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Minutes over Monuments
Rereading the Kootenay School
of Writing (as) Archive

On October 22, 1983, a benefit reading for MacLeod's
Books, which had been the target of arson, was held at the Western Front in
Vancouver. The reading took place just months after BC's Social Credit
government had been re-elected and implemented deep cuts to government
services, including to education, one result of which was the closing of the
David Thompson University Centre (DTUC) in Nelson, BC. This closure led
faculty and students of DTUC's now-defunct writing program—including
Tom Wayman, Jeff Derksen, and Colin Browne—to establish the Kootenay
School of Writing (KSW), initially in both Vancouver and Nelson, though
the school would eventually be based exclusively in Vancouver. KSW was
envisioned as an independent, writer-run centre modelled on the artist-run
centres that had emerged as important sites for contemporary visual art in
Canada in the 1970s. While education in writing was part of KSW's remit in
the years following its foundation, the "Kootenay School" came to reference
a particular language-focused poetics that offered a critique of neoliberal
policies then taking hold in the Anglo-American world. It also became
associated with a group of emerging poets with differing degrees of affiliation
with the school.[1]

Among the twenty-three readers at the benefit was seventy-four-year-
old Dorothy Livesay, introduced by George Bowering as having "just about
invented the Modernist movement in poetry in Canada."[2] The first poem
Livesay read that night was her recently composed "Anything Goes," which
closes with the following lines:

> Above all
> a poem records speech:
> the way it was said
> between people   animals   birds
> a poem is an archive for our times
>
> That is why   NOW   today
> a poem must cry out
> against war (Livesay 245)

Livesay's poetics as articulated in this poem appear now both sympathetic and antithetical to the poetics that developed within the context of the KSW: sympathetic in its insistence that poetry can and must embrace a political stance; antithetical in its belief that poetry is a transcription of speech. In prefatory remarks to another poem she read that evening, Livesay insisted that "poetry must become communication, not just playing with words." The idea that poetry should be "communication" was anathema to the poetics that emerged from the context of KSW, if we understand communication in a narrow, didactic sense. Livesay, a major figure in the development of literary modernism in Canada, as Bowering noted, was also key in forging connections between literary cultures and the political Left, and the degree to which Kootenay School poetics would diverge from hers reflected a changing understanding of the relationship of poetry to oppositional politics that KSW would come to represent, as we can see in the work of the poets I discuss below. But her line "a poem is an archive for our times" is one I want to consider here, in the context of the Kootenay School. Emerging from the unique institutional context of a writer-run centre and independent school— complete with a collective administrative organization, whose activities are recorded in minutes housed in the archive[3]—to what extent did the poetry affiliated with KSW document—archive—its contemporary moment?

In his study on KSW, Clint Burnham—himself a writer with some affiliation to the school—considers "why some things are or are not in the archive, as well as what those 'things' are and, indeed, what the 'archive' is" (161). Attempting to "examine the historical record dialectically," Burnham turns "from the archival and historical minutiae to the aesthetic record" (182). This is a strategy I wish to pursue here as well. But I would like also to expand the notion of the archive in relation to KSW in two ways: first, by considering "the aesthetic record"—that is, the poetry itself—as an extension of "the archival and historical minutiae"; and second, by reading this extended archive as an instance of what Diana Taylor calls the repertoire: a "repository of embodied practice / knowledge" (26). In the belief that work

produced within the context of a collective is best read collectively, I want to read work by several writers affiliated with the school both *through* the archive and *as* an archive. The poetry produced by writers differentially affiliated with a loosely-structured collective, circulating in ephemeral sites such as readings, talks, chapbooks, little magazines, and bar conversations, and characterized by enigma and local contextual reference, was always more concerned with the minutial than the monumental. The work as such invites archival investigation.

