

@poetics

The UB Poetics Discussion Group

Archive of Electronic Correspondence

August 1994

78 messages · Sun 31 Jul 1994 – Tue 30 Aug 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

August is the month of the great reunion — out at Yasgur's farm the mud and the nostalgia are being sold back to a second generation — and it is the one concession the poets make all month to the summer's news: Joseph Conte breaks off to ask whether anyone caught "*Melanie at the Woodstock reunion.*" For the rest, they spend the weeks talking, with a self-consciousness I find rather touching, about the very wire along which they are talking.

The largest thread is simply headed "*e-mail,*" and it is the list turning to regard itself in a glass. Charles Bernstein, brooding on where the audience for poetry has gone, ventures that its critical future is "*surely electronic*" — a prophecy this very volume, assembled from the wire, exists to confirm. Alan Golding is warier, wondering aloud about "*the privacy issues that e-mail raises,*" a question the black bars in these pages answer after their own fashion, a half-generation too late.

There is heavier weather too. Tom Mandel opens a small seminar on what Brecht did and did not intend by plumpe Denken — "*crude thinking,*" he glosses it — and for a week the list works the narrow seam between the rough-and-ready and the merely rough. It is the sort of argument only these correspondents would mount in the dog days: Marxist aesthetics conducted between announcements of readings, with the fan whirring.

Beneath it runs the summer's durable grievance — where the work can actually be bought. Hank Lazer comes home from Cambridge disenchanted with its "*allegedly wonderful bookstores,*" having found on their shelves next to nothing by the poets this list reads. The complaint braids into the still-smouldering anthology quarrel and a brisk hunt for the earliest citation of woman-as-muse; marketplace, canon, and myth-kit all found wanting in the same breath.

What holds it together is the medium's own strange intimacy — several dozen people, most of whom have never met, conducting a graduate seminar, a swap meet, and a wake at once across a continent and a wire. I have swept the machinery out of these letters, drawn the bar across whatever was private, and left the talk standing. That the talk is so often about the talk itself seems to me exactly the note on which this particular August ought to be kept.

— K. M. F.

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1. **Tom Mandel**

Re: Anthologies

Sun 31 Jul 1994

re: Marjorie Perloff's pertinent post on head-counts & quotas,

"There are two kinds of pianists. Homosexual
pianists and bad pianists."

Vladimir Horowitz

tom mandel

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2. **Roberts Mark**

Harmony/Anarchy

Sun 31 Jul 1994

8. Somewhere near Pittsburgh is a small town called Harmony; it began in a utopian gesture sometime near the middle of the 19th century. I turned toward my Dodge Dart toward it one day in I think it was 1973, but when I arrived it was a dim steeltown suburb black with oil and soot of the rivers that mingle thereabouts to (at the time) carry away what was not wanted in making the steel. I'm trying to remember whether I've ever looked at a map and seen a town called Rhyme.

tom mandel

In Victoria Australia there is a town called Anarchy (and North Anarchy). I've always thought that it would be a good place to edit a poetry mag from.

I've never driven through Anarchy. A lot of my friends talk about going there but somehow they never seem to make it!!!

Mark Roberts
SIS Project Officer
Student Information & Systems Office
University of NSW
Australia

Ph. 02 [REDACTED]
Fax 02 [REDACTED]

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3. **Marjorie Perloff**

Re: Anthologies

Sun 31 Jul 1994

Tom Mandel has a good point. Don Allen was "lucky"--lucky too in his particular moment. d In 1958, most poetry was rigidly codified and uniform in

the Hall, Simpson, Rosenthal volumes etc. and then there began to be a really marked counterculture and s{ that became the New American Poetry. But since then, there's been a lot of gamesmanshi{ {and concern to be Newer than New without thinking why? and for what? The best thing an anthology can do is to put work out there that{ _ the readers in question others { r epi;

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4. **Marjorie Perloff**

Re: Anthologies

Sun 31 Jul 1994

something happened to the computer for last message so please{ignore.
Anyway, I just want to sy
dp

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5. **Marjorie Perloff**

Re: Anthologies

Sun 31 Jul 1994

The last note goofed so just to conclude. The best thing the anthology can do is to put work, unfamiliar as yet, out to those who would profit from familiarity with it. I've learned a lot about French poetry, for instance, from some of the anthologies put out by Roubaud, Hocquard, et al. Ditto about Italian poetry from the Gruoop 93 (Gruppo 93) pub- lications. Facts are especially useful- like, who, what, where? {

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6. **Marc Nasdor**

Re: Yau's Review

Sun 31 Jul 1994

Steve--

I'll reply in reverse:

1. Re: crumbling of the priesthods. I was only referring to art & academy priesthods, which are considerably less of a threat than the one Rushdie is dealing with.

2. Re: credentials. Was I unclear? I agree with your response, and the tie-in regarding the question of competence. I thought what I posted was in line with your answer. (Unfortunately, I mistakenly discarded a copy of my post; my mother had a minor stroke and I had to rush down to Baltimore.) :-(

3. Re: middle-class honkies. Let me clarify. I meant to say that the middle class participates fully in that dominance. After all, a dictator, for example, does not *personally* pull the trigger on each and every victim. It is important to talk about complicity and responsibility. As far as the avant-garde is concerned, if you begin in the 19th Century, your conclusions would be as you state. I think, with respect to the arts, that some power relationships *have* changed, unless hip-hop culture isn't avant-garde enough for you. And further, to whose avant-garde do you refer? You assume a static paradigm. In places like Baltimore (my home town), artists have expended large amounts of energy crushing the boundaries of their own community. There's little or no funding, so artists aren't trying to screw each other as much. I would consider the "alternative" arts communities in cities like Baltimore or Cleveland to be much healthier than those in places like New York. The former cities are in such dire economic straits that artists quickly find common ground.

Marc

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7. **Nick Lawrence** *further & additional*

Tue 2 Aug 1994

further murmurings on the subject of anthologies

our gut reaction--we of the counter-counter-counterhegemonic--to the recent slew of post-New American Poetry anthologies seems to be one of queasiness, as if it were all somehow not a good sign; our understanding being as Steve points out that institutional culture's certifications of competencies will coagulate as canons--canons to the right of us, but never canons to the left of us; & that the debate over inclusion and representation, however necessary, leaves the primary legitimizing mechanism unquestioned

but what *are* the uses of anthologies? in the case of Allen's, it's been suggested, not simply to introduce a body of work to a wider readership, but also the diverse forms of (social) life implicated in & by that work--not diverse enough, as it turned out, to present an approximation of "what America looks like," but

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8. Nick Lawrence

(no subject)

Tue 2 Aug 1994

(contd) to suggest at least more of what America *sounds* like than was currently available. As a sourcebook, Allen's collection seemed able to do what so few anthologies manage--that is, defeat the authoritative guardianship of its own frame and actively instigate the reader to follow up on the still-unfolding projects provisionally mapped out within its pages; first-stop reference rather than only-stop textbook or monument

and it seems difficult to envision the girls and boys of Tulsa, OK fingering the pages of any of the recent crop of books & placing checkmarks next to their favored authors for future research--though one shouldn't disallow this possibility

So: if we distance ourselves from the various models of purely "subjective" garland-gathering, grimly inclusive compendiums, slackly conceived thematic clusterings or transparently legitimizing continuity-narratives, can we nonetheless find a further use for the anthology form? What might it be? Steve Evans mentioned the possibility of an anthology explicitly addressing the connections between avant-garde poetries and oppositional social movements, & I'd be curious to hear more about that (poetry only? prose excerpts? one ponders the spectacle of a Pound Canto followed by the transcript of a Father Coughlin radio broadcast--oppositional cutting several ways)

Can, then, the form renew attention to its social placing as well as to its own formal determinations?

Proposals?

Nick

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9. Jed

(no subject)

Tue 2 Aug 1994

Nick Lawrence's reference to the Allen anthology as "first-stop reference rather than final stop monument" points up the current perplexity in which it *has* become monumentalized. It clearly did function, for years if not decades, as a first stop, a research tool (Allen's bibliography--and how many anthologists even offer such a thing?--included dozens of magazines, names of the editors, span of run, and location, and concluded with addresses of fifteen publishers). Allen's inclusion of a whole section of statements on poetics defied the look of generic purity for which so many editors strive--although it's important to note that the

most important precedent setting anthology from the other end of that decade, John Ciardi's "Mid-Century American Poets" (1950), included essays on poetics by *each* of the selected poets. Finally, Allen's mapping of poets into five clusters (which Messerli attempts to replicate with, I think, much incoherence) advances the sense of potential internal dissension. As a table of contents it evokes, to use Nate Mackey's wonderful title, a "discrepant engagement." Every anthology has its discrepancies, but they're invariably attributable to the editor's taste rather than, as Allen provided for, the divergent working conditions/poetics/practices of communities of poets.

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10. **kat**
(no subject)

Tue 2 Aug 1994

Yes, the ALlen anthology did what we needed. It seems that many current books, anthologies not alone, fail to think of simple utility. Students and fellow travellers--is such a distinction is to be made--should be helped toward further research and other more lively exploration. Anyway, just a thought. By the way, I didn't understand the texture of comments on credentials. When did credentials ever get to be--or float--above the market, either at the stage of evaluation or transaction? And, perhaps because the protocols aren't as FIXED as for, say, AMA, or NRA, poetry and criticism are particularly "market sensitive."

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11. **Marc Nasdor**
Re: further & additional

Tue 2 Aug 1994

Nick--

I'm not sure that *poets* are what America looks like.

--Marc Nasdor



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12. **Tom Mandel**
anthologorrhia

Wed 3 Aug 1994

Is there nothing to stem the tide of rhetorical questions posing as poetics?

"So: if we distance ourselves from the various models of purely "subjective" garland-gathering, grimly inclusive compendiums, slackly conceived thematic clusterings or transparently legitimizing continuity-narratives, can we..."

No, we cannot distance ourselves from what we are within. A master metaphor of subject matter with our royal selves outside it in consideration is at once useless and apparently the sole operative in the discourse on this net. Geez...

And an anthology explicitly addressing the connections between avant-garde poetries and oppositional social movements"

..is not an anthology but an essay or the syllabus for a course on the canon we would prefer (to the left of us, of course -- for 200 years now -- nor do I disagree), i.e. another example of what I referred to in my post the other day as "substitution". Thinking by substitution.

An old story told in the advertising/marketing industry (I'm sorry if my reference materials do not meet appropriate credentialar traditions) may shed some light on what Brecht did *not* mean by "plumpe Denken" (crude thinking):

a man walks into a bar and says to the bartender, give me a johnny walker. Would that be a johnny walker red or johnny walker black, the bartender replies. Now, our protagonist thinks for a long moment. "Oh hell, he says, give me a chivas."

c'mon. cut thru it (thru to it).

tom mandel

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13. **Alan Golding**

Twentieth-Century Literature Conference

Wed 3 Aug 1994

Associate Professor of English, U. of Louisville

Phone: [REDACTED]; e-mail: [REDACTED]

A little break from anthologies and their discontents: namely, some conference information that y'all, as we (they?) say in Kentucky, might be interested in. Every year, last weekend in February, the University of Louisville hosts a national conference on twentieth-century lit. (broadly defined--the program includes theory papers, film, etc.) A number of you have attended in the past, of course, and know all about it. Anyway, here's the dope on the 1995 conference:

Conference dates are Feb. 23-25, 1995. Submission deadline is Oct. 3, 1994.

We consider critical and creative submissions (that charged term . . .). Critical

submissions should consist of 2 copies of a readable-in-20-minutes paper, a 250-word abstract, brief bio, and cover sheet with address, phone number(s), affiliation. Creative work submitted should be suitable for a 20-minute reading and can consist of published or unpublished work. The structure is that of your standard academic conference: typically, three papers on a panel, with time for discussion. Creative "sessions" usually feature three short readings. You can submit in both categories, critical and creative. We also consider pre-organized panels, in case any of you want to get together on something; in such cases, panelists should follow the guidelines for individual submissions, since papers are reviewed individually.

The conference features two keynote speakers, and often some further special presentations or readings. In recent years, speakers/readers have included Susan Howe, David Antin, Marjorie Perloff, Jerry McGann, Clayton Eshleman, Ed Dorn, Louise Gluck, Alicia Ostriker, W. S. Merwin, Robert Scholes, Neil Lazarus, Hortense Spillers, Sherley Anne Williams, Jane Gallop, Frank Lentricchia, Michael Burkard, Susan Jeffords, Tess Gallagher.

Any further info., including a handy-dandy nicely printed call for papers, can be gotten from Harriette Seiler, Conference Director, Department of Languages, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292. Tel. [REDACTED]; FAX [REDACTED].

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14. **Hank Lazer**

Re: Twentieth-Century Literature Conference

Wed 3 Aug 1994

Alan-- just got your e-mail about the 20th C. Lit conference. Perhaps I can cook something up & attend/present.

Also, just got the official word from Northwestern University Press (a few moments ago) that my book (of essays, called *Opposing Poetries*) has been accepted. The press board met last week & approved publication. Now, as you know, it's on to corrections, revisions, getting the damned thing out at last. Thought you'd be interested. (Though I suspect that you've looked over the manuscript I sent them....?)

Pank

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15. **Alan Golding**

Re: Twentieth-Century Literature Conference

Wed 3 Aug 1994

Associate Professor of English, U. of Louisville

Phone: [REDACTED]; e-mail: [REDACTED]

Great news about the book--congratulations! I confidently expect it to be one of the best in a long time. Actually I wasn't a reader. Marjorie had suggested to Northwestern (she told me) that they contact me, but they never did--so you have the approval of genuinely outside readers. (Marjorie and Lynn Keller were mine, which is a little "in-house," I suppose, but the Press wanted to use the readers who had originally approved the prospectus. And Marjorie is always usefully tough, even with her friends--one of her many intellectual virtues.)

