her thoughts into the public sphere for all to read, her "heresies" become public. Furthermore, they are not heresies either, as no real authority figure is ever set up as the other endpoint of her heresy/gospel dichotomy. What is the crime without a law? Taken together, the title is no closer to the mark. One might wonder if it is simply better to accept that the publishers required a title, so Kasuba fashioned one and, as she did in declaring herself a pagan theologically, left it at that (p. 1).

Unfortunately, analysis nags. Kasuba seems to play upon our mass love of voyeurism and sensationalism, luring the reader in with a title that not only labels the work as not for public consumption, but also loaded with corrupting thoughts, as visions of Orwellian dystopia dance in our heads. We always want what is bad for us, do we not? Is this dirty pool on Kasuba's part? One might argue as much, but not this author. Those who do peruse the text find no lurid thoughts that curve spines,

---

Requests for reprints should be sent to Scott Stalcup, Department of English, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 47809.

rot out teeth or poison minds irreparably. Rather, what the book contains is a way to look at the world, more specifically, the way Kasuba looks at the world. The text moves from Kasuba's private sphere into the private spheres of her readers. Instead of heresies, the audience finds, for lack of a better term, rules to live by, or, to quote Francis Bacon, "[E]ven that school which is most often accused of atheism doth most demonstrate religion" (1612/1985). In short, Kasuba has written a strange, but wonderful book.

She writes, "I resolved not to read materials that might influence the undertaking . . . as no one else could tell how things felt to me" (p. 6). In her writing, Kasuba either comes in accidental contact with a multitude of sources, or her writing exists in a Jungian space, running parallel to and intersecting with multiple authors. I am inclined to believe the latter. However, no matter which position the reader may take, it is still great fun to note with how many different sources she is synchronous.

Kasuba sees herself as "one open system among a myriad of such systems" (p. 7). In this statement, she aligns herself with Marshall McLuhan, an alliance that is only fitting given the renewed interest in his work generated by scholars such as Paul Levinson (1999). Though Kasuba thinks in more organic terms than the cyborg of a system exchanging energy, she reintegrates McLuhan into the human, though memories of the man/chine remain. Given her early upbringing in a Lithuanian village, it is not as long a journey back for Kasuba to McLuhan's global village (1969/1995, pp. 260–262).

Through her system among systems, Kasuba manages to reorganize sensory feelings as differing levels of dis/integration with other systems. Vision and hearing cover distance, be it long or short, between energy fields. Smell ties in with objects that are closer to the body. Taste forms the highest level of integration, objects becoming part of the body via the mouth. And yet, no matter what the level of dis/integration, she remains central (p. 11). As a whole, she is a part, and apart, she is whole.

From my perspective in literary studies, reading Kasuba is akin to falling down a rhetorical rabbit hole. In some instances, she agrees with certain theorists, but then she turns around and disagrees at the same time. She refutes the notion of *kairos*, writing "Even well-chosen words convey but a fraction of what the senses perceive. In verbal communication, that fraction is six times removed from actuality" (p. 53). She takes Walter Ong's "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction" one step further. While written discourse is flawed for Ong (1975, p. 11), with only a special clique of writers able to get a fair amount of nuances of oral communication into written form, that does not mean that oral communication is any less flawed than written communication. Imperfections still exist.

G.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) resounds in a discussion on verbal memory. Kasuba writes:

> If I am asked what the sound outside the window is, a flash of a feather, a beak, or wing triggers the word "bird." If I am asked what kind . . . an outline of a bird subdivided into compartments appears on the mental screen and the words "head," "wing," "tail," "throat" jump to mind. (p. 74)

No parts are the whole in her head. Otherwise, the bird would be *pecking* a *hole* in her head.

Kasuba exhibits Platonist leanings as well. In her discussion of "seeing the culmination of energy impulses . . . in the repository image of the rooster" (p. 14), one

may recall Plato's cave metaphor of seeing the shadow, or the actual over the ideal. She sees not the rooster, but rather "an *image pattern* specific to roosters" (p. 14).

Words are the domain of reason for Kasuba. In giving items names, "reason reconstructs the outside world one word at a time; and because it arranges words in an order that follows its own logic, reason creates a world separate from the one perceived through the senses" (p. 52). It is housed outside of the "routes of sensations . . . receiving information through hindsight" (p. 43).

