

Bruce Andrews

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L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E

This is the name of the journal of Poetics that Charles Bernstein and I co-edited & co-produced in New York City, from its first modest issue in February 1978 to its fourth ‘volume’ co-published with Toronto’s *Open Letter* in 1981.

Let me sketch out a little of its background & implications — all the while aware of how hard it is to claim any accurate representation of the 1970s & ‘80s, especially about a journal that seemed to ‘come out of nowhere’ & from a community most onlookers were surprised about.

Memoir is not my forte.

Memories fail, even if they are ‘officially’ ‘correctable’ later, after research in the archives. [Much of ours are now helpfully housed at U.C. San Diego].

Certainly the idea of some recoverable — or worse, essential — ‘truth’ of a referred-to world must give way to a mapping of a network of meanings, a little too fugitive for comfort.

Still: how did we end up doing what we do & did, not only as poets but as editors & practitioners of poetics?

Circumstances write the subtext — perhaps especially when the desire is to create something new or unfamiliar.

A lot later, in retrospect, we become a received idea of what is ‘established’; yet this success or this ‘establishmenting’ were not the project, nor are we ‘fully responsible’ for the success.

The project was an editorial intervention in Poetics that we thought was called for — perhaps piggybacked onto an intervention into the stylistic menu of the day for Poetry that we (even beforehand) also thought was needed.

But to understand the Poetics effort, we have to insist on its discursive context, & not just on some valiant energized effort to surpass the usual formal constraints of the poetry of the day.

Maybe a first cut would resemble the kinds of things students are invariably told to emphasize in their applications: tell me what is *distinctive* about three things — your *background*, your *interests*, your *plans or aims* for the future.

1. BACKGROUND

The magazine, a journal of Poetics (rather than of so-called Poetry) stems from relationships among adventurous & rambunctious young poets (largely ‘baby boomers,’ born from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s).

The work of these poets came to be called (by ourselves) “language-centered writing” and (by others) L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writing or poetry, or (my own favorite, with a nod to its availability for being named by outsiders) “so-called Language Poetry”.

Gradually, among the poets, a sense of belonging & group identity did develop, but not as a strategic effort to ‘join’ or align with some already valorized tendency.

Perhaps this did come later — as critics or editors or teachers try to link somebody to an already written ‘success story’, or poets try to get on board the bandwagon.

But the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E years were a time of making this mobile bandwagon, not of building a fortress or a monument.

With this informal Language scene, it's so hard to bring back a sense of the collective enthusiasm or shared exuberance of this experimentalism.

We weren't so much engaged in problem solving as in producing problems.

And the work (& the thinking & feeling that went along with it) had a *scale* that transcended genre.

The poetry being written, and the past poetry being investigated, challenged most familiar expectations about the *raw materials* that could be used and the *finished products* that might result.

On the first, more 'micro' level: challenges to traditional deployments of Syntax and Rhythm opened up (or required) broader explorations of Time; challenges to the usual investments in Transparency and Referentiality led to subtler explorations of Space.

On the second, more 'macro' level: challenges were posed to the final result's commitments to Formal Unity and either Narrative Sequence or 'all-at-once-ness' (which seemed to push an analogy with the closure, in Time, of the experience of the Reader), & to either Representational verisimilitude or Authorial self-expression (analogous to a closure of Space, for the Reader).

To many of us, the mainstream's more conservative commitments seemed insufferably boring or distracting or irrelevant — compared with the desire to explore the workings of Language & the (social, embodied) production & reproduction of Meaning & Sense.

But how to historically situate this?

One common view is agonistic: you go up *against* the past because it is bankrupt, & so you become reactive.

As if we were merely reactive to the neo-classicism of 'official verse culture' or to the emerging phenomenon of so-called Workshop Poetry.

Not really true in our case.

This loose alliance of writers in their 20s, were propelled more by their aesthetic & procedural passions than by any reactive negativism.

We found ourselves similarly situated on the fringe (or edge) of several existing currents in non-mainstream poetry (mostly in the U.S. & Canada).

