Toward a Poetics for Circulars

Brian Kim Stefans

Introduction

The Web site Circulars was founded on January 30, 2003, to provide a focal point for poets' and artists' activities and reflections on the impending invasion of Iraq along with the politics of the media and civil liberties issues. Its format is a multiauthor weblog, or "blog."[1] The HTML design was based on a generic Movabletype template with customized coding added for the comments and archives sections. Original elements of the design included an unambitious header graphic and a Flash insignia—a vertical cylinder of rotating cogs that, when individually clicked, adopt different angles and sizes, courtesy of the freeware Flash site levitated.net—which I superimposed over Guy Debord's collage map of Parisian flows, "The Naked City," in reverse black and white (figure 3.1). Circulars was housed as a subsite of my Web site www.arras.net, devoted to new media poetry and poetics, though as a distinct entity. (Indeed, for the first several weeks, www.arras.net did not even contain a link to Circulars.)

For about four months, activity on the site was high, helped partly by stories about it in the *Village Voice* and *Publisher's Weekly*[2] and by email announcements to listservs and people in my address book. As many as twelve new stories were posted a day by several contributors around the world; the comments section was active, with several distinct threads running concurrently. Predictably, site activity—both posting and random traffic—dropped considerably after Bush announced the "end of hostilities" on May 1, as did
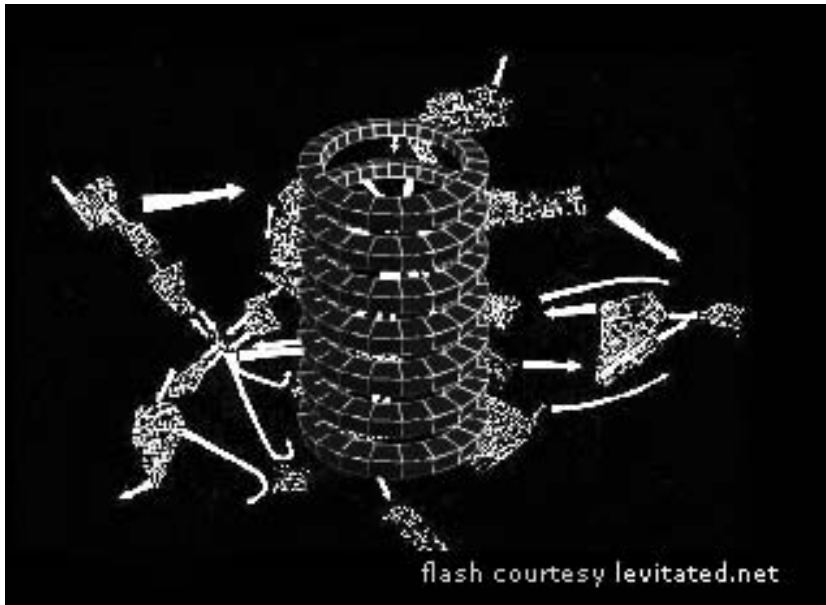
Figure 3.1 Circulars logo. http://www.arras.net/circulars/.

protest activity by poets and artists. Around May 15, I announced that the site would be put in "hibernation" mode at the end of the month—new stories would continue to appear, but the home page would consist of a text-only archive rather than the lively cacophony of material, much of it illustrated, that had been appearing during its peak.

The following paragraphs from the "mission statement" were written during a night of involuntary (i.e., insomniac) brainstorming and sent out to about twelve poets who I thought would be interested in being contributors:

CIRCULARS intends to critique and/or augment some conventional modes of expressing political views that are either entirely analytical, ironic, or humanistic. These are all valuable approaches, of course, and not unwelcome on CIRCULARS, but our hope is to create a dynamic, persuasive idiom that can work in a public sphere, mingling elements of rhetoric and stylistics associated with the aforementioned modes—analytical, ironic, or humanistic.

CIRCULARS is, in this sense, a workshop—a place to explore strategies.

CIRCULARS was not created in the spirit of believing that all poets should be "political" or even "social" in nature. While such arguments are free to be made on the website and poems related to the themes of the site are (selectively) welcome, the focus is on articulating statements that are unique to the poetry community while not speaking for "poetry."

CIRCULARS holds no party line, nor is it particularly adherent to notions of the "avant-garde." All perspectives are welcome provided that they are articulated intelligently or (in some cases) amusingly and do not articulate perspectives or advocate actions that are, in the editors' judgment, of an entirely unethical nature.

CIRCULARS understands that, in the world of the internet, the link can be as powerful as word of mouth and is itself the prize of an effective rhetorical strategy. These are "Circulars" because they are circulated.

There's a lot to unpack in these concise, suggestive statements; I'll comment on some of these facets later. In general, I was interested in having the site be a place where poets could work out strategies of writing that were not necessarily "poems"—a category of writing that, in the minds of the public and even many poets, seems antithetical to "real world" issues, or at least impotent in the face of social conflict. I'd rather they relied on their skills as creative writers nurtured by a progressive, international artistic community that traditionally has affiliations with other disciplines, such as the social sciences, new media arts, and grassroots activism.

In this way, Circulars would stand in contrast to the Web site Poets Against the War (PAW), the organization started by Sam Hamill in the wake of the controversy over his being uninvited to a White House reading organized by Laura Bush after he had sent out an email request to other poets for antiwar poems he could read there. Whereas the PAW site focused on gathering and databasing thousands of poems opposing the war—which suggested to me that poems were being used as "votes" in an unofficial election or, at best, were general expressions of pacifist sentiment rather than fresh articulations of opposition—Circulars would highlight the poets' role as creative, even "revolutionary" (in a psychical sense) intellectuals, forcing the interaction of statements and activities by poets with interviews, opinion articles, open letters, and other writing mainly from left-leaning, independent media sites.

I contacted a small number of my friends, all of them poets, many from England and Canada, to become authors or *superusers*—that is, individuals with permission to add stories and make updates to the site—most of whom

either had some experience in the creation of Web sites or had demonstrable interest in political activism and grassroots organization, "consciousness-raising," muckraking journalism, or simply writing about political issues in their poems and prose. Several poets responded immediately that they were interested in participating and offered valuable feedback on the initial proposal.

The number of authors on the blog reached about twenty, but only a handful became regular posters of stories, mostly those people who were already invested in Internet culture for work or other reasons. Darren Wershler-Henry transformed the site with his contributions; he is the author of several books on digital culture, including *Commonspace* (Surman and Wershler-Henry 2001) and *Free as in Speech and Beer* (2002), so this was right up his alley. David Perry, "Alfred Schein," Angela Rawlings, Jonathan Skinner, Patrick Durgin, and the Language poet and blogger Ron Silliman all made frequent contributions, mostly in the form of links but also in the postings of poems—Schein, for instance, appropriated a fiery piece by Antonin Artaud, "To Have Done with the Judgment of God." One poet, Carol Mirakove, made a very distinctive contribution to the site; three of her "Mirakove Relays"—highly researched, URL-laden, exposé-type emails with a matter-of-fact but persuasive tone on subjects such as the Guantanamo Bay detainees and the Patriot Act II—made their appearance.

