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Stutter, Chew, Stop: Three Mandible Modes in the Poetry of Jordan Scott

As a site for the expression of audible linguistic and extralinguistic sounds, the mouth is undeniably a powerful apparatus for meaning making. The mouth can articulate the environment and world; it can also fragment them. The mouth can break down and ingest materials; it can also expel them. The mouth can divulge information; it can also conceal it. In *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (2014), scholar and artist Brandon LaBelle positions the mouth as an integral "contact zone where language performs as a powerful agent" (2) for mobilizing the forces of subjectivity and agency in personal, social, and political spheres. In conjunction with what anthropologist Edward Sapir calls the "organs of speech"—"[t]he lungs, the larynx, the palate, the nose, the tongue, the teeth, and the lips" (7)—the mouth gives shape to outpourings of sonic expression that bring forth the voice and figure the vocalizing subject as an autonomous being within a network of human, posthuman, and non-human assemblages. Remarking on the mouth's complex functions across these assemblages, LaBelle identifies what he calls "'modalities of mouthing,' or methodologies of bodily figuring, each of which contours, interrupts, conspires with, or elaborates subjectivity" (11). These modalities include speaking and stuttering, biting and chewing, reciting and stopping, and so on. LaBelle's account of these modalities leads him to position the mouth as a site of "extremely vital productions by which the spoken is deeply extended, as well as brought into question." For LaBelle, the mouth "reveals the borders of the linguistic while enlivening understandings of what counts as language" (11). These "borders of the linguistic," as they are revealed and obscured, are central to the inquiry of this article.

LaBelle describes his lexicon of the mouth's movements as a delineation of an encompassing and expansive poetics. He suggests that a poetics of the mouth invokes "beyond the strictly linguistic to that of worldly experience" and "enrich[es] our understanding of all the signifying modalities by which the body comes to perform" (12). The mouth is prominently featured in the oeuvre of Canadian poet Jordan Scott, whose works present formidable case studies for investigating the

significance of the mouth in poetry and poetics. Scott's work engages the possibilities of mouth-based meaning making across a heterogeneity of registers—personal, social, material, and political. It also presents readers with a compelling continguity between mouth and ecology, which forms a through line across a number of his books. To advance this study, I focus on three of Scott's texts that each demonstrate a distinct and dynamic performance of mouthing with particular emphases on human and non-human registers. These texts are *Blert* (2008), Scott's personal exploration of stuttering and "nature poetry"; *Decomp* (2013), a collaborative text (with Canadian poet Stephen Collis) that rethinks the ontological vibrance of British Columbia's biogeoclimatic zones; and *Lanterns at Guantánamo* (2019), his poetry-adjacent online multimedia assemblage that explores disfluency and "speechscapes" at the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center. Reading across these texts, this article examines the mouth as it manifests and is mobilized within Scott's poetry, with a particular interest in how he places language under the pressure of external grammars to challenge the power dynamics of linguistic communication, and in the ways that environmental considerations and verbal expressivity shape one another.

Stuttering Sublime: *Blert*

Scott's exploration of mouthing modalities is most strongly evident in his book *Blert*, which he describes "as a spelunk into the mouth of a stutterer . . . a trek across labial regions, a navigation of tracheal rills, and a full bore squirm inside the mouth's wear and tear" (64). The poems are comprised of words and sequences that Scott finds challenging to read aloud as a stutterer: "Tonsils click hummocky, sound of hummingbirds drenched in glacial milk" (25), for example. The poems also contain playfully repetitive structures:

> Of my mouth and me. Of other people's fluent mouths
> and me. Of fluency and me. Of me and my mouth. Of
> me and other people's fluent mouths. Of me and fluency.
> My mouth and me. Fluent words and me. Other people's
> fluent mouths and me. Me and my mouth. Me and fluent.
> Me and other people's fluent mouths. (48)

Citing the personal dimension of Scott's compositional approach, poet and critic Craig Dworkin explains that Scott's "stutter seems to be tripped by initial stressed syllables beginning with nasal stops or plosive occlusives (whether aspirated, partially voiced, or voiced nasals) and exacerbated

by terminal fricatives and the repetition of internal vowels across words" (179). By composing poetry guided by the complexity of his stutter, Scott transfers "the etiology of his stammer onto the structure of poetic language" (Dworkin 179). *Blert*'s poems foreground Scott's mouth and its inimitable interactions of tissue, bone, saliva, and muscle, while drawing attention to the mediation of stuttering on processes of vocal emittance. This map of his stutter's logic is downloaded to the reader who, even if they usually speak and read with fluency, necessarily stutter when reading *Blert*. Open the book to any page to find an example of *Blert*'s difficulty:

> You lambada glyph: cockatiel into calligraphy like your mouthwash swills hurricane. Puke gauze sphagnum and purr: *outbreaks will diminish* against the chincherinchee festooned on bronchial, you go on go on, urge backwash cha-cha-cha, homily into boomshackalacka like fungi canoodle sequoia: *say nosh cricket merengue, your turn, say gnash locust meringue.* (61)

The diction of *Blert* is rife with unfamiliar and invented words. Scott punctuates this language with commas, periods, and colons in a way that resembles common usage; however, the words together are indeed often a "swills hurricane" of nonsense. As Dworkin points out in his discussion of *Blert*, phrases such as "cha-cha-cha" replicate the stutter's force of involuntary repetition and delay. "[T]he difficulty of reading Scott's text," writes poet and critic Tyrone Williams, "is not due to his rather common use of parataxis but rather its scientific-cum-phonetic lexicon (anatomical, botanical, geographical, etc.), its Joycean neologisms, and its emphasis on the mechanics of pronunciation." One of the book's main thrusts, then, as Williams and Dworkin agree, is an enactment of the stuttering mouth.

Williams expresses some reservations about *Blert* as an aesthetic representation of disability. He wonders,

> [D]oes Scott risk self-exoticism to the extent *Blert* might suggest to non-stutterers that all stuttering sounds the same from the inside, even though Scott has been clear that the idiolect on view in his book cannot be abstracted as a general score from which others might perform?

Williams hopes that readers do not conflate all acts of stuttering by assuming that *Blert* represents what stuttering looks and sounds like. Indeed, I caution readers and listeners to approach *Blert* critically, knowing that the actions and sounds of one's mouth are deeply connected to one's

individual subjectivity. Careful readers know that Scott's text enacts and represents stuttering as a part of his identity. Dworkin gestures to this point when he identifies what "trips" Scott's stutter. Likewise, Scott alludes to the subjective position he occupies within the text when he writes "word order = world ardour" (13) and "word languor = world rancour" (46)—phrases that gesture toward the dictum frequently associated with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: word order = world order. The language that we know and language as we know it construct our worldview.[1] Scott's playful reconfiguration of the dictum suggests a less than straightforward relation to it, suggesting that the connection between word and world is also highly individualistic.[2]

Dworkin's and Williams' analyses of *Blert* raise fundamental questions about the relationship between identity, disfluency, and disability. Scholar Joshua St. Pierre unpacks this relationship, urging for a reconsideration of assumptions regarding speech, communication, disability, and their socio-political importance and, thereby, of stuttering as part of a diversity of communicative modes.[3] He points out that stuttering is frequently theorized within a medical model that represents it as "unwanted" and "invasive," which in turn objectifies the stutterer by reinforcing oppressive "abled/disabled binaries" (6). For St. Pierre, stuttering draws attention to what he refers to as the "liminal nature of the stutterer, who is neither clearly abled nor disabled" (3). This liminality highlights "the oppressive forces placed on stutterers, who, unlike many other disabled people, are often expected to perform on the same terms as the able-bodied." This problem is especially pervasive within the "domain of liberal individualism and American capitalism" (12), wherein disabled bodies are "not capable of meeting expectations of pace and productivity" and "are therefore disqualified from full participation not only in the economic sector but also in social situations" (13). This theorization foregrounds the political and social significance of the mouth and helps us see the radical potential of stuttering for the way it "interferes with established and codified rhythms of communication" within contemporary capitalist machinations. St. Pierre's conceptualization of stuttering within an expanded context of disability studies works in consonance with literary critic Tobin Siebers' critical concept of disability aesthetics. As a concept, "[d]isability aesthetics seeks to emphasize the presence of different bodies and minds in the tradition of aesthetic representation" and to refuse "harmony, integrity, and beauty as the sole determination of the aesthetic" (542-43). Based

on Scott's experience as a stutterer, *Blert*'s aesthetic is characterized by a plethora of interruptions; its language is disjunctive and fragmented, grounded in resistant parataxis, neologisms, and onomatopoeia. It denies readers the possibility of closure through critical interpretation—typically an indication of "efficient" linguistic communication—while positioning the stuttering mouth at the centre of the text.

The poet Derek Beaulieu highlights the radical potential of *Blert* and, in particular, the way stuttering gestures toward the disruption of capitalism's emphasis on linguistic efficiency. He remarks upon *Blert*'s disruptive syntax and diction and reflects upon the opacity of the book's parataxis and phonemic play. Beaulieu describes *Blert's* diction and syntax as "unhinged from a narrative construction" (72), a comment that partially explains some of the thematic content of the text. Beaulieu positions the book in the context of theorist Sianne Ngai's "poetics of disgust," which declares a resistance to "the bourgeois morality endemic to capitalism" (Ngai 98). Beaulieu posits that the book's parataxis informs its worldview and he understands Scott's worldview, to be resistant to capitalist machinations. *Blert* enacts a mode of disrupted articulation that exceeds the linguistic conventions of the capitalist marketplace and its frequent demand for the uninterrupted flow of consumable information. Beaulieu's argument is compelling, but I want to add nuance to his claim that *Blert* is "unhinged" (72), a claim that Beaulieu makes to underscore the disruptive features of the book. It is important also to emphasize that the vocabulary of *Blert* is carefully culled by Scott and representative of his identity. Scott draws from his interests in anatomy, geology, botany, marine biology, toxicology, consumerism, and linguistics, all of which he places alongside onomatopoeic words and neologisms. *Blert*'s interference in codified rhythms and vocabulary is more than a disruptive feature of the work; it is part of Scott's identity that informs his poetics. This personal connection is highlighted by the Author's Note, wherein Scott writes,

> When I was a boy my father would let me play hooky on 'bad speech days' and take me fishing. On one particular day, while watching the tide undulate against the shore, my father offered a precise ecological equivalent to what had been going on in my mouth: 'You see how that water moves, son? That's how you speak.' (64)

In this anecdote, Scott's father inadvertently recognizes that the equation "word order = world order" can also be understood in reverse—that "world

order" can also equal "word order." So, while the paratactic arrangement of vocabulary in *Blert* may be unhinged from capitalist ordering, it is also connected to Scott's identity and his personal story as a stutterer, both in terms of his inimitable modes of articulation and his diverse discursive interests.

