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21st-Century Poetics

Margery Fee

One thing that working on this double issue—certainly more than double in its impact—has taught me is that experimental poetics both needs and resists convention. This explains why the guest editors are calling their editorial an afterword and putting it at the back, where I hope you will look for and read it. (It might have been more creative to call it an afterword and put it at the front, but they are guests, and we try to make them happy.) Like them, I want to let the articles, poems, notes, conversations, and reviews speak for themselves, particularly since they are more closely interrelated than is common in most special issues. It's clear that those writing and written about here live in a world a little at a tangent to the academy and to convention, a world that *Canadian Literature* is happy to invite you to enjoy.

Given that I am co-author of an English usage guide, it might seem that I should be fanatically attached to convention and consistency. But I'm not sure that I'm all that grateful for the labours of those who have standardized spelling, punctuation, bibliographic style, and so on. I am still correcting the spelling of *its* in doctoral thesis drafts (hint: never put the apostrophe *after* the "s" because that will *always* be wrong). Sometimes I wonder if the huge amount of time we spend making sure that everything is consistent is worth it. Who but us, for example, is going to notice that the MLA short title choices in this issue vary from article to article? Nonetheless, if conventions weren't firm, how would poets get a rise from their readers by shifting accents around on their own names, for example, or spelling *translation* as translation, or translating the German *Niemand* as noone? This is one

way poets interrupt our automatic text processing, inspiring us to feel or think new and unexpected things. Trailing pseudo-typos like *framing* and *farming*, *fingering* and *figuring* past our earnest gaze, these poet-critics make proofreaders into their patsies. No wonder there is a whole book of poetry called *[sic]*. Would it make a difference if we convinced you that there were hidden messages in our typos? (No, we didn't misspell your name, we . . . poeticized it.) Oddly, alas, typos remain typos no matter what. It's *even worse* to get an intentional misspelling wrong. Just a normal typo, oh well. But to correct an intentional misspelling is to ruin a philosophical point. So the insanity of standardization is revealed in all its true horror (and beauty), because not even the avant-garde can do without it.

The poems and essays in this issue have led me to rethink my reaction that playing with accents, typefaces, and spelling is just silly. (Clint and Christine have both dragged me through many such impasses, as I plaintively wail "Why wear a cowboy shirt to a job interview?" and "How can this poetry be democratic?" They just drag me resolutely along, their poetic teeth gritted, and I thank them for it.) I loved learning about enantiomorphosis, the Neo-Baroque, and 'pataphysics.

I take the apostrophe in 'pataphysics as standing for something important that isn't there. (Like the o, in *isn't*, but bigger and harder to guess.) Although I read Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* for my doctoral examinations, then I understood only the importance of being earnest (not Ernest). The idea of a science based on exceptions and contradictions had not then appeared in my intellectual landscape. (Soon after, I learned about it from a disco dancing comparativist as we twizzled across the floor at the Toronto Airport Hilton.)

When some analytic philosophers tried to dissuade Cambridge University from giving Jacques Derrida an honorary degree, they wrote to the *Times* of London (9 May 1992) that many of his formulations

> seem to consist in no small part of elaborate jokes and the puns "logical phallusies" and the like, and M. Derrida seems to us to have come close to making a career out of what we regard as translating into the academic sphere tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or of the concrete poets.

He got the degree. Surely someone has already called him Derridada.

Derrida was accused of pseudophilosophy; Dr. Faustroll, one of Jarry's alter egos, *was* a pseudophilosopher. I've been teaching science fiction and science studies for the last few years, keeping in mind Bruno Latour's comment in *We Have Never Been Modern* that the West anchors its superiority in its possession of a singular universal science. This is where my

editorial hooks up with the afterword; no one science can comprehensively account for all the phenomena out there, all moving, all interacting. Good scientists know this. (Neutrinos may have to be renamed, now they appear to be going faster than light—I vote for calling them faustrolls.) Science (we could put an apostrophe in front of it to remind us of what is being left out) aims to generalize, to take a vast buzzing world of events and objects and creatures and taxonomize it so as to deduce explanatory universal laws. But of course, science usually does not deal with individual events, things, or creatures (no unicorns or phoenixes, please). Lyrical poetry finds its voice precisely there, with a wandering lonely poet personifying flowers in a well-known landscape. And poetry also generalizes and taxonomizes and philosophizes ("A rose is a rose is a rose"). In science, the singular exception is not a rose, but the Big Bang. Latour argues in "The Compositionist Manifesto" that it has been deployed to make everything since then into an agentless effect of a singular cause. Dr. Faustroll would never be that dull. Dr. Latour argues that agency pervades networks of connection among people and what is cordonned off as Nature and Technology, at least in our epistemology. For scientists, exceptions are assumed to "prove the rule." For poets, rules make the exception worth writing about. It is not just imaginary gardens with real toads, although that's a start. For Derrida, it is that real toads are, in their reality, beyond the text; humans "cannot refer to this 'real' except in an interpretive experience" (*Limited Inc* 148). If you hold a toad, both your hand and the toad's body are real, but what you make of the experience is an interpretation, whether you write a poem, discover a new species, or just get warts.

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Scott Pound

Language Writing and the Burden of Critique

I HATE SPEECH.
—Robert Grenier

Robert Grenier's famous statement has the distinction of being both the principal rallying cry and battle stance of a vigorous avant-garde movement and a deep well of complexity and strangeness. It first appears in a short text called "ON SPEECH," one of five essays by Grenier published in the first issue of *This* magazine (1971).[1] Fifteen years later, in his introduction to the groundbreaking anthology *In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry*, Ron Silliman would single out the phrase as the announcement of "a new moment in American writing" (xvii).[2] Since then, Silliman and others have returned to Grenier's statement again and again as the hallmark of a poetics founded on strategies of cultural and critical opposition.[3] From this grounding in oppositionalism and critique, language writing has been unified and canonized as a vanguard movement.

Looking back now at Silliman's introduction one is struck by how much qualification it took to stabilize Grenier's statement. This declaration, Silliman writes, "was not to be taken at face value" (xvii). In fact, "*This* 1 was obsessed with speech," in particular Grenier's own poem "Wintry" which reproduces "dialect variations in prosody and pronunciation of his native Minnesota" (xvii). And Grenier's "complex call for a projective verse that could . . . 'proclaim an abhorrence of 'speech''" was "*only one* axis of a shift within writing which became manifest with the publication of *This*" (xvii, emphasis added). Although the "particular contribution of *This*" was to reject "a speech-based poetics" and consciously raise "the issue of reference," "neither speech nor reference were ever, in any real sense, 'the enemy'" (xviii). The use of "I HATE SPEECH" as a literary historical marker also asks

us to disregard Grenier's own background as a writer (in addition to being a vanguard poet, he was also a former student of Robert Lowell, a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and the author of a Harvard honors thesis on the prosody of William Carlos Williams), his relationship to Larry Eigner (whose difficulty with speech profoundly impacted Grenier), the thrust of his essay (to contemplate not just a break with literary tradition but also "the way forward from Williams"), and the performative and rhetorical qualities of the statement itself (the fact that the very resonance of the statement—not to mention that the words are shouted in capital letters—complicates its apparent univocality).

The completeness with which totalizing uses of Grenier's statement have eclipsed the tensions within it is striking and revealing: striking for the rhetorical and critical force generated and for the amount of qualification required to carry it off and revealing for the sense it yields of how deeply the phrase has been leveraged to critical ends. As critique, language writing takes up a powerful and stable position anchored by an outspoken and highly distinctive point of view. From this standpoint, language writers produced statements that were incisive and compelling and relentless in their efforts to expose the false idols of speaking subjects and linguistic referents and debunk the "myth of speech." At the same time, critique is much more than just a vehicle for demystifying the formal conventions of realism and confessionalism. It is also the means by which language writing radicalizes itself as a two-headed juggernaut: a poetic and a critical avant-garde. As Jeff Derksen notes, "the valorization of Grenier's statement as the moment of origination . . . determines the language writers as an historical avant-garde, gaining its originality in splitting from the poetics of the previous avant-garde, the New American Poetry" (46). In addition to functioning as a temporal great divide, Grenier's phrase establishes the other great divide that sustains language writing's oppositionalism: the distinction between speech and writing. The critique of speech in turn puts language writing into obvious alignment with poststructuralism. Derrida's identification of the cultural logic of humanism with the history of phonocentrism gives the language writers' critique of speech-based poetics a much larger purchase, allowing a highly localized critique of poetics to annex an encompassing critique of metaphysics and the humanist subject. The final pillar of language writing's critical poetics was the adaptation of Marx's theory of the commodity fetish to characterize linguistic reference as an after-effect of capitalism. Again, Silliman provides the most forceful articulation:

"Under the sway of the commodity fetish, language itself appears to become transparent, a mere vessel for the transfer of ostensibly autonomous referents" ("Disappearance" 11). This act of doubly dichotomizing the cultural field structures language writing's claims to vanguard status, agonistically and hyperbolically inscribing "speech" and "speech-based poetics" as formally homologous to humanism and capitalism.

I single out critique to show how much it has done to structure and launch discourse about language writing, but also to open it up for analysis and to question it. There is no doubt that the turn to critique as a standpoint for poetics accomplished a great deal for language writing in terms of unifying and radicalizing it as a movement. My argument in this essay is that it is also responsible for introducing a culturally reductive set of discriminations into conversations about poetics. This is because the refinements required to make poetics do critical work result in major distortions elsewhere. For example, in seeking an affirmation of critique based in a rejection of speech, supporters of language writing effect common cause with the most powerful critical vanguard of the 1970s and 1980s, but also commit to an unconvincing cultural narrative predicated on the supposed transparency and metaphysicality of speech. In generalizing speech as a cipher for metaphysics and speech-based poetics, language writing mounts a vigorous and influential critique of poetic norms, but loses track of speech as a medium and the movement's own complex investments in the materiality of opaque and fragmented speech. In splitting the cultural field into ideological positions defined by speech and writing, language writing gains critical currency, but loses the ability to conceptualize the convergence of speech and writing as media. The critical and canonizing work Grenier's phrase performs for language writing therefore needs to be understood in relation to the set of dubious cultural judgments it introduces into conversations about poetics.

Analyzing the status of critique in language writing discourse presents certain difficulties. The ubiquity of critique as the gold standard of theoretical inquiry and interrogation renders it oddly invisible, and the self-validating force of its use can make it seem impregnable. Critique is something of a "black box" in Bruno Latour's sense of the term: a way of speaking and a set of procedures "made invisible by its own success" (*Pandora's Hope* 304). As the opposite of dogma and the foundation since Kant for thinking as a systematic, rigorous enterprise, critique doesn't attract doubt; its job is to project doubt onto other things.[4] The work of critique, like the scientific and technical devices Latour describes in *Pandora's Hope*, therefore constitutes a

self-validating mechanics: "When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity" (304).

The status of critique as both ubiquitous and seemingly impregnable can make its very use culturally validating, and what I will call this "validation effect" can outperform its ostensible function as a mode of inquiry and interrogation. I believe Silliman's efforts to customize Grenier's phrase as a univocal critical statement in the face of contradictory evidence should be read in this way—not as a willful misrepresentation, but as a case of strategic misprision. In its need to mark an absolute separation between the emergent "new moment in American writing" and everything else, it misconstrues equally the Pound/Williams tradition, Black Mountain, and the New American Poetry. This is allowed to happen because the critical narrative thus constructed is ultimately pitched, not as an interrogation of speech-based poetics, but as a validation of language writing.[5] Alan Golding's assessment of the politics of language writing, "as addressed to the canon-making institutions of contemporary poetry" is a valuable insight here (151).[6] The thrust of Silliman's anthology was to counteract the cultural invisibility of vanguard poetry and to intervene in canon-making discussions. The case Silliman presents for language writing's cultural value is its critical standpoint. In the context of a literary field constructed as an arena, language writing proves itself by standing in critical opposition to the manifest complicity of earlier schools of poetry with uncritical ideas. In this way, language writing's oppositionalism is offered as proof of its exceptionalism.

This method of self-validation via critical separation and negation proved remarkably successful. Indeed, Silliman has been so effective in addressing the canon-making institutions of American poetry that he has become one himself. Key to the authority of his work is the self-validating force of its criticality and oppositionalism. As Latour would say, to be critical is to be right![7] Moreover, the theoretical grounding of Silliman's critical writing opens up a space where poets can convene with critics to champion vanguard poetics as an agonistic enterprise bent on critical and cultural emancipation. In this light Golding sees language writing as "the best hope for breaking down the impasse between poetry and theory that has led to the marginalization of poetry within the academy and that is pushing poetry itself toward the status of a minor genre" (148).

In the same way that Silliman's commentary should be understood as a strategic misprision, Grenier's "abhorrence of speech" obviously needs to be

(and has been) understood tactically as a disturbance "in the field." As Pierre Bourdieu notes, "What happens in the field is more and more linked to a specific history of the field, and hence it becomes more and more difficult to deduce it directly from the state of the social world at the moment under consideration" (qtd. in Ngai 954). Grenier's statement is "not to be taken at face value" because its field of application is not the social world, but rather the history of poetics. Which is to say that Grenier invokes speech, not as a thing, but as a critical object. The speech Grenier hates is the ossified "reiteration of the past dragged on in formal habit," an affectation and imitation of the thing itself, "the various vehicle that American speech is" ("ON SPEECH"). The speech Grenier's followers hate is a similar, though constantly shimmering, image of the same spectre: the expressive voice of personal lyricism. But these acts of curtailment also have important consequences. In order for it to perform critical and canonizing work for language writing, Grenier's statement must be lifted from its complex grounding in social circumstance and rhetoric and be put into a critical narrative. The result is a view that separates speech and writing and uses that distinction to structure the literary field as an exaggerated conflict between stereotyped positions. In other words, a cultural melodrama. That is the critical view. The historical view presents us with a different, more nuanced, and far more compelling story.

In his introduction to *The Collected Poems of Larry Eigner* (2010), Grenier describes the visit he made in January 1971 to Eigner's home in Swampscott, Massachusetts, just as the first issue of *This* magazine was being assembled.

> I was a creepy little magazine editor trying to crawl in there and get a poem (for nothing!) for my (unpublished) 'periodical' *this* [sic]—from the author of *From The Sustaining Air, On My Eyes* and *Another Time In Fragments*—and Larry welcomed me, warmly and openly. (This was his opportunity to *talk...*) His diminutive mother, Bessie, brought out a plate of snacks, and I was introduced to his father, Israel, who receded into the background of the house.
>
> Because I couldn't understand *At All* what he was saying—in his <u>barrage</u> <u>of</u> (<u>palsied</u>) <u>speech</u> [sic]—he had not had 'opportunity to converse' for so long!—in my *panic* (after all, I knew something of his work and was currently teaching his poems in my Modern Poetry class at Tufts), I asked Larry to read aloud several poems which I 'knew in the book'—and thereby began the process of learning to hear what he was saying (because I could *see it on the page*, as he spoke). (n. pag.)

Here, the opacity of Eigner's speech prompts a panicked response in Grenier that yields an extraordinary moment of connection. Not just between the two poets who would become lifelong friends, but also between speech and

writing. Picking up the book Grenier learns how to hear and understand because he could "*see it on the page*, as [Eigner] spoke."

> I came out of there (after c. 2 1/2 hours, of that first interview) *utterly exhausted*—from the 'language problem' and trying to keep up with Larry's relentless ('monologue') energy and 'sidewise'/associational thinking. Afterward, I just <u>sat</u> <u>in</u> <u>my</u> <u>car</u> (the green Jeep, it would have been), before gathering myself to drive home to Lanesville, where Emily, Amy and I lived then.
>
> It was immediately clear to me that Larry Eigner was a very considerable person, whose existence shone forth from him (how else say it?)—and who was one with a '*métier*' (just like, differently, W. C. Williams—<u>writing</u>—despite Stein's spiteful retort), a *measure*—a 'homegrown/American' *use of his typewriter* ! (n. pag.)

This highly charged encounter with the embodied prosody of Eigner's speech coupled with the text of his poetry and his use of the typewriter presents a very different story than the usual narrative about the formation of language poetry as a critical site. Here is an example of speech that is opaque rather than transparent, which conceals the speaker as much as it reveals him, and which effectuates itself in an energetic hybrid with writing. This critical moment in the formation of language writing here defies all the critical distinctions that would later come to speak for it.

In the critical narrative that frames language writing, ethos is treated as highly suspect for its suggestion of a connection between language and the speaker, as if such a connection always and automatically constituted an appeal to the metaphysics of presence, and as if such an appeal was always and automatically a symptom of critical blindness and conceptual weakness.[8] But in Grenier's story the complex personhood, speech, presence, and ethos of Eigner is powerfully invoked as a circumstance of literary history.

> That very *presence* of the eyes—and the intelligence and sympathy and 'openness of understanding' in them—was what was initially absolutely engaging to me, when I first walked up to the door . . . (Larry's workspace was the front porch)—this was determinative. (n. pag.)

Grenier's appeal to the presence and personhood of Eigner is continuous with his filiations for Williams' prosody and the claims of projective verse, and deserves to be considered in relation to other pointed statements Grenier has made that signal his ongoing commitment to prosody as a dimension of poetics and his indifference to critique: "Not about 'knowledge', but RHYTHMS of what's being said!" (*Farming the Words* n.pag.). But Silliman's repeated attempts to radicalize Grenier's statement as a "carefully constructed attempt to transform the project of poetry" ("Dysfunction" 182) and *This* 1 as "a calculated revolutionary sequence" (188) take things in a very different direction.

Other statements by Grenier suggest an unwillingness to endorse the critical narrative put together by Silliman and others. In the following exchange from *Hills* 6/7 (1980) about the status of voice and persona in William Stafford's poem "Traveling Through the Dark," Grenier declines to trumpet the party line.

> [*Bob Perelman:*] ["Traveling Through the Dark"] is all persona in the worst sense. It's the persona of the real life self speaking normally. . . .
>
> [T]his is a "voice" poem. William Stafford has "found his voice." It's all realistic, but all it leads up to is the pathetic fallacy of "I could hear the wilderness listen." A typical neo-academic dirge for nature. The poet is firmly in the driver's seat, "I could hear the wilderness," and firmly in control of all the meaning, "I thought hard for us all."
> . . . .
> [T]he I is in a privileged position, unaffected by the words.
>
> *Robert Grenier: I* don't think it's fair to dump on the emotional self as commodity. What is there of interest that draws people to that poem?
>
> *Perelman:* The Stafford poem? I don't know. It's a question of how people read and the circuits that have been opened in readers' minds. The way poetry is being taught now there's less sense of possibility and the mass of people who do read poetry, which isn't very big, have read poems like this, and it's a reassuring, soothing sense of self.
>
> *Grenier:* That you don't often have in your daily life.
>
> *Perelman:* Yes.
>
> *Grenier:* And that you can project yourself onto and identify with as a kind of locus of sensibility that you'd like to be possessed of, at least while reading the page, to give the world a center of feeling it might not have in the flux of shifting phenomena. . . .
>
> *Silliman:* . . . all the language is subservient to this umbrella structure, which only surfaces in the poem at the word *I*. What makes the poem work is that same sense of agreement you get in bad didactic writing, whether it's talking about the individualized subjective I or the People or Logos. We've seen a lot of umbrella terms used badly in poetry. And Stafford simply represents one form of that, where all the language dissolves as you're reading it. When you hear language being used "poetically," like the cat purring, it comes across in a really smarmy way. (qtd. in Perelman et al. n. pag.)

In this example, the revolutionary reading of form that validates language writing is recycled as prima facie evidence of Stafford's standing as a voice-hugger. Grenier's uncritical interest in how Stafford's poem might function within a practical habitus of reading and sensibility is so far out of line with the other speakers that they struggle to formulate a response to it.

In the context of language writing doctrine we should take Perelman and Silliman's assessments as enlightened and critical and Grenier's position as hopelessly naïve, but the degree of generalization and critical overstatement in Perelman and Silliman's position (note the frequency of the word "all") and the goodwill and openness of Grenier's response make that difficult to do. Instead, we're more apt to notice how quickly the revolutionary reading of form yielded its own highly conventionalized way of talking about poetry and how this free fall from critique to boilerplate criticism coincides with the creation of a proscriptive formalist imaginary that legislates for judgment in conversations about poetics.

Even though language poetry's critique of speech is meant as an indictment of personal lyricism and not "the various vehicle that American speech is"—an indictment, that is, of speech the critical object rather than speech the thing—it nonetheless progresses into a disavowal of prosody itself, leading Douglas Messerli to conclude that "a harmful disjuncture between prosody and American poetry has occurred" (n. pag.). As speech the critical object starts to engulf speech the thing, the critical discussion arrives at a generalized condemnation of prosody and intonation:

> As the speech-based poetics of the mid-century has given way, more and more, to the foregrounding of the materiality of the written sign itself, a prosody based on intonational contours has become increasingly problematic. The emphasis on the moment of enunciation (at best variable and transitory) now seems a questionable procedure, whether for the poet or the reader. For such "momentary" or "instantaneous" rhythm suggests that there is first an experience, something lived and felt *out there*, and then only then and secondarily its verbal rendering. But this doctrine goes counter to everything poststructuralist theory has taught us: if writing is regarded, not as the linear representation of a prior "full" or "originary" speech, but as what Derrida calls a "sequence of differences," a sequence in which the phonemic, graphemic, and ideographic elements of language are brought into play, then we may expect to find a poetic composition that is neither conventionally metrical on the one hand, nor breath-determined or "intonational" on the other. (Perloff, *Radical Artifice* 137-38)

One purpose of poststructuralist critique is to destabilize binary oppositions, but as we can see from the above statement, those oppositions have a way of reasserting themselves. In the case of deconstruction it is Derrida himself who first dismantles but then rebuilds the binary opposition between speech and writing. For Derrida, the logic of *différance* dictates that all signifiers are prey to the difference and deference that "always already" affects signification such that the "fallen secondarity" that seemed to characterize writing alone is a property of all language, speech included.[9] Writing thus inhabits speech

and thereby "*comprehends* language" (*Of Grammatology* 7). But in choosing to name the hybrid object that results from this analysis *writing* (*écriture*) and by choosing to validate it in opposition to *speech*, Derrida reproduces the binary logic he had so adeptly displaced. The interrogation poststructuralist critique performs on the history of Western metaphysics yields a new critical object, but the process of validating the results of this analysis reinscribes the binary.

As with Silliman's use of Grenier's phrase we can see the two functions of critique—interrogation and validation—interfering with one another. As a method for interrogating ideas, critique is a very powerful tool, but as a method for validating positions it often seeks shelter in dubious narrativizing. The strong part of Derrida's argument is its interrogation of the idealist logic within the history of metaphysics that valorizes the supposed ontological priority of speech over writing. Certainly, Derrida's readings of Plato, Rousseau, Saussure, and Lévi-Strauss are among the very best examples of critique as a mode of interrogation that one could mention. But how do we explain Derrida's over-reaching attempt to validate writing by casting it as the protagonist in a captivity narrative? Derridean grammatology asks us to understand speech as the domineering figure in a very long tradition that subordinates writing as a mere supplement to inner audition, an idea which Derrida overstates to the point of absurdity: "The system of 'hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak' through the phonic substance . . . has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch," he writes (*Of Grammatology* 7-8). This fullness of speech is in turn totalized via alignment with "all the metaphysical determinations of truth" (10), or the logos. And "Within this logos," Derrida states, "the original and essential link to the phone has never been broken" (11). So convinced is Derrida of this indissoluble link between voice and the logos that he repeats it several more times in the succeeding paragraphs.