A valuable contributor of links to the site was scholar Maria Damon, a tireless reader of alternative news sources. Thomas Mediodia, writer and student of Žižek, was a prolific depositor of redolent prose and poetry in the comments sections. Stephen Vincent, a California poet, made the most unanticipated contribution by sending me, sometimes two a day, his "Gothic News" items—satirical, hallucinogenic news accounts of potential occurrences that read like a cross between *The Onion* and the poetry of the Berkeley Renaissance. The poet Scott Pound sent in occasional journal entries from Turkey, where he was teaching. Essays and poems by Eliot Weinberger, Alan Gilbert, Kent Johnson, Carla Harryman, and Charles Bernstein also appeared. Barrett Watten's statement "War = Language" spurred one of the more energetic comments columns on the site, so active that some bloggers took to linking to this comments section rather than to the site itself.[3] The most active updates to the site were through the comments section itself, much of it contributed by casual passersby who had little interest in poetry per se.

Besides the postings and writings of these authors, some artists and artist groups had a regular presence on the site, most importantly Paul Chan, originator of the Baghdad Snapshot Action that would tape or paste laser prints of digital photographs that Chan had taken in Iraq, where he had spent the January prior to the war as a member of Voices in the Wilderness.[4] Chan, also a Web programmer, distributed the photographs from his site (www .nationalphilistine.com); one artist couple, Lytle Shaw and Emilie Clark, were arrested while posting these photographs, news of which also appeared on Circulars.

As the "mission statement" suggests, my initial hope was to provide poets with a platform in which they could publish work relating to the war, as it seemed—with recent symposiums at places such as St. Mark's Poetry Project and the Bowery Poetry Club and the regular readings on the steps of the New York Public Library—that there would be a proliferation of writing and publishing activity by poets in the future months. There seemed to be a concern that poets were behind the times in not utilizing the Net for organizing or expressing their views (a reprimand usually made, ironically, by writers with little experience in Internet culture).

I hoped Circulars could answer this call and be a staging ground for these disparate activities, rubbing poetry and poets' statements up against news stories from both mainstream and alternative sources, digital art from other sites (often poster art and fake mirror sites such as whitehouse.org), opinion articles and interviews (by the likes of Noam Chomsky and Senator Robert Byrd), and so forth (figures 3.2 and 3.3). Poets are often criticized for speaking among themselves in languages that seem esoteric to the public; Circulars would be a place where the detailed critique specific to the poetry community could flourish while being channeled to, and challenged by, a nonpoetry readership.

Uncharacteristically, I promoted the investigation of "rhetoric" in poems that would be written in this time of war—not, of course, toward the goal of creating poems full of bluster and self-importance but to encourage poems that attempted to engage in tactics of persuasion, that had a rich variety of conceptual handles for even nonreaders of poetry to hook on to. I had no idea what these poems would look like (I was ready for anything), but I figured that, with Bush hiring an evangelical Christian to write his speeches, we had to counter that public rhetoric with something persuasive, charismatic, even manipulative, and not with merely fatalist, defeatist irony and plain old lefty

Figure 3.2 Ann Coulter Li'l Junior Miss Conservative Club.
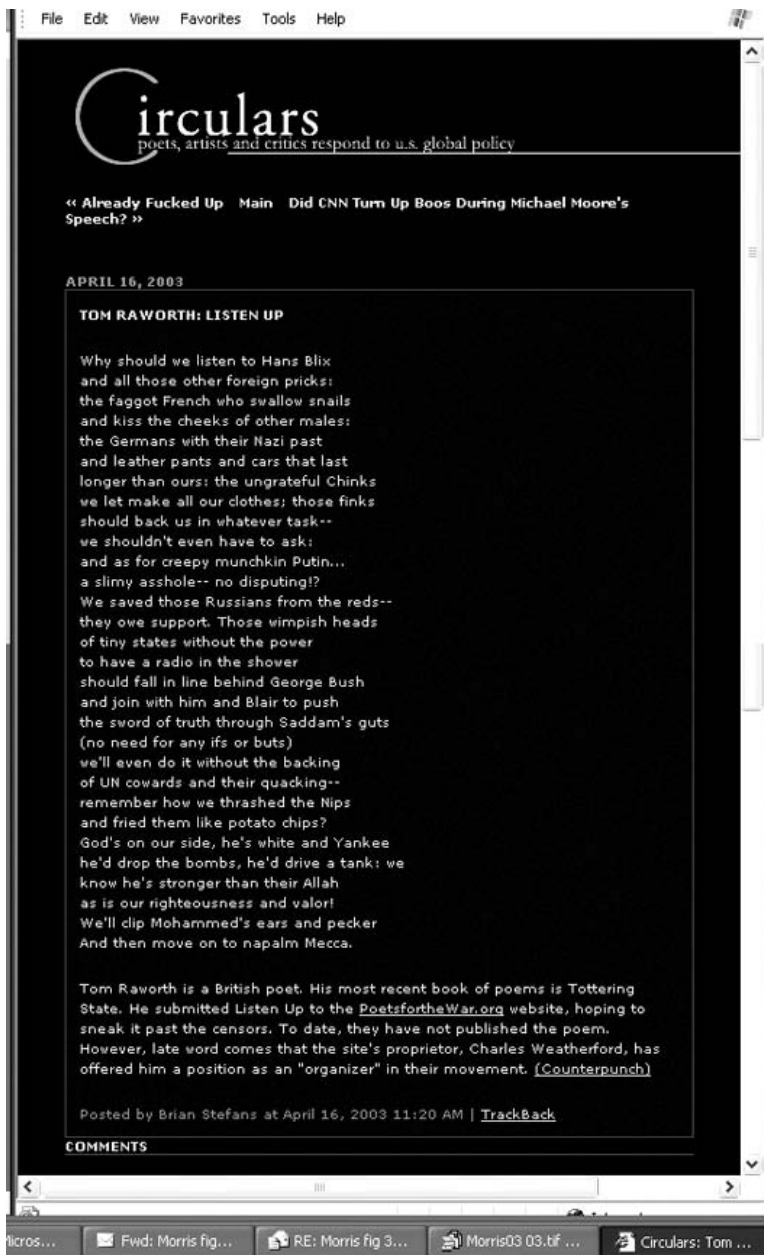http://whitehouse.org/initiatives/posters/ann_coulter_brownshirt.asp.

File   Edit   View   Favorites   Tools   Help

Circulars
poets, artists and critics respond to u.s. global policy

« Already Fucked Up   Main   Did CNN Turn Up Boos During Michael Moore's Speech? »

APRIL 16, 2003

TOM RAWORTH: LISTEN UP

Why should we listen to Hans Blix
and all those other foreign pricks:
the faggot French who swallow snails
and kiss the cheeks of other males:
the Germans with their Nazi past
and leather pants and cars that last
longer than ours: the ungrateful Chinks
we let make all our clothes; those finks
should back us in whatever task--
we shouldn't even have to ask:
and as for creepy munchkin Putin...
a slimy asshole-- no disputing!?
We saved those Russians from the reds--
they owe support. Those wimpish heads
of tiny states without the power
to have a radio in the shower
should fall in line behind George Bush
and join with him and Blair to push
the sword of truth through Saddam's guts
(no need for any ifs or buts)
we'll even do it without the backing
of UN cowards and their quacking--
remember how we thrashed the Nips
and fried them like potato chips?
God's on our side, he's white and Yankee
he'd drop the bombs, he'd drive a tank: we
know he's stronger than their Allah
as is our righteousness and valor!
We'll clip Mohammed's ears and pecker
And then move on to napalm Mecca.

