

@poetics

The UB Poetics Discussion Group

Archive of Electronic Correspondence

February 1994

84 messages · Tue 1 Feb 1994 – Mon 28 Feb 1994

An electronic mailing-list archive

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

A reading edition. For each post the author's name, the subject, and the message are foregrounded, and the date is kept but subdued. Machine headers, encoded attachments, and the repeated listserv routing that once framed every message have been cleared away; email addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and similar personal contact details have been redacted.

Editor's Introduction

Kristen M. Fabians

February 1994 is the month the room finally fills, and the weather it fills with is theory. Where December had left two letters and January one, the shortest month of the year runs to some fourscore, and nearly all of them are arguing — with a seriousness the young list wears like a borrowed coat that has not yet been broken in. Three words preside over the traffic, each trailing its own thread of replies: freedom, community, and, in Patrick Phillips's insistent phrasing, the social poem. The poets have discovered that they are a group, and cannot decide whether the discovery is cause for hope or for suspicion.

The freedom quarrel comes first and stays longest, conducted chiefly between Benjamin Friedlander — far and away the month's most tireless correspondent — and Tom Mandel, with Jean-Luc Nancy consulted in the wings. *"You seem to understand freedom as possibility"*, Friedlander writes, and then worries the formula against its opposite, the renunciation of possibility. Mandel answers in a compression close to verse: *"By leaping I would have said"*. It is the list arriving, almost by accident, at its characteristic pitch — abstraction driven until it turns lyric.

Beneath freedom runs the deeper and more anxious thread: community, and whether a mailing list can honestly claim the word. The correspondents reach past themselves to Blanchot's Unavowable Community and to Pierre Joris, who had a hand in carrying that book into English, and circle the paradox of a community of those who have no community. Patrick Phillips, declining to let anyone retreat into the merely aesthetic, plants the flag that the rest of the month will orbit: *"This is personal, it is ideological, it is social"*. Nobody is quite persuaded, which is precisely how the list prefers its persuasions.

Around these two great subjects the smaller threads cluster like satellites — an argument over the book arts and the fate of the printed object, a puzzled inquiry into what exactly is meant by wobble, a flare-up under the splendid subject-line Martin Spinelli's reply framed in Error. Joe Amato and Loss Glazier and Steve Evans move among them, and the institution itself comes in for interrogation: whose room is this, and who set out the chairs. The transcriptions, one poster notes, begin as the discussion gains speed — as though the talk had outrun the means of recording it.

What one hears, reading the month straight through, is a list teaching itself to think in public — the very thing it will still be doing at the century's far end, when the subject-lines have changed but the appetite has not. I have arranged the letters so that each voice stands forward under its own name, its telephone and its address returned to privacy, the machinery of its delivery swept quietly aside. It is worth remembering, amid so much argument about community, that this is what a community sounds like before it is sure of the word: these were letters before ever they were literature.

— *K. M. F.*

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1. Benjamin Friedlander

freedom

Tue 1 Feb 1994

Tom, I'm happy to see your elaborations and further musings. I think, finally, that our differences of opinion have little to do with Jean-Luc Nancy per se, nor even, perhaps, on the meaning of freedom. You seem to understand freedom as possibility. To think and to act freedom is at once to accept this possibility and to distend it. Freedom is thus both given and beyond the given. For myself, I would say that possibility is how we *know* freedom. This knowledge is what's "given"; given, strangely, as the possibility of *surpassing* knowledge, of going "beyond" the possible. In practical terms the difference between our versions may not be all that great.

I don't, in any case, believe we can legitimately talk about freedom without positing the possibility of a freedom beyond the bounds of knowledge. Again I insist, to speak of a paradox of freedom, of a knowledge of something that surpasses knowledge, is not to fall prey to paradox. We are attempting to take the measure of the abyss our thinking would leap. You say, thinking *can't* accomplish that leap. I say, we take the measure of an abyss only by falling.

Well, I characterize your argument in many ways that you might not accept. I do so in good faith, simply to note what I think is the principal difference of opinion between us: whether or not it is useful to entertain a thought that begins or ends with the concept, with the positing of pure forms and essential states of being. Here two questions assert themselves:

- 1) Has the universal been exposed as untenable, as polluted by concerns more properly understood in terms of ideology?
- 2) Is thinking now possible only when situational, when beginning and ending with the particular?

I'm not going to sort these threads out here. Let me say instead that my own interests, as a poet and as a graduate student, lead me time and again to examine the contamination of discourses. My skill as a reader, if I have any, is my sensitivity to this contamination--intertextual knots fascinate me, places in texts (poetic, fictional, philosophical) where something foreign or anomalous has intruded. The logic of this contamination has everything to do with the persistence of conceptual categories. The refusal to think them, the avoidance of analyzing their workings, of learning their histories (on the grounds, for instance, of decrying universal or essentialist thought), does not free us from their hold.

Ben Friedlander

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 1-FEB-1994 09:26:34.80

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2. **Tom Mandel** *freedom*

Tue 1 Feb 1994

Not possibility but the renunciation of possibility or the experience of that renunciation, but this may be a difference not of opinion but of situation in life/time/space.

In its utter particularity the "thought" of poetry may be said to rejoin singularity as universality in philosophy or maybe better in theology, which despite Johanna's animadversion's is more or less how I experience philosophy being dealt with on this net. Note that I don't use the word pejoratively (act- ually, I know *you* know that of me, but other readers mightn't).

I have a sense from you that's not personal, i.e. not you personally, of lack of hope, as in we measure an abyss by falling. By leaping I would have said. This is perhaps your moment in history, and your moment is more accurate than mine for sure; I was raised in a social order that not only dominated but actually comprised most of what was (US had 40% of world GNP in 1946). W/o knowing it, one felt that the world offered itself up. Ergo, I bought Miles Davis a drink when I was 15; he was wearing a gorgeous pigskin overcoat and his fingernails were as lustrous as pearls. When I was in Europe for the first time, I was a scruffy and (I thought) bohemian student. But a middle class restaurant dinner in Paris cost what a coke and fries had at home. The way it was.

How conceptual categories work does not equal the contamination of discourse, but both these matters need vigilant analysis, you are right. "Places... where something foreign or anomalous has intruded" on the other hand, may be a fine way to characterize discourse, where we must see the "foreign or anomalous" as the source of that discourse's value. Yet we will never succeed to tribalize the language of the pure.

By redemption we mean "to save," and so far from being irrelevant or intrusive (except as defined in the paragraph above), this concern is at the heart of those acts we (e.g. Johanna, or you) call "commitment," "love."

I like the way it was put by Resh Lakish:

(b. Sanhedrin 119b) Whoever answers `Amen' with all his strength, for him the gates of paradise are opened. As it is said (Isa. 26:2): `Open ye the gates that the righteous nation, who preserves faithfulness (shomer emunim) may enter.'

Do not read shomer emunim (who preserves faithfulness) but rather
she-'omerim amen (who say Amen).

as ever,

tom

***** T O M M A N D E L ***** 2927
Tilden St. NW * Washington DC 20008 * Voice: [REDACTED] FAX:
[REDACTED] *****
From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 1-FEB-1 994 15:21:08.53

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3. **Patrick Phillips**

****Imaginary Movie****

Tue 1 Feb 1994

This is a reply to a personal posting. I couldn't contact the person who sent it to me, so I've remove the name.

I suppose this may be regarded as a patient articulation, my take on IM. What filling out of the poem this accomplishes I deny. This isn't my "goal." But my "goal" is to tend to some of the structures of imagination elicited of me by IM. I suppose by posting your note you had no idea I would respond, or attempt to respond, so fully. But, as it so happens, today is devoted to tomorrow's class and you've done me a great service. I hope it doesn't turn out to be a great maze for you.

I too have to admit a dissatisfaction with the "pleasure of the text," that its giving is to say the least opaque, its color often as delightful as the package P&P put together. This grayness can be phonically supported by my take on her reading of the poem at the Ear in NYC; it too being modulated to the point of evaporation, read through with only occasional, slight pauses at line breaks and with little audible support for the mental knots she ties. (However, she is very quiet and calm in personal conversation). This said, I still regard the text with a great pleasure, perhaps more with the "jouissance" that Barthes intended. Another Barthes statement on pleasure: "...pleasure in pieces: language in pieces: culture in pieces. Such texts are perverse in that they are outside any imaginable finality--"even that of pleasure" (bliss does not constrain to pleasure; it can even apparently inflict boredom)."

What I'm getting at here is that the textual evidence of IM may not have to partake in a paradigm of pleasure to emit, or engender a cultural artifact. Granted, the cultural/poetic artifact of suspended modifiers, non-substantiated prepositions, oscillating predicates et al. has long instigated a politics of text which by now is easily seen, or tolerated (that sometimes we critics/poets

remain hostage to the tropes and the critical discourse that was intended as liberating). Granted the "freeze-frame" metaphor is only neat when tied to the title and then perhaps only tropic; and that the six line strophes (I say strophe instead of stanza because of the attendant personality in "strophe" which means, among other things "apartment" in Italian, whereas, stanza, among other things, means to "mental posture") only provide marginal support for the metaphor of movie, or for the internal poetic structure of each six line unit. This characterization of some the structures of the poem would in many critical circles be a pan, a thumbs down in siskel and eberteze. Yet, under my criteria and reading practice another, quite successful text surfaces.

I don't "read" this text so much as allow it to sound out its own cultural relevance. This is not as passive as it may seem. This sounding invites a text which is an "imaginary form" which insists no matter how digruntled I may become with the way the text sits on the page. Its imaginary form becomes a discussion between my imagination and the culture's and the poem's, a discussion which often absent from the page entirely. This absence, or in effect ascribed culture, is what keeps me. Often this keeping is similar to the hostage taking as mentioned above, but it remains political in the slippage between those participants in the discussion. It is this slippage which is the field of intervention for me. This is the level of engagement. This is personal, it is ideological, it is social. You mention the social as a field of intervention. So often, even in O'Hara and Reznikoff, I feel the poem is a description of something material, a personalization which elementizes some margin running the gamut from imprisonment (I as the disenfranchized interlocutor of poetic/cultural condition) to oration (I as arbiter of the imaginary condition). This field of intervention I often find less entreating, in some ways less the jouissance, an more an efigy of the entrapped or of entrapment. As to the materialization of the social field of itervention Wittgenstein said "Psychology connects what is experienced with something physical, but we connect what is experienced with what is experienced." I ask what then does poetry connect?

Now is this "blackmail?" (the Barthesian blackmail of theory) I'm not sure. I'm also not sure what you mean by the poem's and the theory's autonomy; I'm not sure there has ever been such a thing as theoretical autonomy, certainly not technological autonomy. And when it comes to technology, not much can be left out. The theoretical apparatus evident here of course is not culturally bankrupt, certainly it isn't grammatically bankrupt even if it is sometimes critically tedious. The fact that the theoretical aparatus no longer provides the surprise, and then perhaps the strangeness, needs deparately to be examined. But the condition elemented by the grammar emerges, or maybe the grammar elemented by the condition emerges. Sure the often "found text" quality of her work speaks to a possibility of a text made powerless by its automaticness, that

risk that much experience-based art suffers (I'm thinking of Surrealism, Dada, Minimalism, even some Abstract Expressionism). But her insistence that this experience never be deflated, or deflected by appropriative gesture, be that through an acquiescence to theory, to the text, or to the culture, or importantly to imagination, speaks to the possibility of this text to reveal the often conditions of mind and society. No structure is independent here and each is spatially dis-posed and recomposed.[It strikes me that the form she has adopted may be an effort to channel the constant abridgement of this dis-position into a consumable form, a bite-sizing of experience, to effect more of a tension between elements and thereby permit more experiential hinges.] Another thing which may contribute to these pieces opacity is that they take on an epigrammatic tone and in that some morality which when viewed under a theoretical umbra disengages the personal from the textual, perhaps interrupts the very thing which makes an epigram work. But I'm not so interested in that as a stumbling block to the poems effectiveness. I am concerned with the experience of the poem which insists upon an ideology for its effectiveness.

"I can only hazard it" (pg 85) aside from encapsulating the pronoun shift and the subsequent question of being in action, speaks not only of the hazard of this movement from "I" to "it" but also speaks of the obstacle toward acting and guessing, or thinking. These permutations are held in place (position is so vital here) by the shape of technology. The shape of technology here is much like "a place to put the eye" and the struggle between the technology as in human art and technology as in capital industry, but also the struggle between the personal and the social, the private politic, the body and the "apartment" it is in reveals what "color contends for, eye" The concept of a destabilized I shifting from definite to indefinite, viewer to view is always engaging the machine of that coordinate structure I -- technology -- eye. These places of contention are constantly destabilized by the viscosity, but they always promote a imaginary bifurcation which is in-effect a dialectic. To go further would be to fill out...

Of course one of if not the most important features of this movie is its sexual composition. As a man, I can not put my finger on it without its touch being an additional technology for the text to contend with. Nonetheless, these "loaded fingerings" (p79) bear the same shifts, the same constant limits, or positions that the text is constantly critiquing. This is not only the figural body of the text, but of an oppression which is spelled out in a "finite number of units," a real body. The transparency and calculability of currency, of surplus and exchange require this tension to be placed upon the body and upon the poetics. The internal is never exiled by the external, nor is it ever completely decribed by it. Most importantly, though, the internal the "inner" is not completely collapsed by or filled by "economic arousal" the text itself is evidence of this, not to mention Diane Ward's existence. The text suffers its own viscosity which

engenders an imagination engaged with sexual conditions. If the mind/brain is the largest erogenous zone, what is the mind's eye and what is this eye in the field of social intervention. What is its field of vision?

This is not so much ingratiation of the text, or a display of my enamored economy, as it is a stir of the pot of my considerations. It barely envisions only some of the concerns and even at that sometimes thinly. It would be good to hear any comments.

Patrick

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 3-FEB-1994 09:47:01.59

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4. **Patrick Phillips** ***Interview with Diane Ward***

Thu 3 Feb 1994

We (Patrick Phillips and Diane Ward) had this informal discussion/interview on Tuesday, February 1, 1994.

We primarily discussed the title poem of **Imaginary Movie**, Potes and Poets, 1992. The transcription begins as our discussion gained speed.

None of this should be published elsewhere without contacting Diane or Patrick. I didn't get a "release" from her and want to respect her privacy.

The interview was interrupted, which I thought appropriate, by her son who still needs to be by her side after the earthquake. I was interrupting his sense of safety, which wasn't entirely appropriate.

P Its form becomes a discussion between my imagination, the culture's imagination and the poem's, a discussion which often is absent from the page entirely. This absence, or in effect ascribed culture, is what keeps me. This keeping remains political in the slippage between those participants in the discussion. It is this slippage which is the field of intervention for me. This is the level of engagement. This is personal, it is ideological, it is social. I'm very interested in the function of the imagination in this field.

Here her son needs her and the question goes unanswered.

P The poem sets up frames...

DW They are frames for the "viewer" the author and the reader trying to deal with the screen which is the poem for conversation, the back and forth dialogue. where the writing exists is in the dissolving aspect of the work.

P The grammatical situations are often setting up ideological frames (pg 49)

DW Which is a context for the discourse

The text is intent on not allowing the individual so much

I don't see the frustration or violence of erasure in the text as a negative thing. I'm trying to deal with the nature of that exchange between, not so much the writer and the reader, but the person and society, or the person and authority and how to reclaim that self within the context of the language and the visual context of your existence. The constant barrage of information. That's what I'm dealing with and that piece. And it's successful in that way and I almost don't want to write after that. Of course I am. (pg 36)

P Why is it successful?

It's formally on the page this contained thing. I think each individual frame, in terms of its meaning, or its series of images, is always frustrated, it never congeals, or it never comes together as a formal frame in that context of the page. So that it frustrates the control of the formal page by subverting it, by frustrating the logic of expected images.

P Is the writing cultural or theoretical. I think if you write out of a the cultural you write "of" something; if you write out of the theoretical you write for something. And I think you note this later on in the poem. (pg 91)

DW Well I think that's there. You can almost call the cultural a starting point or a recognition of position and the exploration in terms of the theoretical would be, not the solution of the problem of position, but... .. (p 37) P a tool with which you...

DW where they are played against one another. A lot of times in my work, not only in this piece, but in other work, I try to subvert the duality of thought, of experience. I really work with that pretty consistently. Through the use of language and images.

P Wittgenstein (in Remarks on Color) said "Psychology connects something experienced with something physical; we connect what is experienced with experience." By setting up bifurcation and abrogating that agreement sets up a soft focus on the edges of those experiences so that they meld. ...

DW Um hmm...

P Another thing which may point to this is the kind of thing you set up in a line like "I can only hazard it" aside from encapsulating the pronoun shift and the subsequent question of being in action, it speaks not only of the hazard of this movement from "I" to "it" but also speaks of the obstacle toward acting and guessing, or thinking. ...

DW ...and the overcoming of the obstacle.

What you said about the psychological earlier. In order to ground my work I keep bringing it back to a real personal, physical experience of it. As a woman it's really kind of hard to emphasize the body imagery without getting tangled up in these cliches. I don't really use it in a feminist body conscious kind of sense. I use it to grasp the more abstract aspects of perception. To bring the world which is at those soft edges back, to let it go, to bring it back. (pg 85)

P I like that. I find comfort in that. Not only in the way you use light to dispose of a very physical situation but to return to a physical situation. And then you'll use shadow as a notion between those two physicalities and immaterialities. (pp 50, 51)

DW And I find it really workable to even the field that way to bring this work which could go off into nowhere. It's almost a political act. It emphasizes all parts of discourse and experience equally, and that's also very important to me. It's part of that subversion of the duality process.

P This is what I was saying about imagination. That once the form of the poem becomes a discussion in my imagination, the slippage between these aspects that's off the page, it becomes a political act because these things begin to intervene on one another, socially and that becomes a function of the imagination and it becomes replayed in this conversation for example, in the class tomorrow, or in my own work. It's very instrumental. And I'm wondering if that's experiential in your part or cognitive, in other words as you're writing do you erase and rewrite to build in this, or do you allow it to build on its own?

DW I think the latter. I would allow it. I work a lot and rework it. I am really interested in the process of the discourse and not really the discourse itself.

P So it's not so much a political agenda, but an ontological one, or an experiential one.

DW Right. The experiential is really important to me.

P Of course one of the most important features of this movie is its sexual composition. As a man, I can not put my finger on that sexual composition without my touch being an additional technology for the text to contend with. That once I describe it, it (the sexuality) is conscribed, that it is no longer an experiential condition, but it is also no longer female. (79, 95, 65)

DW What I really hope is that my work that I do is not that ephemeral, that your discussing it conscribes it as you say. A lot of what I do in talking about allowing these discourses, or exploring them, is just that, is allowing the technological to exist along side the sexual and not really making a judgment about the clashes so much as exploring them.

P Shifting to a more formal characterization, the frames seem sometimes to take on an epigrammatic tone and in that tone some morality. I'm wondering how when I say epigram and morality, how that strikes you.

DW I think that when I set up that formal frame and that I had to almost work against it. There's a play. Some of the pieces are open ended and some of them are very well scribed and refer back to themselves. In a way I think that's very formal concern and a playful nature of the piece. The whole morality thing I think is part of the voice that comes in reaction to whole idea of the big screen and the control of that. Whether it's true, whether it's a real moral voice I'm not sure. (pg 72 -"tightly scribed")

P I'm interested in what people call fragments.--Holderlin's Hymns and "Fragments," or that people call A Tomb for Anatole "fragments," or that Creeley's Pieces may not really be pieces as such.

DW Well. I'm not interested in that so much. One of the things is the formal and the way language is used in that in contrast with each other and it is again not making a value judgment on a nice formed piece. I find this thing Imaginary Movie frustrating in that way. That "Oh this isn't finished, or it's just a fragment because of the way it's laid-out.

P I don't see a Tomb for Anatole as fragment as such. Whether he wrote them on scraps of paper, or in shards of passion, they're not fragments, but it's fascinating that people would consider them as such.

DW It's not only fascinating, but it's a little annoying. That you would have to, as a writer, as a poet would have to conform your work to what can be read as a finished piece. How frustrating. How insulting. A lot of people have dealt with that in a more thorough way, Jackson Mac Low for example. It's part of what I'm doing. From: IN% " "UB Poetics discussion group" 4-FEB-1 994 11:19:37.15

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5. Catherine D Yates

RE: the book arts

Fri 4 Feb 1994

Joe: "One of the issues I find provocative is the idea of using hypertext as a metaphor for constructing a different sort of printed text...what if one were to...--
- take the electronic form, ...and push it metaphorically in some unexpected *material* directions?..."

Joel: "What do you mean by printed text...forgive me for needing examples" & "I have been fascinated with the

concept of the Search Engine and the logic of search strings...wandering free in a field of unrestricted text...you find what you ask for..."

I am replying not because of what I know about hypertext and search string technology but because of what I know of the opposite if we can take the simplistic duality of print making, writing and electronic writing, searching as a point of departure, more simply, to address your queries in terms of oldslow and newfast.

I just learned how to operate a lithographic press. You pull the bar down on your plate (stone), put the clutch in, & turn the cog. Ink is smashed into the paper under the pressure of approximately 900 pounds per square inch. If you forget to take the clutch out before you lift up the bar, the handle on the cog will fly toward you, hit your nose at great unstoppable speed & break it. You will have to find someone willing to clean up the blood with appropriate blood safety anti-viral gear.

One thinks about an image, what would you want to draw on such a plate (stone) and as a poet what would you write on it?

Few of us have drawing skills, are trained to reproduce in charcoal the sinews and breasts of the human form. Few of us have this same knowledge put into choosing words which could describe our experience of living or even to convey information to someone.

For example what I draw on a hard ground zinc plate is closer to an after-image, a burnt and glinted shape just left of your pupil inside the tissues of your eyelid, of a bluff in the Hudson River Valley north of White Plains than God's hand reaching for Adam though that might be what I mean. (no Feminist version of this reference comes appropriately to mind)

It takes me a month of dips into sulfuric acid and tireless wiping ink into the crevices of the zinc to figure this image onto the page, an image which registered in my mind in just a fraction of a second

Over the core of the month, the drawing was first a face, then two masques, then a tough rock and a fist.

