

“I diverge / you diverge / we diverge”

Scale, Occupation, and an Introduction
to Stephen Collis’ *The Barricades Project*

Stephen Collis’ *The Barricades Project* branches off from what I might tentatively call “a tradition” of Canadian poetry that has taken root within Vancouver’s influential Kootenay School of Writing (KSW). Most recently, the poetry of the KSW seems to have focused on the field of architecture (its language, critical theories, and ideas) in order to enact a political critique that scrutinizes certain culturally dominant ideologies—including those of neoliberalism and of cultural nationalism—at play within the public, urban realm. I might point out works like Lisa Robertson’s *Occasional Work and Seven Walks* or Jeff Derksen’s *Transnational Muscle Cars* as examples of poetry that have attested recently to such an architectural sensibility. I might even go so far as to suggest that, for these West Coast poets, the interest in the public, urban domain points toward a current moment in Canadian art when poetry has begun to examine the role of Canadian culture within the urban space of globalized capitalism. For its part, the materiality of language has proffered a complex of differentiated, disparate, and fiercely heterogeneous elements that have, in Steve McCaffery’s words, “provided an abundance of architectural possibilities” for poetry—possibilities that continue to emerge from within contemporary, innovative writing (“Parapoetics” 98). Or, to be more accurate, these architectural ideas have become a critical response to contemporary urban exigencies placed *on* such writing, because modernity is urban by definition. However, as Collis himself has argued, “poetry’s relationship to architecture must not be limited to discussions of form and

structure as ends in themselves,” but rather this relationship “points toward the ways in which form and structure have become political and have possible (utopian) social implications” (“Frayed Trope” 144).¹ While architectural ideas in poetry have become an efficient means for poets to articulate their social, ideological, or literary contexts within a modern, urban setting, the politics enacted therein provide these poets with a critical paradigm through which they might turn the language of global capital against itself—a language that frequently imprisons notions of identity and subjectivity within a structure of domination. In this paradigm, the city itself has become a kind of experimental surface on which the poet might not only elucidate the quotidian demands placed upon language by collectivity, community, and urban interaction, but also write out the tensions that such a context creates between politics and art.

Stephen Collis' *The Barricades Project* follows in a manner similar to works like Ronald Johnson's *ARK* or Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* in its lifelong poetic scope. Struck by what Collis describes as contemporary poetry's “singular unambitiousness” (“Life-Long” 6), the poet hopes to create a work that tests the spatial mobility of language taken over the course of his entire lifetime. This paper explores *The Barricades Project*'s first two sections, *Anarchive* (2005) and *The Commons* (2008). In doing so, this paper asks the uncomfortable question: does poetry “do” anything? To whatever extent poetry does participate in the service of the public realm, I might argue that *The Barricades Project* reflects the poet's own inquiry, expressing his endless frustration and his unwavering hope that poetry might once again rescale its utopian ambitions to a position of former cultural prominence. *The Barricades Project* has been cut into three volumes (with more to follow). Collis sets his first volume, *Anarchive* (2005), in 1936 revolutionary Spain. He continues in the Wordsworthian landscapes of the English Lake District in *The Commons* (2008), and he follows up with his most recent work *To the Barricades* (2013), which takes place in Paris amidst the recognizable occupations and protests of the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries. Given the recent contexts of the Arab Spring, the global economic recession, and the subsequent Occupy movement, I might easily suggest how Collis' “life-long” project might itself become occupied, having already found its home among the revolutions of the past.² These recent events undoubtedly open up new, speculative avenues for *The Barricades Project* to explore, just as they have underscored how *The Barricades Project* already examines the volumes of our shared, cultural histories and common spaces. Collis' treatment of the project ties back to what he argues is “the contemporary problem: the

globalization of capital” (“Life-Long” 6; emphasis added)—a problem that he feels ultimately reduces to a matter of scale. Thus, he feels, the project itself must reflect this problem both in terms of its politics and in terms of its poetic form. Collis thematizes public space as a kind of “volume” in which poetry’s radical impulses materialize. He suggests a kind of “poetry of scale,” which demands that the questioning of institutional, privatized systems of genre, grammar, and language be taken together within the context of the globalization of capital.³