Taylor's distinctions between the archive and the repertoire are useful here, though they are distinctions I wish to challenge. For Taylor, archival memory "exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change" (19), whereas the repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (20). These distinctions, premised as they are on the opposition between written and spoken, absence and presence, would not stand up to post-structural interrogation, and indeed Taylor acknowledges that the relationship between archive and repertoire is not a binary one; as she points out, "[o]ther systems of transmission—like the digital—complicate any simple binary formulation" (22). Online resources like KSW audio, which provides access to digitized recordings and talks delivered at KSW, adds to the archive recorded moments from the repertoire. But given that so much of the poetry associated with KSW is gestural rather than referential, ephemeral rather than canonical, documenting of affect rather than of information, we could read the poetry as similarly complicating the binary between archive and repertoire. One way to approach the poetry emerging from KSW is to read it both as an archive and a repertoire of embodied memory, at multiple scales: of the social subject; of a literary scene; of a community, literary or otherwise; of a global situation.

Another reader at the benefit for MacLeod's Books was Kevin Davies, who would go on to become affiliated with KSW, and whose performance that night has, in Peter Culley's words, "passed honourably into the folklore of Vancouver poetry" (190). Culley's narration of Davies' performance—written in 1993, ten years after the event—is compelling. After inviting "the now clearly volatile and eager audience to heckle him,"

> Davies began to read, as rapidly as advertised, but every word was clearly audible, filling the room. His poems of that era were as extreme in their content as they were in that evening's presentation, and might best be described as a series of more or less discreet statements designed to exact the maximum

amount of terror and regret from their author. Their effect, especially when read aloud, was that of a long implosion of personality enacted for the moral edification of the onlooker. . . . Presented both with this virtuosic evisceration of self and a built-in framework of response, the audience was pleased to do just that, the air filling with jeers, laughter and shouts of encouragement. It was a revival meeting of a most peculiar hue. (190)

In a reflection on a recording of Davies' performance held at the Western Front, Michael Turner writes that "[g]iven the precision of Culley's text, I was curious about the discrepancies between what Culley remembered and what could be seen and heard on tape" (Turner). In Turner's reading of the performance as archived on the tape, only the laughter and shouts of encouragement that Culley reports can be heard, not the jeers. The hecklers in the audience become "ghosts" who "haunt" Davies' performance, "who, though unseen and unheard, turn the audience from passive listeners into a chorus of active laughers" (Turner). Based on my own viewing/hearing of the recording, I would agree that the content of the "jeers" cannot be heard, but one can discern shouts from the audience to which the rest of the audience responds with laughter: the "jeers" are heard as material signifiers, but their signification is unclear. Put simply, both archive and repertoire are similarly open to interpretation. That performance, and its multiple narrations—by me, by Culley, by the video itself, by Turner's reading of both Culley and the video's documentations, by "the folklore of Vancouver poetry"—provides an example of the dialectical relationship and mutual interpenetration of archive and repertoire, rather than a clear separation between the two.

How might we read the poetry not merely alongside the archive, but the poetry *as* an archive (or repertoire) of the moment? Burnham alludes to a further extension of archival parameters when he observes that beyond the official archive there is also "the private or personal archive, the messy collection of texts that accumulate around any author" (189). These are what Linda Morra, whose recent work on Canadian writing and the archive has similarly expanded notions of the archival beyond the institutional repository, calls "unarrested" archives (9): archives withheld from conventional repositories due either to an institution's disinterest in them, an author's refusal to surrender them, or some combination of the two. If archives operate through principles of scarcity and recovery, of restricted access, of site specificity, then much of the KSW poetic production—largely limited to the small press and little magazine context, and produced out of a particular institutional and pedagogical scene—can be read as an articulation of these principles. In other words, the writing produced

through the KSW in relation to the archive illustrates concretely the relationship Steve McCaffery—a writer, like Burnham, loosely affiliated with the Kootenay School—describes between general and restricted economies of writing: "a complex interaction of two contrastive, but not exclusive economies, within the single operation of writing" (203). The archive, like a restricted economy, is "based upon valorized notions of restraint, conservation, investment, profit, accumulation and cautious proceduralities in risk taking" (203). Reading the poetry emerging from the KSW not just through the archive but as an archive functions as a restricted economy upon an otherwise general economy of writing, striving "to govern writing, to force its appearance through an order of constraints" (203). At the same time, the archive also operates as a general economy, provoking endless investigations that will continually lead to differing conclusions. Attempts to read both the archive and the poetry, and the poetry as archive, necessarily impose a restricted economy upon an otherwise general one. That is to say, an otherwise *open* text, be it a poem or an archive, becomes to some extent *closed* through any provisional reading of it.