Meanwhile, I think about writing into this print & manage only to print back wards in water based crayon two things:

"with"

&

"girl in winter"

which is all I have time for & all I know.

This is my way of taking up Joe's curiosity about hypertext and unexpected *material* form.

I don't think that electronic forums take care of the slow operations of living. There is a kind of reverse nostalgia that maybe we could keep track of what we know or say because of a technological frontier. Do not think that I am, however, willing to do away with it. I am avid about a relationship to stringent conversation by way of the keyboard, by way of e-mail.

This is my way of taking up Joel's careful urge to define a "text" as a way to get to an understanding of "hypertext." (He uses Greek epic cycles, James Joyce...as possible ways to understand the concept of "hypertext" which I am not addressing per se). I am defining a text & it's "material" both in terms of how a particular text is made, physically and where the text/image might come from, experientially. In terms of "wandering free in a field of unrestricted text" and whether SearchEngine changes our concept of "reading" hence "writing" I would say:

Yes.

No.

Yes, SearchEngine changes one's awareness thus, access to textual (written) information and must change how one would read through it.

No, SearchEngine does not change your awareness thus access to understanding the (written) textual information nor will it change our capacity to reply.

I believe one's "awareness" and one's ability to "speak about" or "draw about" what one knows and learns are skills which are developed not because of electronic

space but because of what one seeks, or bumps into. Not to say that one couldn't have all of one's serious physical, intellectual, artistic experiences on, in SearchEngine, that is surely to come, but that one does not figure things out, survive because of the speed of and the mere availability of information.

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 4-FEB-1994 15:46:01.37

[↑ Contents](#)

6. **Charles Bernstein**

subject/object/philosophy/lyric impulse

Fri 4 Feb 1994

Marc Christensen, the editor of the Wayne Literary Review, from Wayne State in Detroit, writes that he is looking for work for a special Summer 1994 issue (deadline May 1): "Theory poetics art culture": "quality creative writing needed which aspires towards an effacement, blurring, or subversion of the subject/object relationship between theory and art." (He mentions that he first saw my work in a 1991 issue of Meanjin, the Australian magazine, in a section edited by Sigi Jottkandt, now at UB & on this list.) Write Marc Christensen at Wayne Literary Review, WSU Dept. of English, 51 West Warren, Detroit MI 48202.

Henry Weinfeld called to say that he and Stephen Fredman are editing a special issue of Sagetrieb on the intersection of the lyric and philosophical impulses in 20th century poetry. They are looking at proposals for through the spring. Both are at Notre Dame. From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 5-FEB-1994 17:42:48.72

[↑ Contents](#)

7. **Joe Amato**

RE: the book arts

Fri 4 Feb 1994

katie [i am most comfortable in lowercase] i take you to mean text-from-life as blood-from-stone...

to which: yes, the sensitivities we develop to a medium are not simply a function of the medium... the transparencies (historically, palpably) associated with media perhaps one of the places to draw out latent structures (that, i would think, are correlative to metabolic impulses---but this reveals a certain body-centered aesthetic to which i am predisposed)...

that is, i find it difficult to construct a 'complete' account of my work 'with' or 'through' corresponding 'material' simply because i'm not certain that i necessarily engage (setting aside the more conscious deliberations of craft) in a conscious processing of same, or in a quasi-conscious forgetting of the 'stuff' at hand (as in this last poorly constructed example, the little noninklings ' ' serving to introduce self-consciousness into my ruminations)... there is some empirical work (wish i could remember where at the moment) to indicate that 'getting lost' in the flow, so to speak, is ultimately beneficial to creative processing... but of course this doesn't begin to address what sorts of "objects" we wish to objectify (and what sorts of subjects correspond thereto)...

to some extent, to argue from mediation (much as from design) represents a residual form/content dualism... that is, to the extent that we read-write 'through' a given medium (i.e., as a mediator) to a presumed experience-construction of content that is somehow exhausted-(or, worse)"explained" in such terms... that is, without content-of-the-form interference, seamlessly...

but your post concludes on the related, perhaps more pressing issue of survival in an age of information... hence opening to the question of what sorts of experiences we might wish to have not so much out of regard for aesthetic taste (itself socially-situated), but for signifying practices that speak to our more urgent places in time(s)... and here, i think, is where the tendency in many circles to view something like hypertext as simply 'facilitating' a more 'interactive' response to 'knowledge production' (those cursed little marks again, drats!) appears a bit naive...

i mean, hypertext is not necessarily going to make anything, incl. life, any easier... i look to it to provide a more complex representation (yes, even mimetically) of how meaning/knowledge emerges from information flows... alternatively, possibly, to help think our way out of the information metaphysics this culture would seem to be so caught up in... hence perhaps to open to a renewed appreciation of contingency (and associated ambiguities), the temporal dimension proper, that underwrites all (mortal) practice (ssorry for any new age intimation)... but hypertext is simply one aspect of an emerging network of new networks, all of which augur, most importantly for me, the possibilities (and associated limitations) of alternative communities (of writers, citizens, etc)...

as you so eloquently suggest, what happens to the page in the midst of these (potentially social) changes will probably be less a matter of emphasizing any material method per se than a consequence of how we learn to survive and seek out together...

joe

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 4-FEB-1994 15:51:47.44

[↑ Contents](#)

8. **Benjamin Friedlander** **"allowing to sound"**

Sat 5 Feb 1994

Pardon my abstracting from Patrick's long message on Diane Ward the following passage. The message was addressed in particular to an unnamed interlocutor but was distributed to all of us on the poetics list. I deleted one set of statements from within the passage (marked below by ellipses within brackets) because I didn't quite understand what Patrick was saying and because the technical character of those statements seemed to derive from the "reading" of Diane Ward's *Imaginary Movie*--a book I don't know-- and so I was unsure how relevant they are to a discussion of poetry and poetics in general. And I put the word reading in quotes only because of what Patrick himself says, that is:

I don't "read" this text so much as allow it to sound out its own cultural relevance. This is not as passive as it may seem. This sounding invites a text which is an "imaginary form" which insists [****on what? here is where i begin to lose track--b.f.****] no matter how digruntled I may become with the way the text sits on the page.[****...****] This is the level of engagement. This is personal, it is ideological, it is social. You mention the social as a field of intervention. So often, even [****but why "even"?****] in O'Hara and Reznikoff, I feel the poem is a description of something material, a personalization which elementizes some margin running the gamut from imprisonment (I as the disenfranchized interlocutor of poetic/cultural condition) to oration (I as arbiter of the imaginary condition). This field of intervention I often find less entreating...

I'll cut it off there because the other half of the sentence refers to the statements I deleted.

I return to this message because I would like to take issue with what I take to be an analogy Patrick is drawing between the two sides of two different distinctions. On the one hand, between reading a text and allowing it to sound

(with the implication being that the latter discovers a world of discussion and interaction unavailable to the former); on the other, between two conceptions of the social poem, one that seems performative (Diane Ward), the other linked to modes of representation (O'Hara and Reznikoff). Unstated as such but governing Patrick's remarks (or so I believe) is the twin association of (1) "reading" with "representation" and (2) "allowing to sound" with "performance." Is that correct?

My reconstruction of the argument is necessarily hazy because I'm unsure what this "allowing to sound" actually consists in, and I'm also unsure what sort of social engagement this "allowing to sound" engenders.

I'm all for the discovery of new modes of reading, and for rich phenomenologically tinged accounts of how the poem solicits the reader's attention. I only recently re-read Nick Piombino's essays from *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine and was struck with the depth and beauty of what he describes. His work in that area has not been taken up and I dare say a critical practice that took Nick's theories of reading as its starting point would look different than anything presently being practiced. My problem in the present context is with the promotion of a certain sort of text and a certain sort of "reading" that defines itself by disparaging reading as such. To disavow reading would seem to me to dictate the terms on which the text can be approached. Speaking as a reader, my inclination is to cry foul. Also, however, I wonder what the actual value of this "allowing to sound" can be if it is only applicable to one kind of poem. If it's impossible, for instance, to allow O'Hara's poetry or Reznikoff's "to sound," I wonder if the social engagement discovered in *Imaginary Movie* is not MORE rather than LESS restrictive.

But these are simply questions that point to a need for clarification. My other interest in all this is more pedestrian: What is the social poem? What ideas about the social poem do we entertain without reflection, and where do we see poets working to articulate newer or deeper ideas about poetry and society?

Patrick mentioned that he is teaching Diane Ward's work and that his musings were inspired by that. By a strange coincidence, my own teaching takes me to a similar line of thinking. I gave my students Langston Hughes's essay "My Adventures as a Social Poet" (from the recently reprinted collection *Good Morning Revolution*). In the coming weeks I'll be trying to figure out how best to teach them Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*, which in my opinion is a profoundly complex text, not at all a simple collection of voices and stories. After Reznikoff I'm taking up texts that are not poetry, but at the very end of the semester I'm going to try to incorporate Alice Notley's poem "White Phosphorus" (from her book *Homer's Art*) in a more general and historical account of the Vietnam War.

Anyone else working in this area? Any thoughts?

Ben Friedlander

From: IN% " " "UB Poetics discussion group" 5-FEB-1994 23:22:52.83

[↑ Contents](#)

9. **Juliana Spahr**

RE: "allowing to sound"

Sat 5 Feb 1994

Ben, I too was bothered by the separation of reading and sounding but felt it might be more just another example of the semantic confusion that seems to take over net discussions. (restrictive editing seems to have a direct relation to vocabulary confusions) in these discussions) But I like the larger question of where these take us--how does sounding allow reading; how reading sounding. I think you are right--Piombino is the place to look. Also Dahlen and Howe and at times the essays of Andrews.drews.

But it is your question of what is the social poem that provoked me to finally reply to something on this list. I think the answer is the poem is the social poem. But that is my easily dismissed anti-Adorno (and the rest) optimism speaking that I've finally accepted because the whole thing doesn't seem like it is worth much without it. I liked your teaching narrative mainly because I think I am using a similar area of concern to direct my class--moving from Heart of Darkness to bell hooks' "narratives of struggle" to a study of contrasts between Cullen's "Heritage" and Lindsay's "The Congo" and Hughes "Weary Blues" and Smith's "It A Come" to Apocalypse Now and the accompanying apparatus to Erica Hunt's "Notes for an Oppositional Poetics" to Teresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Dictee" to Leslie Scalapino's "Waking Life." I am trying to examine in just the most basic levels--what is testimony or struggle or opposition.

This has been in some ways the major question of the poetry of the 70s (it might get its most reductive play in the often drawn contrast between the work of Adrienne Rich and the work of, say, Nicole Brossard; Rich seen as the necessity of a narrative and standardized diction for political purposes, Brossard as the necessity for rewriting the language). We all know these arguments. But in some ways they weren't really answered (or at least I feel that way; I am still

confused if it necessary to start with the assumption of a standard in order to articulate a right, or a document of rights). S

So I am wondering how these issues play out for others, especially in the context of the classroom (which is in some ways a testing ground). I am wondering where others locate the political assumptions of poetry. I am wondering how others fit the aesthetic and social concerns of theorists such as Brecht, Adorno, or more recently, Jameson's call for mapping the postmodern into the poetic. And I am wondering, Ben, whether you think I have done a great disservice to your word "social" by merging it with my vague "political."

Juliana Spahr

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 6-FEB-1994 13:16:26.77

[↑ Contents](#)

10. **William R Howe**

RE: the book arts

Sun 6 Feb 1994

in response to joe's comment that he feels *most comfortable in lower case* i find it interesting to note that most computer systems are completely case insensitive (meaning they make no distinctions between lower and upper case). this is only changed by the applications that we choose to run on them (especially higher order applications that have been designed for a maximum of *user- friendly* bells and whistles). We on the other hand are very aware of the fact of cases. We use cases to clue us into various kinds of syntax. case then becomes a kind of covert linguistic organization that we are blind to as long as it is present, but as soon as the rUles of caSe iNteGriTy haVe been ruptUred wE Become awaRe oF case. And, it is at times like this that we realize that lower case letters and upper case letters not only look different on the page but mean differently as well.

Bill Howe

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 7-FEB-1994 22:31:52.46

[↑ Contents](#)

11. Benjamin Friedlander

the social poem

Mon 7 Feb 1994

Juliana, first of all, no, your merging of "social" and "political" doesn't do me a disservice. I admit I was impressed last year when Tom Loebel told me the two are quite distinct-- impressed though I myself am hopelessly confused about the difference. Tom I guess had in mind a technical distinction that holds sway in political science (which I believe is what he studied before switching to English), but of course readers and writers of literature don't always recognize that distinction. (Langston Hughes, for instance, in his "Adventures as a Social Poet," speaks of social *and* political issues--about poverty and about being black in America, but also about the Scottsboro boys, about segregation.)

Nevertheless, the very *possibility* of a distinction has proven useful. By speaking of the "social" poem, for instance, I would evade some of the cant that collects around the word "political." Also, I hope by returning to a vocabulary that emphasizes the documentary over the activist to reexamine some of our prejudices *against* the documentary (what you were referring to as "the often drawn contrast between the work of Adrienne Rich and the work of, say, Nicole Brossard; Rich seen as the necessity of a narrative and standardized diction for political purposes, Brossard as the necessity for rewriting the language"). For both those reasons I tend to prefer, like Langston Hughes apparently, to use the word social to refer to both the social and political, rather than using the word political to refer to the political and social (the latter choice being much more common these days-- perhaps why you referred to the social as "my" word).

Second, as far as teaching is concerned (and I'm still such a novice at this, still so easily surprised at how quickly my constructions of the classroom can collapse, that I hesitate to offer this, but...), I seem to be moving toward a course similar to yours. Like you, I'm asking my students "what is testimony or struggle or opposition," and trying to do so (since the class is *composition*) by engaging them "at just the most basic levels."

I've tried to organize the class around two overlapping sets of questions. (1) What does it mean to speak for "a people"? How is that different than speaking for yourself? Where do the two tasks intersect and where do they part company? (Here the principal texts are *Testimony* and *The Souls of Black Folk*.) (2) What does it mean for a writer to take music as a model for writing? (*The Souls of Black Folk* and DuBois's emphasis on "the sorrow songs.") What does it mean if the writer's words are not his or her own, or if they're modeled on the language of the courts? (Reznikoff's *Testimony*.)

Because I prize all the texts I'm teaching, I'm hoping (for myself--*forget* the students here!) not only to discover what the resources of the so-called "social"

poem ARE, but to illuminate these resources as a continuum of values, not a set of mutually exclusive choices (here is where my students really do enter the picture--can I somehow escape my own didacticism in order to make these choices available to them?). Isn't the subtext of the "often drawn contrast" between Brossard and Rich an attempt to proscribe certain forms of writing? And what kind of task is that? I mean, I love Nicole Brossard's work, but doesn't the sanctimoniousness of the sheer *use* of that work to criticize another's make you want to prefer Adrienne Rich? (And isn't that contrary preference the very essence of an oppositional poetics!) This seems to be a little of what was at stake in the upholding of Diane Ward as versus O'Hara and Reznikoff.

Ben F.

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 7-FEB-1994 23:18:47.88

[↑ Contents](#)

12. **Kenneth Sherwood**

RE: the social poem

Mon 7 Feb 1994

Ben et al,

Your musings on the social-in-the-political and the political-in-the- social help distill the my muddy thoughts of earlier today. As if the terms could be discrete at all, the 'political' has taken a particular resonance, popularly. Isn't to call one's poems social as over 'political' to propose that they are not overtly functional (as with propaganda), or rather, not purely concerned with overt political effect (since by such measure our most purportedly political poems fall ineffectual) but with a double burden?

How to call that double burden, how shoulder it? Perhaps I invest too much in your preference for the one word; I imagine claiming "social" for my own poetry in hopes that its fact of being, my activity in arranging its language, bringing it before a public in various manners implicitly renders it a social act. And here I suppose I've so sullied the word it designates but sense of ripples on the surface after sinking.

What of my reliance on 'hope'.

KS

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 8-FEB-1994 13:30:29.26

[↑ Contents](#)

13. **Patrick Phillips**
The Socio-political Ward
Tue 8 Feb 1994

The responses to my post have generated several questions circling the issue of "reading" as *opposed* to "sounding". They have also pointed to a tendency toward a lexical pile-up in my writing. I'd like to unpack some of my person to person considerations so that they may be more easily approached by a wider audience. I should say that I had initially sent my reflection on "Imaginary Movie" to one person in response to some of his questions and perhaps it was unfair to throw this on the List without some attention to detail. I also wish to see if I can give a sense of what I find social and political about reading around IM and "this kind" of text.

As to "I don't 'read' this text so much as allow it to sound out its own cultural relevance," "sound" was primarily used to contrast a broad field of effects with "read" which in my response to the "unnamed interlocutor" referred to a once-through oral reading which was ultimately unsatisfying for him. There is, as Ben points out, a disparagement of reading here, but one which doesn't so much devalue reading as place it in a broad relationship with the imaginary. "Sound" was a con-fusion of effects for me (and for others) - a pun attending to the metaphor of movie, an attempt to allude to a sonar-like (non-visual) means of finding the depth of a text's cultural reference, and a wish to find a measure of intention, or of what utility the imaginary is when "reading" such references. These three characteristics of the rather unstable, and somewhat tired "sound" helped me locate the text and the imaginary in a larger matrix than "read." "Reading" still remains an area of contention. I'll drop "sound" because it has a bad ring to it.

As this idea of reading and sounding may relate to Piombino's "Writing and Imaging," my interest is to "parse" not the "symbolic value of images", but the *social* value of the "after-images" I find in reading "Imaginary Movie." These are subtle, but valuable distinctions which I think may help get to how the text is for me is ideological and thereby social and political.

The distinction between image and after-image is made by Piombino as a kind of "shadowing" -- "the image layered on and under, like the creation of an approximate sign." What I find so compelling about *Imaginary Movie* is Ward's use of these "approximate signs." These after-images layered on and under a textual and imaginary horizon induce a soft focus between these lines. Ultimately I am interested in what these after-images *do*, how they interact and what is induced in the "reader" through this interaction. To say the text is comprised of after-images, not signs, but the collusion of approximate signs, promotes an idea of text more like an idea of imagination. Through the blurring

of the distinction between language and a cultural imagination the text becomes, or aspires to, a visual representation of the imagination, an "imaginary movie." A reading becomes a viewing, a mix of motivated participation, reading as in "I read you," and unmotivated participation, a mind's-eye view. What is key for me here is that this view does not consist of a "visual field" per se, that there is no object which occupies our retina, either elemented as word, or as imaginary object. There is nothing in our experience that is surrounded by nothing, wholly marked off and distinct. Or, as Merleau-Ponty says, a "visual field is not made up of limited views." Reading urges a participation in fields of reference which are limited views. Viewing has little of the demarcation reading requires, either in the viewed or the viewer.

To a larger experiential condition, I can testify that I have not read IM in five or six days. In spite of lapse, I am always remembering, always suffused with the elements of its experience, the viewings that Imaginary Movie clipped for me. From this experience I sense no distinct visual fields. The sexual takes place within the technological, the value of the economic within the exchange of testament. This, whatever it demonstrates for me, is social. It too takes place in this unframed field of approximate signs, of after-images, of the *means* toward communication and of the un-ending *ends*. What is instrumental for me here is that it is not the poem which foments the condition, but the experience that foments the poem. The induction into the functional resistance that awareness builds is social, as evidenced in some small way by my attempts to make it so through letters and postings. It's often difficult to go back and forth between experience and culture this way with poetry that is declarative. I just now opened up "Testimony" into the "South" to a terrible child beating and I must say that family terror has a cultural oscillation we all continually suffer. I was quite uncomfortable with this portrait. Nonetheless what is the difference between this portrait of family violence and that on "911" except for the difference between exhortation (Reznikof) and exploitation (911). (I am not ridiculing Reznikof here!) My initial *reflection* was the horror of the "Die, God damn you!" And then I reflected on the reflection itself, something I cannot wholly do//separate in the experience of IM.

Finally, it *is* the reading, the response to the references in words like technology, "Industrial Hygiene," in concepts of exchange and power, violence and sexuality, which is important in politicizing this social text. For me it is the ideology which contorts the reference enough for there to be a soft edge, a value placed upon the after-images so that these approximate signs are motivated. The conditions of culture here become their own critique and thereby our experience, our bodily experience maintains a level of this critique. By and in this there is a politicization of experience, which for me drops away at the moment of reflection. Reflection here is a kind of sustained being, this is

what I meant when I said Imaginary Movie insists. To suggest in what it insists would entail this kind of explanation, or something more. One last thing. In my class, there were several different connotations of "political" which proved stumbling blocks, or at least obstacles for definition. Here I want to suggest that the motivation of the imaginary beyond reflection and into some level of sustainable critique is of itself political. *Imaginary Movie* accomplishes this for me.

Patrick

From: IN%[REDACTED] "UB Poetics discussion group" 9-FEB-1994 15:09:07.33

[↑ Contents](#)

14. **Joe Amato**

RE: the social poem

Wed 9 Feb 1994

All: I find Susan Stewart's brief essay in *Profession 93*, "The State of Cultural Theory and the Future of Literary Form," to be pertinent to the issues being discussed hereabouts (Andy Levy brought it to my attention)... It's pretty dense, but it raises some provocative questions, e.g., whether a reexamination of the lyric (of aesthetic form in general) might help to produce a more "dynamic and concrete avenue of activism" for intellectuals looking "to diversify literary representation under the rubric of multiculturalism"...

Joe

From: UBVMS::V139HLA3 9-FEB-1994 18:54:22.99

To:CHARLES

CC:V139HLA3

Subj: improved blanchot response

Response to Blanchot's _The Unavowable Community_

Last week Ron Silliman gave a paper to Joan's seminar using metaphors of superconductor conductivity and electrical resistance to explore the "polylexic" of poetry and community. These two metaphors took off on their own while "community" and "poetry" got lost somewhere in the traditional prose. Two things: I was apprehensive: it seems "poetry" and "community" were made to fit, or even forced into the literary convention of the metaphors -- no matter how skillfully they were deployed (and they were) I was unsettled; the metaphors got us no closer to what was at issue -- nothing was learned about community _or_ superconductors -- I wondered "what next?" and "more". My uneasiness with his talk made me suddenly apprehensive about mapping the structure of media onto Blanchot's meditation on community. "What's the use? What does it do?"

