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how to say we in an hour?

Sabrina Chou

Abstract

This paper follows from a lecture-form that, over the past three years, I have been developing for first year students on the Central Saint Martins BA Fine Art Programme. The lecture unfolds in two parts. During the first part I read assorted texts – fragments I bring myself and, for the most part, invited and collected contributions from students and the BA Fine Art Critical Studies teaching team. A non-exhaustive list might include receipts for coffee, train tickets, rough translations, clothing labels, shopping lists, AI-generated texts, students’ own writing, flyers, coupons, photos of signs, a paragraph from a novel, a line of a poem, the back of a penny, and the list of potential side effects from a prescription medication. The collectively uttered text that is produced offers a texture through which to reflect how “a people” might “say themselves”; might utter themselves through what they do. In this essay I examine the potentiality of a momentary collective utterance through concepts of ethnopoetics, sociopoetics, the assembly of peoples, counterpublics and strangerhood, the vernacular, and the complex texture that imbues every act of relating. Here, “we” is enmeshed in processes of relating that are “plurivocal” – many-voiced, and collective. In this paper, I probe the ongoing, variable, patterned texture of reciprocal exchange within a local group of people and their acts of making that emerges within an art school. Such processes suggest a becoming-belonging, or a woven texture of relationality that produces difference and accounts for the co-constitution of selves through and with others. I propose one possible form for patterns of reciprocity, for ongoing exchange. In doing so, I begin to unravel the texture of the weave that is produced through our “saying ourselves”, our utterances of poetry, and our co-embodied acts of making.

how to say we in an hour?

used train tickets
receipts for coffee, groceries, breakfast
tea bag wrapper, English
tea bag wrapper, Welsh
clothing tag
shopping list, to-do lists, material lists
flyers
ads
coupons
customer loyalty card, partially stamped
signs from a bus route, jotted down
song lyrics sent via e-mail
a page from a novel
a line of a poem
the back of a penny
an empty booklet of rolling paper
fragments of a short story
the torn off bottom of a fast food receipt
the classified section of a local borough newspaper
a recipe, previously sent to a friend
sheet music from last night’s choir practice
the definition of a made-up word
solicited phrases written on note cards
supermarket free monthly magazine
potential side effects from a prescription medication
weaving yarn sample card
anti-institutional questions scribbled on the back of something else
a packet of ginger candy

The starting point of this essay is a lecture-form I have been developing with first year BA Fine Art students. The first part of the lecture is a reading of assorted texts, including a few fragments I bring, but for the most part is comprised of invited and collected contributions from students, critical studies lecturers, and administrative staff. In another abridged version of this lecture, much of the matter solicited was from symposium attendees and organizers, written on provided notecards. This collection offered a variegated texture that included ingredients lists, single words, lines from other presentations, alongside ephemera such as candy packets and tea bag wrappers. While many critical studies lectures are recorded, these readings are deliberately left unrecorded, so that the collective utterance becomes a provisional, shared moment. Materials are gathered as students and staff arrive, laid out on a table at the front of the room, occasionally e-mailed the evening before or that morning, and are added to as the session goes on. The timing and rhythm of the speaking of this collective text is thus dependent on the spread of items on a table, or when someone brings something up, or if a courageous student takes the microphone. Some of the materials are reclaimed by contributors at the end of the session. The shared speech cannot be repeated, or recreated. And while students are invited

in advance to bring some words or text to contribute, much of what is shared is a function of the contents of pockets; what’s been left, forgotten, and since rediscovered in a bag; or a quickly scribbled thought precipitated by the ongoing reading of things. Each instance of saying “we” is contingent on the material that is assembled.

The incongruous list above samples some of the textual material that has formed these collective utterances of a temporary “we”. This varied texture is followed by elaborations on a series of fragments from assorted source texts – additional voices in the ongoing assemblage. These voices point toward different modalities of thinking through the enmeshed, plurivocal processes of relating and belonging that might be enacted through such a collective utterance, and the necessity that such an enactment demands of questioning who “we” might be. Even as attention to decolonial and inclusive practices is promoted in the art school, the minoritized and estranged still find their voices diminished or silenced. The question of “we” is especially crucial, because whose voices are included in its constitution – and how any relation to an other, to difference, is made – needs to be recomposed each time a collectivity or community is formed.