> The voice . . . has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity to the mind. (11)
> In every case, the voice is closest to the signified. (11)
> Within the heritage of that logocentrism that is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning. (11-12)
> Hegel demonstrates very clearly the strange privileging of sound in idealization. (12)

But in fact the link between speech and logos had been broken. As Friedrich Kittler notes, "Hegel had referred to 'the *sound*' as 'a disappearing of being in the act of being,' subsequently celebrating it as a 'saturated expression of the manifestation of inwardness.' What is impossible to store could not be

manipulated. Ridding itself of its materiality or clothes, it disappeared and presented inwardness as a seal of authenticity" (36). The construction of sound as an emblem of inwardness and unmediated self-presence supposes a pre-Edisonian world in which sounds are always ephemeral, always disappearing in the act of becoming, always indicative of the presence of the subject to itself. With the invention of recording technology, sound ceased to be necessarily ephemeral. It could be exteriorized and stored and manipulated. Sound recording disrupts "the absolute proximity of voice and being," and this dissociation of sound from being breaks the metaphysical contract. In Hegel's day, phonocentrism and logocentrism were the same thing—speech always coincided with self-presence—but after Edison speech and presence are no longer indissolubly linked. The absolute inwardness of the phone that Derrida inscribes as a condition of phonologocentrism does not apply in a post-Edisonian world.[10]

And yet, the rhetorical and self-validating force of Derrida's presentation of this story is so great that his conflation of phonocentrism and logocentrism is brought into literary critical conversations unchallenged. The subsequent construction of speech and voice in language writing discourse as constituting an automatic appeal to presence reproduces the flaw in Derrida's argument. In choosing to understand speech as irredeemably bound up with appeals to transparency and self-presence—as a medium that doesn't mediate—language writing loses its ability to formulate speech and personhood as social facts and cultural material. More than that, the use of critique to problematize speech reinscribes a Cartesian dualism that would seek to distinguish between a form of ersatz mind exemplified by textuality/signification/analysis and embodiment. As Barrett Watten puts it,

> My point in writing on Ginsberg and the 60s has been that Language poetics begins right there, with the dissociation of signification from embodiment. Why was that necessary or good? Because the insistence on embodied presence seemed to imply an authority in the poet, not in the poet's diagnosis of or response to the war. The analysis of the war that produced its rejection finally boils down to an embodied response, but this did not necessarily communicate an analysis. And we need now to communicate our analysis, not only register our rejection of the war. ("War = Language")

Watten's desire to purify analysis of the taint of embodiment mirrors Silliman's belief in the corrupting status of voice and ethos in performance where the presence of the poet on stage is held up as a distraction from the "text *as text*" ("*Who Speaks*"), and the same discrimination features in Silliman's 1986 work *The Chinese Notebook*, to which I turn now.

The Chinese Notebook is a remarkable and provocative work and perhaps the most sustained and considered attempt to flesh out the thinking behind language writing's critique of speech and its corresponding affirmation of the textual condition as a cultural ground, so I will devote some time to it.

Silliman presents the text as a logical positivist discourse on language in the mode of Ludwig Wittgenstein's early philosophy. In place of lines we have a series of 223 numbered propositions and questions. The very occasional eruptions of sound play are spoofs: of alliteration ("Wayward we weigh words" [149]), rhyme ("The chair in the air is covered with hair" [149]), and pun ("*sad is faction*" [165] and "Alimentary, my dear Watson" [173]). The only recurrent image in the poem is, tellingly, a non-image: air. The poem represents Silliman's most complete attempt at a work of pure logopoeia. In Ezra Pound's parlance: "the dance of the intelligence among words and ideas." Whereas Wittgenstein claimed that "One should really only do philosophy as poetry" ["*Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten*"], Silliman is testing out the notion that it is possible to do poetry in the mode of philosophy, making use of propositions, interrogations, and thought experiments to examine the poem's relation to language, truth, subjectivity, and the world.

Is *The Chinese Notebook* a parody? Some aspects of Silliman's investigation of linguistic reference might suggest so. In section 29, Silliman writes, "29. Mallard, drake—if the words change, does the bird remain?" (152). And yet, the will among language writers to question and politicize the referential function of language is a pillar of their critical standpoint, one that finds critical power and poetic capital in the act of corrupting the epistemologies of capitalism and humanism. For the language writers the question of linguistic reference couldn't be more important. As Watten has shown, a poetics of disabled, or complicated, or vanishing reference can work as a method for exposing the ideological structures at work in the cultures of capitalist economies: "*Language* for us was a process of ideological unmasking, an unlinking of interests from chronic ideas, reified frames" ("Turn to Language"). Silliman, in his essays from the 70s, often posits the same relation between form and politics:

> What happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its expository, descriptive, and narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of "realism," the illusion of reality in capitalist thought. These developments are tied directly to the function of reference in language, which under capitalism is transformed, narrowed into referentiality. ("Disappearance" 10)

Like Watten, Silliman finds critical force in this coupling of Marxist philosophy and the poststructuralist reading of Saussurean linguistics. The position Silliman and Watten formulate isolates reference as a strategic point of theoretical leverage, the logic being that if capitalist ideology works by oversimplifying reference, passing off highly contrived representations as transparent and natural, then it is possible to expose and critique the procedures of capitalist culture by problematizing reference. Language writing lays claim to an active politics when it intervenes to expose reference as a fraught process laden with interests and instabilities.

The strength *and the weakness* of this position is its extreme formalism. Reference is a precise and powerful locus of linguistic activity and a highly charged point of transfer in the capitalist language game, but attempts to extrapolate from it to the larger sphere of politics lack a material basis. Several language writers, Silliman and Watten especially, capitalize on the strength of the Marxist formalist model and compensate for its weakness by linking their formalist claims to material histories. Silliman, for instance, endows a critical/formalist poetics with material coordinates by historicizing it in terms of the history of communications media. The result is a powerful interdisciplinary heuristic that unites key aspects of media history and literary studies long before such a thing became academically common. At the same time, Silliman's use of this strategy is curiously partial, as we will see.

Silliman's binding of formalist propositions to the history and materialities of communication media begins, of course, with the title of the poem itself, which refers to the medium on which the text was composed. Silliman writes,

> 18. I chose a Chinese notebook, its thin pages not to be cut, its six red line columns which I turned 90°, the way they are closed by curves at the top and bottom, to see how it would alter the writing. Is it flatter, more airy? The words, as I write them, are larger, cover more surface on this two dimensional picture plane. Shall I, therefore, turn toward shorter terms—impact of page on vocabulary? (*The Chinese Notebook* 151)

Here Silliman demonstrates how the form and format of the notebook bring the visual materiality of words into the composition process and influence his choice of diction.

Other propositions sprinkled throughout the work invoke comparable ideas.

> 6. I wrote this sentence with a ballpoint pen. If I had used another, would it have been a different sentence? (149)

What Silliman writes in proposition 206 suggests that the answer is yes.

> 206. A paper which did not absorb fluids well, a pencil that was blunt or wrote

only faintly. These would determine the form of the work. Now, when I set out on a piece, choice of instrument and recorder (notebook, typing paper, etc.) are major concerns. I am apt to buy specific pens for specific pieces. (175)

For Silliman, the materialities of communication are ontic rather than descriptive categories:

21. Poem in a notebook, manuscript, magazine, book, reprinted in an anthology. Scripts and contexts differ. How could it be the same poem? (151)

Proposition 175 elaborates the notion just expressed:

175. A poem written in pen could never have been written in pencil. (171)

And so, according to Silliman, it is not language that is ontologically prior to the act of composition but rather the instrument used to wield language.

24. If the pen won't work, the words won't form. The meanings are not manifested. (151)

According to Silliman, media play a constitutive role in poetics. Far from being a supplement that extends poetry from the private into the public sphere, the materialities of communication become the ontological condition of poetry, contributing ordering, framing, and selecting functions to the composition process. By furnishing the technical tools by which artists make and distribute their work, media comprise the material substratum of literary culture. By situating poetry and poetics within media ecology Silliman reframes our understanding of poesis in materialist terms. Having come to media through Marxism and its signature commands to historicize and contextualize, Silliman discovers a ready method for endowing a formalist poetics with a materialist orientation.

But this description accounts for only one set of claims Silliman makes about media in *The Chinese Notebook*. From Silliman's materializing gloss on writing instruments we run headlong into his very different take on speech. The shift is marked in terms of both the content and tone of the propositions. From Wittgenstein, Silliman adapts not just the form of the proposition and its logical procedures but also the sober, uninflected voice of logical positivist discourse—except in sections where he ponders what role speech might have in contemporary poetics. There, Silliman's tone is apt to turn sardonic—"8. This is not speech. I wrote it" (149)—and even scornful—"22. The page intended to score speech. What an elaborate fiction that seems!" (151). At moments like these Silliman can't resist sprinkling some intonational spice on his propositions. In a work largely predicated on the suppression of voice, these eruptions of tone stand out and deserve careful consideration.

Clearly, the ontological status Silliman grants to writing instruments is not extended to the voice. Using quotation marks for intonational effect, Silliman writes in proposition 88: "That writing was 'speech' 'scored.' A generation caught in such mixed metaphor (denying the metaphor) as that. That elaboration of technical components of the poem carried the force of prophecy" (160). Silliman's commitment to critique as a standpoint for poetics and his fidelity to the critical binary that marks an absolute separation between speech and writing dictates that he must denigrate writing-speech hybridity as a mere "metaphor." The critical imagination of a recomposed formal hierarchy that elevates the radical artifice of writing over the ostensibly naïve projections of speech fuels Silliman's contempt for the voice. The result is some unchecked slippage from a critique of the *ideology* of speech and "speech-based poetics" to renunciations of speech *tout court* as medium and source material for poetry.

This happens in *The Chinese Notebook* when Silliman ascribes a purely referential and expressive function to speech. "Speech only tells you the speaker" (154), he writes in proposition 41, adding later (in proposition 137):

> 137. The concept that the poem "expresses" the poet, vocally or otherwise, is at one with the whole body of thought identified as Capitalist Imperialism. (166)

In a curious twist, speech becomes the organ of Capitalist Imperialism because it connects language to the expressive subject via reference. Whereas Silliman's analysis of writing instruments foregrounds their materiality, his analysis of speech presupposes a purely virtual phenomenon, pre-programmed by the history of metaphysics and capitalism to perform an expressive, referential function. Speech, as represented in the formalist logics of Derrida and Silliman, is the medium that doesn't mediate, that eclipses its mediality in a burst of apodictic insight.

In materialist terms, the connection Silliman posits between speech and reference doesn't hold because speech, every bit as much as writing, is host to play, irony, semiotic slippage, and all manner of fugitive and opaque utterance. The connection between speech and the expressive subject is equally false in its understanding of the speaking subject as metaphysical automaton, and the idea that an emphasis on speech as a medium for poetry always signals an investment in the metaphysics of presence ignores the strong connection between a vanguard sensibility and the use of speech as source material in writers like Gertrude Stein, William S. Burroughs, and Kenneth Goldsmith. What is more, the conflation of phonocentrism

and logocentrism blocks an awareness of the ways that writers like Stein, Burroughs, and Goldsmith use speech precisely to imagine post-humanist subjectivities mediated and mutated by ideology and technology.

The efforts on the part of several language writers to fashion a poetics that incorporated critique in large part explains the attraction of the formalist logic of textuality. But the resultant construction of a formal hierarchy that pits the enlightened artifice of the text against the naïve projections of speech furnishes a distorted critical imagination of the literary field and forecloses a practical understanding of the many ways that new media condition speech and remove it from the idealist sphere of subjective inwardness. Despite the aggressive renunciations of it that have distinguished vanguard poetics in critical conversations, speech, just as much as writing, has "a radical material exteriority" (Hansen 126) that comes to bear in vanguard poetics. Originating as it does in a critique of Husserlian phenomenology, poststructuralist analysis fails to take into account the role of media in exteriorizing and thereby estranging speech from the subject.

In a text called "Wild Form" Silliman writes that "prosody and p.o.v. beget one another" implying, alongside Perloff and others, that prosody and melos only ever conjure the dummy subject of humanism and capitalism and vice versa. In its studious avoidance of intonation and its adoption of a rigorous propositional format *The Chinese Notebook* strives to avoid this fate. As a corrective, Silliman, like Watten, tries to disengage signification from embodiment by substituting logos for prosody and melos, only to have prosody and melos rear their ugly heads. In the end, prosody and point of view both return to haunt Silliman's text at precisely those moments when he would like to single them out for their supposed a-criticality.

The critical construction of "speech" as a metaphysical myth helps to validate language writing in the same way that it helps to validate Derridean grammatology. But at what cost? In both cases, the crisis and burden of the critical stance is its inability to formulate speech-writing hybridity, rendering inaccessible the material prosody of opaque and fragmented speech as a possible vector of radical textuality. Having purified speech and writing as adversarial positions in a debate about metaphysics and humanism, language writing and poststructuralism erect a great divide where precisely the opposite is needed. In place of a poetics that puts speech and writing into opposition, language writing would be better served by a descriptive poetics that attempts to formulate the purposely unresolved tension between ethos and signification, speech and writing, that is a source of so much energy in

contemporary poetics. If critique forces language writing into an ill-advised renunciation of hybridity, it remains to ask, What is the opposite of critique? Perhaps it is not dogma and naïveté after all, but rather a will toward assemblage and combination, what Latour has called "compositionalism," or if you will, poetics.

NOTES

1   The complete paragraph reads: "Why not exaggerate, as Williams did, for our time proclaim an abhorrence of 'speech' designed as was his castigation of 'the sonnet' to rid us, as creators of the world, from reiteration of the past dragged in on formal habit. I HATE SPEECH" (n. pag.). The first three annual issues of *This* (1971-82) were edited by Robert Grenier and Barrett Watten and the remaining nine by Watten. A complete index can be found at ECLIPSE: http://english.utah.edu/eclipse/projects/THIS/this.html.
2   Eleana Kim writes: "this volume [*In the American Tree*] consecrates what was until then arguably more of a tendency than a movement as such, and it registers Silliman's undeniable editorial power in presenting the public face of this movement" ("Language Poetry").
3   Few descriptions of language writing fail to discuss Grenier's statement as a founding moment. See Reinfeld (1); Derksen; and Perelman (ch. 3) for examples. Silliman returned to Grenier's statement in "The Dysfunction of Criticism" (1998) for further analysis.
4   It should be noted that the de Man affair initiated a period of reflection on critique as a method. Jean-Luc Nancy's "Our History" and Rodolphe Gasche's *The Wild Card of Reading: On Paul de Man* are important in that discussion. Derrida offers a sustained examination of critique in *Spectres of Marx* (ch. 2). See Butler for a more recent examination of the status of critique in the context of disciplinarity.
5   Silliman himself has expressed astonishment "at the lack of historic and social perspective" that his own reading of Grenier's phrase entailed. "It reduces or abolishes dozens, if not hundreds (if not thousands) of alternative literary traditions that are entirely legitimate and necessary for their respective audiences. It is seemingly ignorant of the social forces beyond the horizon of the text" ("Dysfunction" 181-82).
6   Jeff Derksen's reading differs: "Language writing did not aim exclusively at academic reception and canon revision, but rather at the transformation of a social subject through language and through a model of productive consumption for reading" (42).
7   For an elaboration of this position see Latour.
8   For discussions of ethos as problematic, see Middleton; Davidson; and Silliman ("*Who Speaks*").
9   "The secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they *enter the game*" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 7).
10 Kenneth Goldsmith's work stands as an excellent example of the dissociation of speech and self-presence. In works like *Soliloquy* and *Fidget*, Goldsmith singles out speech as cultural material, not because it proffers privileged access to subjective inwardness or because the self-citational moves of the speaking subject vouchsafe the presence of that subject to itself, but because it does exactly the opposite. Recorded speech discloses a form of language that is fragmentary, disjunctive, and radically exterior to the subject. "*Soliloquy* presents speech at its most raw, its most brutal and in its most gorgeously disjunctive

form," Goldsmith says, before adding, "The entire activity [of creating *Soliloquy*] was humiliating and humbling, seeing how little of 'value' I actually speak over the course of a typical week. How unprofound my life and my mind is; how petty, greedy, and nasty I am in normal speech. It's absolutely horrifying" (qtd. in Perloff, "A Conversation").

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Katie L. Price

A ≠ A
The Potential for a 'Pataphysical Poetic in Dan Farrell's *The Inkblot Record*

The first A was perhaps congruent to the second,
and we will therefore willingly write thus: A = A.
    Pronounced quickly enough, until the letters
become confounded, it is the idea of unity.
    Pronounced slowly, it is the idea of duality,
of echo, of distance, of symmetry, of greatness and duration,
of the two principles of good and evil.
—Alfred Jarry, *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*

I am not suggesting switching from an uptight business
suit into sincere jeans . . . but rather acting out, in
dialectical play, the insincerity of form as much as content.
—Charles Bernstein, "Comedy and the Politics of Poetic Form"

The notion that we can be demystified, escape certain ideologies, or trade in certain ideologies for others—an uptight suit for sincere jeans—is itself a dangerous ideology that keeps us powerless. So what possibilities are left? Should poets simply give up and resign themselves to the status quo, regardless of their dissatisfaction? I contend that 'pataphysical texts like Dan Farrell's *The Inkblot Record* offer contemporary poetry a solution. Rather than attempt to alter the status quo or disrupt certain ideologies, 'pataphysical texts perform clinimatic swerves that show the arbitrariness and mutability of our understanding of the status quo. Rather than offering yet another alternative ideological frame, they allow us to think about the logic of framing. This poetic work is vital to a contemporary poetry scene peppered with trends such as Flarf and New Formalism.[1] While making a larger claim for the importance of 'pataphysical practices for contemporary poetry, this paper takes *The Inkblot Record* as its main case study as it exemplifies the political possibilities of a 'pataphysical poetic. Farrell's gesture of placing the language of psychology into the discourse of poetry

enacts the paradox outlined by Alfred Jarry that A ≠ A. The politics of this move are small but palpable. His poetic does not claim a "revolution of the word" or of the world, but rather performs an irreversible clinimatic swerve within them.

In 1898, *fin de siècle* French author, artist, and absurdist Jarry outlined his pseudoscience of 'pataphysics in *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician: A Neo-Scientific Novel*: "DEFINITION. Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments" (22).[2] Even this complicated definition, however, is deceptively simple and does not adequately capture the complexities of 'pataphysics as outlined by Jarry. When Jarry initially decided to write more systematically about 'pataphysics, he planned to publish a treatise on the topic. Ultimately, however, he chose to stage his pseudoscientific philosophy as literature (see Jarry xi). The decision to introduce his pseudoscience through a novel rather than through a treatise suggests that literature is the most appropriate venue in which to conduct 'pataphysical research (even research into how to define the term itself). It also reveals that Jarry imagined that 'pataphysics could not be explained by critical or expository means alone; 'pataphysics had to be *illustrated* rather than *described. Exploits and Opinions,* which came out of Jarry's desire to write a treatise on 'pataphysics, must be viewed as his attempt not only to define the term, but to show 'pataphysics in (literary) action.

Jarry devotes an entire chapter of *Exploits and Opinions* to the "Definition" of 'pataphysics cited in the previous paragraph. Within this chapter, Jarry describes the science in conflicting ways, alternatively calling it "the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics," "the science of the particular," and that which "will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one" (21). The proliferating definitions speak to a key tenet of 'pataphysics: absolute facts, and therefore absolute definitions, do not exist. In this light, the official definition of the term is revealed as a joke. And as if this were not enough, Jarry further complicates the definition by provocatively ending the chapter "upon the irreverence of the common herd whose instinct sums up the adepts of the science of 'pataphysics in the following phrase:" (24). Like the famous colon at the end of Ezra Pound's "Canto I," Jarry's colon acts as a frame for what follows, so that the rest of the book becomes, comically, "the phrase" that sums up 'pataphysics. Despite the definitions' individual differences, the comic web of definitionality woven by Jarry works to support 'pataphysics'

main purpose at the time of its inception: to critique science's truth claims.

In *Alfred Jarry: A Critical and Biographical Study* (1984), Kenneth Beaumont outlines four specific critiques of science held by Jarry, providing a useful snapshot of his main concerns. First, Jarry challenges the idea that there are "laws" of science. In his opinion, they are only descriptive generalizations that attempt to link unique events and phenomena. Because all rules have exceptions, science deals with probabilities as opposed to actualities. Second, 'pataphysics contends that explanations put forth by scientists are chosen arbitrarily, and are just some of many possible solutions. In a word, there are multiple ways of interpreting the same data. In *Exploits and Opinions,* Jarry gives the example of gravity:

> Instead of formulating the law of the fall of a body toward a center, how far more apposite would be the law of the ascension of a vacuum toward a periphery, a vacuum being considered a unit of non-density, a hypothesis far less arbitrary than the choice of a concrete unit of positive density such as *water*? (22)

Jarry asks why we assume that there is a force pulling us toward the earth when a theory that posits the opposite seems equally, or even more, viable.[3] Third, 'pataphysics questions the assumption that induction is a valid method for discovering truth. Lastly, 'pataphysics is skeptical of the use of sensory data as "evidence," since it is always relative to a perceiver (see Beaumont 191-93). In sum, Jarry's "science" reacted to the explosion of a new faith in a science that advocated progress and the discovery of truth.[4] And yet, though Beaumont is right to situate 'pataphysics as a critique of science, it is not that critique alone that has made the practice influential for contemporary poets.

When I use the word 'pataphysical in reference to contemporary poetry, I refer to that which, like 'pataphysics itself, wages critique through the tools used by Jarry: parody, mimicry, and exaggeration. Jarry was not sincerely proposing a new science—one that could get closer to the "real truth" than traditional science—instead he offered an exaggerated, extreme, and eccentric version of scientific methods in order to expose their arbitrary nature. 'Pataphysics imagines a science that incorporates the exception, the accident, the slip, and the possible into our understanding of the repeatable, the expected, and the probable as a way to avoid generalities—a project best situated among the genres of satire, farce, and parody. In its purest form, then, 'pataphysics is more of a verb than a noun, perhaps explaining why, as Roger Shattuck argues, Jarry "never did much more than name it and sketch in its outlines" (188). To understand 'pataphysics, one must see it in action.

'Pataphysics was put to work in North America by the Toronto Research Group (TRG), formed in 1973 by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol. The TRG writes, "If 'Pataphysics is 'the science of imaginary solutions' and the source of answers to questions never to be posed, then "Pataphysics (the open quotation of a double elision) will be 'the literature of all imaginary sciences'" ("Introduction" 7). The move from the single to a double elision emphasizes the fact that contemporary 'pataphysical literature is involved in citation and quotation—open questioning of existing material— a move that becomes particularly important to Farrell's work. Although Dan Farrell is not officially associated with the TRG or Canadian "Pataphysics, he was certainly influenced by their ideas and was in contact with others who were similarly influenced through the Kootenay School of Writing. In short, his work should be read with the Canadian "Pataphysics' "first amendment" (301) to 'pataphysics in mind.

The Inkblot Record (Coach House, 2000) collates one-sentence responses to the Rorschach test from six source texts, all published in New York between 1942 and 1989. These texts supply the content of the book; the form results from that simplest of organizational linguistic procedures: alphabetization. The outcome is approximately 100 pages of block text (left and right margins aligned) with no paragraph breaks or any indication of differentiation from one section to the next. Anaphora, however, heavily punctuates the text; repeated first words or phrases stand out because of the systematic organization:

> Shape. Shape and appendages. Shape and head; climbing. Shape, black bear, no real body. Shape, coloring, white and gray stone. Shape inside a heart effect, a real heart. Shape, it has no head, part of tail, more nearly a moth with open wings, color has nothing to do with it. Shape of a pillow. Shape of urn, gray of wrought iron. Shape only. Shape, tail coming out. Shape with pendulum sticking out. Shaped like a heart. Shaped like that. (61)

Apart from the repetition and alliteration that occurs by default in an alphabetized list, particularly in sentences that are reactions to a similar set of questions and visual stimuli,[5] reading the responses in this form draws out other striking parallels. These strange "shapes" become associated with altered bodies: "no real body," "no head," "part of tail," "tail coming out." Given the diversity of responses, and even greater diversity of potential responses, repeated words in such a small section jar the reader. The sheer number of hearts, heads, and tails, as well as the two strange responses that invoke the notion of the "real," cause us to contemplate the connection

between responses. In this form, the text simultaneously showcases the highly individual nature of each response while accentuating the uncanny relationship between responses. Farrell's 'pataphysical gesture of transplanting raw linguistic data from the realm of psychology into the discourse of poetry puts the language, as opposed to the patient, under the microscope.

Due to the book's alphabetical organization, it can be used as a kind of reference book, situating the poetic language in the discourse of information. This text's encyclopedic nature places it within a larger trend in contemporary poetry that Craig Dworkin has identified as "applied 'pataphysics." Dworkin explains the trend as engaged in "the constructing of useless reference tools, the proposing of imaginary solutions, and the cataloguing of exceptions" (32).[6] Farrell's text is a prime example of the kind of "useless reference tool" Dworkin alludes to. In this form, the book grants us easy access to ridiculous facts: the only response given by a subject in these six source texts beginning with a "q" is "Quite fat" (56). More subtly, Farrell resists commonplace assumptions about what makes a literary text cognizable by displacing himself as the authorial "I" and combining source material in a way that evacuates the text of any distinguishable subject.