The comments from Scott's father mentioned above highlight another dimension of *Blert* that requires a pivot from discussions of the disruption of capitalist machinations to its disruption of normative representations of nature. By drawing a connection between the river and his son's speech mode, Scott's father recognizes an innate connection between nature and his son's stutter, emphasizing that Scott's stutter is *natural*. Following a similar line of logic, LaBelle reminds readers that "[m]oments of fluid speech are actually quite rare" and that speakers commonly punctuate their speech with small interruptions, pauses, and stops (132). Small interruptions in speech and chronic stuttering are not the same embodied experiences; however, LaBelle's point, like Scott's father's, asks readers to reconsider fluency as the dominant speech mode and gestures toward a more inclusive and varied understanding of speech. Both LaBelle and Scott's father encourage readers to reconsider what constitutes the natural flow of speech, and in doing so they undermine binary structures such as *natural/unnatural* but also, by extension, *natural/cultural*. *Blert* takes up this issue by problematizing the way the natural environment is rendered in language, which often relies on normative descriptions of phenomena that exceed language. In other words, Scott uses the structure of his speech to present an alternate understanding of the relationship between nature as an external object and language as an anthropocentric mode of organizing and understanding the external world. He aesthetically employs his stutter in *Blert* to rethink the prevailing conceptual organization of nature as a part of distinctive binaries in a way that is identical to *Blert*'s explicit reorientation of the categories "natural" and "unnatural" in speech.[4] This is not to assume that stuttering affects a stutterer's innate understanding of the language of nature. Rather, it is to say that *Blert*'s representation of nature, via a stutter-based disability aesthetic, undermines the dualistic understanding of nature and culture.

Blert, then, is also a text that poetically engages complex representations of nature and ecology. In her essay "Outsides: Disability Culture Nature Poetry," critic and disability theorist Petra Kuppers contends that in writing from the perspective of disability, "traditional

nature poetry imagery becomes transfigured" (22). Kuppers identifies nature poetry within the Romantic tradition, typified by images of poet William Wordsworth wandering through nature, inspired by the sublimity of the landscape, and seeking the ecstatic dissolve of the self. Kuppers claims that disabled persons experience nature and the sublime by their own inimitable means; she writes, "we create our own rhythms, and rock ourselves into the world of nature, lose ourselves in a moment of sharing" (23). Poetry by the disabled writers that Kuppers analyzes emerges from their distinctive experiences, revising and expanding the conventions of what she calls nature poetry. *Blert*'s aesthetic representation of stuttering and engagement with nature supplements Kuppers' view: Scott employs his stutter to transfigure the conventions of nature poetry even further.

Blert is resistant to the easily consumable linguistic flows and expressions of the egoistic sublime typically associated with the Romanticist tradition of nature poetry, at least as Kuppers characterizes it. In Kuppers' analysis, the binary of nature and culture is upheld—nature is a thing experienced by poets and artists, who then render their experience in aesthetic forms. A subtext of Kuppers' argument suggests how disability alters experiences of nature, thus altering access to traditional notions of the sublime: "[N]ot everyone can see that blueness of romantic worldview, that delimitation, the sublime color to lose a self in" (23). By means of the interruptive force of his stutter, Scott also revises dominant poetic representations of nature. For example, Wordsworth's conception of the horizon in "It Is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free" demonstrates a hard clarity of image and seeks to capture the sublime spirit entangled with his vision:

> [T]he broad sun
> Is sinking down in its tranquility;
> The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;
> Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
> And doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder—everlastingly.

In comparison, Scott resists appealing to such direct and concrete descriptions when portraying the sunset in *Blert*, while also deferring an invocation of the sublime ("the mighty Being") as poets and critics might traditionally know it. Scott contemplates the horizon and writes, "At dusk the sun ughed against horizon and the finches bruised the sky purple. I put the spoon in my mouth. Ziplocked lip to tin. I put the spoon in my mouth,

incisor chunks bunt, bunt, bunt to Pango Pango sky" (31-32). Wordsworth's speaker opens his mouth, exclaiming "Listen!" while dramatizing the sunset and picturesque beauty of the scene. In *Blert*, however, the speaker's mouth closes, blending site and subject, to instead initiate an inward turn. The speaker's "Ziplocked lip" tightens against the sky and becomes part of the scene; it is not a force that mediates it but is part of it. For Scott, the poet's self does not get lost in nature to return and render that experience in flowing poetic form. Instead, the landscape and self are entangled; there is no separation.

Blert's representation of natural phenomena is more appropriately aligned with "ecology," as theorist Timothy Morton defines it. Morton advances a theory of *ecology without nature* to dissolve the commonly held divide between what is perceived as nature and culture. He wants his readers to see ecology as a concept that encompasses both of these terms: "Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings *are* each others' environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman things. Ecology has to do with you and me" (4). Morton's position designates a more collaborative and interconnected mode for humans to think about and experience the world in a way that combines natural and cultural spheres, which are too often seen as separate in the Western episteme. *Blert* highlights this connectedness by drawing from the language of the natural sciences and blending it with consumer language: "We rappel, frantic drips to harzburgites, spelunk carpal a soda straw to outwash, we—excess, wine must have gestured influx, bent knee, hamates wicket belay, Roosa light plunder esophagus. We blitz horizon, the Petzl Ecrin sheds its carbon" (14). This excerpt demonstrates how *Blert*'s phonemic play and syntax resist critical closure, which analogously deny imposing the structural logic of language onto the external world. Scott's representations of nature are tangles of objects, textures, perspectives, and sensations. Words like "rappel," "harzburgites," "spelunk," "horizon," and "Petzl Ecrin" are indicative of climbing and cave exploration, locating readers on a cliff or rock side. "Soda straw" and "wine," though seemingly random, further announce a human presence within this scene. Most notable, Petzl is a manufacturer of climbing and caving gear. The Petzl Ecrin Roc is a rock climbing helmet. Further down the page, Scott mentions "Edelrid," an adventuring manufacturer known for their ropes and cords. By invoking consumerist language, Scott presents an expansive means of recognizing human presence in the landscape, as a

first-person plural voice here represents it. The subject is in the landscape, but the presence of this "we" is enabled by a product made by a consumer commodity manufacturer. In this gesture, *Blert* recognizes that subjectivity in nature poetry is a much more complex assemblage of human and non-human entities akin to Morton's conception of ecology. The subject is entangled with nature and the internal and external grammars of a subject's body and consumer culture.

With its emphasis on human-nature connectedness, Scott's conception of ecology is further pronounced elsewhere in *Blert*. In a section entitled "Valsalvas" (a reference to a modified breathing method, the "Valsalva manoeuvre"), Scott writes, "Tethered to seven *molluscs*, an osteoblast chomps into the burger of *kelp*'s *wreck*; an osteoclast nibbles a *puffin*'s scapula in mid-afternoon weight" (11; emphases mine). Words such as "mollusc," "kelp," "puffin," and even "wreck" conjure a coastal locale. Similarly, Scott takes readers to another distinctive scene in a section entitled "Jökulhlaup," the Icelandic term for "a type of glacial outburst flood" ("Jökulhlaup"):

> Plankton trek trachea, an ice-packed high-top waltz. Walrus flop tongue, chomp tusk onto ice sizzle. Air sac ebb: eco racket dome slow ice furrow, dorsal rip katabatic overflow, tectonic chattermarks rip-rap frazil ice. Mucus globs gumbotill until syrup sweet lymph between words. (29)

Here, the language conjures icy ecological zones, like the Arctic Ocean, where walruses are typically found. In these disjunctive lines, Scott is using the affiliated discourses of nature to enact his stutter, but he is also using the interruptive forces of his stutter to aesthetically represent an expansive definition of ecology. These lines gesture toward particular nature images, but the presentation of these scenes is interrupted by the language of other discourses—words like "katabatic" and "tectonic" gesture toward broader meteorological and geological processes while words like "tongue," "trachea," and "mucus" imply human presence and reiterate *Blert's* preoccupation with the mouth. This paratactic assemblage—this language without coordinating or subordinating clauses—places these words in an equal relation that flattens discursive and hierarchical structures. Analogously, this equal relation inventively disrupts the separation of nature and culture. In doing so, *Blert* engages the tradition of "nature poetry" to reconsider humans, language, and the world as a profoundly

intersubjective relationship.

Blert illuminates the ecological complexity of being an *I* in the world, admitting that there are many forces that interrupt and comprise an individual's experience of nature, and destabilizing the conceptual barriers between inside and outside, human and non-human, nature and culture, and the like. In other words, Scott challenges the aesthetic traditions of nature poetry via his "disability aesthetic" to consequently undermine assumptions about what comprises categories of the "natural," thus generating a more compelling aesthetic representation of ecology in poetry. *Blert* disrupts normative assumptions about aesthetic traditions of poetry and fluency while demonstrating that "nature" is resistant to standardized linguistic quantification. In Scott's writing, nature is instead a complex entity that cannot be understood by discursive divides; it is a "Bramble" as it "harmonizes with glottal percussion" (30). *Blert* suggests that the linguistic expression of nature is better aligned with new materialist philosophies that recognize the inherent intermixing of *things*, a line of thinking that Scott pursues further in his collaborative book *Decomp*.