This essay emerges from collected fragments and collective utterances as a set of theoretical propositions towards possible modes of making, studying, and belonging in an art school. Some of the voices that guide this thinking – Sylvia Wynter, George Quasha, Michael Warner, Ivan Illich, Lisa Robertson, Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, and Karen Barad – help structure this essay. Their thinking contributes to a theoretical opening up of a provisional *we*, towards the other, towards difference, towards relationality. Rather than a set method, objectified data, or conclusive outcomes, this enquiry begins and ends with a question: “how to say we in an hour?” asks how a potential collectivity might be articulated, even if only for a passing moment.

> **“What does any local group of people do together in their [acts of making]?”**
> **– George Quasha, “The Age Of The Open Secret”, 1976**

The uttering of a collectivity recalls practices of oral transmission and the siting of a poetic practice in a local people. These concerns can be found in ethnopoetics, the study of non-Western non-canonical poetry, which often uses recording and other methods of inquiry that can encompass what solely written text cannot convey, and which includes the embodied performative aspect of oral traditions. One of the accompanying voices in this inquiry is Sylvia Wynter’s paper “Ethno- or Sociopoetics?”. Wynter begins her paper by quoting George Quasha, who also spoke at the same conference on

ethnopoetics. Quasha’s paper attempts to decipher the term “ethnopoetics”, and its implications for poetic studies and practices more widely. Quasha writes:

> At root: Ethno-, ‘from’ Indo-European *seu-*, defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as *people, our people, we ourselves, of our kind*. It lives on in *self/selbst* and in the reflexive pronouns of French and Spanish. It has to do with what goes on *here*, it has to do with the *local*.
>
> At root, therefore, Ethno-poetics wants to say: *self-poetics, our kind poetics,* and, with a residual Romantic nuance, *self-making.* What does an Ethno- *do*? That question translates into language as: *What does any local band of people living together do in their poetry?* (Quasha 1976, 65)

Quasha here notes what he describes as “a residual Romantic nuance” which is in reference to the etymological root of the word poetry in *poesis*, which in ancient Greek means “to make.”

So, I’ve rephrased his question to ask,

> *What does any local group of people do together in their acts of making?*

The answer, however, remains the same:

> The answer, at root, is: They say themselves. They say who they are. (Quasha 1976, 65)

Bringing Quasha’s question into the locality of the art school points toward one possible avenue of sounding out the poetics of the acts of making and speaking that might gather and dissipate there. In his elaboration of ethnopoetics, Quasha differentiates between forms of poetry that are based on circulation and the written form, and forms of poetry that are based in oral transmission. He writes that ethnopoetics “as social transformation begin somewhere ‘in here,’ in amidst the talking” (Quasha 1976, 71). In contrast to the more formalized and stable distribution of written poetry, the poesis of provisional forms of making points toward the transformative possibility in an “in here”, an “in amidst”. This potential of transformation emerges through thinking and talking, which “become conscious acts, shared transmissions, in the root sense of ‘conscious’ as ‘knowing together,’ ‘withknowing’” (Quasha 1976, 71).

It is with such a sense “knowing together” or “withknowing” that “how to say we in an hour?” aims to assemble a shared act of self-saying and self-making. Part of the initial impetus to attempt this lecture-form resonates with Maggie Maclure’s discussion of baroque methods. Such practices produce “interruptive methods” against “closure-seeking systems” (Maclure 2006, 732, 729). They engender a shared entanglement of subject and object, which gestures toward the “impossibility of maintaining a stable posture as an autonomous observer/subject/critic/writer” (Maclure 2006, 730, 736). Here, the role – and indeed posture – of lecturer is destabilized through the co-production of a lecture and the live unfolding through speaking-without-knowing, writing-via-reading what is given, provisionally weaving together a collectivity. This approach to plurivocality proposes a patchy, horizontal practice of knowing/knowledge that aims to escape capture, resist objectification, and unfix valorization, moving against the grain of institutional frameworks. How might the unfolding gathering of purposeless speech enact a shared transmission towards transformation “in amidst the talking”, in the middle of saying “we” in an hour?

