

hole magazine
by Louis Cabri

Here are some anecdotal, historical and theoretical contexts for *hole*. *hole* was a project of the "experimental writing group" (ewg) which met regularly to read poetry alongside critical theory and poetics, and produce poetry seminars, talks and readings, in Ottawa, from 1986 to 1995. Rob Manery and I organized ewg events, and initiated and edited *hole* from 1990 to 1996 [1], irregularly producing six issues, the first four formatted and proofed afterhours on computers at work.[2]

ewg's goal was to create poetry as a public act, predominantly by locating poetry in a site of dialogue, by attempting to create conditions for dialogue -- by valuing talk about poetry as much as poetry itself. "Site" understood as constituted by dialogue: but, for all that, ewg did not emerge from an existing local scene. Poetry in Ottawa-Hull in the mid '80s seemed confined to subordinate and instrumental roles as theatricalizing narrative for visually-based performance art -- at times, this was true even when poetry had no prop other than the page it was written on. Poetry remained a token reason (if that) for forming community. Nil public discussion of poetry occurred outside the credentializing abstraction of university classroom. At Carleton University, Christopher Levenson's ARC magazine was preeminent-to us, Arnoldean; at University of Ottawa, Seymour Mayne's influence was mythopoetically Laytonesque. Interesting local page-based poetry (in our opinion) was the work being translated by the expatriate Chilean community, notably Jorge Etcheverry, who attended ewg gatherings and presented in our Transparency Machine series[3]. ewg poetry/theory discussions were attended by twenty or so people at best [4], with a core of about five, including poet Robert Hogg. As former TISH associate, Bob was our immediate connection to a live tradition of formally innovative English-language poetries (the TISH poets; The Four Horsemen, especially bpNichol; San Francisco Renaissance poets, especially Duncan; Olson and Creeley, and the Buffalo poetry scene).

Group enactment of "location" as dialogue, and the writing of discursive prose on poetry beyond an academic frame-historically-have been initiating premises, even goals, for many poetics group formations. We knew group enactment was possible even in the '80s because of *Writing/Talks* (Perelman, ed.), *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*

(Andrews/Bernstein, eds.), and *Total Syntax* (Watten), all published in the year of Orwell, 1984. (I will indirectly address below the talismanic quality these US texts and contexts had specifically for us, in terms of "second-order commodification.") Rob came to know of these texts through his friendship with Hogg (who is a professor at Carleton University), and I from the *New Left Review* (Fredric Jameson's now notorious flagship essay on the "cultural logic" of "late" capitalism). We didn't realize that Vancouver's legacy of group-enacted poetics was alive just then, incorporating names these texts catalogued, into their own context, at Kootenay School of Writing. In contrast, closer to home, we only felt the presence of Toronto's scene of in-my-street surrealism—a sort of alienated WASP parody of 'everyday life', disconnected from surrealism's struggles either with Marxism (in France) or, evidently, the Catholic church (in Québec). But "ewg" was loosely modeled on the idea of "the Toronto Research Group"—also, "OPOYAZ." We knew little about TRG, except for some essays in *Open Letter*. I had read about OPOYAZ in recent historical accounts of the Russian Formalists. What excited us both about these formations was the idea (the idea alone seemed to be enough) that an open-ended "group" might be constituted by individuals practicing and/or talking about poetry from many points of view—scientific, political, etc.

The kind of talk we wanted to generate aimed to intersect innovative form with cultural critique and theory. We wanted to generate talk from within a discursive site that was independent of institutional filiations (universities, predominantly) and yet was also independent of ideological exigencies to positively value "the local" within a poetics of regionalism or place. Our first Canada Council-funded event was inviting Steve McCaffery to read and be interviewed in 1986. Subsequently ewg produced well over one hundred events at artist-run centres, the municipal arts gallery and library, and Chris Swail's Manx Pub, with poets invited from other parts of Canada (by 1988, mostly Vancouver—mostly KSW—and Toronto), the US (mostly "Language" poets, mostly from New York State, some from California), the UK (Tom Raworth, Maggie O'Sullivan, Aaron Williamson), as well as Ottawa itself (e.g., Hogg's week-long workshop on Olson's *Special View of History*). Audience size ranged from upwards of 45, to none (strangely, for a bilingual town, French-speaking Quebec poets did not draw crowds).

