

DIADUCTORY INTROLOGUE

Loss Pequeño Glazier & John Cayley

<DIALOGUE>

John Cayley: We have decided to proceed interactively through our program of essays, as two – apparently two – commensurate entities. As you read our exchanges, will you be able to tell how we were embodied? What was our gender? To what extent were we modulated by machinic processes? How would you have read us if the paratextual programming of this introduction – the form of its editing and layout – had made us appear to write as one entity? Despite our stated focus on digital poetics, we trust that such questions linger in the virtual text-of-inscription (as Philippe Bootz might say) while we address the papers themselves.

For the papers do turn on such issues, issues concerning the social, political and ideological implications of poetic practice in digital media, in networked and programmable media. You may have expected that they might focus on poetics more narrowly, that they would be chiefly concerned with novel poetic formalisms or the relationship of form and theory. Discussion of electronic literature has sometimes appeared to be fixated with this relationship. There are essays here which are so focused, but we choose to frame them top and bottom, in our dialogic introduction, by highlighting the two pieces of writing most concerned with an engaged ‘social informalism,’ as Bruce Andrews names it out of an established tradition of avant-garde practice; while Maria Damon discovers and examines some of the less established, marginal social formations of poetic writers which the network has facilitated.

Loss Pequeño Glazier: Apparently two entities or two voices – or as one? Or are we perhaps being overheard and, as we get up to leave the upscale bar area of the restaurant, we are met with smiles, perhaps even inviting laughter, by the two at the next table? Do you think we’re being

overheard in this conversation, too, and wanted in the same way? Embodied or not I hear the clicking of the keyboard. I do occasionally like to be embodied: the lobster is just so much more succulent that way. And I dare not even mention what ecstasy it is to be in a human body after it has been skiing for two days.

In like manner, I feel the collection of essays presented in this special section will be considerably worthy of physical engagement. It might be of interest that we solicited the articles to be included and that we were extremely discriminating in the contours of these issues. When you look at the contents, one sees a range of perspectives, crossing gender, generation, genuflection, and geography. Further, the range of voices, from practitioner to theorist, and points in between, hopefully will express a continuum of interest informing the project as a whole. What I think is crucial at this point was to engage the field as it is happening, to do what rarely happens elsewhere, keep the focus squarely on the “poetry” in “ergodic poetry.”

The striking thing about this stage in digital poetry – and you know I have not been one to shy away from suggesting one apply aesthetic judgment to the “reading” of such works – is the register of “newness.” Crucial to finding sign posts in this trackless field of new snow, one that morphs and shifts like drifts whitening out the Buffalo winter landscape, are ideas of what might constitute identity in the digital clime. There have been some inklings of this, specific panels at various Digital Arts and Culture conferences (one legacy of which is the yearbook in which this special section is appearing), specific panels at hypertext conferences, parts of some literary gatherings, a few publications along the way, and the disembodied congregations on listservs. The most tangible feeling though, may have been E-Poetry 2001, the world’s first digital poetry festival which took place in Buffalo, New York, in April, 2001, three and a half days of readings, panels, and conversations on e-poetry. I had originally planned the event in the spirit of famous (print) poetry festivals of the past, Vancouver in 1963 and Berkeley in 1965, when many of the movements in innovative contemporary poetry of that period solidified. In a similar sense, E-Poetry 2001 was the most upbeat digital gathering I have ever been, too. This was the first time that numerous digital authors, many of whom had previously worked together for years, even saw each other embodied for the first time! (Well, some bodies were seen to a far greater extent than others, but no matter.) For me, particularly, certain specifics of what sorts of communities might underlie “ergodic poetry” became evident.