> ***“But who are ‘we’?”***
> **– Sylvia Wynter, “Ethno- or Sociopoetics?”, 1976**

To work in amidst practices of “withknowing” and to gesture towards an ambivalent collectivity is also to question the *we* that might be invoked in the institutionally addressed community of a classroom. As institutions of higher education tune and develop metrics of “course units” or “learning outcomes” alongside well-intentioned rehearsals of discourses of decolonization, diversity, and inclusivity, measurable student identities can become subsumed into a smooth-edged *we* that demands assumed generalizations. Moreover, a student body of diverse identities can, in the worst cases, become reduced to images of inclusivity or representational strategies. The implied, implicated *we* might need some slight palpating to find its edges or to determine its form.

To return to Sylvia Wynter for a moment, in her essay “Ethno- or Sociopoetics?” she introduces Quasha’s explication of ethnopoetics and immediately asks “But who are ‘we’?” (Wynter 1976/2022, 421). Wynter discusses the terms that are used to designate possible *we*’s like “people who come from the First World, people who come from the Third World” (terms that might now need readjusting) and in the context of her writing, she identifies how they are set in opposition to one another to “serve an *operative* function; they serve to define a *relation*—a *relation* between a *We* and an *Other”* (Wynter 1976/2022, 421). This presents a crucial problem: how to say “we” without setting “us” in relation – or opposition – to an *other*? How might *we* hold a more differentiated, metrical sense of belonging that has the capacity to reconfigure the perception of difference?

Quasha addresses the potential othering within ethnopoetics by rooting ethnopoetics as a practice of listening in a local orality. He describes ethnopoetics as an “art of reading the oral and written ‘texts’ of disparate locals, necessarily including ourselves” (Quasha 1976, 73). Wynter further unpicks the potential problematics of ethnopoetics by explaining the term *ethnos* and how it came to mean *other*, locating the “fundamental split between the *we* and the OTHER” in the 16th century when the world-market economy was established (Wynter 1976/2022, 423). She identifies in “Western civilization, as we experience it today […] an *expression* of that new social system: an economic world system”, and she calls this development “a *mutation* rather than a simple evolutionary process.” (Wynter 1976/2022, 423). We might question her terminology, because mutations can be part of evolutionary processes, but what I take her to mean here is that Western civilization – or, the global northern hegemonic socioeconomic system – as an expression of the economic world system is not necessarily part of a linear development, or an inevitable trajectory of human history.

Wynter talks about how the discovery of the so-called New World was the beginning of this mutation. Part of this process was the exploitation of “cheap labour far away” that became the “concrete Other”, which then became layered with class, and was expressed through words like “savage”, “native”, “primitive” and “natural” (Wynter 1976/2022, 424). She links this to a concept of humanism in which the human was limited to the *we* that excluded the other. I would add that the establishment of this *we* vs *other*, this initial concrete relation, is not only at work in what bound together – and continues to bind together – the Western colonizing world as a *we*, but is also operative in continuous processes of establishing social relations as functions of division, power, administration, and the institution of education. The invocation of a collective humanist *we* must necessarily be challenged by asking: who is the protagonist of the narrative of a particular strand of history? Whose voices are included or amplified? Who is addressed? Who is called to speak?

Wynter proposes to “free the Western concept of humanism” from the fundamental split between *we* and *other*, to “construct an alternative process of making ourselves human” by “transforming its abstract universal premise into the concretely human global, the concretely WE” (Wynter 1976/2022, 437). She questions the core concerns of the conference, in studying ethnopoetics as a poetics of (the) *other*, and she proposes to reframe humanism from an “abstract universal premise” to the “concretely human global”. Through this process, the notion of a subject-*we* is not foreclosed by the colonial subjugation of those deemed “other”, which abstracts humanity to a universal premise, but instead shifts to a concrete, global humanity that enfolds all people(s). This argument is in line with Rosi Braidotti’s critique of concepts of “we” or a “unitary humanity”, in which she instead emphasizes the

theorization of a “we” that is in “materially embedded differential perspectives”, stating that “we-are-in-*this*-together-but-we-are-*not*-one-and-the-same” (Braidotti 2019, 138).

Is it possible, then, to think or say “we” without enclosing it in an immediate relation of *we* vs the *other*, *we* vs not-*we*? Is it possible to “construct an alternative process of making ourselves human” (Wynter 1976/2022, 437) through acts of speaking and making together? Moreover, how might we engender spaces and conditions in art schools that can support the construction of such processes? How might moments of collectivity enact contingent and variegated assemblages?

