Those Between the Common

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This piece, included in the *drift* special issue of *continent*, was created as one step in a thread of inquiry. While each of the contributions to *drift* stand on their own, the project was an attempt to follow a line of theoretical inquiry as it passed through time and the postal service(s) from October 2012 until May 2013.

This issue hosts two threads: *between space & place* and *between intention & attention*. The editors recommend that to experience the drifting thought that attention is paid to the contributions as they entered into conversation one after another. This particular piece is from the BETWEEN SPACE & PLACE thread:

*April Vannini, Those Between the Common* *Laura Dean & Jesse McClelland, Ballard: A Portrait of Placemaking* *Amara Hark Weber, Crossroad* *Isaac Linder & Berit Soli-Holt, The Call of the Wild: Terro(i)r Modulations* *Ashley D. Hairston, Momma taught us to keep a clean house* *Sean Smith, The Garage (Take One)*
Part 1: Gathering Around

Oct 30, 2012, Gabriola Island, B.C.

“Between” is a preposition used with nouns and pronouns to show a direction, location, or time. The use of the word “between” creates a relational connection of the two nouns, space and place. My interest begins in this intermediate position of space and place: that which lies in-between.

Space and place have been defined by many within a variety of disciplines and fields such as geography, anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies. While the two have been often treated as different and even opposed entities, I understand and conceptualize both space and place as non-representational, multiple, relational, contingent, and open to flows of becoming. I conceive of space and place as non-static, without one form or style, without boundaries and always fluctuating and transitioning. All spaces are places and all places are spaces, therefore always already in-between.

In my writing to come, I seek to reflect on the power of the in-between and the future of which the in-between may promise. I offer a meditation of what is to come: an emergent proposition for all those who seek an in-between. The question remains: who and what is in-between? And more importantly, how can we ensure that we remain in-between? Influenced by the work of Alphonso Lingis, Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean-Luc Nancy, Luce Irigaray, and Maurice Blanchot, I will drift and move and think about the community in-between or “the community of those who have nothing in common.” My
thought and writing is process-driven, which means that I will explore the notion of an in-between community as this project drifts and moves around and between places and spaces.

moving onward to Seattle.

And then...

Part 2: Improper Space/Place

November 18, 2012, Gabriola Island, BC

Dear Laura and Jesse:

Community is what lies in-between. By its very definition, the in-between leaves open a questioning of space, place, identity, and location, therefore questioning understandings of the common while simultaneously reopening a space that lacks proper form. It arises through dilemma, conflict, epiphanies, inclusion, and exclusion. The community of the in-between follows many of the premises underlying the work of Agamben, Blanchot, Lingis, Nancy, Nietzsche and Virno.

The community in-between exists within an improper space/place. It exists because it falls between the cracks of the real—a virtual becoming that which can only be imagined. An improper space/place is without certainty and definition. As Jean-Luc Nancy¹ reminds us, the discussion or relevance of community is not an opening to reminisce a nostalgic past of what once was, but rather something that has not yet arrived. The in-between community appears and disappears within the liminal space of those who lie in-between. Communities imagined are communities yet-to-come. The in-between community drifts like a message in a bottle thrown out to sea; without any clear or mapped-out coordinates or sense of direction, no attachments to an arrival, destination, or departure. It just senses that through movement something will be derived. But it does not know what that something is.

The community in-between is not premised around proxemics or spatial relations. It is in the absence of community that the in-between community emerges. It is the absence of community and the

¹ Nancy, The Inoperative
empty, bleak, desolate space of the in-between that allures and rallies those who are in-between. It is in the absence of the common that a spatial relation or proximity becomes apparent among the many. As Nietzsche professes in *Gay Science*:

> *We who are homeless.*—Among the Europeans today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves homeless in a distinctive and honorable: it is to them that I especially commend my secret wisdom and gaya scienza, for their fate is hard, their hopes are uncertain; it is quite a feat to devise some comfort for them—but what avail? We children of the future, how could we be at home in this today? We feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition; as for its “realities,” we do not believe that they will last. The ice that still supports people today has become thin; the wind that breaks the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and all too thin “realities.”