Site-as-dialogue really began with our friendship—and that's where, in

Ottawa, site-as-dialogue remained most of the time, contrary to our wishes. It was out of a somewhat desperate, pathetic sense of unaccountable loss that I posted the town announcing ewg's first meeting to discuss language-centred and other 20th-century writings, in 1986. I met Rob Manery at that first meeting (remembering him from a previous event because of what he wore for it, a black beret. He was gingerly reading *Piers Plowman* in a Penguin classics edition, sitting by himself in an empty gallery of opened stacking-chairs, waiting for the event to start. Rob was, to me, more memorable than the event itself.). Rob closed down ewg ten years later, leaving it and Ottawa (I left in '94); from the beginning, the imaginary community wouldn't have continued for much longer than a month without Rob. Arguably, the minimal unit of "community" is two. That's what we, precariously (and somewhat homogeneously), had. Viva homosocial bonding [5]. We were profoundly struck by Steve McCaffery's poetry, and essay collection *North of Intention* (published 1987), by *Writing* magazine-run by an editorial collective-which we discovered in 1987, and by any essays or poetry of Jeff Derksen's and other KSW members, whenever found (*Raddle Moon*, *C Magazine*, *Vanguard*). Our connection to KSW really began with inviting, on McCaffery's suggestion, Colin Browne to read. Browne performed with musician Martin Gotfrit their intermedia work, *Ground Water*, in 1987, then Colin returned on a second invitation from us the next year to read from *Abraham*, present a Transparency Machine event (on Stein), and attend the premiere screening of his first feature-length film. It was in an interview with Browne that he suggested someone could start a magazine [6].

To us, the word *hole* implied our poetics orientation -- the idea of the part, or fragment, was to be presented in/as writing, as an absence of, or at least distancing from, ideas (lyrical, etc.) of "wholeness," distancing that would convey the necessary estrangement-effect art must have on "life." -- *hole*-ism, not holism. The word's everyday connotations could also raise the principle that social conventions bound words to contexts of use with ethical (particularly its slang usages) and historical dimensions. -- A *holey*, not a holy, *hole*. Yet at the same time, when presented strictly on its own, in its pure linguistic character as verbal sound and shape, the word *hole* could reflexively pose the intrinsic and even utopic idea of the word-as-such, innocently shorn of all contexts and associations of use. -- The holy *hole*, *hole*.

Our first issue scrutinized the practices, and construct, of "contemporary Canadian poetry magazines," in editors' own words. We asked over sixty Canadian English-language poetry magazines (i.e., all we could find addresses for), "What is the poetics that informs your editorial policy?" and under fifteen responded. We were addressing those who either controlled or were affiliated with means of periodical production (while realizing they were not necessarily poets). Our intent was to "translate editorial policy into discourse on poetics." We wanted to know what kind of poetics and historical thinking was consciously motivating editorial decisions, regardless of what we thought of the poetry they were publishing. We also wanted to know the automatic pilot, so to speak, and alibis it used, in the machinery of poetry magazine publishing. To what extent was the journal in question a readerly induction into the Canadian Stall of Time, rather than into hockey's equivalent, in the poetry world, of a Hall of Fame? We published all responses received, excepting those evidently composed from a government funding application or publicity flyer. The other extreme -- to the bureaucratic rhetoric of application or flyer -- was captured in the boast, "I publish what I like." While probably true, and possibly interesting (either as echo of Steve Biko's apartheid-era oppositional "I write as I like," or in identifying poetics with the poetry itself along the lines of the poetry speaks for itself!), it was nonetheless symptomatic, in our view then, of how preconscious the rules of taste actually were--rules we wanted explicitly articulated, and challenged by, at the very least, talking about them.

Grandly, we imagined ourselves addressing poetry "communities" in Vancouver, New York, and San Francisco--although, it was not the cities attracting us, but the idea of a modeling of social discourses (political, cultural, economic) in which poetry was the prime motive force for all of it. In other words, it was not the style of a single poet or poetry group we wanted to emulate--say, Language writers (as much as we loved their work, and read it carefully) -- so much as the idea of a modeling of social discourses on our own terms, where outcomes were still unknowns, the conditions enabling outcomes, self-caused. The modeling we most admired seemed capable of producing a shared reading horizon among writing individuals. This we thought might pop our respective individual "orbits," releasing that photon of social energy we felt was necessary for writing to begin to find a way beyond an otherwise private, rotating blank

[7].