Tom Raworth is a British poet. His most recent book of poems is Tottering
State. He submitted Listen Up to the PoetsfortheWar.org website, hoping to
sneak it past the censors. To date, they have not published the poem.
However, late word comes that the site's proprietor, Charles Weatherford, has
offered him a position as an "organizer" in their movement. (Counterpunch)

Posted by Brian Stefans at April 16, 2003 11:20 AM | TrackBack

COMMENTS

icros...   Fwd: Morris fig...   RE: Morris fig 3...   Morris03 03.tif ...   Circulars: Tom ...

Figure 3.3   Screenshot of "Listen Up" by Tom Raworth.
http://www.arras.net/circulars/archives/000546.html.

rage. I wanted positive, detailed visions that could give confidence to those on the sidelines of the antiwar movement.

Email stories and jokes, not to mention political cartoons based on "remixes" of found material, were being zinged around daily on the Internet at that time. I thought: with the mere pressing of the "send" button to one's entire address book, one of these poems would be picked up by one of the many visitors to the site and turned into an anthem of dissent for millions— a lofty dream, of course, but nonetheless the guiding principle behind the name of the site.

None of the poems, so far as I know, became huge hits as "circulars"—certainly not as big as the ubiquitous hoax email petition whose first signatory was "Suzanne Dathe–Grenoble, France"[5]—though a few were picked up by newspapers. On that level, the site was a failure, but probably in the way that trying to light a match with a pair of reading glasses is a failure. I don't think the "war" (I'm not sure that it *was* one) lasted long enough for the involved writers to "develop new strategies," and with the exception of Vincent's "Gothic News" and Mirakove's "relays," most of the poetic writing that appeared on the site was not specifically geared toward the Internet.

What did happen with the site was unanticipated: it became an anthropological study of Internet protest culture, a consciously *unofficial* anthology of poetry from several generations of writers, a sort of warzone for the left and right (in the comments sections) fueled mostly by nonpoets, and, finally, a staging ground for ephemeral home pages that themselves had a certain poetic charge in the way the stories and images—many exclusive to the site, many merely links—associated with each other and *dissociated*[6] the reader from mainstream and government media, injecting at moments a spirit of laughter but also a sense of sublimity and possibility in the midst of some very bad news. The site obtained a "poetics": what I mean by this is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

My fear is that this chapter will appear self-serving—I hope not. I see it as a way to record the moment, to theorize it a bit, and to think about what to do next. Because of Darren Wershler-Henry's important contribution during our brief run, I've asked him to help me write the second part of this chapter (which appears here as a confluent sidebar), with the hope of suggesting some of the dynamic of the "multiauthored" blog.

A Poetics for Circulars

What happens, then, in the situation of the decline of the Master, when the subject himself is constantly bombarded with the request to give a sign of what he wants? The exact opposite of what one would expect: it is when there is no one there to tell you what you really want, when all the burden of the choice is on you, that the big Other dominates you completely, and the choice effectively disappears—is replaced by its mere semblance. One is again tempted to paraphrase here Lacan's well-known reversal of Dostoevsky ("If there is no God, nothing at all is permitted"): if no forced choice confines the field of free choice, the very freedom of choice disappears (Žižek 1997, 153).

One of the facets of hypertext literature that is often celebrated by its proponents concerns the issue of *choice* and the malleability of a narrative based on a user's *interaction* with a text. The idea is that the reader, rather than being "passive," takes on a "writerly" position—an allusion to Roland Barthes usually appears here—by determining where the thread of the text (usually figured as a narrative) will go.

It is arguable that a reader is truly given a choice in, say, a hypertext novel such as Michael Joyce's *afternoon* since "choices" have usually been preprogrammed by the writer. Outside of the parameters of an overdetermined narrative—by its nature, linear and noninteractive—the choices presented can have no more than trivial differences between them, and their results can be of no more

Exchange on Circulars (2003)

Brian Kim Stefans (BKS): I've come up with an awkward, unsettling title for this essay: "Circulars as Antipoem." I'm sure cries will be raised: So you are making a poem out of a war? The invasion was only interesting as content for an esoteric foray into some elitist, inaccessible cultural phenomenon called an "antipoem"? (There is, in fact, a lineage to the term "antipoem," but I don't think it's important for this essay.) This legitimate objection is to be expected, and I have no reply except the obvious: that a Web site is a cultural construct, shaped by its editors and contributors, and more specifically, Circulars had a "poetics" implicit in its multiauthoredness, its admixture of text and image, its being a product of a small branch of the international poetry community, and so forth. Of course, the title also suggests that this Web site has some relationship to a "poem," but perhaps as a non-site of poetry— as it is a non-site for war, even a non-site for activism itself, where real-world effects don't occur. But my point for now is that the fragmentary artifacts of a politicized investigation into culture—Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* for example—has an implicit poetics to it, but standing opposite to what we normally call a "poem." This suggests roles that poets can play in the world quite divorced from merely writing poetry (or even prose, though it was the idea that poets could contribute prose to the antiwar cause—as speech writers or journalists, perhaps—that initially inspired the site.

Darren Wershler-Henry (DWH): Hey Brian: what are you using to count words? MS Word

than trivial importance. If there is only a shade of difference between the two options—the difference between clicking the word "Harry" or "Jane" or choosing the left door over the right—then one is not engaged in an issue of *choice* so much as partaking in *chance:* the chance that one link will lead to a more entertaining, substantial, or (in game worlds) utile or informative lexia than the other.

Ethical choices—such as "Would I have put an ice pick through that man's head were he to have killed my daughter?" or "Should I read this atheistic literature even though I am a practicing Catholic?"—are among the more compelling choices one might make in one's life and have been a staple of fiction, drama, and philosophy for centuries. Since most of us don't have to make choices about murder, or even about corrupting a purportedly pristine spiritual geography, there is an appeal to the vicarious experience of having to *decide*. Art can be compelling purely for this reason.

On the other hand, Internet activism, which on the face of it might seem to be all about such choices, could equally be deemed, from some perspectives, trivial. One of the criticisms of online activism—which can include "political" blogs and links sites, advocacy and organizational sites, independent media sites, and so on—is that the Internet has nearly nothing to do with "real world" traditional political activism. It doesn't involve going outside into the world and confronting physical events that can easily spiral into danger but remains stuck in

says the previous paragraph has 254 words; BBEdit says 259 (me, I'm sticking to BBEdit). Poets—particularly poets interested in working with computers—should be all about such subtleties. Not that we should champion a mechanically aided will to pinpoint precision (a military fiction whose epitome is the imagery from the cameras in the noses of U.S. cruise missiles dropped on Iraq during the first Gulf War), but rather, the opposite—that is, we should be able to locate the cracks and seams in the spectacle . . . the instances where the rhetoric of military precision breaks down. As such, here's a complication for you: why "anti-poem" instead of simply "poetics"? Charles Bernstein's cribbing ("Poetics is the continuation of poetry by other means") of von Clausewitz's aphorism ("War is the continuation of politics by other means") never seemed as appropriate to me as it did during the period when Circulars was most active. The invocation of Smithson's site/non-site dialectic is also apposite, but only in the most cynical sense. Is the U.S. bombing of Iraq and Afghanistan the equivalent of a country-wide exercise in land art? In any event, the relationship is no longer dialectical but dialogic; the proliferation of weblogs ("war blogs") during the Iraq War created something more arborescent—a structure with one end anchored in the world of atoms, linked to a network of digital non-sites.