It'd be great if you could get up to the conference. Remember that if you want to cook up a panel with some other folks, that's always a possibility. As is, of course, your poetry. I hope Ron and Kent do come through with a chapbook, but as I've probably said before, I wouldn't hold my breath.

What did you end up including in the book? Maybe you could stick a table of contents in the mail if you get a chance.

Alan

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16. **Alan Golding**

Free-floating mail

Wed 3 Aug 1994

Associate Professor of English, U. of Louisville

Phone: [REDACTED]; e-mail: [REDACTED]

Sorry you all just got burdened with what I thought was, or tried to make into, a personal note to Hank Lazer. That pesky "reply" function got me again. One day I'll figure this shit out. Of course, now you're burdened with this . . .

I wonder if the debates over the privacy issues that e-mail raises factor in the unpredictable results of just plain old incompetence . . .

Alan Golding

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17. **hlazer**

Re: e-mail

Wed 3 Aug 1994

My apologies to readers for my error in sending "private" mail to everyone. Ah, the hazards of e-mail...

I have been interested in the anthology debates and am in the midst of formulating some thoughts as I do a review/essay on Hoover, Messerli, and Lauter (Heath & other Am Lit anthologies). I'll share these jottings as they get father along.

I just returned from a few days at Harvard, mainly doing administrative work and checking into the Harvard Summer Dance Program. It was my first trip to Boston, so, of course, I checked out the allegedly wonderful bookstores. I stayed in a dorm just down the block from the Grolier and from the Harvard Bookstore. Everyone told me how wonderful they are. They're right about the Italian food in North End, wrong about the bookstores. I was shocked. Nothing by Bernstein, Hejinian, Susan Howe, etc. Harvard Bookstore has next to its poetry section a quote from Ishmael Reed about how in American Literature there is not a mainstream but many streams etc. But what they stocked was strictly mainstream. Given the association of folks such as Bernstein, Hejinian, and Howe with Harvard, I was genuinely taken aback. I ended up having a long talk with one of the book- order people in the bookstore, and I left them a list of books, poets, distributors. You may wish to snicker at my naivete, but in other areas--philosophy, theory, art--the bookstore did have some range in selections. In poetry, though, the line drawn in the sand is deep. As most of you know, such is not the case in plenty of bookstores we can name in San Francisco, Milwaukee, Washington D.C., Berkeley, (even in Tuscaloosa). Leaves me wondering how such control can be so "perfectly" managed in Cambridge in poetry? I've come to expect such "control" in the chain bookstores....

Again, apologies for private mail publicly blared....

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18. **Joe Amato**

Re: e-mail

Thu 4 Aug 1994

hank, they wouldn't have poetry selection, but the odd thing is that the tower records/video in back bay is where you'd have found, say, the entire semiotext(e)/autonomeia line, along with the beats, certain strands of evidently more 'hip' critical/literary work (virilio, ballard, etc.)...

quite a scene, right next to the grunge and such, surely SOME sorta comment on the times...

joe

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19. **tiger barb / clown loach?**

Re: e-mail

Thu 4 Aug 1994

Oh to be a tenured prof swimming heroically in the shallows, upstream against the controlled flow of the army bored of engineers. A veritable burr in the panopticon!

Is "mainstream" a convenience or a dead metaphor perpetuating our posturing?

If there is a "mainstream" it's in the middle of the river, carries not just sludge and muck but also good driftwood, and moves and changes fast. Rowboats and weak paddles aren't very effective there. Human voices wake us or we drown. Human voices wake us and we drown. As Woody Guthrie says, both sides of the river we drown just the same.

Blathering...lathering...acid bath

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20. **MARK WALLACE**

Re: Submission

Thu 4 Aug 1994

What thrills me about Alan Golding's recent piece "Submission" in relation to the recent discussion of anthologies and other power games, in poetry and otherwise, is the implication of how much is never discussed, even by those who may be critical of such practices, of the complicated maneuvers by which power decisions are often made.

Even critiques of power tend to frame themselves in terms of what constitutes "acceptable" public debate-- issues like class, race, representation are acceptable to talk about, things like personal animosity, gossip, many others, are usually left alone, I guess in the name of privacy, but the problem of power decisions is that they like to be made in private.

So, does the frame in which critiques of power
tend to limit themselves
also tend to limit potential understanding
of how those decisions are actually made?
Do such critiques therefore further the fiction
that "public" debate exists,
when in fact the very rules by which such debate is limited,
in most contexts,
mean that often no one except those who made the decisions
has any access to how they went down?

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21. **Tom Mandel** **mainstream**

Thu 4 Aug 1994

"and it's ever-present everywhere
and it's everpresent every-ware

warm love
warn love

yes it's evry present everware"

Van Morrison
on Hardnose the Highway

Of course, tsking at the Cambridge bookstores, Hank Lazer, whom I now
presume cavalierly to speak for and interpret as you see, was expressing what
many-a-one, alonesome in a new town, might feel -- a longing for familiarity and
the sense that in some related way her human mark was here already. A
welcome. Like you get here.

tom

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22. **Marc Nasdor** **Re: e-mail**

Thu 4 Aug 1994

Hank Lazer writes:

*Leaves me wondering how such control
can be so "perfectly" managed in Cambridge in poetry? I've come to
expect such "control" in the chain bookstores....*

I would propose that one cannot have it both ways, to criticize the academy and then expect it to offer its support. Just because there happen to be a few enlightened poets and scholars in a few literature departments doesn't mean the literary world has somehow reoriented itself. In fact, the protectors of "official verse culture" never disappeared, never stopped treating as anathema the "language" writers, NY School, beat writing, etc. So it doesn't surprise me that one might find individuals with the aforementioned attitudes among those responsible for stocking Boston's poetry stacks.

Marc Nasdor



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23. **Michael**

Re: e-mail

Fri 5 Aug 1994

In response to the tiger barb's deconstruction of the tired "mainstream" metaphor, I say:

Ditto...with a little less acid.

Or, to quote Hank Williams, "If I jumped in a river, I'd probably drown."

Reporting from the mainstream of America--Georgetown, Kentucky--where even an "official verse culture" sounds promising...

Michael Campbell
Dept. of English
Georgetown College
Georgetown, KY 40324



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24. **Michael**

Re: e-mail

Fri 5 Aug 1994

Marc Nasdor writes:

"I would propose that one cannot have it both ways, to criticize the academy and then expect it to offer its support."

To which I respond:

Why not? As far as I can tell, the strategy has worked pretty damn well for quite a few poets and "schools" of poetry. If I can pick up books by David Antin, Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe and Michael Palmer at the University of Kentucky bookstore--as I did a few weeks back--what does it matter that Harvard--in many ways the "official verse culture" incarnate-- fails to stock certain "out of the mainstream" poets? I should be so marginalized.

Stagnantly yours...

Michael Campbell

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25. **Jorge Guitart**

Re: e-mail

Fri 5 Aug 1994

harvard bookstore
carries the nothing that is
happening

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26. **Peter Larkin**

Puffery

Fri 5 Aug 1994

Prest Roots Press (Kenilworth UK.)

The following titles can be ordered in dollars via: Paul Green, 83B London Road, Peterborough, PE2 9BS UK (making cheques out to "Paul Green"). They will then be shipped to you direct from the publisher.

Prest Roots Press was begun in 1987 to bring together innovative British poetry and fine (not "crafty") hot-metal printing techniques at prices for readers rather than collectors. More recently, a subseries called "Prest Roots 2" has been launched on offset for readers who have no hope of being anything other, though the texts still remain quite collectable. The main series still continues, though its delays are finer than ever.

Letterpress Series:

Thomas A Clark Dwellings and Habitations 1 871237 10 6 \$12.00

J.H. Prynne Word Order 1989 1 871237 04 1 \$15.00

Paul Green Comparative Daimon 1990 1 871237 05 X \$13.50

D.S. Marriott Airs and Ligatures 1990 1 871237 07 6

Peter Larkin Pastoral Advert 1988 1 871237 02 5 \$15.00
Peter Larkin Scarce Norm Scarcer Mean 1992 1 871237 08 4 \$15.00
Simon Lewty Cradles of the New 1994 1 871237 12 2 \$19.50
Alain Delahaye (Trans Anthony Barnett) The Lost One 1 871237 03 3
\$15.00
Peter Riley Sea Watches 1990 1 871237 \$15.00
Prest Roots 2 (Offset)
Peter Larkin Additional Trees 1992 1 871237 09 2 \$6.00
Simon Smith Night Shift 1994 1 871237 11 4 \$6.00
John Wilkinson Chalone 1994 1 871237 13 0 \$9.00

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27. **Marjorie Perloff**

Re: e-mail

Fri 5 Aug 1994

Re: the Harvard controversy. It's been my experience that the tonier the university, the less likely it is to have any interest in poetry, art, etc etc. that isn't absolutely mainstream. It goes with the territory and Hank is quite right. I think of John Cage who was a hero in places like Knoxville College but scorned at Yale and Harvard. it shows little has changed.

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28. **kat**

Re: e-mail

Fri 5 Aug 1994

ditto on the eccentricity of poetry to power-lunch universities. Just a note and query, though. How about Grolier Bookshop? It's been a time since I was there, but Louisa Solano, who does have to survive in the tight confines of course lists, did make an effort to keep some books up. What's the current verdict?

Also, poetry happens in places and ways that escape our grasp. It might even be the case that poetry that we know not to advance the art, craft, idea that we'd like has a positive function. The one Holy and Apostolic Canon, represented by representatives at Harvard, etc., should not inspire us to erect counters that simply serve the same exclusionary function. I say this badly and with too much wind, but what I mean is that, like those bad paintings in houses across USA that became WCW's metaphor for his metaphors, poetry of the street, church, classroom, and computer has place. Perhaps idling by the shore

of poluted rivers. From Detroit, where one has the confluence of many streams,
hello.

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29. **Mn Center For Book Arts**
bookstores & the lack thereof

Fri 5 Aug 1994

I am somewhat surprised at any naivete regarding bookstores. I have thought for a long time that there might be four or five in the whole country which have a varied selection of poetry which would include small presses to any but a marginal degree and would include innovative (OK, that's as misguided & loaded a word as mainstream) work at all. I was, in fact, pleased & knocked off my feet when I moved to Minneapolis a year ago and found that Hungry Mind Bookstore in Saint Paul actually had Chax Press books (several of them). Still, to my mind that bookstore has its own limitations. My measure in poetry is certainly Woodland Pattern in Milwaukee, which is, I believe, unequalled. Yet I applaud all those who are trying in this area. I am surprised & pleased to find from the correspondence on this forum that I may have to add the University of Kentucky bookstore to my short list. Maybe there is a chance . . .

reading & wandering the aisles,
charles alexander

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30. **Michael Campbell**
Re: bookstores & the lack thereof

Fri 5 Aug 1994

Sorry, I wasn't recommending the University of Kentucky bookstore for any "short list"--it's selection is spotty at best. I was just pointing out-- as everyone is all too aware, I'm sure--that what bookstores stock is often unpredictable and that Harvard's "mainstream" bias is hardly surprising.

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31. **David Hannah**
clown barb et al.

Sat 6 Aug 1994

as the wag muttered / re: his position as he saw it /
"i'm in the eddies of the gush" /
familiar?

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32. **Jed**

Re: e-mail

Sat 6 Aug 1994

The Harvard Coop's choice in books is not to be marveled at--it's just another big bookstore that's gone the way of nearly all university bookstores: it sells books as a front for more lucrative merchandise (coffee mugs, beer steins, pretzel dishes, sweatshirts, even a sizeable CD & tape section); and its selection of poetry is exactly what you'll find in any commercial outlet that stocks its shelves by way of the nearest jobber (wholesale).

What *is* disturbing in Cambridge is that the Grolier, which really did use to be a place to score fetchingly reclusive small press (& often out of print) items, seems to have been converted almost entirely to the trade publishing/university press matrix. I discovered this when I went back in 1991 (after not having been around the Cambridge area in six or seven years), later thought it might've been an anomaly, so when I was there last summer checked again: both times found *nothing* on the shelves by _____ (you name it: nobody from "In the American Tree," for starters--well, maybe "The Nonconformist's Memorial" was in there last year, since Grolier does get New Directions...)

--but how to take this? Does it mean an establishment shutout? Or might it rather be that the post-New American Poetry/Language poetry nexus so efficiently developed its own means of production & distribution during the 1980s that it doesn't need the support of Grolier & other "poetry" bookstores?
--Jed Rasula

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33. **Don Byrd**

Poetry & book stores

Sun 7 Aug 1994

When Barnes & Nobles and Border's put stores into Albany, the store that passed for our "literary" store folded. It had a small gallery, made space for readings, performances, and so forth. It was a pleasant community place (and three blocks from my house).

The owner of that store once told me that the poetry section produced more browsers and fewer buyers than any other section of the store. People would stop by the poetry books, read a poem or two, and go on to Literary Criticism, Women's Studies, etc.

The sad fact is that B&N's and Border's have *better* poetry sections than the old Boulevard Book Store. They have better facilities for readings, etc. (And

they give teachers 20%-25% discounts.) The problem is that, if books are not available from their distributor, they tell you that they are out of print. Thus, all small press books and many university press books are 'o.p.'

In one way this should be cause for considerable celebration. Serious poetry has disappeared from consumer culture.

It is interesting that this should happen at precisely the time books seem to be having a great resurgence. The two new bookstores in Albany are wildly successful. They are open until 11 p.m., everyday. I have had to stand in line at the check-out at 10:30 on sunday night.