“our constant imagining”
– Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics”, 2002

I’d like for a moment to reflect on this idea of collective speaking, which points to how a people or a society organizes themselves, ourselves. How is a sociality formed? Braidotti writes that “a people” does not merely exist but needs to be actualized, as a “result of a praxis, a collective engagement to produce different assemblages” (Braidotti 2019, 49). To be part of an assemblage or a people, to be part of a collectively uttered *we*, is not necessarily to be in agreement. It is not necessarily to be working together on the same thing, in unison. Crucially, the assembly’s collective utterance does not have to follow administrative mechanisms of pronouncing a people through their adherence to an institution and its mechanisms of identification and representation. Assemblages might allow for the possibility to be part of multiple, shifting collectivities at the same time. The varied assemblages of such praxis destabilize the autonomous speaker/author, towards an entanglement of subject and object, or *we* and each other. Perhaps, then, the self-saying and self-making of a local people is able to resist flattening modes of overrepresentation because such a poetics is not a singular, unified homogenized voice; rather, it exists as an irrecuperable polyvocality. Is it possible – even amidst difference – to assemble and self-make through shared lived experience?

Acts of assembly/ing/age also call into question who is part of the public, who is addressed when we speak. Michael Warner discusses different concepts of the public, from social totalities to an audience bound in physical space, and a third sense of the public that is formed through discourse, through what is written and spoken “in relation to texts and their circulation” (Warner 2002, 50). He writes that the “discourse of such a public is a linguistic form from which the social conditions of its own possibility are in large part derived” (Warner 2002, 75). In his view this discourse is necessarily poetic, as “all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, projecting for that world a concrete and livable shape, and attempting to realize

that world through address” (Warner 2002, 75, 81). Formed alongside or in opposition to, or out of necessity and survival against dominant publics, are “counterpublics”, which Warner delineates as a public that necessarily maintains “an awareness of its subordinate status” (Warner 2002, 86). Counterpublics are “spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely” (Warner 2002, 88). According to Warner, the poetics of address engender the possibility of thinking and constructing an alternate reality, a “concrete and livable shape.” To gather together not in spite of but by means of a shared awareness of subordinate (or precarious) status is, through the very act of assembling, already a transformative act. In their acts of making and speaking, artists have the capacity to intervene in the material and social conditions that shape and transform realities. Rather than “merely” replicating existing conditions of sociality, the poetics of counterpublics, or in our case the poetics of the local, has transformative potential perhaps because it is necessarily engaged in the projection and making of alternate scenes, or possible forms of life.

For Warner, strangerhood and stranger-sociability are particularly important in the formation of a sociality. Strangerhood is “the necessary medium of commonality. The modern social imaginary does not make sense without strangers.” (Warner 75). In other words, the experience of being amongst strangers is what creates a common experience – or what actually allows that commonality to be formed. He writes that the experience of strangerhood “requires our constant imagining” (Warner 2002, 76). It is the shared experience of not knowing that allows for the formation of a collectivity—despite the difference and strangeness in such relations. Such a process of constant imagining with strangers and others recalls Quasha’s locating of the transformative potential of ethnopoetics through speaking and making together, or “withknowing”.

In the art school, the “medium of commonality” fosters a “constant imagining” not only through acts of making and speaking, but also through the strangerhood that might be part of the process of making for or in dialogue with strangers (both real and projected). This strangeness of art and artmaking might also be located in an approach to art not as an inherited construction or historic, hierarchical lineage, but instead as a complex and unknowable shape, that can only be apprehended through a set of relations. Necessarily there is risk and (self-)estrangement that comes with provisional speaking and making, with exposing that which is thought- and worked- in-progress. How might the making and exchanging of strange relations around and with art, in amidst others, extend a local poetics?

"reciprocity patterns embedded in every aspect of life"
– Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work*, 1981/2009

"the perception of continuous co-embodiment"
– Lisa Robertson, *Nilling*, 2012

How might a collective *we* materialize? Quasha's question of what a local band of people living together does in their poetry, what a local group of people says, how a local group of people says themselves, elicits the vernacular, or the language or dialect spoken by a local group of people. This includes the language practices, exchanges, and ongoing transmissions that develop through a daily practice of speaking, a daily practice of making language.