Wherever possible, *The Barricades Project* asserts a resistance to ideological superstructures, and, in doing so, the project represents the poet’s desire to seek alternatives to such established hegemonies. *The Barricades Project* plays out this aim in two ways. In *Anarchive*, for example, the poet questions whether such a resistance might find its home within the discourses of poetry. In this text, Collis uses the Spanish Civil War as a springboard into his own contemporary investigations. On the back cover of his later text, *The Commons*, Collis expresses his desire to find a kind of literary commons “outside [of] property’s exclusive and excluding domain” (n. pag.). In this way, Collis constructs a poetry “commons” that speaks “towards or for ‘the boundless’” (“Life-Long” 5). Such a commons, as Alfred Noyes explains, represents “not so much an alternative to the system of private property as it is the *absence* of the private” (139; emphasis added). Each text registers a distinct tone. The first book, *Anarchive*, activates an aggressive rhetoric of revolution and declamatory public address; the second book, *The Commons*, meditates upon poetry’s pastoral and lyrical past in order to undermine this rural history. Despite their differences, Collis treats each text as “parts of the same” albeit “discontinuous long poem” that asks “where the relationship between part and whole resides—socially, linguistically—in terms of the poem, the serial, the book, [and] the *oeuvre*” (Interview n. pag.). Indeed, the texts are structurally quite similar (although *The Commons* is undoubtedly the denser of the two). Collis divides each text, for example, into three sections: the first section contextualizes the individual work historically; the second section locates the plot geographically; and, finally, the third section returns us to *The Barricades Project* spatially, thereby rescaling a segmented poetics (of parts) in terms of a complete, if unfinished, *oeuvre* (a whole). This constant rescaling of poetry’s historical modes and literary institutions helps to form what Noyes has called a “borderless structure” within the volumes of both poetry and culture, a structure that is “thoroughly of nowhere,” and whose particularities “can be permitted to speak of the ‘Barricades Project,’ without

having a sense of its limits, origins, or ultimate ends" (137). This open-ended tactic empowers the poet to navigate tensions arising between a politics of form and a poetics of resistance.

David Harvey reminds us that the "imaginative free play" of utopian idealism defines alternatives "not in terms of some static form or even some perfected emancipatory process," but rather such ideals define alternatives "rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as [such a dialectical utopianism] points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical development" (*Spaces* 163, 196). Collis' poetry of scale investigates how poetry's elastic imaginary often recalibrates the social and political cartography of culture in order to reveal certain assumptions about the use and reuse of language.⁴ Noyes notes, for example, that Collis collaborates with poetry's revolutionary past in order to assert a poetics at the nexus of social reformation. As Noyes explains, the past of interest to Collis here "is the past of change, a history of willed futures, a history of movements for change" (138). Indeed, *Anarchive* takes place in "the midst of a recognizable revolution," and *The Commons* takes place at the moment when the "English common lands were taken, by force and parliamentary decree, out of the hands of local, collective use" (138-39). Revisiting the past, either through reference and citation or through stylistic devices, reminds the reader that language is itself a communal activity, a "common" event within culture. As Collis himself has argued about poets such as Robert Duncan, Lisa Robertson, and Ronald Johnson, each of whom have themselves participated in a similar kind of literary retooling, "[w]hen poets reconfigure the works of others . . . it may appear that the social there enacted is not a community of citizens but one of citations. However in turning the mixture of past poetries into the architecture of future poetry, these writers envision an impossible poetic space where the community of poets . . . meet and exchange languages" ("Frayed Trope" 160).⁵ A combination of citation and reference not only mobilizes a text to create a highly pluralistic, even eclectic, language "commons," but also engages the text's thematic and critical trespass into these "common" institutions of language. Take *The Commons*, in which the poet demands that both the reader and the work move intertextually across the increasingly privatized English countryside of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Such movement opens up a privatized past to a contemporary re-examination. Here, an imagined past cannot be consigned to the private annals of history, shelved away from public access; rather, the past becomes a site designed

specifically for public use, reformation, and reinterpretation. As Noyes explains, “[i]n so far as a literature takes on a practice of quotation, collage, allusion and intertextuality, it holds out a sort of commons—a page on which any may write with the common resources of the poetic past” (139). In doing so, the poet binds his larger political critique to the activities of urban, communal reconstruction through metaphor, allusion, and intertextuality, forming a poetry that “choruses out of context” (Noyes 137). To this end, Collis attempts to defeat—or, at the very least, question—potential privatizing boundary markers—either real or poetic—of genre, locality, or historical periodization. Ultimately, the recombinant use of these historical modes of expression allows Collis to test not only the boundaries of these poetic institutions, but also their assumed stabilities, both of which have been carried over from modernism into postmodernism and beyond.