BKS: I hesitate to tease out the "non-site" analogy—the *site* itself is too variable: for me, I was thinking of Circulars as being the non-site of activism, not just a corollary to the sweat and presence of people "on the streets" but a vision of a possible culture in which these activ-

the white box of the monitor, indissolubly "virtual." Internet activism is seen as absenting from the equation specificities encoded on the body—such as racial, gender, and class identity—that form the dynamite that explodes any sort of social cohesion and often aggravates social inequalities. The Internet is figured as a "gopherspace," and Internet activism is categorized as a form of living room radicalism, requiring little physical or mental effort—in other words, a voyeurism.[7]

My sense is that a site such as Circulars makes a step in creating an ethics of "choice" in hypertext literature but also that it makes a gesture toward creating a poetics of online activism, giving it a cultural tone beyond the merely critical or utilitarian. It never hoped to replace classic forms of social activism so much as to augment them and perhaps suggest new themes and angles. Circulars provides the interpretative bed in which events (protests, arrests, speeches) and personalities can be viewed outside of, even in conflict with, the interpretive strategies of the mainstream media, which are becoming increasingly consolidated under umbrella organizations with singular political viewpoints.

Thus, the site can be conceptualized as somewhere between a "poem" and a "community," as a place of shared laughter and contempt that infects and populates the private space with the concerns of the world. In this way, the site might be seen as motivated by a nostalgia for the oppositional "counterculture" of the sixties—not just its paraphernalia and pop songs—as it once

ities (otherwise abandoned to television) can exist, not to mention reflect and nourish culturally. That is, are our language and tropes going to change because of the upsurge in activity occurring around us—in the form of poster art, détourned "fake" sites, maverick blogging? I admit that some of what we've linked to is nothing more than glorified bathroom humor, but nonetheless if the context creates the content for this type of work as a form of dissent, I think that should be discussed, even celebrated. I haven't read too much about this yet. Thinking of Circulars as the "non-site" of the bombing itself is both depressing and provocative: it's no secret that one of the phenomena of this war was not the unexpected visibility of CNN but Salam Pax's Dear Raed blog, written by a gay man from the heart of Baghdad (even now he is remaining anonymous because of his sexuality). I could see Circulars as a "poetics," but I prefer to think of it as an action *with* a poetics, my own tendency being to think of poetry as the war side of the von Clausewitz equation, simply because poetics seems closer to diplomacy than a poem.

DWH: The variability and heterogeneity of the site was, I think, partly due to the infrastructural and technological decisions that you made when putting the site together, because those decisions mesh well with the notion of coalition politics. (I'm thinking of Donna Haraway's formulation here.) The presence of a number of posting contributors with varied interests, the ability of readers to post comments, the existence of an RSS feed that allowed anyone running a wide variety of Web software packages to syndicate the headlines, a

saturated everyday thinking with a need to imagine other forms of government, including self-government, one informed by an erotics as well as an egalitarian ethos.

What follows is a short list of descriptive categories that relates Circulars both to traditional activist/artistic practices (e.g., Brecht's "epic theater" and its genesis in the information-saturated theater of Erwin Piscator) and to issues of "electronic literature," work that relies for many of its effects upon its presentation through a digital medium. The list is meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. I don't necessarily hope to distinguish Circulars from other sites that might be informed by a "poetics" of political activism—several could be said to do that and a short essay such as this cannot double as a history. Though I believe all of the issues outlined below are embodied in the site, there will be no attempt, in this short space, to "prove" that Circulars does or did any of this—one can visit the site and find out.

Aggregation and Amplification

Regardless of one's opinion of the mainstream media, there can be no denying the trend of increased consolidation of major media organizations under umbrella groups such as the Turner Broadcasting System, Rupert Murdoch's empire, and, in radio, Clear Channel Communications. In the face of the semimonopolized state of the most successfully distributed forms of media in the United States and the proliferation of nefarious practices to gain marketable material

searchable archive, a regular email bulletin—these are crucial elements in any attempt to concentrate attention on the Web. Too seldom do writers—even those avowedly interested in collaboration and coalition politics—take the effect of the technologies that they're using into account, but they make an enormous difference to the final product. Compare Circulars to Ron Silliman's blog: on the one hand, you have a deliberately short-term project with an explicit focus that is built around a coalition of writers on a technological and political platform that assumes and enables dialogue and dissent from the outset; on the other hand, an obdurate monolith that presents no immediate and obvious means of response, organized around a proper name. Sure, the sites have different goals, but Silliman's site interests me because it seems to eschew all of the tools that would allow any writer to utilize the unique aspects of the Web as an environment for writing. And sadly, that's typical of many of the writers' blogs that exist.

BKS: I haven't been too bothered with those aspects of Silliman's blog for the mere fact that it would double his time having to respond to the comments, many of which could be vicious flames. I've deleted some of the comments on Circulars, in one case because the poster was making scandalous allegations (drugs, child molestation) about the head of an advertising agency, and another because the poster, in American fatwaesque fashion, deemed that I should have a rocket shoved up my ass. Of course, your point is well-taken—Silliman's blog could use some real-time play-by-play; I'm sure a diagnostic essay is forthcoming. I did set

(such as "embedded journalism" with its reality television overtones), there has been an increased reliance on, and desire for, alternative news sources, including overseas news services that are, in their native countries, relatively "mainstream."

But because, like homegrown butter, stories from fugitive or unknown presses don't have the stamp of officialdom, they only gain visibility and credibility by their reappearance on other Web sites that can contribute—via design, extensive readership, branding, and so forth—cultural capital. *Guardian UK* columnist Robert Fisk was probably one of the most read columnists by American antiwar advocates during the war, and yet, as far as I know, he has never had a regular column in an American publication. Reappearances on other sites, from ZNet to Common Dreams, gave him a visibility beyond that of other *Guardian* writers. A similar thing happened to the Dear Raed blogger, "Salam Pax," an Iraqi in Baghdad who was unofficial enough to have had his very existence questioned yet was read loyally by folks who discovered him through other Web sites (and who now writes a column for the *Guardian).*

The effect of a story reappearing across the Web in different contexts and thereby being *read* differently can be linked to the medieval rhetorical effect of "amplification,"[8] in which a basic descriptive trope—"he is the wisest king," for example—is revisited and teased out to give a grandiose air to the matter at hand. Though hardly in fashion today—the method is best lampooned in scenes of

Circulars up with the intention of there being subsets of discussion on the site, separate groups of people who would engage with each other over some time—"committees" of sorts, with their own story threads. This happened for a brief period: there was a lot of heat generated by one of Senator Byrd's speeches against the war, and there was a discussion about Barrett Watten's "War = Language." I was prepared to develop new sections of the site if anyone so requested, though I confess to being dictatorial about the initial setup, basically because I know more about the Web than most poets, and I hate bureaucracy. I was hoping that some of the more frequent poet bloggers who were writing political material would send their more considered material for posting to Circulars, but most simply posted to their own blogs without telling me.