B&N is marketing itself as a pick-up place: full page ad in the local paper with bombshell beauty in horn-rim glasses reading Nietzsche (shelves of books in background), "I met the nicest person in philosophy! (Nietzsche or CEO in training?) There is a rumor that they are having a single's night, but I have not been able to confirm this.

In all honesty, how much poetry do the subscribers to this list buy? Most of the poetry I read is given to me. Much of the poetry that is most important to me is first given to me in xerox.... I would guess that no more than 5% of the money I spend on books is spent on poetry.

Don Byrd

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34. **keith tuma**

Re: clown barb et al.

Sun 7 Aug 1994

Marjorie is right that, historically, the so-called elite institutions have been slower to respond to so-called innovation in the arts, though I'm not sure that this applies across all institutions and "disciplines." The provinces have always wanted and had to work harder to seem to be "up to speed," which is one thing that marks them as "provincial." And Jed is right that the failure of many bookstores to stock alternative and small press titles--there are some exceptions I know of, in Portland, Chicago, New York, etc.--must be understood not just as a cause for but also as a result of the small success of lp and other groups in creating alternative networks (SPD of course, but listservs like this have potential). But the tiger barb never wanted this to be a chat about bookstores; that "flaming" was rather directed at the posturing which so often is a rhetorical strategy in the self-appointed avant-garde, and sometimes is worse than that, resulting in delusions of grandeur. We are not "enlightened," for instance, just because we read, teach, or write on language poetry or whatever. We've just signed on to one aesthetic (politics, etc.) among

many. To use a word like "mainstream" casually--or, worse, as if it means something as undefined and unexplored as it usually is --is just to pose or to assert some (illusory) power. Perhaps it also forges community-- one uses the caricature and joins the club, as it were. Now, no one wants to deny that there is a whole lot of terrible work being published by "big" (really just "bigger") houses and promoted at Iowa or whatever. But there are also talented writers among the so-called "mainstream," many of whom are completely ignored by the alternative scene, which prefers to create bogeymen. This seems to me particularly true of the academic poetry critics and scholars. Look at journals like ALH or Contemporary Lit or American Literature over the last few years. Count the essays on lp, or on the lineage lp would construct for itself (Zukofsky, Oppen, Stein, etc.) For that matter count the number of lp writers now publishing with major academic presses or employed by good universities. This is not a bad thing, it seems to me--quite the contrary-- but it does indicate that we must be careful about blunt, self-serving caricatures. Am I supposed to believe that would-be lp poet number 709 is more interesting than--oh I don't know, Thom Gunn or Jim Powell or Roy Fisher-- just because he or she is proud to announce one way or another that he or she is not stylistically or (sub)professionally a part of "that" world? When will the so-called avant-garde crawl down off its antiquated donkey and begin thinking about and writing about poets as individuals? There is considerably more sophistication out there than we're sometimes led to believe. And the old binaries--"mainstream" and "alternative," you name them--no longer obtain, or , rather, they are transparently falsifying rhetoric without careful delineation and definition. bernadette mayer says in a recent interview that "it's important to like all kinds of poetry" (more on this is the next Sulfur) and--while I am not willing to go that far, want to be able to say instead "all good poetry"--she has a point. Moreover, she indicates one way out of the corner the self-styled avant-garde is perpetually in danger of painting itself into. That is, one can forge alliances that cross traditional boundaries. If the so-called "mainstream" ignores you, don't ignore it, and don't be predictable in your response to its products.

i could go on, but it's indescribably boring for me to go on in this mode of discourse when I said it all better by "flaming." My gratitude to those who have responded with a little flair, a little panache.

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35. **Mn Center For Book Arts**

Re: e-mail

Sun 7 Aug 1994

Jed, I seem to remember getting a message from the Grolier Book Shop sometime in the 1980's, probably the mid-80's but perhaps even a year or two

earlier than that, as a producer of small press (even hand printed, limited edition) books that they once bought, that they were beginning to get their books only from distributors (my assumption was that they were streamlining the business & not giving particular attention to presses any more), & perhaps that the main distributor for small press was going to be Inland Books (although my memory is fuzzy on this). As you may know, though, this would mean they would lose 90 or better % of small press lit books they were getting, & certainly almost all that would be far from the MFA programs' A List. I don't think I've had an order from Grolier since then, but the question would be a good one for Steve Dickison at Small Press Distribution or James Sherry of Segue Distribution (which is missed).

all best,
charles alexander

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36. **Joe Amato**
clown barb et. al...

Mon 8 Aug 1994

keith, just a friendly amendment to what you've writ, with which i am in essential agreement...

the "mainstream," i think, whatever one means by same, however multifarious, however much a straw---entity, is nevertheless a pretty cranked up media scene, in terms of money and distribution etc, relative to, say, benjamin's day... and i cite benjamin simply because he makes his way into so much 'mainstream' criticism these days...

by which i mean to say that there are nasty aesthetic connotations to 'mainstream' with which i might concur, but that in general i think of this category more in economic-demographic, as opposed to aesthetic, terms... anything can make its way there, good bad what have you... but if one *plays* to it, well---could result in garbage, aesthetically speaking, i dunno, mebbe not...

if you get my drift...

joe

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37. **Michael Boughn**

Re: clown barb et al.

Mon 8 Aug 1994

Yes, Keith. I don't know who (where) you are out there, but thanks for the swift shot of sanity. It seems we expend (waste) far too much energy policing the purity of the empire(s) of the same, often out of sheer ego-terror. Too bad, because poetry often winds up as a cheap accessory in career maneuvers. Another option, or additional mode (to your proposal for a more universal general attention) is more focus on the local in all its breadth and depth. This is something Diane Di Prima always used to organize when she came through Buffalo--some event where everyone, across the board, got together and read to each other. The surprises were wonderful. (Remember that, Jorge?) I know this is not possible in every physical locality as it is in a place like Buffalo which has a large base of diverse writers, but perhaps it has as much to do with a different attention, a different vision (say, intent) as it does with topos. A lot of the war footing we find ourselves occupied with has to do with ghostly residues of other people's old, left over wars. (Gee, what else is new?) Like, wow, it must have been so cool to have a real enemy you could hate to pieces while bonding like crazy with your buddy over a Lucky Strike in a foxhole. Ah well. Perhaps, sad to say, there is no longer any other use for poetry than maneuvering to be in position to eventually get your own Gap ad: (blank) wore khakis during the great, avant-garde poetry anthology wars of '94 against the Mainstream. Hey, a hundred grand is nothing to shake a stick at. Or is it?

Best,
Mike

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38. **Charles Watts**

Re: Poetry & book stores

Tue 9 Aug 1994

People familiar with Lisa Robertson's Proprioception Books, 432 Homer, in Vancouver will be dismayed to hear that as of August 27th, this wonderful bookstore is no longer a place in space. Lisa will, however, continue to sell poetry books on line (if you're interested, contact Lisa at [REDACTED] before August 27th; I don't have an e-mail address for her). This year, Vancouver will have lost both of the bookshops that have paid particular attention to the writing and reading of poetry over the past decade: Proprioception Books and Renee Rodin's R2B2 Books on West 4th Avenue. Both have folded because their revenue wasn't enough to meet expenses, despite a loyal but, alas, too small following. It's been a hard year for writing and the arts in Vancouver: the

death of Roy Kiyooka in January and the death of Warren Tallman in July, and the demise of the two bookshops which have supported poetry most in Vancouver. Who will take their places?

Charles Watts

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39. **Philip Mead**
poetics discussion list

Thu 11 Aug 1994

2:18 PM DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH 11/8/94
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE poetics discussion list Hi - my name is Philip Mead and I was wondering if I could sign up for the poetics discussion list I hear you have at Buffalo. I teach poetry and poetics here at the University of Melbourne and am one of the co-editors of the Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry.

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40. **Loss Glazier**
Question re: _For Love_

Thu 11 Aug 1994

For a paper I am writing, I find myself a little puzzled by the fact that, according to my information, Robert Creeley's _For Love_ (1962) sold 47,000 copies. The puzzlement occurs for this reason: is that not an _extraordinary_ number of copies for a poetry book to sell? This leads me to wonder what social or other factors might have been at work in the early 60s that would contribute to a poetry book selling such a large number of copies. (I mean, this would be an astonishing number for any of our books to sell today, no?) I feel, though, that I may be overlooking some obvious circumstances or making some obvious blunder in wondering about this fact. I would be grateful if anyone could suggest what I may not be considering or some reference to production factors at the time that I may be overlooking. Thanks, Loss

----- Loss Glazier 

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41. **Jed Rasula**
Re: Question re: _For Love_

Thu 11 Aug 1994

Does that figure about 47,000 copies of *For Love* having sold derive from Robert von Hallberg's book? (I think he provides figures for Dorn sales too,

which are also impressive). My sense is that that's the figure of total sales over a good number of years--in the case of Creeley, Scribner's kept that book in print in that form for, I would guess, nearly twenty years. But ask Bob, surely he'd know if anybody would.

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42. **Marjorie Perloff**

Re: Question re: *For Love*

Thu 11 Aug 1994

For Loss Glazier: Creeley has always been a popular poet, a best seller in Germany--people think he's accessible (though he really isn't accessible in the way people think). Then, too, it's a book of Love Poems so that appeals to the average reader even though again, they're not really love poems. But most important: in the early 60s there weren't so many outlets--there weren't endless small press books and so there was a limited set of books and those might then actually sell. Look into the numbers and you'll see what I mean. Bob von Hallberg's first chapter in his book on Contemp Poetry is good for this. Best wishes, Marjorie Perloff

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43. **Folan, Bernie**

(no subject)

Fri 12 Aug 1994

How can I join this list?

Sorry. I don't have the subscription details.

SUBSCRIBE BERNIE FOLAN

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44. **hlazer**

Re: Question re: *For Love*

Fri 12 Aug 1994

Jed & others... regarding sales figures. check out sales for Plath's ARIEL. I recall years ago reading that that one (also from the early 60s) sold well over 100,000 copies. (and then there's Ginsberg's Howl ...)

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45. **Steve Evans**

plumpe Denken

Mon 15 Aug 1994

Though I've been prevented by a crammed schedule from actively participating here in the past couple of weeks, I wonder if I could take advantage of the recent lull to backtrack a little.

Following what I thought was a brilliant, if acidic, posting on anthologies on July 31, Tom Mandel wrote a response--more or less to Nick Lawrence, I gather--on 3 August that said:

"No, we cannot distance ourselves from what we are within. A master metaphor of subject matter with our royal selves outside it in consideration is at once useless and apparently the sole operative in this discourse on the net. Geez..."

To the extent that Tom is sharply ("crudely"?) rebuking theoreticism, I agree. On the other hand, I think the point invokes a spectre of total absorption that is quite as false as the glib distantiation it means to discredit.

Our engagements, with poetic practice, with institutions, with traditions, are more loosely woven than that--or so it is in my experience; and so the majority of postings I've read on this list--including the recent admonitions against caricaturing oneself or one's imagined antagonists by Keith Tuma / tiger barb--indicate.

It is the porousness of practice that opens poetry to poetics, that permits posing counterfactual questions in rotten conditions (how could this condition not be rotten?), and allows most working people, including graduate students and professors, to quit their jobs several times a day, with or without notifying the boss.

But more important than my opinion here is a simple question: what **should** we be doing, Tom? What would "cut it" ("cut thru to it") in your mind?

It goes without saying that this list has never come near to exhausting the potential it presents us, though it also goes without saying that we've been sticking--for no material reason that I can discern--with a model of "substitution" (of one "topic" for another, e.g.) when the logic of multiplication seems built into the very form of the forum.

To put it "plumpe": there aren't any legs, so belief in the dog is superfluous.

On a somewhat different tack: I'm still thinking about Don Byrd's claim that "serious poetry has disappeared from consumer culture," and about whether to celebrate or not. I suppose the recent defenses of the mainstream indicate that at least some people on the list do not agree, but I'd be interested to read further responses.

Finally, and to no specific purpose, from Robin Blaser's "Even on Sunday,"

so to be reminded once again of Puddin'head Wilson: _It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it_

this unified mankind--for that's who's there, quantity or lump, at the end of a materialist's or an idealist's history--_conveived_, Mayer writes, _as a homogenized humanity. Woe to outsiders_

so that was it, was it? an _Enlightenment that promised equality to men and women, including homosexuals_! an age in the hole, running three centuries, surely allows one to say, "Listen, you assholes, a _metaphysical washout_ means you've lost your topsoil"

Plumpe!

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46. **Clint Burnham**

plumpe Denken

Mon 15 Aug 1994

This is partly following Steve Evans comments on Brechtian thinking, and also apropos of the comments on bookstores disappearing from those peculiar hell-holes, American college towns.

Rebukes against theoreticism always seem to be misplaced, 'cause quite often those of us who feel fairly much against overly abstract and non-political formalism are still really part of the culture (generation?) of people educated in the 1980s (say, in North America & Europe, but given the dissemination of post-colonial theory, almost anywhere) that was and is intractably theoretical.

Re Don Byrd's "poetry disappearing from consumer culture," I'd be very sad if that happened, but maybe I don't think of them as being very separate. I mean, unless we're talking about precious little handprinted books you can only find in ten places on the planet, poetry as I understand the term is a part of consumer culture even as it sometimes offers critiques and works thru what all these things mean. Quite often, it seems to me, those who pose themselves against consumer culture just mean the more *apparently* commodified worlds of mass

culture. (& not, then, the "consumer culture" of farmhouses, expensive cheese, and thick, handmade sweaters.)

& given that the overdeveloped worlds are increasingly societies of information production and management, education is in some ways the ultimate consumer product: producing discerning (if not "cerned") consumers of culture, ideology, etc.

Nothing like fucking up your unemployment claim to cheer up the day, hunh?