Extending from the linguistic vernacular, in her "Untitled Essay" proposing a "prosody of the citizen" (Robertson 2012, 74), Lisa Robertson writes about Ivan Illich's discussion of the vernacular:

> This continuous language of collective formation is the commons. […] Illich defined the earlier sense of the word [vernacular] as 'sustenance derived from reciprocity patterns embedded in every aspect of life.' For Illich, the vernacular is what comes from the commons, as opposed to what is obtained through formal and institutionalized exchange. It can include language, as well as food, healing, mending and other daily practices. Carried and transmitted as it is in the variable texture of daily living, rather than embedded in an administrative superstructure, its transformational potential is enormously powerful. (Robertson 2012, 82)

As Robertson elaborates, for Illich the vernacular is sustenance – that is, it feeds us and sustains us. It emerges from and materializes out of the "reciprocity patterns embedded in every aspect of life", patterns that are practices of exchange, that are mutual and motile. What is crucial here is that reciprocal exchange is a pattern – not an event, but an ongoing dialogue – and that it is embedded in everyday life. The purposeless text fragments – receipts, train tickets, tea bag wrappers, recipes, news clippings, shopping lists – accumulated through utterances of "how to say we in an hour?" are reflective of what Robertson calls the "variable texture of daily living", which the vernacular transmits and carries. This textual matter contains elements of a variegated sociality, and it speaks to a potential picture of what might weave together a group of people at a particular moment in time. The assemblage of disparate materials becomes embedded into a patterned texture of daily living, broadcasting a continuous language that we might call a commons, or a vernacular. It produces a shared transmission that might allow a people to say and hear themselves. It asks how a vernacular

subsistence might be carried and transmitted within the art school, in opposition to what is received through the forms dictated by institutionalized knowledge exchange and production.

Later in the same text Robertson writes:

> The poem is the speech of citizenship. The poem distributes itself according to the necessity of subjects to begin, to begin speaking to anybody, simply because of the perception of continuous co-embodiment as the condition of language (Robertson 2012, 84).

Robertson asserts that the poem, or poetry, is also what allows us to relate to one another, through the necessity to begin to relate, through language. The reason we speak through poetry is simply because we can perceive the condition of language as “continuous co-embodiment”, or a state of being together in space, of continuously sharing embodied experiences, like speaking together, moving together, eating together, sitting together, working together, or experiencing together. These are also part of the patterns of reciprocity that Illich describes as the vernacular.

“The perception of continuous co-embodiment” is a mode of meeting the “variable texture of daily living” through a practice of local poetics. This co-embodiment can be extended into the spaces of learning and making art, in which making and showing and responding to art, and thinking, speaking, and writing about it are ongoing reciprocal exchanges, exceeding formalized structures of demand and spilling over into the informal ways that spaces of making and learning can actualize conditions of cohabiting with others and their work. What might be produced through the texture of the weave of our saying ourselves, our acts of making, our utterances of poetry, our constant imagining, our patterns of reciprocity?

“a social poetics”
– Fred Moten, *A Poetics of the Undercommons*, 2016

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s formulation of the undercommons resonates with collective acts of speaking and making together that imbue the “variable texture of daily living” (Robertson 2012, 82). As Harney says, “the undercommons is a kind of comportment or ongoing experiment with and as the general antagonism, a kind of way of being with others” (Harney and Moten 2013, 112). To enter into the undercommons is to engage in a mode of study that is “what you do with other people”, which for Moten includes “talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice” (2013, 110). It has

an aspect of workshopping or rehearsing or even labouring together (Harney and Moten 2013, 110). Such a mode of study can host, for instance, the collective utterance of “we” in an hour through the collecting of scraps of text, the flotsam and jetsam of the material world of language that is produced through being together in space. Against the “administrative superstructure” (Robertson 2012, 82) that the institution of the university imposes, the undercommons is one potential mode of being together and of making space for what could be termed a vernacular poetics of study, a mode of study that is embedded in the reciprocal patterns of daily living, of daily making.

Moten speaks about the artist Harold Mendez’s work in relation to a poetics of the undercommons in terms of the words “fray” and “blur”. Moten writes that Mendez’s edges are “not frayed and blurred as an absence of practice”, but rather “because they have been worked” (Moten 2016, 23):

> And this is how Harold’s work connects to the undercommons, because I feel the undercommons is primarily characterized by the everyday practice of working and making in a (per)version of that old Greek sense of *poesis*. It is a social poetics: a constant process where people make things and make one another or, to be more precise, where inseparable differences are continually made. They make the sociality in which they live […] (Moten 2016, 23-24).