Self and community have a non
-reciprocal but mutual
dependency. The Self can only
feel its solitude in the absence
of community. In this way the
Self is made aware of community
in the presence of its lack. It The Net confirms community in
is solitary only in the the absence of community. Only
remembering of community.ghosts are connected to the
Likewise, community is invoked user. When I sit in front of
holding the hand of the dying --my terminal I can contact
of a dying individual; to invoke anyone in absence. On the Net
it any other way, in speaking it There is, at least for the
for example, is only to invoke time being, a kind of democracy
an _absence_ of community. Here(though only perhaps "an image
is the Communion. But there is of"). Equality is imposed by
something more: the impossible the sameness, or at least
impulse towards equality in the compatibility of the material
face of Self-Other conduit of communication
relationships. (terminal, keyboards, drives,
memory blocks, etc.). But
The act of communicating is there is really only
deadly to its content.a reflexive equality -- who is
"Community" cannot be spoken more the stranger than someone
with intent. Absence is needed you can't see. Nothing is more
to affirm it. The absence of *unavowable* than someone in
content in the ecstasy of shared espace. Emedia is _absolute_
communication. The meaning of absence. There are no deaths
the content only surfaces with a to witness yet the voices it
communal agreement for functional makes audible invoke an
or work related use.overwhelming absence -- all
The unavowable community exists those who can communicate
somehow in the expressionlessness but are not. It is not
of communication. Clarity is to a community dependent on
be eschewed as purposeful, as absence, but is a community
work. "A law which presupposes exclusively _of_ absence.
community (an understanding or
a common accord, be it the "Commodity is spoken in
momentary accord of two singular a clear voice. And
beings, breaking with few words commodification of work(s),
the impossibility of Saying the valuing of labor in the
which the unique trait of measure of money feeds an

experience seems to contain; its inequality that makes a kind
sole content: to be of community utterable in the
untransmittable, which can be form of commerce. Information,
completed thus: the only thing always difficult to commodify
worthwhile is the transmission [*think on the contortions of
of the untransmittable."(17) intellectual property law*],
ironically evades the commodity

Writing must be worklessness. community. It is hard to make
Writing is an action, a verb, it signifies (money). In this way,
not a object; its noun form an information exchange (without
solidifies the community and the communal agreement, but with
for the sake of the community an ecstatic communication, or
must be banished. Blanchot (just ecstasy) is not valuable,
consoles: the object/writing but is the basis of our
is "always already lost". ecommunity. _Nothing_ is
exchanged and our work ethic

Articulatable community produces chides us for it.
friendship and "Friendship calls
upon the community through The writing here is a non-
writing." But this friendship product. It is not consumed.
is only developed in drunkenness The action of writing, the
where "friends disavow their solipsistic ecstasy in the act
previous friendship in order to of writing, is the democracy.
call upon *friendship* And from this emanates the grandiose
(camaraderie without defence of access. Everyone can
preliminaries) vehiculated by and indeed _must_ be an author for
the requirements of being there". the sake of equality and the
When the familiar (ie. the denial of clarity. Graffiti in its
meaning), made so by agreement, self-assertion, in its *Saying as
supplants the unutterable, the all-important thing*, is the only
Blanchot experiences my real forerunner and the paradigm for
uneasiness. In the hurt that true democracy.

he cannot hide, he falls back
into his own textual trap. Yet truer equality is to come in
He resorts to naming and access to experience in only the most
idealization of the real. existential of contemporary ways. In

Virtual reality the Ideal is the perfect
This may inspire groans (or stand-in (not even a substitute)
yawns). It is cliché: "random for the real.... Why do we always
signifiers", "to reveal by smart a bit when the real is
not revealing", "absence is the supplanted? Is it the reduction
core". Need it be said that of experience? Is Violence again

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 9-FEB-1 994 23:45:32.83

15. Martin Spinelli

Poetic Community

how skillfully they were deployed (and they were) I was unsettled; the metaphors got us no closer to what was at issue -- nothing was learned about community _or_ superconductors -- I wondered "what next?" and "more". My uneasiness with his talk made me suddenly apprehensive about mapping the structure of emedia onto Blanchot's meditation on community. "What's the use? What does it do?"

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The act of communicating is there is really only
deadly to its content.a reflexive equality -- who is
"Community" cannot be spoken more the stranger than someone
with intent. Absence is needed you can't see. Nothing is more
to affirm it. The absence of *unavoidable* than someone in
content in the ecstasy of shared space. Emedia is _absolute_
communication. The meaning of absence. There are no deaths
the content only surfaces with a to witness yet the voices it
communal agreement for functional makes audible invoke an
or work related use.overwhelming absence -- all
The unavoidable community exists those who can communicate
somehow in the expressionlessness but are not. It is not
of communication. Clarity is to a community dependent on
be eschewed as purposeful, as absence, but is a community

work. "A law which presupposes exclusively _of_ absence. community (an understanding or a common accord, be it the "Commodity is spoken in momentary accord of two singular a clear voice. And beings, breaking with few words commodification of work(s), the impossibility of Saying the valuing of labor in the which the unique trait of measure of money feeds an experience seems to contain; its inequality that makes a kind sole content: to be of community utterable in the untransmittalbe, which can be form of commerce. Information, completed thus: the only thing always difficult to commodify worthwhile is the transmission [*think on the contortions of of the untransmittable."(17) intellectual property law*], ironically evades the commodity

Writing must be worklessness. community. It is hard to make Writing is an action, a verb, it signify (money). In this way, not a object; its noun form an information exchange (without solidifies the community and the communal agreement, but with for the sake of the community an ecstatic communication, or must be banished. Blanchot just ecstasy) is not valuable, consoles: the object/writing but is the basis of our is "always already lost". ecommunity. _Nothing_ is exchanged and our work ethic

Articulatable community produces chides us for it. friendship and "Friendship calls upon the community through The writing here is a non-writing." But this friendship product. It is not consumed. is only developed in drunkenness The action of writing, the where "friends disavow their solipsistic ecstasy in the act previous friendship in order to of writing, is the democracy. call upon *friendship* And from this emanates the grandiose (camaraderie without defence of access. Everyone can preliminaries) vehiculated by and indeed _must_ be an author for the requirements of being there". the sake of equality and the When the familiar (ie. the denial of clarity. Graffiti in its meaning), made so by agreement, self-assertion, in its *Saying as supplants the unutterable, the all-important thing*, is the only Blanchot experiences my real forerunner and the paradigm for uneasiness. In the hurt that true democracy. he cannot hide, he falls back into his own textual trap. Yet truer equality is to come in He resorts to naming and access to experience in only the most

idealization of the real. existential of contemporary ways. In

Virtual reality the Ideal is the perfect
This may inspire groans (or stand-in (not even a substitute)
yawns). It is cliché: "random for the real.... Why do we always
signifiers", "to reveal by smart a bit when the real is
not revealing", "absence is the supplanted? Is it the reduction
core". Need it be said that of experience? Is Violence again
they are necessarily done?
impossibilities (oxymoronic) in
their articulations in (yet my writing and your
language? In the end Blanchot reading is real. they are
almost warns of the spaces of experiential. a change in
"freedom" inbetween the workthinking about the real is needed.
and the unwork. And says they there is nothing virtual in my
carry with them (*signify*fingers on the keys, electrical
almost) "responsibilities" for resistance in silicon, or your
"new relationships". eyes on the monitor.

I want to ask "Where do we progress to from here?" "What comes next?"
"What now?" What goes >>> HERE <<< ? There is a certain presumption in
these questions, and in the word "new". *New* does not interest me, getting at
the latent does, as does getting at our material relations to the things we have.
Have I also exposed an attachment to the real? From: IN%"██████" "UB
Poetics discussion group" 10-FEB-1 994 10:41:25.17

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16. Patrick Phillips

"911"

Thu 10 Feb 1994

Ben, I hope you see my point bout reflection concerning texts like "Testimony."
On the other hand I have been reflecting on the social and cultural/ideological
crossfire situated by Rezinkof's choice of "examples," his choice of line breaks,
his use of language and have begun to wonder at what length we have to go to
get to these cultural intersections that are quite different from the
"experiential" brought to the fore in texts like IM. (I have a cold right now and
don't have a lot of faith in the sense I'm making, so I hope this erads.) Anyhoo,
the social currents instigated in "Testimony" come from a different place,
exterior, as examples, yet they are pervasive; we have to go out to get at what's
in. This movement also provides a motivated critique, but I'm not sure that it
doesn't remain captured as in some amber, a specimin. I'm also not sure
whether this virtual litho-graphy is not the way we process things anyway. The
constant conundrum of speculative existence. Just to say, I'm not excluding the

variorum of experience, how we process dictum, how we think alike, how we take in the scene. From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 10-FEB-1 1994 21:18:11.37

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17. **Benjamin Friedlander**

RE: "911"

Thu 10 Feb 1994

Patrick, this is my first attempt to make use of the "reply" function of this system & to play with the so-called "chevrons"--I hope this doesn't go through all wampy-jawed. Anyway, with that proviso, let me try to address your last two posts. In "THE SOCIO-POLITICAL WARD" you say, to explain your preference for *Imaginary Movie* over *Testimony*, "It's often difficult to go back and forth between experience and culture this way [i.e., as you do "reading" Diane Ward's work] with poetry that is declarative." Leaving aside for the moment your characterization of *Testimony* as being "declarative," and leaving aside also the distinction between "experience" and "culture"--I think I agree in principle with both of those assumptions but find them too limited in practice--the point seems to be that the reader's options with regard to a critical engagement with *Testimony* are limited by the visceral impact of the work. Now, under the heading "911," you elaborate by writing:

>[...] I have been reflecting on the social and
> cultural/ideological crossfire situated by Reznikoff's choice of "examples,"
> his choice of line breaks, his use of language and have begun to wonder at
> what length we have to go to get to these cultural intersections that are
> quite different from the "experiential" brought to the fore in texts like
> IM. [...]

[...] the social currents instigated in
> "Testimony" come from a different place, exterior, as examples, yet they
> are pervasive; we have to go out to get at what's in. [...]

I gather you're saying that the complexity of Reznikoff's work (marked by the elaborate artistry of "choice," which hides as artlessness, the basic view of *Testimony* so far as I can tell from the little bit of the literature on it I've seen--Charles Bernstein's recent *Sulfur* essay being a notable exception) corresponds in some way with the elaborate "overlays" (as I believe you termed them) of Ward's *Imaginary Movie*. With this you're establishing an equivalence of sorts between the two--a safeguard in some way from the charge that you are disparaging Reznikoff--while preserving the distinction you insist on between a text based on the "interior" and one based on the "exterior." Am I reading you right? That the "social currents" of *Imaginary Movie* are

"instigated" (nice word!) from within, directed *at* the reader, who is the text's exteriority, while the social concern of *Testimony* somehow enters the poem (as if it wasn't there all along!) from this same place where the reader resides. I think you can see right away the problem I would have with that description of *Testimony*:

That the distinction between the outside and the inside of the poem doesn't hold up once you begin to speak of reference.

That the mechanics of this reference--by which I mean the poem's relationship with its exteriority--are not sufficiently explained in terms of "crossfire."

That the role of the reader as an *intelligence*, though it is assumed, is not explored. And that there can be no real understanding of reference without such an exploration.

That the very notion of "declarative" assumes a communication between individuals, and until we address the particular character of this communication in *Testimony* we will not progress very far in understanding just what sort of social concern this poem expresses.

That it is only by carefully observing how the poem utilizes *our* intelligence that we can begin to glimpse the intelligence of the poem itself (a formulation I prefer to, but for which you might substitute, the more vexed phrase "intention of the author").

What's noteworthy to me is that you have gone to great lengths to provide this sort of "testimony" (if I might put it so) to the process of reading Diane Ward's work, while relying in your characterizations of Reznikoff on more or less superficial impressions. I don't say this to knock you--not at all--I'm struck that even the best readers of *Testimony* (Milton Hindus, for instance), despite the evidence of their own research, offer what seem to me superficial descriptions of what *reading* Reznikoff requires. Here again Charles B's essay is an exception--and though I find his imputation of opacity with regard to Reznikoff's *language* to be a bit bizarre, what he says about prying *words* open does I think speak very cogently to the *composition* of Reznikoff's work. Well, let that hurried depiction of the essay stand for now.

Tried to get in tonight to hear Khalid Abdul Mohammad (the Nation of Islam guy) but they ran out of tickets. I'll let this drop here for now, go on to dinner. See ya-- Ben From: IN% " "UB Poetics discussion group" 11-FEB-1994 17:10:33.93

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18. **cy6440%albnyvms.bitnet**

Poetic Community

Fri 11 Feb 1994

Martin,

In your Blanchot Response you clearly outline my understanding of a brief entrance I made into "The Unavowable Community" which came about when Pierre Joris who translated this text moved to Albany to teach.

You touch in detail on some of the concerns I hold on to as I continue to participate in these virtual communities of oversensitive? or are we overlyInvolved readers of peers, teachers, & by consequence at times, close friends.

What we have in common is that we are taking our writing as our writing to one another SERIOUSLY.

One could consider in doing a kind of personal spreadsheet the extent to which one can r e a l l y speak thoroughly about what one is reading or writing TO s o m e o n e in a given {life}{time}.

What I notice in my own emulations, my "addresses" on the Net, is the bold arrogance which dominates as commotion: the hope that I have something to say to -----> & it is disturbing.

for ex to -----> you

Probably, I don't.

Probably,

"this is just to say"

"I'm sorry I ate...'your Blanchot Response'

"it was so cold & ..."

SO

to appreciate your "reading" - in particular your recognition of the "graffiti" (SELF- assertion), your skepticism about "democracy" in electronic writing, your willingness to take an almost (Feminist?) stance here & a minute to talk about how we talk here

My additional curiosity is about to whom we choose to reply to on the Net as well as why we talk in certain tropes = attitudes From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 11-FEB-1 994 20:12:12.32

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19. **Benjamin Friedlander** **"in time"**

Fri 11 Feb 1994

keith waldrop cited or mis-cited or whatever by jean-luc nancy is old news. i've found something even stranger. there is a copy of robert kelly's **in time** (frontier press, 1971) in rodolphe gasche's office, alongside--speaking figuratively--robert heinlein's **i will fear no evil**, several many volumes of lukacs (in german and in english, all so pristine as to seem unopened, if not unread--but even that he **has** them is amazing), & what looks like a full run from the '70s of **tdr**. i mention only the more peculiar offerings of course. but for those who may be contemplating some version of "rudy's marginalia," i think this kelly connection may be significant. who said there was no poetry after mallarme?

b.f.

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1994 11:26:12.14

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20. **Loss Glazier** **rudy's marginalia**

Sat 12 Feb 1994

Ben, I'm a little curious about "rudy's marginalia." Is this an observation on "the order of things"? Or is it because I have no sense of what the "Kelly connection" constitutes? -- Loss From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1994 12:42:36.25

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21. **Loss Glazier** **"Community"**

Sat 12 Feb 1994

The idea of a listserv as constituting "community" poses problems. First, in that a listserv is "virtual," i.e., we are not really "there." In this regard, a community is almost always defined by location. Secondly, most definitions of community imply a sense of commitment--to take this further, I would say entrapment, ie, if you think of a Blue Ridge mountain community, most people don't have the mobility or means to move. "There" is fixed; its participants are fixed--for better or worse. An electronic list implies no commitment whatsoever: any person can unplug at any time; the largest percentage of any list does not participate but stands in the shadows examining the record of the conversation. To say that we

have in common taking each writer's writing seriously is a kind thought. I hope it's true--but is no ground to call this endeavor a "community." (Your name, the name of the sender of the second "community" message, is even unknown / undecipherable.) The idea of an electronic democracy is probably the least tenable of these ideas, just about as true as an other so-called "democracy" ie, a place where people who have power are equal does not argue for equality for all people. So, what then, would we call this? From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1 994 12:42:37.80

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22. Benjamin Friedlander

r's m

Sat 12 Feb 1994

loss, no connection that i can cite, no order of things save the disorder of bookshelves in an office. rodolphe's marginalia is no more existent a project than the tain of melville, just a happy joke on all of us who thought gasche didn't care for poetry. maybe he doesn't, maybe he does. i found it funny in any case to find robert kelly there, in *that* office-- the *only* poet whose work i happened to see. read or unread i can't say. but from a superficial glance (honestly, i wasn't snooping--one of the comp lit grad students, stephen gingerich, is using that office this year while gasche's on leave; steve & I had a brief conversation about what was & wasn't on the shelf), the only books that *really* looked read, dog-eared in other words, were the sci fi novels--not just heinlein but zelazny too. of course, i know he reads zelazny because there's a quote from z at the head of one of g's essays in *glyph* (maybe the *moby-dick* essay!). presumably, however, gasche's library at home is where the marginalia's scribbled, the intimate secrets of reading which susan howe is drawn to in melville. & seriously, i meant it all as a joke--a good-natured one. the waldrop sighting too. ben From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1 994 13:14:31.73

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23. Steve Evans

The Social Poem: for the record

Sat 12 Feb 1994

The recent exchange of posts on Diane Ward's *Imaginary Movie* and on the social poem has added a valuable dimension to my thinking this past week, so let me first register the gratitude I feel towards those who have participated. As the topic evolves, it appears that a hasty response I wrote privately to Patrick on 1 Feb. has come to produce a few effects--through its cited and

implied presence at certain stages of his sustained posting to the list on 2 Feb.-- within the ensuing discussion. I had hoped to avoid entering this space on what could be construed as a sour note, since my initial response to *IM* was not a positive one, but I think now that it would be better to trust that P's indefatigable, meticulous, and generous (though I must add, also terminologically baffling) practice of "sounding" Ward's work will more than compensate for whatever criticisms I first thought to advance.

The following two paragraphs, then, are "for the record." I have omitted one unsympathetic comment that concerned the presentation of the work by Potes & Poets Press, otherwise I have avoided the impulse to amend or elaborate these comments. Because I do, however and alas, have more to say, I will tax everyone's patience with a second posting that will follow on the heels of this one.

ORIGINAL NOTE:

Dear Patrick (please note the ungodly hour at which I composing this [it was two in the morning]):

Just a quick note to see if I can draw you out on the title poem of the book you will be discussing on Wednesday. I read the poem this evening, aloud, and gave some thought to it. But I must admit, it felt more like anemic cinema than imaginary movie. Jen tells me that this book, and specifically this poem, has been an important one for you, and I trust that this means I am missing something. Technically, the repeated six-line stanzars struck me as only erratically interesting as a unit of composition: the stakes are low, mistakes are hard to discern (can they be made?). Less sonically engaging than, say, some of the work in couplets in *Relation.* A certain, quite familiar, indistinction at the level of lexicon: I'll trade the whole gamut of pronouns (the deployment of which strikes me as tired even in Ashbery) for a few committing descriptives (but then I like Reznikoff and O'Hara because I like the social as a field of intervention). Though I can anticipate certain points of contact with a theoretical apparatus (most obviously, of course, feminist film theory circa Mulvey), which, patiently articulated, would "fill out" the poem, I am concerned for both the poem's and the theory's autonomy: there is a trace of what Barthes called "the blackmail of theory" (i.e. here's an aesthetic object such as your theory predicts for) here.

Which is not to put you, or the poem for that matter, on the defensive. I'm just ticking down a list of resistances that are more likely to originate in my hasty and perhaps insufficiently attentive reading than in the text. What I could use is some "testimony" regarding the coordinates you've found to provide a thicker and more moving engagement with the poem. Estrin's public/ private remark doesn't help me so far: much too sweeping and indiscriminate to provide

guidance (what isn't appropriable under this rubric?). Ditto the concept of *politics* (and for the same reason). [following this, some pleasantries in the original have been omitted]

But enough, I do hope you're well, and that my remarks will not seem to require undue cognitive regression on your part in order to answer them. /S.

END ORIGINAL NOTE

From: IN% " "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1994 13:17:52.74

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24. **Steve Evans**

The Social Poem

Sat 12 Feb 1994

I want to follow up on my posting "for the record" with a few thoughts that are perhaps a little more substantial. In light of the postings by Juliana, Ben, Kenneth, and Patrick himself, it would appear that the salient moment in my private reply to Patrick is the somewhat flippant graph of my own value-constellation represented by the claim that "I would trade the whole gamut of pronouns...for a few committing descriptives (but then I like Reznikoff and O'Hara because I like the social as a field of intervention)." Upon consideration, I think this largely gestural move on my part introduces some untenable polarizations (Ward vs. Reznikoff & O'Hara; lexical indeterminacy vs. social commitment). In brief, I throw down a gauntlet that I feel fairly certain none of us on this list would consent to run. But if there is something redeemable in this remark, it might be in the connection (albeit so enjambed as to be indiscernible) between "value" and the "social."

My thinking in this area owes a debt to Bakhtin/Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship,* and especially to the discussion of "social evaluation" that is found on pages 119-28. I will excerpt just three claims made in this book. First, and mainly as a corrective to personalizing the theme of value, I would recall their statement that "the notion that evaluation is an individual act is widespread in contemporary 'Lebensphilosophy,' and leads to conclusions no less false. Evaluation is social; it organizes inter-course" (126). The second claim is perhaps more specifically relevant to our discussion. M/B argue that "social evaluation is needed to turn a grammatical possibility into a concrete fact of speech reality" (123), basing this on their premise that "the utterance is not a physical body and not a physical process" [something some of us might wish to contest, certainly], but rather "a historical event, albeit an infinitesimal one. Its individuality is that of a historical achievement in a definite epoch under definite social conditions" (121). Finally, because it serves

to indicate their more general take on "value" and its relation to "formal" decisions, there are the following sentences: "Social evaluation organizes how we see and conceptualize the event being communicated, for we only see and conceptualize what interests or affects us [or as Stein says: It is very likely that nearly everyone has been very nearly certain that something that is interesting is interesting them]. Social evaluation also organizes the forms by which the event is communicated: the arrangement of the material into digressions, returns, repetitions, etc., is permeated with the single logic of social evaluations" (127).