The Mouthing of Worms: *Decomp*

In collaboration with poet Stephen Collis, Scott intensifies the convergence of the mouth, language, and ecology in their co-authored book *Decomp* (2013) which draws attention to a different set of mouthing modalities—biting and chewing. The book was created by means of an experiment in which Scott and Collis took copies of *On the Origin of Species* (1859) by Charles Darwin and placed them within five different biogeoclimatic zones in British Columbia: Nicola Lake, Prince George, Kootenay Lake, Gabriola Island, and Tofino. Scott and Collis left the books within these zones to endure the weather, flora, and fauna, which subsequently acted upon Darwin's influential text, altering, decomposing, overwriting, and revising it. One calendar year later, Scott and Collis returned to their deposited texts. They photo-documented each zone's act of creative destruction, finding the texts, in ecocritic Sarah Bezan's words, "worm-eaten," "waterlogged," "buried beneath fermenting layers of vegetation" (241). They had become sites of "a vital partnership between living and dead organisms" (241). Each copy of *On the Origin of Species* was transformed into heterogeneous ontological matter: from evolutionary study and canonical text to food, habitat, and art object. Scott and Collis' findings provide the basis of *Decomp*, which comprises the photographs

taken in each zone as well as printed responses to each book-object. Theses responses include meditative poems, reflections, dialogues, quotations, journal entries, and found poems made from the legible portions of the decomposing text. The project, according to Collis and Scott, resists the nature-culture binary that traditionally upholds ecological discussions, reversing "the normal flow of bringing nature into the poem" by "bringing the text into nature" (qtd. in Moss 140). In nature, the text wrote back to the authors but it spoke back too.

Decomp's prominently featured full-colour photographs document the year-long decomposition process in each of the biogeoclimatic zones. Aside from the unavoidable interventions that photographers make when capturing their subject, these photographs present *On the Origin of Species* before the authors' poetic interventions. The photographs capture palimpsests created by layers of soil, dust, leaves, needles, and branches, as well as the erasures and omissions made by rain, sap, and, most notably, the chewing and biting of insects, worms, and birds. The photographs do not let readers forget that humans are involved in the process of creating this text; Collis and Scott consistently announce their presence by including photographs of people—likely the authors themselves—as they move through each zone. These photos are often candid and frequently capture these persons in motion to remind readers that—like the creation of *Decomp*—subjectivity and identity are processual.

The photographs in *Decomp* highlight the many processes and co-authors that contributed to its creation. In one particularly dramatic photograph from the Prince George section, for example, a thin shaft of light illuminates the words *the* and *idea*, making them more visible than other bits of text in the photograph. In this instance, the photograph asks viewers to consider the concept of "the idea" as an anthropocentric invention. Humans historically distinguish themselves from other living beings for their capabilities of critical thinking, ideation, and creativity. This photograph in *Decomp* captures a non-human entity, a beam of light, as it seizes upon "the idea." The photograph is the result of non-human and human interaction: the decomposition of *On the Origin of Species* in the biogeoclimatic zone of Prince George, the plants and undergrowth whose positions in physical space made room for this particular beam of light, and the cosmic alliance of these circumstances with the forces of the solar system, all of which allowed light to shine down on the book at the time that the photographer approached it.

Despite the emphatic ocularcentricity of *Decomp*, spectres of sound and speech are also present in the text. The authors hint at the sonic dimension of the book, referring to the final section as a *coda* (rather than an *afterword*). In so doing, they gesturally figure the book as literary, performative, and musical since *coda* is meaningful to each of these artforms. I am compelled to read the photographs as documents of sound—specifically, as evidence of sonic events that can be heard in the aural imagination. In *Hungry Listening*, xwélmexw (Stó:lō) artist and writer Dylan Robinson refers to this form of imagination as *audiation* (1), a term for the sounds that are heard in one's mind when reading descriptions of sound. Recall here, too, sound theorist Jonathan Sterne's reminder that "the tree makes a noise whether or not anyone is there to hear it" (12). Thus, readers of *Decomp* may not literally hear the sounds of worms and insects chewing Darwin's text, of birds tearing a verso for nesting, or of pine needles falling into its margins. However, the photographs trigger the reader's audiation so that each zone can be heard as it slowly engages the source text over the course of the year. These photographs capture these sonorous sites, charged by the chewing and biting of nature that is forever delayed from our ears but, through the power of audiation, immanently within our consciousness.

The photographs powerfully facilitate further inquiry into sounds and mouthing, prompting questions such as, What do the voices of these ecological zones sound like? Who or what speaks from within them? How do humans meaningfully engage and understand these sounds? Every bite mark, gnaw, and tear is also a para-speech action. Some critics may not consider ecological degradation to correlate to a form of vocal emittance as it is conventionally understood; however, given the active involvement of biting and chewing as a contributing force to the creation of *Decomp*, it is a text that, in part, captures processes of *mouthing*. "[T]he mouth," as LaBelle writes, "wraps the voice, and all such wording, in its wet and impressionable envelope, its paralanguages" (7). Further, he suggests that "what surrounds the voice proper—the paralinguistic, the sociolinguistic, the glossolalic, etc.—contributes a vitalizing base to the spoken by extending, problematizing, and saturating its communicative aim" (9). The mouthing of worms and insects provided the altered source texts that form the basis of *Decomp*, which, in turn, shaped the authors' voices as they composed the corresponding text.

Given the agency that Scott and Collis give to the conditions and

organisms of each biogeoclimatic zone as collaborators in *Decomp*, philosopher Jane Bennett's theory of *vital materialism* is resonant within this context, particularly for how it extends the possibilities of speaking and communication by striving to "give voice to a vitality intrinsic to materiality" (3). Bennett undermines the subject-object binary "to conceive of [non-human] materials as lively and self-organizing, rather than as passive or mechanical" (10). She prefers to refer to all things not as subjects or objects, but as *interveners*. Such a decision decentres anthropocentric thinking and deconstructs hierarchies of materiality to destabilize the divide between humans and non-humans. In Bennett's words, vital materialism generates "newfound attentiveness to matter and its powers" (13). It inspires "a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations." Bennett's reconsideration of materiality does not retract agency from human beings; rather, it encourages more generous ways of thinking and interacting with non-human materials, recognizing them as collaborators in structuring and engaging the self and world.

In her chapter "Political Ecologies," which focuses on the political dimensions of a vital materialist philosophy, Bennett—like Scott and Collis—addresses Darwin and his particular fascination with worms. In this chapter, Bennett's vital materialist perspective significantly resonates with *Decomp*, especially in its attention to the mouth and voice. Making a case for the political participation of non-human interveners—like worms—Bennett suggests that her vital materialist perspective "can uncover a whole world of resonances and semblances—sounds and sights that echo and bounce far more than would be possible were the universe to have a hierarchical structure" (99). Vital materialism advocates for developing a polity with non-human matter (living and inert) and "with more channels of communication between members" (104). Building from Jacques Ranciére's theory of democracy and the political act as a disruption, Bennett asks, "Is the power to disrupt really limited to human speakers?" (106). Thus, Bennett extends speech and democratic political participation to non-human matter. By giving this kind of agency to non-human matter, Bennett suggests that matter *speaks* through and with its interventions to "transform the divide between speaking subjects and mute objects" (108). If the mouth is the site from which speech is, in its most basic terms, expressed, and acts of nature are how non-humans speak, then Bennett's theory challenges the limits and boundaries of the mouth and what it

means to have a voice.

Worms, for instance, have their own mode of communication that relies on chemical signals to exchange information. With Bennett's theory of voice and speaking, the vital materialist may recognize *Decomp* as a text that carefully documents the para-language of non-humans such as worms. For *Decomp,* Scott and Collis recognize that the bodies and biomes of each biogeoclimatic zone are always already speaking. These mouthing interveners, speaking in their way, disrupted and recreated the source text. When reading the text, and specifically when reading the photographs, readers are encouraged to engage their aural imaginations, discerning the sounds made as each zone intervened into Darwin's text. As human interpreters, we may not yet fully understand the para-speech mode of non-human interveners. For now, we can recognize that each biogeoclimatic zone engages Darwin's text, and that those engagements are meaningful. Perhaps these zones have minutely and performatively enacted Darwin's evolutionary claims as they transform the source text into complex ontological forms that diversely express their non-human subjectivities.

Carceral Speechscapes: *Lanterns at Guantánamo*

Like *Blert* and *Decomp*, Scott's poetry-adjacent multimedia project website *Lanterns at Guantánamo* further extends his visceral engagements with disruption, ecology, and the mouth. The materials housed on this site document Scott's research into stuttering and disfluency as a poet visiting the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center. The website is comprised of an assemblage of materials, including sound compositions (made by collaborator Jason Starnes) of Scott's field recordings, audio interviews, photographs of the prison (taken by Scott), photographs and scans of the art made by detainees in 2009, a multimedia chapbook entitled "Clearance Process," and numerous administrative documents (including scans of Freedom of Information Act requests, media visit information, operating procedures, policies, rules, vitals forms, and a press kit). As a poet cognizant of the power of aesthetic frameworks, Scott's choice of an assemblage structure for *Lanterns at Guantánamo* may be partially informed by the ethical quandaries posed by the project. Rather than poeticize his experiences, Scott creates a collage that readers engage by their own inimitable means. In a text adapted from a 2016 lecture, Scott reflects on what he sees as the ethical responsibilities of his research into disfluency

at the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center. He writes,

> When I watched those men pray and eat behind two thick panes of reflective glass in Camp IV, was my position ethical? What would be an ethical response or reaction to that experience? To this lecture? Can poems possibly emerge out of such an encounter? *Should* they? ("Lanterns" 11)

Similarly, should literary criticism be written about Scott's encounter? There are no easy answers to these questions. However, as a seeing and hearing witness to the conditions of the prison, Scott serves his readership by sonically and visually illuminating the conditions of this prison. His work highlights, explicitly and implicitly, the iterations of power that are executed within this space, demonstrating how voice and mouth are bound within these dynamics.