As you mention, the articles by Damon and Andrews follow the thread of such emergent frames for locating this activity. A crucial poet and theorist, Andrews, of course, was also the editor of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Magazine* (with Charles Bernstein) which was the focal point of the defining literary practice of that period. As such, he is an inestimable presence to a sense of community and to the relevance of radical practice. Damon is a scholar and reader who works across a wide range of strikingly relevant community, gender, and ideological formations. She has also worked extensively with Miekal And, an engaged New Media artist who, from a remote communal village in Wisconsin, has been at the cutting edge of experimental publishing and poetry for several decades. Janez Strehovec is another relevant critic here, providing a specifically European perspective. A participant of several of the gatherings mentioned above (and a previous contributor to the *Cybertext Yearbook*), his vision has always struck me as particularly informed and sweeping in scope. He initiates his investigation both in terms of historic European avant-garde movements and in terms of the trendier vantage point of computer games, investigating digital poetry as an extension of “the soft(ware) word”. His energetic survey carries us through several modes of thinking, with practitioners seen through the lens of Net culture.

JHC: Yes, I am always heartened by Strehovec’s enthusiastic critical performances, committed to newness as cyborg networked eruption. His utopia is the word as never before seen: the dynamic moving and morphing word, the rave word that spins and mixes poetics as intermedia. This is not utopia as a regime of literary-theoretical promise established nowhere. Which thought returns us to the past, from “new” cultures to what now seems “old” in the impacted, telescoped hyper-history of new media, where this qualifying “new” threatens to conceal within the term itself its own historical articulation. Philippe Bootz provides us with a poetics of electronic poetry based on a critique of its supposed historical origins, in hypertext. He does this by dissolving hypertext in the more general theory he resolves. It would have been possible and might have been desirable for us to put together a collection of essays on digital poetry with no mention of hypertext. Perhaps now is the time to lay the ghost of hypertext to rest, in this context at least. Bootz’s projects in electronic poetry date back at least as far as Ted Nelson’s coining. He is a pioneer of electronic poetics, a prominent practitioner of long-standing, and a founder-editor of *alire* the first periodical devoted to electronic literature. As such he represents

a tradition and practice that arose in parallel with the hyper-context that tends still to be more familiar to us. Bootz points out that Nelson's discovery of hypertext was the response to a *documentary* problem. It was never intended, by Nelson, to answer or address any problem of poetics, and it is arguable that Nelson, for one, was never even particularly interested in so-called narrative or fictional or indeed literary uses for hypertext. Bootz points out that writers – in his particular experience chiefly French poets and writers – simply discovered new-to-them compositional media in programmatological systems and went on to solve poetic and literary problems by exploiting emergent characteristics of the media. They made things that made poetry, without regard to a pre-existing theoretical or software form. Bootz as co-practitioner then goes on in the guise of Bootz-theorist to elaborate his “Procedural Model” which accounts not only for hypertext but also for other (arbitrary numbers of) literary machines many of which do directly address poetics. He provides us with some good tools of thought and also applies them fruitfully, by the by, to the work of another of our contributors, Jim Rosenberg.

In the English-speaking world, Rosenberg is, perhaps, *the* pioneer of poetry that is made and delivered in new media. Rosenberg is also known for his insistence on technical and theoretical relations with hypertext and its research community, while in many ways – as Bootz makes clear – his practice both extends and denies it. Here, he has given us a superb little paper which asks what kind of “notebook” is required by a new media writer. The “writer’s notebook” of print culture is just that; however, when, for example, we are about to make something, a poem, in which, as Bootz puts it, “the ergodic activity of the reader is itself read as a sign,” then what tools will we use to record the “notes” and other raw material of such potential signifying activities? This brings up many questions concerning why’s and wherefore’s around the design and engineering of new media systems, tools and projectors. Word processors and even hypertext systems get built, but there is, as yet, no off-the-shelf software for poetic animation (to mention what is merely one example of a potential poetic figure). Instead, we all spend our time misdirecting Flash to similar ends. Flash wasn’t made for poetry.

Thinking about it, can you, my divinely mediated interlocutor, think of any major practitioner of whatever it is we identify as digital poetry who has used vanilla hypertext for a significant poetic project?

LPG: Of course there would be some prime examples in codex form, such as Jorge Luis Borges. (Io sono at swoons over the writings of Borg-

es!) Despite all the high end, cranked up, crackpot multi-gigabyte CPUs burning the sinister world-polluting fuel of Adobe and Macromedia high end consumer products, I don't think his cunning elegance has yet to be surpassed. Maybe *codex* is the only true vanilla hypertext?? (And one should note that vanilla elegance itself, like basmati rice, might be the choicest flavor.) But your question is an interesting one, though you are putting me somewhat on the spot in front of this international audience of poet-practitioner-theorists. I'm feeling most human! Please everyone, close this introduction for a moment while I think!