We were huge fans of (& cartographers, if not detectives about) what would be known as Radical Modernism & its most adventurous descendants.

In that period, what seemed hegemonic in this arena was the New American Poetry (taking its name from the Grove Press publication of Don Allen's anthology) — of the Black Mountain, Beat & San Francisco & New York School groups of prominent poets, mostly born a full generation before us in the 1920s & 1930s, with their second & third cohorts competing in an implicit pecking order of status, publication, attention..

[It's worth mentioning that this was still playing out largely inside the small press poetry world. In the early 1970s, the biggest names of the New American Poetry were just beginning to shuttle into that mainstream publishing success & canonical status we're now so familiar with.]

Also, by the late 1960s, this lineage is taking clearer public shape (with the critical writings of what has come to be called the Pound/Williams/H.D. tradition having offered a toolkit to be put to use (& variously added to) by the New American Poetry, with prominent theorizers of its own (for instance, Olson Creeley Spicer Duncan...) extending what Hugh Kenner called *The Pound Era* (in a book of which many of us had pretty well marked-up paperback copies).

For the young baby boomers of the '70s, outside of the academy, these previous formulations (of the New Americans) did seem comprehensible, using these existing theoretical lenses or paradigms to frame their stylistic adventures.

Yet by this point, the New American toolkit was bulging, with other heritages already being hoovered into the mix (Whitman or Dickinson or the European Symbolist/Surrealist traditions or the Objectivists).

It was already in need of re-sorting, if not a full makeover.

What was coming into print & coming our way was distinctive, underprocessed & volatilizing: the full record of Gertrude Stein's more radical experimentalism [possibly the one thing most of the so-called Language Poets could agree on is that Stein is the key 20th century 'writer', let's just forget about so-called poetry for a moment], of the related 'Revolution of the Word' tradition which Jerome Rothenberg anthologized, of European Dada & Futurism & Constructivism, of Concrete & Visual & Sound & Performance Poetries (from Brazil to Europe to....), of the procedures & use of Language in ethnographic materials (Rothenberg, again, a huge resource & inspiration as translating 'hunter/gatherer' but also less macho 'gardener/redecorator'), of the results & procedures of Minimal, Post-Minimal, Neo-Avant-garde or Conceptual Art, of the methods of the Cage circle, of New Music composers & free improvisers, of experimental filmmakers, post-Judson movement choreographers, etc.

So, what was now available for being put into the mix (by those of us pushing outside the limits of the New American Poetry's 2nd or 3rd 'generation') was not *already fully* theorized.

We had a job to do — which neither our elders nor the English professors were up for.

So the poets, first in the mail (from the very early 1970s, when we were much more geographically dispersed) & then supplemented by community-wide discussion & talks & essays on Poetics, took this on— as a task complementary to our poetry-writing & even, to some extent later, as a possible profession or life focus.

Largely through the mail, rather than in school-based or urban 'scenes', a dense network of connections got created in the first half of the 1970s.

Plus, there was a connection between the poetic methodology & the social methodology:
seemingly something about the move away from expectations of transparent self-expression made the writers a little less self-preoccupied, more willing to engage in interchange or collaboration. Writers got involved in an ongoing dialog about Poetics, sometimes with the closest (often local, *nearby*) readers of their work & at other times with peers they ended up meeting in person only years later.

The cultural contexts of a poetry 'scene' & of a poetics journal end up being nowhere near the same. For example, 'Language Poetics' is often talked about in terms of the development of a 'group consciousness' among the 'members' of a 'Language School'.

Basically, with $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$, these were all things we tried to avoid — the inevitably grotesque connotations of a 'school' & its 'groupthink'.

Groups are centripetal.

We wanted $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ to be centrifugal.

Group identity was not the point.

[Nor was it how to define the basis of *exclusion*. Instead, how could we help establish some sort of integration policy among the egalitarian gatekeepers of a 'placeless' community? Of course, the exclusions might appear more striking once the scope of inclusion gets expanded.]

By design, this was a counter-sectarianism — not a sloppy eclecticism.