In one sense, "modeling" was time-honored poetic communizing. In another, we were interested in structuring what might be called live proceduralisms. ewg's so-called Transparency Machine series (the name referring to both the actual overhead projector machine, and to a linguistic metaphor) would invite a poet to present her poetry in a context of other texts and images distributed as a package in advance and then projected by means of overhead for the poet's informal talk about them. Michael Gottlieb's poetry in *hole 4* appears alongside collages presented during his Transparency Machine event (for a sample collage, see fig. 1). He made the collages from materials found on New York City streets; they are the found basis of his poems, and they were left out of the poetry book that subsequently collected the poems [8]. While not published in *hole*, these newsletter-style packages of texts from the Transparency Machine series provide interesting documentation by Peter Culley, Jeff Derksen, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, Erin Mouré, Melanie Neilson, Tom Raworth, Jed Rasula, Fred Wah, as well as McCaffery, myself-among others. [9]

We thought of *hole* as purposefully negotiating expanded value for the term "language poetry" as primary writing. To our thinking, we combined Steve McCaffery's sense of "Language Writing" (from his essay in *North of Intention*) with Jackson Mac Low's description of a "language-centered" analysis and practice of poetry (we found Mac Low's essay in *In the American Tree*, the 1987 anthology edited by Ron Silliman), to arrive at the politicized word-as-such, localized through poetic activity. We persisted in homologizing the political with the aesthetic, as a poetic practice. The paragram, for instance, was of interest to us for what it might disclose of the social word.

Paragram as gateway to language became important to the proofreader of *hole's* first issue and reviewer of *The Black Debt*, Christian Bök. I think there was a split in Canada on how to read McCaffery's poetry and theoretical statements (e.g., on the paragram). We favoured what we then thought of as "the Vancouver reading," and emphasized the political-aesthetic axis of McCaffery's writings, and his brave homologies. In contrast, "Toronto," to where Christian moved, seemed to emphasize McCaffery's "pure" word and sound, as if in spite of his "social" word (as if they were separable). The same poetic value of purity which generally

pervades the first-wave reception of bpNichol seems now, ironically, transferred to McCaffery. I think Vancouver and Toronto communities still continue to split the good maple this way.

Using "language-centred" and related terms required facing in the direction of where this aging term was already going according to those with claims on it at the outset of the '90s. Our second issue includes Kit Robinson's "Dayparts." His line, "the prospect / of a simple, straightforward / communication," seemed to us to profile the spectre recently come from within this writing community to haunt the various poetries subsumed under its "language" rubric. Such a prospect, of "straightforward / communication," had been most complexly argued by Alan Davies since the mid '80s. Davies was, I think, in large measure responding to a condition of poetic discourse-its "second-order commodification" I'll awkwardly call it [10] -that had historically inflected our magazine's moment and trajectory from the start (in a way that it had not in other communities, to the same degree).

Part 24 of "Dayparts," from *hole 2* (p. 19):

After the difficulties
or correct spelling, serial
murder, and extravagant
gestures inappropriate to
any context, the prospect
of a simple, straightforward
communication possesses
a disarming appeal.
That flight, however,
is booked, and we are
forced to go by ground,
wending as we make
up our way. In this
way, we actually discover
more to say, although half
of it gets lost in translation.
Finding places to stop
and rest can be
the best achievement of

an ordinary day-
an occasion fit
to be tied up
by a redoubling
of every effort
until the moment spills over
and it's time to get back
to luck. Late arrivals form
the basis of a new
century, part figment, part
chill, a situation no one
could have predicted.

The apparently self-evidently damning title of the language-centred magazine, *The Difficulties* (ed. Tom Beckett), Charles Bernstein's poetic device of the spelling error, serial poem as "murdering" sequential lyric-Robinson's opening lines can playfully conjure a list of criticisms of what very loosely they invoke as a metalanguage of "extravagant / gestures inappropriate to / any context"-i.e., the metalanguage "Language Writing"-in order to oppose it to a redeemer, "straightforward / communication." I think an urgent need to address the problem and prospect of direct address, of straightforward communication, propelled Davies's post *Candor* (1990) critique of language-centredness as much as it initially propelled (e.g.) Barrett Watten's language-centred writing in the '70s through to his late '80s poem "Direct Address." To explain why would digress from my immediate point here-that Robinson's text discloses where a significant difference lies between the popular criticisms of language-centred writing Davies seems to confirm (but does not, I'd argue) and Watten. The shared urgency for (the seeming impossibility of?) direct address is socially apprehended and situated in Robinson's lines, in a way that it is not in the popular critique of language-centred writing's various poetic and theoretical responses (responses that invoke mediating concepts such as ideology, materialism) to the problem of direct address. Straightforward communication is not available for all, Robinson says in these lines, insofar as it is something-a technology-one must buy. While I can't go into Davies's own critique at length, I think its gist is that "straightforward communication" is not mediated by technology, nor does it specifically require a "social" apprehension; it is a pure affect, experienced in words, of unmediated addressor-addressee contact. But, for