M/B conceive of "social value" as the medium that pervades, supports, and constrains the generation of specific meanings from the field of linguistic (or grammatical) possibilities. It is their answer to the question of why such a limited number of linguistic combinations result in the production of "sense" (and thus to the opposition of narrow vs. broad band that Pat termed "reading" v. "sounding"). Zukofsky had, I think, something similar going on when he wrote: "_Impossible_ to communicate anything but particulars-- historic and contemporary--things, human beings as things their instrumentalities of capillaries and veins binding up and bound up with events and The revolutionary word if it must revolve cannot escape having a reference. It is not infinite. Even the infinite is a term" ("An Objective" in **Prepositions** 16).

My answer to Ben's question of "what is the social poem" would then be: that poetic practice which proceeds by "particulars" as they circulate in the social medium of value. There are other media, other practices, other ways of fashioning the particular. There are words that wobble out of orbit and **do** escape having a reference (or at least first order reference, though they are usually recuperated at the level of the social through categories like "nonsense," "difficult writing," "writing elites do and I don't understand," etc.). To pick up on Juliana's list of people thinking about this question, I think Bruce Andrews calls this "horizoning" in his **Politics of Poetic Form** essay (Roof 1990). In short, I recognize the "unframed field of approximate signs" (as Patrick so memorably puts it) as a possibility of writing, but as a possibility that the "social poem" as I understand it refuses to convert into an end in itself.

I would attribute Patrick's provocative unwillingness to distinguish between **Testimony** and **Rescue 911** to an unwillingness to conceptualize social value (though as Peter Gizzi pointed out to me, the word "rescue" does resonate in Reznikoff's project, though more in a Benjaminian direction of "redemptive critique" than in the frame of network television, which is directly where my students took it also when I taught Rez's book last semester). So many decisive levels of mediation are manhandled in this analogy that I doubt Patrick would "upon reflection" stand by it. Likewise,

though, the concept of "reflection" as he uses it fails to distinguish between the hyper-presentation of a presence (i.e. contemporary barbarism ala Cops & Rescue 911) and Reznikoff's preserving of an absent present through testimony (i.e. a project oriented to the redemption of historic and contemporary suffering, always *particular* in Zuk's sense). The eerie affectlessness of much of *Testimony* couldn't be further from the adrenaline-soaked stimulations of exploitation t.v. Nor is the "exhortation" dogmatic; it is ethical in any meaningful sense of that term.

I apologize for the length of this posting, which exceeds by several screens my own e-mail attention span (unless I download, print out, and thereby re-establish the space of reading as I've previously known it...). It's just that these topics are central to my own thinking, and to the values that direct that thinking: poetry and social emancipation.

From under a lot of snow..., and noticing that everyone's posting today....

Steve

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1994 14:46:08.00

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25. **Loss Glazier**

RE: r's m

Sat 12 Feb 1994

ben, i guess actually understtod t'was in jest, though something that intrigues me is the relation of science fiction to all this and especially that science fiction, which once held as its location outer space, has now penetrated the "inner reaches," ie the field of computers. To discover it as the marginalia of those bookshelves is interesting, methings. loss From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1994 14:05:29.15

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26. **Joe Amato**

RE: "Community"

Sat 12 Feb 1994

Loss, I've just gotta jump in here with some friendly amendments to your last one...

Note Howard Rheingold's recent book on virtual community, worth taking a look at... Howard had sent me an earlier essay (over the nets) in which he'd argued, in effect, pretty much the same thing: to paraphrase (and too hastily)

that these "places" are altering what "community" is and can be, and that they most assuredly will not be w/o their problems...

I'd argue that lists and the like begin to take on a more stable sense of "community" (whatever we mean by same) once folks find ways to complement same by meeting in the flesh---conferences, gatherings, snmail, what have you... Surely some of you folks at Buffalo see one another ftf, hence the list works somewhat differently for you than for many of us outside your geographical environs...

In any case, I would argue against simply conceding that older notions of "community" must dominate these regions (and some of this slippage can be pursued alphabetically), even as I would concur that we would do well, as you suggest, to continue to challenge the (communal?) basis of these our 'exchanges'...

Joe

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1994 13:26:28.57

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27. **Kenneth Sherwood**

RE: "Community"

Sat 12 Feb 1994

Since Loss and I have actually *spoken* of this notion "community", I feel compelled here to insert some form of response. But first, must we assume that the quality of this "compulsion" reflects Loss's geographic proximity: just outside of shouting distance?

That the idea of electronic communities poses problems, I will not dispute, yet I cannot abide the implied distinction between "virtual" and "real" as pivoting at "committment".

While we are not compelled to any poetics@ubvm committment, many here writing have demonstrated a significant concentration of effort to address fellow participants, an *integrity* of engagement which, in fact, may exceed that displayed in the communities cited as authentic.

I will want to STEP HEAVILY on fact of this "community" and membership/participation/spectatorship as specifically NOT grounded in entrapment. The unmotivated, intense character of exchanges here indeed distinguishes it as a poetic community.

I think it's mistaken to ground "community" merely in shared circumstances of geography, since the 'situations' of this list's members has and continues to propose relationships of an equal or stronger INVESTMENT.

(ps: Loss, the sender of the second community message was Katie Yates)

...dee dee,
dee dum...
... it's a small world
after all....

Kenneth Sherwood | "Fragments are
[REDACTED] | our wholes"
RIF/T (e-poetry@ubvm) |--Clark Coolidge

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1
994 14:08:02.92

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28. **Pierre Joris**
RE: "Community"

Sat 12 Feb 1994

Maybe the internet community -- & I do think there can be/ maybe even is/ such a thing is the kind of community Blanchot speaks of, via, thru & around Bataille, when he suggests the possibility of a "community of those who have no community."

=====
===== Pierre Joris| Je ne connais pas d'autre
grace que celle Dept. of English |d'etre ne. (I know no other grace than the
SUNY Albany |grace of having been born) Albany NY 12222 |
tel&fax:[REDACTED]| Isidore Ducasse aka Comte de Lautreamont
=====
===== From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics
discussion group" 12-FEB-1 994 16:32:51.57

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29. Loss Glazier

RE: "Community"

Sat 12 Feb 1994

First, Ken's objection, I cannot abide the implied distinction between "virtual" and "real" as pivoting at "commitment" requires brief clarification, that is that this distinction does not pivot on "commitment," but pivots on physical proximity, "entrapment," as I penned it, also to the objection: I will want to STEP HEAVILY on fact of this "community" and membership/participation/spectatorship as specifically NOT grounded in entrapment. But in this objection, perhaps is a key. I think of membership, participation, and spectatorship as all being very relevant terms to describe what we here engage in. That is, membership, as if a club (again contrasted to the idea of democracy)--also invoking exclusivity, participation--a kind of virtual intramurals, (doesn't that mean "outside the walls"?), and spectatorship (somehow, Christians being fed to lions come to mind, especially with the theme of redemption that was floating here some time back, though perhaps it would be more benign to think again in terms of intramural sports.) (Perhaps a relevant metaphor, except we might not be "coached"--but think in terms of doing outside class time, of doing it voluntarily, of its being a forum to sharpen our technical/theoretical skills). I understand that my choice of word, entrapment, is somewhat adversarial, yet the point is not needless controversy but a resistance to the LULL of romanticized notions of communality. (That is, common effort, common ends, shared means. Not irrelevant thinking perhaps of communes in the Sixties and whether or not these generated new social forms. Contrasting Sixties communes perhaps, with underground newspapers--which invoked no sense of community but of statement, that is, words, generated with somewhat common goals but always typified by divergent approaches to said goals.) How can geography be so important? We are physical beings, not virtual ones. I think of Joe's statement, that lists are made more real once folks find ways to complement same by meeting in the flesh--conferences, gatherings, snmail... and think that this is not untrue, in fact desirable, but casual (vs. causal); take for instance how well people get along with their siblings when they no longer live at home. Communities also involve a degree of isolation, as a group. Think of prairie communities in the old west, or think of Jonestown, Waco, the Manson family. (Of course these are "religious," again an invocation to redemption and the Word.) Regarding Pierre's suggestion, Maybe the internet community -- & I do think there can be/ maybe even is/ such a thing is the kind of community Blanchot speaks of, via, thru & around Bataille, when he suggests the possibility of a "community of those who have no community." I might suggest the *impossible* nature of such, that is: (1) if you can only be a member of a community once you have no

community, then (2) you have a community so then (3) you are therefore no longer without community then (4) you are thus exiled from the community of which you have just become a member. Obviously, Ken's and my efforts in RIF/T focus at a common place in voice or literary idea. Perhaps there is a difference with a list--so I will not blur the discussion by referring to the electronic journal. And obviously (perhaps Blanchot's statement refers more to) the *yearning* for community--which may possibly never be attained. This discussion may all hinge on a definition of community. And we may choose to define it to suit our criteria. Even so, what makes this different than an intramural sport? It's not the "integrity of engagement" because that exists in other venues which would in no way aspire to community status. What makes us aspire to regard ourselves as community? Ken, you suggest that The unmotivated, intense character of exchanges here indeed distinguishes it as a poetic community. and yet this takes place in political debates, in Sproul Plaza at UC Berkeley, (and what's that corner of is it--Hyde Park?--in London) and there's no aspiration to community. I only pose this because I'd like to get a finger on it. "Poetic community" eludes me. Was this list a community when it was rather inactive? What if everyone unsubscribes tomorrow? Though I too would like the comfort of being part of a better whole, I don't exactly see the point where these aspirations converge...or if they ever can converge.

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1 994 21:23:38.60

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30. **Benjamin Friedlander**

the social poem

Sat 12 Feb 1994

Steve, I have what I suppose must be an antinomian streak that forces me, often against my will, to take issue with positions that in fact attract me a great deal. Something of the sort occurs now, reading your eminently useful contribution to the discussion of the social poem. Take issue with is too strong--to question, and so, perhaps, modify.

What you say about value seems both right and necessary. The implications with regard to our discussion are significant. That evaluation is a social form, an activity whose meaning and whose value, constituting an "historical event," is *objective* (in a sense that clarifies what Zukofsky and Reznikoff had in common as "objectivists," i.e., more than some sentimental attachment to Pound's dictum "direct treatment of the thing"), that the subjective is therefore no less "objective" than those forms of evaluation which *call* themselves objective (i.e., that subjectivity no less than objectivity has a social content and a political form), that the individual is derived from the social and not the other

way around--these are all helpful correctives to the "untenable polarizations" (as you put it) that at every turn threaten to undermine discussions of poetry, to turn discussion into an argument between schools. Not that there aren't differences between Ward and Reznikoff--of course there are--but that the differences we have been attempting to identify as essential *between* their projects occur first of all *within* them.

To take one example: if "social value" is "the medium that pervades, supports, and constrains the generation of specific meanings from the field of linguistic (or grammatical) possibilities," then the "social value" of Reznikoff's *Testimony* will be most directly evident in those places where his actions are ostensibly *individual*--his choices, his juxtapositions, the ways he alters the original material. The "social value" of the material itself, which we might naively assume to be an unmediated glimpse at the United States, is in fact measurable only by way of a regression to the archimedean point of individuality where the social first allows itself to be glimpsed. To take the social content of the poem as an *un*mediated view of the social field out of which the poem is lifted would be to forget that the social *is* mediation. (And in this forgetting the "eerie affectlessness of much of *Testimony*" begins to be felt.) The poem thus flips the relation we might expect to find between the social and the individual: "outside" the poem, the individual is a construct of the social; "inside," the social is a construct of the individual. This is not to insist, however, on a dichotomy between inside and outside--or rather, it's to insist that the dichotomy occurs equally on both sides of the mythical boundary that the dichotomy is said to put into effect. NOT that *Imaginary Movie* works from within while *Testimony* works from without, but that in each work a dynamic is established between inner and outer, subjective and objective, social and personal. The singularity of the poem rests precisely here, in the character of the dynamic that governs the poem's meaning.

Or if I might say that again, a little more simply, the distinction between individual and social *has* to occur *within* the poem, in order for the poem to be intelligible according to *either* category. That, in any case, is the logic of Bakhtin/Medvedev's formula, which conceives of individuality as an historical achievement, a social form.

And it's in light of this analysis that I feel drawn to question your definition of the social poem. Much as I share the values that your definition privileges--"poetic practice which proceeds by 'particulars' as they circulate in the social medium of value"--I wonder that the emphasis on "particulars" doesn't attempt to establish yet another dichotomy between poems that only makes sense within them, here between the particular and the general. You refer, of course, to "other media, other practices, other ways of fashioning the particular" (but since these would have to be circulations in a "medium of

value" other than the social, I wonder what they can be), and you refer also to poetic practices "that wobble out of orbit and *do* escape having a reference" (and you qualify this, but again I wonder what sort of work you are referring to--and I wonder also at the equation of particularity with reference).

Nevertheless, I think the upholding of particularity as opposed to generality--or to be more accurate, a *proceeding* by particularity instead of generality--only makes sense if "as opposed to" is understood as occurring *IN* the poem. And if that's the case, then the generality is as essential as the particularity. And isn't that in fact the case in *every* poem? For surely there are no purely particularist or purely generalizing poetries...

This isn't simply a matter of logics and abstract argumentation. *Something* occurs in Reznikoff that seems to both of us illuminating about poetry in general and the social poem in particular. For both of us, the specificity of Reznikoff's content and the redemptive quality of his formal appropriations of that content are not only striking but exemplary. I would want to say, however, that too great an emphasis on the historical moment *Testimony* enshrines and on the apparent lack of mediation in the poem's presentation of this moment blinds us to the insistent leveling of particularity that also occurs, and the shrewd, often polemical presence of the author in the ways this leveling is interrupted. It's interesting that my students last week noted first of all--somewhat complainingly-- the repetitiousness of the book, the endless permutations of violence and neglect was "predictable," they said. We spent a lot of time talking about courts and law and what testimony is in *that* context, and after a while they grasped that not all testimony is true. They began to notice, also, Reznikoff's sarcasm, and the fact that not all meets the eye in these stories. Of course this only annoys them further since if there's anything they hate more than the depressing it's the subtle--*Testimony* being both. All of which is to say that the particularity has meaning above all because of the clarity with which Reznikoff organizes it conceptually.

I could say more about *Testimony* in this regard, but the message is long enough. A quote then from Charles Bernstein's *Sulfur* essay:

I've been told that Reznikoff disliked obscurity and would certainly not have wanted his work to be characterized as obscure. Yet Reznikoff, from the beginning, seemed to expect that obscurity was the likely outcome for his poetic work and seemed to accept that with remarkable equanimity. Perhaps he understood the nature, the social structure, of obscurity better than his contemporaries. Neglect, disregard--the socially obscure, the forgotten and repressed, the overlooked--this was his subject.

Hiding in plain sight you may never be found: if sight is not to "See by but to look at," not to use but behold.

I like that.

Ben F.

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 12-FEB-1 994 22:48:46.03

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31. **Benjamin Friedlander**
marginalia

Sat 12 Feb 1994

loss, it finally sunk in. i hadn't quite grasped the double meaning of marginalia, illustrated rather nicely by the shelves in gasche's office: myself meant the comments scribbled in the margins of a book (sheltered at home), you meant the marginal items in the library (consigned to the office). ah, why am i so slow? (as pere ubu once sang...) ben From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 13-FEB-1 994 02:51:27.34

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32. **Mn Ctr for Book Arts**
RE: "Community"

Sun 13 Feb 1994

Loss, I would agree that a list-serve, or any other kind of group connected by its own whim to sit at a terminnal as well as the current technology (which is never current) is not a "community" in the sense of a Blue Ridge Mountain or north Central Wisconsin Amish or many other non-mobile communities, I wonder why you think that the definition of "community" should not grow to encompass current groupings. I'm not against calling it something else, but I also don't really see the need for a new coinage & am sometimes distrustful of such. From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 13-FEB-1 994 10:13:33.24

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33. **Jed**
RE: "Community"

Sun 13 Feb 1994

Does "community" involve companionship? Or may it simply consist of collective anonymity? In the strictly civic sense of vernacular usage, community means little more than the aggregate of people and activities that bring them momenta

They all have, in some form or another a "real" material presence -- Yes, they are not transparent like anything dependent on the casual agreements of language, they are mediated, but they are no less real.

We are all **really** here with our **real** eyes reading from our **real** monitors at our **real** keyboards banging away at the keys (perhaps with, as Katie suggests, intensity, sensitivity, and seriousness).

Whether this is

"munity"

COM mitment

munication

doesn't really hold my interest. What I am trying to get at, what I tried to suggest in my first post, was that the unreflexive use of the word "virtual" ("not quite as good as", pejorative less or unequal, or even suggesting the existence of an "Originary") to describe what we're doing has some *real* dangers.

"Virtual" carries with it the kind of implicit indictment that resonates in the voices of our "being-there" mates and companions:

"How much time can you spend doing 'that'?"

"You're not done with the phone yet?!?"

Quotes"" are always cold
and only make me more hungry

--martin

[illegible]

{at this point in his original post Martin repeats Loss's previous message; I have deleted this. --The List Owner} From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 13-FEB-1 994 22:20:39.85

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36. Pierre Joris

RE: "Community"

Sun 13 Feb 1994

Tom & Pierre's stuff on community:

Here a communal post, collaged from a couple e-mail exchanges between Tom Mandel & Pierre Joris. Following Pierre's posting of the Blanchot quote, Tom e-

mailed him both to get back in touch after a few years & to continue the exchange on community. Pierre answered, Tom too & they culled from the private e-mail what they thought could be usefully shared with the net community on the subject of community.

"Community! -- Well, the first para of your e-mail shld/cld have been posted to the POETICS List, while the 2nd was clearly to me & so you e-mailed the whole to me. Which makes for at least 2 community tiers on the net: those who don't know each other otherwise than through the discussion threads, & those who have known each other face to face. Or at least some such division exists to begin with, though it may alter. In that sense the net-community is again like many other communities, composed of different intensities, different vectors. All this seems rather banal... Mut maybe we should post the non-personalized parts of these 2 email messages to the POETICS list? Or speak there to this tiered affair?"

"... a community also of those not known to each other, of the unknown; and, it is interesting to watch a range of behaviors develop among people unbounded by outcomes of close living. On the one hand a kind of intimacy and relaxation, on the other... frivolousness? would that be the right word? At the very place in an expression where it most ought to matter what one is saying, there seems to rise a "not-mattering" often, so often, rendering discourse subtractive rather than additive. Perhaps "the gift" is after all basic to communities and not present in this one. It's hard to take anything away from these postings, a thing useful I mean."

"But perhaps we should go ahead, and include my remarks in this paragraph and just the (kind of obvious) further remark that "community" with its "commonality" and its "unity" in it only *has to* mean people unified by something they have in common, and in common are usually both social thematics and a dwelling place. These two are usually also two sides of the same coin (i.e. a town spread around a church). In the case of the net, the two are moved apart: the medium of communication is not the reason we are in communication.

Most communities also involve a kind of discipline as to the outcomes of anyone's contributions. It matters in immediate ways what you say in a real-world community, because of the multiple intersecting relations one has with everybody. If you argue with the butcher in church, you may not get the best cut of meat across the next-time counter, right? And more serious versions of this. The net community, with its abstraction of the context/contact layer, makes for a simpler and more unidimensional community, and also means that there's less at stake in what anyone says; this leads to a sense of experimentalism wch is great, and it also leads to pushing "d" for delete very