It soon becomes apparent to a researcher spending time in the KSW archives that the school organized itself as a quite conventional, if less hierarchical, bureaucratic structure. Hundreds of pages of the minutes from weekly meetings from 1986 to 1993; drafts of grant applications; correspondence with administrative figures in positions with funding agencies; office logs; phone records: these are the banal documents at the disposal of the cultural historian interested in a collective like KSW. Such documentation may appear disjunctive when read alongside the poetic texts which emerged from this administrated context, but the collective members of KSW appeared to recognize what Theodor Adorno had pointed out decades earlier: that culture and administration, long considered oppositional, are necessarily (if ambivalently) intertwined, and that "[w]hoever makes critically and unflinchingly conscious use of the means of administration and its institutions is still in a position to realize something which would be different from merely administrated culture" (Adorno 113). If the relative autonomy of the cultural attenuates its social praxis, then that autonomy, in the eyes of the activist artist, must be reduced. KSW's unashamed adoption of a bureaucratic structure was not only a pragmatic necessity, but an effort to close this gap. The collective's hope for social praxis was related to the extent to which it engaged with administrative cultural apparatuses. Moreover, the poetry emerging from the collective and the minutes that record its activities

may not be as discursively disjunct as they first appear. Just as the minutes can only gesture towards an absent context—we can see a record of who was at a meeting, for instance, and have one person's summary of what was discussed—so too can we read the poetry as offering a kind of recording of a moment: the minutes of life under late capital.

The various collections relating to KSW in the SFU Contemporary Literature Collection demonstrate how the archive at once shapes and reflects canonicity. In addition to the KSW fonds themselves, the collection also includes the Lisa Robertson fonds, which are processed and described in an online catalogue, as well as the Jeff Derksen/*Writing* Magazine fonds and the Tsunami Editions fonds, both of which are listed as collected but are neither processed, described, nor catalogued.[4] But the papers of other individual writers associated with KSW remain, as far as I am aware, unarrested, located in no repository other than the private archives of the writers themselves. This situation implies a hierarchy of recognition among the writers associated with KSW: Derksen and especially Robertson have to date received more critical and academic attention than the other writers variously affiliated with the school. A read through the Tsunami substrate unearths a document which may also reinforce this hierarchy of recognition: a list of Tsunami titles sold from May-October 1994. These titles include the first perfect-bound releases of a number of writers most often associated with KSW:

TSUNAMI SALES
MY 1 – OC 31 94

Title	Sold	Price	Ext
Ambit [Gerald Creede]	2	7.95	15.90
Pause Button [Kevin Davies]	5	8.95	44.75
Relative Minor [Deanna Ferguson]	6	9.95	41.70
XEclogue [Lisa Robertson]	25	8.95	223.75
Ape [Dan Farrell]	4	7.00	28.00
Braids of Twine [Peter Ganick]	3	4.00	12.00
Oral Tragedy [Dorothy Trujillo Lusk]	3	7.00	21.00
rImage [John Byrum]	4	6.50	26.00
Ready Terms [Robert Mittenthal]	3	5.00	15.00
Visualized Chemistry [Calvin Wharton]	4	5.00	20.00
			448.10
		Less 60%	(268.86)
		Payable	179.24

(Tsunami fonds)

Assessing the relative canonicity of writers affiliated with KSW through the measure of the market is ironic indeed, and we need to be wary of assigning too much significance to the numbers here; it is possible, even probable, that sales of Robertson's *XEclogue* were so much higher because someone elected to teach it. Also found in the Tsunami papers, incidentally, are a series of uncashed cheques made out to Tsunami Editions from Small Press Distribution totalling $143.21: material evidence, perhaps, of a sincere refusal to commodify this writing, but also possible evidence of administrative neglect (Tsunami fonds).