And this fit our circumstances in New York City in the mid-to-late 1970s:

the discursive social space of the city itself [or is it, "THE City"] seemed to enable a wild centrifugally-tilted experimentalism.

This became especially hard to square with the textual closures of transparent representation or authorial self-centeredness or with the tidy time-lines of narrative or epiphanies of self-disclosure.

It was just too c - r - a - z - y.

For that reason, the notion of a Language Poetry having two ‘fronts’, with the East Coast or NY one centered around *L=A=N=G=A=G=E* magazine, is false.

In the San Francisco Bay Area (unlike NYC), more of a vacuum in non-mainstream poetry culture was *visibly* being filled up by an emerging ‘Language’ group — who were put more actively on ‘group defense’.

In NY, discourse & poetic experiment could develop more easily ‘under the radar’, without drawing the notoriety that attracts attacks & denigrations (based in part on envy, in part on oppositional politics).

For Charles & I, having moved (or moved back to) New York City in 1975/1976, there’s a distinctive whiff of ‘location as destiny’ — or at least as the facilitating of idiosyncratic openness.

To launch a Poetics project, we didn’t need to succumb to some well-detailed group consensus or compulsory bohemianism among poets — especially when it came to our investment in serious poetic conceptualizing.

Even (or perhaps especially because of being) without ties to an English department, we were in proximity to arenas of intense involvement in other *arts* and other areas of *inquiry* operating at a national level — instead of subsisting largely in a coterie or tightly-knit scene of poet-practitioners.

[Those local scenes were often prone to keeping poets just as locked into an identity-expressive-heroic-romantic (& anti-intellectual) stance as any MFA workshop poet today — albeit more ‘boho’, more ‘street’, more ethnically hybrid, etc.]

In retrospect, these were lucky (& enabling) contingencies.

2. INTERESTS

What dissolved some of the isolationism of the small press poetry community were currents of internationalism, historicism, & nonfiction discourse (aka 'theory' or, in downtown jargon, 'academic bullshit').

In fact, we could ask: what ended up being the most stigmatizing about so-called Language Poetry: its radically disjunctive, non-narrative/non-lyric writing, or its interest in (high-falutin'/Continental) theory?

The era was crucial — especially in the city: with its almost alchemical condensation of the energy left over from the new social relations & enthusiasms put on the table in the 1960s.

It gave us access to a social vernacular or speech coming 'from below', along with the excitements of negotiating such a dizzying quilt of different personal & social textures.

Even so, the poetry was often later perceived as having taken place in much more of a social vacuum, narrowly framed by others as if it were all just a (reactive) assault on contemporary poetic orthodoxy.

Yet: what would be the reason to *take on* the poetic orthodoxy?

Taking on (or, very often, simply ignoring) the orthodoxy is usually aimed at countering a restrictive range of poetry & its powerful 'promotional literature' (bolstered, in an elective affinity, by institutional power & \$\$\$) which fosters equally restrictive notions of identity (splayed across certain categories, but still riveted onto valorizing institutions or solid/sticky 'tendencies').

But the 'enclosures of the possible' in the world of poetry had an analogy or allegory in what was being ruled in or out within a wider social world.

In turn, this helped nudge the journal's project along a more socially & politically ambitious path — at the national level, where these connections or parallels among different social domains could register.

True, any discourse about a unified national heritage was unraveling after the 1970s, but we had at least a vision of a national mosaic or constellation (if not yet fully a global one) beyond whatever was happening in our neighborhood.

[Also, very likely there was something resonant about having grown up, as Charles & I both did, in 'national' towns (whether D.C. or New York) that stoked some of that desire for national (as distinct from local) connectedness. My own training as a scholar of International Politics & U.S. Foreign Policy, or Charles's studies in Philosophy, helped point us similarly *outward*.]

'Language' — what our poetry was polymorphously centered on — was vast enough in scale, eventually even beyond the national — to offer housing for most of our projects & ambitions.

Not as a given but as a question.

What different ways of characterizing it could do the best job of clarifying our literary praxis?