very often, and that takes care of that. Again, without much consequence. Perhaps, the net is more like Goethe's term: elective affinities. A version of acquaintanceship and even (argh) professionalism. Is the poetics forum more like a convention than a community. That's it! It's a virtual convention!"

```
=====
===== Pierre Joris| Je ne connais pas d'autre
grace que celle Dept. of English |d'etre ne. (I know no other grace than the
SUNY Albany |grace of having been born) Albany NY 12222 |
tel&fax: [REDACTED]| Isidore Ducasse aka Comte de Lautreamont
=====
===== From: IN%" [REDACTED]" "UB Poetics
discussion group" 13-FEB-1 994 23:23:16.91
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37. **Patrick Phillips**
The Wobbly Social Poem
Sun 13 Feb 1994

I continue this personal/community fold (developed further by Steve's unmasking of the "unnamed interlocutor") with yet another public/private posting. This is an excerpt of one I sent to Ben in response to his "re: "911" on Feb 10.

Ben

I'm **becoming** interested in the difference between the two examinations and not so much interested in the **equivalence** (A safeguard indeed, but it would be a poor one under any thoughtful look-see!) My surface casting, the superficiality, is due to my beginning, that I ain't done much thinking about the Rez/Ward issue as I've set it up. You bring up a **vital** situation in talking of intelligence, I prefer reconnaissance. When it comes to reference under this kind of mission, I need some brooding -- not so much what kind of thoughts I spy, but what ideas hatch. I'll sit on this one a coupla days, 'll have another look at Charles's piece and we'll see what comes up....

Snowing like a dandruff commercial --

Pat

The exposure of a personal/public here speaks on at least a coupla fronts. One is as a formal gesture toward "the other" conversation on "community." Another, and the one I'll attend directly to, is a notion of frame, or field. My desire, as Steve suggests, not to "conceptualize a notion of social value" is so bound in my appreciation of unframed field of approximate signs that some people may see this as a destabilization of particulars. That this destabilization could in turn lead to the demise of a critique, even my own sense (or lack

thereof) of contiguity, and could thereby promote an ugly conjunction of "911" and *Testimony*. In the terms of the political question arises: How can a critical theory lack a *particular* ideological framework and is it this a lack of particularity that conjoins such things? Although the first part of the question is somehow more interesting it is the second part that I think has more relevance in terms of the "social poem." (For some reason this idea, the "social poem," seems anemic, like generic drug; something's hiding in there.)

On the surface of things, like words, I "wobble out of orbit," often as a matter of course. In my wobble the terms of argument become indiscrete; however, this is not to say that this wobbling undermines my reference, nor does this wobble undermine a word's reference. Here lies the kicker. At what point does this wobble become an element of theory distracted from the social discourse (a point brought up in Steve's initial personal, now public post)? And at what point is this wobble a "social evaluation." My wobble is social, not theoretical. Its point of arrival is quite close to its point of departure. It would appear that this is an important point, one that in my book is an edge of confluence which resists conceptualization, but one which is constantly demanding it.

Here's one of the reasons I included that "private" post. What I've just begun to try to uncover are the similarities in the expedient forms in *Imaginary Movie* and *Testimony*. What are the motives, how are texts, words motivated in spite and because of their wobble. *Testimony* veils a culture just out of reach both temporally (the turn of the century) and, spatially through the constantly misplaced modifier ("The *United* States"). This veil positions the reader, creates a point of reference from which judgements are made and then, through "subsequent" portraits, those judgements are stressed in to a re-making. The coordinate structure of *Testimony* forces a de-limitation of reference points while never relieving the reader of a concise condition. This reinforced delimitation is in itself often a ethical and moral co-ordinate structure which in many ways could be likened to a "structure" of *Imaginary Movie*. However, the temporal shift that the reader must engage in is a relentless positioning. This situation, though the terms of its economic and social critique are current, becomes fused with the nostalgic. In other words, because of "its" reflective composition *Testimony* is a compromised dis-position. Just how *Testimony* resists falling apart in the echo of its own distance, or just how in its portrait is not of his grandfather, or of our grandparents, but stays here, now, is a matter of technique, economics and morality. It is also a matter of its instability. In that instability its reference is clear.

For Reznikof, the wobble is stated in action, the unsaid, a testament of the given in the *form* of our activity. That for Ward this unsaid is in the abridgement of meaning, doesn't alter this engagement so much as it alters the textual form it takes. What is stated in both texts differs dramatically from what

is experienced in each text. The linguistic wobble in Ward is radically different from the conceptual wobble evident in Rez., but its object remains the same, its reference is clear. If we are to rely upon the term, or the area of definition as the condition of the "revolutionary word," a concept which for me remains highly suspect, we still have to engage those areas of ideology and the social which defy boundary in order to discover the term.

This doesn't answer anything, but continues to set up a range of problems for further rumination

Thanks Steve for the word "wobble." I kinda caught it for a ride here.

Pat

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 14-FEB-1994 10:27:54.52

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38. **Katie Yates**

RE: Martin Spinelli's reply framed in Error

Mon 14 Feb 1994

This is from "Tristan and Isolde" from the third section "The Community of Lovers" of Joris' translation of Blanchot's "The Unavowable Community" in which Blanchot is responding to a recit, "La Maladie de La Mort" written by Marguerite Duras (1982):

No, end, then, to a recit that also says in its own way: no more recit, and yet an end, perhaps a remission, perhaps a final condemnation. For it so happens that one day the young woman is no longer there. A disappearance that cannot surprise as it is but the exhaustion of an appearance that gave itself only in sleep. She is no longer there, but so discreetly, so absolutely, that her absence suppresses her absence, so that to look for her is pointless, just as it would be impossible to recognize her and join her, be it only in thought that she has existed only through the imagination, cannot interrupt the solitude where the testamentary word is murmured endlessly: the malady of death. And here are the last words (are they the last?):
"Soon you give up, don't look for her anymore, either in the town or at night or in the daytime:
Even so you have managed to live that love in the

only way possible for you. Losing it before it happened."

Martin,

This is my way of dealing further with your concerns surrounding
qua real
qua virtual

How?

1. To go back into Blanchot and find some more inferences, illustrations of untransmittable transmissions, unintentional community, ...
2. I happily find the ci-dessus & want to think (or is this talking) about what is happening (a transmission via Lyotard's The Differend in the virtual or real relationships between Duras, Blanchot & Joris.
3. For example, we are reading Joris' translation of Blanchot's reading of Duras -ok- who are we reading? I ask this within the confines of formal discourse: Literary Criticism or Literary Theory because they are privileged in this electronic {poetics} dialogue which does not necessarily need to abide by the same strictures. Yet, for the most part it does. This is an example then of how limited we are in our range of how to talk about writing or write about talking (replace "write" or "talk" in the above clause with "read"). It may be interesting to figure out to what extent writing on email is talking and to what extent it is writing...attention-wise...
4. My reading of the above from The Unavowable Community is:
+Real concern is rare & in the stairwell it is also rare
& on stage (in relationship, in conference...)
no surprise.

So the effect of commitment in one's reply
is notable in the absence of that integrity

5. The illusions of presence are magnified in electronic media but the magnification intensifies the speed with which we can reply(retort) as well as the frame within which we can respond. It is more possible then

"Losing it before it happened."

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 14-FEB-1994 13:18:21.86

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39. **Tom Mandel**

RE: Martin Spinelli's reply framed in Error

Mon 14 Feb 1994

Losing it before it happened... this is an experience free of conversion and which "all" have shared. How does the testamentary word transmit when what is shared (of which this testament wd be witness) is virtual? Even the phonemes of testamentary rch w/ a visceral. "...has existed only through the imagination..." which rubric finds no fit w/ these media. A network is, specifically, a set of mechanisms for conversion and reconversion, and it presumes (i.e. offers no way to question) and ignores (i.e. does not "process" in any way) all issues of status in what it finds to pick up and move. I.e. "the absence of that integrity." Does reply give an effect of commitment? or commitment show its effect in a reply. I.e. does commitment come from the reply or from the social engagement and its bindings? These, which precede both question (concern) and reply, precisely are at question on a network; the intimate laxity. All the stones seem lead across some stream but never to another side than this.

***** T O M M A N D E L ***** 2927
Tilden St. NW * Washington DC 20008 * Voice: [REDACTED] FAX:
[REDACTED] *****
From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 14-FEB-1 994 16:20:59.54

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40. **Jed Rasula**

RE: Martin Spinelli's reply framed in Error

Mon 14 Feb 1994

Reading Tom Mandel, I get to the thought:

Reply is an *affect* of commitment.

The stones always do lead to "this" side; but the word is (as the place is) a deictic, a shifter; it locates with reference to the "speaker"--or the keypad pusher.

Would the net (does it?) seem less metaphysically perplexing to those who grew up in rural areas and got used to telephones with party lines? (Rural electrification programs being what they were in the 30s, the USSR got Stalin & the farmbelt got party lines...) From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 16-FEB-1 994 05:09:44.13

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41. **Benjamin Friedlander**

RE: The Wobbly Social Poem

Tue 15 Feb 1994

I want to reserve my right, as they say, to say something at a later date about the "intelligence" that reading calls upon, or substantiates. I've mentioned to Patrick already that for me the word alludes to those angelic orders which Henry Corbin says Islamic mysticism terms "intelligences." I've been reading Corbin nibblingly as a way of finding a new path into Olson's poetry, which many of us here in Buffalo are now reading for the Creeley seminar. I want to say that there's an angel of reading, and most of what is sort of stupidly accounted for as "self-reflection" really makes more sense when understood as a reading that is watched over. I want also to say that it's impossible for me to think about the so-called "social" poem without reference to its opposite. Which would be, to my mind, not the *anti*social poem (the antisocial is no less social than the law abiding), but the poem concerned with what's trans-social, trans-historical, mystical, ontological. And I think this opposition is again one that only makes sense *within* a poet's work, is not a means of categorizing the differences *between* poets. Reznikoff is an easy example of this--though not perhaps in *Testimony*--since in Judaism the trans-historical uses the historical as its referent, and Reznikoff's ideas and imagery in large part derives from Judaic sources. (See, for instance, "Jerusalem the Golden.") But Olson too is a wonderful example of the social poem giving way to its opposite, only to be rediscovered in the most improbable manifestations.

OK. I save all that for later--or rather, I offer it as a possible direction. And in the meantime I wonder just what "wobble" means. Patrick?

On the surface of things, like words, I "wobble out of orbit," often as a matter of course. In my wobble the terms of argument become indiscrete; however, this is not to say that this wobbling undermines my reference, nor does this wobble undermine a word's reference.

A habit of communication. But this habit would seem to be "revolving" toward an articulation that is itself revolution. That is, the undecidability of your immediate meaning demonstrates a stance that is ultimately opposed to the immediacy of understanding which communication *seems* to depend on.

[...] My

- > wobble is social, not theoretical. Its point of arrival is quite close to
- > its point of departure. It would appear that this is an important point,
- > one that in my book is an edge of confluence which resists
- > conceptualization, but one which is constantly demanding it.

If I'm right then I would have to say your wobble is social and yet in a wholly theoretical sense--theory enacted as a social relation. Moreover, your attempts

to resist not only demand conceptualization, they can be intelligible only to the extent that we (your interlocutors) *do* conceptualize them.

Is this how poetry operates? That what poems "do" is intelligible only insofar as we accept this doing as a "saying." That what poems "say" makes invisible the fact that this saying is also a "doing." Here we return to Charles Bernstein's comment on Reznikoff about hiding in plain sight. There's a Blaser poem too that comes to mind:

THE TRUTH IS LAUGHTER

Locked out, and at the same time locked
in the look-out what perfect rose could
I say or write the Nietzschean brilliance,
who knew that *the best writers understand
form as what others consider content*

We're probably not too far either from the old "How does a poem mean?" line that I got in high school. But I too would like to write or say the perfect rose. And why has wobbling got to be so dramatic? What if this very sentence, held out to you as simply as a plucked flower, turns methodically on an axis, round some sun of meaning toward its point of origin?

Ben F.

From: IN% " "UB Poetics discussion group" 16-FEB-1994 15:16:16.95

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42. **Steve Evans**

the social poem: recitative

Wed 16 Feb 1994

"A reading that is watched over" (as Ben puts it) seems not a bad definition of this list. It certainly revalues the participation of those, clearly the majority of subscribers, whose "presence" is otherwise referred in a more ominous direction by the term "lurking." But then, who's to say angels/intelligences (at least the sort whom this list is likely to attract) don't *lurk*? Rilke's did...

Culling over the thread, testing my sense of what has been said to date, I find myself thinking of Juliana's comment that "the poem is the social poem." By which Juliana might mean politely to say that "social" doesn't really advance our thinking beyond the point "poem" has already brought it to...

In which case, shifting the question to "what is testimony or struggle or opposition" seems a more generative option than the one I've noticed my own thoughts to be drifting into: i.e. placing an article before an adjective (the

social) and counting the resulting abstraction as a cognitive gain. Truth is, everything that lead me to introduce the term in my note to Patrick is lost once that abstraction has occurred.

The Jameson of **Marxism and Form** has an interesting take on why this swivel (more determined than a wobble) between concretion/abstraction might haunt our mediations on society. He notes that "society is clearly not some empirical object which we can meet and study directly in our own experience: in this sense the neo-positivist criticism, which considers the idea of society an inadmissible abstract construct or a mere methodological hypothesis with no other kind of real existence, is justified. At the same time society--precisely in the form of such an impossible, suprapersonal abstraction--is present in the form of an ultimate constraint upon every moment of our waking lives [he's clearly an optimist vis-a-vis the unconscious!]: absent, invisible, even untenable, it is at the same time the most concrete of all the realities we have to face.... (57).

That doesn't seem a bad way of parsing the problem "society" poses for thought and linking it to the one it poses for (everyday) practice.

As for poetic practice, I will tempt the anti-Adornian in Juliana only slightly by rewriting an admirable phrase from **Minima Moralia**: "you must have tradition in you to hate it properly." In the context of this discussion, I would say: the poem must have society in it to hate it properly. Against one variant of the "necessity for rewriting the language" argument Juliana mentioned, I would add: society is neither reducible to, nor even "structured like" a language.... One could, hypothetically, "hate" the structures of signification, and one could (though not without paradoxes) even practice that hatred or opposition in one's writing, but that would not be, in my definition, necessarily the same thing as "hating society properly."

But to get that word, "hate," to have the inflection I want, I'll need a couple of stanzas from O'Hara:

Poem

Hate is only one of many responses
true, hurt and hate go hand in hand
but why be afraid of hate, it is only there

think of filth, is it really awesome
neither is hate
don't be shy of unkindness, either
it's cleansing and allows you to be direct
like an arrow that feels something

out and out meanness, too, lets love breathe... * The fact is that oppositional practices can stay clear of neither hate nor violence: that Reznikoff's *Testimony* admits and re-cites (while refusing to turn into arias) scene after scene of hate and violation releases us into a comportment beyond fear and amazement, beyond the "awe" that O'Hara speaks of. *Testimony* refers us not to the unmediated traumatic occurrence, but to the comportment that might make such occurrences impossible: "why be afraid of hate, it is only there"--why be afraid of hate, in other words, when the absence of our ability to respond to it is what truly is fearful?

But Benjamin said it better in 1939:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge-- unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable ("Theses on the Philosophy of History").

This opens the wider question of what view of history would be tenable, and what relationship Reznikoff bears to the history he writes and the history he, albeit infinitesimally, and from within the social-structure of obscurity, helped to make.

I sure could use some help....

Steve

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 16-FEB-1994 09:34:07.87

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43. **Benjamin Friedlander** ***hate***

Wed 16 Feb 1994

Just a quick response to Steve's post before going off to teach. The structure and value of "hate" in *Testimony* is of course utterly different than in O'Hara's work. The epigraph to the first volume, which reveals quite a bit of Reznikoff's method in this book, comes noteworthily from the New Testament:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing, be put away from you, with

all malice.

Ephesians IV, 31

In a book that both depicts and arouses all these feelings we are called upon to put them aside--*this* is justice, for Reznikoff. Perhaps, like Benjamin, he would say that our amazement at these stories, or at their accumulation, is not philosophical (or: judicious). Perhaps he would be curious about our amazement. Perhaps he would share it.

Amazement is just one of many responses...

Thanks for the thoughtful reprisal of how we've gotten here, Steve.

Ben F.

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 16-FEB-1994 12:14:50.21

[↑ Contents](#)

44. **James Sherry**

RE: "Community"

Wed 16 Feb 1994

The idea of virtual community seems to be more complex than location. One interesting though oversold index of its uses is in Howard Rheingold's *Virtual Communities* or some such title. Rheingold is one of the leading journalists of the virtual reality group.

Along with the word community is the word communication, a footnote to our poetry, but another comm word. Having read our collective communications for a few weeks I wonder if there might be a recognition of epistolary form for computer terminals that will add to the commutativity of our community.

The notes in short paragraphs are a lot easier to read than the huge blocks of undifferentiated prose that remind me of someone trying to prove the opacity argument of the 1970s. And the messages that use the screen as a field communicate a lot more meaning than their lexicons.

The potential speed of responses on email can change what we say. The accuracy of messages also plays w/ th' erasability of the matter and its speeeeeed. Layout composition plays screen size spelling spin.

On Sat, 12 Feb

1994, Loss Glazier wrote:

> The idea of a listserv as constituting "community" poses problems. First,
> in that a listserv is "virtual," i.e., we are not really "there." In
> this regard, a community is almost always defined by location. Secondly,
> most definitions of community imply a sense of commitment--to take this

> further, I would say entrapment, ie, if you think of a Blue Ridge mountain
> community, most people don't have the mobility or means to move. "There"
> is fixed; its participants are fixed--for better or worse. An electronic
> list implies no commitment whatsoever: any person can unplug at any time;
> the largest percentage of any list does not participate but stands in the
> shadows examining the record of the conversation. To say that we have
> in common taking each writer's writing seriously is a kind thought. I
> hope it's true--but is no ground to call this endeavor a "community."
> (Your name, the name of the sender of the second "community" message,
> is even unknown / undecipherable.) The idea of an electronic democracy
> is probably the least tenable of these ideas, just about as true as
> an other so-called "democracy" ie, a place where people who have
> power are equal does not argue for equality for all people.
> So, what then, would we call this?

From: IN% " " "UB Poetics discussion group" 17-FEB-1
994 13:44:31.70

[↑ Contents](#)

45. **Patrick Phillips**

RE: The Wobbly Social Poem

Wed 16 Feb 1994

Though "wobble" has a depth which commands more attention (something I'll
give when I have a little more time), now I'll just give a quick response to Ben's
post before I too go off to class.

In response to your plucking of Glaser's rose, I turned to Zukofsky's *80
Flowers*.

"X"

Of thousands grown climb head-on-head
A "X" unknown stand indued
no glue kiss'd peon knee
"freesia's" iris grass-tropical tru scourge
bee earthflight magnetic north 4-native
dial-canter excellence scent one-thousandth-in
one-night "lady's-eardrops-fuschia" seaborne northeast unnailed
papyrus-bath-nut "trailing arbutus fringed-gentian hydrangea"

As we know, Zukofsky could not only name whatever plant he saw, and could
follow that name through the vague maze of usage back thousands of years, but
could truly course a wobble of his own making. He can also serve to throw off
our compass and perhaps can help us to locate that berm we seek.

As to round which sun this flower methodically turns I can only hazard...

Patrick

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 16-FEB-1994 17:33:23.83

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46. **Charles Bernstein**
from Arkadii Dragomoschenko

Thu 17 Feb 1994

--Boundary (ID 6bR7XQfMFfF8oDJV788cNA)

[Arkadii Dragomoschenko sent me this letter on the occasion of his dropping out of the Poetics listserv. He gave me permission to send it on. Arkadii live in St. Petersburg.]

Date: Tue, 15 Feb 1994 11:44:15 +0300

From: "Arkadii T. Dragomoshchenko" <██████>

Thank you, Charles, I think I will try to be in touch with Joel and time to time, I hope, he will make me know what happens there, in an electronic space of talking... To be sure, the "problem" of community (if there exists such problem) is rather interesting for new and new generations. Yet, to my mind this very process of configuration/reconfiguration or - in other words - articulation of indifferent relations in a certain pattern of community is like "chemical" process taking its course in our own body. The main thing, as it seems to me, lies in mutual disposition of two perspectives: "we" in my "I" and at the same time - "I" in this "we". The dynamic of their intersections produces the syntax of community, this it to say, its ideology. Meanwhile I think that the latent interest in such question sounds as possibility of writer to form his/her own reader, audience or at last - public, i. e - the *presence* of his/her work which have constitute his/her presence in turn... Anyway, with my best - Arkadii.

--Boundary (ID 6bR7XQfMFfF8oDJV788cNA)--

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 17-FEB-1994 21:20:36.96

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47. **Benjamin Friedlander**

RE: from Arkadii Dragomoschenko

Thu 17 Feb 1994

[...] The main thing, as it seems to me, lies in mutual disposition of two perspectives: "we" in my "I" and at the same time - "I" in this "we". The dynamic of their intersections produces the syntax of community, this it to say, its ideology. [...]

huh?

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 18-FEB-1994 10:40:06.46

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48. **Patrick Phillips**

RE: What does "wobble" mean?

Fri 18 Feb 1994

I'd like to respond to Ben's question "just what does "wobble" mean" by trying to negotiate my way through several essays I've recently been reading.

Initially wobble was brought up by Steve in "There are words that wobble out of orbit and *do* escape having a reference." The question became for me - how does it happen that a word wobbles out of orbit and what "social evaluation" does it need to maintain some form of revolution. However, to approach this quite particular terrain without scaring off the meaning hiding there I think instead of going at the wobble through an examination of reference, it may be better to examine experience.

This week I've been looking at several texts, including Benjamin's "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in an effort to get to some measure of experience. Something fell into place when reading and I was helped into the idea that wobble is the product of shock, I suppose a kind of violence, even a catastrophe. Not to be distracted by the cosmological metaphor, I stayed close to Benjamin's examination of Baudelaire's city. Taking a cue from Silliman's examination of the same essay, I looked for Benjamin's proposal that shock was not merely caused by something physical, something present, but by something quite absent as well. "The masses had become so much a part of Baudelaire that it is rare to find a description of them in his works." But, how does something not textually evident insist, that is, "stand in" for that which is textually evident? And what about this insistence of absence is a shock?

Benjamin's discussion of the past, of tradition, (which is backgrounded much in the way the city is "backgrounded" in Baudelaire) goes hand in hand with his idea of "Erfahrung." Experience, for Benjamin, fends off shock and allows us a

sense of place and relative position, comportment. "The shock experience which the passer-by has in the crowd" is more the jostling of what is lost in the social than it is a jostling of what is there. "The jolt in the movement of a machine is like the so-called "coup" in a game of chance...Since each operation at the machine is just as screened off from the preceeding operation as a "coup" in a game of chance is from the one preceeding it...[t]he work of both is equally devoid of substance." With each "throw," each turn of the worker to the piece, experience is lost, time is lost, the past is lost, completion itself is screened off from any preceeding operation. So "wobble" here can contain the out of phase relationship with "experience" induced by the shock of being stripped to the perpetually new.