“Common” Spaces and Other Barricades

The Barricades Project aims to erect a “barricade in language” in order to “(temporarily) obstruct a passage in Capital or, alternatively, [cast down] a fence put in place by the language of capital” (Noyes 137). Take, for example, how Collis threads his poem “Dear Common” throughout *The Barricades Project*. This segmentation permits the poet to take up multiple residencies across the breadth of both volumes as well as to maintain common sites throughout each individual text. As a result, the reader must move in and among the text’s multiple, common spaces in order to read the poem. Thus, Collis takes advantage of the reader’s impulse to accumulate meaning by sending the reader constantly away to discover the poem elsewhere. This textual stoppage acts as a kind of language barricade: the reader never gains access to the whole poem since it is still being written. Collis claims that his purpose here is to “produce what is past / again and again” in the hope that “the violence of forgetting / will be remembered / with indignation” (*Anarchive* 10). Such a provocation questions the role that contemporary poetry plays within culture. In particular, “Dear Common” asks whether today’s poetry can affect social change at all, or whether poetry has itself become an outmoded form of expression. In other words, can poetry “do” rather than simply “be”? Is the poem leading the charge? Or is poetry merely the material detritus from which we form these barricades? Between each text, Collis’ mode of inquiry differs. *Anarchive*, for example, voices an anxiety of ethics through its rhetoric of declamation. In this volume, Collis’ “Dear Common” calls for the dismantlement of our public space. Only

through such dismantlement, he seems to argue, can this space be rebuilt from the grammatical detritus left behind in *Anarchive's* revolutionary wake. *The Commons*, however, takes a more erosive approach. In this text, Collis mixes contemporary twenty-first-century modes of expression, events, and languages anachronistically with nineteenth-century poetic sensibilities, locations, and genres. Throughout *The Commons*, Collis slowly undermines the Romantic's claim upon the public commons of the English Lake District. In both texts, Collis combines the material detritus of the past with a poetics of the present in a radically eclectic way that, when taken together, moves his poetry toward an examination of how the hierarchical institutions of tradition and history might themselves be restructured.

Anarchive's "Dear Common" pledges, for example, "to name you futures / that have not been / written down" (9-10), and the poem considers "the heart of the future / repetition" (10). We might take the antecedent of "you" here to refer back to the "common" space of language itself—the subject of the poem's proper addressee, "Dear Common." In this way, Collis names the "Common" to be the "futures / that have not been / written down." Within poetry, language alone presents itself as *the* "common" element shared between both text and reader alike. The poem takes itself to be its own subject; "Dear Common" pledges itself, therefore, to be a kind of textual future, thereby telegraphing its recurrence in correspondence with the external reader. Indeed, Collis' disintegration of the poem seems to make good on its promise of return, even though individual textual fragments might not always be of the same scale as previous or even future segments. The poem invests itself, in other words, as language capital, and it speculates upon its own textual and semantic delivery. Collis then spreads these textual "futures" among "the ruins of / imagined communities" (15), whose own radical dismantlement had urged their "soft walls to remain / a whisper outside / the institutions / of palaver" (14). Here, I might argue that *Anarchive* constructs a kind of imagined cityscape that attempts to gather its community of anarchists together within a socio-political space of language. As Collis has argued elsewhere, poetry shares a primary and ambitious social concern with architecture, in that both practices—architecture and poetry—posit themselves as a "nexus of an imagined community" ("Frayed Trope" 147). By allowing not only his project, but also his poem to inhabit multiple historical periods, geographical locations, and textual volumes, Collis underscores poetry's desire to take up residency within our built world, where language often becomes reduced to a form of capital, and poetry itself functions as a capital project.⁶