After a year-long application process to secure his visit, Scott was granted five days of access to Guantánamo Bay as the only poet known to have visited the detention centre. Scott was subjected to numerous reference and background checks, and he completed and submitted a number of documents and forms that were a standard part of the application. As part of the process, Scott was informed of the allowances he could take while visiting the centre. For example, officials at the prison could dictate whom he was allowed to interview and the kinds of photographs that he was allowed to take. It was clear, then, that Scott was subjecting his creative process to the design of this infamous carceral facility and that its logic would likely pose significant limits and challenges to his ability to articulate—in speech, writing, and image—the experience of the prison. Scott admits that he sought access to Guantánamo Bay to bring himself "closer to the apparatus of state interrogation," knowing full well that it would also bring him "to a place of uncompromising hostility toward dysfluency" ("Lanterns" 3). According to FBI interrogators, disfluency is a bodily signal of lying (3). Thus, a space like Guantánamo Bay pursues the "desire for speech to greet the ear smoothly and clearly, and for subjects or suspects to make themselves both understandable and believable" (3). As a lifelong stutterer, Scott clearly objects to this fiction that posits a linkage between stuttering and lying since the fallacious extension of this logic is that persons who stutter are liars. Scott refers to this logic—which informs interrogation processes in a space like the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center—as the "regime of fluency" (4).

Scott's interpretation of the power dynamics at the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center are prominently displayed on the *Lanterns at Guantánamo* website. When visitors reach the site's home page, they are presented with an image of a makeshift guard tower elevated above a chain-link fence and topped by coils of barbed wire. In the background beyond the fence, vegetation browns and steel structures rust. This image establishes the contours of the power structure and hierarchy inherent in the prison. The centred and elevated tower symbolizes the power and control of the prison guards. This is contrasted by the apparent decay of the buildings and vegetation and the absence of human subjects—a testament to the prison's particular form of corrosive power. These combined features attempt to recreate the ominous and spectral feel of the prison as an environment and its anti-human ideology.

Below this image of the prison, Scott places a compelling epigraph, a quotation from the late Canadian composer and sound theorist R. Murray Schafer: "Noises are the sounds we have learned to ignore" (Schafer 4). The quote gestures toward Schafer's theories of acoustic ecology, wherein he appeals for the need of noise abatement laws to reduce the prevalence of noise in everyday life. For Schafer, noise as sonic phenomena is broadly defined as both problematic noise pollution and unwanted sound: "When the rhythms of the soundscape become confused or erratic, society sinks to a slovenly and imperiled condition" (237). Finding a means of returning society to the premodern soundscape, wherein noise is significantly reduced, is one of Schafer's key aims.

Scott's field research at the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center draws Schafer's premise into question and draws attention to the unsettling implications of ambitions to dampen or reduce "unwanted sound." The carceral soundscape far exceeds Schafer's considerations of the soundscape of primarily urban and rural spaces. Scott, however, brings the implications of Schafer's quest to the fore in his documentation of the carceral soundscape, highlighting the unsettling effects of rules and conditions pertaining to sound, and poignantly outlining the way that sonic expression is permitted and denied. The carceral soundscape is a site of control over the human ability to sound. By acknowledging this fact, Scott's recordings throw the audible sounds of the prison environment into stark relief. For example, in the prison, Scott "was not permitted to record what one Public Affairs (PA) representative referred to as 'non-permissible human voice'" ("Lanterns" 9). Scott offers another, slightly more oblique example when he

recounts interviewing the warden at the prison:

> He replied that on a typical day, when he walks into the prison he hears nothing; it is mostly quiet and unremarkable. The warden made sure to tell me that if I were asking whether he hears screams, then the answer is no. He then paused and said that what he hears all the time is the sound of air conditioners. At Gitmo you hear the air conditioners before the cooling begins. The sound is all drone. (24)

Here, the warden provides a machinic characterization of the prison's soundscape, describing how the ambient sound of air conditioning dominates the environment. Scott points out in the transcript of his 2016 lecture that the air conditioners are used as torture devices at Guantánamo ("Lanterns" 25). He cites Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritania-born man who was detained without charge in Guantánamo from 2002 until his release on 17 October 2016; Slahi explains in *Guantánamo Diary* (2015) that

> [t]he interrogators turned the A/C all the way down trying to reach 0°F, but obviously air conditioners are not designed to kill, so in the well insulated room the A/C fought its way to 49°F, which, if you are interested in math like me, is 9.4°C—in other words, very, very cold, especially for somebody who had to stay in it for more than twelve hours, had no underwear and just a thin uniform, and who comes from a hot country. (242)

Thus, there is an especially sinister kind of malice underwriting the warden's seemingly innocuous description of the soundscape. Further, embedded in the warden's comment, there is the powerful implication of the prison's powers over the mouth—voices are forcibly concealed, and the prison is generally haunted by an absence of vocalization. These implicit and explicit controls over speech define Guantánamo's carceral soundscape.

Lanterns at Guantánamo also comprises the multimedia chapbook "Clearance Process" (2016). Visually, sonically, and linguistically, this chapbook furthers consideration of the prison's paradigm of control over the voice and mouth. If *Blert* is a book that, as Tyrone Williams suggests, captures the "momentary loss of control, of agency" in the moment of the stutter, then "Clearance Process" engages different losses of agency. In "Clearance Process," these losses are voluntary and forced, though

both are products of the systemic operations of a space like Guantánamo. "Clearance Process" comes with a soundtrack by Jason Starnes made from Scott's field recordings. Starnes' composition in the chapbook captures the prison's hauntingly sparse soundscape. The soundtrack is composed of textures and ambient sounds—crackles, echoes, chirps, and buzzes from the prison space. The few voices on the recording are distant and muffled, interrupted by hums and percussive clangs: "This goes through the nose and down into the stomach to provide the [inaudible]" (00:01:41 – 00:01:47). What few voices there are in these recordings drift in and out of audibility. They are vulnerable to interruption by other sounds in the space as well as to the restrictions imposed by the detention centre's policies.

"Clearance Process" positions the voice in a soundscape like Guantánamo as that which is both silenced and forced to emerge through the interrogation process, thus materializing the the space's anti-human ideology. Representations of human life in "Clearance Process" are spectral. Many of the photographs are void of human subjects: nearly empty skies, flat stretches of concrete horizons, empty facilities, and piles of coiled barbed wire. The few images of human subjects that are present in "Clearance Process" are partial and fragmentary: a silhouette of a body on concrete, a barely visible body blurred by an unsteady camera, a body obscured by thick sheets of glass. There are cropped bodies too: hands holding a camera, a hand holding a bottle of liquid meal replacement, the lower half of a Guantánamo guard in military attire. Bodies in "Clearance Process" are presented as faceless (obviously cropped in accordance with Operational Security [OPSEC] protocols).

While, like *Decomp*, the collection is emphatically ocularcentric, Scott's "Clearance Process" draws us toward two related configurations of mouthing and vocalization: the voice that is silenced and the voice that is forced from the body. We know from Scott's introduction and the few audio compositions made from his field recordings that OPSEC limits whose voices can be heard and who can hear them. "Clearance Process" opens with a heavily redacted excerpt from *Guantánamo Diary*. These elements of the text gesture toward the mouth that is stopped and not permitted to speak, that is erased from the record. "Clearance Process" also subtly gestures toward the other mouth modality, the mouth that is wrenched open and forced to vocalize. There is a quiet violence to Scott's photographic assemblage that signals the physical violence and inhumane atmosphere of the prison: images of rusted barbed wire, specks of blood

on rocks, a lurid red heart carved into a tree trunk, and lots of debris. These images indicate the greater violence that lurks inside the prison: the interrogation and torture of the detainees. Without actual images of torture and violence, Scott's photographs point to these elements of Guantánamo, leaving us to imagine the various forms of violence that the state uses to coerce speech from prisoners who are unwilling to speak. The "quietude" of Scott's audio and visual materials invite the violence, screams, and pain of this space into the viewer's audiation.

In his introduction to "Clearance Process," Scott notes that the "speechscape" of the detention centre "was one of feedback loops and evasion, repetition with variations on an echo-forming language strategy," a voluntary stoppage and circumvention of what otherwise could be said (10). The strategy here is to always deny and delay the arrival of the requested information. Scott compiles a series of quotations of overheard speech during his visit:

> That's not in my lane.
> I don't know what they've done or what they haven't done.
> I'm not privy to that information.
> I'm not authorized to tell you that, sir.
> I can't speak to that. But I'll see if I can find someone who can.
> Sir, you're not allowed to ask that. (10)

Each seemingly scripted line, presumably uttered by one of the staff of the detention complex, is not necessarily a stutter, but a stoppage, a distraction, a deviation from speech to purposefully limit or stop the flow of information.

