A Continuous Act...

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In this issue we include contributions from the individuals presiding at the panel Alin a Jumal’s Work: A BABEL Wayzgoose, convened at the second Biennial Meeting of the BABEL Working Group. Sadly, the contributions of Daniel Remein, chief rogue at the Organism for Poetic Research as well as editor at Whiskey & Fox, were not able to appear in this version of the proceedings.

From the program:

2nd Biennial Meeting of the BABEL Working Group Conference
“cruising in the ruins: the question of disciplinarity in the post/medieval university”
September 21st, 2012: Session 13
McLeod C.322, Curry Student Center
Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

Traditionally, a wayzgoose was a celebration at the end of a printer’s year, a night off in the late fall before the work began of printing by candlelight. According to the OED, the Master Printer would make for the journeymen “a good Feast, and not only entertains them at his own House, but besides, gives them Money to spend at the Ale-house or Tavern at Night.” Following in this line, continent. proposes in its publication(s) a night out and a good Feast, away from the noxious fumes of the Academy and into a night of revelry which begins, but does not end, at the alehouse or Tavern. continent. proposes that the thinking of the Academy be freed to be thought elsewhere, in the alleys and doorways of the village and cities, encountered not in the strictly defined spaces of the classroom and blackboard (now white) but anticipated and found where thinking occurs.
Historically, academic journals have served a different purpose than the Academy itself. Journals (from the Anglo-Fr. jurnal, “a day,” from O.Fr. jomel, “day, time; day’s work,” hence the journalist as writer of the news of the day) have served as privileged sites for the articulation and concretization of specific modes of knowledge and control (insemination of those ideas has been formalized in the classroom, in seminar). In contrast, the academic journal is post-partum and has been an old-boys club, an insider trading network in which truths are (re)circulated against themselves, forming a Maginot Line against whatever is new, or the distinctly challenging. All in a Jurnal’s Work will discuss (in part) the ramifications of cheap start-up publications that are challenging the traditional ensconced-in-ivory academic journals and their supporting infrastructures. The panel will be seeking a questioning (as a challenging) towards the discipline of knowledge production/fabrication (of truth[s]) and the event of the Academy (and its publications) as it has evolved and continues to (d)evolve. Issues to be discussed will revolve around the power of academic publishing and its origins, hierarchical versus horizontal academic modules (is there a place for the General Assembly in academia?) and the evolving idea of the Multiversity as a site(s) of a (BABELing) multivocality in the wake of the University of Disaster.

In Phillippe Hadot’s extraordinary essay, Philosophy as a Way of Life, the practices of philosophy—that is the exercise of what we can term pre-institutionalized love of wisdom, what Philo of Alexandria described as a training towards wisdom—are described as, following the Stoics, “a continuous act, permanent and identical with life itself, which had to be renewed at each instant.” This renewal of thinking, this coming to be of being itself—meeting itself on its own ground, concerns the way philosophy is practiced, and more often, taught, or rather not taught.

Hadot continues his thinking with a description of what happens to the structure of thought in the medieval ages as it becomes adopted—co-opted—by the church, and by extension, by the institution of the university. Philosophy becomes no longer a way of living, no longer a praxis as such but becomes a condition that is locked in a theoretical construct, one which was literally removed from life (and in life we read then love, wisdom, being etc, also the home, the market, the field, the street) and secured behind the high walls of the monastery (which were shortly replaced by the high walls of the Academy) where thinking unfortunately rests for the most part today.

Hadot writes further that this dangerous movement of removal reduces thinking to a theoretical practice akin to the mythical Ouroborous; “education was thus no longer directed toward people who were to be educated with a view to becoming fully developed human beings, but to specialists, in order that they might learn how to train other specialists.” Thought then is trapped behind the walls of the academy, and with the exception of such thinkers as Spinoza, Descartes, and Liebniz as well as others who think from an outside in, thought remains, in the form of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, a practice reduced or removed from life and restricted to what Schopenhauer will call “mere fencing in front of the mirror.” This is of course
the tendency today and philosophy remains, for the most part, a discourse produced and thought inside the academy and deseminated, inseminated through the apparatus of university presses and of course the academic journal.

It seems necessary to me that we have to have a place, a return, to a thinking which is closer to the Stoics, closer to the pre-Socratics, to a thinking which is a practice of becoming, a training to think, to live, to die. This movement is not so much romantic than imperative. This thinking is one of a deep irresponsibility because it is not known, it is not figured out. It requires a risk and what Heidegger calls a leap (for there is no bridge to it). I call it irresponsible because for too long sanctioned thought has had as its premise the idea that thinking has a goal, a direction, a telos; that it is not an activity but a process which gives a product; that the responsibility of thinking in turn demands an answer. In my mind, only freed from that goal can thinking, in contrast, bask in its own thinking, bask in a state in which the unknown can remain unknown, that mystery can rest as mystery. This is not to say that the world needs no answers, or to promote a Whitmanesque “leaning and loafing” as the only valid practice. It is only to say that for too long, thinking has been validated by the academy, by the answerable, by the already decided. To me, this requires—as an answer— the irresponsibility of thought, what Nancy calls, “a world for which all is not already done (played out, finished, enshrined in a destiny), nor entirely still to do (in the future for always future tomorrows).” This is a thinking not sanctified by the academy’s myriad committees, made sacred by the church or the palace but rather it takes place on the périphérie, beyond the ring road, in alleyways behind the marketplace, in cafes stained with the syphilitic patina of irresponsible talk, of loose talk, the kind of talk made loose not only by the tankard and the goblet by the practice and training of attuned thinking.

continent. was formed as a collective of thinkers coming out of the European Graduate School (also known as the University of Disaster) three years ago, in an effort to combat, or challenge, the dominant paradigm which isolates thinking from the street, from life, from the true nodes of being where perhaps wisdom tends to emerge. We feel that not only is the university herself no longer the privileged site of where true thinking takes place—and where only official thought can take place—but that the very artificiality of the academy denies thinking—at times—authentic, thought. Our goal at continent. is to create a media agnostic publication which is rigorous in its intellectual underpinnings but which will remain permanently beyond and out of reach of the academy. Though many of us butter our bread with academic paychecks, we attempt to keep continent. as a refuge—and a refugee—from the University in ruins, from a previously determined, artificially ordained site of preformed and institutionalized dialogues. In concert with other publications—both cyber and print—as well as various blogs we are attempting to redialogize the dialogue of thinking. We are attempting both to speak to—as well as with and against—the university as a site of accreted knowledge. We have not been utterly successful and continue to attempt to define what that role of being perpetually beyond is (while still trying to maintain rigorous intellectual standards) but it is just that, a goal, which is perpetually opening, perpetually unanswered, perhaps even by design, perpetually unanswerable.