Ironically, this move reclaims the Author that Roland Barthes pronounced dead. Farrell was not the author, in the traditional way that we think of the term, of *The Inkblot Record. The Inkblot Record* insists at every moment that Farrell's hand was absent from the process of composition; the source texts are listed in the back of the book and the paratext includes a note that insists on Farrell's reluctance to tamper with the sentences in any way other than their organization: "Orthography in *The Inkblot Record* is consistent with [the source] texts" ("Sources" n. pag.). Farrell's book literalizes Barthes' assertion that all texts consist of other texts. Barthes argues that a text is never an expression of inner feeling, but rather "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146). Farrell takes literally Barthes' assertion that an author's "only power" comes from "mix[ing] writings" (146). Farrell responds to Barthes' cry that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148), by calling authors to reclaim writing *through* reading. Farrell's position as "author" of this text *is* that of reader, disallowing critical readers to fall into the trap that Barthes describes, namely that the notion of authorship allows critics to close a text, to solve the puzzle sociologically, historically, or psychologically (147). Asserting

its status as a text that cannot be solved, *The Inkblot Record* is primed for a 'pataphysical parody of science's ideology.

The Inkblot Record is 'pataphysical in that it parodies scientific method by systematically organizing the language used by clinical psychologists to diagnose and analyze patients, and placing this language in a context where its aesthetic qualities can be examined. By putting the raw data into this new context, the text illustrates the claim that 'pataphysics makes: that the solutions proposed by science, or any other discourse, are just one of many possible solutions, one out of many ways of looking at data. The notion that these sentences can be used to diagnose a human being is just one way of interpreting the data. When these sentences are stripped of their diagnostic potential and put into a literary context, can we come up with a different interpretation? Rather than generalize and extrapolate meanings from the sentences, *The Inkblot Record* attests to the particularity of every single response and showcases the exceptions to the rule. Farrell's text allows us to examine the bizarre, unexpected, and uncanny aspects of the responses—their rhythm, syntactical parallels, or simply their beauty: "Like a cockatoo, large, sharp beak, body, facing away" (44), "Pair of eyeglasses. Pair of hands. Pair of pliers" (55), "White dead bare branches" (102).

By cataloguing particulars, a 'pataphysical move in that it avoids generalizations, *The Inkblot Record* not only documents the expected responses to the Rorschach test—"a butterfly," "a cloud," "a flower" (5)—but also the anomalous responses. In fact, the cliché's main function in the text is to cast the anomalous responses into relief. "Pelvic bone. Pelvic bony structure. Penguin or seal, black. Penguin, white belly, feet. Penis. Penis there. People. People" accentuates the oddity of the responses located just a bit further down on the page: "Pistachio ice cream," "pointed orange hats," "President Eisenhower" (56). The clichéd responses act as background to the figure of the particular. And since this is the product of systematic reading rather than authorial design, a reader cannot deny the reality of the peculiar responses.

In this form, the language becomes less about any individual subject than a searchable collection of linguistic oddities. Organized alphabetically and presented in bulk, the language attests to something beyond the psyche of any one subject. The language draws attention to other information, whether about the Rorschach test, the test subjects as a group, or the psychological industry during the second half of the twentieth century. But let us not get too optimistic. *The Inkblot Record,* like a good 'pataphysician, resists generalization at every moment; the *truth* of Farrell's book lies in the fact

that it does not proffer any final claim. 'Pataphysics does not want to replace one system with another, but aims to highlight the absurdity of conflating systematicity and predictability with truth.[7] *The Inkblot Record* enacts this 'pataphysical negation: it is neither/nor, both/and; it simultaneously exposes the language it alters while exposing its own bias. Again, however, this should not be taken as an argument for a nihilistic poetic. Indeed, Farrell's 'pataphysical practice is deeply rooted in politics.

Rather than propose an alternative linguistic space that might be able to combat capitalism, for example, Farrell's text ends up describing, with 'pataphysical precision, the reactions of the subjects in the six source texts. In other words, rather than creating a language that attempts to disrupt or alter its complicity in capitalism or phallocentrism (Language poetry or *écriture féminine*), Farrell's work shifts the focus to the materiality of existing language, already infused with capitalism, but strips it of its use value. If we believe, with Ron Silliman, that "what happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word" and that "these developments are tied directly to the nature of reference in language, which under capitalism is transformed (deformed) into referentiality" (125), then Farrell's book forces a new attention to the materiality *of* that capitalist language.[8]

One might argue that *The Inkblot Record*'s parody of psychology through an appeal to systematicity is stunted by the fact that the Rorschach test has faced criticism as a pseudoscience itself.[9] Examiners ask subjects to create imaginary solutions to the problem of the inkblot: "These slits here could be eyes too, like from a science fiction monster or something" (Farrell 73), "Well, you really have to use your imagination to see the tree" (101), or "Well, if you really use your imagination you could make it a mushroom too" (90). The imaginary solutions that people conjure often verge on the hysterical:

> Two boys or young tough men with pug noses, wild green hair, probably Irish. Two bulls. Two cannibals over a brewing pot. Two chickens with their hands pushing away from each other. Two crabs and coral. Two crabs on either side. Two crickets sassing each other. Two crocodiles, looks like they're about to die. Two dancing ladies, each is missing a leg, an arm and a head. . . . Two frogs engaged in a rather profound discussion on the structure of the nervous system of which they have diagram right behind them. (84-85)

The test itself asks respondents to put content onto indeterminate forms— to make meaning out of strange formless inkblots. The subjects admit that what they are offering is just one of many possible solutions and often begin

their responses with hesitation: "If I turn it this way . . . " (107), and "This part could be . . . " (81). Despite the imagined nature of these responses, an anomalous response can still be diagnosed as a pathology.

The most controversial use of the Rorschach test was its use in trying to understand, or discover, a common pathology among Nazis after World War II. Although the psychologists were unable to find any "specific inclination towards violence, aggression, or sadism," in an interview with Sinja Najafi, Eric A. Zillmer notes the test did reveal "an oversimplified problem-solving style," which he takes to suggest that "they were not creative thinkers, were easily influenced by authority, were attracted to the rigid and quasi-military Nazi hierarky, relied heavily on denial, and were lacking an 'internal moral compass'" (n. pag.). Equating non-creativity with a lack of an "internal moral compass" and attraction to military hierarchies is nothing if not an imaginary solution. So if both the original responses to the Rorschach test and *The Inkblot Record* attest to their 'pataphysical nature, what does *The Inkblot Record* accomplish?

The text not only accentuates the materiality of language, but also highlights the status of language as linguistic data, allowing us to see how that linguistic data can be used to different ends.[10] Changing the frame shows that the language does not have to be interpreted psychologically and strips the content of its use value as a diagnostic tool while betraying its original context at every moment. Psychologist Bruno Klopfer notes:

> The distinguishing feature of *Psychodiagnostik,* as compared with previous attempts at using ink blots as psychological material, is the complete shift of emphasis from the more or less imaginative content of the subject's response to certain formal characteristics in the concept formations. In other words, the interest is not so much in what the subject sees as in his method of handling the stimulus material. (4)

Since in Farrell's presentation of inkblot responses no given response can be attached to any one speaker, and the language is removed from the subject's "method of handling the stimulus material," the sentences are rendered invalid as diagnostic tools. As mentioned earlier, the text also resists the emergence of clear subjects. In the lengthy section of sentences that begin with "I" (24-41) we sometimes hear intimate details about a person, but the notion that any knowable "I" can emerge from reading this text is soon disrupted by the proliferation of "I's":

> I always had a feeling he was a sneaky person, I remember him laying little traps for my mother, makes me feel he was a very alone person. I always wanted to

play, but I worked since I was thirteen. I bet they have tartar. I can see the projectiles going. I can't look anymore, it's too frightening, it makes me feel crazy. I can't look or I'll go crazy again. I can't make anything out of all of it, but this lower part looks like a very exotic butterfly. I can't say what else. I can't tell. I can't think of anything else. I couldn't see, that made it even more frightening. (24-25)

We may be prompted to think that we are learning something about a person—"I'm frightened," might suggest a particular respondent is easily frightened. However, given the juxtapositions we are inclined to wonder if we are not learning more about the test and the examiner, or even the reader, than the so-called subject, since others were similarly frightened.

The Inkblot Record asks its readers to perform a task similar to that of the Rorschach test subject. Apart from the list of questions on the back cover and the list of source texts printed at the back of the text, the paratext of *The Inkblot Record* does not indicate how Farrell produced the material, or that the book is comprised of responses to the Rorschach test. Even the cover is not the expected image of an inkblot, but rather a picture of the kind of rolling stool one might find in a doctor's office. In short, Coach House's paratextual decisions offer minimal guidance for a reader on how to contextualize the text, making the first reading a kind of test case for the reader. Even after a reader becomes aware of the context, Dworkin argues that if there is something to be diagnosed it is the reader's projective habits: "Rather than ask what patients see in the form of blotted ink, [Farrell's] enjambed sentences prod us to perform the inverse function and imagine what image could have possibly provoked these texts" (42). The difference between Farrell's test and the Rorschach test is that Farrell will not be scoring us at the end. Through an appeal to the absurd, the amusing, and the artificial, 'pataphysical texts like *The Inkblot Record* highlight their contradictions and mock any truth claim other than their status as textual facts.

It would be impossible to catalogue all the possible responses to the Rorschach test, which means that *The Inkblot Record,* or any project like it, cannot give a complete account of the language of Rorschach respondents. But this is precisely the point: *The Inkblot Record* does not profess truth, but rather insists on its existence as a particular, isolated, discrete, and singular set of data. This data cannot be extrapolated from and the sentences that comprise *The Inkblot Record* do not add up to any generalization. But it does allow us to notice facts about this language that were previously indiscernible because of the context. Enlightenment may not be attainable; every insight has a blindness. We may go from dark to dark, but dark does not equal

dark, as A is not equivalent to A. And this is the lesson of 'pataphysics: everything is extremely particular, singular. Built into the definition of equivalency and identity is a potential for rupture, a fundamental difference. *The Inkblot Record*'s political power comes by enacting, or acting out, this phenomenon. It proves that no two solutions are the same and that each is equally imaginary by creating a consciously artificial, alternative, and absurd solution to the Rorschach responses. Acknowledging the task of complete reformation as futile, 'pataphysical poets find promise in deformation.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw 'pataphysics and similar anti-rational, anti-positivist, and anti-linear discourses explode alongside a cultural shift characterized by a general distrust of truth claims, skepticism about the possibility of complete coherence, and a questioning of authority. This shift from absolutism to relativism manifested itself in a variety of artistic techniques from William Burrough's "cut-ups," to Allan Kaprow's "happenings," to Andy Warhol's silk screens. More recently, and at an exponential rate, poets have been turning to procedural techniques like those found in *The Inkblot Record*.[11] These poets are not so much interested in "direct treatment of the thing" as "systematic treatment of the thing," using formulas, constricted vocabularies, and other experimental writing procedures.

Although 'pataphysics underwent a general revival in many different contexts in the post-war era, it has dramatically appeared recently in the contemporary poetry and poetics scene. The last two decades have seen the launch and explosion of Goldsmith's *UbuWeb*,[12] a digital archive of all things avant-garde; Northwestern University Press published *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* as part of their Avant-Garde and Modernism series; *Contemporary Literature* published an article by Craig Dworkin entitled "The Imaginary Solution"; Jerome McGann launched a lab dedicated to Applied Research in Patacriticism;[13] and *Open Letter* published a special issue on Canadian 'Pataphysics.[14] Some of the main concepts taken up by poetic avant-gardes from 'pataphysics are the notion of equivalence, the idea of the clinamen, and a belief in absurdity. Equivalence has come to represent the idea that one "solution" is not more correct than another; they are all equally imaginary.[15] The clinamen, a term Jarry appropriates from Lucretius, is the small swerve or derivation any atom can make that means nothing is repeatable and things can happen accidentally.[16] Lastly, contemporary poets latch on to 'pataphysics' absurdity: their modes of engagement are exaggeration, parody, and mockery, which they employ to showcase the arbitrariness of certain ways of thinking. In short, beginning with what Beaumont has called

a "Jarry revival,"[17] North American poets have been participating in 'pataphysical practices, whether that be in the conflation of chance and constraint seen in the work of Jackson Mac Low and John Cage, the procedurality and scientific precision of Ron Silliman or Christian Bök, the attention to the combinatory possibilities of the alphabet in Steve McCaffery, or the creation of virtual textual spaces by Brian Kim Stefans.[18]

This post-war flowering of 'pataphysical enterprises might be no surprise given their affinity with postmodernist sensibilities.[19] Indeed, despite the small amount of critical work on Jarry's 'pataphysics, similarities between Jarry, Derrida, and the Nietzsche of *The Gay Science* have been outlined (see Barker). I argue, however, that Jarry might more appropriately be seen as a literary forerunner to Paul Feyerabend, who argued against adhering to any specific method or theory, whether that be a "gay science" or deconstruction. In Feyerabend's last letter, he writes:

> It is very important not to let this suspicion *deteriorate into a truth*, or a theory, for example into a theory with the principle: things are never what they seem to be. Reality, or Being, or God, or whatever it is that sustains us cannot be captured that easily. The problem is not why we are so often confused; the problem is why we seem to possess useful and enlightening knowledge. (qtd. in Feyerband xvi, emphasis added)

"Deteriorate into a truth" gets at the heart of Feyerabend's critique: all truth claims are false—even that one—and to assume their truth is to deteriorate. We might summarize this view with the help of a popular sign at political rallies: "If your beliefs fit on a sign, think harder." The irony of the sign—that the statement itself fits on the sign—captures a 'pataphysical sentiment that is not simply a performative contradiction. When considering 'pataphysics, we must always remember Jarry's clinamen, that acts as a constant disturbant behind the "sign" of his science.

Rather than arguing over whether or not it is possible for poetry to establish new linguistic orders (as many contemporary poets attempt, or claim, to do) or avoid any political valence whatsoever, 'pataphysical texts re-imagine, through various formal tactics, the ideologies, bias, and predilections of existing discourses. 'Pataphysical texts do not attempt to escape or disrupt ideology, but rather expose the political and aesthetic aspects of language, which close readings show are always intertwined. Instead of using language in non-normative ways that disrupt its complicity in capitalism, phallocentrism or any other *ism*, 'pataphysical poetry participates in a Foucauldian enterprise where "[ideology] always stands in virtual opposition to something else

which is supposed to count as truth," but "the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false" (Foucault 60).

Even if the relation between Jarry's 'pataphysics and Farrell's *The Inkblot Record* is imaginary, reading the text *as if* it were real allows us to situate it within the contemporary moment and within a literary past. 'Pataphysics can help critics of contemporary poetry account for the political importance of texts that neither attempt to instigate social change directly nor assert that poetry holds power only because of its (imaginary) status outside politics. Farrell's poetic does not claim a "revolution of the word" or of the world. Farrell's text performs an irreversible clinimatic swerve within those structures. Just as the sentences that comprise *The Inkblot Record* can never be completely severed from their original context, once read in this book, neither can those sentences ever again be seen outside of its context. By showing that the same linguistic data can be used to very different ends, the book reveals the arbitrariness and mutability of our view of any data. *The Inkblot Record* not only "lays bare the device," but playfully enacts the art of (re)devising.

NOTES

1 Flarf began as a listserv of the Flarfist collective in 2001. Initial members included Nada Gordon, K. Silem Mohammad, and Gary Sullivan. Flarfists use the Internet as a source text, entering strange combinations of terms into search engines to garner unusual, and often inappropriate or offensive outcomes. For a brief introduction see the Flarf feature in *Jacket* 30 and Kenneth Goldsmith's "Introduction to Flarf vs. Conceptual Writing." For an excellent critique of Flarfist techniques see Dan Hoy's "The Virtual Dependency of the Post-Avant and the Problematics of Flarf: What Happens when Poets Spend Too Much Time Fucking Around on the Internet." In poetry, New Formalism began in the 1980s with writers that called for a return to older forms that emphasized rhyme and metre. See Monroe K. Spear's "The Poetics of the New Formalism." In my mind, Flarf and New Formalism represent two reactions to the problem of form in contemporary poetics. Flarfists take the "form" of the Internet and evacuate it of all meaning—turning it into a game and using it as a venue for low jokes. New Formalism has reacted in the opposite way, arguing that the only way to reclaim poetic form in a meaningful way is to return to older understandings of form.

2 Although *Exploits and Opinions* was written in 1898, it was not published until 1911, fulfilling Jarry's postscript: "This book will not be published integrally until the author has acquired sufficient experience to savor all its beauties in full" (Jarry, "Notes" 136).

3 N. Katherine Hayles uses a similar example in *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and*

Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century to explain the current scientific moment we are in: "Imagine, for example, that we are sitting in a diner, waiting for a hamburger. In the ordinary view the plate, knife and fork, and ketchup bottle are 'real,' while the pattern they form is a transitory artifact of their relative positions. But suppose that we were to shift our perspective so that we regarded the *pattern* as 'real,' and the ketchup bottle, plate, knife, and fork as merely temporary manifestations of that particular pattern" (19). She argues that this shift in worldview is comparable to the change in perspective caused when Copernicus proved that the Earth was not the centre of the universe. This shift, including trends in science such as quantum mechanics, is evidence of the world becoming more 'pataphysically minded.

4   Jarry was part of an anti-positivist reaction to science around the turn of the twentieth century, which Beaumont says had three main critiques: "Firstly, the movement questioned the methods of science, pointing out (a) that science deals not in certitudes but merely in useful hypotheses containing a greater or lesser degree of 'probability'; and (b) that science deals not in literal descriptions but in 'working models' or 'symbols' of reality. Secondly, it questioned the equation of 'reality' with the merely scientifically observable and measurable, arguing that it is only a part of total reality which is accessible to such observation and measurement. Thirdly, it questioned the doctrine of epistemological realism (or 'naïve realism')—the view accepted, at least implicitly, by the great majority of scientifically-minded thinkers in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, that through our senses we perceive the world exactly *as it is*" (190-91).

5   Although the way that the Rorschach test has been administered has changed over time, those who administer the test typically ask any number of stock questions and use the same ten stock inkblots. *The Inkblot Record*'s paratext frames the book around the systematic questioning of an imagined examiner. The back cover reads, "What do you see? Why? What would it be? What was the difference? What might that reflect in your life? What made you think of that? What kind of an animal is it? What in the card gave the impression of mice? What about this part? What's the connection? What gave you that impression? What do you mean by that? What do you mean? What do they remind you of? What does that make you think of? What does that call to mind? What does it remind you of? Was this part of it? Shape too? Only shape? Nothing else? Is the sex organ male or female? Is there anything else about them? Is it big or small? Is it a face? How much of the face do you see? How do you see it? For example? Do you see more than the profile in any of these? Do you have any special reason for calling them bears? Do they seem alive? Do they have anything to do with each other? Does it look like it's moving? Could you tell what gives that feeling? Anything else?"

6   Some exemplary poets that Dworkin addresses in his essay are Kenneth Goldsmith, Douglas Huebler, Darren Wershler-Henry, Christian Bök, and Judith Goldman.

7   Beaumont writes, "To read ['pataphysics] as a 'serious' attempt to affirm 'beliefs,' new or old, would be a total misunderstanding of Jarry's purpose" (199). Although here Beaumont is specifically referring to the last chapter of *Faustroll,* he makes the same argument for the book (and 'pataphysics) in general.

8   Dworkin notes, "part of Farrell's larger project has been to chart the psychological matrix of capitalism, and the ways in which even the most scientific discourses, with all of their cultural authority and supposed objectivity, are of course socially constructed and implicated" (42).

9   The validity and usefulness of the Rorschach test has been widely debated. See James M. Wood, M. Teresa Nezworski, and William J. Stejskal's "The Comprehensive System for the Rorschach: A Critical Examination."

10   For another example of this phenomenon, see Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day.*

11   See Marjorie Perloff's recent *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century,* which deals specifically with texts that rely heavily on citation.

12   The "Ubu" of *UbuWeb* is a direct reference to Jarry's most famous character, star of his *Ubu Rex, Ubu Cuckolded* and *Ubu Enchained.*

13   See http://www.patacriticism.org. Last accessed December 2010. The website is currently unavailable, but can be seen via http://web.archive.org at http://web.archive.org/web/20100526163417/http://www.patacriticism.org/index2.html.

14   Canadian poets have had the most sustained and intimate engagement with 'pataphysics and their influence cannot be overestimated. For more on Canadian "Pataphysics and the TRG, see McCaffery and bpNichol's *Rational Geomancy.* For a critical view on the subject, see Jaeger's ABC of Reading TRG.

15   The rationalization for the title of *Rational Geomancy* is telling of this idea's influence: "We mean by Rational Geomancy the acceptance of a multiplicity of means and ways to reorganize those energy patterns we perceive in literature. There can be no absolute inter- pretation (i.e., system of alignment) for the geomantic view of literature sees interpretation as any system of alignment, any organization and/or reorganization of those energy pat- terns. As we shall see later interpretation of this kind is equivalent to both a reading and a writing upon the ground of all literature" (153).

16   For a more extensive discussion of the clinamen, see Bök 43-45 and Warren F. Motte Jr.'s "Clinamen Redux." "Clinamen" has become a central term for several poets, most notably Steve McCaffery and Joan Retallack.

17   The introduction to Beaumont's *Alfred Jarry: A Critical and Biographical Study* is entitled "The Jarry Revival."

18   For more examples of poets who might be classified more loosely as 'pataphysical see Charles Bernstein's syllabi for his graduate courses "Unsettling the Word: The Attack of the Difficult Poems (The Aversive Poetics of Estrangement, Disturbance, Expropriation, Abnormality and the Pataqueerical)" and "Poetry Ordinary and Extraordinary: The Pataque(e)rics of Everyday Life." Bernstein introduced his recent coinage, "pataqueerical," at the Rethinking Poetics conference at Columbia University in 2010.

19   Although the difference (or not) between modernism and postmodernism is constantly under dispute, Jarry's pseudoscience falls more in line with the popular understanding of postmodernism.

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Michael Aird

Of Proximity

little by little if i interject. . .
—Angela Carr

engine of your voice
even not having it, here today
you smile sadly
    as a taken shape
    as impossible
otherwise i didn't carry off
my resistance,
    the partial cost
of being among the materials
if at all, or if
it's not the value you were seeking
    of a sacrifice
i'm using your hand to rearrange
the rumour mine is lifeless
nothing more
for the moment breaking into
    license

Sarah Dowling

Persons and Voices
Sounding Impossible Bodies in
M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*

The past is neither inert nor given. The stories we tell about
what happened then, the correspondences we discern between
today and times past, and the ethical and political stakes of these
stories redound in the present. If slavery feels proximate rather
than remote and freedom seems increasingly elusive, this has
everything to do with our own dark times. If the ghost of slavery
still haunts our present, it is because we are still looking for an exit
from the prison.
—Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the
Atlantic Slave Route*

M. NourbeSe Philip's most recent book, *Zong!* (2008), is
a dense, highly fragmented, and melancholic reflection on *Gregson v. Gilbert*
(1783), the only remaining document in an insurance dispute that resulted
from 150 slaves being thrown overboard to perish in the ocean en route to
the Americas in 1781.[1] Although it is written in English, Philip fractures and
recombines this document anagrammatically, deriving words in multiple
languages from it,[2] and creating the impression of myriad voices moaning,
stuttering, and working to sing. The resulting poem, "this language of pure
sound fragmented and broken by history" (205), inscribes the violations of
transatlantic slavery into its very structure: while certain voices are written
according to lyric conventions and express interiority, others, the voices
of enslaved Africans, are instead written as bodily emissions. In this essay,
I argue that *Zong!* contrasts the voices of persons and nonpersons, using
differences in poetic form to render slavery's dehumanization.

As Philip explains in "Notanda," the essay that closes the book, *Zong!*
turns toward certain traditional poetic and philosophical concepts,
relying strongly upon lyric modes and conventions, and on definitions of

personhood derived from classical liberalism. While these might suggest that in spite of its formal adventurousness—its fragmentation or its palimpsestic layering of light grey text—*Zong!* has certain less-than-radical investments, I believe that a preoccupation with formal and political radicalism misplaces the question of historiography that motivates this book. In order to maximize its faithfulness to the conditions represented by *Gregson v. Gilbert*, *Zong!* begins at the intersection of personhood and property. If "every man has a property in his own person" (Locke 20), and if self-ownership remains at the heart of contemporary human rights discourses, *Zong!* asks what kind of personhood remains for those who as "subjects of property" did not even have the right to be murder victims (*Gregson v. Gilbert* qtd. in Philip 211). What kind of personhood remains for slaves whose existence was recorded alongside limes, china, silk, and other commodities, in lists arranged according to the relative "perishability" of each item (Hartman 148)?[3] Not merely "commodities for sale," the eighteenth century's nascent insurance industry treated slaves as "the reserve deposits of a loosely organized, decentered, but vast trans-Atlantic banking system" (Baucom 61). It was this development that gave the captain of the *Zong* the incentive to massacre the slaves: "in doing so he was not destroying his employer's commodities, but hastening their transformation into money" (62). "This was an action on a policy of insurance," the *Gregson v. Gilbert* justices write, and "the argument drawn from the law respecting indictments for murder does not apply" (211).