This textual play on Benjamin's part pulls the force of value into the idea of shock. Something we must have if we are to say a word wobbles. But what is the value of nothing and when does this nothing become the past so thoroughly that every thing has become so occult, so "new," so now. Adorno picks up this thread of Baudelaire in Benjamin in **Minima Moralia** #150 "Late Extra" in order to examine this newness. "Today the appeal to newness, of no matter what kind, provided only that it is archaic enough, has become universal, the omnipresent medium of false mimesis. The decomposition of the subject is consummated in his self-abandonment to an everchanging sameness. This drains all firmness from characters." (p 238) But if we are to pick up again that what is jostled in the crowd is what is "lost" *and* "there" and that the lost is shock producing, perhaps the lack of firmness in characters actually produces experience. In this case the wobble would be not false mimesis at all, but a continual production of the shock, which in Benjamin's case, constantly acts to firm up consciousness, experience. In reference to Freud's **Beyond the Pleasure Principle** Benjamin quotes "...consciousness comes into being at the site of a memory trace." Perhaps here wobble is not only the out of phase relationship with experience, but also the site of just such a trace. Of course this consciousness would constantly be coming into contact with the catastrophe of modern existence which in itself induces a fleeting, but continual hope for what is lost; the big jostle.

So wobble at the moment of the word has for me an extreme astronomy, or better, entails a diagnosis of the wakes or traces of multiple asynchronous orbits: tradition, the past, loss, consciousness of loss and presence, the catastrophic impact of Capitalism upon intimate and public spheres and in, or of these orbits, language.

The follow up in this lead to the trace will lead me inevitably to Derrida, again, probably to **Cinders**. It will urge me to re-examine ideology as an apparatus, probably in Althusser. But this (Althusser) brings to mind Simone Weil and I'll stop here with this quote and I'm not sure exactly how it fits in...

For every task, there exists a limited and small number of possible errors, some which would break the machine, others which would ruin the piece.

Patrick

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 18-FEB-1994 11:58:41.03

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49. **Charles Bernstein**
from Evan Heimlich

Fri 18 Feb 1994

Date: Thu, 17 Feb 1994 14:47:38 +0000 (U)

From: Evan Heimlich <[REDACTED]>

Subject: Re: the heaping potential

Reply to: RE>the heaping potential

Add a teepeeing he-spoon of potential-flour,
William Least Heat Spoon and wash hands in free basin.

the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential
the heaping potential

was:

Date: Sun, 13 Feb 1994 10:00:32 -0500 (EST)

: Jed <[REDACTED]>

Subject: Re: "Community"

In-to: Message of Sun

Howe's your community. Virtually heaping.

[REDACTED]

In response to the message repeated below:

Date: 2/13/94 9:20 AM

To: Evan Heimlich

From: UB Poetics discussion group

Does "community" involve companionship? Or may it simply consist of collective anonymity? In the strictly civic sense of vernacular usage, community means little more than the aggregate of people and activities that bring them momentarily together in public spaces--little league ball, traffic snarls, school board bonds--which amounts to a collective display of the heaping potential. A primary reason why the net increasingly seems a site for community--or at least why most discussions on the net erupt into these speculations about community--is because it enacts *both* the aleatory potential of the casual encounter and the motivational tensegrity of contact: "Contact," as I recall, was the little mag that William Carlos Williams edited, wasn't it?
--Jed Rasula
From: IN%[REDACTED] "UB Poetics discussion group" 18-FEB-1994 22:17:42.70

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50. **GENE E. HULT**

wobble wobble

Fri 18 Feb 1994

Hmm... first of all, Benjamin's not totally correct re: Baudelaire's lament over the continual new. In Baudelaire's *Salon Criticisms*, he pushes for a sort of mixture: "the relative or circumstantial and the invariable or eternal: 'I defy anyone to find a single scrap of beauty which does not contain these two elements...'" Which is a point of view I find myself falling for time and again. And experience... experience may lessen the shock of some of the unknown, but it's my experience that experience leads to sightings of further absence... as in, the more we know, the more we see the parameters (or lack thereof) of what we don't understand... and that leads to a sort of perpetual wobble. When that hits language, we then get into all that buggy semiotics. When is a rose not a rose, when it's wobbling? A wobbling rose? It's all fine to point this stuff out,

but what to DO with it afterwards? How is it going to change how your put down on paper a line of your own writing? Do we paper over the gaps in language, or admit to the unknown and get caught up in that particular lament over and over? (It sure didn't help Baudelaire any... suicide is not an option.) Anybody write fiction? Because I'm having particular problems reconciling this sort of wobble with the necessary "story" in fiction... if even the words aren't to be trusted, if the metaphors are all transitory, how can we trust something as "invented" as fiction? Or is willing suspension of disbelief enough (as it is in the grocery store, where we use words for simple transactions)? From: IN %"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 19-FEB-1 994 01:08:26.23

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51. **Patrick Phillips**

RE: wobble wobble

Sat 19 Feb 1994

I don't believe I ever hint that Benjamin was entirely correct re: anything, or propose his examination as the final word. In utilizing Benjamin, I wasn't attempting to examine Baudelaire, but to use some of the tools Benjamin uses in his *Motifs* essay. To this, I think if you'll look closely you'll see that I was trying to get at a mode of experience which is an attempt to deal with the constantly absent, but to deal with that absence in a particular way--something which approaches your "perpetual wobble."

As to the Salon Criticism quote, it appears to me that often the circumstantial is often eternal in Baudelaire. This would present a problem with your analysis of my post as well as with Baudelaire.

I'm also not satisfied with Benjamin's definition of "Erlebnis" and "Erfahrung," and the parallel construct of voluntary and involuntary memory, or for that matter, of his use of memory as opposed to remembrance, [though I do have a fondness for the conjunction of, *not* the opposition of, consciousness and trace.] These "rails" running through the essay sometimes provide too clear a structuralist proposition which merely points at a possible absence. But point it does.

As to what we *do* afterwards. There is no afterwards, this comes after. This is the attendant (perhaps not so attendant) spiel. From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 19-FEB-1 994 02:03:53.83

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52. Benjamin Friedlander

RE: wobble wobble

Sat 19 Feb 1994

It's all fine to point this stuff out, but what to DO with it afterwards? How is it going to change how you put down on paper a line of your own writing? Do we paper over the gaps in language, or admit to the unknown and get caught up in that particular lament over and over? [...]

Begging for the moment the question of what "this stuff" is, I would answer, for myself, that a radical doubt that language ever reaches its destination, the fearful perception that words must travel a long way, across a veritable world, in order to let the past clasp hands with the future, is not a state of affairs that demands a response, but is the state of affairs our responses are born in. Papering over the gaps in language is its own lament, admitting that the unknown is there is another way of ignoring it.

[...] Anybody write fiction? Because I'm having particular problems reconciling this sort of wobble with the necessary "story" in fiction... if even the words aren't to be trusted, if the metaphors are all transitory, how can we trust something as "invented" as fiction?

But isn't the question of believability an intrinsic one in any kind of narrative? Isn't the element of surprise, which the so-called "wobble" makes possible, one of the principal pleasures of fiction? I think we have a tendency to overdramatize the difficulties of language, to think that our doubts are peculiar to our own age.

On another note:

James Sherry wrote, "The notes in short paragraphs are a lot easier to read than the huge blocks of undifferentiated prose that remind me of someone trying to prove the opacity argument of the 1970s. And the messages that use the screen as a field communicate a lot more meaning than their lexicons."

Am I the only one to find this statement remarkable? The publisher of Roof Books advocating something that sounds a lot like projective verse--labelling something called "the opacity argument" a form of nostalgia!

Undifferentiated prose of any length sounds awful. Let difference bloom in the hugest blocks!

Ben Friedlander

From: IN% " " "UB Poetics discussion group" 19-FEB-1994 16:35:56.50

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53. **Katie Yates**

RE: from Arkadii Dragomoschenko

Sat 19 Feb 1994

I am perhaps avoiding the ideological problem of this *quest*ion* of community but wish to address Arkadii's:

"mutual disposition of two perspectives: 'we' in my 'I'
'I' in my 'We'

with the following forced juxtaposition between Don Byrd & George Oppen -

In the most recent (and final) issue of NOTUS Byrd writes his essay

"Sound's Domain:"

Organization or formal reality, by contrast, is
closed and circular. It is never self-present;
indeed organization only appears in consciousness
to the being which discovers that it makes the mark
which distinguishes itself as a separate identity.

Oppen quotes his own poem in a letter to Sherman Stein [late Spring '67"

Substance itself which has been the subject of all our planning And by this we
are carried into the incalculable

What I wish to consider here is weight with which each man considers him, a
"self." Byrd speaks of a solitary epiphany or reconciliation of the matters of
one's existence. Oppen by contrast is willing to bear the weight of human
limitation with at least one other My interest is limited by a severe need to
understand how pronouns reflect where the attention of the writer is. In all 3 of
the above cases & in my own, I recognize at least some level of deliberation in
how the self (I) is described in relation to other (we?) kyates From: IN
%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 20-FEB-1 994 15:50:32.57

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54. **Tenney Nathanson**

RE: What does "wobble" mean?

Sun 20 Feb 1994

As I read (or read, a few months ago, so this may be off) the Benjamin stuff on
what he calls "shock defense" (a purposely awkward locution?) and the Freud
metapsychology in both BPP and Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety, it seems to
me perhaps to authorize instead the formulation that the text, as part of a shock
defense, a parrying of the new (after all it's [hyper] conscious) is there
INSTEAD of experience, instead of a memory trace (Freud) or "Erfahrung."
(There's something bizarre about the metapsychology, or at least about Ben's

appropriation of it, so all this might best be taken I think as parable or trope). So the wobble might be caused by a lexical or idiomatic memory trace, submerged, out of some OTHER context? (cf. Cavell on Thoreau, or Bernstein on Cavell on Thoreau?). That is: the words I use to parry shock have another, older history, not "meant" by my use of them but trailing.... good book: Susan Buck-Morss, /The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project/

Tenney Nathanson

(hope this posts....)

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 20-FEB-1994 15:51:03.17

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55. **Tenney Nathanson**
RE: What does "wobble" mean?

Sun 20 Feb 1994

or, for that matter, the "trailing" history might NOT get evoked. Less wobble, perhaps, and in Jameson's system: less "modernist" and more "pomo".... unless that sense of blanking out or bleaching out, as I'd trope it, is after all akin to what others are troping as "wobble" From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 20-FEB-1994 18:28:41.59

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56. **Charles Bernstein**
Community and the Individual Talent

Sun 20 Feb 1994

Community and the Individual Talent

I had a number of thoughts, over these past weeks of posts, about community, but I've misplaced them.

Every time I hear the words literary community I reach for my bivalent autocad simulation card emulator.

Poetry is (or can be) an aversion of community in pursuit of new constellations of relationship.

In other words, community is as much what I am trying to get away from -- reform -- as form.

So there are a spectrum of communities, from the closed community modelled on the family, to

communities fixed by location (what might otherwise be called, for example, neighborhoods) or civic identification (the community bounding a literal and figurative commons or commonplace) or political ideology, to utopian communities that have either sought to form a new place or to remain open by refusing to be grounded by a place.

Literary communities have often been understood in terms of place -- the "local" -- as Michael Davidson writes about the emergence of a literary community on the West Coast in his book on the SF Renaissance, or in terms of scene (a local hub within a place) or group. Black Mountain remains crucial because it forged an arts community from writers and artists from many places. Most recently, the connections of writers within an ethnic, gender, or racial groups have been designated as communities. Schools or movements have not usually been called communities, although Ron Silliman, among others, have wanted to insist that a shared aesthetic project among writers in different locations can best be understood on this model of community. It's possible to speak of the "poetry community" in the sense of "the poetry world" (in the sense of "the art world") -- but such a formulation immediately suggests that arts funding agencies are nearby (more commonly, one speaks of the "small press community"). I would say "poetry communities" but this begs the questions even as it suggests relief. Many poets that I know experience poetry communities, say scenes, as places of their initial exclusion from publication, readings, recognition. Being inside, a part of, is often far less striking than being left out, apart.

Communities, defined by what they have in common -- a place, an ideal, a practice, a heritage, a tradition -- cannot immunize themselves against what they do not find common. To have a community is to make an imaginary inscription against what is outside the community. & outside is where some poetry will want to be. That is, some poetry will want to work against received ideas of place, group, ethnicity,

gender, sexuality, person, member, individuality, tradition, aesthetic tendency. One does not use collective nouns, or at least not without skepticism (if not anxiety).

Robert von Hallberg, in *Culture & Value*, argues for a poetry that reflects community values; this is what he calls a poetry of accommodation and also, for the U.S. in the 1970s and 80s, a suburban poetry.

I suppose it has something to do with how comfortable you feel about the confines of family or nation (fine or confining). As the critic asked the poet who had slipped on the ice and was lying in the middle of the road -- "Are you comfortable?" -- "I make a good living."

(I take it Steve Evans' comment in his introduction to the "Technique" in *o.blek/Writing from the New Coast* about his generational "hatred of identity" could also apply to a hatred of community, and perhaps that is implicit in his recent discussion of "hating society properly" and also "hating" tradition. Would this include a hatred of virtual, or for that matter unavowable, communities? Echoing W.C. Fields' famous reposte to being corrected about his insistence that Jews were running the Studio --- Catholics, worst kind of Jews -- might we say: Virtual communities, worst kind of communities!?)

Any discussion of community would do well to start with the idea of institution rather than association. For the rules of our associations, one on one or one with many, is fundamentally an institutional matter (in the sense that Erving Goffman details in his many works). So that I would say the first fact about the "community" made possible through modems hooked up to mainframes that are teleconnected is that the access and protocols of this community are predetermined by the institutions that give us entry into them; for most of us on this particular list "membership" in the university "community" -- (and for the few on commercial services bearing the insignia of ".com" at the end of their e-mail addresses, they

have simply paid to have access to this already formed nexus.)

This is changing but that only makes more crucial the need to acknowledge the overlay of different institutional interests that mediate our interactions in these spaces. We don't shed old institutional habits as we inhabit new institutional spaces so much as project our old ways onto the new spaces. A great deal of sociological analysis is sure to follow us here. But it is interesting to consider, what patterns of "who speaks?" in "live" group settings -- meetings, seminars -- are also present in listserv situations, which may at first appear to be free of the need to interrupt or speak up or find a temporary opening in the discussion.

For example, I will soon begin monitoring how long each of you spends online with Poetics@UBVM or whether and what you download. -- The potential for monitoring such transactions, as well as doing various forms of statistical analysis of posts and activity, is part of the medium of our communing here. Several subscribers have noted that one of us has chosen to conceal his identity from the publicly available list of subscribers; am I right to "out" Chris Funkhauser of our SUNY-Albany node?

I have set up this listserv so that anyone can subscribe and I am automatically notified, but also so that the list itself is not listed in any directories of listserves. At some point, to keep the list at a scale small enough, or "common" enough, to work, will it be worth

The idea of possibly hidden listeners is something a listserv invokes insofar as the communication is considered interpersonal, private in the way a letter is, or even a seminar or meeting; although we accept that we never know who buys our books (or checks them from the library). But perhaps the situation here is more like a performance, where we make our recits individually to an audience that is able to see one another, even if, when on stage, our view of the audience may be blocked by the kleiglits.

That, anyway, would bring to mind Rousseau's preference for public meetings over and against public spectacles (theater): the public convenes to consider its circumstance, its common needs.

What is public space and why does there seem so little of it, as if the public had become a commodity no longer in much demand, but still available for import at high prices, free trade notwithstanding? (We import it from ourselves and the tariffs are high.) So little public space, that is, so much public spectacle.

This suggests the civic values of spaces like these: not reinforcing existing communities but taking up the constitution of social space.

If I resist the idea of a literary community, while working to support the "actually existing" communities of poets among which I find myself, it is because I want to imagine reading and writing, performing and listening, as sites of conversation as much as collectivity. I want to imagine a constellation of readers who write, to and for one another, with the links always open at the end, spiralling outward -- centrifugally -- not closing in.

At one point in these parts, posts -- a message identified as from Lolpoet (Loss Glazier), echoed G.E. Moore's shaking of fists at the skeptics ("at least I know two things that are real!"): "We are physical beings, not virtual ones." My heart sank, for it is our virtuality that allows for hope. V139HLA3 (at Buffalo it is an institutional privilege to have your name be used as part of your user ID), aka Martin Spinelli, wanting to put off the idea that this space of exchange in unreal, insisted, "We are **really** here with our **real** eyes at **real** monitors" (but unfortunately no real italics): yet, my real eyes do me no good if I aspire to something else than what I see, and what I want to monitor is neither real or unreal.

So my hope for electronic communication is not that it engenders virtual communities, but rather virtual uncommunities.

-Charles Bernstein

(rest area)

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 21-FEB-1994 00:13:11.96

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57. **peter quartermain**

"Community"

Sun 20 Feb 1994

Yes. This conversation is (like the idea and institution community) fascinating, like a snake eyeing a mouse. "Community" is virtually undefinable [pun intended], possibly undesirable, and ever shifting, perilous -- the more closely defined, the more closely and powerfully an instrument of control. *Odi et amo*, then. Like definition, it feeds on hunger.

Do not pass "Go"; and don't forget to cut the grass (if not the mustard).

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 21-FEB-1994 00:30:59.06

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58. **Linda Reinfeld**

RE: "Community"

Mon 21 Feb 1994

Yes, chilling. The List generates Owner and Orders: IMPORTANT. Spread no information. Download and be counted. The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.

Or, "It's just ordinary hopelessness."

+-----+

| Linda Reinfeld ██████████ |

+-----+

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 21-FEB-1994 13:23:45.62

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59. Benjamin Friedlander

derek jarman

Mon 21 Feb 1994

Here in the anti-community chamber, the brain, the obituary watch continues. Donald Judd last week, and now this. I forward (without permission, but so it goes) the following from the derrida-list:

| *Date: Sun, 20 Feb 1994 21:28:00 +0000*

| *From: Andy Butler*

> To return to an earlier debate, I spent this afternoon watching videos
> with friends. By common consent we watched Jarman's Wittgenstein, and
> even the person who was resistant admitted he enjoyed part of it. My own
> wavering between thinking it a masterpiece and flawed masterpiece moved
> further toward the masterpiece: the Wittgenstein actor excellent, Tilda
> Swinton incomparable, Michael Gough as wachable as ever, Maynard Keynes
> entertaining. Only the rough trade Johnny stands out as unconvincing. I'd
> forgotten the importance of the Martian, and how he appears, naked, to
> speak the final words of the film.

>

> We then watched an episode of Northern Exposure, the cricket score and
> ate. Then the news announces that Derek Jarman has finally died of an HIV
> related illness. I'd last seen him on a Channel 4 Christmas Eve rpogramme
> "Camp Christmas", looking ill but alert. I knew there couldn't be long to
> go. I'd heard that he'd been in hospital bnut no more.

>

> Personally I think this is a great loss: to experimental film, to British
> cinema (whatever that means) and indeed to film world wide. We have
> also lost a forthright commentator on Gay / Queer / HIV issues. Working on a
> shoestring he produced astounding art. Not to everyone's taste, yes, on
> the edge of pretentiousness but that's part of taking risks. With Edward
> II, Wittgenstein and Blue Jarman reached the height of his powers; there
> can be no one to replace him.

>

> Cheers (and ins ombre mood already this weekend)

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 22-FEB-1

994 20:24:50.69

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60. **Jennifer Moxley**
Institution?

Tue 22 Feb 1994

I think you boys must be getting a little saddle weary from all that wobbling. Those who muse around in definitions of community without self-referentiality obviously can "step away" long enough to question: are we in one? do we want one? etc... Most people on this earth are born into your vagary. And I think the likelihood of any significant change happening surrounding community is very low among our current poetic dissidents if we don't feel "wrongly defined" only "wrong definitions" --changing definitions is easy, we're poets, or are we? I noticed that M. Hult admitted he goes to the grocery store which reminded me of something I read about the new left in the 60's, it's not that anyone said to the women leftists, "you can't speak," it is simply that the dynamic was such that even theoretically sophisticated women felt invigorated but shut down from participation. The way they were defined proceeded any definition changing they might have wanted to take part in. Being left out, cut off from the dominant modes of whatever, while remaining in a position of privilege via class and gender, can sometimes make us forget to keep a keen eye peeled on the house that shut the door in the first place, and subsequently our shack takes on an inflated importance. I find it interesting that while we spend a lot of time opposing our enforced and chosen communities we still accept their terms. I think this is because it isn't that we hate our communities, but rather that we hate that the possibilities they open to us (academic, poetic, love relationships, virtual and democratic communities) are rarely realized. I just hate that. But it's like always waking up to a sink full of dirty dishes, you must say to yourself, at least I have dishes. We cannot extirpate ourselves from community any more than we can talk about the social as if we aren't in and defined by it, neither can we give up hope that we might be able to risk humiliation and defy these spaces that define us. -Jennifer Moxley From: IN %"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 22-FEB-1 994 20:30:17.97

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61. **Joe Amato**
RE: Community and the Individual Talent

Tue 22 Feb 1994

charles, that virtuality could be a virtue///

"virtual uncommunity"---community defined by what is excluded from same?---"i never wanted to belong to a club" etc?... in what ways is this specifically *virtual*?...

real vs. virtual---yet another site of collapse... what *about* the body, finally?... that is, the site whereupon such collapses--culturally, socially--are instituted, the "who" that does/does not speak, that is/is not allowed access, etc... does 'virtual uncommunity' renegotiate zones of institutional exclusion such that a 'we' denotes absence thrice removed?...

"not only are these [not] my words, not only am i not t/here, but i stand apart from you, to boot"

hence through this absence/addresslessness (think nomads with newtons) to rethink, or begin to rethink, presence (of others, or of congenial others etc)?... calling the bluff, as it were, of a certain telos of presence (this is fuzzy, yes, and formal)...

trafficking in wish lists: i would wish, were i the type (am i?), that the virtual were deployed as real, not over and against reality, but of the various realities that we construct... it's taken a mimetic shape thus far, but it needn't... hence virtual becomes, under one definition (from a new bill on the washington state govt. agenda---"public health & safety act 1994" bill, sbr 6174---and I shamelessly excerpt from a post to the media lab's narrative intelligence list):

NEW SECTION. Sec 702. (4) "Virtual Reality" means any computer or other electronic technology that creates an enhanced illusion of three-dimensional, real-time or near-real-time interactive reality through the use of software, specialized hardware, holograms, gloves, masks, glasses, computer guns, or other item capable of producing visual, audio, and sensory effects of verisimilitude beyond those available with a personal computer.

note "verisimilitude beyond those" etc...

but to get back to community commentary: a bit smartass, i know, but i'm thinking of the uncola at this moment... i'm wondering what it is, exactly, your concluding hope constitutes (as in constitution---bodily/legislative)...

i want to point out---and here i'll risk as much as you have, ethically, in doing so (which is not to suggest that either of us is being unethical, however impolite, but that ethos is always at stake)---that un-concealing (there's that un again) chris funk at suny/a was unconcealing a grad. student (chris---hi!, permit me to speak of you in the third person for a moment)... were you aware of chris's postsecondary status?... not that you wouldn't have unconcealed, say, a faculty member---but that there are institutional distinctions of community, as we're all aware, that go beyond listowner/non-listowner status, and that these raise issues, as you intimate, of power... much as i have just un-concealed chris's status in this institutional hierarchy...