Edges fray because they are worked, they blur because they are lived in. In such a social poetics, fraying might be produced by working through/with the woven textures of an assemblage, a (counter)public, a people. The frayed and blurring of a social poetics might also reveal entangled and ambiguous approaches to subject-object relations. Within these worked edges are patterns of exchange, the vernacular texture of everyday subsistence that modes of study can inhabit. These edges are worn from daily use, from repeated exchange, from continuous acts of making. Here the space of the art school holds particular potential because it can create spaces that sustain ongoing practices of making that are situated outside of demands for formalization and presentation. This can include not only the making of works but also the ambient materiality of making that is ongoing in the studio, or the ambient sociality of speaking-thinking that is ongoing in a crit or seminar, or the spaces around and between them. How, then, might the art school safeguard such spaces, which foster making as a practice that is embedded within processes of reciprocity, exchange, and poetics? Alongside or opposed to administrative demands and curricular structures, how might an art school sustain a frayed and blurred poetics?

Moten’s social poetics echoes the poetics of the local that Quasha describes. To inhabit such a practice of poetics is also to live and work “in amidst” the ongoingness of a sociality. The poetics that Moten speaks of is a poetics of making, not only of speech and language but also of each other. For Moten, for people to live with one another, to “make the sociality in which they live” is a process which necessarily includes the production of “inseparable differences”. The making of one another and of relations might then be reframed as a poetics of difference. In the vernacular poetics of a local group of people saying themselves, in the assemblage that might be engendered through the patterns of reciprocity that weave together a collectivity, is a continual process of making. In the art school, if we ask again, what any local group of people does together in their acts of making, we arrive at a poetics of the social, a poetics of continuous co-embodiment. It is a poetics of making the social through the making of “inseparable differences”, that indeed may only be possible through the medium of strangerhood, or the recognition of each other, of an other. How might the making of “inseparable differences” sustain the making of relations, of a potential *we*?

> **“an iterative (re)opening up to, an enabling of responsiveness”**
> **– Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance”, 2010**

A social poetics of making one another through difference might point toward a process of becoming-belonging that resonates with Karen Barad’s account of becoming in/of the world. Such a process is open-ended, entangled, sedimented, and responsive/responsible to possibility. For Barad,

> our (intra)actions matter – each one reconfigures the world in its becoming—and yet they never leave us; they are sedimented into our becoming, they become us. (Barad, 2007, 412)

Barad highlights the significance of how our (intra)actions are processes of making the world. What we do not only “reconfigures the world in its becoming”, but it then reconfigures we ourselves as these (intra)actions accumulate and are “sedimented into” us. This process reflects the reciprocity through which our (intra)actions are entangled in the world around us. We are embedded materially and socially in and through our actions. Crucially, in this process of becoming, “there is no ‘I’ separate from the intra-active becoming of the world” (Barad, 2007, 412). Rather, “entanglements are relations of obligation – being bound to the other – enfolded traces of othering”, processes which constitute an other “who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through, the ‘self’ – a diffraction/dispersion of identity” (Barad 2010, 265).

In Barad’s thinking, the “I” or “self” is necessarily “bound to the other”. It is co-constituted by “enfolded traces of othering”. Identities cannot be isolated or individuated but instead are diffracted or dispersed. I’s, self’s, and we’s are inseparable, entangled, obligated, bound, enfolded, threaded though one another. Our making of each other makes ourselves as an ongoing social poetics. Here, might there be a possible approach to Wynter’s call to disrupt the relation of *we* in opposition to the other, of the *we* to the not-*we*? The reconfiguration of self and selves through the “intra-active becoming of the world” proposes that any potential *we* must be understood as enmeshed with the other; the other is diffracted and dispersed through *we*.

In such entanglements, individuals are embedded in a texture of relationality. Processes of making, speaking, and acting are processes of becoming that reconfigure others, the world, and ourselves. Barad writes about the responsibility in making such relations that is “an iterative (re)opening up to, an enabling of responsiveness” (Barad 2010, 265). In this sense, “differentiating is a material act that is not about radical separation, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments” (Barad 2010, 266). To make relations is to engage in processes of differentiation that at the same time enmesh us inextricably with others. This is akin to Moten’s social poetics producing “inseparable differences”. Differentiation as a material process of relation makes “connections and commitments”. It is a process that opens us up to becoming responsive to others, exactly because others are also responsible to us.