Philip explains that her text accounts for the slaves' transformation into commodities and into money, but that her ultimate goal is to "re-transform" them "back into human" (196). Placing the human at the centre of the work, Philip holds off on what might appear to be more politically radical critiques of liberalism, or of humanism, for example.[4] However, to criticize her work from this perspective ignores the importance accorded to the body in *Zong!*, and the careful ways in which Philip disarticulates it from the legal person. *Zong!* re-imagines poetic voice as a bodily emission, but one that neither connotes nor corresponds to personhood. I read Philip's project—both a formal and an ontological one—as the sounding of impossible bodies, slaves whose material traces have been fully lost, and as the sounding of the impossible communion with those bodies that she wishes to inaugurate. Philip's poems contrast the self-possessive voices of unified subjects, legal persons, with the particulate, overlapping voices of legal nonpersons, the slaves whose bodies persist beyond and are shaped by their legal nonrecognition as persons. Reading these contrasting voices, I argue that the distinctions between models

of poetic voice—between expression and bodily emission, between presence and trace—signal the historiographic problem that motivates Philip's work: how to write the non-person, what textual forms are adequate to the representation of non-personhood.

Wanting the Bones

Philip provocatively contends that the answer to the dehumanization enacted through legal ownership, slavery, is metaphorical ownership in the present, a claim made through the investment of affect and the establishment of legacy—a form of affective possession. Thus, the slaves' "re-transform[ation]" is accomplished via tactical deployments of two discourses: a rhetoric of desire in which affective investment is understood as a type of ownership and a lyric discourse that attempts re-animation of its object through apostrophic naming. Before I turn to Philip's "retransform[ation]" of the slaves, though, I want to hesitate on the word "back," so crucial to her phrase "back into human." Her project is precisely located in this word, which signals the fact that the 150 Africans killed in the *Zong* massacre came to be considered as other-than-human at a particular and traceable historical moment. The word "back" reminds us that the definition of "human" can be historicized, that it is dependent upon the rise and fall of specific discourses, and that its universality has always drawn a boundary.[5] When Philip expresses her impossible desire to possess the slaves' bones, as she so frequently does in "Notanda," she signals the fraught status of possession at work in *Zong!*: if it was being possessed as property that stripped enslaved Africans of their status as humans, paradoxically, it is in being possessed affectively that they will become human again. The word "back" evokes both a past and future beyond the dehumanization of slavery.

In "Notanda" Philip narrates her struggle to justify her relationship to the slaves and to their story, frequently turning to moments when she encounters challenges to or confirmations of her claim. She describes the feeling of needing "to seek 'permission' to bring the stories of these murdered Africans to light," and so undertaking a trip to Ghana in the summer of 2006 (202). She meets with an Ewe priest and discusses her project with him, at which point the priest assures her that "none of [her] ancestors could have been among those thrown overboard," otherwise she "would not be there" (202). Shocked at these comments, Philip states that she had "never entertained the thought that [she] may have had a personal connection to the *Zong*," and further, that she had never "sought to

understand why this story ha[d] chosen [her]" (202). However, Philip's shock is renewed when her daughter reminds her that "those who were thrown overboard" could have "left . . . offspring," making a genetic connection to the victims possible (202). This prompts Philip to remember an additional detail: that "only some of the African slaves were drowned" (202), and that she could therefore be descended from those who survived.[6] Although Philip acknowledges that these genetic connections are unlikely, her assertion that they are nevertheless possible bolsters her claim to affective property in the drowned slaves. The strange and remote possibility of familial relationship justifies her "want[ing] the bones" (201), and suggests that her desirous attitude constitutes an appropriate claim to these bones, that legacy is an acceptable form of ownership.

The question of possession in *Zong!* is complicated not only by the unlikelihood of Philip's familial connection to the victims of the massacre, but also by the impossibility of ever making that possession literal by retrieving the victims' bones from the ocean. Indeed, this impossibility is not only a practical one; it is also conceptual. Philip reveals that there is no "word for bringing bodies back from water," nothing that "has as precise a meaning as the unearthing contained within the word exhume" (201). Within a chain of earnest questions, she proposes the term "exaqua" (202), a neologism whose necessity provokes sympathy both for the unburied slaves and for Philip, their dispossessed legatee. When Philip states that she "want[s] the bones" (201), she does so in recognition of the impossibility of ever receiving them, and one of the premises of *Zong!* is that affective investment will always be made in the absence of an actual, physical object in which to invest; as much as the slaves are affectively possessed, they will never literally be held.

Thus, Philip brings into conflict the desire to hold the slaves as affective property and the more literal questions of ownership that also occupy her text. When she "lock[s] [her]self into this particular and peculiar discursive landscape" (191), the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision, Philip restricts herself to the legal discourse that stripped the murdered Africans of their humanity even before they were stripped of their lives. Indeed, she locks herself within a document that makes explicit its refusal to recognize these murders as murders. "The drowning of 150 people," Philip explains, was "merely the disposition of property in a time of emergency to ensure the preservation of the rest of the cargo," the remaining slaves (191). Although "all the justices [in the *Gregson v. Gilbert* case] agree[d] that the action of the ship owner

was wrong," their legal objection was not to the killing, but to the owners' contention that the underwriters should pay them for the sacrificed property (193). Against this cruel logic her poem's wager "is simply the story of be-ing which cannot, must, be told" (200).

The contrast between Philip's desirous, expository "I" and the non-personhood of those whose stories will be "told by not-telling" (191) is very sharp, and part of her project is to reduce this extreme distinction through her stated goal of "re-transform[ation]." *Zong!* employs lyric modes such as apostrophe, seeking to reanimate the lost slaves and to endow them with some degree of lyric if not legal personhood by giving them names. Lyric poetry, as Barbara Johnson has argued, negotiates the relationship "between the 'first person' (grammatical 'I') and the 'constitutional person' (the subject of rights)," such that "what comes to be at stake" in lyric poetry "is lyric poetry itself as a poetry of the subject" (164). Turning to lyric modes in order to demonstrate the differential distribution of legal personhood, *Zong!* makes the relationship between the lyric "I" and the legal person a key question of its poetic form.

The first lyric mode that works to bring the murdered slaves "back into human" in *Zong!* is the use of apostrophic naming that occurs throughout "Os," the first section of the book. Although many forms of actuarial listing took place on slave ships, slaves' names were never recorded. Countering this loss, Philip uses procedures of fracture and anagrammatic recombination to find West African names within the legal text and includes these names as footnotes to her poems. Below the main body of text on each page in "Os" is a thin black line, and under this line is a handful of names: "Masuz Zuwena Ogunsheye Ziyad Ogwambi Keturah" (3), "Kesi Modele Mtundu Ibunkunle Adeyemi" (18), "Akilah Falope Ouma Weke Jubade" (25), "Bomani Yahya Modupe Jibowu Fayola" (43), and so on. These names endow the slaves, whose real names have been lost to history, with some form of distinctness, of identity. The names are reminders of their linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, and the fact that Philip places the names in small groups is suggestive of societal and familial ties. This naming is not an address exactly, but it undoes the slaves' anonymity, calling them into some form of lyric personhood.

However, the names that Philip gives the slaves and their placement in the footnotes also demonstrates the slaves' extraneous position in the *Gregson v. Gilbert* trial and its documentation. Drawing on her experience as a lawyer, Philip explains that "the basic tool in the study of law is case analysis," which requires that the student isolate the core legal principle, the *ratio decidendi*,

or the *ratio*" (199). Having isolated that, "all other opinion becomes *obiter dicta*, informally referred to as *dicta*. Which is what the Africans on board the *Zong* become—*dicta*, footnotes" (199). The Africans' position as "footnotes" in the *Zong* case is literalized in "Os," and in this section the diction and syntax of Philip's poetry is closest to the language of *Gregson v. Gilbert*. The poem "Zong #23" illustrates the strange interaction between the legalistic poems and their footnotes:

```
was
            the weight in being
            the same in rains
            the ration in loss
            the proved in fact
            the within in is
            the sufficient in indictment
            the might have in existed
is
            the evidence in negroes
```

Moleye Maideyi Ibeyemi Nobini Olonade Bunmi (40)

The body of this poem uses only words from the original legal text, without breaking them apart or recombining them into other languages. The poem refers clearly and specifically to elements of the case: the problem of insufficient water on board the ship is alluded to through the mention of "rains," the "loss" under consideration is present in the third line, the burden of proof at trial is referenced in the words "proved" and "sufficient." Each word can be located easily within the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision, and the repeating syntax of the "was" section endows this short poem with the logical consistency commonly associated with legal proceedings, or with double-entry bookkeeping.

The implications of the case are referenced in the word "existed" and in the two controlling terms, "was" and "is," that give the poem its shape. Essentially, the work of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* justices is to interpret what "was," and on the basis of that interpretation to rule on what "is." This division of the poem into temporally distinct sections demonstrates that being changes over time according to changes in the law: the diverse pieces of evidence, implications, and modes of argumentation listed in the

"was" section are translated into legally admissible evidence that "is." The consistency of the poem's interrogative syntax across both sections, however, suggests that the slaves' "being" remains in question throughout; they are merely "the might have in existed." While Philip states that her aim is to "'exaqua' them from their 'liquid graves,'" (202) it is only below the surface that the slaves have names, that they are distinct individuals with a value beyond their circulation in networks of global finance.

Whereas the lists of names appear below the dark line in the first section of "Os," its second section, "DICTA," maintains the dark line, but no names appear below it. In this section, the slaves' status as *dicta* is more literal: because they are, emphatically, not the *ratio*, they are absented even from their position as footnotes, and do not appear in the text at all. Philip gives these names in order to demonstrate the power of the law, for their erasure shows that "the law supercedes being" and that being "can be changed by the law" (200). Thus, the specificity and individuality of the Africans, the lyric personhood implied by their names, is annulled by the legal discourse in which "negroes" are only "the evidence," not the victims. The legalistic and actuarial logic of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* source text negates the possibility of the slaves' personhood, and accordingly their names vanish, just like their bones.

The Lyric Person and the *Oba*'s Sobs

Philip's affective possession of the slaves directly counters this formation, and her apostrophic naming stakes a claim to what is immaterial and irrecoverable—to the bodies that legally do not, and literally are not matter. The challenge that *Zong!* answers is how to create various different kinds of poetic voices that, in their combination and contrast, demonstrate the differential distribution of personhood imposed by the law.[7] "Sal," the section following "Os," intensifies the use of lyric conventions, particularly those of traditional elegies, such as the vocative "O" or "oh," the preponderance of the first person "I," and the use of apostrophe to address an absent figure. However, "Sal" is not strictly lyric, as the text is dispersed across the page, and includes instances of demotic English and other languages, which interrupt the dominant voice, seeming to come from other sources. The main voice in "Sal," Philip explains, belongs to "someone who [is] white, male, and European" (204) and who addresses his discourse primarily to "dear ruth" (64), a figure who is listed in the "Manifest" at the back of the book under the category of "WOMEN WHO / WAIT" (186). While this voice represents the thoughts and feelings of a single and unique person

conforming to the categories that Barbara Johnson has called "the lyric 'person'" and the "the legal 'person'" (158),[8] the utterances in other languages are brief, limited, and difficult to parse. These utterances are not sufficient to signify personhood either lyrically or legally, and the most striking effect of "Sal" is its structural differentiation between these contrasting models of poetic voice.

The "white, male, and European" voice illustrates the problem of lyric personhood: because he is clearly identifiable as a person, narrating and reflecting upon his experiences, and protected (so we presume) from the violence that he describes, this voice offers a certain measure of relief from the relentlessness of Philip's difficult text. Identification with this murderous voice, however, can only be perverse, and in this perversity, Philip demonstrates that the lyric can deploy emotions such as grief and remorse in order to garner sympathy even for the most heinous crimes. This voice delivers a broken narration of a sexual assault which he has committed: "she / falls / fortunes over / board rub / and rob her / now i lose / count i am / lord" (61), "gin / & rum of / murder / rimed with sin / her sex / open all / night rain / a seam of sin & / to market to market / tin / such / to trap a fat pig / a fat nig" (67), "cut / her / open her / shape / tie her / ripe / toes / round / and firm" (71). He speaks in extremely racist terms, rhyming "nig" with "pig" throughout the section: "our pig got / with n / got / our nig too / egroes" (69). His narrative of sexual assault is intertwined with descriptions of throwing someone, probably the victim, overboard: "dead she went / over & / under she was / wet put / ashes / on her water s" (71), "whore they laid her / to rest she died" (73). Finally, the voice also describes the deaths of children: "over / board / all / fled the lair / as / on wing / such a thin / mite he / was just / seven" (74).

Philip expertly manipulates the expectations of the lyric tradition, and also makes this voice a figure of sympathy. In addition to the preponderance of the anguished O/oh, this voice laments "the loss within / how many / days how long" (61), begs "ruth" or perhaps God to "save us *os* / salve / & save / our souls" (63), and declares his fallen status: "who can cure / me the cur" (67). He ponders the contradictions of his role: "as there is / *ratio* / in rations / but why ruth / do the stars / shine / if only / murder made us" (65). He states that "my plea is negligence" (69), and attempts to justify his actions: "our aim / to rid the good / ship of dying" (74). He also seems haunted by what has happened on board: "*rêve* the she negro / he s done for / drives me / mad *je rêve je* / *rêve* him him / him & him / her" (72). Further, he is aware of the slaves' fragile physical condition, and often refers to their "scent of mortality"

(62), "pus" (65), "*sang*" (68), "piss" and "bile" (70), and suggests his own role in their injury: "torn we sear / & singe the rose / of afric a" (76). Thus, the lyric modes taken on in this poem not only construct a "white, male, and European" speaker, they encourage a perverse identification with this voice by making his thoughts available and demonstrating his grief and remorse.

While the use of lyric modes allows this voice to atone for his sins, his lamentations do nothing to diminish the distinction between the personhood that is accorded to him and the debased or illegible status of the interrupting utterances. In addition to the words in French and in Latin contained in the quotations above, many of these utterances take the form of words in Yoruba. Rather than phrases that evoke psychic interiors, single words in Yoruba tend to be repeated over and over. For example, the word "*ifá*," which means "divination," occurs frequently in proximity to the English word "if." Like all of the words from languages other than English, "*ifá*" is always italicized, and thus is immediately apparent as a fragment of another language. However, this fragmentariness makes it difficult to parse: if "*ifá*" is divination, should this repeated word be read as a series of frustrated attempts at divination made by the "*oba*," the king or ruler, whose "sobs" begin this section of the poem (59)? The word "*ifá*" transitions into the nonsense syllable "fa," and then into the English phrase "fall / ing over / & / over the crew" (60), which might be spoken by the dominant voice. Thus, the *oba* and the "white, male, and European" speaker are put into contact and contrast: while the latter speaks, narrates, and conforms to the formal structures of lyric personhood, the former "sobs" inarticulately. His affective state is apparent, but this does not fulfill the formal requirements of either legal or lyric personhood.

Because Philip is an influential theorist of demotic English and its uses and position in literature, it is striking that *Zong!* uses so little of it.[9] However, in addition to the English-language lyric voice and the words in other languages, there are a few instances of demotic English in "Sal." Unlike the single words in Yoruba and other languages these are brief phrases, but they too work in counterpoint to the "white, male, and European" voice. Highly localized and extremely brief, when these phrases are combined they suggest a narrative of capture: "*de men / dem cam fo mi* / for me for / *yo* for *je* / *pour moi* & *para* / *mi* flee / the fields / *gun bam* / *bam*" (66), "*de man him / cam / fo mi a fez / pon his head*" (74). The voices in demotic English do not carry the same implication of interiority as the dominant voice's lyric "I": they only narrate actions, never thoughts. Unlike the dominant voice, whose reflections and remorse characterize him as a lyric person, these demotic

utterances stretch only just beyond the single words in other languages and still do not attain this normative form of personhood.

And yet, the utterances in demotic English share a formal feature with that dominant voice, which is that both are interrupted and intensified by words in other languages. In her playful essay "Interview with an Empire," Philip describes the significance of interruption in her work, explaining that she views the Caribbean "and the entire New World as a site of massive interruptions" (200). These include the fatal interruption of "Aboriginal life," "the traumatic and violent wrenching from Africa that slavery entailed," the "indentureship of the Asian," and even the "interruption of another sort" faced by European colonists who attempted to create continuity with their former lives and cultures in their new environment (200). She explains that the use of disjunctive syntax and formal disruption in her poetry is intended to recall these violent interruptions, and that these techniques create a poetic form rooted in Caribbean history. Reading *Zong!* in the context of this statement of poetics, the book's pervasive multilingualism makes an implicit claim about the multilingualism of the slave trade; *Zong!* suggests that any writing about this horror must take into account the multiple languages in which it was experienced and carried out. The interruption of one voice by another, of one language by another, recalls the violent interruptions of this "traumatic and violent wrenching from Africa" and the interruptions in personhood that made it possible, that were a part of it, and that followed.

The Song of the Flesh

Zong! does not constitute a reparative historiography that seeks to discover and prioritize disappeared voices, inserting words in Yoruba or in demotic English to let the victims speak. Instead, Philip creates a contrast between different types of vocal utterance in order to break the association of voice with personhood. While more traditional lyric modes express personhood that is recognizable as such, particulate, fragmentary, and often very physical utterances evoke a form of existence severed from the protections and rights afforded to the person, a form of existence in need of being "retransformed . . . back into human" (196). For the sake of clarity I have used the terms "utterance" and "interruption" to distinguish the speech of non-persons from the more traditional uses of poetic voice in *Zong!*, but scholarship in contemporary poetics has, of course, already made the term "voice" multiply significant. In his essay "Voice in Extremis" the Canadian poet-critic Steve McCaffery summarizes "two distinct scenarios presented for the voice in

poetry" in the twentieth century (163). He argues that the first voice "serves . . . as the unquestionable guarantee of presence—when heard and understood through its communication of intelligible sounds this voice is named conscience" (163).

The second scenario that McCaffery describes originates in high modernist vocal experimentation, and "requires the voice's primary drive to be persistently away from presence," and instead toward "its own dispersal in sounds between body and language" (163). This second scenario for the voice emphasizes its "intense corporeality," which he "insist[s] on calling a community," (169) even though it never quite succeeds in establishing one (163). Philip also emphasizes corporeality and failed community in her implicit theorization of poetic voice, but the unique challenge of *Zong!* is to consider non-presence historically, to enter into an impossible communion with historical non-persons. Thus, poetic form follows the dictates of historical necessity: Philip's concept of poetic voice emphasizes corporeality rather than interiority because it refers to non-persons to whom such interiority was not considered applicable. *Zong!* emphasizes the enfleshed voice, as its cultural work is to create a "code" that is adequate to the representation of the "cacophonous . . . babel that was the *Zong*" (207). However, in tying poetic voice to the historical bodies from which that "babel" issued forth, her attempt to constitute community must fail: Philip demonstrates the impossibility of communing with bodies that have been absented or silenced, with bodies that have disappeared beneath the ocean.

Especially in the later sections of *Zong!*, such as "Ferrum," voices are conceptualized as persistent material traces of historical anguish, so that the hurt and killed bodies of the slaves inhere in their utterances.[10] "Ferrum" begins with two epigraphs, the first from Ezekiel and the second from St. Augustine. Both emphasize the physical persistence of historical bodies that might otherwise seem to have disappeared. The epigraph from Ezekiel (37:4) is particularly interesting:

> *There was a noise and behold, a shaking . . . and the bones came together;*
> *bone to his bone . . . the sinews and flesh came upon them . . . and the skin*
> *covered them above . . . and the breath came into them . . .*
> *and they lived, and stood upon their feet.*
> (qtd. in Philip, *Zong!* 126)

In the Book of Ezekiel, God gives Ezekiel a vision of a valley filled with dry bones and commands Ezekiel to prophesy to them. Ezekiel does so, and the bones come to life as newly living people with flesh and breath; inert matter

is "re-transformed . . . back into human" (196). In her citation of this passage, Philip eliminates all of the content of the verses that makes it clear that Ezekiel is receiving a vision from God, and instead suggests that the bones are miraculously coming to life in real time, not in a remembered dream. By quoting a passage in which "hear[ing] the word of the LORD" brings the dead back to life, Philip demonstrates the extraordinary power of the voice, particularly when it speaks testimony (*King James*, Ezek. 37:4). The crucial relationship of voice to flesh is furthered through her second epigraph: "*Praesens de praereritis. / The past is ever present*," from St. Augustine (qtd. in Philip 126). In the juxtaposition of these two epigraphs, Philip argues that the dry bones of the past are never fully gone; rather, the past waits to be revivified and enfleshed by the voice.

The high degree of fragmentation in "Ferrum" makes the relationship between voice and flesh more clear, as the body's work in producing sound is evident. Words are broken into letters and syllables, a stuttering text that is barely legible on the level of content. Evoking the physical processes of speech, Philip demands that we read poetic voice as bodily emission, and not as an expression of inferiority. It is only through this intense and painful physicality that the names of the slaves reappear.[11] Unlike in "Os," where the names are a series of vanishing footnotes, in "Ferrum," the names appear at the end of the section, still below a black line, but placed in the middle of the page and rendered in a font resembling handwritten cursive script. Centred on the page, caressed by the stroke of the pen, the twenty-two names and the twenty-two people to whom they refer are no longer mere "dicta," but have been presenced by a hoarse throat and a shaky hand. Significantly, the next section of *Zong!*, which begins immediately after these names, is "Ebora," whose title means "underwater spirits" in Yoruba. This title, the only section title in a language other than Latin, steps away from the legalistic associations of the others and instead evokes the ongoing but submerged presence of the enslaved Africans.

Although the enfleshment of the voice is most evident in the final sections, it is clear from the very first poem in the book, "Zong #1," where words are broken into their component sounds and scattered across the page. If these were gathered together to constitute a more standard text, it might read something like, "water was our water, good water, oh one dey/day, one day's water, water of want" (3-4). Even this unpoetic translation emphasizes repetition, but in Philip's drawn-out rendering, each phoneme roils and stutters so that the first line of the poem contains only the letters w and a,

barely completing the first syllable of the first word. The only word in this poem that is never broken apart into its constituent sounds is the word "our." This pronoun signals the choral nature of the poem; rather than a single voice stuttering "wa wa" and wailing its want of water, in "Zong #1" different voices begin and then begin again, layering their wants together. Poetic voice, then, is not only bodily, it is collective.

Flesh is the nodal point, the place at which Philip crosses all of the complex philosophical issues with which *Zong!* is engaged. The slaves were considered as flesh but not as persons, and it was their flesh that persisted in spite of their legal non-personhood. Contemporaneously, however, the absence of their flesh and of their bones is what makes the literalization of affective possession impossible; retrieving their bones from the ocean, "exaqua," can never be accomplished. And yet it is affective possession that makes the murdered slaves appear as more than mere flesh, as persons and as communities. It is therefore through reference to the flesh that Philip explains the title of *Zong!*:

> Why the exclamation mark after *Zong!*? *Zong!* is chant! Shout! And ululation! *Zong!* is moan! Mutter! Howl! And shriek! *Zong!* is "pure utterance." *Zong!* is Song! And Song is what has kept the soul of the African intact when they "want(ed) water . . . sustenance . . . preservation." *Zong!* is the Song of the untold story; it cannot be told yet must be told, but only through its un-telling. (207)

The very title of this devastating work indicates the fleshiness of what is spoken. The list of sounds, "chant," "Shout," "uluation," "moan," "Mutter," "Howl," and "shriek," elaborates upon the exclamation point in the title, listing the sonic components of the voice that the page has trouble indicating graphically. The exclamation point in Philip's title gathers into itself the corporeality of the voice, what the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero calls the "song of the flesh" (15). It indicates the specificity of the voice, what is material, unique, and unrepeatable about each utterance, the trace of the physical body that marks every vocalization. Divorced from interiority, these utterances are not individual, but indicate a transhistorical community in which voices from the present and the past sing together, simultaneously but not in unison: unevenly, imperfectly, and painfully, but also beautifully.