Just as the city organizes our multiple cultures into imagined utopian communities, so too does language attempt to organize our multiple dialects into an imagined (perhaps utopian) common space. In *Anarchive*, the poet claims that these “daily approximation[s] / of utopia” (16) attempt to form “spontaneous links” (15) between the multiple, fractured elements of culture—elements that are themselves unstable and in flux. As such, *Anarchive*’s occupied and revolutionary cityscape becomes an example of what Calgary-based architect Marc Boutin has referred to as “a verb”: “a process, a continually shifting landscape based on activity, accessibility and imprintability,” all of which draw our attention back to the concerns of the urban (n. pag.). For Collis, what happens to poetry when the concerns of policy—the organizing principles of a culture’s constituent parts—meet the urgencies of aesthetics is at issue here. Inasmuch as *The Barricades Project* interrogates the dual issues of openness and enclosure, the project challenges not only how politics open up poetry to the wider, public discourses, but also how such political discourse simultaneously threatens to enclose poetry within a structure of ideology. Note how “Dear Common” urges the reader to “break off” from the whole: “I diverge / you diverge / we diverge . . . so in this way one / may become isolated,” until “we the anarchists / are everywhere and nowhere / nowhere at once” (*Anarchive* 14-15). The poem atomizes, transforming itself into a formless structure that undermines the notion of a stable and “ubiquitous utopia” (31). Just as Phyllis Webb’s poem “Performance” (the source of this passage) demands that the reader consider “[w]ho is the *I* infesting my poems” (352), so also does Collis demand that the reader contemplate how the individual comes to identify with the whole—whether as part of the collective city or as part of the collective anarchy—and how such identification might lead the reader ultimately to conflate or equate notions of collectivity with those of stability.

Yet the poem never escapes being a poem. The poem must remain part of its own imagined community, a resident located within the institution of a poetic tradition. While Collis seeks a poetry that occupies a space of resistance, he also questions if the “utopian” can assert an effective critique of the socio-political order of global capital culture. For its part, *The Barricades Project* asks us to consider why poetry might be “the revolutionary act *par excellence*”—or not (cf. Guy Debord’s *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*). “Dear Common” reminds us that in the “abyss of history . . . rebellion was in [poetry’s] blood” (*Anarchive* 31). This rebellion was continuously “looking for / a space for hope” from which it might campaign “against / what history is / in the mind” (33). Here, Collis points out the gap

between the expected results of revolutions past and the actual outcomes of these rebellions. While one might hope that radical ideology might alter the social world, failure always remains a possible, even common, result of any revolutionary movement. As Collis remarks, “[p]oetry demands / the impossible . . . we have not won / our political battles” (32). The poet suggests that even when poetry attempts to dismantle traditional institutional hierarchies, poetry often fails to remove the perceived hierarchy between, for example, the poet who communicates textual meaning and the reader who passively receives this meaning. Collis writes in yet another iteration of the poem:

Tell me
Theodore Adorno
if you know
is art a logic
that makes reason ridiculous?
Or if it isn't
tell me why the singing ended
.....
are these means really appropriate
to our appropriated ends?
.....
thinking about politics lacked poetry
when it was poetry
lost its politics
and set off for a world of *its* own. (“Life-Long” 21)

Rather than collapsing the barrier between poet and reader, poetry's radicalism often inverts the author-reader relationship, relying instead on the reader to construct meaning. In doing so, poetry merely trades one “Franco” for another. “[I]n real revolutions,” Collis notes, “every ideology shatters / thrown down by the throng” (*Anarchive* 15). Moreover, “Dear Common” desires to “campaign against . . . what the poem is” (33). Note how his tone shifts, disclosing poetry's past failures to the public. “Dear Common take / these letters as / confessions,” writes Collis, “as I wait for the / fuse to burn the / fascists to strike so / we can strike and throw / the state down just / throw it down and / begin without boundary / bound” (72-73). As Collis further reminds us, “you cannot / commit acts for / liberty that counter / the essence of liberty” (71-72). Nor can one liberate a commons within language in order to privatize that language. Purge language of its privileging hierarchies, demands the text, but do so without simply replacing those structures. Such a move would only block the passage of language's shared progress.