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47. **Nick Lawrence**

Re: plumpe Denken

Mon 15 Aug 1994

Well, after Tom's exasperated boogie I thought I'd let the matter drop, even if on my toes. But Steve's post reminds me that sitting out the dance is not what this list is meant to be about. Another bout, then, for health's sake.

"No, we cannot distance ourselves from what we are within." But Internal Distanciation is my middle name! I've got the ID card to prove it. I'd be lost without it . . .

And on "thinking by substitution": if poets have to relinquish **that** pleasure, then we're truly out to sea without a paddle (so not to speak). Or is drowning in the puddle on which we float our crumpled paper boats our punishment/reward for getting lost in thought?

But I know Tom wasn't thinking **about** metaphor. And Steve seems to refer to something else again when he suggests multiplication rather than substitution as the mode by which discussions might more fruitfully be conducted on the list. Indeed most live lists have multiple threads running simultaneously, with participants switching among the various discussions as they see fit. But with only 108 or so subscribers, what can one reasonably expect.

When the horse itself informs you that it's dead, even the most enthusiastic driver will hesitate, whip in hand; but at the risk of simply adding to the available stock of ennui I'll point out that the anthology discussion, such as it was, began with a consideration (including much worthy griping) of the recent batch of (non)experimental anthologies. It seemed time to reconsider the form and purpose of the thing, to question what it might (& thus may) do. Here's an example: suppose I am thinking, marveling really, about the inescapability of race matters in the poetry of Frank O'Hara, how consistent and unremarked-on this aspect of his work is, how rare, even unprecedented it is among white American poets (of which I'm one--primary context not academic here, though it could be). It may occur to me that the best way to explore this phenomenon is

to compile a selection of such work, see where it goes. The result won't be an essay or a syllabus, though it shares with the essay an exploratory as well as a critical motive; nor will it be an anthology of my favorite flowers. I may or may not end up doing this selection, but it presents itself as possibility-- and I'll always strenuously defend the legitimacy of tarrying in the realm of the subjunctive. "Can we get some air in here?" goes the cry.

More loose threads: I wonder if the splashless disappearance of Mark Wallace's questions re the privacy of power was the result of bored dismissal or silent acknowledgement of their aptness? I didn't see the Alan Sondheim piece MW referred to, but such speculations seem closer to home (the road we're on) than even the railing against standardized critique.

A last example of thinking by substitution:

The concept of "legislator" must inevitably be identified with the concept of "poet." Since all people are "poetical beings," all are also "legislators." But distinctions will have to be made. "Legislator" has a precise juridical and official meaning--i.e. it means those persons who are empowered by the law to enact laws. But it can have other meanings too.
--A. Gramsci

Nick

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48. **Tom Mandel**
Re: plumpe Denken
Mon 15 Aug 1994

Steve,

Of course, when I wrote

"A master metaphor of subject matter with our
royal selves outside it in consideration is at once
useless and apparently the sole operative in this dis-
course on the net"

I didn't mean that this was the **only** place
such a metaphor was at work -- viz, in the same posting my characterization of
the community of poets as an absolute monarchy where everyone is the
monarch.

But, don't imagine me to be "rebuking theoreticism," not much of a labor nor,
however pervasive self-imagined theory has become, not really news neither. I
was talking about experience, which is a social phenomenon, and
thinking/writing which is a social phenomenon as well.

It is a theological task to point out error, and I am a theologian. Of course, one starts with oneself, "telling myself what to do" Kit Robinson calls speaking of the practice in his own writing. Yet, I won't share that with you; instead I'll take Steve Evans to task, despite that his response to my posting makes me happy, i.e. he brings up real issues.

The issue of embeddedness has nothing to do with that of identification, i.e. with one's impression of oneself. Steve writes,

"Our engagements, with poetic practice, with institutions, with traditions, are more loosely woven...or so it is in my experience"

as if this constituted some kind of response. But, Steve it is exactly not the ex-post-(counter)facto working of your individual mind we wish to find, that condition is in fact exactly where my critique was aimed. There's the subject matter, and here I am saying what I believe I can resume about "it" out of "my experience" (the whole problem lies in those words, doesn't it: "my experience," for how long has that phrase been in use in our language I wonder; not long, I bet).

I'll cite 3 treatments of embeddedness which I think bear on this issue, only one of them from a point of view much in common (i.e. like arrows pointing at each other and about to strike), and I'll leave out what might be the most interesting one to discuss i.e. Jonah.

First of course, the cave. From within the cave we cannot know the cave. How did we get out to where we can know it? Such an enormous epistemology erected on that site, namely Plato's philosophy and the thousands of years of decorative additions. Is it the seventh letter, but by now that is commonly thought a forgery, of P that so distantly extends the metaphors of fire to find a way to create a fire other than that which casts up shadows for us to see, a fire that touches us first, sparks mind to move beyond. I don't find it convincing, however profound.

Spinoza, his arrow point my bullseye since ever I was polysyllabic, in a letter somewhere evokes the stone falling in space, felled by a gravity more universal than any can comprehend, but sensing its own motion, feeling free. He is thinking along that long contact of freedom and necessity, so much thought (i.e. scholasticism) and so little felt.

Finally (and this I may have cited to the list before), in the preface to the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant speaks of a bird soaring effortfully, its wings pushing through heavy air, as it thinks how much more easily it would fly how high it'd rise, if that heavy substance were banished. The bird cannot think the absence of air.

the porousness of practice ... opens poetry to poetics

No. Practice is not porous, poetry is a witness aiming at uniqueness and exclusivity, the difficulty of whose communication is in the difficulty of the material, i.e. the material act, the practice. Quasi-theoretical terms like porousness/porosity do not help, for porousness is a determinate state too, as fully determinate as opacity, just different. It opens no gap (except between the way things are and what we can allow ourselves to admit of them, i.e. "that steel wall is porous;" the gap between what is true and what is not).

most working people, including graduate students
and professors... quit their jobs several times a day,
with or without notifying the boss.

That's not true, or rather, the difference between telling your boss and not telling your boss is the difference between doing it and just being alienated. Anyone can be alienated; all of literature from the romantics forward presents a pleasant how-to manual. If you have the impression of having quit your job, well... you also "could play dead.../as a means of flirting." (Rae Armantrout)

The world of the individual mind begins when you have an individual mind, when you have "quit your job." The social world begins when you have made effective commitments and it operates among those commitments. You'll never have a loosely woven engagement with anything except so's you imagine the better not to come to consciousness. What's gramsci say? "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." These things are not opposites, but deeply connected like the two sides of a coin pile ou face, the sides of the coin Cary Grant flips in the closing scene of "Only Angels Have Wings." A great film on this very subject, as it happens. Once, when I was young miserable alienated, living in Paris and seeing 3-5 movies a day, that one saved my life -- along with Hawks' other equally great "Rio Bravo."

Please don't imagine that I'm changing the subject. Or that you are either.

Maybe I will write about Jonah one day soon.

tom mandel

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49. **Marc Nasdor**

Re: plumpe Denken

Mon 15 Aug 1994

Re: Clint Burnham's comments.

Well, I suppose we could simply understand ourselves to be a *nicke market* in the consumer culture. :-)

Marc Nasdor



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50. **Mn Center For Book Arts**

Re: consuming that poetry soup

Tue 16 Aug 1994

No, you won't find much in the way of poetry at the mall. You also won't find much in the way of poetry at your local university bookstore. And many of us won't find what we want of it at the university library, either. (maybe that's one reason some of us have chosen not to be at universities, but that's a much more complicated question & beside the point).

But yes, it's a part of consumer culture, even if it sells one copy, maybe if it sells zero copies. It is produced within our culture, which is one of consumers. Anti-consumer practices are subsumed within the consumer culture just as anti-intellectual stances are rather common within intellectual circles.

But the flip side to bookstores not carrying poetry is the combination of a lack of knowledge about marketing and a lack of a marketing budget among the few presses still publishing poetry. How many presses take out ads beyond the ones in the back of literary magazines which are also not finding their way into bookstores? How many presses put out catalogues with regularity & send them out widely? How many presses know about the requirements for reviews in Library Journal, Publishers Weekly, and other publications which serve librarians & bookstore owners? If you look at presses which get their books with regularity into lots of bookstores, including the chains, my somewhat informed guess is that they have marketing budgets which equal or exceed their production budgets. If they are nonprofit presses (there are a handful of such with budgets over half a million), they likely have someone on staff who spends a lot more time fundraising than editing or designing. They have to be able to produce books in editions of 2500 (minimum) with regularity (four a year, possibly more) in order to attract distributors which have sales representatives which actually go into bookstores and talk to bookstore managers face-to-face, convincing them to carry the books.

I'm not criticizing the presses. It's somewhere between impossible & extremely difficult to do the work to get to a budget the size which allows any marketing & distribution strategies which work. But it's simply true that without it we won't see the books in the bookstores. I even have a hard time critizng the bookstores. I know they work with extremely small profit margins & simply can't afford to give shelf space to books that don't sell well (meaning that marketing to the bookstores is only one step; there's a public out there, too).

These are only a few reasons why the disappearance of small press distributors like Bookslinger & Segue in the last few years is so devastating. They weren't solving the problem, but they were contributing to the ability to get books to readers.

It might be as useful for users of this forum to talk to people at bookstores you frequent, write them letters, help them find the books you would buy there, and otherwise convince them that they can carry such books & customers like you will support them.

As one who produces books (& not just precious handprinted ones), I can't celebrate a condition in which those books can't reach more than a hundred or so readers.

Sorry to introduce such a mundane note into this often more theoretical forum.

charles alexander

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51. **Jed**

Re: plumpe Denken

Tue 16 Aug 1994

Re Tom Mandel's skepticism about the presumed primacy of "experience" I have a useful qualification from Gayatri Spivak (who I find almost unreadably self-indulgent, BUT): "...we are attempting not merely to enlarge the canon with a countercanon but to dethrone canonical *method*: not only in literary criticism but in social production; the axiom that something called concrete experience is the last instance." (OUTSIDE IN THE TEACHING MACHINE, p. 276) Think about how often--at conferences, discussions after readings, even casual conversation--the energy, or the energetic anxiety, of the situation gets dispelled in the brandishing of an Experience Trump: "my" experience, the sanctimonious untouchable. The canonical experience.

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52. **Roberts Mark**

Re: POETRY

Tue 16 Aug 1994

Thought people might be interested in the following exchange which has been taking place on the Discussions about Literature list

Date: Wed, 17 Aug 1994 09:59:39 +1000
To: Discussions about Literature <[REDACTED]>
From: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: POETRY

*In Message Mon, 15 Aug 1994 18:08:20 -0500,
"ALAN C. REESE" <[REDACTED]> writes:*

*Anyone sample the new CD "Poetry in Motion" which includes text, readings,
and interviews with Tom Waits, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Wm Burroughs,
Charles Bukowski & others?
I see it is being offered in the Quality Paperback Book Club and wonder if
it's worth the price tag.
Thanks*

*Another CD with poetry on it is called -Sahara Blue-. David Sylvian's voice is
on it and Rimbaud provided the texts. It's absolutely beautiful!
Ineke Winnips
[REDACTED]*

*A Melbourne based magazine 'Going Down Swinging' released a CD of the late
performance poet Jas Duke with its 1993 issue. If anyone is interested I could
look up the GDS address and post it.*

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53. **Charles Bernstein**

mundanity

Tue 16 Aug 1994

Following up on Charles Alexander's "mundane" note, I thought a recent rather mundane, and introductory, essay of mine on alternative presses might, at this point, be of some interest to some of you. The essay is called "Provisional Institutions: Alternative Presses and Poetic Innovation". (I have sent copies of slightly earlier versions to some people on this list already). It's about 15 ms pages and I am posting it as a separate file for those who might want to take a look.

A local note: Buffalo's own Talking Leaves books continues to be the model of the independent bookstore. John Walsh and his virtually collective staff (I suspect this primarily means that John is the last to be paid) have an incredible commitment to new poetry books, as well as just about anything else in book format I have found myself interested in during the past years. You can pick up more information browsing the shelves of Talking Leaves than in possibly any classroom in the US (my own, needless to say, included). In fact, it strikes me

that John knows more about books than just about anyone I know (he also does a great reggae show on the community radio station every Saturday night).

Not only that, but ... Talking Leaves brings the poets books to every local reading we do, stocking the books at the store for months before and after the poet's visit.

One useful turn of events is that SPD, with its essential list of mostly U.S., but also Canadian and UK books, now takes VISA, which makes ordering considerably easier for people from outside the U.S. As I say in my essay, on-line booksellers, like Grist and Lisa Robertson's anticipated reformation of Proprioception, and poetry information servives like Taproot and the UB's Electronic Poetry Center suggest necessary new directions -- not, I'd note, "progress" but rather innovations necessary just to keep up with the changing environment. So it is no surprise that some of the people involved in these new formats are a part of this electronic discussion group.

--This is Charles Bernstein transmitting direct to your screen from just outside the village of Swan Lake in the Town of Bethel, County of Sullivan, State of New York

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54. **Charles Bernstein**

Provisional Institutions (long post/essay)

Tue 16 Aug 1994

Charles Bernstein

Provisional Institutions: Alternative Presses and Poetic Innovation

In our period, they say there is free speech.
They say there is no penalty for poets,
There is no penalty for writing poems.
They say this. This is the penalty.