Taking literally the notion of *voice*, this vibration of flesh, Philip proposes a body in contradistinction to a person or a subject, foregrounding the distinctions between "experiences [that] count as life or one of its parts" and

those that "don't" (Freeman 57). Her attachment of poetic voice to physical body indicates just how impossible these bodies whose wants are sung in *Zong!* really are, just how impossible it is to commune with those who have been violently absented from the historical record, "whose activities do not show up on the official timeline" (57). Unlike Ezekiel, who stands in an imaginary valley of bones and revivifies them through the power of his voice, Philip stands at the edge of a real sea, in which there are no longer any bones, and tests her voice, wondering what, if anything, it can do. Philip's fleshy voice confers personhood upon the immaterial trace of the murdered slaves; what we can hear of her body, of their bodies, in the voices of this text signals the ongoing problem of existences within and "*outside* of the law," "the law it was that said we were. Or were not" (206-07).

In her essay "Still After," Elizabeth Freeman describes and justifies a "longing for form, even for the hyperintelligibility of a form so ordinary that it has been discarded," a "willingness to be warmed by the afterglow of the forgotten" (498), but without imagining "a prior wholeness locatable in a time and place we ought to 'get back to'" (499). To long for legal personhood—impossible in the past, irreparable in the present, uncertain in the future—within a text in which personhood is brought into violent contrast with other forms of life is to demonstrate that we have an ongoing debt to these dead nonpersons. Indeed, the end of legal property in persons has not come to pass, nor have we managed a more equitable distribution of personhood. If Philip returns to these traditional forms within her astonishing text, she does so because their promise remains unfulfilled, and because the forms that have replaced them, more often than not, have replicated their failures.

NOTES

1 Following the number listed in the *Gregson v. Gilbert* decision, Philip states that 150 slaves were killed in the *Zong* massacre. However, in *Specters of the Atlantic*, Ian Baucom claims that 132 slaves were killed; in *Black Ivory*, James Walvin puts the number at 133; and in "Slavery, Insurance, and Sacrifice in the Black Atlantic," Tim Armstrong states that 134 were killed. As Philip's book is my focus, I use the number 150.
2 Philip's glossary lists words in Arabic, Dutch, Fon, French, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Shona, Twi, West African Patois, and Yoruba (183-84).
3 John Weskett's *A Complete Digest of the Theory, Laws, and Practice of Insurance* (1781) provided exactly such a list, as Saidiya Hartman recounts (148). For descriptions of Weskett's transformation of maritime insurance, see Armstrong and Baucom.
4 We might think of Hannah Arendt's various critiques of human rights, some already more

than seventy years old, and of the ways in which they have been received in contemporary philosophy. See, for example, Giorgio Agamben's essay "Beyond Human Rights," which takes as its starting point Arendt's 1943 essay "We Refugees" and considers the chapter "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man" from her book *Imperialism*.

5 The blurring of the terms "personhood" and "human" here is intentional, as Philip's work does not make a clear distinction between the two. By "personhood" I intend at once the legal person who enjoys the rights and privileges of citizenship, and a set of literary effects that combine to produce a speaking subject. Philip's use of the term "human" seems to have a similar valence; however, I have adopted the term "person" for its more precise legal definition.

6 According to Baucom, a total of 470 slaves were incarcerated on the *Zong*.

7 Elizabeth Freeman offers some clarification of this idea in her essay "Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography": "some human experiences count as life or one of its parts, and some don't. Those forced to wait or startled by violence, whose activities do not show upon the official timeline, whose own timelines do not synchronize with it, are variously and often simultaneously black, female, queer" (57).

8 Johnson describes the distinction between "a lyric 'person,'" an "emotive, subjective, and individual" entity, and "a legal 'person,'" who is "rational, rights-bearing, and institutional" (158). She points out that law and lyric, two highly rule-bound discourses, have provided us with differing "instantia[tions] of what a person is," and argues that "these two 'persons' can illuminate each other" (159).

9 For a discussion of Philip's views on demotic English in the context of Anglophone Caribbean literature, see her interview with Kristen Mahlis. Philip's essay "Interview with an Empire" also provides explanation of her views on literary uses of demotic English, drawing on Caribbean history as context and rationale.

10 I am thinking of Fred Moten's contention that the voice inheres in even entirely visual African American art forms, for example, that the cries of Emmet Till and his mother can be heard even in the photographs taken at his funeral.

11 See Philip's recent reading from *Zong!* at "North of Invention: A Festival of Canadian Poetry," available online at PennSound.

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Natalie Helberg

lustral

*(i come out of sleep water come from the river   surging
surfacing unclean):*

that river   full of sleep sweat now i must wash in reality birds
administer their beaks their backs tender but trivial this (day is)
a shower on me flirting burning i turn down the tapping water foam
of my palm pecked at delinquent   short-lived quick-pick dissipation

a puncture mark

or the drain going down

slurping &   stertorous &

slow

claimsome:

density (as such) abbreviates what matted

her tongue aslant   & sinuous chute

brinks rig bid   difficult (a day)

fulsome & thoughtfulsome

*(if knowing could be daubing resinous fog substance:
his breakfast of bactroban his knife in bees' bactroban
first grey   then sweet):*

unformed of thought (you   me) the antipodes of a table

          . . . implacably tectonic   (contemplative
          with tilt   in a year or two are stranger to
          each other   (confounding factors: controlled for)

          (the trace of traffic: controlled for)

Ryan Fitzpatrick and Susan Rudy

"These marked spaces lie beneath / the alphabet"
Readers, Borders, and Citizens in Erín Moure's Recent Work

> I don't want what is already made but what is tortuously in the making.
> —Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva*
> (qtd. in Erín Moure, *O Cidadán* 83)

In their call for papers for this special issue of *Canadian Literature* on poetics, Clint Burnham and Christine Stewart ask a key question: "Should one make political claims at all for formally-motivated poetry?" We intend to argue that when poetry is motivated by an awareness that form is not neutral, it always already demonstrates an overt and engaged relation to the *making* of the world by human agents. We can and should make political claims for such poetry. But how? To consider this question, we will focus on one of the key political issues of our time—the nature of citizenship—in relationship to recent work by Erín Moure. In our view, Moure's challenges to notions of authorship and the book enable her to enact citizenship otherwise. To make this claim, we will focus, not only on Moure's essays on citizenship[1] in her recently collected *My Beloved Wager: Essays from a Writing Practice* (2009), but also on her theory of reading, which we see as developing in two pieces she wrote in response to the work of artist Lani Maestro,[2] and in two recent books of poetry: *O Cidadán* (2002) and *Expeditions of a Chimæra* (2009), written in collaboration with Oana Avasilichioaei.[3] As Moure's work in these several modes demonstrates, thinking about citizenship requires us to think about readers, writers, and books. Just as her recent work challenges conventional notions of authorship and the book, so too does it challenge us to think about citizenship in a different mode.

In "Redefining Citizenship by Poetic Means," Moure makes the overtly political claim that "citizenship is a mode of enactment, not belonging" (164) arguing that how we act as readers affects how we act as citizens. She sees both modes of enactment as intimately tied to what we make of borders. Do we stay put? Move across borders? Force others into or out of (our?) space(s)? Facilitate free movements? Do we see the world as given and unchangeable or as something, in Clarice Lispector's words, "tortuously in the making"? If our reading practices involve the ways we engage with the spaces of the page and the book, how do they reflect or complicate other spatial relations between bodies, cities, and nations? How are we citizens not only of cities or nations but also of books? Can we learn, in being different kinds of readers, to be different kinds of citizens? How does our reading practice change if we consider ourselves citizens, not only of the book, but also of a field of books, and of discourse itself? What are the implications of these ways of thinking about readers for our practices as citizens?

In *O Cidadán,* the text that, as its name suggests, most overtly engages with questions of citizenship and yet consistently challenges them, Moure writes, suggestively, that citizenship is "[n]ot 'origin' but the signal that traverses or imbibes, breaaks [sic] . . . " (98). Lianne Moyes speaks of *O Cidadán* as "not so much a collection of poems about citizenship as a field of conceptual inquiry into the epistemological limits of discourses and practices of citizenship" (113). Moure's notion of citizenship as a kind of signifying energy that enacts crossing and opening extends the possibility of exchange across national and linguistic borders, encouraging us to see the foreign as Moure does, as "the possibility of meaning, rather than noise or the absence of meaning" (*O Cidadán* 165). As we will argue below, Moure's work teaches us how else to act in the world by interpellating us first as citizens of a different kind of book.

The Book / A Book : Tent / Tentative [4]
In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari propose that the book should no longer be seen as a reflection of the world, separate and complete. They argue that "[t]here is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)" (23). Instead, they see the book as an assemblage that "establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders" (23). This "rhizome-book" is "always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (25). So when Deleuze and Guattari instruct

us to "[n]ever send down roots, or plant them, however difficult it may be to avoid reverting to the old procedures" (23), they are focusing our attention on this rhizomatic, decentred notion of the book and the ways it is able to remain unrooted and moveable. In this sense, "the book" is always already "a book," an insight Moure drew to our attention in a 1999 book of poems which had two competing titles, one referring to "a book," the other to "the book" (Mouré, *A Frame of the Book* / *The Frame of a Book*). But no book is rhizomatic naturally. Rather, books become rhizomatic through stances of authorship and readership that are open to and indeed generate possibilities. In fact, our own practice of flooding the textual site with various and varying questions (thereby suggesting multiple paths through the text) is one stance we might take to generate these possibilities.

Or Moure's stance toward authorship. Although some scholars don't recognize the name change at all,[5] the author formerly known as "Erin Mouré" has, since the publication of *O Cidadán* in 2002,[6] been publishing under the name Erín Moure. In fact, this proliferation of authorial identities began even earlier, in 2001, when the name "Eirin Moure" appeared on the cover of *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* (2001). A close reading of the title of this book reveals Moure's stance toward authorship, since *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* is a translation, not only of "the" book *O guardador de rebanhos*, which she translates as *Sheep's Vigil*, but also of "the" so-called author himself. She translates the name of the author—"Fernando Pessoa"—as *a Fervent Person*. "The" author may be a fervent person; but so is the reader as translator. It is in this sense that the poems in *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* are what she calls "trans-*e*-lations. Trans-eirin-elations" (*Sheep's Vigil* ix) of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's *O guardador de rebanhos*.

To complicate the matter even further, Pessoa published *O guardador de rebanhos* under the name Alberto Caeiro, "one of [his] five major heteronyms" (131).[7] In her essay "Subjectivities," Moure explains that it was "the movement in Pessoa that called upon [her] listening" (182). In using "Eirin," "the old Galician version" (182) of her name, she exemplifies the ways that, for her, "[a] practice of reading is always embodied" (Erín Moure, "The Exhorbitant Body" 173) and it always engages an "other." The "elation" of translation arises, for Moure, in those moments when the border between author, translator, and reader is open for negotiation. In a piece written collaboratively with Moure, the London-based French-Norwegian poet Caroline Bergvall points out that "[t]he more [Moure's] work as a poet and as a translator[8] proliferates, the more [her] names do too" (Bergvall and Moure 167). With

Deleuze, whom she cites in the following epigraph to *Pillage Laud* (1999), Moure sees "experimentation on ourself" as "our only identity, our single chance for all the combinations that inhabit us."

Pillage Laud is another text that complicates notions of authorship, since it seems to have, with the help of a computer, written itself. But of course this is not true. *Pillage Laud* was written in a collaboration between Moure and the computer since she chose the vocabulary that produced the poems and "selects" the poems from among those generated:

> *Pillage Laud* selects from pages of computer-generated sentences to produce Lesbian sex poems, by pulling through certain found vocabularies, relying on context: boy plug vagina library fate tool doctrine bath discipline belt beds pioneer book ambition finger fist flow. (n. pag.)

Moure is in fact one of the few women poets to have generated poetry with a computer (Emerson 59). *Pillage Laud* was written between September 1997 and July 1998 (*Pillage Laud* n. pag.) using MacProse to generate "random sentences based on syntax and dictionary instructions internal to the program" (Moure, *Pillage Laud* 99). Unlike the mostly male writers of conceptual poetry however, Moure is interested in formal innovation only insofar as it simultaneous engages in "a critique of the generative process itself" (*O Cidadán* 47). For her, "a purely generated, purely intentionless writing (free of ideology)" (Emerson 60) is impossible. Because she sees reading as "inherently a practice of exchange, of responsiveness," as "radically communal" (Bergvall and Moure 170) the process of making alternative meanings is always available. As Anna Leventhal writes in a review of Moure's collected essays, her "beloved wager" is on the opportunity "to be changed by language and have the world created anew" (n. pag.)

At the literal boundary of *O Cidadán* (the cover), Moure presents, in the form of a photograph of an installation entitled *Cradle* by Montréal artist Lani Maestro, a spatial metaphor that suggests how, in being "changed by language" (Levanthal n. pag.), we become both active and tentative readers: a structure that is unrooted, temporary, and yet habitable, the tent is a spatial metaphor for citizenship itself. Maestro assembled *Cradle* by using sisal strings to suspend cheesecloth tents across the gallery space (Baert and Maestro n. pag.). As Moure's work does, Maestro teaches us how to occupy such official spaces (like galleries, books, countries) otherwise. The tents do subdivide the space. But because they are made of a gauzy, translucent fabric, the internal pockets are penetrable. In a catalogue of Maestro's work, Baert reads the space created by these tents: "Cradled in these airy enclosures that

are private yet permeable, set apart yet neighboured, one is invited to expand silence, to breathe" (22). In Maestro's work, borders separate inside and outside, but in a way that allows light, motion, language, and sound to cross.

But Moure does more than simply include a photograph of Maestro's *Cradle* on the cover of one of her books. She wrote two crucial pieces in response to Maestro's *Cradle*. Taken together, these pieces constitute a kind of Mourean theory of reading. The first piece, entitled "These Notes on Lani Maestro's Cradle [sic]" (1-3),[9] was published as a poem in Calgary-based *dANDelion* magazine (2002). A significantly revised version was published as an essay in Moure's *My Beloved Wager* under the title "Three Notes on Lani Maestro's *Cradle*" (127-30).[10] In both pieces, Moure ties Maestro's tents to language by linking Maestro's sisal strings with the alphabet: "Tension in the strings—each string an / alphabetic letter—its tension (is readerly)" (1). For Moure, *Cradle*, with all its permeability and *tent*ativeness, gives us a way to think about language and discourse:

> *Cradle* is a stringed instrument.
> Its lines contrast with its planes—
> because it marks off space with planes.
> These marked spaces lie beneath
> the alphabet.
>
> This is a description of discourse
> that is working for me. (1)

What are these "marked spaces" that "lie"? That lie "beneath the alphabet"? How do we read the instrumentality of lines and planes (of language and discourse) when they "mark off" (or tortuously make) space? Why is Moure interested in the kind of space produced in *Cradle*? How does this notion that "marked spaces lie beneath / the alphabet" describe a discourse that works for Moure? Why and how does it work for her?

The word "lie" names an equivocal relationship between the "marked spaces" and "the alphabet." The spaces thus marked both exist (there they are, lying there) "beneath the alphabet" *and* cease to exist (since the marked spaces "lie") simultaneously. Moure writes that a "description of discourse" which marks spaces off with planes, which sets up a temporary relationship between space and representation, works "for" her. Why and how would this notion of discourse be particularly useful to a woman poet? A lesbian poet? A girl who grew up in Alberta and became a multi-lingual translator living in Montréal? Perhaps there is something in the equivocations of the spatial field assembled in *Cradle*. Perhaps Moure is interested in the temporariness and

alterability inherent in Maestro's installation. The risk of marking off space is that the space might become permanently marked, that space might become fixed and unquestionable, that space might root itself rather than be a route elsewhere. Perhaps Moure is interested, to *détourne* the statement by Lispector originally quoted by Moure and then by us at the beginning of this essay, in a space (and a discourse) that is not always already marked out but is tortuously in the process of being marked and remarked on, made and remade.

As Moure writes in "Three Notes on Lani Maestro's *Cradle*," the second version of her reading of *Cradle*, Maestro's permeable borders and impermanent structures make up a kind of discursive field. We play the reader in *Cradle* just as *Cradle* plays with us as readers:

> What is in a discursive field
> can be said to make it up.
>
> All discursive fields include the
> reader, who performs not just in
> front of them, but in them.
>
> In *Cradle* we play the reader.
>
> The reader is a performance complicit
> with a tension in the body.
>
> *Cradle* makes up my discursive field. (130)

For Moure, *Cradle* is a discursive field in which the reader performs, moving perhaps from tent to tent, looking through to other spaces, calling across to others. The space is gauzy and dream-like. But it is also open to the movements of meaning making, since, from each seemingly private space, one can see through to adjacent spaces. The reader is a performer *inside* the textual field.

Moure invites us to participate in the textual spaces she constructs in the same way we might enter the space of Maestro's *Cradle*. Speaking of "Lévinas's take on 'hospitality,'" Moure notes that a hospitable space is "a space of interruptibility or leakage where there is no claim to totality. The one welcoming the visitor is already in the visitor's debt, for visi-tor is also visi-ble, brings the visible into being" (*O Cidadán* 103). Moure changes a reader/text relationship into one of visitor/visited, creating a discursive field of being among and with, but not alone. Perhaps this discursive field is that of the readerly citizen, unwilling to impose meaning on the other, instead negotiating meaning in a field of exchange across a porous border.

O Cidadán (2002): Closing Singular Narratives, Opening Textual Borders

How might we think about the notion of citizenship *spatially*? And how might that relate to the space of the book and the act of readership? In the "Thirteenth Catalogue of the Maternity of Harms" section of *O Cidadán*, as she reflects on the relationship of the body to the body's image of itself and to the city, Moure suggests that the "citizen-relation is itself spatial" (83). This connection makes sense, given our discussion of Maestro's *Cradle* and the interactive spaces it provides. But here she applies the flexibility found in Maestro's installation to the body, arguing that "*lability of meaning* means sexual organs might be *invested in* or *migrate to* any region of the body" (83). Psychosexual investment can shift to different sites on the body and is not automatically assigned to the genitals—Moure suggests, as an example, "her right ear" (83). "Funny thing is," Moure turns, "an organ could also, then, be cathected outside the body—'proper' so that the body—'cognizant' oversteps the body—'proper' at any given time" (83). These different bodies, these shifting investments, these labile meanings: how should we read them? Certainly the body is a conflicted site for Moure, who resists the unified (and typically psychoanalytic) reading of the body. The overlapping spatial scales Moure engages with (body, city, nation, *book*) are dealt with in similarly complex ways. Elements of the body (or city or nation or book) might "be *invested in* or *migrate to* any region of the body" (83).

It is interesting then that just two pages later, Moure invites her readers to "fold here, tear along seam, and remove from book" (85):

fold here, tear along seam, and remove from book-----------------Quae vita, que mores, MS.
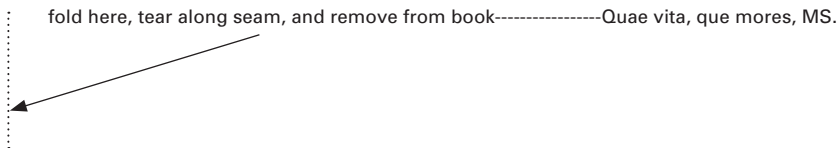
The words "fold here, tear along seam, and remove from book"[11] gesture via an arrow that points to the inside margin, where, from the bottom of the page to about halfway up, a dotted line is printed. The words that invite us to fold, tear, and remove appear at the top of this dotted line, forming a horizontal plane—the words themselves are another kind of dotted line, printed deliberately in a very small font to match the cut-line in size. These two lines demarcate a space in the book she dares us to remove, to excise from the bounded space of the book.

When we suggest that Moure "dares" us to remove the page from the book we have used the verb "to dare" deliberately. As Johanna Skibsrud noted

in her 2010 essay on "Border Crossings in Erin Mouré's *O Cidadán*," for Moure,[12] "Poetry is a limitless genre. Its borders are only in ourselves and we can move them, in our lifetimes, if we dare to" (18; qtd. in Skibsrud 24). This section of the book could be understood therefore as a dare to the reader: do you dare to fold and tear and remove it?[13] Why or why not? And if you do, how do you think about the book that remains? Is it scarred? Does it become a supplement? After all, the book is now, in at least one sense, more open. It has gained a roaming page, which, though still numbered, can move to different locations in the book or to a different book altogether. It can also disappear completely, be excised from the book as waste, relegated to the trash, or recycled. It is not, however, imperative that we remove the page. Moure playfully gives us the option of leaving the page in the book: the verso of the page invites us to remove the page "[o]r not, MS, or not" (86). How might we read this daring invitation to consider the ways the page could migrate from the book? Certainly our reaction, and our action (if any), reveals several assumptions about our reading practices. It functions as a litmus test measuring our attitudes toward the borders of books and our attitudes toward borders generally.

   With *O Cidadán*, Moure drops us in a field of books. On her acknowledgements page, she notes that *O Cidadán* represents "a reading practice in a community of others" (141), following this with a substantial list of texts, theoretical and otherwise, that contribute to the dense textuality of her own book and that are in fact "critical to the book's conception and movement" (141).[14] Moure references these writers and their texts throughout her book, making *O Cidadán* one book floating on a shelf with others, each book with gauzy, translucent covers to better see from one book to the next. Moure's book is exploratory, a research project in process, or rather several projects overlapping: theoretical "documents" sit beside love poems, lineated poems have diagrams added to them. Skibsrud complicates her discussion of border crossing by drawing our attention the notion of overlay or overlapping in Moure's work. The illustrative figures in Moure's text, she argues, and the ways figures and shapes "exist simultaneously" and "overlap" in them are indispensable to Moure's project because they

> not only allow us to perceive literally the ways bodies (here, read 'bodies' in both the literal and figurative senses that Mouré intends) 'touch,' but also to call into question—by this superimposition of figures 'under' and 'over' one another—the notion of 'origin.' (20)

For Skibsrud, Moure's focus on overlapping texts and images calls into

question the notion of origin by presenting textual bodies that do not remain solitary, that instead touch and interact, that overlap in complex ways. The proactive reading practice Moure teaches us to adopt might lead us to attempt, when we face *O Cidadán* as an isolated book object, to give in to this logic of overlapping. Instead of removing one page, we feel as if we could cut *all* the pages from *O Cidadán*, leaving us with a stack of archival documents—an archive of Erín Moure's reading practice around the problems of citizenship, an archive we could fold into other books and discourses.

But if we think of Moure's texts as exemplifying her reading practice, we can recognize that she is marking off (but not rooting down) a discursive field of and for ethical citizens to inhabit (invest in and migrate across). Here spatial production is tied to a relationship with the other. But not just with the other we know directly; also with the other we may not know and yet remain connected to:

> As if "being among" is a kind of reading—for not everyone is "now present" *sur place* in this "among," just as people in a book are not present. In "being with" [relation of amor] the other *is* present. In French this is marked as *autrui* (every other) or as *autre* (the other). (*O Cidadán* 72)

In "Acts of Citizenship," Lianne Moyes reads this attention to the *autrui* as a kind of "civilian love," referring to Moure's 1992 book *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*.[15] She argues that *O Cidadán* "explores citizenship as an ethical practice of 'being among,' an ethics that allows for the 'elsewhere' and irreconcilable difference of 'others'" and that "[s]uch acts of citizenship—the leap of imagination that is reading or that is 'being among'—constitute civilian love" (117). If reading is an act of citizenship, its performance must not only take into account those who are already within the discourse, but those who are excluded from it. Moyes' conception of "civilian love" is tied to the ethical accounting for "those subjects who are without papers, who are stateless" (117).

Ironically then, if we think of citizenship within a practice of reading, we must not only think of including those "without papers," but perhaps also those "without language" or "without letters" or those excluded from participation in the public sphere outright. O Citizen; O Cidadán; "O reader" (*O Cidadán* 98). "A public space," Moure tells us, "is where we are both signs" (*O Cidadán* 9), making each of us a sign to be read (or not read). We face the other as a page to be read, to be marked up as we circle certain words and erase others. We inscribe the other's body (the other's page), but how? Moure connects reading to the idea of a "trait," a mark created through our own reading of it:

> Even *if* reading creates the trait, aren't *both* gestures needed? Isn't the *gestural* crossing of "reading" with "trait" the very armature of trait as marking? The origin of any particular condensation of meaning is thus outside the body of the fold or mark, and outside the body of the reader, at a gestural point or series (temporal) of points that are traversed and that traverse (both active and passive). (*O Cidadán* 21)

Since "[t]he readings we can give each other, and the world, are the world" (*O Cidadán* 68), any creation of meaning, of the trait, depends on a gestural exchange between the body of the reader and the "body of the fold/mark," that is, the body of the *read*: "As if reading itself is localization, situation, siting" (*O Cidadán* 68). A citizen's identity is based on a gestural exchange between participants in a public space.