The Barricades Project rescales the events of history, fitting them within a contemporary poetic landscape. *Anarchive* comments, for example, on

how the general often envelops the specific by rescaling it to fit within a contemporary political, cultural, or linguistic milieu. As Collis' portmanteau title suggests, the poet wishes to create both "an archive" designed to preserve literature's historical modes of representation, and "an anarchy" designed to destroy these modes of representation. On the one hand, "an archive" preserves the volumes and artifacts that a culture deems significant by shelving these artifacts away from the public's reach; on the other hand, "an anarchy" suggests that these documents have already been seized by public unrest and that they now belong to the larger discourses of the public space. By embracing the plurality of existing cultural remains, the poet is able to subject these remains to recombination and reformation. As a further example, *The Commons* uses England's privatized countryside as a metaphor for how literary tradition often lays a proprietary claim to landscape, style, genre, historical period, and subjectivity, all of which Collis suggests that contemporary poetry might reform in order to combat these privatizing impulses. *The Commons* invades the spaces of the past in order to seize the consignment of representation from a privatized history. In both texts, Collis implements an aesthetic that retools the past in order to reform the present—a praxis of poetry that relies on using resources already at hand in order to erect a barricade in language. Poetry, like revolution, longs for blockade and stoppage. These "dead ends," Noyes explains, "force us to circle back to other streets—streets not yet blocked, streets that might be in need of blockading—streets of possibility, streets of trespass and occupation" (138). I might even go so far as to suggest that if contemporary, innovative poetry "does" anything, then *The Barricades Project* showcases the extent to which such poetry reroutes our own exploration of previously uncharted avenues of cultural representation, avenues that have been missing from a history rife with exclusivity and exclusion. *The Barricades Project* enjoins the reader, in other words, to refuse literary history's proprietary claims, so that this history might become more fully "in the present." To this end, Collis constructs a diachronically fluid poetry that permits the reader to trespass freely among the spatial, temporal, and textual volumes of history, and, in doing so, he is able to launch his poetics—and by extension, our literary culture—into a shared and radical, public space of protest.

"Clear" and Common Volumes

The narrative of *The Commons* follows the so-called mad poet John Clare as he escapes from his asylum in Essex and travels to his home in Helpston.

Clare is a thoroughly quixotic character who—rather than tilting at antagonistic windmills—“vanquish[es] fences” in order to “forcefully [open] enclosures” in language (44). We first meet John Clare in the opening sequence of *The Commons*' second section. Collis titles this sequence, ironically, “Clear as Clare,” punning on the French adjective *clair*, meaning “clear.” However, Collis' protagonist is anything but clear; his personal language often borders on nonsensical ravings that, like fences cutting through the English countryside, obstruct the passage of meaning to the reader. Take, for example, his description of a quarry that he passes on his journey home: “old quarry / swordy well / lip tipped and vetted / pilfering hedgerows / sheep and dale / roly poly scriptor est / botanized and abetted / rough grass / to trim lawn / remains disinhabited” (35). On the one hand, Clare describes a typical English country landscape. This landscape contains an abandoned stone quarry surrounded by valleys that have been divided by stone fences. On the other hand, Clare's deliberate “un-clarity” critiques this landscape as it describes it. Not only do the “pilfering hedgerows,” for example, rob the landscape of its “common” ground by delineating the bounds of private property, but these walls also owe their existence to the “pilfering” of stones from the surrounding quarries—the literalized robbing of the “common ground” itself. Here, even nature turns against itself: “rough grass” and “sheep” aid and “abet” the accumulation of property. Clare's remark that this landscape “remains disinhabited”—rather than “uninhabited”—suggests that privatization prevents settlement. Moreover, Clare's rejection of normative grammar and syntax also cuts away at our shared language. Instead, Clare creates his own, personal dialect of English from an assemblage of personal remembrances and rhetorics.

Clare slips repeatedly into this personal idiolect throughout the text—a kind of “real language of men” beyond what Wordsworth conceives.⁷ Visually, Clare's utterance “as ey in meyne and theyne” (115), for example, appears almost nonsensical; however, when taken aurally the text gains a new synthesis of meaning. The phrase might in fact sound something like “as *I* in mine and thine”—literally placing the lyrical “I” (rescaled to “ey”) into the second person possessive. Clare implies that his “language” belongs equally to both himself and the public. This “rescaling” of the first person recurs throughout the text, and, once again, the reader is forced to ask, “Who is this *I* infesting this poem?” Compare this previous line to a later excerpt from “Dear Common” in which Collis writes: “Ordinary things / ‘doves’ and ‘stones’ / other bodies / exteriority *in me* / movements posing / the world”