The Derksen and Robertson fonds provide traces, among the many drafts of texts that would eventually form *Dwell* and *XEclogue*, respectively, not only of the compositional process of these books, but of the community within which the writing took place: the papers here become an embodied archive of social relations. The Derksen fonds, for example, provide substantial materials relating to his composition of the poems that would comprise *Dwell* (1993), including typescript drafts with holograph notations of texts from the various "excursives" that make up "Hold on to Your Bag Betty"; a preliminary outline of the poem that would become "Interface" (a note card written in Derksen's hand reads "-written during Gulf War / -popular culture, TV ads, lines from songs etc" [Derksen fonds]); as well as the source texts from which Derksen would draw his decontextualized quotations that thread through "If History is the Memory of Time What Would Our Monument Be." The line "Countries exist because people think they do" (*Dwell* 60)—which sounds like a pithy summary of Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities"—was apparently lifted from a document entitled "Culture, Nationhood, and our Constitution," a statement developed by Darlene Marzari, BC's Minister Responsible for Culture at the time, "in consultation with B.C.'s cultural community" (Derksen fonds). The various statistics that thread their way through the poem—"Male 98%, married 92%" (60), for example—are taken from an article describing Canada's "corporate leaders" entitled "Life at the Top" in the July 1992 issue of *Canadian Business* (Derksen fonds). We also see that Derksen wrote and dated many of the sentences that would make up this long poem on the back of flyers for a show featuring the artists Aaron Van Dyke and Laurel Woodcock at Artspeak Gallery, KSW's parallel artist-run centre; promotional materials here become transformed into the poetic drafts that comprise the archival substrate. One of these drafts, dated "March 4 / 93," for example, has the handwritten line "Try a little triceps," alongside another

line, "It seems / appears cancer grows faster than hair or fingernails," both of which would appear in the poem as published in *Dwell* (62, 69). Although the lines were composed on the same day, they are not placed in sequence nor even in proximity in the published poem. Derksen's poem is assembled in such a way that lines like these, that share a similar referential vector—in this case, the body—thread through the text in a relationship of structural repetition rather than hypotactic reference. Here the archive itself—messy, incomplete, ultimately misleading—provides one possible answer to the question raised in the poem's title, a title which itself offers a response to Charles Olson's poem "History is the Memory of Time" in *The Maximus Poems*.

Within Robertson's fonds are notebooks that contain the drafts of texts that would become *XEclogue* (1993), drafts that show the writer revising back and forth between singular and collective pronouns, and between present and perfect tenses. On one holograph page Robertson (presumably) has drawn a square around a paragraph that would eventually become an important part of "How Pastoral," the "Prologue" to *XEclogue.* The version published in *XEclogue* reads: "Ontology is the luxury of the landed. Let's pretend you 'had' a land. Then you 'lost' it. Now fondly describe it. That is pastoral" ("notebook"). The holograph version reveals Robertson had been considering other pronouns: rather than the "you" in the published text, she had written "pretend we 'had' a land. Then say we lost it," over which she had superimposed "he," so the text would read "pretend he 'had' a land. Then say he lost it" ("notebook"). Similarly, in the holograph Robertson had revised the sentences that would become the opening lines of "How Pastoral." Those lines read in the published version as follows: "I needed a genre for the times that I go phantom. I needed a genre to rampage Liberty, haunt the foul freedom of silence." In the holograph version, we can see that Robertson at one point had considered writing these lines, "We need a genre for the times that we go phantom. We need a genre to rampage liberty" ("notebook"). The implications of shifting from "we" to "I" and from present to perfect tense in this passage are multiple, but to me the most significant would be that the holograph version reads more like a manifesto in its collective, present tense address ("We need a genre"), whereas the published version reads less like a manifesto than a personal reflection or explanation of her project: an exploration of the politics of pastoral and how pastoral might be written at the end of the twentieth century.

Reading through this palimpsest within the substrate throws into relief the implications of the "final" version through juxtaposition and contrast.