DWH: I'm not suggesting that blogs and news forums should be about the abrogation of editorial control—far from it. It's always necessary to do a certain amount of moderation and housecleaning, which, as you well know, takes assloads of time. During its peak, I was spending at least two or three hours a day working on Circulars, and I'm sure you put in even more time than that, even with the help of the other industrious people who were writing for the site. Which takes me back to the value of the coalition model: a decent weblog *needs* multiple authors to work even in the short term. The classic example of a successful weblog is Boing Boing (www.boingboing.net), a geek news site that evolved from a magazine and accompanying forum on the WELL (www.well.com) in the late eighties/early nineties. Mark

sycophantic bombast by attendees of the court in Monty Python skits—it has been used effectively by such writers as Thomas Carlyle, who mated it with Protestant fury in such hypertroping essays as "Signs of the Times," and T. S. Eliot, who used it in his liturgical poems. It also reappears in hip-hop lyrics, often in a comic form of macho bragging in which recurring invention around a single lyrical trope gives proof of social power.

The argument that a rhetorical effect that reduplicates a turn of thinking is associated with the reappearance of a story on different Web sites depends on an understanding of Internet reading as an activity closer to "browsing"—in which the story might not be read until the third or fourth time it has been chanced upon—than it is to, say, reading a newspaper, which is discarded as soon as it is read. In this way, the more superficial aspects of a story (its headline, its byline, and so forth) become part of the poetics of a site such as Circulars, which featured the names of the last one hundred stories in a sidebar.[9]

Centrifugal and Centripetal Motions

Circulars had the benefit of being a simple site to understand—the navigation was easy, most of what you needed to see was right on the home page, and its perspective was clearly antiwar—yet it housed materials created by people in any number of fields taking any number of angles (satirical, poetic, pacifistic, Marxist, conservative, and

Frauenfelder, the original editor, has worked with many excellent people over the years, but the current group (including Canadian science fiction writer/Electronic Frontier Foundation activist Cory Doctorow, writer/video director David Pescovitz, and media writer/conference manager Xeni Jardin) presents a combination of individual talent and a shared vision. There's nothing *wrong* with personal weblogs, but, like reality television, they get awfully thin over time. Even when the current search technologies adapt to spider the extra text that blogging has created, the problem of anemic content isn't going to go away unless we start doing more collective writing online. The problem is partly a need for education; most writers are still in the process of learning how to use the Web to their best advantage.

BKS: I'm not sure that it's necessary for a blog to be multiauthored; what it really needs is a mandate, and it's possible that, were the mandate simply to produce rich, incantatory prose—imagine the Marcel Proust blog—a highly disciplined approach could work. Steve Perry's Bushwarsblog, for example, succeeds quite well on this level (not the Proustian but the muckraker), as does Tom Mantrullo's Swiftian Commonplaces. Both of them have "political" agendas, but they are also well-written and thoughtful for what are in effect news publications without an editor. It helps that these two are journalists and conceptualize their blogs as a distinct form of news writing alternative to the mainstream—the individual voice is sharpened by an informed sense of the social arena in which it will resonate (in which the message will ultimately become dulled). Just today, Tom posted

so forth) on the impending crisis. Some materials were outright offensive to some readers—the most notorious case being the poster art from the whitehouse.org Web site—while others might have appeared saccharine, obscure, reactionary, petulant, dismissive, even irrelevant.

My sense is that the very simple blog structure created a centripetal motion—that is, users were easily drawn deeper into its form to scroll downward to reach new stories, click comments links, avoid what they did not care to read, and so forth.[10] At the same time, in a centrifugal motion, the site constantly pointed outside toward other sites and toward the lack of centrality of the reader in the political event. (See the following "non-site" entry.)

Complexity and simplicity formed a dialectic, and the engagement between the two drew the reader into a questioning of motives. One can become part of a virtual community simply by showing up, but one only becomes implicated by moving in deeper and making choices about reading. There is clearly plenty of material to dissuade a reader from further engagement were this material figured as the dominating, monolithic content of the site, but because Circulars was unspecialized, the *culture* of the site was porous: readers who wanted to avoid poems could read, say, a speech by Senator Byrd or view a gritty satirical "remix," as each is contextualized as part of a single cultural mix.

a link to the [New York] *Times* story on corporate blogging—yecch!—and has coined this aphorism, a détournement from Foucault though sounding somewhat Captain Kirkish to me, to describe his project: "To blog is to undertake to blog something different from what one blogged before." A version of "make it new" but with the formal precedent being the blog itself—a vow not to let individual "multiauthoring" become equal to corporate monoglut. Perhaps the model blog is that which responds to the formal issues of other blogs as if they were social issues (i.e., beyond one's "community"), hence transforming the *techne* of the writer into a handling of hypertextual craft.

DWH: It's all too easy to imagine the Marcel Proust blog—Christ, what a nightmare (shades of Monty Python: "Proust in his first post wrote about, wrote about . . ."). Endless streams of novelistic prose, no matter how incantatory, are *not* what I want to read online. William Gibson, for one, thinks there's something inimical about blogging to the process of novel writing. I think that the paragraph-as-post is the optimal unit of online composition—and that an optimal online style would be some sort of hybrid of prose poetry and healthy geek cynicism (imagine a Slashdot [slashdot.org] full of Jeff Derksens). But I think I see your point, that it's possible for one writer to produce the kind of dialogic multiplicity that could sustain a blog. There is, however, a large difference between "possible" and "likely." In my opinion, as less stratospheric talents than the geniuses of high modernism, we stand a better chance of generating strong content collectively. Another model

Non-Site of Community

The artist Robert Smithson was best known for his large-scale earthworks such as the *Spiral Jetty* and the photos, films, and essays he used to document them. Equally celebrated, if not as freakishly grandiose, are his artworks consisting entirely of collected items which he calls "non-sites," such as the totemic *Non-Site, Pine Barrens, New Jersey* (1968), a hexagonal grouping of earth and industrial materials gathered at a disused airfield. He described his gallery-bound non-sites as

the absence of the site. It is a contraction rather than an expansion of scale. One is confronted with a very ponderous, weighty absence. . . .

The making of the piece really involves collecting. The container is the limit that exists within the room after I return from the outer fringe. There is this dialectic between inner and outer, closed and open, center and peripheral. It just goes on constantly permuting itself into this endless doubling, so that you have the nonsite functioning as a mirror and site functioning as a reflection. (Smithson 1996, 193)

This description addresses what might be called the active negation of Circulars, which is manifold:

· The site is the negation of community. For better or worse, the site replaced physical communion with virtual, while drawing attention to the absence of the reader

that I find promising is the Haddock Directory (www.haddock.org)—a site I've been reading daily for at least four years. Haddock has recently moved to a two-column format: standard blog description-plus-link on the left (maintained by the site's owner and editor-in-chief, if you will) and entries from the Haddock community blogs, identified by author, on the right. It's a very neat example of the effective aggregation of data within a particular interest group. And it seems to follow Stein's dicta: "I write for myself and for strangers."