In her "chapter on reading" (*O Cidadán* 67) Moure calls into question the ways bodies are read, specifically

> [t]he ways women's bodies are read, reified (plunder / essence / demeure). "*Fighting the dominant codes of intelligibility*" (Butler) critical. Fighting that fraught foreclosure of sense, by fraying another way through.
>
> Here, reading's relation to the body is intelligibility's demeure. Our bodies extend into the book. (*O Cidadán* 70)

"Here" where "[o]ur bodies / extend into the book" (70) we can challenge fixed readings of women's bodies, fight the dominant codes of intelligibility and see "reading's relation to the body" as "intelligibility's demeure" (70). Moure exemplifies an open, resistant mode of reading bodies, "Fighting that fraught foreclosure of sense, by fraying another way through" (70). In an interview, Deleuze relates a story about a woman in treatment whose experiences are reduced by the analyst. The analyst is struck by a detail—the name René, which he associates with re-né, literally rebirth. "The doctor gets his bearings," Deleuze tells us, "And he gets her to talk about her mother and father" (51). Before the analyst asked the question about René, the woman's narrative was, we are told, already detailed and complex. Deleuze notes that "[u]p to that point, she was speaking about the metro, Hiroshima, Vietnam, of the effect all that had on her body, the need to cry about it" (51). The analyst, in focusing on a single detail, marks the patient's narrative within the narrow confines of the Oedipal triangle. The patient's narrative shifts scales, moving from the body to the city to the nation—her narrative dynamic and panoramic—but the analyst, in limiting the scale to the family, eliminates its richness and possibility, relegating the narrative's "noise" to the trash. The analyst effectively drains the site in an attempt to read a pure truth. Clearly, Moure cautions us about this kind of fascist reading.

In fact, several of the essays collected in *My Beloved Wager* warn against fascist reading practices. In her essay on "Redefining Citizenship by Poetic Means," cited at the beginning of this paper,[16] Moure reminds us that "Originary thinking—war on evil, eternal Name-your-Country, infinite justice—brings us closer, [she thinks] to fascisms. It removes others from our conception of ourselves, flattens the paradox of the citizen as movement, and the troubled and transgressive relation of this citizen to borders" (167). Moure links the widescreen nationalist "originary thinking" to the scale of the body, suggesting that fascisms can easily exist at both levels—in both the way our nation treats other nations and cultures *and* in the way each of us treats the others we encounter in our everyday lives. In her own poetic movements, Moure complicates these scales, suggesting that we not disavow our complicity on the wider scale and daring us to remain critical and vigilant in our everyday relations. In contrast to the "being with" and "being among" of *autre* and *autrui* respectively, perhaps we could think of this tight drawing of borders as a "being apart," as a troubled nationalism. Moure evokes one of the central tensions of globalization—the seeming loosening of borders to commerce at the same time borders tighten to bodies:

> Rio street children excised by police, por exemplo. And the fundamentally right-wing nationalisms that nourish societal fracture, instead of *accueil*. The two "sides" block any who would convect new forms of confederation, insisting all convectibility "colludes" with hellishness. (*O Cidadán* 137)

Moure opposes the societal fracture caused by the impermeability of borders to *accueil,* or welcome. This closing of borders because of an originary, nationalist thinking, of rooting the identity of the citizen in a specific place, limits us to a singular narrative opposing all others. This nationalist space is, as Moure suggests, "Where *l'accueil* is impossible, for the eyes go blind to the other, thinking they see god" (137).

In an essay on "The Medium," Moure reminds us, "The medium is not poetry but language itself" (69):

> Because language affects the way we perceive.
> Because perception is all we know of reality.
> Because the surface and density of the words
> Affect our seeing, even if we don't believe. (69)

Moure is interested in interrupting "the surface and density of words" so as to "affect our seeing," to permit us to see across otherwise impermeable borders. In an interview with Dawne McCance, Moure notes that *O Cidadán*

is "a text about crossing borders, and it finds out that movements into a territory are part of what defines a territory; a border is only a useful edge if it can be crossed" (n. pag.). Further, McCance identifies the citizen as enacted in and by Moure's text as "not defined by a territory per se, but by how she or he acts in a territory. *O Cidadán* is a call to action, to acting, to acts that open borders" (n. pag.). Moure explores the inside/outside relation of the border, noting that "[w]hat is placed 'outside' gives 'inside' *purchase*. Similarly, inscription bears the 'not-inscribed' as its very possibility for speaking" (*O Cidadán* 112). The demarcation of a kind of border, marking those outside as essentially different from those inside, gives those on either side an identity. Moure is clearly uninterested in the impermeable border—the border built through nationalist or Oedipal narratives—but doesn't wish to deny the existence or importance of borders "[f]or they mark a disruptive and unruly edge" (112).

For Moure, the disruptive edge of the border is not hermetically sealed, but is closer to the lung, the porous entryway to the body, letting in oxygen and letting out carbon dioxide. Moure is interested in the lung's porosity and its sheer size, the potential of its exchange surface: "They call the surface of landscape a skin (the hugeness of that organ). But it is a lung. 25 times the surface of the skin, 500 million passageways into the blood" (*O Cidadán* 65). The lung is a folded boundary, porous, and the source of speech. Moure gives us an unnational map—a "[m]ap of the inside of the lung"—where "[i]f a language does not belong solely to its speakers, but to everyone, the nation as soil makes no more sense" (59). The floating page (or the archival mess of floating pages) mimics this economy of the lung in the ways that knowledge and information can always move between the inside and outside of books, thereby complicating the unitary conception of the book as singular object (and the conception of nation as singular place).

As we have suggested, *O Cidadán* invites readers to produce our own roaming pages, our own readings across books. But an actual roaming page called "HOW" was published with and inserted into *Expeditions of a Chimæra* (2010), Moure's collaboration with Oana Avasilichioaei. Single, long lines of text appear on both sides of the page entitled "HOW." All but the last line begins with the word "How." The last phrase of the last line is "how to breathe." Here is a sample:

> How to find language in life's commonplaces and have it mean.
> How to live in language that opens language to language, opens us to one another, language that humanes us. . . .

> How to threshold the threshold. How to live in the crossings of a threshold. How to unborder a border. How to unmean, unwar, unnormalize a border.
>
> How to unborder a language's borders. (Avasilichioaei and Moure n. pag.)

How, we ask, might we read "HOW"? The repetition of the word "how" at the beginning of every line suggests, at first glance, that what we have before us is a list of questions. But in the absence of question marks, "HOW" can be read, instead, as a "How to" catalogue or even an index. Another text is referenced directly from the page marked "HOW": a footnote leading to Edmond Jabès that reads, "*J'évoquerai le livre et provoquerai les questions*." Rosmarie Waldrop translates this line as "I will evoke the book and provoke the questions" (Jabès 31). Jabès' statement can be read as another kind of "how to" and as a key to "HOW." The indexical nature of the piece gestures *elsewhere* in the same way that an index directs the reader to another place in the book. As a kind of index (though one that refuses the specific reference of page numbers), "HOW" literally evokes *a* book (rather than *the* book) and provokes questions in us about where we would find the information we need to read the world.

When Moure and Avasilichioaei enter the line "[h]ow to open hands justly" (n. pag.) into their index, not only are they inviting us to ask the question, "how *do I* open my hands justly?" they are also inviting us to ask, "where is the information that would help me to answer that question?" The floating nature of "HOW" means it could cross any textual border and inhabit any book. Because it floats, the answers to the questions provoked could be anywhere. Looking for and perhaps even finding them is what Moure's texts, which ask us to keep reading, invite us to do. Perhaps the question that needs to be answered, therefore, is not whether we *should* make political claims for poetry like Moure's that addresses the meanings form makes, but rather *how* we as readers should stake out our claims. Should we take a book like O *Cidadán* that is rich and multiple, unwilling to root itself in a single discourse or poetic, and pin it down to a simple political gesture? Perhaps we should. But by doing so we play out the script of Deleuze's analyst, looking only for the moments in Moure's text that prove one singular point. The failure of much politically motivated writing is the way it risks reductive polemic in attempting to get a point across (capitalism is bad, don't eat meat, etc.). And we could say the same about most politically motivated reading. Moure's recent work is politically valuable precisely because it resists simple political readings. In the process, it invites us to think about how we,

as readers, draw our political lines across the space of bodies and rooms and cities and nations, choosing where to make or dissolve borders and how to include others in the negotiation of that space.

NOTES

1 Particularly "The Public Relation: Redefining Citizenship by Poetic Means" (163-72).
2 These two pieces, published under two different spellings of Moure's name, are "These Notes on Lani Maestro's Cradle [sic]," which appeared in *dANDelion* as by Erin Moure, 2002, and "Three Notes on Lani Maestro's *Cradle,*" which appeared in Moure's collected essays *My Beloved Wager* as by Erín Moure, 2009.
3 *Expeditions of a Chimæra* offers another example of Moure's open, generative, and collaborative relationship to authorship. Not only was it written in collaboration with Avasilichioaei, it was written with "interferences" from yet another of Moure's identities, her heteronym Elisa Sampedrín, who first appeared in a piece called "Eight Little Theatres of the Cornices, by Elisa Sampedrín" (Erín Moure, *Little Theatres* 27-34).
4 We are indebted to Angela Carr and Tente, her "collapsible, feminist poetry and poetics press" (mclennan n. pag.), for reminding us to think about tents as temporary and yet inhabitable structures.
5 Note the retention of the earlier version of Moure's name in Johanna Skibsrud's 2010 essay "'If We Dare To': Border Crossings in Erin Mouré's *O Cidadán*."
6 That these books don't "belong" to a particular named version of herself is underlined by the fact that *O Cidadán* offers a list of books "Also by Erin Moure / Eirin Moure" (n.pag.)
7 In "A Note on Fernando Pessoa Heteronyms," Moure tells us that heteronyms are "complete poetic personalities/characters with different bodies of work, biographies, horoscopes, educations, professions, and aesthetics" (Eirin Moure, *Sheep's Vigil* 131).
8 Moure has translated the work of Nicole Brossard, Chus Pato, Fernando Pessoa, and Andrés Ajens from, respectively, French, Galician, Portuguese, and Spanish into English.
9 This piece was published under the name "Erin Moure" (i.e., without any accents anywhere); this may or may not have been an accident.
10 In an endnote to the so-called essay version of the piece, Moure explains that her "Three Notes" were made in response to a 2000 exhibition of *Cradle* at the Galérie Université du Québec à Montréal (*My Beloved Wager* 317).
11 This instruction appears on the verso of the page as well, reading "fold here, tear at the seam, and remove from the book" (86).
12 As we noted earlier, Skibsrud uses the pre-*O Cidadán* spelling of Moure's name.
13 For the record, one of us removed the page; the other didn't. Interpret this however you wish.
14 This dense texuality includes references to texts by theorists (Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Luc Nancy), writers (Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Federico García Lorca, Clarice Lispector, Cormac McCarthy) and, again in *O Cidadán*, Lani Maestro.
15 A section of this book is also entitled "Civilian Love" (*Sheepish Beauty* 39-73).
16 Significantly, this essay was originally published in a book on *Global Neo-Imperialism and National Resistance* (2004).

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Ken Belford

I thought this day would never come

I thought this day would never come
after yesterday came apart in my hands
but today wishes come before dreams
and my desire is out of all proportion.
Wishes come to my house tomorrow
but greens come from the back and
come what may, meaning is based
on difference. It's too ambitious to
maintain the illusion of identity,
which is to say why claims to truth
require exclusion. My dishevelled
leaving of the place I'm done with,
then to a new shifting scene bears on
whose meaning, does me no harm
and I can get along without the river.

     * * *

The river to which I belong and
all the small, disabling acts for
which I have no name became
the misery in my bones. I am
the blood brother from the river
up the coast, the cousin once
removed, the trash in the truck,
the descendent begrimed in
the raff and rags of language.
I am the brother who licks
the meal of the marginal land.
One of these days you will say

goodbye and travel north and
leave behind your nana of the
home you share and take a
part of myself with you. I am
my own master. Nurtured in
the same water as the river
I was given to live with, I take
with me my hand wound with
string and with roots and a
twist of my father's hair bound
together and made inseparable.

      * * *

I didn't grow up here so I've got
a different story about where I live.
Others like me live up and down
the street, but if you live here,
you better have a truck. Walking
makes me a bum but I repeat myself.
I live where the narrative of place
isn't choosiness, but differentia,
and I never think about working
here. Taxpayers don't appreciate
my poetry but there's no game
this fun in PG. I don't have a debt
to a boy poet gang so I can be
where I don't belong. I write in
free places with my magic marker,

borrow some ink and write
my name on the sides of books.
Some think it's chicken scratch
but I'm getting my name up.
There's a shortage of space now
so I write on moving surfaces
without leaving a nick or a drip.
Writing's been good to me.

        * * *

Today it's snowing hard but
to say my vocabulary did that
to me is to simplistically say
the weather is about meaning.
Today the former means the
latter, which allows for, and
then limits affinity. Up north
I learned content isn't pervasive
so I'm making translations into
something to be understood.
It's too bad it's snowing today
but always the confusing stories,
the rituals that mean there's no
way of ever being able to apply
the misguided common judgments
of tradition to a page of poetry.
Truth can't be made explicit.
The Blackwater is still remote—

its too far away for scrutiny.
Knowing about the Blackwater
belongs to the age but belongs
to yesterday too and writing is
belief in progress, a discernment
other than the poem's limitations.

* * *

Like causes, consequences run in families as
independent replications prior to publication,
with a possibility of transmission from
those who don't play a role in disorders.
I'm not a sensation seeker but even so
I soaked up an acute exposure to critics.
Expected to pair, I've always been leaning
to false positives, knowing I'm of a different
generation, and prone to a loss of tolerance.
In addition to being poor, I smoked and
used animal subjects. Findings can be
measured in my body where emotions lie.
Today I'm a reliable indicator who avoids
strong smells coming from words. These
are some of the things I watch around home.
I'm for simple design and I don't take part
in tests the old guard considers meaningful,
You could call it a preexisting aversion to
retired English teachers. When a building
is remodeled, I walk away from the effects.

* * *

And then, when Johanson showed
the embeddedness of affectation,
and wrote about the down to earth
customs of the unideal, I remembered
the farm economy is to harrow and hoe
with humanism, to keep learning,
and mix and refine. I have not been
of relevance to the hyper-functioning
model but I know about the grooves
that relate to complication and the
models of literary patterns. These
outlines are not of the studied regions
of the Skeena, but the Nass, where
transient pathways evolve in reverse
from disturbance prototypes. This
poem is not of relevance to either the
assimilation model, or the specifics
of the local. The eventual outcome of
the making of the father's founding
georama about forms is, finally,
an occasion for departure, bringing
on reconfigurations, linking news.

* * *

Houses care nothing for bears
but bears disappear and fade
away to hiding places where
I imagine they pass out. Moving
and breathing, bears are only
found in the present. Contemptuous
of nothing, bears dump on stairs,
insulting home owners, who
ordinarily think nothing of bears.
But bears awaken and get to live
again and it's always when they
see the light. It's best to think twice
about bears. Bears leave the scene
and bears leave a trace, and bears
are cautious but they never hop
when mad. Bears are big wheels
but not bad influences. Any day,
any time now, as expected, and
as may be, bears can be counted on.

* * *

Not everything is tied to beliefs.
The farfetched poems of lofty diction
are mostly made from the self importance
of the cocksure, whose inevitable theories
are too ambitious and chosen as a kind
of denial of instability. I wonder about
immanent influence, if that might be

a secret language whispering how
the world would be if poetry might
overcome the impulses of the critic's
desire for domination, Claiming a
relationship to the fixed place, and
misled by the literature of coherence,
the western stories of status pass
for knowledge and are witless and
wrong. The truth is, contradiction
is inevitable. Without fiction, the claims
that cohere to the old body are not
a love story, but a fiction of old rules.
Meaning is based on difference but
on the other hand, la da ga da,
claims to truth require exclusion.

  * * *

What always happens
is beliefs are not true
but friendship figures
in the old arguments for coherence
and when friendship is undone
and we make use of our friends,
our concern for what is said
is not what ought to be
in this bleak, bleak world
where I'm divided along the lines
of the thing loved

and the twilight hour—
an image that is not shared between friends
and is not even out of the present
and does not impel us to conversation
given the future of
what it means to cross each other out
and make a living.

     * * *

Use is what is done
when custom is in the air.
Praxis is the proper thing.
The reality is, place is
any pleasant get-together
and reality is a gathering
policed by men.
I've always thought
the centre of gravity is somewhere else,
and I often talk out-of-turn
but I'm just an insurance man
apparently called on to occupy
the displacement of attention,
piecing phrases together,
shaping significance
from background dirt.

     * * *

And in the end the dogs
followed, grouping into
lines, an endless belt of
drones chasing buzz.
Perceptions are a precursor
to barking and the hounds
of hierarchy, some with
hangovers, run the scale.
But dogging is the problem
and barking is a nuisance.
The true, essential nature
of poetry is still inscrutable,
and dogs have much to do,
but not with meaning.

Sonnet L'Abbé

North of Invention
Interview with Charles Bernstein
and Sarah Dowling

Charles Bernstein and Sarah Dowling co-organized *North of Invention: A Festival of Canadian Poetry*. Taking place over four days in January 2011 at Kelly Writers House in Philadelphia and Poets House in New York City, the festival aimed "to initiate a new dialogue in North American poetics, addressing the hotly debated areas of 'innovation' and 'conceptual writing,' the history of sound poetry and contemporary performance, multilingualism and translation, and connections to activism" ("North of Invention"). Sarah Dowling, a poet and editor, is currently a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania. Charles Bernstein is Donald T. Regan Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, and the author of 40 books, ranging from large-scale collections of poetry and essays to pamphlets, libretti, translations, and collaborations.

Charles and Sarah, thanks for sharing your thoughts with Canadian Literature. *Let's start at the beginning. Where did the initial urge to put together the* North of Invention *festival come from?*

SD: *North of Invention* has its roots in discussions that Charles and I have been having since the spring of 2006, before I enrolled at Penn. In fact, Charles recruited me to the PhD program in English with promises that he and I would collaborate on a festival of Canadian poetry. Had I known at that time what such a festival would entail, I might have been more inclined to understand these enticing offers for what they really were—threats—and pursued my graduate work elsewhere. Fortunately, however, my naïveté got the better of me, and the result, ultimately, was *North of Invention*: four days of presentations and readings by eleven poets whose contributions

to contemporary writing are absolutely astounding: Lisa Robertson, M. NourbeSe Philip, Stephen Collis, Christian Bök, Nicole Brossard, Adeena Karasick, Jeff Derksen, Jordan Scott, a.rawlings and her collaborator Maja Jantar, who came to us from Belgium, and Fred Wah.

Sarah, can you say a bit about your background, your poetic practice, and how you came to live and work in the States?

SD: I'm originally from Regina, and I came to the US in 2004 after spending several years in Quebec and in the UK. Initially, I came to Philadelphia to do a Master's degree in English/Creative Writing at Temple University. Temple's program is academically oriented, and its curriculum emphasizes the Anglo-American modernist roots of contemporary experimental writing practices. At the same time, Temple students have a longstanding tradition of active participation in the poetry communities that operate in parallel to Philadelphia's academic institutions and their poetry scenes. My formation as a poet came about through the combined influences of intensive literary study and engagement with writers in the local area: Pattie McCarthy and Kevin Varrone, CAConrad and Frank Sherlock, Jenn and Chris McCreary, Ryan Eckes, Sueyeun Juliette Lee, Divya Victor (who is now in Buffalo), Julia Bloch, and many others.

Charles, how would you describe your relationship to the idea of a Canadian avant-garde over the past three decades?

CB: I don't have much of a relation to the idea but I like the poetry. I'd be a fool not to since so much of the "kind of poetry I want," to use a phrase of Hugh MacDiarmid's, is coming from Canada. Susan Bee and I are featured in the current issue of *The Capilano Review* (3:12, 2010), which focused on our time in Ruskin, BC, in 1973, just after we graduated from college. The issue includes Susan's early artwork, early and previously unpublished poems of mine, and an interview about our time there and my connection to Simon Fraser University (SFU) and meeting Robin Blaser.

What's your working definition of "the cutting edge of contemporary poetic practice?" What do you need to see or not see?

SD: I don't think that either Charles or I are particularly interested in making definitions about who or what constitutes the "cutting edge of contemporary poetic practice" (although I realize you're quoting us here). In fact, we had hoped to feature a good number of writers whose works and activism have

been especially foundational in Canada since the 1970s and 1980s, but remain relatively unknown in the US. In this sense, we wanted to emphasize practices that we see as historically significant as much as a current "cutting edge." In particular, we had invited Miki and Marlatt, whose writing has been informative of so many contemporary poetic practices. Unfortunately, however, neither was able to attend for personal reasons.

Nevertheless, the presentations by Brossard, Wah, and Philip fulfilled this role quite beautifully: Wah, for example, spoke several times about how reading feminist works such as Brossard's gave him the tools to explore his social location as a biracial Chinese-Canadian. Brossard spoke about continuities between her early works and her current works and explained how her feminism has changed, telling us that although she still has the same anger, she now has more information. Philip also spoke about her recent work, particularly *Zong!*, in the context of older works like *Looking for Livingstone* and *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Although these books are quite well known in Canada, they are really not known at all in the US. I think for Charles and I both, it was very important to present a long trajectory and a broad array of "cutting edge[s]." I think we are both ideologically opposed to the idea that there would only be one, or that the most recent one is the most important, the sharpest. Maybe instead of one cutting edge, we're interested in pulling out all the utensils in the drawer.

My impression is that Canadian (or rather, Toronto and Vancouver) collectivities are internationally understood to have played an important role in the estab-lishment of the international poetic avant-garde. Do you agree? What kind of reputation do we enjoy in American conversations around avant-garde practice?

SD: I would agree that communities in Toronto and Vancouver are seen as playing an important role in poetics on an international level. Canadians frequently come up in conversations on American avant-garde writing practices, but I wouldn't say that Canadians frequently come up *as Canadians*. Rather, I think it is more common to see appeals to "North American" poetics. Often this means that someone merely wants to cite one Canadian among a list of American practitioners, but sometimes it is more nuanced and indicates a sense of coteries and practices that cross borders.

In my own academic writing I try to connect Canadian and American writing practices, but I place these within a broader, hemispheric context. My dissertation, "Remote Intimacies: Multilingualism in Contemporary Poetry," argues that contemporary poetry turns to languages other than

English in order to explore attachments to difficult or even impossible objects: dead languages, defunct textual practices, murdered slaves, wartime childhoods, and bitter enemies. I see this kind of work happening in Canadian poetry—M. NourbeSe Philip's, Rachel Zolf's, Erín Moure's, to name a few examples—and what interests me are the commonalities this poetry shares with American poetries, Anglophone Caribbean poetries, certain South American practices. When these are viewed together, we get a rich sense of poetry not so much as a future-oriented avant-garde, but as a historiographic practice. So I'm interested in multilingual experimentation as a form uniquely suited to writing the histories of linguistic contact, collision, and extinction that have characterized the past several hundred years of life in this hemisphere. But I would point out that such poetries—not just the Canadian poetries, but all these multilingual works—are infrequently discussed in criticism, especially in the US, and also that they don't tend to fit into geographically or regionally identified scenes.

Though originally from Britain, Steve McCaffery is still one of Canada's most internationally known avant-garde practitioners. Christian Bök is another. Does these poets' "Canadianness" become significant in understanding their aesthetic once they achieve recognition in the US?

CB: Leonard Cohen is the best-known living Canadian poet in the US and probably internationally as well, though, tellingly, he is not known for his poetry. As far as recognition in the US goes, if you mean that McCaffery and Bök have currency within the poetry circles in/around, let's just say the expanded field of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E for convenience, it should first be noted that this field is a far cry from the official literary culture of the US or indeed from its subset of official verse culture. Among the Canadian poets who do have this currency, in addition to McCaffery and Bök, I'd point to Brossard, Philip, Wah, Robertson, and Derksen, among our small group of *North of Invention* conferees, but also Moure, Karen Mac Cormack, Darren Wershler, Christopher Dewdney, Sina Queyras, Gail Scott, Zolf, Kevin Davies, and Alan Davies; and permit me to add the influential modernist and contemporary poetry scholar, Peter Quartermain. (This list is, I know, as striking for the names left out as for the ones included.) Having expanded your list, I've made the rhetorical point that you can't generalize. Brossard's connection to Quebec is hard to miss. Alan Davies' connection to growing up in Newfoundland (and other parts of Canada) may not be obvious since he has lived in New York for so long; but I never forget it,

partly because it's so different from my growing up in New York. At *North of Invention*, Derksen, Collis, and Robertson spoke adamantly of their relation to Vancouver and to specific issues of urban development related to the city; in the discussion period, Bruce Andrews noted this emphasis on place, on Vancouver, was more marked than when we first encountered these poets twenty years ago. At that time, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Derksen, and others in/around Vancouver's Kootenay School of Writing (KSW), wrote about how Canadian literature has been framed in such a way as to make the exportable cultural product "canned lit," not an activist poetics. So for any one familiar with this compelling critical work and the related poetry, national frames are explicit. For each of the other poets I mention here, the specific relation to Canada, to the US, and to other cultural, gender, ethnic, and racial frames would be different. I could write a book.