Robinson, "That flight ... / is booked, and we are / forced to go by ground...." And insofar as "straightforward communication" is something one buys into, Robinson poses an alternative ideal; admittedly "part figment, part / chill," it is, nevertheless (the poem's claim goes) "the basis of a new / century." That new basis obtains agency in the poem as, paradoxically, "late arrivals" lingering in "places to stop / and rest," and in the figure of local production, addressed as "the best achievement of / an ordinary day." Robinson's poem circuitously anchors for his reader a sense of social space that we prized in the discourse modeling we thought was taking place under the name of Language writing, social space locally carved out of corporate flux and state devolution in the everyday, "although half / of it gets lost in translation." Which is to say that, theoretically at least (. . . leaving the ground for a moment, as if that flight mentioned in Robinson's poem were not booked. . .), what made us stick to (although eventually feel deeply stuck in) Ottawa was the self-justifying conviction-we felt it as ideologically "real" at the time-that the leveling effects of global capitalism rendered redundant any modernist yearnings to locate oneself in a "cultural capital" (felicitous pun intended) or centre in order to come to terms with capitalism's processes.

hole 2 also includes an interview with David Bromige [11]. In an extended footnote written for the issue, Bromige elaborates on how Language Poetry ("LP") critically addressed a contradiction in Projective Verse ("PV") between subjective and objective expression:

[T]he fetish PV made of the utterance-of the specific person, the poet's, utterance-led to a similar fetishization of the written word, because of the need to preserve the utterance (and the utterer) in writing. It had to be on the page just so.

Just so, it had to be on the page.

This [was a] liberating turn-around [by LP, that] left PV behind, enmeshed in its struggles to perpetuate the subjective, the person of the poet, and this despite early successes and the best of intentions. (*hole 2*, p. 51)

"Second-order commodification" is a condition of reception of the cultural "new" (a relative matter) where the emergence (of the new, from "here") and the arrival (of the new, from "elsewhere") intersect in a contested site-

as-dialogue. That condition existed for us in employing the term "language-centred." Second-order commodification refers to a myth-inducing condition in which there is simultaneously (a) the emergence ("here") and arrival (from "there") of primary writing only later to be identified as "new" (for instance, as "language-centred") with (b) the emergence/arrival of a metalanguage (in this case, conveyed by the term "language-centred") identifying the work as new. Second-order commodification results from a cultural context in which primary language without a name, and its metalanguage that brings a name, temporally co-exist. One reception-effect of second-order commodification, particularly in Canada, is to have poetics stances appear clearly staked, already amplified, distinctly audible, a critical lexicon already worked out and available to draw from in identifying aesthetic tendencies in possibly opposing, even reductive, ways. Determining the direction in which the term "language-centred" was headed required that we realize how effects of the processes of second-order commodification-which we felt inflected our belated context-could be defined, engaged (as in Bromige's narrative of formal succession) and critiqued.

When a poet knows second-order commodification to be an "inevitable" condition of her work's production and reception, causal chains can be set up, or broken. One such poetic knowledge of second-order commodification takes the form of resolute intransigence towards the "received standard," whether that might be represented by KSW specifically (its own standard), or more broadly by the ideology of discursive-prose contextualizing, itself. Deanna Ferguson's "Received Standard," in *hole 4*, is a good example (for a page from the poem, please see fig. 2). These lines desire to "lift out into its own consequence" the field of reception itself, in which the reader/writer "hangs" like an "ornament" and, by dispelling second-order commodification, return with the reader to a primary condition of engagement with verbal process. The reader is beckoned to exempt herself by deliberately recontextualizing the processes of second-order commodification as a "rigged game" ornamentizing the importance of context-critique-itself.

Lisa Robertson's poem from *hole 6* demonstrates another order of poetic knowledge of second-order commodification, one that is opposite to resolute intransigence: resolute participation:

My premise is simple. All method is a

demonstration of history. All change is substitution. "Yesterday was a new day."

"We are enraptured," the stage-direction says.

And why should we not live near the beautiful streets, have and like the meaning of our pleasure and its measurement. But let us leave aside the question of the material dream, not out of tact, not from the need to figuratively diminish the little drama of sensitive expenditure, but in order to get familiar with the civic minimum. Longueurs of desperate truancy name an idea about the "un governable" world. Yet here I am not extending the maudlin phantasy of limits. Sure, a person will have-at their own admission-and penultimate before the marvellous environment-real material romance. Today I want to address those of terrifying enthusiasms and meaning's ordinary jobs-those for whom both origins and limits repeatedly fail. Oh ardent transgressors whose walls are also my own; what country, good friends, what forest, what language, is not now smothered by our sobs?