Such a reading follows a "genetic" critical model, which examines archival evidence of the evolution of a work not through an attempt to recover authorial "intent," but to consider the significance of the "final" version of a text through juxtaposition with its earlier iterations. The notebook in which these poems are drafted also contains the addresses of various writers and intellectuals within the Vancouver community, including those writers associated with KSW, as well as a time and directions for a meeting with "Clint" (presumably Burnham) one afternoon in Toronto ("notebook"). The close proximity of these more quotidian details with the drafts of work Robertson would publish reminds us of the collective matrix for this writing: just as Robertson vacillates between "I" and "we" in the drafts cited above, so too do we need to read these texts dialectically between the writing subject and the collective in which she is embedded.

The genetic critical approach that we might take with Robertson or Derksen's work can still be performed with the work of writers whose papers remain unarrested. In this case, rather than comparing drafts of poems within an archive with published versions of the poems, we could compare different versions of the same poem published in different venues. This suggests an inherent instability to KSW poetic production even in the ostensibly less-ephemeral venues such as anthologies, little magazines, or even books. Take as an example the case of Colin Smith's "Indolent Corollaries," published in both *East of Main* (1989) and Smith's perfect-bound Tsunami title *Multiple Poses* (1997). Here is the second stanza of the poem as published in *East of Main*:

> Anyhow I wake up (a habit, can't seem to break)
> and tie off my wrist for my morning coffee. Bath   stuff-face   out
> for love and shopping. I trundle along the drive, newspaper boxes leer
> misfortune out their faces, the gist of too much is "we killed
> something or someone and stand to clear a profit." Good intentions hunt
> Nicaraguan coffee and politically correct bananas. Looking for the mountains
> through trolley wires, spelling "thru" with an "ough" so it rhymes
> with "trough." Am I showboating my social construct,
> i.e. personality? Verified I have no girlfriends or boyfriends
> but every day I do get fucked in the head, heart and pocketbook
> by the President of the Free World, using only his hair dye for lubricant. (128)

This is the second stanza in the version published in *Multiple Poses*:

> Anyhow I wake up (unbreakable habit) and
> tie off my wrist for my morning coffee. Bath   stuff-face   out
> for love and product. I write and tote a slim "text"
> so I'll know which groceries to buy. Bigots are 55¢,

veggie back bacon $2.29. Trundle buggy, newspaper boxes leer
misfortune out their faces, the gist of too much is "we killed
something or someone and stand to clear a profit." Good intentions hunt
Sandinistan coffee and politically correct bananas. The mountains as
through trolley wires, spelling "thru" with an "ough" so it rhymes
with "trough." Am I showboating my social construct,
i.e. personality? Verifiable no girlfriends or boyfriends
but every day I do get fucked in the head, heart and pocketbook
by the President of the Free World, only his hair dye for lubricant. (53)

Both versions of the stanza attend to quotidian details and the ubiquity of consumerism, and both tend to emphasize discontinuity, *ostranenie*, and the disruption of the lyric subject, indicating a poetics determined towards the disjunctive. Both versions situate a subject attuned to his privileged position within neoliberal globalism and aware of both the cynicism and futility of political action reduced to consumer decisions, and both allude to US foreign policy and imperialist interventions—although the "President of the Free World" referenced in each version would be different in 1989 and 1997. Yet there are also substantial changes: sections are added or removed between the two versions, and topical references are clarified or updated: in the above passages "Nicaraguan coffee" becomes the more politically specific "Sandinistan coffee," for instance. Even a text like "Indolent Corollaries," which seems more "confessional" than most poems emerging from the context of KSW, cannot simply be read as such. It remains a documentation of an ephemeral structure of feeling in our long neoliberal moment, rather than a confessional narrative—and one that, as we see here, remains in process, even after publication.