There are many languages of Canada, real and imaginary, including the Taelon language Bök declaimed at the festival, which, as I said in introducing him, is, so far as I know, taken from a local idiolect in the town just outside Toronto where he grew up. (He created the language for *Earth: The Final Conflict,* a sci-fi TV show created by Gene Roddenberry.) I should note here that our festival name comes from McCaffery's essay collection, *North of Intention*. McCaffery, a son of the West Riding of Yorkshire now living in Buffalo, must well be the most Canadian of all, or let's just say, north of nationality: "thuzzer booergy-mister mouchin un botherin awl oer place."

Thinking of Bök and McCaffery's transnationalism (if that term can cover a commitment to working and collaborating internationally, rather than living internationally), I also think of Blaser's move to Vancouver, and Sina Queyras' time in NYC and the conversations she has facilitated. . . do you suspect transnationality to be productive in thinking through questions of where to take innovation next? Does this festival signal a kind of return to nationalism as a useful category for understanding poetic innovation, or radicality, today?

CB: . . . Or does it signal a turn away from nationalism? You can't live with it, you can't live without it; *it*—a word constantly invoked by Bök to suggest an "alien" threat—won't let you. To be a non- or anti-nationalist Canadian poet is all the more to be a Canadian poet. I'd say *North of Invention* also explores non-national poetics, poets connecting and in exchange across national lines, but not pretending those don't exist. The only way to have such a dialogue is to acknowledge the force of national literary cultures, like them or not. Philip noted her discomfort with the term *from*: from Toronto, from Tobago, from

Africa. When Wah speaks of the hyphen, of inhabiting the space between Chinese-Canadian, he acknowledges a condition many of us share (*on both sides / of the borderline*). In the Americas, with the considerable exception of indigenous people, we are always from somewhere else; this is most often a defining condition and often manifests itself as stigmatizing others as "aliens" (or internalizing the stigma) or protesting a bit too much about one's nativist roots. And if we are not from somewhere else, we are usually mixed up with others who are. For some poets, myself for sure, our ties across nation-states may be stronger than our national affiliations. I count as my most immediate company in poetry, poets from Finland and Brazil and Canada and England and Argentina and France. The work for us at *North of Invention* has been to think in terms of the larger context of poetics of the Americas, South-North in orientation rather than in relation to Europe, which has bequeathed to us as our national languages in the Americas: Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English. The Americas percolate with languages, from the lost and living languages of those here before the Europeans came, to the many languages of Africa, Asia, and Europe that form our linguistic foundation as poets. I'm inclined to think we need recognize more, not less, lines of resistance and difference. In order to form a more perfect union, and we desperately need it to be more perfect, we need to go not just from many to one (*e pluribus unum*) but from one to many (*e unum pluribus*). From that point of view, we in the US might also hope to be north of invention.

There does seem to be a bit of a split in ethos amongst conceptual poets' enthusiasm for boredom and a kind of excess of insignificance and the more explicit drive to an activist ethic of the KSW, among others. Do you think this split is real, is generative? Is it a Canadian polarization, a North American east-west thing, other?

SD: I definitely see this split in the US; I don't think it's exclusively Canadian. I have seen it come up at plenty of other events, like the Rethinking Poetics conference that took place at Columbia in 2010. This split came up during *North of Invention*, where it took the form of a sustained set of discussions that primarily featured Bök, Collis, and Derksen. It was interesting to hear this conversation play out. Charles remarked that this issue does not often come up as a conversation; in other words, we are not typically treated to more than one side of the debate, or invited to listen and engage for extended periods of time.

Then there was also Adeena Karasick's paper reframing Kenneth Goldsmith's writing practice as Kabbalistic trope. Rather than an excess of insignificance,

she read his work as a perhaps unwitting or even unwilling engagement with longstanding Jewish mystical traditions. I think this paper offered a rich opportunity for rethinking excess and insignificance in conceptual works.

As long as Bök and Wershler remain influential figures in conceptual poetics, would you consider conceptual writing a practice that has its origins "in Canada," perhaps with 'pataphysical roots? Can Canadianist scholars stake that territory?

CB: I can't prove it, but my impression is that Conceptual Poetry, in the sense of the trademark term, was invented by Bök in his lab, working with two imaginary friends. The mechanism by which he did this is not yet fully understood. The two imaginary friends thought they were in a Toronto bar. The work attributed to poets "south of invention" was likely teletexted from Toronto and then Calgary to the putative authors, unbeknownst to them, who were feasting off the sensation that they were creating original works.

SD: Derksen's presentation at the Kelly Writers House described writing after conceptual art. In this paper he explored the Vancouver art movement photoconceptualism, looking at the influence of photographers like Jeff Wall on the practices of writers such as Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, and exploring specific textual borrowings and exchanges between the two. This was a provocative, and indeed a very Canadian discussion of the relationship between conceptual art and writing, and one that very much expands the notion of what we mean in poetics when we say "conceptual," what kinds of practices might fall under that umbrella. I think we'll see more discussions of the art-historical uses of that term. For example, one of our colleagues at Penn, Katie Price, is writing a dissertation in which she argues that current understandings of conceptual poetry are fairly limited and gloss over a variety of poetic practices that might be viewed as conceptual. There's also the forthcoming anthology from Les Figues Press, *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*. I think that these projects and others will significantly shift our understanding of what constitutes conceptual writing, and how we might understand the roots of this practice.

Can you tell us a bit about how you built and maintained ties to Canadian writers during your time at SUNY-Buffalo and the importance of that program to building the current Canadian/American transnational poetic community?

CB: Buffalo's proximity to Canada made an ongoing relation, especially with poets in Toronto, not only desirable, but also necessary. I was at Buffalo

from 1989 to 2003 and we started the Poetics Program in 1991, twenty years ago. Robert Creeley, who had come to Buffalo in the 1960s, had a strong connection to what might be called the new Canadian poetry and, during the brief time Charles Olson was at Buffalo, both Robert Hogg and Fred Wah came to study in the graduate program. When I arrived, Mike Baughm was there, working closely with Creeley. During my time in Buffalo, many Canadian poets came to read and talk, with Blaser and Brossard coming more than once and having a lasting impact. Both Bök and Peter Jaeger were Social Science Research [and Humanities] Council fellows at Buffalo and they both attended and organized events, spoke in the seminars, and brought in fellow Canadian poets. There was also a focus on exchanges between the younger poets in Toronto and Buffalo, with a carload of Toronto poets coming down to read and Poetics Program poets reading in Toronto. Christian, always a generous soul, was great about that as was Scott Pound, who got his PhD at Buffalo but commuted from Toronto. McCaffery and Mac Cormack, then living in Toronto, were also important presences. And this ended up with Steve getting his PhD at Buffalo, an extraordinary circumstance given that at the time he was more likely to have been on the Poetics faculty. So you could say the Poetics Program has had an ongoing, decades-long, Canadian poetry festival.

Which Canadian institutions do you see as having created the strongest ties to poetic communities in the US?

CB: I don't want to speak for anyone but myself, I would have a hard time doing that. The poets in/around/about the KSW, the Toronto-associated poets already mentioned, and in Quebec, Brossard, have transformed the relation between the US and Canadian poetry, creating a post- or 'pata-national set of exchanges via affinity that in some ways intensify our particular socio-cultural and national contexts but use that intensification as a site for dialogue. Some of these poets are very much part of my immediate company, as much as anyone in the US. Right now, too, there is Jay MillAr and BookThug in Toronto and of course now and before Coach House Books, Talonbooks, Snare, *West Coast Line*, *Rampike*. Colin Browne is less well known as a poet in the US but for me he has been a crucial companion and a significant force in/around KSW. And Frank Davey, both when he was at York and then at the University of Western Ontario, has been acutely active in building connections across the national literature divide. His *Open Letter* published the fourth volume of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* in 1982

and the magazine continues to be a rich source for the development of an ongoing poetics that we share. Of course, early on, before I knew almost any American poets, I was at SFU, so that gives some specific grounding to my perspective. I first heard about Creeley and Spicer through Blaser, when I was in Vancouver. SFU still looks to be a central location for poetics, faculty and special collections both. McCaffery was a core part of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E project and collaborated on *LEGEND*—and we were in close exchange from the time I started to publish. I feel closer and closer to Fred Wah as the years pass and our intersections cross-connect in the swift currents of our thinking. Fred's work at Calgary surely put that on the North American poetic map. And with Bök now at Calgary, the tradition continues strong, with younger poets and publications.

Can you say a bit about how you chose the poets you did for this festival?

SD: Our initial idea in planning *North of Invention* was to feature mostly poets who had read in New York and Philadelphia not at all or only very rarely. As you can imagine, this evolved somewhat as the planning went on. Charles, Stephen Motika, and I all had particular folks in mind when we set that curatorial constraint, and I'm pleased to say that many from our initial imaginary cohort were indeed featured in the festival. However, we had to balance this ideal with the need to attract an audience, and therefore to have some figures more recognizable to US audiences on our roster. We also wanted to have a good balance of emerging and established writers, writers from across Canada, and writers representing various social and aesthetic contingencies. In the end, some of the poets we had initially wanted to feature also had to withdraw for personal reasons or because conflicts arose in their schedules.

CB: For years, I've been haunted by the fact that I never heard Barrie Nichol (bpNichol) read in New York. So there are some long-standing concerns, on my part, for a lack of reciprocity, especially with some of the *TISH* generation poets. But we wanted younger and older poets. Ten poets is tiny in number and of course we left out many more relevant poets than we were able to include this time around (I hope the series will continue). Still, in the end, for the idea we had in mind, our ensemble was pretty close to perfect.

One of the aims of *North of Invention*, and one of the reasons we got such strong support from the Canada Council, is that we were introducing a group of distinct, but interconnected Canadian poets. "A" Canadian Poetry Festival, eh? We wanted to raise the profiles not just of the individual poets

but also of this field of activity in Canada. As Sarah noted, it's easier in the US for individual Canadian poets to get absorbed as North American, or even just as American, than to be recognized in terms of being Canadian, because that frame, to quote Rodney Dangerfield, gets no respect, or it's respected but considered innocuous. As a practical matter, showcasing the quality and range of the Canadian poets (which is not to say *Canadian poetry*), our event was enormously successful. But we have many great lectures and readings at Penn and in New York. What was unique about *North of Invention* was the qualities of the ensemble. A group of people with different perspectives who listened to one another and responded with a care and engaged articulateness that is a model for us all, we who too often talk at, and not with one another, and whose pronouncements too often are motivated by personal positioning rather than toward a larger conversation. Or worse: engage in empty praise, as if poetry had nothing to contest, as if the prizes and contests were not a mark of the betrayal of poetry by those who value it too little. The four days spent with these poets were inspiring because of the way they talked with one another, the brilliance of what they said, and the slow unveiling of their interconnected poetic histories. I kept saying, *they are better than we are*. But then, as in *The Great Gatsby*, good to "remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

Canada's racial politics and history of multiculturalist policy means its avant-garde maps a very different sense of the relation of race to radicality in poetics. How does race enter the conversation in a discussion of Canadian innovative practice happening in America? What questions are you asking?

SD: I wouldn't say that we had our own set of questions that we wanted to ask. We thought it was really important to discuss various relationships among inscriptions of race and radical poetic form, and we thought it particularly important to create a structure within which the significance of texts like Philip's "Discourse on the Logic of Language" would be obvious. And actually, this structure was reversed in some ways, as Philip herself devoted a great part of her discussions in Philadelphia to explaining the significance of Jordan Scott's work on the poetics of stuttering for her own work in performing *Zong!* Wah and Philip also held an amazing conversation at Poets House in which they discussed a range of topics, and asked each other about the pressures and opportunities of being an innovative writer of colour. They both spoke about the policy of official multiculturalism and the violences that this policy has enacted and continues to enact; in particular,

Philip spoke about the ways in which "liberal" policies aimed at immigrants have been used to blunt the legitimate claims and complaints made by First Nations peoples.

Is gender an important category in tracing the maps of associations and influences of avant-garde practice across borders? What questions do you hope to ask around gender?

SD: Yes, absolutely. It is my belief that the legacy of the feminist 1970s in particular has too often been overlooked, especially in the US, where too many scholars of poetics understand feminism primarily as an identity or an activist orientation and not as a theoretical or philosophical tradition. In my view, the academic field of poetics imagines itself as a social-theoretical field based in Marxian theory, and tends to posit such theories as the basis of all experimental writing. In this way, feminist concepts and innovations tend to be considered only in relationship to the textual productions of self-identified feminist writers and communities. My pet polemic is that French feminist concepts are absolutely pervasive in contemporary experimental writing in Canada, the US and elsewhere, and that they form the theoretical ground for experiments with embodiment, vocality, and non-subjective affects, which I see as most common, and most theoretically significant projects being carried out in contemporary poetry. I suppose in this sense it is not so much that we wanted to "trac[e] maps of associations and influences" along the lines of gender, but rather that we wanted to prominently feature writers such as Brossard, Philip, and Robertson, whose feminist interventions have been absolutely foundational. We also wanted to bring their work into relationship with that of younger writers like rawlings and her collaborator Jantar, whose works stand as truly exhilarating examples of contemporary feminist writing and performance.

Is there anywhere you hope the North of Invention *conversations* don't *go?*

SD: I hope that they don't go away! There were so many wonderful poets and critics present at the festival, both in Philadelphia and in New York, and I hope that the work of the presentations, conversations, and readings can continue. In Philadelphia we were lucky enough to have Christopher Nealon, A.L. Nielsen, Josephine Nock-hee Park, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Jena Osman, Mark Nowak, Al Filreis, Michelle Taransky, Tsitsi Ella Jaji, Julia Bloch, Frank Sherlock, Janet Neigh, Bob Perelman, and many others in the audience.

CB: And in New York, Bruce Andrews, Michael Golston, Kristin Prevallet, Lee

Ann Brown, Dorothy Wong, Thom Donovan, Laura Elrick, Rodrigo Toscano, Evie Shockley, Pierre Joris, Mimi Gross, Susan Bee, Tonya Foster, Brenda Iijima, Patricia Spears Jones, Anne Waldman, Lytle Shaw, and John Yau, among many others.

SD: And I know many people watched online as well through the KWH-TV webcast. So I hope that these conversations begun at *North of Invention* can continue.

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Shane Rhodes

The Promise / Broken Land
mediatation on Treaty Three

Muskeg

Poplar, Good land

Cedar, Poplar & Spruce

They promise   t   wo hoes
and engage   one spade
that they will   one plough
obey   five har
and abide   rows one
by the law,   scythe one
that they will   axe one
maintain   cross cut
peace   saw one
good order   handsaw
between   one pit
each other,   saw files
themselves   grindstone
other tribes   one aug
between   er one
themselves   chest of
Her Majesty's   ordin
subjects,   ary
Indians   tools wheat
or   barley
whites,   potatoes   and
inhabiting   oats the   land
or hereafter   yoke   broken
to inhabit
any part
of the
said
ceded

All text in this meditation is taken from the Government of Canada 1873 Treaty Three document which
has been shaped to the outline of a map taken from book one of the 1882 Field Notes of Reserve 21 from
the Canadian Lands Survey.

Alessandra Capperdoni

Why the Avant-Garde?
The Function of the Letter in Canadian Avant-Garde Poetics

> if avant garde is followed by only more avant garde
> meaning *is* literal despite long lines yielding only merchandise
> —Karen Mac Cormack, *At Issue*

> I want to be helpful *and* avant-garde
> —Roger Farr, *Surplus*

The title of this essay—the "function of the letter"—owes something to Jacques Derrida's and, especially, to Jacques Lacan's deconstructive work on language, critique of referentiality, and, perhaps, final blow to a centuries-long epistemological tradition of the unitary subject as the ground of knowledge of the self and the world.[1] All these terms, in fact, are primary concerns of avant-garde artistic and literary practices, though, as it has often been pointed out, these practices are hardly reducible to one theory or program. Indeed, the wealth of criticism on literary vanguardist texts in North America and Europe has shown the array of differences and concerns underlying various poetics. The focus of my discussion will be avant-garde writings based in Canada or working within a Canadian horizon. However, it will necessarily invoke the larger discourse and theorization of the avant-garde which, despite its contingencies and localities, cannot be read outside the international and cosmopolitan impetus that first generated it and which still marks the matrix of relationships among writers engaging with what is loosely termed "language poetry."[2] "Function of the letter" therefore points to the critical investigation both of the work of language along the chain of signifiers and the conditions under which meaning is produced. But it also attempts to shift debates about what constitutes avant-garde writing and claims about its relation to the political to the *function* of the avant-garde at specific geopolitical and historical junctures. The question introduced in the title, then, hopes to identify a different set of relations

between the avant-garde and the social which, rather than being seen as descriptive, could best be summarized through the interrogative, "What do we ask of the avant-garde?" This demand is perhaps already implicit in the different terms generated to indicate textual practices outside the boundaries of mainstream culture—whatever mainstream might refer to at different historical moments. As I hope to demonstrate in the following section, these terms might best be read less as a description of what avant-garde writing practices *are* than what readers *ask* these practices to do at specific historical moments. But if different conditions produce different exigencies in writing, it is also true that the anxiety around naming shows not only the inadequacy of narratives but also, and more importantly, that no truth hides behind the signifier. Yet attention to the avant-garde is still important for it invokes the scene of psychoanalysis not as a model of interpretation but as a way to address what Lacan called the *other* side of knowledge (*Book XVII*), or the political and ethical implications of knowledge production, toward which the final section of the essay will gesture.[3] This question, articulated in different ways and with different effects by "counterpublics" (Warner; Lutticken), sets into motion an important work on language as failure and the force of the Real against which hegemonic notions of knowledge are constructed.

In Canada, the terms experimental, radical, disjunctive, conceptual, oppositional, innovative, or rearticulatory—to name only the most used—have been proposed at various times not only to contest the forward-looking and militaristic implications of the term avant-garde or the exclusionary positions avant-garde groups have historically fashioned for themselves (especially in terms of gender and race politics), but also to emphasize different aspects of their practices—and thus, *different exigencies*. This restlessness in naming is only in part the product of the need to differentiate "the new" from "the old" (or what is constructed as new and old) and clearly marks the ex-centricity of the sign to its name.[4, 5] Each term does not quite seem to "capture it all." For George Bowering, for example, *experimental* writing has more to do with the failures of experimentation than with "writing being something that just looks or sounds different from what was happening before" ("George Bowering" 92), a notion that I will explore in greater depth later. The words *disjunctive*, *conceptual*, and *innovative* seem to emphasize formal aspects, but they are also part of the social and political impulses underlying oppositional, radical, or rearticulatory poetics.[6]

A primary concern with the materiality of language, which Bowering has repeatedly emphasized through the years and which underlies the politics

of language of the terms listed above, has been key to the experimentations dating back to the work of the *Tish* group; the interrogation of speech-based linguistic forms (with the deconstruction of lyric expressivity and voice); and the work of language on the page (concrete poetry and typographical concerns). The privileging of processual forms has increasingly focused on practices that Steve McCaffery, in a 1977 issue of *Open Letter*, has introduced as "language-centred, de-referential writing" (61). While the term could suggest an enhanced formalism, detaching language from the social, the politics and practices of language writing do indeed follow a different avenue, highlighting the relationship of formal construction to the construction of the social and the mechanics of language to the workings of capitalism. In this sense, the "constructivist aesthetics" that Barrett Watten broadly defined as "the imperative in radical literature and art to foreground their formal construction" cannot be neatly separated from the cultural poetics that posit a "reflexive relation of artistic form and cultural context" (xv). From its modernist inception to postmodern practices, then, language-centred writing shows "the radical formal meanings of the avant-garde" (xv).[7]

Radical formal meaning is conceptualized by Fred Wah as the "politics of the referent" (37). In his critical examination of contemporary poetics in *Faking It: Poetics & Hybridity* (2000), Wah discussed the centrality of the politics of the referent to Canadian language writing and identified some of the many avenues of exploration produced: the translation poetics of the Toronto Research Group of bpNichol and McCaffery from 1973 to 1982;[8] the work on the interstices of bilingualism and displaced languages in Lola Lemire Tostevin's "poetics of re"; poetics highlighting the "combinations" and "recombinations" of language (Bowering, "Power" 102); Wah's own "half-bred poetics" of racialized subjectivities; and poetics of the body subverting the symbolic structures of gender and sexuality. Wah is careful not to homogenize these practices under a single heading and seems to avoid the term avant-garde, preferring, instead, "strang(l)ed poetics" (21), that is, formally innovative writing working against the constraints of grammars of nation, race, gender, and class, and poetics that are simultaneously inhabited by conditions of estrangement. In this sense, strang(l)ed poetics seem to echo Watten's linking of constructivist aesthetics to cultural poetics in the modernist and postmodern avant-gardes and Charles Bernstein's call for attention to the relation of poetry to public policy in *The Politics of Poetic Form*. Yet "strang(l)ed" also refocuses work on language on questions of subjectivity and the problematic of self-articulation. This move was

particularly resonant with the concerns voiced at the time of an emerging politics of identity, either by women writers or writers of colour.

Nowhere is the tension between formalist radical work and the politics of subjectivity more evident than in Nicole Brossard's tongue-in-cheek line in *Baroque at Dawn*: "I chose to bear my mother's name and write in Mr. Vanguard's language" (48). For Brossard, then, avant-garde bears the sign of male writing, a language seemingly at odds with the impulses of feminist politics, but also full of possibilities.[9] Ironically, Brossard has emphasized the importance of her encounter with the great modernist tradition of women avant-garde writers like Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes in her writing politics, and she herself has been recognized since the 1980s as the foremost Canadian and Québécois feminist avant-garde writer. While her work stems from the linguistic experimentations associated with the Québécois radical magazine *La barre du jour*, with which primarily male poets were involved, attention to the *matter* of language becomes essential for a deconstructive critique of the sex-gender system. It is with her essay "L'e muet mutant" that the gendered politics of language is brought to the fore—an essay which will have a determining influence, an echo of recognition, on West Coast writer Daphne Marlatt. For Brossard, poetry is "Poetic Politics" (*Fluid Arguments* 26), connecting women's words and creative powers. The experimental subtending her vanguardistic practice means "trying to understand processes of writing" (31), but cannot be divorced from the ludic (playing with words) and the exploratory (searching). Feminist avant-garde is a troubling of language carried out at the level of exploration, intelligence, and pleasure. In this sense, the estrangement produced by language experimentation is also inhabited by that foreign (strange?) territory of self that has not been allowed to come into articulation. Only then can the "playing with language" hope to "reveal unknown dimensions of reality" (27) to effect change.[10]

Yet the term avant-garde still seems to be haunted by the shadow of elitism. This accusation has been equally directed to either radical poetries from the 1960s and 1970s or the feminist avant-gardes from the 1980s, though with different intents and effects. For the first, it is the cross-cultural exchanges with the New American poetry that raised the spectre of cultural imperialism and, ultimately, a suspicious refusal to use language as reflexive of a Canadian cultural milieu (language as transparent medium of representation). These poetries' engagement with (European) theories of language and representation grounded in poststructuralism and psychoanalysis also spurred criticism of the "colonization" of literature by

theory, and the exclusionary stances that the "difficulty" of theory (that is, theory constructed as difficult) produced. Similar criticisms were frequent in feminist circles, where the suspicion toward work on form traditionally dominated by male writing was compounded by a commitment to feminist politics and change in women's lives, with which the "impenetrability" of experimental writings seemed at odds. This perception still lingers in contemporary criticism. In her retrospective analysis of "aesthetic radicality throughout the twentieth century" ("(Re)Defining Radical Poetics" 17), for example, Pauline Butling argues for a notion of new radical poetics which, "by the 1980s and 90s . . . could no longer be adequately described within the discourse of avant-guardism" (26). This discourse includes, but is not limited to, "the traditional qualities of youthful rebellion, formal invention, and individual adventurousness"—a claim aligning the notion of the avant-garde with these positions supposedly exploded by later radical aesthetics. Further on, she argues that "this model [new radical poetries] not only embraces diversity but also avoids the implicit elitism that lies at the heart of the notion of an avant-garde" (19). Within the framework of her discussion, which is developed with reference to Richard Kostelanetz's accounting for the exclusion of Black and women's poetry from his *A Dictionary of the Avant-Garde*, to Charles Jencks' framing of the avant-garde within a progressive notion of social advance in "The Post-Avant-Garde," and to Susan Suleiman's notion of forward movement in *Subversive Intent: Gender Politics and the Avant-Garde*, Butling's point seems to be well taken. What is apparent in these narratives is that the avant-garde has been subsumed by the notion of the "new" and the "progressive," thus becoming an increasingly suspect term once these notions have been disqualified. As Christian Bök notes, "newness has itself become nothing more than an upgrade to the software of ideology" (qtd. in Wershler-Henry 109) and "innovation in art no longer differs from the kind of manufactured obsolescence that has come to justify advertisements for 'improved' products" (qtd. in Voyce 2).