[Rebooting...]

One would imagine that somewhere such a text exists. Just HTML, black text on a white screen, like the splendor of a sun-baked 52 Buick on a winding Habana Vieja side alley. I am also quite interested in your comment about the misdirected use of Flash. As you know, having been there, both at "Language & Encoding: A Symposium for Artists, Programmers, & Scholars" (Nov. 8–9, 2002) at the Univ. at Buffalo and at "New Media Poetry: Aesthetics, Institutions, & Audiences" (Oct. 11–12, 2002) at the Univ. of Iowa, I drew quite a bit of fire (friendly or not, the bullet-holes still rend too-human flesh) for even suggesting that Flash might not be ideal to our purposes. This extended even to vigilantes of scholars hunting us down for late night grudge matches over the pool table, where you may recall, our team sank the cue ball shooting the eight ball (that one atom blackly transcending atomic theory) at the crucial moment. (I think this similarly occurred in Providence, too.) Thank goodness there's no cue ball in e-poetry theory ... in this field we can stay on our table while everybody else lays down *their* coins! (Je blague – bien sur!) I bring up these recent conferences because, as we have been discussing the idea of community formations, I think it was apparent from these (all too) real world events that there is also a body of scholarship developing. The works by Bootz and Rosenberg here provide a very clear foundation. Of scholar-practitioners who are central and who were probing these issues early, there are few left (i.e., still addressing poetry rather than having gone after the high rolling life of related genres) maybe, besides Bootz and Rosenberg, just you and me. Bootz and Rosenberg delineate one approach to the medium however, one that truly could be called "historic" in their insistence on hypertext as *the* paradigm. (Of course, their use of the term is more sophisticated and more expressive than most link-noders could possible conceive.) One question that interests me is, beyond such foundational theo-

rists, what scholarly communities are in formation. In this vein I'm not talking about marquee scholars. Those will have their entitlement of an inordinate share of the attention – or maybe not. In any case their work is not at issue here.

I think what is crucial to the work we are presenting in this special section is that we are bringing forward newer voices that might provide some fresh and keen insights into the field. Charles Baldwin and Lori Emerson stand out in this regard. Emerson's essay provides a key breadth of vision. After identifying a triad of key texts in the field (Aarseth, Manovich, Glazier), Emerson does an incredible job of explicating the posthuman thread as initiated by N. Katherine Hayles. In this regard, I find it remarkable how she extends her analysis into contemporary practice. Her examination of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget* in this context provides a fresh look at his piece, one that adds significant context to the whole issue of embodiment. Baldwin picks up a topic that has been debated at a number of recent critical gatherings on both sides of the Atlantic (or both sides of that smaller Atlantic, Die Nordsee, for part of that debate), the relation of code to practice. He touches notably on the writing of Florian Cramer, an active thinker in this area. I have strong views on this point, of course, and I have long been in agreement with the value of, as you have put it, "code that works." I have otherwise referred to some of the work being done in the arena of non-working, visual, or dysfunctional codeworks as being works of "pseudo-code" practice. In this vein, one review of *Digital Poetics* noted that certain specific practitioners were not mentioned in the book's topologies of practice. Well that *was* my intent, because the book *is* trying to define a *specific vision* of the field. I do think there is a line, admittedly elusive and permeable, that separates what, in the new medium, we might call "poetry" from other engagements. No firm line can be drawn but it makes sense to at least sketch in a guide line, indicating some scene of action. I think it is a remarkable observation Baldwin makes when he says, "Codework may involve a new genre alongside an emerging field of digital poetry". This may be the truest expression of where we are. I would suggest that, though the line will be crossed throughout this collection of essays, one will not find codework authors really present here. To address "Ergodic Poetry" I find the distinction between codework and poetry a fundamental one and, to paraphrase and recast one of your comments, it is "language that works" rather than language of surface dynamics or code as curiosity, as interesting as that can be at times. Baldwin

suggests the term “software art”, a term I like inasmuch as the emphasis is on writing our own software. Obviously, this smart suggestion is plagued by the fact that most people will think of commercial products any time “software” is mentioned. But, back to the basics, I’m not unhappy with “poetry” as a term. As the title of this special section indicates, the editors have perspicaciously not asked us to address “ergodic writing” or “ergodic text”. The temperament of poetry can offer much when it comes to thinking through such practices of *working* language. Dare I suggest, within the context of networked and programmable media, we propose a continued use of the term “poetry”, oh venerable voice across the Atlantic?