Or I could pose the matter otherwise.
What are the terms of our complicity?
We cannot definitely know, for reasons of faulty appearance and mis managed debt. Our apparent sameness leads elsewhere than to cause or origin. . . .
(from "The Device," *hole 6*, pp. 1-2)

Here the collective pronoun "we" is at once fiercely singular and

empowered in a sort of garishly triumphalist way to resolutely participate in, if only to play with and differ from, history's method acting. Resolute participation is a necessary response because second-order commodification is always already a condition of the discourse-field, however primary the claim for writing may be (there is commodification at all levels of language). Ferguson's resolute intransigence occurs within the domain of poetry as a claim for poetry's exemptability from discursive contextualizings, while Robertson's resolute participation brings poetry and prose together, stylizing that which is not poetry as material for poetry.

Contrary to both positions, Alan Davies gestures towards a nonverbal outside of poetry-from within poetry. Distinguishing primary writing from second-order commodification misses his point, which I think asserts, in an almost lyrically nostalgic mode, referent as absent referent. To what "level" of language does a word such as "life" belong, when used in a Davies poem? This question, its possible answers, creates a dialogue within poetry and its discourse genre-and is therefore beside Davies's point. Against poetry (he calls it "poesie," below), Davies paradoxically uses poetry in an aesthetic manoeuvre to gesture beyond its own rules, towards the limits of dialogue. In "Life," Davies determines to mark poetry's limits, inscribing those limits within poetry itself, thereby displaying what are for Davies the aesthetic's best poetic resources:

Some of my friends are contented to plot the little
movements of their minds. They think poetry is an art.

.....
.....

If somebody has written some poems and you read some of
them you can tell pretty much right away whether they
concentrated on the poesie or the life.

.....
.....

There is something pathological about the usual attachments
towards words but writing at its best has to do with doing
without them. (*hole 3*, pp. 40-2)

To what does "them" refer? Is it that "writing at its best has to do with doing without" the "usual attachments towards words," or in a zen-like paradox, doing without words themselves? If the former is true, then

Davies's pre and post Signage work remains connected by a modernist impulse to "free" words of their everyday affects, their "usual" and "pathological" attachments. If the latter, then Davies pushes towards internal limits of dialogue within writing, limits that establish zen-like balance between art and life, and introduce to writing the role of maintaining health. The larger implication of these lines (and of his post Signage work), for Davies, I think, is that some of his poet-friends follow a modernist impulse to make language new at the expense of a goal of "healthful" living: poetry is, as Louis Zukofsky argued, "for the well-being of sense." [12] I think Rob Manery's own poetry is very much interested in pursuits of similar ratios and "balances" between art and life.

Resolute intransigence; resolute participation; and in Davies's case, the resolute itself-squared. These are three theoretical routes from *hole's* poetry, image-texts, reviews and essays.

The idea of talk, site-as-dialogue, was central to ewg. ewg predates the formation of the Buffalo poetics listserve. A listserve in Canada is yet to be created. I wonder if we would have begun this imaginary group, for the reasons we did (to publicly immerse ourselves, as speakers, writers, within contemporary poetry), if poetry listserves were already in place, and if we had access to them (computers, modems). What is talk, finally? Poet Nick Piombino recently writes this ambiguous assessment:

Perhaps an aspect of the astonishing success rate of groups like Alcoholics Anonymous is that such a group allows for an ongoing possibility of talking among people, with an unusual degree of freedom, for very long periods of time—no doubt in some cases, for a life-time. Artistic uses of talking do not afford for this dailyness and gradualness, particularly poetry. Our culture will no longer support this for poets. (Theoretical Objects, p. 123)

Is this the reason why the ewgroup remained more imaginary than it intended, because "our culture" no longer supports the idea on which it was fundamentally based—poets' talk? [13] Conspiracy theory, or leisure wear? But what is it exactly that "our culture" no longer supports: artistic/literary, or ordinary/usual uses of talking by poets, and is there a difference? In what sense to understand "support"? [14] Is Piombino drawing a possibly insulting analogy from poetry-group to AA-group, or

drawing a possibly flattering one to transindividual values for artistic and nonartistic uses of talking "through" societal pathologies? Either way he writes: "Our culture will no longer support this for poets."