-- Muriel Rukeyser, "In Our Time", The Speed of Darkness

Imagine that all the nationally circulated magazines and all the trade presses and all the university presses in the United States stopped publishing or reviewing poetry. New poetry in the United States would hardly feel the blow. But not because contemporary poetry is marginal to the culture. Quite the contrary, it is these publishing institutions that have made themselves marginal to our cultural life in poetry. As it is, the poetry publishing and reviewing practices of these major media institutions do a disservice to new poetry by their sins of commission as much as omission -- that is, pretending to cover what they actually cover up; as if you could bury poetry alive. In consistently

acknowledging only the blandest of contemporary verse practices, these institutions provide the perfect alibi for their evasion of poetry; for if what is published and reviewed by these institutions is the best that poetry has to offer, then, indeed, there would be little reason to attend to poetry, except for those looking for a last remnant of a genteel society verse, where, for example, the editor of The New York Times Book Review can swoon over watered-down Dante on her way to late-night suppers with wealthy lovers of the idea of verse, as she gushed in an article last spring. Poetry, reduced to souvenirs of what was once supposed to be prestige goods, quickly gets sliced for overaccessorizing, at least if the stuff actually talks back. If poetry has largely disappeared from the national media, nostalgia for poetry, and the lives of troubled poets, has a secure place. One of the cliches of the intellectual- and artist-bashing so fashionable in our leading journals of opinion is that there are no more "public intellectuals." The truth of the matter is that writing of great breadth and depth, and of enormous significance for the public, flourishes, but that the dominant media institutions -- commercial television and radio, the trade presses, and the nationally circulated magazines (including the culturally upscale periodicals) -- have blacklisted this material. Intellectuals and artists committed to the public interest exist in substantial numbers. Their crime is not a lack of accessibility but a refusal to submit to marketplace agendas: the reductive simplifications of conventional forms of representation; the avoidance of formal and thematic complexity; and the fashion ethos of measuring success by sales and value by celebrity. The public sphere is constantly degraded by its conflation with mass scale since public space is accessible principally through particular and discrete locations. Any of us teaching college will have ample proof of the frightening lack of cultural information, both historical and contemporary, of even the most searching of our new students. These individuals have been subjected to cultural asphyxiation administered not only by the barrage of network television or MTV, but also, more poignantly, by the self-appointed keepers of the cultural flame, who are unwilling to provide powerful alternative programming, prefer to promote, as a habit and a rule, a sanitized and denatured version of contemporary art, debunking at every turn the new and untried, the edgy or the cutting, the odd or unnerving; --that is those works of contemporary culture that give it life. Could I possibly be saying that the crisis of American culture is that there is inadequate support and distribution of difficult and challenging new art? Does a tire tire without air, an elephant blow its horn in the dark, a baby sigh when the glass door shatters its face? The paucity of public funding for the arts has done irreparable damage to the body politic. Arts funding is as important as funding for public education. It's time for our federal, state and local governments to consider linking arts funding with education budgets: a percent for the arts! & if that seems farfetched, it goes to show how far afield our educational priorities are.

Every dollar spent on the development and distribution of new art will save thousands of dollars in lost cultural productivity over the next fifty years.

At the community ("free") clinic I worked for in the early 1970s we sold T-shirts that said, "Healthcare is for people not profit." Not that we were ahead of our time. Times are just behind where they could be. Whenever I go into a Barnes & Noble Superstore or Waldenbooks (If we don't have it it must be literature!), I'm reminded that our slogan for healthcare applies to poetry too. Does anybody wonder anymore what the effects will be of the consolidation of publishing and book distribution companies into large conglomerates? Let them read cake. This month's bestseller list contains the perfect symbol for the current state of affairs as the two top slots are occupied, in effect, by the publicity machines designed to promote "cultural product". What sells, in this purest form of hypeomania is the apparatus of publicity itself: for here we have self-consuming artifacts par excellence -- no external referent need apply. Meanwhile, in the upscale journals that condescend to the truth bared by H. Stern and R. Limbaugh, no book has been more attended to than a memoir by one of the originators of this phenomenon, Willie Morris, formally editor of Harper's: for what better subject for promotion than promotion?

There is a world outside this semblance of culture. In poetry, its institutions go by the name of the small press and the reading series. Along with small press magazines and books, poetry reading series are the most vital site of poetic activity in North America. Readings provide a crucial place for poets not only to read their new work, but also to meet with each other and exchange ideas. Readings provide an intimately local grounding for poetry and are commonly the basis for the many regional scenes and groups and constellations that mark the vitality of the artform. Despite the fundamental importance of readings in the creation of North American poetry over the past forty years, very little attention has been given to this medium either in the press or by scholars and critics. While reading series are more concentrated in New York and the Bay area, many American cities have long-running local reading series. The best source of information about readings in New York City area is The New York City Poetry Calendar, which has been publishing a monthly broadside of poetry events since 1977 (60 E. 4th St #21, New York, NY 10003). The calendar lists about 300 different readings each month, has a print run of 7500 and a readership of well over 10,000. Poetry readings range from small bar and cafe and book store and community center series, with audiences ranging from ten to a hundred to poetry center readings that can draw from twenty to several hundred people. Community reading series differ in several crucial ways from university-sponsored series. These series often offer a forum for new and unpublished local poets through "open mike" and scheduled readings. The organizers of these series rarely receive any compensation for their work --

and often can run a series for incredibly little money: the money from the door going to the poets plus a few hundred dollars a year for publicity. State and local arts agencies will sometimes provide such series up to a few thousand dollars for featured readers, which allows for some out-of-town poets to get travel money or a small fee of fifty to a few hundred dollars. Poets & Writers, Inc., is particularly helpful in these contexts, providing matching money for poets's fees. A community reading series can run a year of readings on less than many institutions spend on a single cultural event or speaker. That effects the spirit of the event. The atmosphere at a local reading series is often charged and interactive. In contrast, university series often suffer from a stifling formality. Unfortunately, English departments have been slow to include and support local readings series in their areas -- despite the fact that these series can often provide a lively point of entry into poetry for students new to its forms and formats. Despite the striking vitality of poetry readings, readings are never reviewed in any of the nation's daily or weekly newspapers, even though these papers routinely review theater and dance and art events whose scale is comparable. I suspect the reason is that cultural editors, like most literary critics and scholars, wrongly assume that the book is the only significant site of a poet's work. Contemporary North American poetry is realized as significantly in its performances in live readings as it is in its printed forms. Critical response to contemporary poems that fail to account for its performance are, for the most part, inadequate. For the scholar, the audio archive of poet's performance has become as fundamental as manuscripts, publication history, and letters; indeed, it is equal in importance only to the published text. Yet studies of the distinctive features of the poem-in-performance have been rare. In contrast, the drift of much literary criticism of the past decade has been away from the auditory and performative -- and therefore material -- aspects of the poem, partly because of the prevalent notion, commonly attributed to Saussure, that the sound structure of language is relatively arbitrary. In contrast, cognitive linguists such as Reuven Tsur, following Roman Jakobson, have recently emphasized research that demonstrates the expressiveness of sound patterns, at the same time, the "phonotext" -- or acoustic dimension -- of the poem has begun to receive some scholarly attention. This work, combined with the range of new work on performance theory, suggest a crucial new direction for literary studies.

The past thirty years has been a time of enormous growth of small press publishers. According to a Loss Pequeno Glazier's statistics in *Small Press: An Annotated Guide*, the number of magazines listed in Len Fulton's *International Directory of Little Magazines & Small Presses* has gone from 250 mostly poetry magazines in 1965 to 700 in 1966 to 2,000 magazines in 140 categories in 1976 to 4,800 magazines in 1990, of which about 40 percent were literary. The

importance of the small press for poetry is not restricted to any aesthetic or indeed to any segment of poets. According to a recent study by Mary Briggs, independent noncommercial presses are the major source of exposure for all poets, young and old, prize winning or not. The staple of the independent literary press is the single-author poetry collection. Douglas Messerli, publisher of Sun & Moon Press, a high-end small press comparable to Black Sparrow, New Directions, and Dalkey Archives, provided me with representative publication information for a 100-page poetry collection: Print-runs at Sun & Moon go from 1000 to 2000, depending, of course, on likely sales. Messerli notes that print-runs of less than 1000 drive the unit cost up too high and he encourages other literary presses to print a minimum of 1000 copies if at all possible. Sun & Moon titles are well-produced, perfectbound, and offset with full color covers. The printing bill for this runs from \$2600 to \$4000 as you go from 1000 to 2000 copies. Messerli estimates the cost of editing a 100-page poetry book at \$300: this covers all the work between the press receiving a manuscript and sending it to a designer (including any copyediting and proofreading that may be necessary as well as preparation of front and back matter and cover copy). Typesetting is already a rarity for presses like Sun & Moon, with authors expected to provide computer disks wherever possible. Formatting these disks (converting them into type following specifications of the book designer) can cost anywhere from \$300 to \$1000, one of those variable labor costs typical of small press operations. The book designer will charge about \$500. The cover will cost an additional \$100 for photographic reproduction or permission fees or both. Publicity costs must also be accounted for, even if, as at Sun & Moon, no advertising is involved. Messerli estimates publicity costs at \$1500, which covers the cost of something like 100 free copies distributed to reviewers, postage and packing, mailings and catalog pages, etc. The total cash outlay here, then, for 2000 copies, is around \$6800. (For the sake of this discussion, overhead costs -- rent, salaries, office equipment, phone bills, etc -- are not included; such costs typically are estimated at about 30 percent more than the cost of production). If all goes well, Sun & Moon will sell out of its print run in two years. Let's say Sun & Moon prints 2000 copies of the book and charges \$10 retail; let's also say all the books were sold. That makes a gross of \$20,000. Subtract from this a 50 percent wholesale discount (that is, most bookstores will pay \$5 for the book) and that leaves \$10,000. Subtract from this the 24 percent that Sun & Moon's distributor takes (and remember that most small presses are too small to secure a distributor with a professional sales force). That leaves \$7600. Now last, but not to be totally forgotten, especially since I am a Sun & Moon author, the poet's royalty; typically no advance would be paid and the author would receive 10 percent of this last figure, or \$760. That leaves \$6840 return to the publisher on a cash cost of about \$7000. As James Sherry noted years ago in

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E: a piece of paper with nothing on it has a definite economic value. If you print a poem on it, this value is lost. Here we have a vivid example of what George Bataille has called general economy, an economy of loss rather than accumulation. Poetry is a negative -- or let's just say poetic -- economy. But of course I've stacked the decks a bit. Many small presses will eat a number of costs I've listed. Copyediting, proofreading and design costs may be absorbed in the overhead if they are done by the editor-cum-publisher, proofreader, publicity department, and shipper. Formatting and production are commonly done on in-house computers. But these costs cannot be absorbed away -- 600 dpi laser printers and late-night "proofreading" can cause some serious malabsorption problems for which your gastroenterologist has no cure. Then again, if a book generates enough of an audience to require reprinting, modest profits are possible, allowing the publication of other, possibly less popular, works. The situation for the independent literary magazines is similar to presses, and indeed many small presses started as little magazines. *o.blek*, a beautifully produced magazine edited by Peter Gizzi and Connel McGrath, was started on borrowed money in 1987. One thousand copies of the first 148-page issue cost \$1000 for typesetting, \$2700 for the printing, and \$400 for postage. That cost has remained relatively consistent, although a switch to desktop halved the typesetting cost. That first issue, with a cover price of \$5.50 (and with the distributor taking 55 percent), sold out in a year and a half. After one year, *o.blek* had about 75 subscribers; after six years, that number is 275 (a figure that does not include libraries, who mostly subscribe through jobbers). *o.blek*'s most ambitious publication (edited by Juliana Spahr and Gizzi) is just out: 1500 copies of a two-volume set, 600 pages in all, collecting poems and statements of poetics from mostly younger poets, many of whom participated in the Writing from the New Coast Festival held at the University at Buffalo last spring. Compare this to *Sulfur*, edited by Clayton Eshleman, who reports that there were 1,000 copies printed of the first issue in 1981 -- "maybe 50 subscribers at the time the issue was published, with perhaps 300 to 400 going out to stores. Now, 2000 copies per issue; around 700 subscribers, with 800 to 900 copies going to stores." Of course, many small presses and magazines produce more modest publications than *Sun & Moon*, *Sulfur* or *o.blek*. Indeed, the heart of the small press movement is the supercheap magazine or chapbook, allowing just about anyone to be a publisher or editor. In this world, marketplace values are truly turned upsidedown, since many readers of the poetry small press feel the more modest the production, the greater the integrity of the content. There is no question that many of the best poetry magazines of the postwar period have been produced by the cheapest available methods. In the 1950s, the "mimeo revolution" showed up the stuffy pretensions of the established, letterpress literary quarterlies, not only with their greater literary imagination, but also with innovative designs

and graphics. In 1965, 23 percent of little presses were mimeo, 31 percent offset, 46 percent letterpress, according to Fulton's Directory. By 1973, offset had jumped to 69 percent, with letterpress at 18 percent, and mimeo only 13 percent. As Loss Glazier notes, the mimeo in "the mimeo revolution" is more a metaphor for inexpensive means of reproduction than a commitment to any one technology. Indeed, poetry's use of technology often has a wryly aversive quality. For example, as offset began to dominate the printing industry in the early 1970s, letterpresses became very cheap to acquire, so that presses like Lyn Hejinian's Tuumba and Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop's Burning Deck could produce books with little other cash expense than paper costs and mailing, given the editors willingness to spend hundreds of hours to handset every letter and often enough handfeed each page. In the metaphoric sense, then, the mimeo revolution is very much alive in the 1990s, with some of the best poetry magazines today -- such as Abacus, Witz, Mirage #4 (Periodical), The Impercipient, Interruptions, lower limit speech, Letterbox, Situation, lyric& and Object -- consisting of little more than a staple or two holding together from 16 to 60 sheets of paper that have been xeroxed in editions of 50 or 100 or 150. Yet the new mimeo revolution for poetry is surely electronic. Because the critical audience of poets, mostly unaffiliated with academic institutions, does not yet have access to the internet, attempts to create on-line poetry magazines remain preliminary. & technical problems abound; computers actually make reading and writing harder than previous technologies -- but it's just the difficulties that make for poetic interest. Still, the potential is there and a few editors have started to propose some basic formats for creating virtual uncommunities. In 1993, the first three electronic poetry magazines I know about were founded -- We Magazine, collectively edited in Santa Cruz, the Bay Area, New York City, and Albany (c/o [REDACTED]) -- which in its active periods sends out one short poem per post to a list of subscribers; Grist, edited by John Fowler ([REDACTED]), which has produced two full-length issues so far; and Rift, edited by Ken Sherwood and Loss Glazier ([REDACTED]), which produced an ambitious array of material for its first issue a few months ago: the main body of the magazine featuring poems by 16 poets (the equivalent of 50 pages), plus a series of associated files of translations, poetics, a set of variations on a poem, and a chapbook. Also online is Luigi-Bob Drake's, and friends', Taproot Reviews ([REDACTED]), an heroic effort to review hundreds of small magazines and chapbooks committed to "experimental language art & poetry." Experiments with poetry and poetics "listserve" discussion groups have also begun, with Joe Amato's pioneering Nous Refuse ([REDACTED]), but as yet the intriguing mix of newsletter, group letter, and bulletin board has not yet found its place. It seems certain, however, that the net will be a crucial site for the distribution of works of poetry, especially out-of-print works, as well as for information on obtaining books and magazines, and, I suspect, for long-term local, national and

international exchanges of ideas and work in progress. The new computer technology -- both desktop publishing and electronic publishing -- has radically altered the material, specifically visual, presentation of text. No doubt a new aesthetic will emerge. But at this point, the absence of visual aesthetics in the production of many desktop magazines is discouraging. Simply having access to a laser printer does not mean an editor has any idea how to design type. Ironically, many of the typewriter and mimeo publications of the past thirty years were visually richer than some of the more poorly designed desktop products. In the case of e-space, editors have, as of now, little control over the visual appearance of the text.