JHC: Dear human, I really didn’t mean to put you on the spot like that, but then you hit it anyway, as expected. I’m now much looking forward to our next road trip: “sun-baked” sounds good when you’re clicking away in soggy Keats-ville. I think that these very phrases, by the way, are like Bootz’s notion of the “anchor,” seemingly for him the one instantiated aspect of a “classic” hypertextual model that provides a literal “doorway” to the full potential of the virtual text-of-inscription that is addressed by an author, be she writer or poet. Unsurprisingly, for us poets, this demonstrates – I mean right here, in mid codex (yet again, and “comme d’habitude”) – how poetry, when it is poetry, has always done the job so well of providing “doorways behind each of which a reader might discover much more information that was immediately apparent,” precisely by being “anchored” in a practice of vessel-making, be it Keats’ urn or some ocean-spanning cybership. “Node, link, navigation” pales in the play of our poetic embodiments. Think how “vessel” ambiguity defers navigation – how far? From where to where?

And no, I don’t think that we should be afraid of the term “poetry” or be unprepared to distinguish it from the codework Baldwin addresses. Only that “poetry” has an impoverished common usage that is often far from the way I think of it, as “a trial of language.” As such, I would allow a wide range of linguistic practice to be counted as poetry where common usage might find no formal features to recognize it as such. For me to deny (some particular type of) codework poetic status would be to claim that it does not make a significant trial of language, that, perhaps, it simply *uses* language in another, or in some relatively novel mode, as conceptual linguistic art rather than poetry.

Of course it’s hard for me to avoid the fact here that Baldwin takes me on directly in the debate over code and codework. I’m glad, by the way,

that this debate enters into our selection, and that we can provide links outward to some of the existing contributions. Whether codework is poetry or a new genre, still leaves many questions concerning the role of code and coding in all language-making – be it documentary, narrative, poetic, etc. – unanswered. Baldwin makes a neat move when he suggests that it may not necessarily be critically significant to say, as I have, that code, as incorporated into the interface-text, is broken, does not work. As he says, precisely its failure to work – and how this failure, for example, reflects on the fetishisation and commodification of productive “power” that dominates technomedia – may be part of an aesthetic which becomes a genuine trial of language (and society) and therefore also poetic in my sense. Nonetheless, when, at the end of his essay, he turns back to Rosenberg, he turns back to work in which the code is hidden and working – unlike in most codework. How this hidden working of a text-that-is-not-the-text yet functions as an intrinsic property of atoms of signification, the discrete material of poesis: this question remains an obsession for us, and needs more work.

We’ve got this far, fellow all-too-human, having touched on all but the essays of Simanowski and Beiguelman, both of which also take us outside the usual frames of reference for poetry as it is commonly constructed.

LPG: But to an informative outside, it is clear.

JHC: Simanowski discusses Simon Biggs’ *Great Wall of China*, a text generator based on Kafka’s prose. He discovers a poetic – “language as an *individual* house of being” – that emerges from the entire system that Biggs has made. Again, if Biggs’ work is poetry, it is not because of its raw materials, but because of the way it addresses language-making. I keep coming back to Bootz’s theorizations (partly because I have attempted to understand and translate them for our selection), and Biggs’ work is a good example of how the reader is – very explicitly – cut off by coding and mediation from any direct experience of what the author experiences as Bootz’s text-of-inscription: the particular dataspace or linguistic world of the piece as it is composed but before it is (actively, ergodically) read. Instead, the reader must maintain a relationship with language that literally constitutes a text-of-reception. The question is: when do we call such a relationship poetic and when do we not?