i write the foregoing noting that, whatever my intentions, i risk a culpability on many counts... and what does it mean to be "polite" around t/here, anyway, esp.

given the potentially international context(s)?... "netiquette" hardly seems an answer... i have some ideas---

it sounds, in all, as though you would like to see these spaces mitigate the "hatred" you refer to... does this mean that they help to mitigate differences in difference?... wherever this stuff 'goes' that i'm in the process of typing, fact is that it emerges pretty much out of something american///

forgive me this latter---it needs to be unpacked---are these the places through/in which to venture forth so?///

am i publicly, well, what am i?... wouldn't ontological questions of identity be inscribed (o.k.---yuck) within a social controversy situated at the level of "national" or "continental" (as in north american) conceptions of community?... i mean, is your projected uncommunity international in scope, or transnational? (is the internet?)... new world borders?... or no borders defined as such, in national/international terms?... or---

what what?...

i am a bit too persistent (and digressive) perhaps... and i mean, as you are aware, no flames at all... i take these spaces as providing both for performative possibility as well as intimate deliberation... integrity, all told, is something i hope for within any un/community...

i would like to read more...

best///

joe

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1994 08:22:54.66

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62. **Benjamin Friedlander**

RE: Institution?

Wed 23 Feb 1994

Jennifer, I don't think I was wrong to detect a criticism in your remarks not only of **the content** of my (and others') postings, but of the very **fact** of them. That's what principally annoyed me. Is this the same as my response to James Sherry? I wanted to be ironic there but say that in telling others to shut up he was adopting the rhetoric of poets I know he dislikes. Likewise with Tom Mandel--let him know that he couldn't simply brush aside what others say without answering to his rhetoric. Have I brushed aside what you wrote? This is what I objected to:

| [...] you boys [...]

and that whole sentence, not only is it dismissive, but the imputation that it's a boys' club (and that we're playing cowboys and indians) is extremely insulting

| [...] *Most people on this earth are born into your vagary.*

the imputation that we lack "self-referentiality" (by which i take it you mean self-knowledge?) is one thing, but to suggest that our supposed ignorance is a "vagary" others are subject to, not only on the poetics list, but their whole lives...! what sort of power are you attributing here to the "boys"?

| [...] *it's not that anyone said to the women leftists, "you can't speak," it is simply that the dynamic was such that even theoretically sophisticated women felt invigorated but shut down from participation[...]*

though your "i was reminded of" doesn't really link this statement to the discussion on the poetics list in any specific way, the implication is clear: the "boys" are shutting you down. perhaps i'm not jaded enough to accept such a ghastly charge with humor, but i do think it IS a ghastly charge, & an undeserved one, & it makes me angry.

The rest of your post had less to do with the poetics list and more to do with this analogy, and I don't particularly object to it--though I might say, having never fully ascertained what it was that made you dissatisfied with the discussion, or feel shut down, I had little to say in response. Your post is as abstract, in its way, as any of Steve's or mine or Patrick's or whoever's.

And yes, I DID think I was doing you a favor, of not "flaming you" on the list (which I wouldn't do) or just being pissed off and remaining silent (which I would do only if i didn't know you or count you a friend). Ben From: IN %"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1 994 09:58:27.01

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63. **Benjamin Friedlander**

yow!

Wed 23 Feb 1994

well, those of you who've read my last message (which i meant to send privately) can draw your own conclusions. robert duncan said the psychopathology of everyday life is a manual of composition, so freudian slips might in some way indicate a desire to compose without composing...it would seem some part of me wanted this private correspondence to spill into the public. but most of me didn't, doesn't...and i apologize to jennifer for any difficulty or embarrassment this may cause her. frustration run amok! ah dear ben f From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1 994 10:52:22.40

64. **Joe Amato**

From Andrew Levy, re: Community and uncommunity, 1 of 4

Wed 23 Feb 1994

2-22-94

I'm not sure what to call myself in this social space. A "hidden listener" perhaps, though as I'm not on-line, I'm not electronically hidden. I have been able to follow several parts of various discussions on the Poetics list [e.g., the wobbly, social poem??] thanks to occasional hardcopy provided by Joe Amato---sympathetic to my un-linked status. Should Joe and I worry that we're breaching an institutional decorum, i.e., subscribing to the UB list?---does providing me with hardcopy of certain conversations Joe believes I'd be interested in suggest indiscretion on his and my part... that I'm nosy, spying voyeuristically into the dialogue/communications passing between people, some of whom I know and consider friends, others whom I don't know?

I believe Charles is wise to raise the question of meanings and potentialities within an interrogation of "the idea of institution rather than association." For example, as an "outsider" (I'll say something about my situation in a moment), I tend to think a more productive way to conceptualize/practice the activity on the UB Poetics list would be to consider the fact that it constitutes not a literary community or "uncommunity" (it in no way resembles whatever forms *that* has taken in the past), but an electronic community. I think it would be important to investigate exactly what electronics *is*, and along with that research one could link the question of... and/or one might discover one's whole sense of what constitutes community has changed, and continues to---while mapping the specific and local details and densities of "old institutional habits... inhabit(ing) new institutional spaces." Tho I wonder how "new" these spaces are?

What I would hope to experience in any kind of community would be the sense that it's an effective community. That it consist "not of propositions to be communicated from A to B but of orientations in fields of meaning [there's that word "field" again, Ben], measures by the scales in which humans share not a perspective or a belief but a world that opens to this or that particular vantage and practice. In order to constitute an effective community rather than a symbolic machine for social production, organized beings must orient themselves in their media-scapes" (Don Byrd, *The Poetics of the Common Knowledge*, 23).

(cont'd)

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1994 10:52:29.45

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65. **Joe Amato**

From Andrew Levy, re: Community and uncommunity, 2 of 4

Wed 23 Feb 1994

I am not a subscriber to the UB Poetics list (or any other list) because I cannot afford the privilege. That is, I own neither the hardware nor software needed to participate electronically from home, and Illinois Institute of Technology, where I am teaching as a pre-doctoral fellow, does not provide even its full-time Humanities faculty with computers. The best I might muster is limited on-site use of a machine in another location---and I don't own a vehicle, making it difficult for me to schedule my time on campus around such peripheral activities (however valuable). I mention my personal situation as it brings to mind very serious matters concerning the issue of institutions, participatory systems of information exchange and creation, and social progress---this latter in that its directions, purposes and results rely heavily upon one's ability either to heed or to ignore the divisions of class, and local, national and global economics. This is inseparable from the question of electronics above.

E.g. does my situation problematize or effect in any way Charles' query true electronically is sometimes true in the print world. For example, I just saw a copy of *_Lingo_ #2* on the magazine stand at Barnes & Noble. There was an article about the New Coast conference at UB last spring, and a few other pieces that looked interesting. The price, however, was \$12.50. I generally don't spend \$12.50 for an issue of a magazine. Instead, I bought the recent issue of *_Artforum_* for \$7. Inside, I found an article by Jonathan Crary---founding editor of *Zone*, and professor of art history at Columbia. Bernstein's question, "What is public space and why does there seem so little of it?," and consequent hope for "the civic values of spaces like these: not reinforcing existing communities but taking up the constitution of social space," receives substantive problematizing when juxtaposed against Crary's reflection on electronic communications and communities (echoing to some degree Jacques Attali's prognosis of intellectual productivity complicit with the distribution of information and its technologies, absorbed into and enhancing the north-south hemispheric disequilibrium of resources and capital, and further straining the already growing fragmentation of east/west relations---the buying & selling of people; see *_Millennium: Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order_*---it's a disturbing and frightening book.)

I quote, rather extensively, from Crary's text:

"... Many evocations of an emerging 'on-line' world assume as a matter of course, or else never question, that a more or less uniform and available information and communication culture is now being installed globally. Generalizing language of the following sort is depressingly pervasive: 'In the near future we may all be on-line.' Beyond the curt and brutal exclusions of the words 'we' and 'all,' this class of statement, in its sweeping untruth, resonates with both a complacent faith in the certainty of modernization and a banal anticipation of its posthistorical fulfillment. "That western patterns of technological consumption could ever be extended to a world now six, soon ten billion people boggles the most elementary economic, not to mention ecological, common sense. The inescapable yet continually evaded truth is that participation in the emerging information, imaging, and communications technologies *will never* (in the meaningful future) expand beyond a minority of people on this planet. Before supposing 'we' will 'all' soon be in cyberspace, consider an isolated statistic: less than 20 percent of the world's population today have telephones. Despite relentless claims that the new computer networks are somehow egalitarian, in the next half century somewhat fewer than that 20 percent are likely ever to have economic access to the capabilities of these systems. An argument for a higher estimate would depend on projected growth rates that are historically unprecedented and are unsupported by even the rosiest long-range economic forecasts.

(cont'd)

From: IN%"██████████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1994 10:52:25.95

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66. **Joe Amato**

From Andrew Levy, re: Community and uncommunity, 3 of 4

Wed 23 Feb 1994

[quoting from Crary]

"To avoid misunderstanding, my argument here is not for or against any given technological arrangement. Rather, it is against the fictions, mystifications, bad faith, and worse in critical analyses that ignore the immensity, and the violence, of this disequilibrium. For our new electronic communities and digital subjectivities, whatever their local value and however subversive they might seem, are also part of an intensifying process of global polarization, segregation, and impoverishment. "...The sleek cyberdream of a collapsed global surface of instantaneity and dematerialization persists only by erasing the waking actuality of a world that is increasingly unlivable for most of its

inhabitants. "Some critics have celebrated the advent of an era of 'generalized communication' in the belief that new technologies will open up a multiplicity of 'local rationalities,' a multicultural world in which ethnic, sexual, religious, and other minorities would all have voices. But such a multicentered pluralism would depend on the universalizing and impossible idea of a relatively even distribution of technological culture. Instead, population is acquiring increasingly potent, supple forms of technological expression while the majority continue to inhabit radically dissimilar 'off-line' spaces and temporalities (or machinic 'creolizations' that will never mesh on equal terms with the most powerful networks). "With the growth of telecommunications and information systems in the West, Japan, and elsewhere (along with the corporate scramble to control and reorganize this arena of exchange), what used to be thought of as 'consumption' is increasingly synonymous with 'communication.' Within this field, where 'interactivity' is a new word for 'shopping,' it is becoming harder to distinguish effective resistance from what are merely alternate fashions of consumption. The 'grand narratives' and authoritarian perspectives may to some extent have collapsed, but the new proliferation of voices, truths, and subject positions has as much to do with the logic of the electronic marketplace as with the inception of any new public sphere."

[the above paragraphs are from Crary's article in the February issue of *_Artforum_*, 58-59, 103.]

(cont'd)

From: IN% "██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1994 10:52:31.56

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67. **Joe Amato**

From Andrew Levy, re: Community and uncommunity, 4 of 4

Wed 23 Feb 1994

In the context of Crary's examination, the resulting economic disparity between the haves & have-nots is manifest not only "in political and economic crisis but, perhaps just as important, in the phenomenon of radically dissimilar perceptual and cognitive lifeworlds." Beavis & Butthead vs. Whitman & Emerson. As mentioned in Charles' posting, being outside a (literary) community is a sometimes self-elected position. When it comes to electronic communities, however, the decision and possibilities of that choice are mediated, if not imploded, within the social space of a discriminatory and post-apocalyptic economy of knowledge many people will be powerless to affect within the space of the screen, having no terminal or one not monitored by management from which to speak. Crary goes on to mention that some current research in the

neurosciences suggests that prolonged use of new image technologies "will produce *physical* remappings of neural connections in the brain." How large will the boundary between "inside" and "outside" become when heightened by unbridgeable perceptual and cognitive divides? "... the prospect is for medicobiological elites and castes of a sort unimaginable even in the most archaic premodern societies" (103). Crary ends by asking how one is to stay in touch with, listen to and learn from that majority of voices "outside the circuits of compulsory communication and 'augmented' realities?" This question complements Don Byrd's profound and densely complex investigation in the book referenced above.

I'm sure some of the concerns and ideas of which Crary speaks are not "new" to many of the subscribers to the UB Poetics list---but I thought it appropriate to interject them directly into the discussion and making of community *here*. That's a typo, but let it stand. By the way, I (aka Andrew Levy) am not actually "posting" this response. Instead, Mr. Amato has been kind enough to volunteer his services. Also, my apologies to anyone who objects to my eavesdropping and textual intrusion into this space. Please direct all objections to Joe Amato---otherwise, I'll never know.

best to everyone hovering, lurking, listening, or subscribing!

Andrew Levy

p.s. A book I've found useful for thinking about community is *The Coming Community*, by Giorgio Agamben. His work in this book would also complement, I believe, Steve Evans' thinking about identity and the "hatred of identity."

[p.p.s. all typos, garbling and related wobbling by Joe]

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1994 17:53:44.28

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68. **Joe Amato**
RE: Institution?

Wed 23 Feb 1994

well, i don't wanna 'take sides' re the disagreement, public/private and in-between, 'between' ben & jennifer...

but i *would* like to say [and i'm editing in here that i'm not at all pleased with how this post turned out] that i've noted posts similar to jennifer's on a number of lists (that is, from women, and addressing similar issues), and that i think we would all do well to consider the extent to which these spaces are gendered so as to exclude possibilities for all... that is, that women might feel somehow

excluded from these environs is not simply an idiosyncratic or sensitive (which is to say hypersensitive) observation... there are a number of related issues here---the sorts of subject positions that technologies typically help to institute, even within a presumed space of first amendment freedoms, public domain and such---and it is likely, i think, that many of these issues are backgrounded in the midst of differing levels of dis/comfort vis-a-vis such public spaces...

that is, it's not that wobbling per se, whatever one makes of same, is a poor point of departure (and as i recall, there have been both women and men involved in that discussion, if predominantly men (this latter observation perhaps significant in itself))... it's more to the point that such a discussion---and i've certainly indulged myself in similarly compulsive (?---is this fair?) threads/exchanges---bypasses perhaps without much forethought or deliberation (around t/here, at least) questions pertaining to---not how "we" is/are conceived contra or in association with various "i's"---but how "we" as an implicit operational construction has/have already de facto eliminated particular "i's" from its/our field of possibilities...

who is we not speaking?... and why?...

joe///(awaiting meanings of silences, departures... which will, w/methinks, require a few words from our sponsors...) From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1 994 18:26:41.12

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69. **Kristen Prevallet**

angry boys

Wed 23 Feb 1994

Ben:

You can dish it out but you sure can't take it.
You're Freudian Slip was successful, and now you
had better answer to your own rhetoric instead of
calling everyone else on theirs.

I can see that you took Jennifer's message personally, but you shouldn't have.
The bigger issue has to do with talking about community in terms that, whether
you mean to or not, and I know you don't, are purely rhetorical and thereby
exclusionary to those who don't know what the heck you're talking about. Not
that I have any big ideas about how to make this e-mail thing *useful*--I just
think that you all have to be careful about laying down the terms for
conversation, and then getting "angry" when someone calls you on them. It's
funny, because I did not find Jennifer's posting "abstract" at all. Rather, it is
among the most straight forward of most of what I have read on this thing. And

I shall add this, apologizing if it has already been said, for I joined the list late: What is the point of all this talk about community and when will the talk stop and the communalizing (word?) begin? I guess that's the problem with virtual--its all talk about the talk about the talk, removed, from EXPERIENCE.

Kristin Prevallet

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 23-FEB-1994 18:59:06.73

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70. **Loss Glazier**

Gender

Wed 23 Feb 1994

I'm not sure what direction this leads but it occurs to me that Kristin's comment that "Ben can dish it out but not take it" might overlook the basis of Jennifer's dissatisfaction, as I see it 'that the holds of abstraction are dominated by men' (paraphrase). Whether this is or is or not true is one of those endlessly debateably points, on which I'm willing to willingly give ground just because I can't see a defining argument in either camp. It's clear that much of technology has been developed by males, I don't think that bears any argument. But is the invoking of "boys" because of use of abstraction an accurate call? I can't enter into this because I don't know but (and it may be unnecessarily tedious to do so) want to suggest that there are always other elements (not under- estimating gender at all) but what about class, ethnicity, geography as poet-entially also influential? Is it relevant that discussions of community lead to a recognition of difference within the "community"? Isn't it far too reductive to draw the line at gender--I mean aren't there all sorts of gradation of experience and social location (including gender, aren't there gradations of "male" experience and "female" experience despite one's biological gender?) that make such divisions incredibly destructive? From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 24-FEB-1 994 01:42:41.25

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71. **Belle Gironde**

community a'gin

Thu 24 Feb 1994

Thanx to Andrew Levy for contextualizing the community discussion in a lrger world. (Post)-apocalyptic tho' his "posts" are. meanwhile:

I'm happy to have entered the list at this incipient moment when the (I think) necessary/requisite activity of community

formation is happening.

Inevitable that in a purely text based environment, "community" must produce itself (identity) textually via some discussion which takes as its subject its subjects (us) & our relations (community--or the hope/dream/image/concept & c. of).

The "signs" seem good when, in this process, exploding Freudian cigars go off, voices who feel themselves somehow silenced speak out, dissenting, a "Dad" (mon Bernstein) chimes in w/ affectionate pronouncements and (as i began w/) a bucket brigade of un-wired wisdom makes its way from Indiana (is that the right M-western territory?) via Amato's transcription to the list reminding "us" (can I say so?) of how lucky we are and the responsibilities implied by fortune

Belle Gironda

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 24-FEB-1994 01:46:29.46

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72. **GENE E. HULT**

Ah...

Thu 24 Feb 1994

It is rather wonderful to read people talking to each other (even if in anger) rather than making guarded intellectual pronouncements. But what are we all here for? It's a poetics forum, so let's discuss poetry! Anyone have a particular favorite he or she has read lately to share with the rest of us? Anyone feeling particularly brave and want to share one they wrote? Let's get this thing in high, useful gear.

Gene Hult

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 24-FEB-1994 01:55:25.07

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73. **Belle Gironda**

a'gin

Thu 24 Feb 1994

Oh,

& I meant to say that the point Katie Yates made via Blanchot seems vital in that the "I" / "We" relation ultimately frames

all our possibilities for speaking to each other and encompasses
(uh, I don't know if that's the word but..) categories (word?)
like gender, race, class, which matter but which (seem)
automatically
reductive by virtue of their (well-meaning)
ambitions.

BG

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 24-FEB-1994 10:34:24.71

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74. **Patrick Phillips**

RE: Institution?

Thu 24 Feb 1994

Doesn't it appear that just when you think you got "community" down, something discombobulates...

Like Kristen, on one hand I feel its too bad that we have to negotiate the notion of community. It's kinda like thinking about thought. When one brings some thing, something particular, into a group, no matter if its a loosely knit group, there is a focal point that in turn defines the group, or community.

On the other, I feel relieved by Jennifer's post. Perhaps the thing brought into the group must then be thrown out for the definition of community to be clarified, changed. I think this is what Jennifer is tending to. That the institution sterilizes the "community," or it acts as a kind of radon, seeping into the house, or in our case, the "shack," and we slowly mutate. Raise the windows, knock down a wall, air it out!

Yet another facet. What happened with Ben's public post of a private tussle should be examined in that light as well; that privately we do negotiate on terms which often sound completely off-key in public; that the time and energy of talking "intimately" is quite different from this odd publicity both in its intention as well as to the attention it is given.

As it turns out, the eaves on this shack accomodate a lot of people. They also accomodate, or produce a lot of apprehension and skepticism, which in turn breeds distrust. That the rain has eased up, or the shack remodelled a bit, allowing a different accomodation, a different form, speaks to a determination and resilience that this forum may have, but that gets lost at times in the particular posts; a loss which can be and is recouped most times without animosity, or acrimony.

In all this I have to say I was a little pissed that when I posted the Diane Ward interview and tried to get something going around her remarkable work there were no takers. That my taking an explicit approach to EXPERIENCE in her work wasn't engaged, or challenged. Couple this with the fact that I'm a "boy" it becomes hard for me to see where in fact the wobble is and to what "you boys" refers. Although I see that the boys club metaphor is not just a metaphor, there are variables, soft edges which are accessible. Just to say that this forum has a form which is ultimately arbitrated only by a very tenuous "we." That all constructs here are provisional. Jennifer has shown this. Thanks

Patrick

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 24-FEB-1

994 16:54:47.08

To:IN%"██████" "Multiple recipients of list POETICS"

CC:

Subj:

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75. **James Sherry**

RE: Institution?

Thu 24 Feb 1994

When we get stuck defining community
We are ignoring the rest we be.
Community for me at least
is one logical view of our networking
in a specific area of interest -- poetry.

Other components are logical as well
like this notion of institution
which sends alarms to most
but has impact as the sum
of our messages coheres.

Physically we are nodes,
and individuals, and poets,
and other things which are not
all the same : some teachers, some computing professionals,
and here we diverge like with gender.

The community cannot define all we are,
but our similar interests in coming together
over this server: poetry.

But poetry is not one thing either:
and to define it for net purposes is essential to me.

The form / forum of email and the net define
much of what we can do best, read effectively,
here and what can be saved for other forms
like sonnets, hand written letters, books,
phone calls, group discussion, readings...

This form in its email suit is provisional.
I would not attempt full-scale legalistic discussion.
I might want to send an attachment, more carefully worked
up on a word processor, but that is another form of the net.
In fact to do so requires a different program than email which is just a
carrier.

Not only are these notes mostly provisional,
hardly edited and off the top of our heads,
they are often not sequential, are intersected
by multiple other topics on any given session
and by well edited attachments like Levy's quotation.

From this perspective the forum for our various missives
has a curious impact, since we never know what form
will appear inside a message: its contents.
For one thing we have a change in the idea of form
and content. Form is forum and contents can be one of several forms.

Also errors are so easy to make that like in our own brains
we have to give a lot of room for alternatives.

On a personal level that's forgiveness, on an ideational
level the writers' different contexts are critical,
on the level of subject we need to discuss these issues
of institutions, communities, nodes, persons, subjects,
and others as they apply to networking. Otherwise
we get one person wanting to have a poetry discussion,
another an exchange of sources on issues, another
"what I think of this writer".

And all of these have their place here, although I have
said I think that some are effective here and others
off putting or even scandalizing, since we are not
all the same on the net, simply equal.

And here is where Bernstein's list of rules

Is more vital to me than the subjects of poets,
issues, and personal exchanges arising from
misunderstanding that we are messaging