It is unsurprising that the poetries emerging from KSW during the late 1980s and early 1990s have been associated with so-called Language writing in the US. KSW hosted the New Poetics Colloquium in 1985 that gathered a number of these American writers in Vancouver; significant Language writers such as Charles Bernstein and Lyn Hejinian held workshops at KSW in the late 1980s and early 1990s; and writers associated with KSW were in turn hosted at readings in San Francisco and New York during the same period. Klobucar and Barnholden emphasize this association in their Introduction to *Writing Class*, describing "the work associated with the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, and Ron Silliman's essays on the 'new sentence'" as "important touchstones in the evolution of a KSW aesthetic" (29). Considering the poetry within the wider frame of Language writing suggests we read it as moving towards a horizon of diminished reference, of a deliberate poetic opacity in an attempt

to frustrate reference. Such writing situates the reader as producer rather than consumer of meaning, or engages in a critique of the word as commodity fetish. For Steve McCaffery, such writing privileges "the incidentality of the signifier rather than the transcendentality of the referent," with the reader "seen structurally as a theoretical location in a textual activity" (McCaffery 19, 27). For Ron Silliman,

> What happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its expository, descriptive and narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of "realism," the illusion of reality in capitalist thought. (Silliman 10)

Following Silliman, a poetry which seeks to diminish or frustrate reference and call attention to the materiality of language is an anti-capitalist gesture at the level of the signifier. McCaffery's and Silliman's theories here seem appropriate frames through which to approach the poetry emerging from KSW in the late 1980s and early 1990s, insofar as these are conscious elements of the poetry. Burnham's reading of these texts as "social collage" follows this hermeneutic. "By collage" writes Burnham, "I mean work that operates with a high level of disjunction, and by *social* collage I mean that this disjunction operates as a critique of the hegemonic role of meaning in late capitalist society" (93, emphasis original). But the diminishment or frustration of reference is not the same as its elimination; as Derksen puts it, these texts magnify "existing social relations," and if approached as "*aesthetic rearticulartory practice[s]*," read as works of conjunction as much as disjunction ("Introduction" 9, emphasis original).

These approaches are not inconsistent with my practice of reading the poetry itself as an archive of context, as the embodiment of a community at a particular historical juncture. This becomes evident when we observe how frequently KSW poets return to their own texts—to reconsider them, reshape them, plunder them for new texts. This is probably most notable in the practice of Kevin Davies. Davies' *Pause Button* was composed, as Colin Smith recalls, out of slivers of longer texts written and destroyed with only intermittent and limited publication, "sequences in progress" he would read in public but refuse to surrender to Lary Bremner—the publisher of Tsunami Editions—until he finally published *Pause Button*, which Smith describes as "the accumulated and stitched-together pieces from these destroyed and renovated reading scripts" (Mancini and Smith 98). *Pause Button* presents text that, rather than leading to coherent reference, instead gestures towards a missing context:

 —[   ] a little in his hand, an involuntary
movement. Punch-drunk & frivolous,
making holes, delivering versions.
Having everything one needs in-
side one bag that one carries, or
lugs. [ ] heated myself therein
& was very violent. Now they
understand – *we're* the punchlines. (13)

The empty brackets are the most obvious such gesture towards the missing context, but the entire text could be read as doing so: Davies' compositional method here is indeed one of "making holes, delivering versions." *Pause Button* is exemplary of the tendency among writers affiliated with KSW to employ enigma as a structural component of a text; as Alan Davies (no relation to Kevin) puts it, the enigma, "made to be unresolved, affords the opposition of immersion, of argument: it offers an opaque exterior; not offering entry or exit, it posits" (71). Reading *Pause Button* is comparable to exploring a particularly disorganized archive: one continually unearths intriguing scraps which are suggestive of an absent context, but the text is also akin to the repertoire in these gestural components and in the performative context of its gestation. As Kevin Davies relates in his acknowledgements, "This poem is made up of the interruptions, rewritings & 'translations' of many poems & poem series, most of which were originally written or assembled for public readings."

 The archival history of Deanna Ferguson's recorded talk "And Weep for My Babe's Low Station," on a cassette tape deposited in SFU's Special Collections, presents a case study in the perils of the archival process. As far as I know, there is no record of the dating of the talk, nor any record of whether the talk was ever performed publicly. Nor is the talk included in the KSW online audio collection. The talk is therefore a repertoire available only in the archive, narrowly construed: a most ephemeral document that can only be found if one knows it is there. The tape is labelled with Ferguson's name and the talk's title, but in the process of its accession to SFU's collections, the title has been reinscribed as "Twiggy for my Babe's London Station." The archival process, in this case at least, corrupts even as it preserves. The talk provides a context for a reading of the work she was producing at the time, work that would comprise her Tsunami publication *The Relative Minor* (1993). This is a context that the poetry in turn further elaborates. "And Weep for My Babe's Low Station" is not a public talk as much as a recorded private monologue, evidenced by the absence of any