Emotions run along those lines from which reason is removed, relaying "how the spirit responds to what is encountered" (p. 46). Kasuba writes, "One can recall feelings but not emotions, for emotions bypass the senses, leaving no imprints behind. Emotions are remembered in hindsight by the actions they prompted or the responses received in their wake" (p. 46). As envy and jealousy are often used interchangeably, indiscriminately, and incorrectly, so may feelings and emotions. When a person is in love with another, he or she might exclaim, "I've never felt this way before!" He or she is completely correct, but at the same time, also wrong.

Feelings may be thought of as multiple sensations working in combination almost like a musical chord (p. 17). Again, and appropriately, Kasuba notes how feeling may be oversaturated. A song once found catchy soon becomes annoying after repeated listening. One must allow a "sorting out" to take place before the song becomes enjoyable again (p. 21). Anyone who has been subjected to "top forty" radio may easily relate.

Comparatively, Part Two of the text is brief. The first two-thirds of the book are taken up by Part One. One might argue that this is appropriate since her book is about the "private." However, Kasuba acknowledges that the self does not exist in a vacuum, saying, "Since I share the environment with other entities, the energy I release affects them, and when other entities respond to my presence, the resulting interactions affect my own state as well" (p. 100). Part Two focuses upon the external as opposed to the internal.

Kasuba outlines three states of equilibrium: stable, temporary, and constant (p. 101). She also notes the five dispositions, which are "emotional, rational, assertive, resigned and resolute" (p. 102). Afterward, she maps out the inner states according to a series of concentric circles denoting states of being, sensory engagement, emotion and/or reason, action taken, and response received (p. 104). From here, Kasuba outlines with circle diagrams the varied states of the dispositions. It is here that her background as an artist really shines.

As with her concentric circles of the self, Kasuba lets her sculptor's nature run as she outlines the four freedoms, "physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual" as stacked one on top of the other (p. 125). However, for all of the insistence that the individual is the center of the universe in relation to the other individuals/centers, Kasuba admits to being constrained by the laws written and perpetuated by conglomerations of individuals.

To return to the heresy motif, the pharmaceutical industry might consider Kasuba's association of feelings with events rather than with chemical imbalances as heresy. Such a scenario mixes theology with science, of course, but to suggest that changes in energy levels mark a feeling's beginning, such as depression over the death of a loved one, and a settling of the level marking the end of that feeling, obliterates the anti-depressant industry (p. 19). If the feeling and its associated process are natural, then why expedite nature with the aid of a pill?

Twice, though, Kasuba veers close to examining her thoughts in relation to theology. In her discussion of the path of least resistance, she notes that "Traditionally,

the path of least resistance is supposed to lead to sin and destruction" (p. 94). However, if the individual is "guided by spiritual yearnings," then the path leads not to destruction, but rather to self-actualization (p. 94). Also, in examining the Golden Rule, Kasuba notes that the prevailing mindset within is not one of peaceful coexistence, but almost an ideological fascism where people are given license to force their beliefs on others, whether they agree with those people or not (p. 122).

It is oddly fitting that in her book, dealing with the self and its differing levels of consciousness, Kasuba should tip her hat (un)intentionally to the father of stream-of-consciousness writing, James Joyce. *Ulysses* was (and is) a literary minefield of allusions, something which *Private Heresies* ends up being. At the end of the Gabler text of *Ulysses* is the word "Yes" followed by a period in the middle of the page (Joyce, 1922/1986 p. 644). The two are collapsed in the open circle which seems to signify not an ending, but an opening. Kasuba's final "heresy" in ending the book is not ending it (p. 140).

## References

Bacon, F. (1985). Of atheism. In J. Pitcher (Ed.), *Essays* (pp. 108–110). New York: Penguin. (Originally published 1612)

Joyce, J. (1986). *Ulysses*. New York: Vintage. (Originally published 1922)

Levinson, P. (1999). *Digital McLuhan*. New York: Routledge.

McLuhan, M. (1995). Playboy interview. In E. McLuhan and F. Zingrone (Eds.), *Essential McLuhan* (pp. 233–267). New York: BasicBooks. (Originally published 1969)

Ogden, G., and Richards I. (1923). *The meaning of meaning*. New York: Harcourt.

Ong, W. (1975). The writer's audience is always a fiction. *PMLA, 90*, 9–21.