But this fact is itself not only poetry's symptom. If that were so, the symptom would be private-an individual's somewhat desperate, pathetic sense of unaccountable loss, mine, for example, driven to poster the town, announcing "ewg." It's the culture's symptom (that poetry articulates). There, was Rob (Rob lost the beret pretty quick, as I did my visual encoding of Rob once we began to talk-I don't know if Rob did likewise, his encodings of me!). It's "The Sustained Siege," as Michael Gottlieb's poem title has it, a phrase reiterated in the first line:

The sustained siege.

The great teeth and
the mighty jaws.

Pretending
that these tails are not lashing,
that these blows
are not coming fast and low,
that these are not
our vitals, so stapped.

Like a fervid gift
for deflection.

"If it's not yours
perforce
it's mine,
even if I never use it."

"I can't carry you anymore,
you don't weigh enough."

Orphaned all,

a descending series
we are obliged to appraise,

like a kind of metrical test,

the dreadfully unkeyed
mirrored phrasings,
the anguished, somnolent draughts
streaming back empty,
the smoking cliffs,
the empty loges,
the halls where the insults
were first tossed.

All of us entirely under-rehearsed.

The atrophied, antic, strophes.

The arbitrarily endurable,
the purblind tolling,
the graven, wan,
detuned verging.

These gravid,
"posthumously born."

The giving up
-that makes it official.

The suspicious rising
and the cheered fall.

The stingy padding,
the lack of anything we would recognize
as insulation.

Jinking left and right,
availing not.

"I can't shake them."

Sunk to the axles.

"This time

it's not different."

("Gorgeous Plunge 7. The Sustained Siege," *Gorgeous Plunge*
[Roof, 1999], p. 35)

Gorgeous Plunge is one of the first contemporary poetry books, that I know of, to enact and reflexively address -- from within -- the idea of the poetry community as a specific, lived, historically time-bound, objectifiable structure of near-absolute subjective relations (another is Australian Ken Bolton's *Happy Accidents*). The book will especially resonate, I believe, with almost anyone who has written, read and talked about poetry with others for some time, outside of an institutional and officially pedagogical context. Gottlieb's poem hints that the poet's education takes place in a self-made context ("Orphaned all") independent of official educational structures and canons. Is this still true, or possible? What the book fully explores is the current state of such an idea of community in relation to the pervasive economism driving "our culture," as well as in relation to the demise of the idea of the avant-garde that such a community once aspired-to without question. While ewg was from one perspective a successful group formation-in that, for example, its poetry magazine has been remembered by a reader-guest editor in another city, years later-from another perspective ewg's political and community ambitions remained largely unrealized and unrealizable.

The political unconscious haunting any aspiration to an avant-garde practice-since the 1950s at least, if not earlier-is that of failure. Perceived by their political unconscious, aspirations to avant-garde status might appear reducible to "amateur therapy," as Robert Hughes would characterize it-the loudest critic since the '70s to proclaim the death of the idea of the avant-garde, but not the only one to do so.[15] Is "amateur therapy," then, the political unconscious of Piombino's analogy to AA? Is poets' talk an avant-garde practice? Did ewg aspire to a sense, however imaginary, of the "avant-garde," as the name might suggest? Inevitably, naively, unapologetically, I think ewg did (and was not alone in this).

The idea of poets' talk, in its multiple histories since World War II, from speech-based poetics to variations on the poet's talk as genre, extends and modifies the manifesto form. The modernist manifesto derives its own avant-garde rhetorical caché from the French Revolution, and on, back to 17th-century Diggers and Levellers tracts.[16] Talk, collective/collaborative

practice, avant-garde-these have historically overlapped as interdependent functions of the same event: (at risk of being overly schematic) talk requires at least two people, two people talking implies a form of communal endeavour, communal endeavour for change used to be capable of utilizing, in the right context, the idea of the avant-garde. Values for collective action and for collaboration no longer require the rhetoric of the idea of a vanguard in order to ensure actualization-as they once did, in some specific instances in order to withstand threat of identification as "communist." Avant-gardism once ensured the politicization of art (for good, and ill). Collectivist aesthetic values no longer pose the same order of symbolic cultural threat; unions still do. Politics and aesthetics are divided. "Our culture" may no longer support poets' talk, if it ever did; poets' talk continues.

Endnotes

[1] *hole* also became a chapbook series: Alan Davies, *sei shonagon* (1994, o.p.); Clint Burnham, *Pandemonia* (1996, o.p.); Deanna Ferguson, *ddilemma* (1997); Ammiel Alcalay, *A Masque in the Form of a Cento* (2000); Jeff Derksen, *But Could I Make A Living From It* (2000); Jackson Mac Low, *Struggle Through* (2000).