Meanwhile, the 'linguistic turn' in other disciplines far outside the poetry world unleashed a flood of relevant critical theorizing.

The late 1970s/early 1980s were especially marked by this postmodern Theory Boom, bringing forward (often in new translation) an incredibly wide range of writing: from the European Marxist tradition, from structuralism & semiotics & so-called post-structuralism, from emerging studies about sex, gender, popular culture, diasporic or hybrid social identities — much of it becoming voguish cross-disciplinary reading for young intellectuals, students, activists, artists.

This range of resonant materials could completely disrupt the complacency of any tightly-consensual 'local scene'; outside of academia, nowhere was this perhaps more true than in New York City.

Instead, we were enticed by the chance to investigate a variety of protocols of understanding & engagement — reminding us that 'orthodoxy' operates not only in the writing of poetry but in any, even vague, sense of what system of evaluation or grasp sits underneath it.

Like the social system itself, this can be unveiled or contested.

But this wasn't just true in poetry.

Before the trends toward the academicization of many precincts of the art world, New York City had been the vital center of a cross-media ethos of constant exchange across disciplines & genre conventions.

It was a poly-arts town, an intermedia town.

We could envisage language as a 'medium' (in a modernist discourse of medium-specificity), resonating with new theorizing about postmodern visual art or 'new music' or dance performance.

Meanwhile, various new practices were getting *pieced together* in dozens of specific personal projects & distinctive careers, all visibly on display in the years we were, at first, strategizing & then publishing.

These poly-art procedures often seemed ripe for sharing or appropriating, even if the specific 'forms' did not [— or was it that the significances of 'form' got taken for granted while the significances of 'process' (& the openings they allow for readers) seemed to call for extra critical probing?].

3. AIMS

The aims of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* had almost nothing to do with academia, nor with its enshrining of Poetry as an autonomous (or decontextualized) institution.

Contemporary poetry had not been typically receiving official academic attention; maybe it occasionally would get covered in journals, but usually only as an occasion for a myopic (exclusionist) survey of the landscape, eager to bolster itself with conservative standards derived from poetries of the (often distant) past.

[This began to change, perhaps a decade later; by comparison, for example, in the discipline of Art History, a willingness to come to terms with more radical postmodern work came a bit quicker].

So, rather than contesting the current academic version of a contemporary canon, we were digging beneath the past canon (of, say, 20th century modernism) to probe what had been excluded & why; to shift the spotlight, to reveal some hidden procedures of sorting & comparative valuation, enmeshed in networks of power & hegemonic authority.

Some of this went on in person — the comments, the formulation of notions, the gathering of hints & urgencies & sharp questions & dreamier tugs at a response.

But it also pointed up the need, beyond either local talk or the postal system, for a chance to get more sustained critical theorizing about radical poetics into print.

[This task, of course, paralleled the political activisms centered around race, gender, empire, etc. — that sought to use new theorizing to help clear a path toward a more open, egalitarian, praxis & future. In each case, critical writing was needed, building a theoretical armature to support some resolutely independent community players as well as a drastic embrace of idiosyncrasies.]

The agenda for exploring Poetics works off of the particulars of this challenging work of our peers: to shed some light on *tactics*; not to prescribe, ahead of time, some grand strategy based on fashion or ‘theoretical correctness’.

It meant avoiding a narrow exclusionist poetics — that typically results from a justificatory impulse.

In a way, the theorizing felt retrospective: aimed at understanding how to grasp or come to terms with our own work & the work that we were already excited by (in the present & past).

It wasn’t prescriptive.

It wasn’t a guidebook (as we were sometimes charged by our detractors — as if we were just sitting around reading our Derrida & then immediately proceeding to work out its dictates in our poetry).

Perhaps the active mapping was at least prescriptive in its ambition or scope, in the quite expansive breadth of what we were proposing as relevant insights & sources for self-reflection.

But that’s a long way from some programmatic or manifesto-like power grab.