(*Commons* 123; emphasis added), or, similarly, to an earlier line: “[T]hat *me / was we* in my private version” (108; emphasis added). This repetitive situating of the lyrical subject into the collective whole suggests the extent to which the personal in fact belongs to the liberated public domain. Collis compels the reader to find common ground within the cultural volumes of language. He even goes so far as to place Clare’s personal language firmly within our own shared literary tradition. For example, Clare’s observation that “*aapral es cruddle moot*” (115)—which I take to mean, “April is the cruelest month”—is perhaps a brief, anachronistic dig at T. S. Eliot and his high Modernist cohorts (Eliot 1). This short but radical encounter with Eliot aligns Collis’ text with the Modernist avant-garde, in addition to the text’s already established link to Wordsworth’s formal experimentation. Taken together, however, these references draw our attention to the “present-ness” of this text, since the text belongs to neither historical period nor formal experimentation.

In “Words’ Worth,” Collis tells us that the “words’ value is in the words’ freedom” (*Commons* 111). For Clare, this freedom entails that the word be liberated from grammatical and semantic signification.⁸ By destroying the position of the word within normative grammar, the poet destroys the status of the word in language. In “Words’ Worth,” we read that Clare now inhabits “that Poetic Region”—the landscape of Wordsworth’s Lake District. Just as soon as the poet takes up his residency here, the very characteristics of these lakes begin to take on new significance. These lakes become the “swimming language lakes” of literature, lakes that now dot the poetic landscape of tradition (111). Collis writes “*lake* a flock of sheep” or “*more lake* a man / *lake* clouds sound” (109; emphasis added). Notice here his use of the word “lake” to operate like a corrupted simile. I might even go so far as to suggest that, since Collis wishes to undermine Wordsworth’s claim on these lakes, we must also perform our own renovation of this passage by replacing those errant “lakes” with “likes”—as in “*more like* a man / *like* clouds sound.” As Clare remarks, “this land is your [Wordsworth’s] land but / I’ve bought it now” (108). This transfer of ownership seems to entitle Clare to do with the land as he pleases; however, Clare soon recognizes the danger of this assumption, and he reminds the reader that “that *me / was we* in my private version,” and that any subsequent “colonized description” of the land would only “guide to death” (108). Clare claims, therefore, that any further act of privatization would only serve to undermine his efforts to create a language commons to be used for our public well-being. As he notes, “the poem [is]

not a / nation's property but a commons all can share," (108)—a (perhaps utopian) space liberated from literary privatization.

Out of the Poems and into the Streets

In the 1950s, members of the Lettrist International Movement in Paris had declared that poetry is written in the "form of cities," further cementing the practice of poetry within the civic realm of the public space ("Potlatch #5" n. pag.). By May 1968, the Situationist-inspired revolution had reconfigured the city's architecture "with decidedly *poetic* ends" (Dworkin 11; emphasis added). Graffiti covered the streets with slogans promising utopia: *Sous les pavé, la plage* ("Under the pavement, the beach"). In spite of the promise to deliver radical social change, which had excited an entire generation of architects and poets to revolutionary ends, this action had brought with it an equal measure of disappointment at the reluctance of the world to go along with these ambitions. One of the aims of this paper has been to imply the extent to which poetry critiques the public urban domain as a mechanism in which excess capital simultaneously flows and becomes fixed. If architecture is the material form of our cultural ambitions, then poetry is the articulation of those ambitions. In the face of globalized capitalism, the poet might find it increasingly difficult to oppose forces that otherwise drive the private accumulation of both material goods and linguistic meaning. However, when the poet articulates our cultural aspirations as a utopian gesture of language, the poet scales poetry to a level situated between the social and the political. In doing so, the poet constructs a kind of "architecture of poetry," built within the public space of language.

By participating in the civic realm, Collis constructs a poetry that not only finds itself occupying a space of resistance within culture, but also, in his exploration of how a utopian revolutionary poetics might counter the dispersal of global capital culture, Collis constructs a poetry that hopes to inspire peaceful socio-political change: a "space of hope" built for poetry's imagined future as well as its imagined past.⁹ And although we might easily debunk the fantasy of utopia, dismissing its viability as a means to organize our daily lives, such a fantasy in poetry nevertheless proposes possible futures that this profession might construct. As innovative Canadian poetry now enters into the second decade of the new millennium, poetry will no doubt continue to forge ahead along already well-established intellectual and aesthetic trajectories, just as poetry will no doubt find new, untapped avenues of potential to explore, prying up new cobblestones from which to

erect new barricades. Noyes writes, “[A]ll time’s peasants pin a hope” (140). In spite of—or, perhaps, because of—poetry’s anxiety about its power to enact social change, poets continue to test the limits of such a proposal. By throwing down walls that prevent progress and by erecting other barriers that promote radical movement, Collis proposes an alternate image for the world, an image unfettered by the imprisoning regimes of dominant ideologies, an image that might yet pin such a hope to the future of poetry.