audience reactions and the occasional sounds of birds chirping, presumably outside a window where Ferguson talks. In other words, the tape records a "private" rehearsal of a public performance which may or may not arrive: a suspended repertoire of sorts. "And Weep for My Babe's Low Station" begins with a sociolinguistic analysis of the different speech utterances on the starship *Enterprise* from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, then moves on to a brief discussion of how Language Poetry would not be welcomed on the Enterprise because "instead of advocating openness and plurality in the interests of specific identities and specific groups" it would present writing as "counter socialization, unveiling the fundamental building blocks of sense." The talk further includes Ferguson singing a song about Lady Godiva; some of the definitions from the untitled glossary in the middle of *The Relative Minor*; a third-person narration of an encounter between "Deanna" and "Kevin" about the latter's upcoming move to "the big apple"; and concludes with a reading of section 24 of Kit Robinson's poem "Dayparts" from *The Champagne of Concrete* ("And Weep").

I would like to focus on one particular section of the talk, a reflection on growing up in a working-class section of Cranbrook (a reminder that Ferguson is one of the few KSW poets who actually hails from the Kootenays). Ferguson recalls how her father would imitate accents—of "Newfies," "Indians," "Scottish or high-class English," "a gay man"—and that she now realizes her "dad's conceptions of others, or of other cultures, were not only small-town-minded, but sinisterly deluded fabrication." She then considers how her own talk might be similarly problematic:

> But with even more horror I discover that that very legacy of irresponsible play at imitation persists in this prepared talk, replete with ersatz shrift of styles, sectional organization commanding hierarchy, subordination, and postponement, a dwelling on banal insight and counterfeit speech, the appropriation of form without regard to process, this wretched rhetoric, this sickening irony, makes me want to tear back to the redneck wrong side of a bad town where I belong. And so, just as the sun sinks behind immutable mountains, my heart sinks, and is as blackly disposed as this night, as the clouds gather, and weep for my babe's low station. ("And Weep")

Ferguson is careful in her talk to link this "irresponsible play at imitation" with her working-class background, her origins in a "redneck wrong side of a bad town," not to excuse the "irresponsibility," but rather to refuse to romanticize that class background while acknowledging it. Ferguson's talk reflects on the heteroglossia of language, employing a stylistic multiplicity while noting its "sectional organization commanding hierarchy,

subordination, and postponement." Reading her poetry alongside the talk, then, suggests we read the former as reflecting language's inescapable heteroglossia while attempting to flatten its hierarchies and tendencies towards subordination. Ferguson's questioning of a poetics reduced to apolitical formalist play anticipates wider ethical concerns within the avant-garde which seem only more timely in our contemporary moment, just as her reference to her father's imitating "Indians" alludes to the settler, colonial context of the Kootenays.

 "Received Standard" is representative of Ferguson's work in *The Relative Minor*, moving to an extreme pole of opacity and disjunction. These are the closing two stanzas of the poem:

> Lady Godiva
> was a freedom rider she was
> a sister, convincing, collective. Through
> tubes. Choosing to leave Minneapolis the big
> apple swell clerical and oh Mister Grant
> quit teasing. Contaminant-free yet fish
> politic the received standard everyone here
> looking at those sheep getting horny or
> Scottish blood. Attaining refinement
> read herence bordering on epicurean
> crack wise synthesis because
> intrinsic units disco compost
> sushi font differ
>
> One must immediately and directly lead
> so on and so far
> Just upon one time
> in friendly market
> I'll miss you most of all. (32)