Restrictions on speech are found elsewhere, particularly in the audio recording "The Camps Are Good" on the *Lanterns at Guantánamo* site page. This recording contains an interview with a prison guard by Joan Faus, a former Washington correspondent for the Spanish newspaper *El País*. There are three voices in the room: the guard, the interviewer (Faus), and a mysterious voice, presumably of a senior official, that occasionally interjects into the conversation. It is important to note here that this third mysterious person is not the subject of the interview, as indicated by the way Scott identifies this recording: "This interview with a guard was conducted by Joan Faus *EL PAÍS* U.S. Correspondent." He does not mention that this is an interview with a guard *and* a senior official. The conversation between Faus and the guard mainly focuses on the day-to-day

operations of the centre. Strikingly, however, the third voice intrudes at crucial moments, particularly when the conversation begins to veer toward information that is classified. For example, when the guard is about to reveal the time of day that the detainees receive their meals, the third voice interjects to stop the guard from revealing this information (00:02:25). Similarly, Faus responds to the third voice in the room, which has seemingly gestured that the interview will be wrapped up soon (00:06:34). This occurs at the 00:06:34 mark of the recording. The interviewer holds to the initial terms of the interview, reminding the third voice that they had agreed on ten minutes. The power and presence of this third voice are notable since the person to whom this voice belongs is not the subject here. Yet, this third voice's influence is central to understanding the powers of the mouth and voice in the prison. As a mouth and voice of absolute authority, the third speaker intervenes in the discussion to delay, stop, and pause the flow of vocalization at moments when the information carried by those voices threatens to become too revealing. It is this all-powerful, unidentified voice that is indicative of the veiled authority in carceral spaces that controls the flow of vocal emittance.

Shutting Up: Conclusion

To return to my proposed investigation of the "borders of the linguistic" as represented and traversed in Scott's poetry, I now draw attention to one of the core tenets of his work. The mouth is, as LaBelle reminds us, a passageway from inside to outside. Thus, if we pay careful attention to the mouth and its many modalities, we can learn a great deal about our relationships to the external world—how to express it, relate to it, navigate it, ingest it, and expel it. Each of Scott's poetry collections under discussion confirms LaBelle's claim that the mouth is a "contact zone where language performs as a powerful agent" (2). Across these texts, Scott examines the mouth as it stutters, bites, chews, speaks, and stops to articulate complex relationships between humans and non-humans in aesthetic and systemic configurations. Scott's varied investigations into mouthing modalities are linked by his thematic interest in diminishing the division between inside and outside, as demonstrated by a frequent invocation of ecological themes—natural landscapes and carceral soundscapes. As works of poetry, they specifically demonstrate how language is shaped by the mouth, and subject to many forms of disruption, reconfiguration, and erasure. Most importantly, Scott's

poetry demonstrates the necessity of expanding assumptions around the processes of poetic meaning making to accept that these processes often involve a range of bodily communicative acts, that the utterance is more than words written or heard, and that the communicative act exceeds the logic of language and normative assumptions about speech. Scott's poetry powerfully and persuasively testifies that not all that needs to be understood can be said.

Notes

1. Anthropologist Edward Sapir is notable for his relativist theory of language and perception, which claims that the structure of language that is known by a person shapes their understanding of the world. In turn, this suggests that a person's experience of the world is relative to the language they know. See Sapir, *Language*.
2. Derek Beaulieu also highlights Scott's *Blert* in relation to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as a way of exploring what he refers to as a Calgarian poetics.
3. This thinking also underlies the important work of projects such as the *Did I Stutter?* project, a community-focused group dedicated to hearing the "diversity of sounds present in the human voice" and whose mission is "to challenge assumptions about speech-disability and . . . to open a conversation about how much of the anxiety related to dysfluency is produced by oppressive social structures and values."
4. Scott continues to approximate a relationship between disfluency and nature, most recently in his bestselling children's book, *I Talk Like a River* (illustrated by Sydney Smith). The book has received much acclaim, and it was featured on the BBC's *CBeebies Bedtime Story* program, where it was read by popular singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran.

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An Ambivalent Gaze at North Koreans in Guy Delisle's *Pyongyang*

I. North Korea, Graphic Travelogue, Otherness

Guy Delisle's *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea* (2003) records his daily observations and experiences in the capital city of North Korea, where he stayed for two months in 2001 to supervise the production of an outsourced French animated film.[1] *Pyongyang* has been critically acclaimed, as is demonstrated by a list of forty-three international reviews inside the book, but its topic alone is compelling enough to deserve wider attention. The travelogue is about North Korea, a territory of "others" that has not opened its doors to the world like "normal" nations.[2] As David Shim notes, North Korea has been represented as "a timeless 'mystery,'" an "enigma," "terra incognita," and a kind of "blackhole" (1-3). Yet these representations do not mean that the outside world has no inkling of the nation at all. North Korea is known for its totalitarianism, centralized economy, human rights violations, and its development of nuclear programs. These characteristics are not particular to North Korea alone, but lack of access to the nation means that North Korean lives remain mysterious to the outside world. Since North Korea seems inaccessible and travel to the nation unusual, *Pyongyang* demands critical scrutiny. Delisle's text produces ambivalent effects, as colonial writings about non-Western regions have often historically demonstrated. Writing from a position of privilege, Delisle has the opportunity to extend knowledge of North Korea to Western readers. However, his text runs the risk of merely legitimizing Western presuppositions about North Koreans.

Pyongyang is not just a travelogue of a "strange" land. It is "the first graphic novel of North Korea in English (or in its original language, French)" (Armstrong 366).[3] To retell his past experience with dramatic effect, Delisle presents the protagonist in his own image, whom North Koreans call "Mister Guy," and depicts him grappling with local people and their culture in the panels. *Pyongyang* allows Delisle to visually represent the interior spaces of a city that he was not allowed to photograph or film during his stay. *Pyongyang* features visual tropes that are predictable and familiar as they depict North Koreans as eccentric, impoverished, and indoctrinated, if not brainwashed. In "(Dis)Orienting North Korea," Suzy

Kim writes that despite the wide influence of Edward Said and postcolonial critique, "places like North Korea continue to be refracted through the Orientalist lens in the West today" (481). Nevertheless, *Pyongyang* is not another text that simply reinforces stereotypes about North Korea. Although Deslisle's protagonist, Mister Guy, searches for and reaffirms the "otherness" of North Koreans, a close reading of *Pyongyang* calls into question the legitimacy of this affirmation.

The meaning of otherness and the way it highlights certain qualities of particular people cannot be discussed without considering power relations. In Jean-François Staszak's definition,

> [o]therness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us," the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ("Them," the Other) by stigmatizing a difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. (43)

Otherness has been recontextualized, redefined, and reconstructed to identify who "we" are. Let me give two examples. In his discussion about Europe as an idea, an identity, and a geopolitical reality, Gerard Delanty pays attention to the way that "[identities] are constructed against a category of otherness" (5). The "we" is identified not by what "we" share or experience in common but rather "through the imposition of otherness in the formation of a binary typology of 'Us' and 'Them.' The purity and stability of the 'We' is guaranteed first in the naming, then in the demonisation and finally in the cleansing of otherness" (5). In this process, otherness is categorized as either "recognition" or "negation" based on whether or not it works for "self-identity"; otherness can be accepted when others are not regarded as "threatening stranger[s]," but if they are, their otherness will be excluded (5). Delanty's analysis overlaps with Sara Ahmed's view of how difference is treated in the construction of national identity. Taking the United Kingdom as a case study, Ahmed argues that the multicultural nation uses two types of others to present its ideal image "as 'being' plural, open and diverse; as being loving and welcoming to others" (133). On the one hand, some others "'give' their difference to the nation, by mixing with others" (139), thus assisting the nation to "[construct] itself as ideal in its capacity to assimilate others into itself" (137); on the other hand, other others who fail to do so "become the sign of disturbance" (139) that presents "this national ideal . . . as all the more

ideal" (137). Under these circumstances, the status of incoming others is determined by whether they "meet 'our' conditions" to love the nation as "an ideal object" (135).

Although Delanty and Ahmed focus on different geopolitical contexts, they both recognize that othering particular people, especially those who are inferior in power, involves defining "us" as *un*-othered at the expense of the complexity of diverse social relations. The dualism founded on a simplified "us" and "them" is detected in the Cold War construction of "North Korea as a problem of security and a failed state" (Choi 2). As Shine Choi explains,

> North Korea is a product of encounters between various "us's" and various "North Koreas", but this various, diverse, fragmented, ambiguous "us" remains a particular "us" on one side of politics along the line reified by the Cold War binaries of (neo)liberal US–Western Europe versus the communist-socialist Soviet bloc. (2)

During the Cold War, the United States pursued a "policy of 'containing' the Soviet system" (*NSC*). Paraphrasing the Americanist Donald Pease, Alan Nadel notes how "American cold war foreign policy is marked by a complex narrative of Other and Same" (14). Consequently, North Korea, aligned with the Soviet Union, was predictably othered in the West during the Cold War. But the Western representation of North Korea as "them" persists even in the post-Cold War era geopolitically and culturally. The image of North Korea is thus not simply a Cold War legacy but an ongoing cultural issue that, as Choi argues, leads to the discussion of "how a particular position (e.g. the culture, subjectivity, perspective of the 'self') gets privileged and how the figure of the 'Other' operates in these cases" (3).

Given the above examples of how to treat otherness in different contexts and the historical status of North Korea, Mister Guy's view of the North Koreans expresses a desire to adhere to the historical division between "us" and "them" rather than an attempt to view the local people from a new perspective. As a result, *Pyongyang*, even if inadvertently, reveals the discrepancy between the North Korea that Mister Guy expects to see and the actual situations that he observes but does not fully perceive. While Delisle's cultural identity as a Canadian living in France requires consideration, my examination of otherness in *Pyongyang* does not intend to rearticulate the reductive dualism of East and West. It is hard to overlook the negative perception of North Korea in South Korea despite

their shared history, culture, and language. Han S. Park, for example, notes, "preconceptions and prejudices about North Korea are frequently used as common sense" (39), and Jin Woong Kang admits, "misconceptions and prejudices about North Korea show that the remnants of the Cold War are not entirely overcome" (14) in South Korean society.[4] With this in mind, a critical approach to Delisle's text provides an opportunity to discern not only the Western visitor's gaze but also various other gazes that want to see North Korea as "we" believe it to be. From such a perspective, *Pyongyang* allows readers to consider difference and sameness, rather than otherness, in the people whose nation was once labelled as part of "the axis of evil."