Distribution remains the most serious problem for the small press and one of the least understood parts of the process. While larger independent presses have distributors with sales representatives to visit bookstores, most small presses must rely on mailing lists and informal contacts to circulate their books and magazines. Small Press Distribution (1814 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94702) is the most important source for alternative press titles published in the United States. With the recent demise of over half-a-dozen alternative press distributors, it is also the "sole remaining noncommercial literary book distributor left in the entire country." SPD, which must take 55 percent of the retail price of a book (bookstores will typically take 40 percent or more of this), now distributes about 52,000 books a year, from over 350 presses, with net sales of \$360,000. Their quarterly catalogs and annual complete catalogs are fundamental resources. From 1980 to 1993, Segue Distributing published an annual catalog that offered a curated selection of small press titles that could be ordered through a central address. Segue, unlike most distributors, was able to articulate an aesthetic commitment with its choices, as well as being able to include presses and magazines too small to be handled by other distributors. In addition, Segue included selections of small press books and magazines from the UK, as well as New Zealand and Australia. Segue Distribution was discontinued this year after losing its government grant support. I suspect that in the future activities such as Segue's will best be handled through electronic bulletin boards or similar formats. One of Segue's most useful assets is its mailing list, which it makes available to affiliated presses. The mailing list keeps track of a shifting community of readers, with special attention to the local audience who wishes to receive notices of readings as well as the national and international audience who wishes to receive notices of book and magazine publications. I say community because audience is too passive a term to describe this matrix and because there is a tendency to speak of community when referring to a small press readership or, especially, the local "scene" for a reading series or a magazine. But I resist the term community as well, since it is more accurate to think of

constellations of active readers interested in exchange but not necessarily collectivity. While much distribution of poetry takes place in the mail, we all owe a great debt to the few remaining independent bookstores that make an effort to keep in stock a full range of poetry titles. There is no substitute for flipping through new books and magazines in a bookstore, and such bookstores themselves are crucial sites of whatever a poetry community might be. We also owe a debt to those publications that are committed to reviewing and discussing small press publications, since one of the most involving aspects of the small press is the intensity of interchange that takes place in reviews, letters, correspondence and conversation. This is what makes *The American Book Review* so much livelier than *The New York Review of Books*. At their best, reviews and essays in the alternative poetry press are less concerned with evaluation than with interaction, participation and partisanship; in this respect, the prose of the small presses offer a refreshing alternative to the evaluative focus of newspaper and mainstream magazine reviews as well as the often stifling framelock of academic discourse. Indeed, the literary small press provides a forum not just for innovation in poetry but equally for innovation in prose, in the process demonstrating that a free press means giving writers stylistic freedom, not simply the freedom to express their opinions in mandated forms.

The power of our alternative institutions of poetry is their commitment to scales that allow for the flourishing of the artform, not the maximizing of the audience; to production and presentation not publicity; to exploring the known not manufacturing renown. These institutions continue, against all odds, to find value in the local, the particular, the partisan, the committed, the tiny, the peripheral, the unpopular, the eccentric, the difficult, the complex, the homely; and in the formation and reformation, dissolution and questioning, of imaginary or virtual or partial or unavowable communities and/or uncommunities. Such alternative institutions benefit not just from the support of their readers and writers, but also from contributions from government, individuals, and foundations. Recently, such large foundations as the Lila Wallace - Readers Digest Fund have committed substantial funds to independent literary presses, but they have done so in ways that are often destructive to the culture of the institutions they propose to support. Rather than provide funds to directly support the production of books and magazines, or, indeed, editors or authors, such institutions insist on primarily funding organizational expansion, for example, by providing money to hire new staff for development, publicity, and management. While any money is welcome, the infrastructural expansion mandated by these foundations -- defended in the name of stabilizing designated organizations -- makes the small press increasingly dependent on ever larger infusions of money, in the process destroying the financial flexibility

that is the alternative press's greatest resource. By pushing the presses they fund to emulate the structures of large non-profit and for-profit institutions to which they stand in honorable structural opposition, these foundations reveal all too nakedly their commitment to the administration of culture rather than to the support of poetry. Ironically, the negative economy of poetry is one of its greatest assets for our culture in that it provides an alternative system of valuation to the bureaucratic professionalism of the academy and to the commercialism of the book industry and art world, not to mention the TV and movie industries. But the value of the alternative institutions of poetry is not just that they do not seek, or make, a profit. In that respect, they are no match for such mainstream magazines as *The New Yorker*, which, despite a circulation that has recently surged to 750,000, appears to be losing as much as \$10 million a year (that's something like \$13 per subscriber) -- an amount that could finance a good part of the annual cost of the alternative poetry presses and readings and magazines. *The New Yorker's* parent company, S. I. Newhouse, is apparently less concerned with profit than with cultural dominance -- legitimating the cultural product that forms the basis of its media empire; for this exercise in hegemony, circulation and publicity are more important than profit. Literature is never indifferent to its institutions. A new literature requires new institutions, and these institutions are as much a part of its aesthetic as the literary works that they weave into the social fabric. The resilience of the alternative institutions of poetry in the postwar years is one of the most powerful instances we have of the creation of value amidst its postmodern evasions. When you touch this press, you touch a person. In this sense, the work of our innovative poetries is fundamentally one of social work.

Notes

Presented at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association on Dec. 29, 1993, in Toronto.

1. Rebecca Pepper Sinkler, "Hell Night at the 92nd Street Y," in *The New York Times Book Review*, 98:31 (May 9, 1993), p. 31. "For some" ("We lucky few" is the last sentences of the article) "there was to be a post-poetry spread laid on by Edwin Cohen (a businessman and patron of literature) back at his apartment at the Dakota, a Dantesque menu announced in advance: roast suckling stuffed pig stuffed with fruit, nuts, and cheese; Tuscan salami; prosciutto and polenta, white beans with fennel."

2. "The budget for the National Endowment for the Arts, which has not changed appreciably in the last 12 years, is smaller than the Department of Defense's budget for its 102 military bands," according to an article in *The New York Times*, 3/13/93, p. C13.

3. Rush H. Limbaugh 3d, *See I Told You So* (New York: Pocket Books, 1993) and *Howard Stern Private Parts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).
4. Loss Pequeno Glazier, *Small Press: An Annotated Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 2-3.
5. Mary Biggs, *A Gift that Cannot Be Refused: The Writing and Publishing of Contemporary American Poetry* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990); cited in Glazier, p. 38.
6. Clayton Eshleman, letter to the author, 11 January 1994. Information on Sun & Moon Press is based on an interview with Douglas Messerli in November 1993; information on o.blek is based on an interview with Peter Gizzi in December 1993.
7. *Abacus*, edited by Peter Ganick (181 Edgemont Avenue, Elmwood, CT 06110) is the longest running of these magazines; in February, 1984, they published their 80th issue, *Cornered Stones Split Infinites* by Rosmarie Waldrop. *Witz*, edited by Christopher Reiner (P.O. Box 1059, Penngrove, California 94951), is a newsletter featuring poetics, reviews, and listings of recent publications; it is published three times a year in association with *Avec*, a magazine comparable to *Sulfur* and *o.blek*. The other magazines mentioned feature new poetry, often by younger or infrequently published poets: *The Impercipient*, ed. Jennifer Moxley (61 East Manning Street, Providence, RI 02906); *Letterbox*, ed. Scott Bentley (379 Latimer Place, Oakland, CA 94609); *Mirage #4/ Period(ical)*, ed. Kevin Killian and Dodie Bellamy (1020 Minna, San Francisco, CA 94103); *Situation*, ed. Mark Wallace; *object*, ed. Kim Rosenfeld and Rob Fitterman (229 Hudson Street #4, New York, NY 10013); *lyric &*, ed. Avery E. D. Burns (P.O. Box 640531, San Francisco, CA 91640-0531); *lower limit speech*, ed. A. L. Neilsen (1743 Butler Avenue #2; Los Angeles, CA 90025); *Interruptions* (a magazine of collaborations), ed. Tom Beckett (131 North Pearl Street, Kent, OH 44240).
8. In February 1994 *Grist* announced its first electronic book, *Gleanings: Uncollected Poems of the Fifties* by David Ignatow, including many poems "published here for the first time." Cost is \$25 on diskette; the text is also available online.
9. Letter, dated October 22, 1993, to affiliated publishers from Lisa Domitrovich, Executive Director, SPD.
10. During much of this period, I worked as editor of the catalog.
11. Elizabeth Kolbert, "How Tina Brown Moves Magazines," in *The New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 5, 1993, p. 87.

12. Publishing statistics are notoriously unreliable, especially when they concern the amount publishers are willing to lose -- less to obtain cultural legitimacy, I would say, than to establish cultural values. According to The New York Times (3/2/94, p. C20), Harold M. Evans, the publisher of Random House's adult trade division, told an audience at the PEN American Center that "the 29 books he published that made it on to The New York Times's 1993 list of Notable Books lost \$680,000" and the eight books that "won awards from the American Library Association lost a total of \$370,000." Evans went on to say that three of these books had advertising budgets of \$71,000 to \$87,000 each and that these books lost from \$60,000 to \$300,000 each. Innovative works of literature or criticism or scholarship that challenge the dominant cultural values of institutions such as Random House are not the most likely candidates to receive this type of support; yet without such subventions they stand little chance of being reviewed or recommended in The New York Times, whose reviews are closely correlated to its advertisers. The point is not that official "high" culture, just as alternative-press poetry, requires subsidies; but that a system of selection and support favors certain works over others; it is this system of selection and promotion that allows the media conglomerates to control cultural sectors that they have written off as largely unprofitable. Note, however, that the content of the selections is less important for this system of dominance than the system of selection and promotion itself, since the alternative presses can never afford to lose as much as these corporations. It should be no surprise that it is neither the audience nor quality nor accessibility that creates official literary product, nor that much of official "high" culture is a loss leader. Advertising and promotion of targeted "loss leaders" are evidently worth the price in influencing literary and critical taste, specifically by fostering a cultural climate in which genuinely profitable products may thrive. The recent "fiction" issue of The New Yorker (June 27/July 4, 1994) is a perfect example of how that magazine goes about promoting the idea that "Only what sells has value and value is determined by the extent of the sales." The issue included a "good cop" feature on a struggling "serious" fiction writer that, while seeming to question the value system of commercial publishing, actually reinforced its claim to exclusive value. Remarkably, the piece, and indeed the whole magazine issue, systematically avoided any reference to alternative and independent presses so as to better foster the illusion (not to say comic notion) that the New York trade presses are the sole purveyors of literature. The story on the "struggling" writer emphasized that he had been praised by the Times (which, inevitably, is where the author of the profile had first heard about his work, since that's where you hear about worthwhile fiction) and had five books with HarperCollins that are neither (Si forbid!) "inaccessible or highbrow". The problem seemed to be that he was shifting from one New York trade press to another (a Disney

affiliate) and that his projected advance would be only \$10,000 (nonetheless, considerably more than most literary writers in this culture receive) (pp. 48-9). The New Yorker's sell was so hard that the following "bad cop" article got right down to business. It was devoted exclusively to promoting the preeminent cultural value of the top ten books on the Times's best seller list: "They have a better ear [than nonbestselling fiction] for what we say, or try to say, or don't notice we're saying -- for the small ways in which the mind works and stumbles" (p. 80); so eat your Wheaties, kids! "Wonder Bread helps build bodies 12 ways" (& that wholewheat stuff doesn't taste as good either!) I don't think "we" can say it any better than that.

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55. **Tom Mandel**
Re: plumpe Denken

Wed 17 Aug 1994

It is not the primacy of experience that I treated skeptically, but the concept of experience in use in that reference to primacy, and this not in the service of anything like G. Spivak's attempt "to dethrone canonical *method* in...social production" (leave aside the fact that the term "social production" simply restates the "canonical method" as a "social" event). If it could be dethroned, one might escape the skepticism, but it is as inherent to mental processes as figure/ground or any of the other pattern-matching, template-imposing schemata upon which our little leaps rebound.