to equals that are not the same.

Any discussion must begin with recognition of the variety of components.

The net is not only an institution and beginning with any one component risks forefronting it to valorize or criticise which is not the point. Here there is a method to apply. Yet the application of rules by an individual does raise an issue of polity that can be institutionalized.

It must be questioned before it is institutionalized. That is why we must be glad to hear from CB about his rules and regs and we should all have input on the subject before we get so far down the road that they have become binding assumptions.

PLEASE READ THOSE RULES AND CHANGE THEM TO SUIT US.
ANYONE WHO WILL NOT CONTRIBUTE WILL SUFFER
FROM ALLOWING OTHERS TO MAKE THE DECISIONS.
PLEASE CONSIDER ALL THE COMPONENTS AND EVEN
LIST THEM TO AVOID MISSING AN IMPORTANT ONE.

I for one cast a ballot for a clearly stated list of rules governing network management to be published and discussed and within the boundaries of the mechanics put into place with the consent of contributors. Here CBs rules and Ben Friedlander's problem of public and private can be addressed.

Please, Charles simplify and complete your management rules indicating those which are in place and those which are contemplated. I'm not sure I understand or can sort them among all the prose. For those who think this a bad idea because it's not free, we can go back to that discussion, but it's probably not to the point.

Since it's not free now as Ben found and can only get to be so by defining boundaries within which we can be free, publishing will help. For those who think it's not poetry, remember poetic form. We are here defining a form within this forum which I hope I've convinced most is different enough from other forums to require preconception.

Too many forums I've been in have dissolved because some one overstepped and the group disintegrated from a combination of boredom, anger, guilt, and irrelevance. Which of our problems in other forums can we avoid bringing to this one? 1. list of rules. 2. list of components of the net that are relevant to consider.

JS (provisionally)

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 25-FEB-1994 05:36:00.29

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76. **susan**

(no subject)

Thu 24 Feb 1994

To members of the poetics net:

The discussion of community that I've recently tapped into is interesting, from a mid-Pacific perspective, for what it leaves out--only proving, I suppose, that definitions of community are inevitably context driven, "community games," as it were. In Hawaii, the term "local" is a racial as well as a regional tag; to be "local" here is to be Asian-American, which distinguishes "locals" from native Hawaiians, and haoles (whites). It's possible, though not easy, to be a "local haole," if you grow up here. Increasingly, that definition of "local" enters into local writing through the use of pidgin; Lois-Ann Yamanaka's SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE PAHALA THEATER (Bamboo Ridge Press, 1993) is written exclusively in pidgin (except for a moment of affected standard English, meant to be laughed off).

A couple of weeks ago I went to a reading for the publication of Jessica Hagedorn's fascinating anthology, THE DEATH OF CHARLIE CHAN. The first two readers, Yamanaka and a gay Filipino American writer, Zack Linmarck, read in a language so local (and so infused with particular cultural references) that I had a keen sense of living outside of it (I've been in Hawaii for three and a half years now). And yet I'm reminded of what Charles Bernstein said a few days ago about uncommunities--I feel myself a part of this community precisely because it is one that acknowledges a multitude of contexts; even though I'm not "local" I do have investments in the community. I am both inside and out of the game, especially when I set about "teaching" local literature at UH. My feeling about this discussion group is similar; it strikes me that the community's self-definition will change often, according to the particular contexts of our musings. Perhaps, to follow Gene Hult's comment, we should turn to poems--poems that contain within themselves these shifts of context which are the community as it exists inside poems. It also strikes me as a potentially productive exercise to examine poems that do not seem to welcome us into their community, since that exclusion (gender, class, or race-related) is part and parcel of our definition.

As an aside on pidgin writing: I'm interested in the way in which local writing is (finally) catching on on the mainland. Yamanaka is widely published, as are

Eric Chock and Wing Tek Lum, to say nothing of Cathy Song, though her work isn't generally considered to be local--her audience, as she put it horribly in the pages of MANOA, is the workshop writer she was most jealous of. Garrett Hongo's new anthology THE OPEN BOAT (a strange title for a collection of Asian American poetry--what DOES Stephen Crane have to do with it?) includes several Hawaii writers, and should make them more popular to a larger audience. But, although the use of an exclusive, non-universal language, pidgin, should attract the attention of "Language writers," the poems themselves are relentlessly conservative, more intent on mimesis than on any challenge to it. They buy into notions of "authenticity" that grate on literary critical ears.

In what sense, then, will a discussion group like this one welcome in the "multicultural" literature of places like Hawaii? How do we want to define multiculturalism? We need to keep in mind that "experimental writing" is also a context-driven phenomenon. What is experimental here isn't in Buffalo, and probably vice versa. (Though Hagedorn's anthology puts the Heath in the dust on that score.)

Anyway, I find myself piling on here. I'll sign off for now.

Susan M. Schultz (██████)

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 24-FEB-1
994 17:01:25.26

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77. **GENE E. HULT**

RULES

Fri 25 Feb 1994

ALL--

Gotta be rules, gotta be rules.... my only suggestion would be for everyone to drop our competitive defenses... yes, we're all (all? don't hesitate to challenge my words in your mouth) writers, we're all adrift on the seas of language, knowledge, learning, yes, we're all human. But, as G.B Trudeau once wrote re: We are the World -- Welcome, and check your egos at the door. Respect is rule #1, perhaps personal honesty rule #2?

Ah, the vultures circle... water, water!

Gene H.

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 25-FEB-1
994 21:04:45.85

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78. **Patrick Phillips**

RE: angry boys

Fri 25 Feb 1994

Kristen --

Yesterday I posted something which I hoped would help us to recognize that this space is provisional and the tone of that post was intended to be generous, or open, available. In addition to being projective, it also was reflexive, critical of the institutional form that this space sometimes takes and sometimes this boy's a part of.

I began to think about the "angry boys" post not really dealt with in my agreement in part with your "What is the point of all this talk about community..." and I again focused on tone; not as rhetoric, but as the personal and of a reflection of understanding.

I think it was clear that Jennifer's "institution" letter was not an invective intended to silence, or chastise, or to be critical of a person, but of an institution. I think that the debilitating facets of "the institution," though more insidious, can be compared to a rhetoric intended to chasten, or publicly ridicule. That you chose to air your frustration at Ben publicly, not at the institution, seems to me to ally you with forces of marginalization that you so refute. At least they speak to public frustrations that I don't see comensurate with his private "anger."

This note is not to chasten at all, but to bring into light and into focus the means of our discussions and the motivations behind them. This is not to soften rhetoric either, to marginalize through a modality. I know the tone of this post is self-conscious, but forthright. Thas tone is itself a contingency, provisional and by no means is used to set a tone for our discussion, or for our heated debate. It so often happens that a mode, or a tone sets up a kind of hegemony; but that hegemony by its very existence is necessarily open to challenge, not necessarily is the person open to such a challenge. I just can't help but wonder which was the focus of your quite public ire.

Patrick

From: IN%"[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 26-FEB-1994 21:47:33.15

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79. **Juliana Spahr**

silence, gender, two horses in another world

Sat 26 Feb 1994

Then the water seems to talk and I am Joan of
Arc or Jean Arthur hearing voices, I am nei-
ther a woman nor a man but an ethereal person
leading two horses in another world; where my
sex is something I can't recognize, the face
of a mandrill, a kind of football, the drama
of wind blowing cold gray clouds past the
sightless moon, you only see this figure on a
screen from the room of the other dream I
would have told you like prayers if the rain
hadn't made me so pale and winter was my only
memory, besides every time I say I dreamed
the phone rings and the kind young man
replaces the window and seals up the hole
above the heaters, it's Triptolemus, pour
holy water on his head this morning.

--Bernadette Mayer, %The Desires of Mothers
to Please Others in Letters%

Missent letters are always fascinating. The places
they end up--the garbage dump peopled with pick-
ers, sifters, and its analog, the mailbox of the
virtual community--are places where one wants to
be. The space of what goes on underneath the veil
of community-talk becomes suddenly exposed. Read-
ing the missent letter one is trespasser and owner
of the sacred nature of "communication" and its
pal "community." We know we never control our
words; this much is obvious. Or what I want to
say, is Ben's letter, which showed us how our
words and signals to senders betray, and its
replies should have opened things up, freed us
from the belief that our thought must be clear and
level-headed at every moment, not closed them
down.

But lets face it--it closed things down. And the
opposite of missent, the unsent letter, is just
plain unsettling. I have been complaining about
this discussion of community to a number of people

(gender: F) over the last couple of weeks. One writes: Are the woman just not hooked up technologically? (I think the answer is no.) Another, hoping to find some angel therein...Feel a bit left off/out of the dis. And another, It is too horrible to talk about on e-mail.

Discomforting or not, the issue of those identity centered social construct cliches (race, class, and gender) have been pointedly absent from the community discussion of community. The definition of community on this list has been as a consequence an uneasy one (after all, these constructs are dominant discussions in our culture, they compose almost every discussion of community. I do not mean to indict those involved in this discussion but rather to point to how rigorous our avoidance of them has been). So Jennifer's response, which I read (although she should correct me if she feels I am softening it in some way) as one that does not attack the continual male presence on the list, attacks the noted absence of gender in the discussion. She notices "invigorated but shut down"; "at least I have dishes"; "the house that shut the door." She wants a "keen eye." This eye she wants from all of us, every gender.

A. L. Nielson came and gave a talk the other day on the social constructions of identity (his concentration: race). This is something that is in vogue in the academy. I like this argument. Race, gender, class, all %are% social constructs. But always I am left wanting the next step. To apply to my experience, I am always trying to escape my gender. I want to be virtual. I want to be believed when I am in various forms of drag. But this argument about the social construct is one that always leaves me wanting. At the same time that part of me wants to celebrate, another part of me tells me to wake up. The word "drag" and "passing" speaks not of our ability to transcend these social structures, but rather that there is

an institutionalized name (and thus definition with its limitations) of this transcendence. As we are always filling out forms, we are always checking off boxes. So--What do I do now that I recognize that this thing that I am told that I am during a great part of my day is a construct?; Can I join a self-help group about escaping my construction?; Buy a manual for creating a new one?; Take riding lessons for Bernadette's two horses?

I guess my question is where should this "keen eye" look? And more specifically to Ben, how do you reconfigure, review, whatever, the power, the overwhelming presence, of male discourse on this list?

Juliana Spahr

From: IN% "[REDACTED]" "UB Poetics discussion group" 27-FEB-1994 14:36:42.80

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80. **Patrick Phillips** *the purloined*

Sun 27 Feb 1994

Spun from Julianna's idea of "missent" letter is that of the "purloined" that too has a margin, but one which is much more motivated, less mis-taken; the purloined preceeds, "creates" the unsent letter. I just wonder what sets up this area of theft, of what goes unwritten, and how unsettling it is, or where, as some kind of unmeasurable quanta of experience, this unsettling goes on in some kind of purloined sphere.

So there is the purloined experience that goes unquantified.

But we know who is stolen and who steals.

Yet, our aesthetic mix ellides the search and the letter sometimes to the point that we aren't sure who's the inspector and who's the thief.

We often seem to remain in the hiatus of this discovery. This hiatus resembles the virtual, as some "secret drawer." But we all know that there is a "certain amount of bulk-of space-to be accounted for in every cabinet." It's purely physical.

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?"

I'm not sure how we "sound" such spaces without attributing.....

This is where characteristics come in, gender, the physiognomy of "this space," the "tone" of the object sounded, the "institution" of discovery.

"I presume you looked into the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes...You include[d] the "grounds" of the houses?"

In some ways I wish to remain stolen, but I steal which makes that somewhat impossible. Perhaps I'll never apprehend my thief, but I will "examine [him] to better purpose in the dark." There too lies the unseen and the unsent.

Patrick

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 27-FEB-1994 16:33:38.13

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81. **Martin Spinelli**
sounding))))))))

Sun 27 Feb 1994

Being a tender sort, I dwelt for hours over what I read as Charles' dissatisfaction at what he sees and doesn't see here... and more hours still over Gene's suggestion that we "check our egos at the door." But in the end I only found myself questioning their (very different) expectations.

In Hans Enzensberger's "Constituents of a theory of the media" (NLR #64) I found these same anxieties over "response".

the utopia in Enzensberger's article is made possible through "mass participation in the social and socialized productive process." the Vision is this: everyone a participant. that is a participation in the media -- in its production. he says at once that media can produce the Social and production can control the media.

more interestingly for us Enze says the social power is in response. *response is power* shutting down response is domination.

in spite of the optimistic rhetoric, Enze himself gives us examples of media's failed potential (which he never

sufficiently recuperates). in the hands of his "masses" short wave radio is pathetically impotent, badly imitating bad examples from commercial radio. the goal of his idealized liberated media is "mobilization" (vague throughout). whatever it is, radio hams don't have it. they are isolated and remain so. somehow mobilization for Eze must be physical. an intellectual mobilization, a mobilization of response seems possible both on radio and on the Net. Community needs dialog.

the Net, the medium with the potential for response, can't equal Eze's imagination. initially and in places there is a vocalization in unison at places if not an "organization" or "mobilization". but looking further it is lacking: there are only prolific and pervasive fragments, all their own centers or all speaking equally comfortably from the margins. can a greater Social exist without interaction between the frags, without impetus towards the improvement of the Whole? (yet there is this impetus around the hardware -- everyone wants to improve the medium itself.)

Where is the revolution?

there is the opportunity to exercise power -- to say something. like a baudrillard essay nothing is heard before [EOB] or after the last footnote. containment. what would the virtual revolution look like? erev? control cannot be taken of anything on the Inside -- for the first time the Inside is the place bereft of power and imagination, bereft of agency with the simulation of agency.... curiously supervised

scrutinized

Clipped

surreptitiously censored

evaluated

categorized

and

fast

(it posits a new class: the techobourgeoisie over the infobourgeoisie.)

again Eze: media's power is its mobilization of the masses. but real mobilization coming from media would

presume at most three channels (three access points, three meanings all referring to each other). mobilization is an anomaly on the Net because of the infinity of channels and the infinity of messages...is it enough to be united around a medium? to have a vested interest in the medium, to be dependent on it? there is a kind of mobilization around this but it can only ever be mustered _in support_ of the medium. with an infinity of channels, consumption and production don't just get blurred. production *becomes* consumption. supporting a right to production is only like good advertizing... teaching us we're not really happy. we didn't know how unhappy we were. responding erodes. the mic is too close to the amp.

feedback... the repetition of what has already been transmitted fading and distorted but essentially the same as what has already been said. the difference between feedback and response is the difference between a system of simulations and a system of meaning? Badrill is great on this in his "The Masses": public opinion polls dictate the limits of public experience.

in his media strategy which seeks to end isolation (read "alienation") COMMUNITY IS MANDATORY

Eze is aware that a sys in which everyone produces/expresses will yield only noise. noise which does not hold one's interest like nonsense but is only irritating -- distressing. here he says that the masses must be taught to be better producers if the utopian mobilization is to be realized. in this way they could record their daily experiences and learn from them. again organization is liberating not the tech that provides it.

on the net you can respond to the message, and only indirectly, inadvertently about the medium. you use the Net yet you cannot have a dialog with the Net.

there is a danger when the link between community and medium becomes too perfect (seemless, transparent as tech pretends it can make it) *as obvious intrusions of the media begin to disappear more completely the less there will be to say* the connection is the only viable issue,

source and site of discourse. as it evaporates so must communication.

the resistance of the medium, the time spent in the friction of translation/communication allows for rumination, for contemplation, for thought (even if it is only an examination of its deployment). when this space disappears all we will be able to do is sit and stare.

the eze short term solution: authors and producers must work as agents for the masses and only when the masses learn to cut tape and mix music can the producer "lose himself". This is how he ultimately solves the noise problem.

as media are currently constituted (one-directionally), *response* is anti-media. the ideal response that Eze is after must go beyond the limits he sets for it. it must be outside like spray paint on the monitor. Badrill claims there exists "a possible subversion of the code of the media [in the] possibility of alternative speech and a radical reciprocity of symbolic exchange."

exchange is the radical thing... but exchange of what... a change must happen in the exchange -- reworking it into what is an anti-aesthetic -- (anti- to the aesthetic of the professional media and the OED) -- upset the hegemony, don't believe the authority and twist its structure with implied orthography. Signify without rules. ignore Expectations.

the Net is not often used in
the way say Bill or Ben or
Jonathan (Howe, Freidlander,
Fernandez, three that came
first to mind) use language
in their poetry. the
materiality of the Net
is not often tinkered
with --thought about --
addressed as something
other than a transparent
medium of representing
(thought or something).
the hegemony of these lingos

is not exposed or disrupted
by toying with, or even
showing, the structure. it
is believed in. we must
lose/loose our faith.

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 28-FEB-1994 12:17:02.62

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82. **cynthia kimball**

two horses

Mon 28 Feb 1994

Ghost that I am--or is ghosting an act, so I
"ghost" but AM not a ghost--I read these messages
invisibly, until now silently. I FEEL invisible
and safe that way, to be perfectly honest. I'm
scared right now writing, don't even know if this
post will post, don't want to expose my silence
my silent reading presence. Female that I am--or is
female-ing an act, so that I can "check my gender at
the door" (no double meaning intended), be a ghost
pass judgment and take sides and change my mind with
every new side there is to take without exposing the
vulnerable new sprouts of opinions to the frost
while in the process of sprouting them....Is my silence
because I'm female and feel left out or am I leaving
myself out because I'm female or am I a temporarily
ungendered ghost because I haven't claimed my USERID
in front of anyone yet for whatever fear-full reasons.
I could choose a male pseudonym that would protect my
silence a little longer. I thought about it. Anyway
Im going back into the ether for a while.

From: IN%"██████" "UB Poetics discussion group" 28-FEB-1994 21:01:40.22

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83. **Steve Evans**

****Repair Work****

Mon 28 Feb 1994

In my experience as a young recruit from the post-no-fault-divorce-secretarial-working-class into the technobourgeoisie...

But can a sentence really begin that way?

I think a keen eye should be kept, as Charles has already indicated, on the way our apparently **elective** affinities are underpinned by **selective** institutions. Cross out that "s" and the drainage pipe starts pumping inertial goo (mystification) into the discursive stream... We all go belly up.

The question of how to generate maximum democracy in an institution that is fundamentally anti-democratic obviously cannot be suspended until "the others" arrive. Should we then call an constituent assembly, as James Sherry recommends? Or would people on this list see in that just another act of mystification?

The question of "how universal is the university" (to quote an analogous debate, cf. **transition** a few volumes back) is obviously **not very.** But how convert that answer into a political project if not on the basis of a concept of real universality?

Education is a generalizable interest; those of us who write, publish, teach, read, get all upset about, and sacrifice our sanity to, poetic practice are also sometimes acting so as to **generalize** an interest in poetry. Sometimes we're just making moves on one another for the sake of maximizing our own symbolic capital. No amount of individual saintliness will purify our acts of formation of this element (saints actually understand symbolic capital better than most sinners do), but rigorous and humorous techniques of deflation are a resource we should never forget to renew and use.

I think the theoreticians of ecstatic communication are of extremely limited relevance to our situation here. However inappropriate the model of **communicative action** advanced by Jurgen Habermas may be when it comes to thinking through our aesthetics, a sublimity-soaked aesthetics-pretending-to-be-politics is an even worse cognitive liability when it comes to thinking through the politics of this for(u)m.

Nomads with newtons = monads with modems?

I think we're in a situation where un-coerced agreement on how to proceed is possible. I think we've done very little so far to identify and thematize resources and commitments that are shared and that might come in handy when a little **repair work** is necessary...

Finally, because Pierre Joris and Tom Mandel's joint-post a while ago brought up the issue of "outcomes" as something "communities" usually have at their disposal for sanctioning the unruly, and because we have been trafficking in negative outcomes for long enough, I would like to tick down the list of outcomes experienced by this participant at least as positive.

Because of this list, I have either read or re-read: Diane Ward's **Imaginary Movie,** Reznikoff's **Testimony,** Erica Hunt's **Notes for an Oppositional Poetics,** Bernstein's **Reznikoff's Nearness,** Susan Stewart's article in **Profession 93,** to mention just the ones I can remember here at work. Because of this list, and specifically the discussion of our failure to address gender until recently, I had an alternate context in which to place the gender politics of the Kootenay School Writers who just passed through Providence to our great delight last week. Likewise, when Susan Stewart gives a lecture tomorrow on **Lyric History** I'll know a context in which what she says is apparently already known... I could go on...

This list opens a dimension within social space. It is **not** a social space unto itself (I would feel sad for anyone who found it so). Every contradiction that governs our social order will be visible at one time or another here in this dimension. That should not surprise us. That should not shut us down. At the minimum, the fact that postings do not cancel one another out--as monologues in real time conversations and seminars and public meetings do-- should be recognized and explored. The low opinion of how things are going so far (in the sent, the unsent, and the missent postings) reminds me a lot of the "mood" that kept threatening to congeal at the **New Coast** festival last spring in Buffalo. Now I know that complaint and gossip are vital signs ("that's not a cross look it's a sign of life") that something is happening. I also know that most complaints are grounded: things are **that** bad. But given the relative scarcity of occasions when something can actually be done about what's bad, it seems almost lazy to keep on in those modes.

A thought, like any other relationship, isn't real until you risk it.

Steve

From: IN% " " "UB Poetics discussion group" 28-FEB-1994 21:16:05.16

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84. **Hans-Joachim Rieke**

community, gender

Mon 28 Feb 1994

I wanted to avoid raising the gender question, as the effect usually is, that women suddenly speak up, but are at the same time cornered, labelled, hemmed

in by the topic. Women talking/writing only to write about gender. Personally I don't feel excluded by the jargon of the discussions. Many of the books that are being talked about are not available, or not immediately so, for me, so I am content to "listen", read, and I don't feel like a peeping Tom for it. Not all of what is being discussed is interesting anyway, and I need a longer time forming my own ideas about e-mail effects on discourse, at the reading Flusser and Bolz and others on the topic. A lot of what is going on in this list seems the public continuation of private discourse of e-mailing, so that it is often difficult to cross the gaps. What I do not quite understand though is, if I personally address people, asking simply for information, that I didn't get an answer more than once - gender unrelated by the way. This is more than rudeness, it has to do with community. I was a little surprised anyway how little the various investigations of the term community were touched by a Foucauldian understanding of how discourse functions; if I understand him rightly, community is not only made by the collective of all speech acts, the absent presence of all participants, but equally so by all speech acts that are silenced, excluded, treated as "gibberish", foolishness, etc. Only a "huh?" for a critical letter by Arcadii is not much worry indeed. Finally I find amusing, the indignation (read emotional outburst) the "woman speak" (?) created by the private/public letter...

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