For the far flung 'Language-centered' writers, it made sense to raise the question: what sorts of poetic activity had been (already) theorized enough to be understood, to enable the invoking of standards or clear-cut guidelines to move the writing *at least a little bit* into fresh territory.

For instance, by the late 1960s, mainstream modernism was being dissected in undergraduate English classes; also, contemporary (often defanged) versions of it would receive enough attention in the reviewing press so that *their* standards were graspable.

But our experimentalism couldn't as comfortably rely on previously theorized poetry.

We weren't producing work that was immediately 'accessible' based on existing protocols.

[The density of words — & the diversity of worlds — seemed to exceed those protocols.]

Outside of a local scene, this community of poets didn't need a unifying program, but it did seem attractive to open up discussion (beyond our locales) about the sets of distinctions & emphases & shared understandings that could serve as the basis of comparison or enthusiasm.

We needed our own forums for discussion.

But not just 'debate' (often just a non-generative clash of fixities) so much as something we both enormously prized: a creative, improvisatory, wandering, self-clouding, self-twisting of thought & feeling in & on & around & about Language.

[One parallel from well outside Literature: avant-garde visual artists in the 1960s were intent on getting out from under a (watered-down Kantian) formalist aesthetic & its belle-lettristic chatterers.

They not only found inspiration from other art-making projects outside their medium (John Cage's wide-ranging impact is notable) but also clarified the significance of their own efforts by engaging in a dialog with newer philosophical (or even scientific) modes of thought & analysis. And just as much as our homegrown/hothouse hybridizing thinking gradually morphed into respectable academic presentations in the later 1980s & '90s, the theorizing about visual art had already begun to gravitate back to philosophically well-versed non-artist critics & art historians in academia by the 1970s — (the

launching of the journal *October* in New York, out of a faction from the editorial staff at *Artforum*, provides a handy example).]

PRODUCTION

OK, we have these aims & interests.

How is it going to work, how to make it work?

We are not denizens of English departments.

We are not independently wealthy.

We are keeping close to the ground (our slowly expanding network of interested folks).

There is no bookstore sales/distribution available beyond what is going on in the small press poetry world.

Subscription sales are possible — & in our case, subscriptions developed out of the very same network that made up our list of potential contributors and potential targets of inquiry.

The parallels would perhaps be the beginnings of *Social Text* or *October*, or, better: the start-up of journals on the Left based in academic disciplines but without any institutional support: for example, the *Review of Radical Political Economy* in Economics, *Antipode* in Geography, *Insurgent Sociologist*, or *New Political Science* (the journal of the Socialist Caucus of the American Political Science Association: I was on the tiny editorial collective of this during the years I also co-edited *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*).

Centerstage, in each of these Left journals, were endless debates over format & fanciness (often including costly compromises that would make the journal 'classy' enough to get journal distribution yet would risk financial ruin if everything did not work out maximally).

Grant money might eventually come available, but the prospects were a little dim.

We took the risk-averse route, keeping to a DIY tradition of self-production (which involved doing all the data-input [we used to call it ‘typing’] ourselves, the proof-reading ourselves [I am perhaps obsessively/narcissistically proud of there being no noticed typos during our entire 4 year run: the unheard-of journal without an errata slip *ever*], doing the layout & design ourselves, doing the mailing ourselves].

[This brings up memories of labelling & packaging sessions “with a little help from our friends”, of schlepping to offset printers & to the post office (facilitated by odd contingent things like James Sherry’s new Segue Foundation getting non-profit status which allowed for cheaper bulk mailings of the journal as well as of promotional matter), of shameless requests for private donations from people we did not know, of hawking of product at Small Press Book Fairs, of athletic efforts to get the hard-to-categorize journal into a few bookstores here in New York City, etc.]