II. Inside the World of the Soldier and the Toy

Like Delisle's other travelogues, *Shenzhen* (2000) and *Burma Chronicles* (2007), *Pyongyang* is neither in colour nor exactly black-and-white but instead filled with greyness of different degrees. The colour grey works effectively in *Pyongyang* for visualizing the opacity, if not obscurity, of North Korea, which is not easy for an outsider to penetrate at first. The difficulty is adumbrated at the beginning of the book. When Mister Guy meets his guide Mr. Kyu at the airport, the panel represents Mr. Kyu as a thick grey silhouette. The interior of the airport is dark due to a power shortage, and Mr. Kyu is standing indoors with his back to the sunlight. Upon closer examination, however, Mr. Kyu's face and clothes are not completely obliterated; they are dimly outlined in dark grey. Mr. Kyu's blurred appearance underscores why readers should scrutinize *Pyongyang*; otherwise, they may only find the Western stereotype that sees North Koreans as unknowable.

The first few pages of *Pyongyang* appear to reinforce Western stereotypes about the absurdity and eccentricity of North Korea. The awkward formalities for entry, the mandatory company of attendants, and the foreign visitors' obligatory floral tribute to the gigantic statue of the nation's founder, Kim Il-sung, are all peculiarities of the North Korean nation. *Pyongyang* highlights two national features of North Korea: economic deprivation and dictatorship. The economic difficulties are epitomized by low quality meals, non-functional elevators, buses manufactured in Hungary in the 1950s, an empty grand ballroom in a hotel, lack of goods at a department store, and so forth. The local conditions are dreadful, but Mister Guy's humorous, if not sarcastic, reactions serve to lighten the mood without minimizing the seriousness of the economic

problems. While looking at an empty dish in his hotel, a metaphor for the food shortage in North Korea, for example, Mister Guy abruptly picks up a toothpick and says, "[T]he toothpicks must be handcarved" (43). Similarly, when his translator Mr. Sin keeps refusing to explain the reason for citizen labourers, referring to them instead as "volunteers," Mister Guy blithely responds, "Ah!" (57).

Likewise, Mister Guy makes jokes about even politically sensitive issues. In a passage that mocks North Korea's surveillance culture, for example, he expresses shock at discovering the face of Kim Il-sung's son, Kim Jong-il, in the mirror on his desk. After realizing that the mirror reflects Kim's photograph attached to the wall, Mister Guy remarks, "Ha ha . . . What a joke!" and adds, counting his days left in Pyongyang, "I've gotta get outta here" (132). Mister Guy does not hide his cynicism toward the North Koreans' worship of Kim Il-sung either. One day, he and a group of North Korean soldiers bow to Kim's statue together at the International Friendship Exhibition, a holy place for the dead leader. While the soldiers have "tears in their eyes," Mister Guy narrates, "[I was] biting my tongue to keep from laughing out loud," because the statue seems ridiculously alive due to certain special effects (105).

The inseparability of North Korea's economic backwardness and the idolization of its former leader is inferred in a splash page. It shows Kim Il-sung's gigantic portrait on the top of a building as the only lighted spot in the darkness of the city (49). In *Pyongyang*, visual imagery in splash pages serves to underscore the otherness of the nation. Delisle's illustrations of monolithic public structures like the Tower of the *Juche* Idea (65), the Monument to Party Founding (97), and the incomplete Ryugyong Hotel (113) embody lifelessness and stagnation. On other splash pages, a huge propaganda billboard (17), a young girls' accordion band (145), and mass games (161) illustrate nationhood and collectiveness as the top priority of North Korea. The splash pages sometimes include factual information about the nation, but this seeing is not simply objective; it also conveys information about the observer. As John Berger puts it, "[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe . . . To look is an act of choice" (8). The subtitle of David Shim's *Visual Politics and North Korea: Seeing Is Believing* indicates a similar perspective. Examining photographic representations of North Korea, Shim argues that

> the depiction of something like, for instance, "real" life in North Korea is not initially a copy of the real, as many

> observes would contend, but rather a reflection of the photographer's own interest and prejudices. In this vein, a photograph is an act of visual imagination. Hence, the taking of a picture is as revealing of the photographer as it is of the subject depicted. (28)

Choi discusses Delisle's *Pyongyang* via reference to what she describes as "a detective mode of seeing" (77). "This mode of seeing," Choi writes, "creates a distance between the self and the Other, where the Other is evaluated from a higher moral position." The problematic aspects of seeing are legible in Delisle's splash pages and in his representation of North Koreans. For readers who uncritically take Delisle's travelogue as a source of factual information, *Pyongyang* functions primarily to reinforce the otherness of North Korea and its citizens.

It is necessary to remember, however, that all societies contain complexities that are difficult to grasp. North Korea is no exception. In the introduction to *Ask a North Korean*, Daniel Tudor cautions his readers not to generalize information or knowledge about North Korea: "If you asked a wealthy Manhattanite and a rural Arkansan to describe life in the United States, you'd likely get divergent answers. The same is true of North Korea" (10). It is thus no accident that *Pyongyang* reveals the multifaceted or even self-conflicting aspects of North Korea. Take isolation, for example, which Westerners frequently regard as a definitive feature of the nation. Delisle emphasizes the isolation of North Korea not only by means of Mister Guy's comment ("North Korea is the world's most isolated country," 10) but also by depicting North Korea as a fort protruding on a map, with a caption telling the reader that the Communist Party "sealed off the country to all sides" after the Korean War (26). Nancy Pedri reads this image of North Korea as an example of how "Delisle's cartoon maps . . . adopt a number of discursive strategies—appraisive, evaluative, persuasive strategies—to present a very particular view of North Korea" (101). Using Mister Guy's comment and the cartoon map, Pedri argues that Delisle presents the two kinds of isolation in North Korea: that of the nation as well as the people (Pedri 104). The confinement of North Koreans is also represented by a reappearing image of a lonely tortoise in an aquarium (Delisle 35, 81, 174). In an interview with Kenan Kocak, Delisle says that the tortoise symbolizes his "trapped" condition as well as that of the North Korean people (110-11).

North Korea is not portrayed as completely "sealed off" in *Pyongyang*, however.[5] The presence of Mister Guy in North Korea evinces the

connection, though anemic, between the nation and global capitalism. He is not the only Western animator in town either. Over the course of two months, Mister Guy meets various French colleagues: Sandrine, his predecessor; Richard, who started working in Pyongyang one week earlier; David, an old acquaintance; Henri, who is a producer at a small French studio that Mister Guy once worked for; and Fabrice, who later replaces Richard. North Korea is the French version of "an animation Who's Who" (134), in Mister Guy's own words. On his flight to North Korea, Mister Guy also sees a "French Alcatel employee," a "German mineral water exporter," and a "young Italian foreign aid worker" (9). He later discovers other foreign visitors, including French telecom engineers, Chinese tourists, a Libyan long-term resident, a Turkish delegation, and even Americans who came to retrieve the remains of US soldiers. Moreover, the city has a small "expat microcosm" (116) that hosts parties at which Mister Guy sees foreigners who have come to Pyongyang from different nations for different purposes. As the caption says in the scene of the reunion between Mister Guy and his acquaintance David, *Pyongyang* ensures that "globalization is global" (82).

Mister Guy's claim that "meeting Koreans is next to impossible" (10) is an exaggeration. It is nevertheless true that he is not allowed to freely engage with North Koreans in North Korea. He only manages to encounter a small number of them, such as an animation technician, a chambermaid in his hotel, and local animators at the Scientific and Educational Film Studio of Korea (SEK), not to mention the attendants who always accompany him. The cultural and language barriers prevent both sides from communicating with each other. The technician, for example, keeps annoying Mister Guy by singing or playing propaganda songs (28, 131), and the chambermaid keeps interrupting his sleep early in the morning to switch water bottles in the refrigerator, even disregarding the "do-not-disturb" sign on the door (35, 44). Mister Guy also fails twice to help the North Korean animators to understand the meaning of a cartoon bear character's "typically French gesture" (128), which they need to draw. He explains that people make this gesture when experiencing an electric shock. He even strangely appears to rejoice in the hypothetical situation: "Yes, ha ha ha ha! That's exactly it, an electric shock! Dzzt! Dzzt!" (77). In another instance, he vaguely responds that the gesture means "Ooh la la" while mimicking the cartoon bear's speech and hand movements (128). Differences of language and culture cannot be resolved in a short period

of time. Yet these anecdotes suggest that the nation's isolation is a major cause of the North Koreans' ignorance of manners and cultures widely acknowledged in the outside world.

The North Koreans in *Pyongyang* remain anonymous except for Mr. Kyu and Mr. Sin. Mr. Sin is the North Korean with whom Mister Guy most often talks. The disagreements between them signify not only individual but also geopolitical division. When Mister Guy raises the issue of Korean reunification, for example, Mr. Sin points out the responsibility of the United States for the division against the aspirations of both North and South Koreans. Mister Guy responds, "Hmm . . . I see" (63), but in his mind, he says with a playful smile, "Dream on, pal!" and rebuts that after the German reunification and the Asian financial crisis, South Koreans are no longer enthusiastic about reunification with "a country 46 times poorer than their own" (62). South Korean positions on reunification are open to debate. *Pyongyang* does not intend to seek these out, but Mister Guy's comments in his mind have the effect of aligning South Korea with the rest of world and against the North Koreans.