Beiguelman acknowledges her roots in international and Brazilian visual poetry and outlines some of that history for us here. How do you find that or some other poetic translated in her contribution and her work, my sun-baked Buick?

LPG [tail fin glimmers nostalgically]: Actually, next month literally, I will be back to the sun-baked Buicks and chan chan so these metaphors are not off the chart. (Especially also since the avatar has noticed that though the thermostat in this house is set to 70 it will only heat to 62. Given the 8 degree F. temperatures out there, this could seriously affect our processing speed!)

So, like the eruption of bats when one pokes their nose into one of the Mammoth Caves, here is a flurry of thoughts, most Kentuckian in contours and continuities and dammit because one likes the banjo and harmonica! (I have even heard one of the editors of this section playing the latter in the byways and back alleys of the Motownesque digital metropolis of E-Buffalo.) I think it amounts to what one would think “poetry” means in this day and age. Is it, like the stuff that wins “poetry” awards, some stiffened stricken regurgitation of modernism? I’m not saying that modernism can’t be beautiful. I have enjoyed hours too numerous to count immersed in that intoxicating aesthetic. But I do find it problematic when workshop aesthetics or modernist practice tries to label itself as “new”. As if the crop contents of adult birds that is regurgitated into the beaks of the nestlings can be considered “new” food. Or worse yet, when such poetics of regurgitation associates itself with digital poetry, I feel that is especially heinous. It is self-serving and ideologically suspicious, denying digital poetry’s present possibility to embody completely new forms of innovation. Such moments are all too rare in just one lifetime! The uninnovative and decoratively hypertextual tries to suffocate the medium with old trappings of I-deology. This conflict raises the question of what *poses* as digital poetry vs. what *is* digital poetry. Though I admire your generous, convincing, and indisputable defense of codework as poetry-in-spirit (if not in-flesh), I wonder if the pseudocode practitioners themselves would call their work “poetry”? I think the argument that code must work has real merit, though I see there’s a lot of latitude in *how* it might work, as you explain. I see there are many axes of “working” – metaphorical, symbolic, etc. – but aren’t those really codex aesthetics? I also acknowledge your more general suggestion that “poetry” has “an impoverished common usage”. That’s why you and I turned down those distinguished professorships at Oxford! ‘Cause we couldn’t beat that poor old tired horse any longer! I would posit that even more important is to consider poetry as a way of *thinking through* the materiality of a given medium. (This is a point I stress in my writings, with Robert Creeley as an informing pres-

ence.) It gets worse when one argues for *innovative* poetry, too. Unfortunately, rather than being “a trial of language” it often seems to be a kangaroo court of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, a point that has been made in the literature of late. Writing poetry as a way of thinking through a medium, though, to me offers a tangible path.

But let’s propose a test case. For example, one could conceive of a work where:

1. One made visual patterns in the code;
2. Compiled it and ran the program, and;
3. Sounded out the results.

Through cycling over and over through such a process, one could adjust the visual patterns of the code to modify the sound and continue revising while sounding. In that manner, one would have the hidden quality of working code to which you refer but also the tangible quality of code as part of the material (and in this case aesthetic) struggle that brings the work of poetry to the screen.

[Clicking on main window...]

That Simanowski brings up Biggs is truly germane to this discussion. Simanowski has a particular authority, as an active digital publisher and for his tireless enthusiasm in the questions of new forms of literature. The Kafka text that Biggs uses is particularly germane because there is a poetics involved – an almost perfect poetics (of grammatical construction) – and yet I’m certain that Biggs would immediately deny he is a poet. I believe he would disavow any relation to the production of text; an aesthetic distance he rather relishes. (That’s why he had Kafka make the text!) Since the work works so extraordinarily, one would have to observe that here is a poetics of code that works.