NOTES

- 1 Collis’ argument follows Charles Bernstein’s central thesis in *The Politics of Poetic Form* to a certain point. Bernstein argues that “radically innovative styles [of poetics] can have political meanings” (vii) that allow for “a more comprehensive understanding of the formulation of public space: *of polis*” (236; emphasis added). Although Collis agrees with Bernstein’s assertion, he also adds that “the architectural gives expression to poetry’s social and utopian desires, and furthermore . . . the architectural paradigm is crucial to the understanding of twentieth-century avant-garde poetics”—a notion which Bernstein falls short of enunciating (“Frayed Trope” 144).
- 2 Indeed, Collis has participated widely in the Occupy movement of Vancouver since the movement took up residence in October 2011. Collis has since released a collection of writings on this movement entitled *Dispatches from the Occupation* (2012). As David Harvey notes, the tactics of the Occupy movement have been to demonstrate what happens when a protest moves “close to where many of the levers of power are centered” and effectively “convert[s] [a] public space into a political commons, a place for open discussion and debate over what that power is doing and how best to oppose its reach” (“Rebels on the Street” n. pag.). Collis’ other writings on the Occupy movement may also be accessed online via *Occupy Vancouver Voice*. I watch with anticipation to see how these movements might yet inform Collis’ work in the years to come.
- 3 Here, I borrow Collis’ term “poetry of scale” from “*The Barricades Project*, the Life-Long Poem, and the Politics of Form.”
- 4 My use of the term “imaginary” invokes Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Lacan (see *Sublime* 95-144) in that I suggest poetry’s desire to enact a politics of form has been accelerated by its search for other aesthetic proving grounds on which it might enunciate its own identity. By keeping the search for identity constantly on the move, poetry itself undergoes a kind of discursive and aesthetic rescaling.
- 5 In a personal email correspondence, Collis lists several architects, theorists, and poets who have been of “crucial importance” to his own poetic practice. Among those figures, Collis includes Rem Koolhaas, Robert Venturi, Antonio Gaudi, David Harvey, and Ronald Johnson (“Re: Quick Question” n. pag.).
- 6 Here, my argument follows from insights made by Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Steve McCaffery, and Jeff Derksen—all of whom comment on how language functions as capital and how poetry shares a dialectic relationship with capitalism. While the arguments made by these critics are both compelling and convincing, these arguments are also far too extensive to rehearse here with any justice. All of these critics, however, suggest the ways in which a radical poetic structure might be used methodologically

in order to combat the potential alienating forces of capitalism. See "Disappearance of the Word" by Silliman, "Dollar Value of Poetry" by Bernstein, "Rejection of Closure" by Hejinian, *North of Intention* by McCaffery, and "Where Have All the Equal Signs Gone?" by Derksen.

- 7 In "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," William Wordsworth explains that *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) began "as an experiment" in order to discover how poets might use "the real language of men" as a model for the metrical arrangement of poetry (1). Wordsworth continues, explaining that often the language used by "even the greatest Poet" falls short "in liveliness and truth . . . of that which is uttered by men in real life" (16). Wordsworth hopes that his lyrical experimentation might inject some of this passion of "real life" into poetry, thereby resuscitating poetry from obsolescence and stagnancy. Despite these intentions, however, Wordsworth's poetry never actually lives up to this claim, adhering strictly, as it does, to regular metrical patterns and ornate poetic diction.
- 8 Žižek argues that two kinds of freedom exist today: "formal" freedom and "actual" freedom. He explains that "the distinction between 'formal' and 'actual' freedom ultimately amounts to: 'formal' freedom is the freedom of choice within the coordinates of the existing power relations, while 'actual' freedom designates the site of an intervention which undermines these very coordinates" (*On Belief* 122). I suspect that Collis deploys a similar "actual" freedom throughout his work.
- 9 I borrow this term from David Harvey's book of the same name. In *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey explores the contemporary urban scene within the context of economic equality and social justice.

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