BKS: I'm still curious about the line "generating strong content." What do you mean by "content"? My guess is not "writing" as we know it, but some admixture of links, intro paragraphs, pictures, and HTML formatting, that creates a dynamic, engaging, and timely space on the screen. "Content" moves from "writing" to the shape one creates by selectively linking to other sites serving, but also provoking, a "particular interest group." (I wrote earlier today in a dispute over blogs: "Circulars was a short-term effort [or as short term as the war] that was a response to what I sensed was or would be [or hoped to be] a moment of crisis in terms of American self-identification." Who would have thought, ten years ago, that a group of weblinks and writing could contribute to a crisis in national identity?) Most writers would probably feel demeaned to be referred to as "content managers," as if all writing were a versioning of some other writing (put it back in your pants, Harold), but, frankly, we're admitting for a whole lot of plagiarism in this concept of "content." I think the blog-ring model on haddock.org is strong,

from these time- and place-based forms of interaction, whether in protest activity or war itself.

· It is also the negation of technological power and the omniscience of "electric eyes": the site as a *willing myopia,* a metaphorical corrupting of the exactitude of satellite photography, and the guiding systems of smart bombs. Implicit in this is a critique of voyeuristically "engaging" in war via observing the embedded journalist on television, for example.

· It is also a negation of the poem. Despite a "poetics," there was no single rhetoric for the site, no way to recuperate it into an "author," no way to domesticate its contents into a confirmation of a bourgeois subjectivity. It targeted the very space of the "poem" in society. Further, it troubled language and narrativity, but in a way that did not require idiosyncratic reading strategies promoted by, among others, Language poets or the novelists of the Nouveau Roman.

Via these negations, reliant on a process of collecting—a "recovery from the outer fringes" that "brings one back to the central point"—Circulars had the effect of creating traffic between an inside and outside, fringe and centrality. That is, one was reminded of the monitor's limits as one is of the gallery's bounds in a non-site. The aura of the postmodern simulacra was actively dispelled via the extreme rhetoric of some of its contributors, overwhelming the irreality presented by the embedded journalists. The emphatic anger of many of the contributors, often

since it lets writers tend their gardens, deriving whatever classic satisfactions one gets from writing, and yet contribute unwittingly to a larger collective. I agree that some "types" of writing just *work* better online—claustrophobic syntax, also non sequiturs, drive readers back to hunt for hearty prose (though writers such as Hitchens seem to be as uncompromisingly belle-lettristic on-screen as on paper).

DWH: I like to think of myself as a malcontent provider. As someone who works regularly with found text, copping to the "plagiarism" that's at the heart of all "original" writing doesn't worry me at all; in fact, I'm beginning to think it's a necessary strategic position for artists at this particular moment in history. As thinkers such as Siva Vaidhyanathan and Lawrence Lessig have been arguing strenuously for the past few years, the concept of intellectual property is a relatively recent, regressive invention that has nothing to do with the reasons that copyright was established two hundred years ago and that it actually reverses copyright's original function—that is, to provide a short-term monopoly solely to drive innovative thought, not to create perpetual profit. Artists in many disciplines are increasingly moving toward creative processes based on appropriation, sampling, bricolage, citation, and hyperlinking, but the multinationals and the entertainment industries are driving legislation in the exact opposite direction by arguing that ideas can and should be owned. Artists and writers who have a large investment in their own "originality" do us all a serious disservice by refusing to recognize and protect the public

operating from the fringes of standard modes of expressivity—via avant-garde poetry, truly tasteless satire, and détournement—created the "reality" of the situation more adequately than the photoshopped images on the cover of the *Los Angeles Times*. One was not permitted to be a "political voyeur"—ironically, it was a non-site that taunted one into taking a position.

domain . . . the very thing that makes ongoing artistic activity possible. So by all means, yes, don't just "write" (a verb that in many cases bears the superciliousness of the romantic), build (mal)content. Bring on the hyperlinks, intro paragraphs, pictures, PHP scripts, and HTML formatting, especially if they help to demonstrate the mutual indebtedness that all creativity entails. Use Your Allusion.

Challenging Censorship and Making Dissent Palpable

In a climate of threatened civil liberties via the Patriot Act and the looming of its successor, the Patriot Act II, Circulars encouraged association with sites, individuals, and cultural traditions that engaged in nonacceptable, even antisocial, expressivity in a bid to contest the bounds of legal speech and encourage a discourse around what is permissible in U.S. publishing. The site intended to "sound out" what appeared to be, at times, an echo chamber of opinion and cultural evasions and to suggest that the practice of dissent for its own sake is worth refining.[11]

As Noam Chomsky and other critics from the left have argued, the conspiracy of silence and lack of risk taking in a prosperous democracy is voluntary, not forced. One legacy of Ralph Nader's experiment with American politics in the 2000 election was the discovery to many that, for the first time in recent history, a sort of "truth" could be expressed from behind a televised podium that was not compromised by million-dollar funding and that a language could be used in politics that was direct, detailed, and effective and appealed to an auditor's civic sense. Rhetoric was not being rendered anemic by the conflicting desires of special-interest lobbyists, nor was it being laced with subliminal religious assurances. That a reliably unanimated public speaker could draw such excited crowds was an event that couldn't be ignored.

Circulars encouraged an investigation of these fringe forms of expression and content not merely in an attempt to dissolve adherence to official perspectives and pry open the floodgates of political desire but, additionally, to create new semantic horizons beyond safe, well-worn, politically correct agendas. The zone between these two, in which pragmatic proposals and irrationality were in close consort, was where I expected the average reader of Circulars to flourish.

The Poem of Prose

Circulars offered a dynamic collage of visual and linguistic materials in a consistent but changeable structure. Even the most mundane inclusions, whether presented in excerpt form on the home page or as a full story once clicked through, contributed to this hypertext poem. In this egalitarian, psychically charged universe, the blandest Reuters update meshed with the most scurrilous opining in the comments section, their stylistics foregrounded as something crafted, purposeful, and aesthetically rich.

Several American poets since Walt Whitman and E. A. Robinson have experimented with using prose stylistics in poetry: Ezra Pound advocated turning to Gustave Flaubert and Ford Madox Ford to avoid "abstraction" and ambiguities inherited from the symbolist tradition, while John Ashbery and other New York School poets purposely flattened out the tone of their poems, moving even beyond the conversational to the bureaucratic to a degree that risked making the writer himself appear bored.

Such tactics might appear to be appealing to the avant-garde and no one else, but even the decidedly mundane prose stylist Chomsky observed that there is a transcendental beauty in the most pedestrian language. He expresses this through the following paraphrase of Schlegel's notion of the poetry intrinsic to everyday language:

Schlegel describes language as "the most marvelous creation of the poetic faculty of the human being." Language is "an ever-becoming, self transforming, unending poem of the entire human race." This poetic quality is characteristic of the ordinary use of language, which "can never be so completely depoeticized that it should find itself scattered into an abundance of poetical elements, even in the case of the most calculating and rational use of linguistic signs, all the more so in the case of everyday life—in impetuous, immediate, often passionate colloquial language. . . ."