[A related anecdote: both Charles & I were huge enthusiasts of Richard Foreman’s vanguard theatrical works, which often involved his framing of his productions with written essay material. We thought one recent intro piece of his would work perfectly in our magazine if we could just edit it, for length, & reorganize it, which I remember doing — without asking first; then we decided to simply publish it — without getting permission. This insouciant boldness (now reminiscent of Kenneth Goldsmith’s curating of his Ubu site) worked out surprisingly well: Richard lived in Soho in Manhattan & frequented Jaap Reitman’s hip art-spangled bookstore which we got to carry some copies of the journal. Richard bought the issue including his edited-down piece — but, instead of being ‘professionally’ outraged, he became a huge supporter of our project, which led to close relations & a long interview project with Charles & his introducing the ‘Language Writing’ portion of the N.Y. Public Theater’s ‘Language/Noise’ Festival (which I helped organize) with terrific enthusiasm.]

Our frames were the postal service, the library, the public reading (where authors sold their books), the occasional bookstore taking things on spec...

(Relatedly, a year or so into our project, we also launched the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Distribution Service, where we advertised a list of out-of-print poetry books that we would make available as photocopies: this was, revealingly, a project closely tracking our most basic commitment — to encourage readership as well as dialog about the vast *scale* of what was relevant for experimental literary practice in our era.)

The first issue appeared in February 1978 and went out to our initial subscribers — about 200 by the end of the first year — as well as being distributed through a few bookstores.

The first three volumes (years) of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* were typed on legal size sheets on an IBM Selectric typewriter, sprayed to prevent smearing, and then pasted into our format by our designer Susan Bee; the initial run was offset printed, although we often produced additional copies by photocopying.

We stopped publishing the magazine in 1981, with our fourth volume, a perfect-bound book co-published with the Toronto magazine *Open Letter*.

In 1984, Southern Illinois University Press published an anthology, *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* including about half of what we had published; this anthology has been reissued by the press.

[A side note: occasionally the question comes up about the meaning of the equal signs in

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E. “Language” was among a long list of possible names Charles & I compiled in 1977 — based on conversation with several of our friends and collaborators. As we began to settle on *Language*, we did want something to make it stand out both from the generic word & from the title of the journal of the Linguistics Society of America, not to mention Jack Spicer’s great book. We knew we needed to use some kind of punctuation or visual mark between the letters. Ultimately, we decided on the equal signs, without explicitly discussing what those equal signs between the letters meant. It looked good &, at the time, that was good enough. (Just this week, I notice the appearance of a GIANT equal sign on the cover of the new *Postmodern Reader* cover, although admittedly it is: $E = mc^2$)]

RIGHT NOW

It is tough to reimagine the 1970s.

I've characterized the project of the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* & have tried to sketch in some of the factors that made it possible & that account for its distinctiveness.

It would be interesting to see what prescriptive implications for the future we could tease out of this experience:

For instance, what are the chances of a similar journal getting off the ground in today's context?

How much of its distinctiveness is a period phenomena, now long vanished?

Now, the *background* as well as what would be typical current *interests* are profoundly different.

Literary materials (especially from the multiple 'pasts' of Modernism) that could be layered into the 'mix' of a new Poetry tendency seem to have become pretty thoroughly available — in print or back in print.

Before the 1970s, there had been enough *missing* in what had been available to open up some striking changes in what would seem stylistically or procedurally attractive. [Examples: lots of Stein, Zukofsky, Loy, Riding, Reznikoff, Gillespie, Khlebnikov, Shklovsky, Celan, de Campos].

These materials called for discussion as a prelude to being in any way incorporated into ongoing writing practice.

The discussion was crucial — take our feature on Stein, as a modest instance — because, in their era, these tendencies had not been given elaborate critical or theoretical treatment.

Three decades later, this is much less the case.

[A revealing exception might be the still-needed effort to make available large archives or data bases of avant-garde or experimental work from the worlds of film, performance, music, visual art, activism.]

[Right now, a closer parallel might be an ‘undermanaged’ flood of modernist poetries from outside the usual U.S./British canons — & the uses of language (or presentational procedures) within those heritages. Even so, arguably, the theories & concepts needed as a basis for discussion of these *global* (modernist) *languages* have already become well-monitored & familiar. Also, they may have gotten entrenched enough in the academy for the poetry community to have all the guidance it needs, when it comes to grasping the significance of what is now available for influence & inspiration. More likely, some elaborate *sorting* of this now dramatically overwhelming body of poetries is called for, but not so much the independent working out of their theoretical implications. This sorting (& translating) might now self-consciously take place *in relation to* the already existing poetic tendencies with which they resonate, rather than as building blocks for drastically different new tendencies or startling new perspectives.]