Experience is primary, but it is so not the way a prince is, but the way the people are. However one feels convinced (daily, hourly) that this quantity is debased (repeatedly), it is the only place from which anything can emerge.

Perhaps we need to go back and read Howard Fast and the early Irwin Shaw. James T. Farrell. Places where the partial could figure a whole, or if you've seen the Hawks picture "Only Angels Have Wings", which I so insisted on in my last post, you might view it against "Tarnished Angels" another flying picture this time by the great Douglas Sirk or perhaps someone would like to discuss the subject of mimesis? Has anyone read Auerbach's last-published essay, "Philology & *Weltliteratur*" which I think would provide the foundation for a telling critique of the function of theory in literature. Interestingly, it was translated by Edward Said, who may be said to grow entirely from one of Auerbach's lobes.

tom mandel

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56. **Clint Burnham**

Re: plumpe Denken

Wed 17 Aug 1994

Experience etc.

I'm not really sure what "experience" means when it is founded as some base of thought; I think that the Spivak quote Jed cited was just continuing Spivak's continuing skepticism about what she othertimes calls the "native informant," or the tendency to take some narrated "experience," in this case from a native or primitive "other," and treat it as authentic, etc.

& I was also puzzled by Tom Mandel's comment that "the term 'social production' simply restates the 'canonical method' as a 'social' event." Quickly, it seems that Spivak *there* was saying (I read that book from the library a couple months ago, so I can't remember in any way the context, so I'll go by the quotation) that truths are formed or produced in what we call "the social," which means in history, in the current collective situations. (As Bernstein's interesting essay just posted posited, the "ruling class" of American literature is obviously a collective enterprise in how it protects its own against the threats from we tweeby little xerox geeks: someone else on his panel at the MLA tried to make the claim that there was no real canon [unwittingly repeating Bernstein's "State of the Art" essay to different ends] based on his experience as a reviewer for those NYC journals everyone refers to by their initials); I lost track of my parentheses just now, but surely the emphasis on experience in Mandel's post has to do with seeking some ineffable individual basis for thought, cognition, poetry?

What if Kant had remarked that a bird flying in a flock wishes s/he were alone and free.

Aspects of Said's humanistic method may derive from Auerbach, As Aijaz Ahmad pointed out in **In Theory**, but I don't think the old philologist did much for the Palestinian people.

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57. **Joseph Conte**

Re: mundanity

Wed 17 Aug 1994

Everything that Charles Bernstein says of Talking Leaves bookstore is true--the place is a community treasure, and many faculty choose to order their coursebooks there instead of the capitalist UB bookstore--except for the name of the proprietor and reggae-meister, Jonathan Welch.

Charles, did you catch Melanie at the Woodstock reunion? I have often felt a phenomenal bond with the Mud People.

Joseph Conte

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58. **Steve Evans**

My recent experience with error

Wed 17 Aug 1994

I appreciate the care with which Tom Mandel responded to my assertions about the "porousness" of practice. As the narrator of Melville's **Pierre** writes: "If to affirm, be to expand one's isolated self; and if to deny, be to contract one's isolated self; then to respond is a suspension of all isolation." An apt motto, from a book that explores the dialectic between "identification" and "embeddedness" in chilling detail.

In fact, I only remembered the above while searching for a passage that complemented Tom's three examples, and caught something of the texture of Tom's post in general. It is this paragraph, from the chapter called "Some Philosophical Remarks":

From these random slips, it would seem, that Pierre is quite conscious of much that is so anomalously hard and bitter in his lot, of much that is so black and terrific in his soul. Yet that knowing his fatal condition does not one whit enable him to change or better his condition. For in tremendous extremities human souls are like drowning men; well enough they know there are in peril; well enough they know the causes of that peril; nevertheless, the sea is the sea, and these drowning men do drown.

Tom's model of experience is apparently one in which we are drowning always; the main exercise of mind, he implies, comes in disguising that mortal fact: "You'll never have a loosely woven engagement with anything except so's you imagine the better not to come to consciousness."

Let me counterpose a passage from Rosmarie Waldrop's **Lawn of the Excluded Middle**:

Because we use the negative as if no explanation were needed the void we cater to is, like anorexia, a ferment of hallucinations. Here, the bird's body equals the rhythm of wing-beats which, frantic, disturb their own lack of origin, fear of falling, indigeneous grey. Static electricity. Strobe map. Gap gardening. (24; also in Messerli anth. 250)

As Waldrop's entire book shows, what Tom calls the "gap between what is true and what is not"--the only gap he allows--actually traps that engagement I was calling "loosely woven" in the excluded middle.

As for the assertion that "the social world begins when you have made effective commitments and it operates among those commitments," I don't think Tom and I disagree either on the claim or on the value placed on such *social,* as against "individual," commitments. But my argument is that such commitments are not effectively sustained on the model of total absorption. To pick up Rae's lines, if you value flirting, playing dead as a way of flirting is an option. If you value flirting, a certain tradition in poetry, and anti-capitalist political and intellectual work, well, the commitments are porous enough to admit of all three projects in time. (Though anti-capitalists are on the whole inept flirts, there are exceptions.)

And, Tom, don't think I'm changing the subject.

As sidenote on the phrase, "in my experience." I despise the use of the term as a conversation stopper, as do Jed and G.C. Spivak. But having been taken to task for it, I still don't feel too repentant (my apologies to the theologians). I think the ghost of the public sphere that wanders the circuits of these lists is benign: private people critically debating public interests test "their experiences" in a social medium. And despite its recent vintage in geo-historical terms, the category of "my experience" is an objective one in capitalist social formations. Remember ideology is seldom *just* ideology.

There's so much else to respond to, not only in Tom's post but in the extremely interesting message Charles Alexander posted, and Charles Bernstein's article as well, but let one accident of attending both to this list and to Messerli's anthology in the past two days suffice.

Clint's noticing that "those who pose themselves against consumer culture just mean the more *apparently* commodified worlds of mass culture. (& not, then, the "consumer culture" of farmhouses, expensive cheese, and thick, handmade sweaters)" finds a direct echo in Robert Kelly's poem "Recessional," which I just read for the first time in Messerli's volume:

Not much in this culture
left for me. I will arise
and go into the future,
to the country I take it
joggers are also trotting to
beyond the quiche and croissants
beyond the poignant resurrections
each commodity promises and fails.

I see a rough grey hill there
I am suddenly determined to climb
and set a pebble down to praise
all those who came before me
knowing no more than I do of the way. (238)

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59. **Tom Mandel**
Re: plumpe Denken
Wed 17 Aug 1994

re: Clint Burnham's post, yes of course I overstated Said's relation to Auerbach -- although it was not in a "humanistic method" but a view of history that I was locating the relationship, & I think one would have to discuss this in the context of the Auerbach essay I referenced to take it any further -- I was trying to raise an interest in A's work. (By the way, I'm delighted to hear of A. Ahmad's mention of this relationship, and I'll be looking into **In Theory** which I don't know).

As to

"What if Kant had remarked that a bird flying in a flock wishes
s/he were alone and free"

well? What if? I mean I would much appreciate to hear more on this subject. The desire for solitude, so intense and ambiguous a force in Spinoza, does it really come to formal expression in Kant (as, shortly thereafter, it surely does in Kierkegaard's work)?

"the tendency to take some narrated "experience," in this case from a native or primitive "other," and treat it as authentic..."

How does one get along in life, really? Is there any way to escape belief in, commitment to, the reality of another's narrative frame? Do we exist in relationships, and do these pre-exist the critical solitude (sorry, it's a fiction, however useful) in which we make such claims as Clint is claiming Spivak makes (and can we understand what C says unless we credit **that** narrative frame?). What, on the other hand, is the very special, highly constructed, altogether test-tube situation in which we critique this "tendency to take..." ? Lets call it Situation A.

Where does poetry come from? Does it come from Situation A. Language poetry, to take an example we all in varying degrees seem to know and care about, did it come from Situation A? No thank you, it did not. And what of its force in a human life, a reader's life, does this force come from Situation A? We see in **Ketjak**, in **Oxota**, in **Agreement** that the author has refused

commitment to the authenticity of some witness or record (his/her own?)?, or is it to some alternate way of expression that commitment is refused and this refusal is or at least defines the work? These seem trivial burdens for a poet to carry who knows the world she occupies fellow-citizenized by Arnaut Daniel & Dante. That...

"truths are formed or produced in what we call "the social," which means in history, in the current collective situations"

is not news, not theory, just a menu-pick among truth-version-windows. A poet's job is to figure out what such "current collective situations" are as roll in our lives, to really figure that out.

Here are a few closing words, not mine but of Mandelstam:

An artist considers his world-view a tool and an instrument, like a hammer in the hands of a stonemason, and his only reality is the work of art itself.

Conscious sense, the Logos, is still taken erroneously... for content. (It should instead be) considered on an equal footing with the other elements of the word (as form)...., conscious sense as creative material.

There is no equality nor competition, only the complicity of all who conspire against emptiness and non-existence.

tom mandel

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60. **Tom Mandel**

Re: My recent experience with error

Wed 17 Aug 1994

Other than that I have no interest in "disguising" anything (but maybe he meant to write "deguising"), I find Steve Evans post convincing in every particular. Lets remember that this "drowning" is a social state, the exact state of those creatures who from water took to air and, drowning, moved on.

Those who came before can't know our praise; those to come, are they more likely to? Only we seem to know the praise we pause to give. Does this mean it is really ourselves we are praising? No answer hides in the question; I really wonder.

Rosemary's passage, which seems to be a meditation on Wittgenstein, is brilliantly apposite (brilliant & beautiful itself). Let us explain our denials, it seems to counsel itself.

tom mandel

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61. **Mn Center For Book Arts**

buy or bye poetry

Wed 17 Aug 1994

Steve Evans has asked me to elaborate on what one might do to contest the disappearance of poetry from "serious consumer culture," as someone put it in an earlier post. I would hope the culture includes serious consumers of poetry, and as Charles Bernstein so eloquently puts it in his long essay, which he also delivered at the "Art & Language" symposium at Minnesota Center for Book Arts in April of 1994, it does so include them (even everyone on this list).

So, here are some more earthly suggestions, not earthly delights, at least not in themselves.

This may come in two or more posts over the next several days. The first one is mostly directed toward what you can do at bookstores. If your only bookstore is Barnes & Noble, you may be lost. Managers of the chains, unfortunately, have very little independence in what they are allowed to carry. But you can ask them.

But here goes:

First, talk to your booksellers. Get to know them. Make requests personally as well as through slips of paper called order forms. Encourage them to obtain the specific books you want. If they are receptive, ask them to carry representative work from presses you like. Let them know that SPD will tailor orders specifically for a particular bookstore and make it easy for the bookseller. But you have to persuade these booksellers NOT ONLY that these are important books, but that, MORE IMPORTANTLY, that, given a decent chance, they will sell.

Get your friends & people with similar ideas to do the same. Hearing it from one voice will not move a bookseller. Hearing from five to ten might. Hearing it from twenty will.

Then -- buy the books, & make sure those friends buy them, too. This will make the bookseller very happy, perhaps even make her trust your future recommendations. Tell your students to buy these books. Submit reviews to your local paper, especially when there is a local connection -- but, hey, the disappearance of poetry is a good story. You could even write about that and about what you & some local cohorts are trying to do about it.

You may end up negotiating regular 10 to 15% discounts on these books for members of a reading group or other association. But don't push for the discount first. Despite how much you may detest consumer culture, please help the booksellers make money by selling these books. It helps the books survive.

Hold readings at the bookstore & let the bookseller make selling the books a featured part of the readings. Have reading & discussion groups meet there if this is at all possible.

If you achieve a good relationship with the bookseller, ask if you can have 6 inches of shelf space in the store to create a "poetry books of the month" corner. And, again, get people to buy these books.

If you teach at a university, or are a student, by all means do all this (& anything more you can invent) at your university bookstore or local store which serves the university community.

Also, if you teach -- USE small press books. In seminars on contemporary writing, use several -- maybe even use small press books exclusively. In large survey classes, use some small press books. Try to get the bookstore to order directly from the small presses (stores pay no more, & the presses are able to give a smaller discount than is required by distributors or book "jobbers") or from SPD (which helps support the entire field). It's ironic that I know several people teaching at major universities, yet only twice in the last four years have I received, for Chax Press books, orders for 40 or more books for a class. Every small press, every day, is on the verge of disappearing. If they do, then we won't have to worry about poetry books being in bookstores. There will be no poetry books. In the fall of 1993, when the University of Toronto bookstore ordered \$1,000 worth of bp Nichol's ART FACTS from Chax, it literally saved the press. Such orders, to the presses you care about, should occur at least a few times every year. If you teach contemporary, or even 20th Century writing, & don't use contemporary small press books (& a variety of them, not just from the biggest of the small presses), shame on you. You are contributing to the disappearance of poetry.

Why not teach a contemporary writing class which uses a book from Sun & Moon, one from O Books, one from The Figures, one from Potes & Poets, one from Chax, one from Roof? Why not use one or two of these books (& not always from the same press) next time you teach a large survey class?

I read in an earlier post that Don Byrd doesn't buy poetry; people or presses give it to him. He is then getting a marvelous service. I hope he contributes money and time to the presses he cares about, and I hope he teaches their books in his courses.

I remind myself now that I am addressing myself to a poetics list. I read poetics & theory of various kinds & enjoy this reading. I also read a lot of poetry. What are your reading habits? What are your buying habits? How much money do you spend each year on books of poetics, criticism, and theory? Consider spending an equal amount on poetry. It will help immensely.