[2] Rob Manery's input and friendship has been invaluable to me in writing this essay, which is my reading of our collaborative project, *ewg/hole*. I'd like to thank Aaron Levy, director of the Slought Foundation, who designed this essay for the web, where it appeared on his site (<http://www.slought.org>), Fred Wah for inspirational discussions, Nicole Markotic for her fine editing, and Jason Le Heup for inviting *hole* to be a part of his small presses in Canada guest-edited issue of *The Capilano Review*, in the pages of which a shorter, less complete version of this essay appeared (Ser. 2, No. 34; Spring 2001).

[3] The Ottawa poetry scene was more populated than I describe it, but my focus is on that scene (subjectively) perceived as a dialogic social space. A lot of the Ottawa scenes, that we knew, rejected dialogue implicitly or outright (e.g., the musician in a sound-word performance group wrote of

the dictator-genius role of artist vis-à-vis audience/society), or else dialogue did not arise as a prospect for poetry worth pursuing in a public way.

[4] These frequently included musician, poet, performance artist Scott Moodie, and sound poet Mark Robertson (aka Max Middle of the Max Middle Sound Project, www.maxmiddle.com) and, infrequently, cultural critic, theorist Jody Berland, among others.

[5] Please read-in the intended irony. No pairing is "freely" chosen in the peculiarly fraught trials of mutual recognition and tests of exchange through which one discovers the poetry-world beyond its façade of publicized prize names and educational anthologies. It is nevertheless true that such pairings are a common literary phenomenon, and historically have tended, in the most celebrated male examples, to reinforce identity over difference (Michael Davidson writes of this with respect to the '50s San Francisco scene, and there are other examples).

[6] See *The Carleton Literary Review* for 1988; guest issue editor, Rob Manery.

[7] Today, with the widespread use of poetry listservs, the situation might actually be reversed. Contrary to what I imagined on first hearing about poetry listservs, and to my initial enthusiasm, my experience of them is that they sometimes enhance, if not actually induce, the sense of a private, rotating blank -- nevertheless (or, should I say: "even worse"), a "blank" of poetic discourse, rather than a blank of "silence." By silence, I mean a buried-alive feeling, in which, as Eugene Jolas once wrote, "There is no more talk" and "All the mouths are pinched with waiting."

[8] New York (The Figures, 1993).

[9] Two Transparency Machine events have since taken place at the Kelly Writers House in Philadelphia, one featuring British poet Tony Lopez, the other, US poet Rae Armantrout, and six at the University of Windsor: Erin Moure, Rob Budde, Carla Harryman, Rita Wong, Roy Miki, and Fred Wah.

[10] The term "sec.-o c." is modified from Barthes's 1957 theory of the ideology of myth as a second-order semiotic system.

[11] Incidentally, *hole 2* contains uncollected work by Daniel Davidson (from his manuscript, "Shine"), who since has passed away.

[12] Zukofsky writes specifically: "The universals of poetry are for the well-being of sense: the five senses of different individuals, in whom Aristotle's 'singlars' of history grow and decay, no less than for 'common' sense-the world where a tongue may talk about it all with its fellows" (*Bottom: On Shakespeare*).

[13] But if "our culture" did support such talk, what would one get-"table talk," as the genre was called in England, of the so-called literary greats, in "timeless conversation"? For Charles Bernstein, the 'freedom' of the innovative poetry world lies in its having evaded the commodifying, reifying attentions of "official culture." "It is a measure of its significance that it is ignored," he emphasizes (see his introduction to *Close Listening*). This statement has to be translated, however, since there will likely always be "official culture," and the problem, which Bernstein does not have, is the way this statement may be interpreted in Canada to mean that a private-funded, consumer-driven official culture that 'ignores you' is better than a state-funded official culture that says, on principle, it will not. While there is no doubt in my mind that Language poetry has provided a set of tools with which to critique and articulate effects of global capitalism, it is obvious that a critique from inside America will be inside the narrative of capitalism-e.g., the narrative of Coca-Cola in Olson's 1958 poem, "Being Altogether Literal, & Specific, & Seeking at the Same Time to be Successfully Explicit" -- in a way that is not quite the same for someone who lives outside America -- whether that's "America," the imaginary community, or nation-state. The PhillyTalks series of poets' dialogues I've curated since 1997 offers a different order of engagement with poetry than either the Buffalo poetics listserv -- with its implicitly broad democratic hope of dialogue and of community -- or the "Great Conversation," as Barrett Watten calls it, between the elect few. PhillyTalks attempts to offer more than the poetics listserve, by focused dialogue (it wants to be great conversation, as in worth listening to and participating in, and open to as many as possible), in a context of way fewer pretenses of "literary" conversation (e.g. of the latter, the imminent conversation, as of this writing, between Anselm Hollo and Lisa Jarnot at \$25 a ticket: one wonders how venue and audience will negatively affect their actual

discussion) by providing a newsletter of dialogue and poetry available in advance of the talk so as to encourage informed audience participation, by ensuring the event is free, and by having it occur at a volunteer-run site at arms-length from funders.