Beiguelman’s piece offers much more of a conceptual engagement than a historical overview. Working through it closely, as I pick out a few threads and work at polishing its translation, I see that it is about poetic vision in material circumstances – exquisite relations indeed! In this sense, Brazil could be very instructive to our explorations of “ergodic poetry” because it is both isolated and connected, because it is both visual and textual, and because it is bilingual – and all works of digital media involve multilingual thinking. (Curiously, as a rule such interlingual grounding is far from the norm in the U.S. context – as it is in the British context and the

Canadian as well, Quebec included. As Beiguelman notes to me in an e-mail, “In 3rd World countries you are not allowed to be monolingual.... You are the only bilingual American I know!” (E-mail message, 8 Dec. 2002) So I see her history as a record of ways that visuality and textuality have crossed-fertilized, miscegenated, reconciled; and ways that methods and media have converged, called each other, and accommodated the shifts of history that somehow seem accentuated, if the record of Concrete Poetry is any indication, in the Brazilian context. The poetic about which you ask me is one of somehow crossing boundaries between languages while at the same time remaining “true” to the historic mission. Her article draws an affinity between those struggles and the present case. We are indeed at no less of a historic moment as we tackle the issues here before us.

I am always struck at how riled people get when L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E is raised and when I suggest that the perspective of the solitary “I” might not always be the most useful one. Immediately, the hallmark card of personal expression is pulled, as if it were a trump card and one hears the protest, “But *I* do matter.” (Yes you do. Put two quarters on the table and we’ll get to it!) I really think this lands us squarely back on the issues of community and poetics. It’s useful that Andrews enriches this collection of essays with his sense of radical practice – and that Damon provides the scope of “countercultures of practice” grounded in the likewise radical varieties of practice, from backroads Wisconsin farm country to glistening Cape Cod to the stultified cultural vacuums of La Florida. This radical approach is not necessarily addressed in this section exactly as I am addressing it here. But I invoke it as the missing dynamic in our conversations, the overlooked communal urgency in the headspun, visually mesmerized, Ted Turner media overloaded catastrophe of the medium. Radical digital poetics, “radipo”, as it has also been called, step forward! I was most struck how even the suggestion of radical practice drew such ire at a recent critical gathering (just four hours from Wisconsin). My detractors seemed to want to pose the counterargument, “Aren’t we beyond that?” I was floored. Here I had been thinking all along that the joy of this fresh new medium was nothing less than the possibility of radical practice itself! (Did I ever tell you that Berkeley has air-puffed, fat free french fries? You can eat all you want!) Radical practice, alternative community, bodies/disembodies, e-poetry festivals, and all night pool. (As long as mainly unskilled participants get to play. Who needs, zzzz, to watch those sharks sink ball after ball? Let the poetry bozos make quarters last for hours!

That's what really pisses them off...) Counter to dominant culture itself. I think that communities are defined by various landmark publications, such as this one, and by defining gatherings, such as E-Poetry 2001. We are now in the midst of planning E-Poetry 2003 in Morgantown, West Virginia (co-organized by Charles Baldwin, one of the contributors to this section). The first E-poetry cast somewhat of a wider net seeking to postulate: what would the broad terrain that *includes* e-Poetry look like? E-Poetry 2003 is much more specific, following on the heels of a lot of listserv caviling about the impossibility of even trying to define "poetry" in the digital medium. For this event we seek to draw a much closer aim on the pulsing heart of this matter, *mi pequeño amor*, where the material matters. Again it will be a festival where a community is identified; perhaps more narrowly, but there are so many more voices here now than there were even two years ago!

To answer the question of when we call such a relationship poetic and when we do not – an absolutely essential question my fog-dignified Bentley! – I would say: *when it transforms the medium*. It is a bit of an enigma to illustrate this point, I admit. Here in my northern climate I spend many happy hours on cross-country skis (if the rum-toting St. Bernard doesn't show I go out looking for it myself). Engaging the medium is much like the paradox of cross-country skiing. If you put your feet down you stop. As long as you keep the middle of the skis up (your feet) and try to glide, even awkwardly, you enter a rhythm of movement that defines, through its specifically dynamic nature, what movement is in that context. So I can't really answer your question about where to draw the line (and our dear Finnish hosts may have much more expertise on the cross-country topic than this Tejano two-stepper – though I do have more experience than they in digging cactus thorns from my boots!), but I do think that fixed texts, output as product, and/or artistic arrangements of static (and that means repeatable) visual tropes, give rise to pause. My personal satisfaction is in texts that are almost always different each time you view them, that are navigable but variable. From the perspective of performance, this seems to put the poet in the pot, flame turned full kilt, really makes the poet perform for their money. (As if remuneration even ever occurred!) From a literary perspective I'd suggest that what is the work of digital poetry *is* how it *works* – even better if this "works" is both figurative and literal. I'm only describing a specific bull's-eye of interest that, I would argue, extends from many innovative artistic experiments of the 20th cen-