Perhaps the art school has the potential to relocate the understanding of connecting, relating, and differentiating as material acts. In their poetic sense, material acts produce not only works of art and the vernacular texture of everyday exchange, but also social relations that necessitate connection and commitment. Within the art school, material acts of making, speaking, and studying are acts of imagining of, for, or through strangers. They are intra-actions that have the potential to recompose ourselves through our relations to one another and through our reconfigurations of the world around us.

Extending these intra-active forms of making relations reveals a process of becoming-belonging, in which belonging is not a fixed image but is continuously made and remade. The notion of a becoming-belonging can resist institutional practices of overrepresentation in which belonging or community or collectivity risks reduction to the promise of an ideal image. Instead, belonging that unfolds over time is a material and relational practice of constantly producing socialities and social poetics. To utter a collective “we” which necessarily enfolds the other is a process that destabilizes the self or the central speaking subject and instead foregrounds the material embeddedness of relations.

To say “we” – any “we” – is a material act. How, then, might each becoming of belonging shift in relation to who else is “in here”, who else is speaking? Might belonging then *become* through the patterns of reciprocity that produce a social poetics of continuous co-embodiment?

how to say we in an hour?

The attempted enunciation of “we” here weaves together Quasha’s *we* that speaks itself with Wynter’s concrete global *we* that is not dependent on establishing an opposition to an other. It is a *we* that might make space for difference in line with Braidotti’s “we-are-in-*this*-together-but-we-are-*not*-one-and-the-same”, a *we* that develops in Warner’s medium of strangerhood. This *we* might be produced through Illich’s vernacular patterns of reciprocity and Robertson’s perception of continuous co-embodiment. It is a *we* that can engage in Moten and Harney’s mode of study, that produces the frayed edges of a social poetics of difference. To say “we” is a process of becoming, a material enactment of Barad’s entangled relations to the other through obligation, commitment, and connection.

Through the polyvocality gathered “in here”, the proposition of saying “we” in an hour attempts to make space within the structures of the art school for a social poetics in which what is made is not only artworks and speech acts, but also one another. In doing so, the shifting assemblages that are made and remade might exceed what is institutionally required and transmitted. Instead, what might be exchanged can construct acts of differentiation, in which difference is not only a mode of separation but is also a manner of being materially obligated to, responsive to, committed to, and open to one another. It might thus be supported by the “medium of commonality” that is based in a shared sense of strangerhood that cultivates a “constant imagining” of, with, and through an other. To give time and space to speculative “study” is to return again and again to patterns of reciprocity that make space for “materially embedded differential perspectives” (Braidotti 2019, 138). Enacting material and social poetics acknowledges that a becoming process of belonging is also a form of sustenance.

The production of difference and discontinuity as a mode of relating to one another might lead us back to some of the initial questions in this inquiry: Is it possible to think or say “we” without enclosing it in an immediate relation of *we* vs the *other*, of *we* vs not-*we*? Is it possible to “construct an alternative process of making ourselves human” (Wynter 1976/2022, 437) through acts of speaking and making together? Social poetics, or patterns of reciprocity, allow us to make “we ourselves” not through the oppositional relation of *we* vs the other but through the entangling commitment of *we* to each other. In this sense, to engage in a vernacular poetics of making ourselves through/with others

gestures toward a becoming-belonging, a process in which belonging is not a given, nor is it a recognized, representable, identifiable state. Instead, belonging can be configured as a continuous process of making and remaking within the contingent conditions and amongst the strangeness of co-embodiment, of being “in here” with others. In the art school, working within interruptive forms of studying, or speaking, or making, proposes a reading amidst the lines that might allow us to develop our receptive capacities toward the production of difference. To say “we” in an hour, a day, or even a glancing instant is not an event that can be imaged. Rather, it is a continuous textured pattern, an ongoing reciprocal process of relating-through-imagining. In making through entangled obligations to/through others, it might thus be possible to make a sociality, to remake the world and its relations, and in doing so to remake ourselves.

The continuous co-embodiment of socio-poetics is a condition not only of language but also of the acts of making, patterns of reciprocity, and of the utterance –

> through used train tickets, receipts for coffee, tea bag wrappers, clothing tags, lists, flyers, ads, coupons, scribbled notes, and recipes
>
> – of a temporary, collective *we*.

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