Overlapping allusions within both talk and poem—to *Star Trek*, to the Big Apple, to Lady Godiva—cue us to read them as companion pieces, as does the concern in both texts with the relationship between language, class, and power. We *can* track references in these lines: to Olson's "Projective Verse" or to *The Wizard of Oz*, for instance. But any attempts to construct a coherent narrative or argument from these lines will be frustrated. Sianne Ngai includes Ferguson in her discussion of poets whose work articulates a "negative potentiality of language as exasperated atonality" (105). Reading Ferguson's "Still Life" from her later book *Rough Bush*, Ngai asserts that in this writing, "the question of what a word means (the form it gives to a pre-existent thought) *as well as* the question of how it relates abstractly to

another word in the system (form deferring to form) becomes secondary to its simply 'being there,' in all its insistence and affective force" (106, emphasis original). This critical framework could also apply to "Received Standard," and it is a convincing reading. Yet when we read "Received Standard" alongside "And Weep for My Babe's Low Station," what appears to be an opaque exercise in extreme disjunction becomes a meditation on the stratification of language according to class, power, race, and region, and an ironic comment on the illusion of a humanist, diverse linguistic community which masks the assumptions implicit in the idea of a "received standard" of English. The poem does not simply advance the argument of the talk by different means; we might read the poem as a discourse which aspires to evade or exceed the rhetorical limitations of the talk.

In a reflection on the Kootenay School, Derksen asserts that "there obviously is a dialogic relationship in the circulation of social conditions and political aesthetic decisions that results in 'structures of feeling' (Williams) and a 'structure of necessity' (Grossberg) embedded in an aesthetic" (*Annihilated* 285). Colliding Raymond Williams' notion of structures of feeling with Ann Cvetkovich's understanding of an affective archive, in which cultural texts are "repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves, but in the practices that surround their production and reception" (9), leads to a reading of the writing emerging from the context of KSW both as and through an affective archive. Certainly, critics have addressed this work through the concept of affect, as Jennifer Blair does in her essay on affect and Derksen's "Happy Locally, Sad Geopolitically," for instance. Ngai also attends to affect in the context of the writers associated with KSW in her essay—an essay that could be read as an early canonizing gesture in terms of the KSW poets it discusses (namely, Davies, Derksen, Dan Farrell, Ferguson, and Dorothy Trujillo Lusk). Ngai's inclusion of several KSW poets as exemplary practitioners of a poetics of abjection aligns with a reading of their work as and though the archive, particularly if we think of the connection between archives and waste, of "the fragile border that is usually built between the two" (Bates 96). It is precisely the combination of the writing's lack of canonicity, its tendency towards the enigmatic, its diminishment of reference, its circulation in different forms and in ephemeral sites (small press publications, little magazines, readings, talks), its affiliations with the collective rather than the singular, and its orientation to the minutial over the monumental, that invite us to read it both *through* and *as* an archive, both *through* and *as* a repertoire.

1 Throughout this essay, I focus on the period of KSW's existence from roughly 1984-1994, and my references to "writers associated with KSW" refers mainly to those writers included (or discussed) in Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden's 1999 anthology *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*. These include the writers I discuss in this essay—Peter Culley, Kevin Davies, Colin Smith, Lisa Robertson, Jeff Derksen, and Deanna Ferguson—as well as others I did not have space to include, notably Gerald Creede, Dan Farrell, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, and Nancy Shaw.

2 All references to the benefit are from the video recording "Celebration" in the Western Front archives.

3 I refer here to the collection of documents, including minutes, correspondence, financial records, publicity materials, and course catalogues, but also taped recordings of readings and talks, currently housed in Simon Fraser University's Special Collections as the Kootenay School of Writing fonds. When I was researching my doctoral dissertation, these materials were not yet acquired by SFU (it acquired them in 2004), but were made available to me in KSW's offices, at that time on Hamilton Street in Vancouver. My work on this paper has involved not only a return to that particular archive, but to the broader archive of my own doctoral research, conducted in 2000-2001. But the "archive" I reference in this paper extends beyond that particular collection, and includes the papers of Lisa Robertson, Jeff Derksen, and Tsunami Editions, as well as the various publications of the poets.

4 On a visit to SFU's Special Collections in September 2016, I was, through the generous assistance of the Collections staff, granted access to both the Derksen papers and the Tsunami papers. I would like to acknowledge that assistance, and the assistance of archival staff at the Western Front, in writing this paper.

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