At present, in what we could (very roughly) call the world of experimental poetry, we have even more diversely mixed local communities — still clustered around a few large U.S. cities & a number of university scenes, but now perhaps even more inflected by political thematics & community concerns & both art world & popular culture involvements outside the usual poetry viewfinder.

[An example today would be Vancouver, Canada: arguably, in the 1980s-90s, the site of what most closely resembled a ‘second generation’ Language Writing scene, now caught up in much more locally particularized social & political involvements in the struggles against globalizing ‘neo-liberalism’.]

[Also, today we have forms of so-called conceptual ‘poetry’ or writing praxis that oppose (or claim to transcend, or leave in the dust) not only mainstream neo-classicism & workshop poetry, but also earlier radical modernism as well as the New American Poetry and even the Language project as they negotiate a changing techno landscape as well as art world opportunities.]

Another issue is today's greater dangers of exclusiveness & exclusion, along with the reinforcing (or reification) of group identity.

Likely this occurred *less* within an older small press poetry world made more pluralistic by its self-management (compared to a newer poetry world made more hierarchical either by the dominance of mainstream publishers & their journalistic apparatus — or, now, by a scholarly establishment in today's English departments).

[Maybe the latter hierarchy feels exclusionist to, for example, today's 'workshop poets' compared to today's so-called Language Poets; & perhaps *their* exclusion becomes a breeding ground for hostility to the (now, academic) success stories, in a twist or reversal from the anti-academicism of the New American Poetry (which did, also, promote their group solidarity). One parallel, perhaps, for the so-called Language Writers would be a feeling of exclusion from the dominant practices of creative writing workshops, which have become so enormously more powerful since the early 1980s when *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* finished its run.]

Also, the small press poetry world has by now ceded much of its sovereignty or self-governance to the English departments (at least in the U.S.), with both their helpful institutional support & their unhelpful domesticating conservatism operating as an outside filtering device.

Plus the 'Theory Boom' (along with its highly politically-charged agenda) has largely subsided.

The power of the Creative Writing Programs & of so-called Workshop Poetry has increased — with one notable effect: a reduction in the felt need for conceptualizing the writing of poetry in either historical or theoretical terms, in fact within any framework much beyond personal self-expression or credentialing.

Meanwhile we hear all about the end of the book, or of taken for granted literacy, the decline in enthusiasm for challenging reading material, the handwringing about the lost era of sustained & focused attentiveness by today's youth, etc.

The frame now for a serious formatting of poetic inquiry would be different.

It would be much less that of the library, the bookstore, the public reading, the extensive archive of private correspondence.

Instead, it would now very largely be the Internet — that wild, ever-expanding data set.

The geographically located 'scene', & the public reading as a privileged site where a community could take shape around a particular mode of writing: these are pre-web notions.

Now, given the flood of information, for an adventure in Poetics, you'd need more than an informal community organized through the mail (along with two or three face-to-face scenes); you'd need full-scale reliance on the social networking potentials of the net &/or on 'official' institutional support.

So, it's not coincidental that these alternatives track pretty well with the trajectories of the hugest (& most ambitious) success stories of recent years on the U.S. experimental poetry scene: the SUNY Buffalo Poetics Program, with its Electronic Poetry Center Listserve & Website, the huge archives at PennSound, UbuWeb, Eclipse, not to mention vibrant blogs, websites, collective autobiography projects & ambitiously crafted individual 'careers' taking full advantage of today's dramatically transformed media/tech landscape.

Spearheaded by some of the most active players in the communities that paid attention to so-called Language Poetry (& to *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*), those parallel developments keep opening up a future for our particular story.

The centrifugal pulls continue.

The radicalism continues.