tury, that has real precursors in that history, but that somehow seems to have been waylaid in the virus-conscious safe lex practices of the static 21st century. It's the action that makes sense – action on the lexical front and action on the code level, code that cranks right in front of you like a homemade ice cream machine! (Please make mine mango.)

JHC: Don't you just love it when a generator generates! Crank it right on up, I say, snow or no snow. As for me, I feel as if the fog must clear, that I must respond to the underlying question of why does it matter, however briefly but clearly as we close and open out to the essays themselves. First, oh snow-glider, your words provoke my constrained generative sino-telegraphic quatrain subroutine:

poetry thinks language trial medium
code works exquisite pattern relation
vision experiment performs radical practice
countercultural community cranks digital machine

It is important to acknowledge the ways in which artists self-identify because this does help us to be more clear about what it is they do. Are you, as an artist, willing to call what you do poetry? You are. What is poetry? It is a trial of language. At the same time it is language trying and testing your practice, in your case, digital practice. I agree whole-human-and-posthuman-heartedly that poetry is thinking through and radically reconfiguring the medium. The primary medium of poetry is language. Poetry thinks through language. Language sometimes thinks through poetry. The atoms of language – at all levels of linguistic structure, from letter to docuverse – are objects with properties and methods. They may be instantiated in the poem and they run and respond, performing the events of language. Time – duration and change – is necessary to their existence, their performance, the navigable textual spaces they generate. A program (or 'method' in this extended Object-Oriented metaphor) sets out what is to be performed and promises both the event and the intrinsic temporal character of the sign-string. Programming is emergent as an artistic practice due to recent technological history. The programmability of digital media helps us to perceive the intrinsic temporality and programmability of the sign itself. Signification is programmable at a granular level, and this is poetry. For certain kinds of artistic, aesthetic, social, and political purposes, we may both extend and override the methods and properties of tradi-

tional classes of literary objects. It matters both that we make and what we make. Therefore we must pay special attention to who is making, where they are making and why. When radical countercultural communities reconfigure and reprogram the very medium of an (inter)language that may hem them in and hold them down, when they make literary objects in new media that allow them to be silly, sillious, serious and exquisite, that is poetry, the poetry our contributors address.

LPG: I find the atomic perspective and the object-oriented metaphor, as we have passed these methods back and forth between us over time, to be very useful. In fact, they are so useful they cannot really be fully explored in this window. (As I enter textual data, it is Christmas Eve, 2002 and packets o' Saint Nick are already being piped via the flue object, locally declared to my homeranch.) Because, as you mention, it's really time to get on to the essays! I think they will mark a real beginning. I am not certain we can lay claim to defining what radical practice might be but, especially after many recent conversations at gatherings in the field, if we have at least introduced it as an object of contemplation, a jade enigma or flickering flame on the altar of if-we-are-artists-then-let's-do-more-than-reinscribe-the-same-old-doggone-dogma (a sect so radical our robes, though silky and dazzlingly bejeweled, are all open source), then we have declared this object to be of a public class. I think that is something we need to do, the two senses of this in one, take this class to the street and declare that this art should be public property. Thus declared in a responding, unrestrained quatrain:

dogma oh best to leave that old bone, err, aburied
no more shall we, soft Microsaps, merely consume – instead
odes to the grindstone, hand code, radical radiantly we
make our own objects, hence the “ergo” in “ergodic”

Thus, my friend, and to you comrades who have joined us for this conversation, I suggest we read the essays that follow – but in the spirit of things – let's make this collection truly ergodic. Read with limbs akimbo, shout aloud with passion, tear down walls, self-defibrillate, cumbia from one page to the next, let your bones sing. An ergodic poetics? Let's make the medium into our own making.

</DIALOGUE>