The "poetical" language of ordinary language derives from *its independence of immediate stimulation* (of "the physically perceivable universe") and its freedom from practical ends. (Chomsky 2002, 61; my italics)

The growth of the Web site over several months correlates with this romantic notion of the growth of language through time, akin to Hegelian conceptions of history as an organic "becoming," similar to the growth of plants.[12]

More than a "poem containing history"—Pound's famous description of his *Cantos*—Circulars was able to permit sovereignty to its constituent elements while forcing them to exist together in a tight, even teleological, motion. But because it is the "non-site"—not the space of war or community itself but a pointing to it from within Plato's cave, hence "independent of immediate stimulation"—the site acquires poetical qualities that are akin to those of the lyric or elegy, remarking a material absence.

As a form safeguarding the right to trouble national self-identity "independent of immediate stimulation," Circulars can be seen not only as a "poem" but as a romantic and utopian one, even if its effects are nonlyrical and of an ambient nature.

Real-Time Détournement

"Détournement" is a word that appears frequently on the site, though in fact most of what is posted there is more properly "collage" or "political cartoons" or even "doodles."[13] The first writings on détournement by the Situationists noted that it must "go beyond any idea of scandal . . . drawing a moustache on the *Mona Lisa* is no more interesting than the original version of that painting" (Debord and Wolman [1956] 1981, 9). Further, "détourned elements, far from aiming at arousing indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity" (9).

The products of the *Propaganda Remix Project* and www.whitehouse.org, while performing useful eviscerations of the underbelly of American classism and racism and the hypocrisy of a unified cultural front in prior war efforts, were not much concerned with effects of "sublimity." Most of these products were willing to be lowbrow, even exploitative, though there is, indeed, an implicit sublimity in the speed with which these "remixed" posters appeared on the scene. Many of the visual and textual remixes that appeared on Circulars were involved in a digital subterfuge in which imagery and textual elements were borrowed from "legitimate" Web sites (Tom Ridge's Homeland Security site was one immediate favorite) and reflowed into dystopic and dissociating mirrors.

However, the greater effect of détournement on Circulars happened on a less conscious level; items that had clear argumentative functions in isolation participated in a real-time documentary on the various home pages of the site.

As the Situationists wrote, "It is obviously in the realm of the cinema that détournement can attain its greatest efficacity, and undoubtedly, for those concerned with this aspect, its greatest beauty" (Debord and Wolman [1956] 1981, 12). They then move on to consider an "architectural" form of détournement: "Life can never be too disorienting: détournements on this level would really make it beautiful" (13).

Disorientation—both through time in its play-by-play commentary and through space in its architecture—might very well have been the modus operandi of Circulars, as its many authors contributed at ungoverned, merely opportune moments, thereby contributing in disparate concord to the ludic image of a collapsing social architecture.

Carnival

A Web site that collects such disparate materials by both marginal and central cultural figures can be seen as a stage on which to enact creative dissent. Via the mechanism of Web searches, links, and other forms of electronic word of mouth, the site begins to "contain multitudes" (to quote Whitman) and, in the process of simply acquiring more content, to become exponentially more visible to the various spiders and search engines that create Internet hierarchies of significance.

This snowballing effect, in which information and digitalized personalities (some of them salty) rub up against each other in dynamic fashion, is the effect of carnival. The term "carnival" is, of course, borrowed from Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's writing about the preservation of certain medieval social structures into the Renaissance and beyond. For Bakhtin:

The basis of laughter which gives form to carnival rituals frees them completely from all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism, from all mysticism and piety. They are also completely deprived of the character of magic and prayer; they do not command nor do they ask for anything. Even more, certain carnival forms parody the Church's cult. All these forms are systematically placed outside the Church and religiosity. They belong to an entirely different sphere. (1984, 7)

While I'm not proposing that Circulars displaced community into cyberspace, the site did present an "anything goes" atmosphere, complete with video games, bawdy songs, dissident literature, and commentary by any number of

geographically unlocatable (often pseudonymous) *citoyen* congregated there for no other reason than a particular focus on the war. On such a stage, via the violent yoking together of spontaneous acts of creation, is enacted the singular affect of a virtual community's political desire—a real-time, polyvalent performance of dissent that has, as its goal, the puncturing of what seemed like a monolithic expression of international prowar policy motivated by a bullying U.S. government.

While the future of the Internet is uncertain, this activity can be said to have been subsidized by this very "monoculture," which relies on the free trade of information to keep business culture fluid.[14] Circulars allowed the expression of political affections outside of the confines of understood party affiliations, even outside of standards of aesthetics and taste, in a cacophony that, upon inspection, reflected remarkably coherent wishes and needs. It focused a current of passions and gave an operatic scale to what might otherwise have been a series of "drive-by" expressions of political will.

Conclusion

In many ways, Circulars wasn't original or very effective, and it remained, for the most part, read and contributed to by a clique of people related to the poetry community, though a few right-wingers did attempt to use the site as a stage for their own agendas.[15] But perhaps this sketch of the site can inspire future efforts and even provoke that leap from screen to street that seems to lurk as some promise behind all Internet cultural activity, helping to catalyze, as I note in my dialogue with Wershler-Henry, that "crisis in national self-identity" that I think is important at this time when our notions of democracy are being subsumed under purely economic, often transnational, interests.

On the Web, "writing" is often a matter of creating links, inserting images, parody (both through writing and graphic design), and the creation of several flavors of détournement. As Wershler-Henry emphasizes in our dialogue, a liberated public domain is necessary to maintain the type of free-wheeling, free-*borrowing* Internet discourse necessary in a heteroglot "democracy." Though the point of the site was to articulate ideas regarding war and government, it also made a political point by the mere exploitation of digital— and by extension social—means, contributing to the sort of fervor one might associate with a "revolutionary" (I prefer the term "renaissance," as in "reborn") culture.

Appropriation, with its hint of criminality, was one surprisingly popular means, and I think the torrent of remixes and détournements leading up to the war put center stage a seething but as yet underground counterculture, an entire population of unrepresented people, that shares new views on intellectual property (one of which is that few of us outside of the corporations *have* it). This angle on property and how it can be recombined into new cultural products could be a key aspect of a new shared sensibility, one that, indeed, might frown upon classically romantic notions of creativity (the "transparent soul," for instance) but could unearth others that will take their place.

But "original" poems survive, even thrive, in this mix also: Tom Raworth's poem "Listen Up," written in the voice of a bigoted warmonger in tight couplets and submitted as a joke to the Web site Poets For the War was perhaps stronger for being sui generis as a tactic—a poem used as an ethical Trojan Horse, a virus of words (figure 3.3). The power of writing, rather than being overwhelmed by the very celerity with which text is produced and zinged around the Internet, was often buttressed in its classic qualities by the inherent properties of its formal, however (relatively) antiquated, construction (provided it was done well). Writing, and not Macromedia Flash, was the darkling plain upon which the invisible armies of civic night waged their heated but melancholic debates.

Circulars is perhaps best understood as an exploration in genre—where a Web site could figure in relation to pop songs, movies, television, and the novel and poem, but also where it figures in the social realm of opinion and in the dissemination of knowledge. What the site *was* and how that could be exploited for the future is the big question for me now. It illustrated, I hope, the potential power of community-created sites in times of crisis to be provocative, popular cultural tools and to put our heritage in avant-garde poetics to the service of a specific cultural effort. But, of course, motives are neither here nor there.