It is those that are strangers, estranged, strange, foreign, and absent from a space/place that behave as thinkers:

> Being a stranger, that is to say "not-feeling-at-home," is today a condition common to many, an inescapable and shared condition. So then, those who do not feel at home, in order to get a sense of orientation and to protect themselves, must turn to the "common places," or to the most general categories of the linguistic intellect; in this sense, strangers are always thinkers. As you see, I am inverting the direction of the analogy: it is not the thinkers who become strangers in the eyes of the community to which the thinkers belong, but the strangers, the multitude of those "with no home", who are absolutely obliged to attain the status of thinkers. Those "without a home" have no choice but to behave like thinkers: not in order for them to learn something about biology or advanced mathematics, but because they turn to the most essential categories of the abstract intellect in order to protect themselves from the blows of random chance, in order to take refuge from contingency and from the unforeseen.

> The community in-between is always already in transformation. It holds no form, no structure, and no clear decisive line of division. This community is ephemeral—coming and going as it exists. However, it exists in no real time and no real place but seeks time and place. Or better yet it lurks, calculates and ponders the right time and place. Oh we homeless ones…

> The community in between is of open space—(an)other space. There are no boundaries, borders, property, or attributes of propriety—improper space/place. Nevertheless it seeks to find and open new

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2 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 338

space/place. This (an)other space, or what Alphonso Lingis refers to as “other community,” manifests itself outside of the rational community:

This other community is not simply absorbed into the rational community; it recurs, it troubles the rational community, as its double or its shadow. This other community forms not in work, but in the interruption of work and enterprises. It is not realized in having or in producing something in common but exposing oneself to the one with whom one has nothing in common: to the Aztec, the nomad, the guerrilla, the enemy. The other community forms when one recognizes, in the face of the other, an imperative. An imperative that not only contests the common discourse and community from which he or she is excluded, but everything one has or sets out to build in common with him or her. 4

Part 3: The Meeting Place

December 10, 2012, Gabriola Island, BC

Dear Amara:

The community in-between dwells in an improper space/place. Neither you nor I can rightfully claim or give a name to this space/place since it lacks an identity. Such a space/place is absent of all identity and as such shall rename nameless. We cannot know where this space/place is located, describe what it looks like, or aim to represent or recreate what we think such an improper space/place looks like—without form, without identity, without function, without property. This in-between community is bonded by its fleeting presence and proxemics. A free flow of bodies: here, there or anywhere. Lebbeus Woods imagines a community that dwells in “freespaces”:

People from every social class inhabit freespaces—whomever has the desire or necessity to transform their everyday patterns of life from the fixed to the fluid, from the deterministic to the existential. For the most part, it will be people who find the old, hierarchical orders too uncomfortable, too oppressive, too unworkable to stay within their dictates of custom or law, and are driven—from within or without—to take their lives more fully into their own hands. They will be the people of crisis: the crisis of knowledge, the crisis of geography, the crisis of conscience. They are the ones who must perpetually begin again.5

We could address the question of who participates or who dwells within the ephemeral walls of this in-between community but doing so would result identifying the unidentified—who shall remain nameless. I

4 Lingis, The Community, 1.
5 Woods, War and Architecture, 32.
would be more inclined to consider the question: How can we participate or activate the in-between community? However, a response to such a question may acknowledge that such a community is always already activated. This is true. But how can those who dwell within a claimed, rational, identified community co-emerge with the community in-between? It is through communication that such co-emergent communities of the in-between will appear and just as quickly depart. Co-emergence already arrives and derives as soon as we greet—hello. Nice to meet you! Or a resonated gesture, of those there are many. The space between us becomes our meeting place—our freespace. The ebb and flow of our bodies, the laboured rhythm of our breath, our strained voices of discontent, incoherent but much needed babbling of wrongdoings, the evanescent of our laughter echoing, and our words adrift.

Bibliography