[14] *hole* had little financial support from arts funding bodies; we thought the work of applications and of civic duties the funding entailed would lead us wide of our primary motivations for starting the magazine. The poetics survey of Canadian poetry magazines (*hole* 1) taught us that funding bodies frequently created an automatic-pilot panel for the editorial chair. We didn't take the "official culture" route.

[15] See Paul Mann's bleak, yet remarkable book, *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (1991), which analyses Hughes's critique of post-WWII avant-gardism in a page or so.

[16] I'm suggesting that the history of the manifesto form, as recently outlined for instance in Janet Lyon's *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (1999), be considered as extended and modified by postmodern versions of poets' talk.

hole 1 (1990): art, Marie-Jeanne Musiol; poetry, Gerald Burns, Peter Ganick, Karen MacCormack, Steve McCaffery, Melanie Neilson, Jena Osman, Hannah Weiner; reviews, Christian Bök, Allison Fillmore; essay, Jeff Derksen; survey, contemporary Canadian poetry magazines.

hole 2 (1990): poetry, David Bromige, Frank Davey, Daniel Davidson, Karen MacCormack, Kit Robinson; David Bromige interview, Louis Cabri; review, Kevin Killian; correspondence, Kevin Killian/Kit Robinson.

hole 3 (1991), poetry/review issue: poetry, Bruce Andrews, Dennis Barone, Alan Davies, Jeff Derksen, Edmond Jabès, Eric Wirth; reviews, Barone, Davies, Derksen, Wirth.

hole 4 (1993), image/text issue: cover art, Louis Cabri and Rob Manery; poem/collage, Susan B., Charles Bernstein, Ray DiPalma; poetry, Ray

DiPalma, Deanna Ferguson, Michael Gottlieb, Jed Rasula; essay, Franklin Bruno.

hole 5 (1995): cover art, Rob Manery; poetry, Bruce Andrews, Clint Burnham, Louis Cabri, Peter Culley, Stacy Doris, Gerry Gilbert, Harryette Mullen, Ted Pearson.

hole 6 (1996), poetics & reviews issue: cover art, Germaine Koh; poetry, Lisa Robertson, Johan de Wit; reviews, Clint Burnham, Nathaniel Dorward, Susan Holbrook, Mike Magoolaghan; essay, Fred Wah.

Louis Cabri's new chapbooks are *What Is Venice?* (Wrinkle Press) and —that can't (Nomados). Recent poetry appears in *jacketmagazine.com*, *Rampike* and (together with a dialogue with Roger Farr) *The Capilano Review*, in the anthologies *Less Is More* (SFU Gallery), *Open Text* vol. 1 (CUE), and *Post-Prairie* (Talon), and is forthcoming in *Windsor Review*. *The Mood Embosser* is available online at *chbooks.com*, web-designed by Damien Lopez. Last year Louis edited and introduced a selected poems by Fred Wah for Wilfrid Laurier UP and with Peter Quartermain a collection of critical essays on poetry and sound (accompanying CD edited by Michael S. Hennessey) for *ESC: English Studies in Canada*. "The Social Mark" was a poets' symposium he helped to curate, produced by the Slough Foundation (Philadelphia), and *PhillyTalks* a newsletter and events series of poets' dialogues he edited (available online). He has also edited (with Nicole Markotić) two issues of *Open Letter* featuring open letters to/from poets, and produced (with Rob Manery) *hole* magazine and books, and the *Transparency Machine Reading Series* that so far has featured over thirty events where a poet presents his or her writing in a selected context. He has written essays on Bruce Andrews, Earle Birney, P. Inman, Jackson Mac Low, Frank O'Hara, Harryette Mullen, Laura Riding, Catriona Strang, Roy Miki, Louis Zukofsky, among others, and teaches modern and contemporary US and Canadian poetry, literary theory, and creative writing at the University of Windsor, in Windsor, Ontario, where he is currently organizing a spring symposium (25-26 March 2011) on Ron Silliman's booklength poem, the *Alphabet*.