Notes

1. Readers interested in more technical aspects of blogs can refer to www.blogger.com. The URL for Circulars is http://www.arras.net/circulars.

2. See Clover 2003 and Sharf 2003.

3. This comments section periodically digressed into the internecine debates about literary politics that have stifled any sort of productive activity about poetry on the

Internet. Hence, I didn't necessarily applaud the severing, through direct linking, of this post from the site as a whole. But at its best, this comments section, with active participation from Watten, was one of the few instances of the spin-off subsites that I anticipated becoming part of Circulars culture in its inception. The page can be found at http://www.arras.net/circulars/archives/000417.html.

4. For a description of Voices in the Wilderness, see http://vitw.org/.

5. This email petition can still be found on several blogs and Web sites or via a search for "Suzanne Dathe Grenoble France."

6. "Dissociation" is a concept Ezra Pound (1996, 11–29) adopted from the French poet and critic Remy de Gourmont. It is, in their view, the act of divorcing readers from their outworn or unexamined ideas and unrealistic associations—such as the confusion of "education" with "intelligence"—that is a necessary prelude to cultural epiphany. It is a predecessor of Brecht's "V-effekt" among other versions of modernism's fascination with making reality "strange" in order to bring about new perceptions.

7. An example of such a critic is John Lockard. In his essay "Progressive Politics, Electronic Individualism and the Myth of Virtual Community," he writes,

> In the skeptical view, global cyberspace lends itself to an elite political voyeurism more readily than to effective activism. Distant lives translate into a gopherspace file organized into a collectivity of deprived subjects and absent even the materiality of yesterday's newspaper. (Lockard 1997, 229)

> Now as then, emergent cyberspace ideologies commonly promote credence in machine-mediated social relations and their benefits, together with mystifications of individual, community, and global relations. Progressive politics should seek to analyze, clarify, and demystify these relations. (Lockard 1997, 230)

8. This term can be found in Geoffrey de Vinsauf's "New Poetics" of 1210, a treatise on style that was influential on writers for centuries: "If you choose an amplified form," de Vinsauf writes,

> proceed first of all by [repetition]: although the meaning is one, let [it] not come content with one set of apparel. Let it vary its robes and assume different raiment. Let it take up again in other words what has already been said; let it reiterate, in a number of causes, a single thought. Let one and the same thing be concealed under multiple forms—be varied and yet the same. ([1210] 1974, 391)

9. RSS (Rich Site Summary) feeds, a method for syndicating news and the content of news-like sites, automatically put these headlines on other sites as well.

10. Indeed, part of the appeal of blogs is the *conventionality* of the navigation and the information-laden home pages, which is why they are so popular for public diaries: the screen becomes a window upon the soul, begging to be deeply examined by the viewer purely for the vanity of upping the hits count. Circulars co-opted this "open soul" aspect to become a window onto an undercurrent of American political life.

11. This is a point of political philosophy involving dialectics and identity that I can only touch on here but which is important and also runs against common sense. "The educator must be educated," writes Christopher Hitchens in *Letters to a Young Contrarian,* and follows with this anecdote:

> I have a dear friend in Jerusalem. . . . Nothing in his life, as a Jewish youth in pre-1940 Poland and subsequent survivor of indescribable privations and losses, might be expected to have conditioned him to welcome the disruptive. Yet on some occasions when I have asked him for his impression of events, he has calmly and deliberately replied: "There are some encouraging signs of polarisation." Nothing flippant inheres in this remark; a long and risky life has persuaded him that only an open conflict of ideas and principles can produce any clarity. (2001, 30–31)

12. Indeed, multiauthor blogs offer a vision of anarchist syndicalism in action, though I hesitate to make the transference of informational architectures to visions of societal organization (as others did during the time of the dot-com bubble). At the core of Chomsky's anarchistic politics are his beliefs that what is common to all humans is a striving for self-realization and that government oppression of linguistic self-realization is nefarious. Paraphrasing German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt, Chomsky writes:

> The urge for self-realization is man's basic human need (as distinct from his merely animal needs). One who fails to recognize this "ought justly to be suspected of failing to recognize human nature for what it is and wishing to turn men into machines." But state control is incompatible with human need. It is fundamentally coercive, and therefore "it produces monotony and uniformity, and alienates people's actions from their own character." (2002, 67)

This paragraph suggests why Chomsky, who distrusts an analysis of "motives" to interpret world events and who is often criticized for emphasizing the negative in lieu of an argument for "what we should do," nonetheless exercises his faculty as a discerning and articulate political thinker above and beyond what might be considered standard cultural bounds—indeed, taking these bounds as his target. The act of utilizing language ethically is synonymous with being *human*.

13. Tom Raworth coined this term for the political cartoons and other societal lampoons that appear on his Web site at http://tomraworth.com/doodles.html. A more

popular coinage for these sorts of artifacts, when done entirely digitally—in Adobe Photoshop rather than with scissors and glue and thus devoid of the rough borders of collage—is "remix." As for détournement, the Situationist International (SI) was quite specific about what could not qualify:

> *Détournement is less effective the more it approaches a rational reply.* . . . The more the rational character of the reply is apparent, the more indistinguishable it becomes from the ordinary spirit of repartee, which similarly uses the opponent's words against him. . . . It was in this connection that we objected to the project of some of our comrades who proposed to détourne an anti-Soviet poster of the fascist organization "Peace and Liberty"—which proclaimed, amid images of overlapping flags of the Western powers, "Union makes strength"—by adding onto it a smaller sheet with the phrase "and coalitions make war." (Debord and Wolman [1956] 1981, 10–11; italics in original)

14. The passage that inspired this observation is Simon Schama's portrait of the ways in which aspects of carnival managed to survive well past the Enlightenment into the embryonic "information age." Schama notes that in the censorship-free zones of the Palais-Royal—"the most spectacular habitat for politics and pleasure in Europe" (1989, 136)—information and theater, role playing and revolution had a potentially volatile marriage:

> One could visit wig makers and lace makers; sip lemonade from the stalls; play chess or checkers at the Café Chartres (now the Grand Vegour); listen to a strolling guitar-playing Abbe (presumably defrocked) who specialized in bawdy songs; peruse the political satires (often vicious) written and distributed by a team of hacks working for the Duc; ogle the magic-lantern or shadow-light shows; play billiards or gather around the miniature cannon that went off precisely at noon when struck by the rays of the sun. . . .
>
> Louis Sebastien Mercier, who had railed against the boulevards for encouraging feeble-minded dissipation among "honest citizens," adored the Palais-Royal, where he witnessed "the confusion of estates, the mixture, the throng." (136)

15. A short treatise could be written about the politics of banning or deleting comments from a blog. In general, if I felt the comment was both indulgent and violent, a version of "hate speech"—this happened with some frequency—I deleted it. If the commenter continued to post to the blog and did not respond to my email petitions to tone it down (or to post less frequently, as certain commenters felt obliged to respond to each story going up), I blocked the IP from using the blog, which I don't view as a public service but a Web site project that I am paying for and invest time in maintaining. Even were it a public service, like a park, I would challenge anyone to argue that violent or pornographic graffiti is a version of "free speech" and thus should be welcome there.

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