Mr. Sin is presented not simply as an unknowledgeable civilian. When speaking of the military tension in the Korean peninsula, Mr. Sin is transformed into a military commander (63). The visual change suggestively identifies his voice with the military's, thereby blurring the line between North Korean civilian and soldier. This is not the first time Mr. Sin's civilian-military identity is illuminated. When he is first introduced, two panels show the same figure of Mr. Sin, but his attire switches from civilian clothing to military uniform, and each caption implies that it is not easy for him to free himself from the military way of life: "Mister Sin. Fresh out of eight years of military service" (34). Commander Sin reappears as the captain of "a battalion of animators" (159) in Mister Guy's imagination, following panels that illustrate North Korea's military forces and North Koreans' preparedness for military drills. Another image attached to Mr. Sin and the North Koreans is a smiling clockwork toy that has a Kim Il-sung badge on the left side of its chest. The toy first appears, alongside the caption "[b]ody and soul serve the regime" (59), when Mr. Sin explains the North Koreans' duties to prepare for national events. The toy reappears later when Mister Guy visits the Tower of *Juche* with his attendants (75).

These images of North Koreans as both soldiers and clockwork toys are consistent with "the often-stereotypical ways in which North Korea is

looked at, thus establishing boundaries and difference" (Shim and Nabers 295). In "Imagining North Korea," David Shim and Dirk Nabers discuss two kinds of photographs of North Koreans from the Western media and analyze their "political and ethical significance" (296). On the one hand, Western photographs of North Koreans in "distress, depression, and desperation" or in suffering from malnutrition stereotype the nation as a "wimp" (Shim and Nabers 297). On the other hands, official North Korean photographs of military parades, displaying North Koreans as a "homogeneous, brain-washed, and robot-like mass" (301), offer evidence that the nation is a "menace" (300-01). The representation of North Koreans in military parades also appears in Suki Kim's travelogue, *Without You, There Is No Us* (2015). Kim infiltrated North Korea in 2011 as an English teacher and documented her observations of students from the ruling class, whom she describes as follows: "My little soldiers were also little robots" (278-79).

While Mr. Sin represents a stereotypical North Korean, the way he reifies the otherness of his people is not inherently "North Korean." When Mr. Sin or any other attendant expresses admiration for the achievement of North Korea at local attractions, his performance is not different from that of non-Western local tour guides outside North Korea, who mythologize the distinctions of their inheritance for Western tourists. In "Imagineering Otherness," Noel B. Salazar notes how "global tourism is the quintessential business of difference projection and the interpretive vehicle of Othering par excellence (with many peoples now cleverly Othering themselves)" (690). The primary purpose of tour guides is not to provide factual information but rather, as Salazar argues, "to satisfy the tourist's wish to see and experience the Other (as imagined since colonial times)" (691). Mr. Sin does not commercialize his knowledge or language capacity, and Mister Guy is never impressed by Mr. Sin's presentation. Nevertheless, it is hard to miss that Mr. Sin willingly embellishes his nation by othering himself for the Western visitor. As a result, like the narratives of other non-Western tour guides, his narrative of national glory inevitably participates in "the constant (re)production of stereotypes and categories of ethnic and cultural difference across the globe" (Salazar 690).

The attendants' explanations, therefore, should not always be taken at face value. Yet Mister Guy assumes that the North Koreans believe in their words. When an attendant says that there are no disabled people in North Korea because "all North Koreans are born strong, intelligent and healthy,"

for example, Mister Guy thinks to himself, "And from the way he says it, I think he believes it" (136). Mister Guy questions the authenticity of what he hears, but he often does not discuss it with the North Koreans. Mister Guy is silent as often as he is talkative. By his silence, he shares his thoughts about North Korea with readers, but not with the local people, thereby further distancing himself from North Koreans, as well as "them" from "us."

The same attitude is witnessed when Mr. Sin and Mr. Kyu inform Mister Guy about the global spread of *Juche*, the official ideology of North Korea, which the attendants promote as "the source of life that invigorates the spirit of all people, transcending latitude and longitude" (73). Mister Guy expresses repulsion but again only to himself: "Do they really believe the bullshit that's being forced down their throats?" (74). He believes that his attendants should know the position of North Korea in the world "[b]ecause they are among the privileged few who are able to leave the country" (75). Their status raises questions about North Korea's isolation again; the borders are not completely closed for North Koreans either. Mister Guy is speechless, however, when Mr. Sin denies the attractions of Paris: "It's full of beggars and it isn't very clean" (75).

To illuminate the reason for Mr. Sin's pretense, Delisle deploys a comic technique called *closure*, which Scott McCloud defines as the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (63). The first panel, showing Mr. Sin silently looking out of the window with his arms folded, is juxtaposed with a panel in which the clockwork toy reappears. While the first toy has only one spring in its back, the second toy has an additional spring in its head, connoting North Koreans' lack of critical thinking towards the regime. The image of the toy is followed by another panel showing the location of North Korea's political prison camps. According to McCloud's notion of closure, Delisle's ordering of these panels compels readers to fill the gaps ("gutters") between them, thereby reaching the conclusion that Mr. Sin may end up facing "life imprisonment" if he happens to "let on" about his personal thoughts to Mister Guy (75).

The logic underlying the arrangement of these three panels accords with the dominant "cultural representations" of North Korea widely circulated in the West. As Christine Kim elaborates, "these cultural representations function as a cultural fantasy of the inhuman for the rest of the world, one wherein the spectacular and macabre are pitched as the North Korean everyday" (223). In "Figuring North Korean Lives," Kim argues that the problem with post-World War II human rights discourses

concerns how they "imagin[e] the subject of human rights in Western terms" (222). As a result, she argues that "North Korea functions alternately as a metaphor for the inhuman and as a metonym for Asian incivility" (221) and thereby its historical achievement has been disregarded (224). Bruce Cumings corroborates the latter part of Kim's argument:

> An internal CIA study almost grudgingly acknowledged various achievements of the regime: compassionate care for children in general and war orphans in particular; "radical change" in the position of women; genuinely free housing, free health care, and preventive medicine; and infant mortality and life expectancy rates comparable to the most advanced countries until the recent famine. (viii-ix)

Mister Guy's adherence to a traditionally Western view of North Korean society causes him to overlook the complex subjectivity of Mr. Sin and other people of the same class. They are not simply native informants; as Mister Guy admits (Delisle 75), they are also travelers like himself, who may have "hybrid, cosmopolitan experiences as much as . . . rooted, native ones" (Clifford, "Traveling" 101). As Ulrich Beck writes, "*Transnational* is not conceptually opposed to *indigenous*. Transnationals are local people" (445). Moreover, Mister Guy is not the only one who acts as an observer. To Mr. Sin and his colleagues, Mister Guy is only a short-term visitor whom they should take turns watching. While performing his duties, Mr. Sin thus does not need to tell a foreign stranger what is on his mind at the risk of undermining his position. Mutual distrust is then sensed by both sides. Mister Guy, however, can hardly understand the significance of the local people's unheard voices, which are acknowledged even in Suki Kim's travelogue, a text that rarely deviates from its general skepticism about North Korea: "In groups, [my students] inevitably mouthed the right answer, which would then be reviewed in weekly Daily Life Unity critiques, but in private, their voices resonated" (279).

Even North Koreans with no opportunity to travel abroad were not completely "sealed off" (26) at the time when Delisle visited Pyongyang. During his reign from 1994 to 2011, Kim Jong-il's leadership was tested against "three crises": famine, the emergence of a market economy, and nuclear development (Buzo 247). The "Arduous March" (1994-1996), a catastrophic famine, is estimated to have "claimed the lives of between 200,000 and three million North Koreans" (Tudor and Pearson 18). The

government's inability to supply food and protect their people precipitated a market economy (*jangmadang*) in which daily necessities and foreign products were traded, including smuggled South Korean goods (Tudor and Pearson 25-29, 34-39). The markets that burgeoned in the late 1990s have continued to grow; according to Travis Jeppesen, who has visited North Korea five times since 2012, "[f]ar from being cut off from the rest of the world, the markets have put North Koreans directly in the middle of it" (114). North Korean markets did not only circulate material necessities from the outside in the early 2000s. As North Korean refugee Ji-min Kang recalls, "At first, it was Western culture that initially swept across Pyongyang. After that, Chinese and Hong Kong culture was the next to reach the big cities. Then South Korean dramas and music started to arrive" (qtd. in Tudor 69). Another refugee, Jinyuok Park, shares Kang's observation and underscores the popularity of South Korean television programs: "When I was still in North Korea, I only watched South Korean TV occasionally, and out of sheer curiosity. But these days North Koreans watch it almost every day" (qtd. in Tudor 76). Despite the North Korean government's control, South Korean popular culture had spread even among the elite. Referring to the work of Hye-il Ho, a former North Korean security guard, Ka Young Chung states: "during inspections in 2002, 600kg of South Korean videos, compact discs, and other publications were collected from students at Kim Il Sung University" (141). North Koreans were already aware that South Korea was materially richer and politically freer. Restrictions on information and mobility limit normal cultural flows. But North Koreans are no exception in terms of their connectivity with the world, as an anonymous translator demonstrates in *Pyongyang* with questions about Microsoft Windows and HTML (144). Mister Guy is not impressed, however; he instead stresses the absence of the Internet in North Korea. Upon discovering Autodesk 3ds Max graphics programs installed on computers at a school for gifted children, Mister Guy focuses on something else again: "I bet they didn't buy the licenses" (156). Despite the legitimacy of his concern about license, Mister Guy's remarks ignoring the local economic situation can pose a potential problem, which Michael Faber points out in a review of *Pyongyang* and *Shenzhen*: "There's always a risk that disdain for an oppressive regime can cross the line into disdain for people too poor to be cosmopolitans."