And please don't go into your local bookstore, notice no innovative or invigorating poetry on the shelves, and complain outside the walls of the bookstore, without doing anything to try and change the situation.

Thank you for reading this.

Read poetry. Buy poetry.

Next time I'll try to convince to contribute to presses & literary organizations.

By the way, I applaud Talking Leaves, as I do Woodland Pattern in Milwaukee, Bick's Books in Washington, the bookstore at SPD in Berkeley, and only a very few others I know about. But I've found some very good books in The Bookstore in Lennox, Massachusetts, and elsewhere. I feel like someone's had a good idea when I find even one fugitive and fine poetry book on a bookstore's shelf.

And I am grateful to Charles Bernstein for bringing up the increasing role being played by on-line bookstores and informational services.

Does the book on the shelf struggle for its pages to be open, resisting the heavy air? Come to think of it, it used to keep me awake that a book spends perhaps 99% of its life closed. Now I think that once it's been opened, it is really never closed. There's a confusion of the physical with another realm, yes?

charles alexander

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62. **Robert Creeley**

Bookstores etc

Thu 18 Aug 1994

Just to note a key bookstore for the southwest: Gus Blaisdell's THE LIVING BATCH just off Central across from the u/. Not only does this store have a ranging and specific collection of books for sale, it also publishes them, eg, Gene Frumkin's recent col- lection and (forthcoming) Ronald Johnson's ARK in toto. Gus also has readings throughout the year--and serves as network for that part of the country. Thus I had word of John Yau (who had read there recently), and it's also the last time and place I had chance to talk with Ed Abbey (we both were grad students at UNM in the 50s!). Anyhow, "community," "consellations," "collectives," it's always hand to mouth or head or heart. Somebody's got to be there for real.

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63. **Loss Glazier**
Cite for woman as "muse"

Thu 18 Aug 1994

I'd like to know anyone could recommend a (definitive/defining) source that might provide me with a perspective on the question of the male poet invoking woman as image of perfection, inspiration, "other." That is, I've run across, in various places, allusions to the colonial, etc. nature of this question but wondered where I might find "the argument" (or arguments) (specifics?) re this "invocation" as objectionable, sexist, Romanticism (romantic vs. Romanticism?), commodifying (?) etc. Is the question one of "conquest" vs. attention to the formal qualities of the writing? Are these mutually exclusive?

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64. **Tom Mandel**
Re: buy or bye poetry

Thu 18 Aug 1994

...Bick's Books in Washington" alas is gone (or in its last few days). Rod Smith, who filled Bicks' shelves, has moved on to Bridge St. Books also in DC (Georgetown); but, we have nothing like Talking Leaves or the even-more-azazing sounding Woodland Pattern (after all, TL is in a col collegetown, or doesn't this make it a little easier?). Yet, we've got a Borders, a Supercrown, heavens knows how many more; and Washington sells more books per capita than any other city in the states (so they say).

tom mandel

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65. **Jorge Guitart**
poetry guerrilla

Fri 19 Aug 1994

give the gift of alternative poetry to a friend who reads mainstream poetry but doesn't know better. I mean buy a book for him or her.

i did.

My choice was THE COLD OF POETRY, by Lyn Hejnenian (Sun & Moon Press 1994) which i recommend to everyone who wants to know what poetry is/can/should be.

i bought it at our stellar TALKING LEAVES.

incidentally i saw it at Borders in Mount Lebanon, Pa (a suburb of Pittsburgh) a couple of days ago. it was my first visit to a Borders and it inclined me favorably towards that outfit.

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66. **Clint Burnham**

Re: plumpe Denken

Fri 19 Aug 1994

or: phat thots (to use some more jargon):

Tom Mandel responded carefully and generously to my rant, for which I'm grateful. Certainly, I think if there is value in poetry, or in some poetry, it lies in specificities of language and experience; the poetry I value from the sixties, say, in either Canada, the U.S., or Britain, seemed to puncture the rhetoric of a prevailing "popular" or at least wide-spread poetry; in each of these countries that was different. Raworth and Prynne don't seem to have the same stance on that rhetoric (Raworth abandoned the high for the low? to put it grossly, whilst Prynne tried to push the high & see how far it would go?), but their work and of their contemporaries that I've read seemed to be a formally-based attack on the class inflections of the angrymiddleagedmen and the faber&penguin books. In Canada the work, say, of the TISH folk, stealing from OlsonCreeleyDuncanetc, was in contradistinction to a form still popular here, that of a populist-anecdotal vernacular that offers "experience" as something which can be transmitted. (That enemy is still with us, as I said, & can be said to constitute an official poetry, but the postmodernists have had some success in the academy).

Sorry if this is turning into a mini-essay/shortpost.

I suppose the point of my fictitious Kant was to indicate I was/am trying to find a poetry that comes out of the collective *not* either as a timeworn lefty phrase nor as some chimera or utopia but with the same rigour as Mandel's working through the philosophical (I'd love to have a book called "Realism"):

"Light circles the other past" goes on and on and on ...

Clint

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67. **Joseph Conte**

Re: Cite for woman as "muse"

Fri 19 Aug 1994

Loss:

I'm not sure when the invocation of a feminine muse became sexist commodification, but the tradition of such invocation goes back to classical literature: Menin aeide, Thea . . . Sing, Goddess the wrath of Achilles. Id est, the figuration of the imagination in the male poet was his feminine, divine, other. The trope is that the song--anything but a "conquest"--is a gift of the muse to the humble poet who would be nothing without her. Plato (I think it's in the "Ion") mocks poets as incompetents and virtueless for being only the passive receptacles of such divine (feminine) speech.

I'm not sure, really, when the invocation becomes objectionable-- or perhaps I'm missing the point of your inquiry. What's the context?

Joseph Conte

PS: As a netiquette cavil, would posters to this list please undersign their posts. It can be difficult to find the sender in the header material.

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68. **Jed Rasula**

Re: Cite for woman as "muse"

Fri 19 Aug 1994

Loss: Like Joe Conte, I'm not quite clear which direction your query intends. But I did think right away of a book by Lawrence Lipking, ABANDONED WOMEN AND POETIC TRADITION (U. Chicago, 1988). I've been working for several years myself on a seemingly interminable project called "Poetry's Voice-Over," which assesses various implications of poetic empowerment & primal scenes of such, as in Hesiod's invocation of the Helikonian muses. One section of that is coming up in the next issue of Sulfur ("Gendering the Muses"--it may be most pertinent for what you're up to); an abridged version of the whole text is forthcoming in Adalaide Morris's collection SOUND EFFECTS (U.North Carolina Press).

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69. **Mn Center For Book Arts**

Re: plumpe Denken & a reel

Fri 19 Aug 1994

real ism

is em real?

charles (in memoriam bp)

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70. **Joe Amato**

Re: Cite for woman as "muse"

Sat 20 Aug 1994

ah, can't resist... my favorite invocation being in byron's *don juan*, beginning of canto iii:

| Hail, Muse! et cetera.---

joetomato

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71. **Tom Mandel**

Re: plumpe Denken & a reel

Sat 20 Aug 1994

"The past is all that can be changed."

-- *Realism* / p.66

tom mandel

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72. **Charles Bernstein**

FROM: Joel Kuszai, "Re: poetry guerrilla" (rejected post)

Tue 23 Aug 1994

--Boundary (ID sKTkrmvl9vLD4Bx788Vzfg)

Subj: Rejected posting to [REDACTED]

Your message is being returned to you unprocessed because it looks like a LISTSERV command, rather than material intended for distribution to the members of the POETICS list. Please note that LISTSERV commands must ALWAYS be sent to the LISTSERV address; if it was indeed a command you were attempting to issue, please send it again to [REDACTED] for execution. Otherwise, please accept our apologies and try to rewrite the message with a slightly different wording - for instance, change the first word of the message, enclose it in quotation marks, insert a line of dashes at the beginning of your message, etc.

----- Rejected message (37 lines) -----

Date: Tue, 23 Aug 1994 13:40:41 -0400 (EDT)

From: Joel Kuszai <[REDACTED]>

Subject: Re: poetry guerrilla

leave a book on a shelf at borders. Sign it "William Burroughs" or "william shakespeare" or "fuck you"

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--Boundary (ID sKTkrmvl9vLD4Bx788Vzfg)--

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73. **Roberts Mark**

Re: FROM: Joel Kuszai, "Re: poetry guerrilla" (rejected post)

Wed 24 Aug 1994

--Boundary (ID sKTkrmvl9vLD4Bx788Vzfg)
Content-type: TEXT/PLAIN; CHARSET=US-ASCII

Subj: Rejected posting to [REDACTED]

Your message is being returned to you unprocessed because it looks like a LISTSERV command, rather than material intended for distribution to the members of the POETICS list. Please note that LISTSERV commands must ALWAYS be sent to the LISTSERV address; if it was indeed a command you were attempting to issue, please send it again to [REDACTED] for execution. Otherwise, please accept our apologies and try to rewrite the message with a slightly different wording - for instance, change the first word of the message, enclose it in quotation marks, insert a line of dashes at the beginning of your message, etc.

----- Rejected message (37 lines) -----

Date: Tue, 23 Aug 1994 13:40:41 -0400 (EDT)

From: Joel Kuszai <[REDACTED]>

Subject: Re: poetry guerrilla

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--Boundary (ID sKTrmvl9vLD4Bx788Vzfg)--

Small publishes will go to any extreme!! I know of many people who will admit to stealing from major bookchains - but actually giving them books and then running away so that you don't get caught (what will they charge you with?).....

Oh well my press (Rochford Press) was once 'accused' on a writing program on Australian national radio of being prepared "to beg borrow or steal" to get books and litmags out. Which isn't so far from the truth.

I love the concept of 'poetry guerrillas'. Things (at least in Australia) seem to have settled down so much over the last couple of years that it is even getting difficult to get alternative and small press books into non mainstream bookshops who would traditionally take them (or if they do take them they will leave them under the desk and not display them - and then complain that "new poetry doesn't sell"). Lets shake things up a little/alot!!!!

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74. **Joe Amato**

selected and collected poetry...

Thu 25 Aug 1994

in the recent anthologies/small press vein: those interested might check out this month's *american book review*... there's a piece by rochelle ratner (who assigns poetry reviews for abr) about presumed problems associated with prematurely issuing selected/collected volumes of poets' work...

note this assertion: "The numbers might prove otherwise (a recent 'Poetry Showcase' at Poets House in New York City had nearly 1000 books on display, all published in 1993), but my own sense of the marketplace suggests that poetry publishing is at a low ebb. And what are the more respected presses publishing these days? *Selected poems*."

joe

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75. **Clint Burnham**

Poetry gorillas

Thu 25 Aug 1994

Magilla and otherwise

Reverse shoplifting has an honourable history here in Toronto, as well. Some guys at York U in the mid-80s did a parody of university-published student mags called "In4mation", complete with letraset-crazy pages & really bad poetry & left it, with the price pencilled in the corner, at the U bookstore.

One of the ways people here have circumvented bookstores for the past 10 years is the small press book fair, which, with little publicity in the media (even the so-called alternative papers), once or twice a year offers space for 50 or so local small presses (usually of the one person in their basement apt. scenario, & some larger "literary" ones). Quite successfull. But probably only possible in a city.

By the way, I sent a message to Luigi-Bob Drake's e-zine (Taproot Review) in Cleveland and rec'd 42 single-spaced pages worth of chapbook reviews, so check it out (the address was in Bernstein's essay from last week: [REDACTED])

Clint Burnham

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76. **Roberts Mark**

Re: poetry guerrilla

Thu 25 Aug 1994

Date: Tue, 23 Aug 1994 13:40:41 -0400 (EDT)

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Mark Roberts
Systems Office

Ph 02 [REDACTED] Student Information &
Fx 02 [REDACTED] University of New South Wales Australia

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77. **Alan Golding** ***Cite for woman as "muse"***

Thu 25 Aug 1994

Associate Professor of English, U. of Louisville
Phone: [REDACTED]; e-mail: [REDACTED]

Loss--Re your question about the muse, there's some useful stuff in the first chapter of Mary K. DeShazer's Inspiring Women: Reimagining the Muse (NY:

Pergamon, 1986)--that chapter essentially offers a historical overview of male invocations of the muse and of the issues those invocations raise.

Alan Golding

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78. **John Keeling**
hello and update

Tue 30 Aug 1994

Marjorie:

Just want to touch base with you. Hope all is well in LA.

CSU Summer Arts was fantastic and Robert and Susan were wonderful. I still haven't received a compact disc of my multimedia project, but I expect it to arrive very soon. I've managed to acquire many of the software programs we learned this summer, as well as some more sophisticated multimedia-programming packages, so I hope to keep working with the technology in the future. I hope, and this may be naive, to develop projects in some of my courses this year--for example, I already have the programming skills to put together something like McGann's Rossetti Project.

This summer has been quite eventful. I started working with Plugged-In, a volunteer organization that brings technology into low-income areas in East Palo Alto, Redwood City, and Menlo Park. I also have started collaborating with some artists from the CSU program on a documentary on the Winchester mansion in San Jose. On the downside, my wife received some bad medical news, and we were forced to move because of the increasingly violent drug traffic in our old neighborhood. We relocated to Redwood City in August.

Look forward to getting the Qualls behind me. Started reviewing a couple weeks ago, much later start than I had planned, lets just say I took a Wordsworthian approach to my preparation (thinking of how Wordsworth went hiking in the Alps the summer before his university exams--my Simplon pass is the bridge from Palo Alto to E Palo Alto).

Will fill you in on more details when you come to town. Is there anything I/we need to do with regard to the independent study? no paperwork, etc.?

Sincerely,

John

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