The recognition of the North Koreans in *Pyongyang* as social and cultural subjects interacting with their surroundings can change readers'

reception of Mister Guy's perspective. In "Travelling Culture," James Clifford suggests that the reconsideration of "indigenous collaborators" as "writers/inscribers" can help "to loosen the monological control of the executive writer/anthropologist and to open for discussion ethnography's hierarchy and negotiation of discourses in power-changed, unequal situations" (100). Clifford's argument can caution readers of *Pyongyang* to not entirely rely on Mister Guy's view and to recognize him as the outsider who fails to converse with the local people. Mister Guy is similar to his attendants in that his opinion of North Korea never varies over the course of his visit, thereby continuing to affirm the distance between North Korea and the West. Later in his stay, when a translator brings up US opposition to Korean reunification, Mister Guy breaks his silence to disagree with him, insisting that "the real problem . . . is that you've got only one source of information: the regime" (154). To support his position, Mister Guy picks up a French newspaper cartoon that satirizes President Jacques René Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, arguing that when "people are free to criticize . . . at least you can base your opinions on more than one point of view." Turning his back on the translator, Mister Guy then concludes his outburst by remarking, "[D]'you know what *we* say about democracy and dictatorship? Dictatorship means shut up, democracy means keep talking! Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha!" (155; emphasis mine). Mister Guy's skepticism about the potential for change in North Korea is intimated at the end of the book. In an interview, Delisle chooses *Pyongyang* as his favourite work and says, "I really like the ending of the book," though without providing further explanation (112). In *Pyongyang*, there are two scenes in which Mister Guy makes paper planes from recycled storyboard sheets and flies them from his hotel room on the fifteenth floor (114, 176). Mister Guy says, "I don't know why, but it makes me feel satisfied. Especially when I make it [a paper plane] to the river" (114). Here the paper airplane can symbolize the freedom of mobility, which Mister Guy believes does not exist for North Koreans or, temporarily, for him either. Interestingly, the storyboard sheet used for the paper plane on the last page has an image of the bear character making the "typically French gesture" (128) that the animators at SEK did not understand. In this sense, the ending can be interpreted as implying that establishing freedom in North Korea may be as hard, if not as impossible, as overcoming cultural barriers.

Despite essentializing North Korean "otherness," *Pyongyang*, like Delisle's other travelogues, is a complex text that includes representations

of North Koreans as ordinary people, which do not corroborate with Mister Guy's perspective. Ironically, Mr. Sin serves as a good example of this. After visiting a tae kwondo demonstration, Mr. Sin and Mr. Kyu bring Mister Guy to a shooting facility. Lacking military experience, he wildly fires his gun, mimicking Corto Maltese, Hugo Pratt's comic character (142). Mister Guy believes that Mr. Sin and Mr. Kyu "have the advantage of a few years of military training," but he surprisingly obtains the highest score. The subsequent panel shows Mister Guy celebrating by putting his hands up and saying, "Yes!" while Mr. Sin's sullen face silently looks down at his score sheet (142). Mr. Sin's reaction may not seem special; it can be observed in any person whose self-esteem has been hurt. But considering the portrayal of his identity as a clockwork toy and a soldier, Mr. Sin's expression of emotion, not to mention the comical atmosphere of the situation, makes him appear more human, like people in "normal" nations. At another moment, Mister Guy asks Mr. Sin to identify a propaganda song in which "Kim Jong-il" is the only Korean word that Mister Guy recognizes. After Mister Guy imitates the song as "Pa-Pa-Pam / Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa / Kim Jong-Il! / Pa-Pa-Pa" (125), Mr. Sin sings a song that sounds like "Ani-Yooooo-Na / To Yo Suuuu-ki / / Sun-Yo Chouu," and smiles, believing that he has figured it out (126). Yet Mister Guy responds, "No, not that one. Mine was slower," and imitates the song again. Mr. Sin sings five different songs in a row, but Mister Guy keeps saying, "That's not it," "Nope," "Not at all," "Don't think so," and "Uh-uh." The last panel on the page shows Mr. Sin's singing face with the caption, "If we hadn't arrived at work, we could have spent the day going through the repertoire" (126). The propaganda songs undoubtedly praise the glory of Kim Jong-il and his regime. Nevertheless, Mr. Sin is not portrayed as an impenetrable other as in other anecdotes; the onomatopoeic representation of his singing and the sequence of his various faces create a comic effect. At this moment, Mr. Sin is seen as a local person willingly helping a foreign colleague, who cannot identify a local song due to the language barrier.

Furthermore, not all North Koreans in *Pyongyang* are portrayed as homogenous and collective. In the later part of the book, Mister Guy is happy to learn that the current animation director is being replaced by a more skillful animator who "comes from a village near the Chinese border" (151). Considering the new director's success, Mister Guy admits that it is possible to gain social status in North Korea through individual ability, although Mister Guy's admissions are not without reservation:

> [I]n a way, I'm glad to know his drawing skills let him leave his remote village to make a better life for himself and his family. Come to think of it, it's probably the only upside to the whole Asian subcontracting system. The others who wind up in Pyongyang take a far less glorious path. (151)

Later, Mister Guy encounters a young animator who does not join the mandatory screening of a propaganda film in his workplace. When Mister Guy asks for the reason, the young animator asserts, "I don't like movies made here. They're boring" (153). Mister Guy is so impressed that he describes the young animator's words as "the most subversive thing I heard a North Korean say" and "as incredibly bold" (153). No further depiction of the new director or of the young animator follows; nevertheless, the fragmentary anecdotes indicate that North Koreans also desire success and individuality, the same as in Western societies. Mister Guy may not have imagined finding such universality in North Korea, but his encounter with these two North Koreans, along with the anecdotes of Mr. Sin, present moments, albeit brief and transient, when North Koreans are *un*-othered and seen as fellow human beings living in a different society.

The young animator's attitude may preview what the following generations of North Koreans could be like. At the end of his North Korean travelogue, *See You Again in Pyongyang* (2018), Jeppesen describes the soldier who guided him to the Demilitarized Zone and nearby areas during his first visit to the nation in 2012. Jeppesen finds the soldier to be almost the same age as him (early thirties), likely from an affluent family, and "full of questions" (300), about which they have a conversation. Here is Jeppesen's reminiscence of the young North Korean about ten years after Delisle left Pyongyang:

> [W]e find ourselves on common ground, and we both know it, without having to say it. I'm from where I'm from, he's from this place, and there's nothing we can do about it. We are both the products of countries determined to do their own thing, to pursue their agendas and interests with cunning and aggression. Maybe there's a part of both of us that tends to look at the worlds we come from and wonder what's real and what's not.
>
> He looks at me, and I look at him. He smiles and shrugs, says something in Korean. My guide laughs.
>
> "What did he say?" I ask her.

> "Countries are countries," she translates, "But people are people." (300-01)

III. Negotiation between "Our" Belief and "Their" Reality

Pyongyang reinscribes the effect of "our" conventional perspectives on "others" even in the era of globalization. It also evinces that travelling does not necessarily prompt visitors to question "our" previous knowledge of local "others." To stop othering North Koreans, however, is not "to 'whitewash' the behavior of the regime" (Tudor 10). It is a first step toward "an affirmation of the other as both different and the same" (Beck 439). Cumings arrives at a similar point of view and writes, "I have no sympathy for the North, which is the author of most of its troubles" (xi). "But on my infrequent visits to the country," he continues,

> I have been happy—in trying to fathom an undeniable difference, in getting to know ordinary people who say and do the same things ordinary people do in the South, in meeting highly skilled officials who have taken the measure of our leaders more than once (xi).

These experiences lead Cumings to conclude, "*It is their country*, for better or worse—another country." Rüdiger Frank, a German economist, shares Cuming's view, based on his multiple visits to North Korea between 1991 and 2018. In the preface to the Korean translation of *Unterwegs in Nordkorea*, he writes:

> North Korea is certainly not paradise, but it is not hell either. Many people are successful, and many are not . . . We should not have delusions about the North Korean regime and the intentions of its leaders, but we should also avoid blind hatred and stereotypical thinking. The North Koreans are not stupid, simple, uneducated, uncivilized, or cruel. At least in such special circumstances, we can do the same, but nothing more. (10)

The views above presuppose the recognition of both differences and commonalities between "us" and "them." *Pyongyang* presents the possibility of identifying North Koreans by negotiating between two conflicting representations of them: On one hand the North Koreans who correspond with Mister Guy's preconceived notion of otherness, and on the other hand, the North Koreans who do not appear like "them." Both appear in Delisle's text, and it is up to readers which of the two representations

they will primarily take into account.

Notes

1. This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2018S1A5A2A02070219).
2. According to Philipp Wassler and Markus Schuckert, North Korea has opened its gates to foreign tourists "gradually, during the last decade," for the purpose of obtaining foreign currency, although the tourism program is "still far from developed" (123). The government aimed to host one hundred thousand tourists in 2014 and two million in 2020, but the goal does not seem to have been achieved. About six thousand Westerners are estimated to have visited North Korea per year until 2017, when the US government banned Americans from visiting due to the death of Otto Warmbier, who visited North Korea but returned in a vegetative condition (Frank 29).
3. As a French-speaking Canadian, Delisle published *Pyongyang* in French in 2003, with the English translation appearing in 2005. Another notable graphic travelogue of North Korea is Yeong Jin Oh's *A Visitor from the South*, which was published in Korean in 2004 and translated into French in 2008 under the title of *Le Visiteur du Sud*. It won the Prix Asie-ACBD in France in the same year. The travelogue portrays Oh's daily life in Sinpo, North Korea over 548 days (2000-2001), when he worked as an engineer on the construction of a light-water reactor.
4. Park's and Kang's books are published only in Korean. The translations are mine.
5. In 2011, Charles K. Armstrong notes, "The study of North Korea is no longer *terra incognita* in the English language world" (357). He presents as evidence scholarly works, refugee testimonies, journalism, expatriate accounts, films, photographs, and other uncategorized texts about North Korea, including Delisle's *Pyongyang*, published in English in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As Armstrong demonstrates, these publications were made possible because of internal changes within North Korean society, the migration of North Korean refugees, and released Chinese, Japanese, and Soviet archives. Despite the ongoing opaqueness of North Korea, Armstrong argues that the production of further works is "not a problem of insufficient information, but rather insufficient motivation and imagination" (369). In 2017, Tudor notes in *Ask a North Korean* that "North Korea is well represented in English language articles and books," although topics are concentrated on politics and refugee "horror stories" (7).

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