Bök is among the few to show awareness of the way in which these critiques, while to the point, are also blind to *their own construction* of the avant-garde within a narrative of progress, a construction which, in the end, reproduces the history of writing as diachronic development, with each stage struggling to subvert the old in Oedipal fashion or to contend for space against institutional culture within a "field of cultural production" (Bourdieu).[11] But is this the only critical model for a theory of the avant-garde? Recent publications in the field of feminist poetics have proposed a

more nuanced understanding of innovation, refocusing on the question of language as a political question (a notion defended throughout by Language poets). For example, in *Prismatic Publics: Innovative Canadian Women's Poetry and Poetics*, Kate Eichhorn and Heather Milne reaffirm the notion that language is key to understanding the relation of nation to gender. The collection problematizes those social analyses of nation and gender that often eclipse work approaching "language as an inherent problematic and subject of inquiry rather than mere vehicle for representation," hence work engaging with "linguistic innovation" and "experimentation" (9). Rather than progress or newness, formalist concerns are central to the critical deconstruction of language, showing the ways in which categories of gender and sexuality, as well as race and class, are historically produced under the specific material and ideological conditions that also produce the nation-state. But the fact that Eichhorn and Milne also prefer to discuss "innovative poetics" rather than avant-garde practices could be read as a symptom of the lingering discomfort with the notion of the avant-garde. In a similar vein, *Beyond Stasis: Poetics and Feminism Today*, edited by Kate Eichhorn and Barbara Godard as a special issue of *Open Letter*, focuses its critical attention on the emergence of younger generations of women writers and their relationship to feminism through "a range of forms and concerns" (17). What the issue demonstrates is the variety of experimental practices and political concerns (ranging from subjectivity and translation to ecology and globalization) addressed by the new writings. In tune with third wave feminist suspicion toward naming, these writers resist fixed positioning or groupings, yet their poetics expand the possibilities of social critique through work on language. These works seem to talk back to the notion of the avant-garde either as progress, newness, or difficulty by resisting categorization within what may have become *le grand récit* of the avant-garde. But a 2002 essay by Godard offers a different perspective. In "La traduction comme réception : les écrivaines Québécoises au Canada anglais," Godard replies to habitual criticisms of the experimental by noting that the opposition of avant-garde practices to "more inclusive" writings reproduces the opposition of form to content, exterior to interior, culture to action, rather than asking *what conditions and ideologies do, in fact, produce these oppositions*, and what their effects are on bodies, subjectivities, and social relations.[12] Her essay is not only a passionate defense of the avant-garde but also a fresh departure from endless queries about inclusions and exclusions which, despite their value, don't change substantially the questions at stake—

questions proposed anew by the call for papers of this issue: What is the political value of the avant-garde? Or, why the avant-garde?

What these critiques also show, in fact, is that different terminologies respond to different conditions and the exigencies of their moment, exigencies that reflect differently on the question of language in relation to meaning.[13] Formal structures in feminist poetics, for example, have shifted from the interrelationship of space, body, and the feminine (and the structural violence of containment of the feminine) in the poetic scenes of Gwendolyn MacEwen and Pat Lowther in the mid 1960s and 1970s—poetries seldom included in representations of the Canadian avant-garde—to, for example, the experimental work on writing, body, and desire of Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland in the 1980s and 1990s, Dorothy Lusk's interrogation of the social construction of gender and class in her disjunctive poetics of the 1990s, or Erín Moure's radical "trans*elations" and intersections of language and the political at the turn of the century. Despite the constant difficulty feminist writers have in maintaining a sense of genealogy and connectedness given the marginal status of feminism in the institutions of literature and culture, and the divisions produced by canonizations or exclusions, these explorations are hardly at odds with each other.[14] Indeed, all these writings represent *different moments* of avant-garde poetic practices rather than a contestation or overcoming of earlier limits. Brossard, Warland, Lusk, Marlatt, and Moure may be more recognizably avant-garde for their radical breaking of form than other women poets (in the case of Lusk almost to the point of unreadability). Yet their poetics explore different dynamics of the material sign and effect multiple disarticulations. In "enjeu de pointe," for example, Brossard unhinges the pronoun "elle" ("she") from its gendered and sexed inscription in the social by sliding the letter "l" along a chain of signification whose accumulation of meanings, throughout history, has produced the sign of Woman:

> *E L le*
>
> sibylle si belle elfe ellipse, la lyre
> elle a de plus tout intérêt à
> couper court au vertige des vestiges
> en travers de son corps écrivant
> toi (108)

In similar fashion, in *Two Women in a Birth* Marlatt and Warland's play of letters (through alliterations and assonances) also destabilizes the referentiality of the sign. As the literal meaning leaps from word to word

and from line to line, the signifier is shown to be *on the slide*, and a different
reality (the void of the Real?) is opened up—one bearing the traces of a
feminine *jouissance*:

> egg broken
> mouth open
> tongues *bloom*: 'blow'
> tornados cresting our *mounds*:
> 'manure, manuscript, command'
> texts of our bodies (tongue come)
> under the *tornado* 's: 'moan'
> surrendering ground hungry for home
> (Warland, "Open Is Broken" 57)

These disarticulations are more overtly political—that is, formally
political—in Lusk's disjunctive poetics, showing how social determinants
of labour ("industrialized diffidence"), sex (the lyric innuendo of "*Art
Thou troubled?*"), and class relations ("Beer Girl") are, indeed, entangled in
language systems and speech acts—

> Passive voice (no suggestion), therefore incomprehensible
> To that which could be my ultimate justification, sic love to
> Demos, characteristic of an otherwise analytical mass.
>
> Beer Girl, *Art Thou troubled? The slimy troll under the bridge*
> he condescends so
> prettily to
> an industrialized diffidence, a feint then an upper thrust to the diaphragm.
> ("Funny in a Bonnet" 21)

—and in Moure's poetic intervention into language, such as the inflection of
the sign of the citizen in the feminine through the language of the (foreign)
other—*unha cidadán* as "a semantic pandemonium" (*O Cidadán*)—or in
her half-ironic nudging of avant-garde practices: "the search for form is
abandoned. This is its form" (*Little Theatres* 41).

Lowther and MacEwen, by contrast, do not abandon the domain of the legible
in their poetry—a choice that has situated them within aesthetic categories
of, respectively, the mimetic and the mystic, or a broadly defined modernism.
But their poetry is replete with gestures and postures enacting ruptures of
language and representational writing. In Lowther, the signs of reality are
shown in their ideological saturation to the point of bringing language back
to the material base of words and social constructs, almost echoing Lenin's
saying, "Be as radical as reality!" Her poem "Kitchen Murder," for example, is
replete with objects of everyday use in food preparation and domestic tasks.

But it is precisely this abundance of objects exposed in their materiality and potential uses that opens up to a radical reading of the construction of gender relations through the politics of space. The poem recasts the historical construction of the domestic as the (feminine) sphere of intimacy and feminized work sheltered from the demands of the public as a space of contradictions where the gendered expectations of the sex-gender system, and the determinants of female labour, are laid bare—but also subverted.[15]

> Everything here's a weapon:
> i pick up a meat fork,
> imagine
> plunging it in,
> a heavy male
> thrust
>
> in two hands
> i heft a stone-
> ware plate, heavy
> enough?
>
> rummage the cupboards:
> red pepper, rape-
> seed oil, Drano
>
> i'll wire myself
> into a circuit:
> the automatic perc,
> the dishwater, the
> socket above the sink
>
> i'll smile an electric
> eel smile:
> whoever touches
> me is dead. (155)

Every object and movement is saturated with real or potential violence—from the reality of potential abuses that the domestic hides from public visibility to the gendered power that social and political systems distribute among men and women. Thus the realism of "a heavy male / thrust" and the "rape / -seed oil" become radical injunctions of sexual relations well in tune with the social critique of the 1970s feminist movements. Yet Lowther is careful not to place the woman subject in the position of victim: the eerie quality of the poem concludes with a subject eager to articulate her subject position and, in so doing, her resistance.

In MacEwen's poetry it is the working of the imaginary that is brought into visibility, but an imaginary that is anchored to the symbolic and the ideological structures that form it. The stakes are high for women, and not surprisingly her poetry revolves thematically around the violence of the letter in determining (phallic) love relations, the engulfing of female subjectivity by the m(O)ther, and the effects of reproductive politics. Her poetics of the womb anticipates the production of feminist writers from the 1980s and questions the production of gender relations within the imaginary of national cultures. In the postwar climate of cultural nationalism and postmodern challenges to the status quo, MacEwen's poetry is often read as mystical, "dark," and "egocentric" (Gustafson 107-08) or expressing a "feminine *personal* imagination" (Bowering, "A Complex Music" 70). While these terms are not necessarily misplaced, they are not adequate to express the complexity of her poetic landscapes—landscapes of subjectivity that cannot be reduced to either interiority or expressivity, but show a subject knotted to the space of "external intimacy" and "intimate exteriority" where "the interior is present in the exterior and vice versa" (Kingsbury 246).[16] This space, which Lacan defines as *l'extemité*, or extimacy (*Ethics* 139) is also the empty space of the Real cut by the symbolic and simultaneously irreducible to it. Lacan's notion of extimacy better allows us to understand the way in which subjectivity, far from representing the inside of the subject or the outside of discourse, is, in effect, a knot undercutting the notion of the inside and the outside. In MacEwen's "The Garden of Square Roots: An Autobiography," subjectivity is a primary concern, as suggested also by "autobiography" in the title. But what is of interest, in the context of this discussion, is the poet's concern with the space that is not signifiable but is knotted to the structures of signification:

> and then the rattlesnake spines of men distracted me
> for even they, the people were
> as Natajara was, who danced
> while *I was anchored like a passive verb*
> or Neptune on a subway—
>
> and *from the incredible animal i*
> *grew queer claws inward to fierce cribs*;
> I searched gardens for square roots,
> *for i was the I interior*
> the thing with a gold belt and delicate ears
> with no knees or elbows
> *was working from the inside out*
> (71, emphasis added)

Where is language in this poem? In the "passive verb" anchoring the subject? In the (small) "i" growing "queer claws inward to fierce cribs"? Echoing Lacan's notion that the unconscious "is outside," the subject is "ex-centric," and that "the gaze is inscribed in the object rather than the subject" (Kingsbury 246), the poem asks its readers to consider how we know and what, indeed, can be known, "for i was the I interior."[17] There is no content or truth behind form, and the subject's desire can only circulate around a non-signifiable void. The extimacy of the Real (that is, the space of emptiness both interior and exterior to the subject) is explored in the poem as a source of terror—what critics have read as the "darkness" of MacEwen's writing. Can we read the poem's "incredible animal" as Lacan's notion of "the Thing"?

MacEwen's organization of language and form does not propose an aesthetic of opposition. Yet, by questioning common assumptions, in Canada, of language, subjectivity, and representation on which social imaginaries (including national and cultural imaginaries) are built, she moves into sets of relations at the level of the political: its *effect* is oppositional. This brings us back to the questions raised at the beginning of this essay. In proposing a reading of the avant-garde in terms of what we ask of it, I am not interested in contesting its borders to enlarge the number or make-up of its members. As I pointed out earlier on, claims about inclusions and exclusions, though a pertinent critique, are not necessarily productive and risk shifting the problematic at stake to a question of labelling and categorizing, rather than analyzing the function of specific positions, which can help us rethink the relation of writing to the political.

To address these questions within the horizon of the contemporary necessitates the questioning of what constitutes political action. Political programs have always infused avant-garde practices (let's think of the many manifestoes of twentieth-century modernism) and postmodern language poetics have made important claims about the relation of structures of language to the ideological structures of the social. Experimentation does not lie exclusively in the ciphers of the linguistic (the playing with language); it is also found in the different exploratory avenues pursued at the level of structure (or the undoing of structure) and functions of language, from McCaffery's libidinal and general economy to Derksen's rearticulatory poetics, which highlight otherwise invisible social relations. Yet Bowering's notion of experimentation as failure may be useful here at the level of poetic practice. For failure implies a working never complete to itself, never quite reaching a goal, which would amount to newness and a new site of power or a possible aestheticization of

contestation. Failure, as Bowering also notes, produces an inassimilable remainder never caught up by the structures of the symbolic. Is this the irruption of the Real in MacEwen's poetry, the non-sense of Lusk's disjunctive poetics, or McCaffery's poetics of excess and loss?

It is the *other* side of knowledge that is at stake here. For Lacan, knowledge is not represented by the consciousness of classical philosophy or the master position of ego psychology. There is no ontological ground for a subject endowed with essence and self-knowledge, for the subject is the product of the dynamic interaction between imaginary, symbolic (language), and the Real, a relationship that positions the subject's desire and actions in the world. But in his insistent attention to the primacy of language in the constitution of subjectivity, Lacan has also shown how not everything is subsumed by the cut of the signifier. Something remains outside, unsymbolized, unrepresentable. Yet what is not signifiable is knotted to the structures of signification in that it threatens its orders. The register of the Real, and its ex-timacy, inevitably ties questions of subjectivity to the social, for the social cannot be posited any longer as a discursive outside. For Lacan, art and poetry show how structures of signification do not re-present reality but are different forms of organizing meaning around the void of the Real, and of acknowledging the loss constitutive to language and our entry into the symbolic. An aesthetics of the letter, writing, then, is not moving toward the production of sense (Bowering's failure?), but "toward the point where sense is suspended and the real is shown as non-sense," liberated from the imaginary of meaning (Recalcati, *Miracolo* 132).[18] By contrast, other social discourses organize knowledge in ways that foreclose or repress this loss, often transforming the mythic object of desire of individual subjects (Lacan's *objet petit a*) into social fantasies and utopian promises.

Gesturing toward Lacan's theory is not a way to propose a psychoanalytical truth of the text. Lacan never claimed a homology between the working of the unconscious and the construction of the work of art: the poetic text is not decipherable like a dream or a symptom, nor is art concerned with the fantasm of the artist.[19] It is writing that can teach something to psychoanalysis about its own object of knowledge (Lacan, *Ethics*). But in thinking of the function of the avant-garde in terms of a new set of relations between writing and the social, the question of the Real cannot be avoided. For some time, this question was addressed at the level of subjectivity, for example by poetries advancing the notion that the production of a different subject can change the structures of the social. Yet, as we all know,

subjectivity is knotted to the social and there is no outside of language. Perhaps a more appropriate question is, if the Real is unrepresentable non-sense, how is it historically produced and under what conditions? What social function does it perform? Can avant-garde poetics address the Real within the social? Can we read the function of avant-garde practices as poetics of the Real?[20]

By way of conclusion, an example from contemporary avant-garde poetics may best illuminate the function of the letter in producing new positions and relations to knowledge. In *At Issue*, Karen Mac Cormack utilizes the vocabulary of female-geared magazines as a critical disjuncture of the apparatus of gender production through syntax and form. "At Issue IX: Diminish" lists disjointed and incomplete phrases, some of which have the status of quotation, without any grammatical connection. Yet the list is not senseless, for the mere adjacency of phrases can be linked in a loose meaning through the reading. In this process, the text not only questions the encasement of meaning within grammatical strictures (not a new procedure in language experimentation), but also liberates possible meanings which, within the codes of the mass media, would not be possible. The result is a linguistic effect of "fabricated reality" (39) that points to the ideological structures demanding our (consumers') allegiance to the market at the level of affect, for which desire is not only what you lack but what you were not aware (until now) of lacking. But while the individual phrases resonate with the *Vogue* reader in ways that could suggest marketing strategies of language use, meaning has to be actively constructed through an attentive work on letters, words, and patterns in ways that shows how the signifier is a signifier for another signifier. This vacuity of language is negative critique through a form of excess—the propulsion and combinatory process demanded in the reading act—which, neither working through constraints nor libidinally, shows the non-identity of the sign and the signifier and, ultimately, language as fabrication. Yet, it never loses itself in playfulness for its own sake. Words are not isolated from the echoes of their original (magazine or marketing) source and the disjunction of phrases from different contexts shows the articulation of different sites and social relations rarely made visible (Derksen, "PhillyTalks"). Mac Cormack's poetry works simultaneously at different levels. It shows loss to be already a condition of language, rather than manufactured desire. It points to surplus value and labour as the unrepresentable of contemporary discourses of economics. But it also reminds its readers to ask of avant-garde practices not to lift texts out of social relations.

NOTES

1 While this essay relies primarily on Lacan's thought and does not explicitly cite Derrida's body of work beyond the echo of the title, it still claims a deconstructive approach *à la* Derrida in its concern for the construction of the (Canadian) avant-garde. Deconstruction is used less as a reference to poststructuralism *per se* and the supposed divide between the two French thinkers than their concern with the role of language in positioning the subject's relation to the social world and knowledge formation. (This divide is also produced by critics who fail to pay attention to the interconnectedness of Lacan's and Derrida's work at various moments in their careers. See Hurst.)

2 In this essay the terms "language poetry," "language writing," or "language-based poetics" are used loosely to refer to poetics that pay special attention to the work of language in the construction of subjectivity and social relations, and to the linkages between formal poetic structures and socio-political and economic structures. The poetic networks around L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E will be referred to as language poetry. For a history of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E in relation to Canadian contemporary poetics and the concurrent disarticulation (but not dismissal) of categories of modernist and postmodern poetics, see Jeff Derksen's essay "Inside/Outside the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Site: Nation, Avant-Garde, Globalization."

3 Notably, the analytic process begins with the question of the analysand to the analyst.

4 "Ex-centricity" follows Lacan's notion of the ex-centric subject as explained in *Book II*, rather than Linda Hutcheon's notion of "ex-centric" as the relation of the margin to the centre of culture.

5 Although the question of newness is often traced back to Ezra Pound's dictum "Make It New," Pound's radical aesthetic break is best read in alignment with an emergent European modernist impulse from the (much cited) "crisis of language and representation" in literature and philosophy. Indeed, in Pound's poetics the old has a specific function in the construction of the new. In the Canadian context, newness was framed within competing claims amongst the desire for modernity, internationalization, cultural nationalism, nativism, and Anglophile or American sentiments, determining, in part, the allegiance to different magazines (*McGill Fortnightly Review* from the 1920s, *Preview* and *First Statement* in the 1940s, and the "regional" *Contemporary Verse* from the 1940s) and the self-fashioning of specific groups as the avant-garde (i.e., the "Montreal avant-garde"). While *Preview* foregrounded its "coterie" program through an editorial statement, all magazines, with the exception of *Contemporary Verse*, were, in fact, what Dorothy Livesay called *cliques*. It is this specific exclusivist tradition that Butling addresses in her essay, as well as the gendered and "virile" poetry that *First Statement* privileged. Nonetheless, allegiances amongst the different camps were also set in motion by ideological differences between the individual participants. The reading of the Canadian modernist avant-garde within a dualistic narrative is as much a product of its later academic construction as the actual complex interrelationship between players, ideologies, and local/national/international relations. See Francis; McCullagh; Norris; Trehearne; Brandt and Godard; and especially Kim and Irvine.

6 This essay does not provide a historiography of these terms, which would require a longer discussion. Suffice it to say that while "oppositional" and "experimental" have been used at large by poets and critics of different formations, "conceptual poetics," dating back to the early experimentation of John Cage, Jackson MacLow, and Oulipo (l'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle), have reemerged in the last two decades. See Dworkin and

Goldsmith; Perloff; and, in the Canadian context, Bök's *Eunoia*. For the use of the term "radical," see Butling and Rudy. See also Jeff Derksen's discussion of "re-articulatory poetics" in *Poets Talk* (2009); and, for "innovative poetics," see Eichhorn and Godard; and Eichhorn and Milne.

7 The term "postmodern" will be used here only in general terms to refer to writing practices with formalistic concerns produced since the 1960s, rather than a specific aesthetics or politics. This choice is not due to any dismissal of or suspicion on my part toward the term, but the problem of addressing an array of poetics which, while relating to larger international theories of writing, are also historically and spatially specific in the context of Canadian literature. See Pauline Butling's use of the term "*My* postmodernism" in "Re: Reading the Postmodern—'Mess is Lore'" (315), which she also contextualizes in regards to Charles Olson and the Black Mountain School; Susan Rudy's discussion of radical poetics in "Why Postmodernism Now? Toward a Poetry of Enactment"; and Christian Bök's excellent critique of Linda Hutcheon in "Getting Ready to have been Postmodern." Bök also advances a key argument in longstanding debates about the avant-garde in relation to modernism and the postmodern: "While I do not mean to imply that all species of the avant-garde throughout history are, by any means, 'postmodern,' I do argue that postmodernism does itself constitute a 'moment' in the evolutionary redefinition of these avant-garde techniques" (88, n.4).

8 Colin Browne dedicated the entire issue of *Ellipse* 29/30 (1982) to the Toronto Research Group. See also Steve McCaffery and bpNichol.

9 For a more in-depth discussion of the relation of feminism to the avant-garde and the work of Nicole Brossard and Daphne Marlatt, see, respectively, my own "Feminist Poetics as Avant-Garde Poetics" (2010) and "Acts of Passage: Women Writing Translation in Canada" (2008).

10 The proliferation of feminist magazines like the Anglophone *Tessera* and *Fireweed* and the Québécois *La Nouvelle barre du jour* and *Les têtes de pioches*, of which Brossard was co-founder, testifies to the wealth of creative experimental feminist practices emerging at this time.

11 Bök reiterates this critique in his 2010 essay.

12 In the essay, Godard responds to Robyn Gillam's critique of her translation of Nicole Brossard's *Lovhers*, a translation that brings to the fore Brossard's work on language. Gillam claims Godard seems to have translated her text with a male avant-garde audience in mind rather than an Anglophone feminist audience.

13 This terminology is in marked contrast with European readings of the avant-garde foregrounding the breaks and returns of old and new within a syncretic and diachronic model. In the seminal works of Renato Poggioli, Peter Bürger, and Raymond Williams, "experimental" is a practice, a *poesis* subtending the politics of the historical or neo/postmodern avant-gardes.

14 The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a wealth of events (readings, conferences, book fairs, and workshops), as well the work of important magazines like *Fireweed* and *Tessera*, nurturing the production of feminist cultural work and networks. Nonetheless, this work has not positioned itself within culture at large and the wavering feminist visibility on the horizon of Canadian culture is now a reality.

15 In *Poets Talk*, Jeff Derksen discusses this procedure as hyper-referential (125).

16 "In order to map part of the 'patient's landscape,' that is, the 'topology of subjectivity' [*Ethics* 40], Lacan coined the neologism *extimité* (derived from conjoining the adjective *intimaté* (intimacy) with the prefix 'ex' from the noun *extérieur* (exterior))" (Kingsbury 246).

17   See Jacques Lacan, *Book II* (1991) and *Book XI* (1998).

18   Following Lacan's discussion in *Ethics*, Recalcati refers here to a psychoanalytic interpretation of art as poetics of the Real. "Non-sense" is used both in Lacanian and avant-garde terms as what challenges the orders of discourse and signification, thus a Real dismantling the illusion of hermeneutics.

19   See Recalcati, *Il vuoto e il resto* and *Il miracolo della forma.*

20   These questions cannot be fully developed in the context of an essay focusing on the interrogative "what do we ask of the avant-garde" and the value of this "demand" in instantiating new sets of relations in the social and the political. The essay itself is part of a larger project where I will be able to attend to these questions in depth. Suffice it to say that we can think of the way in which, for example, race or labour have been positioned as the Thing of the Real in social terms at specific historical moments.

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rectangle 4

Meredith Quartermain

T'ang's Bathtub
Innovative Work by
Four Canadian Poets

In the fall of 2010, I received an invitation to contribute to a discussion of the political effectiveness of innovative literary form. In particular, the call for papers posed the question "If the experimental is so easily plugged into the agendas of late capitalism (from i to iPod), might it be better, as Alan Badiou claims, 'to do nothing . . . [rather than] contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which the Empire already recognizes as existent?'" As a writer of innovative texts, I found this question irritating. It suggests I could and perhaps even should choose to be mute rather than write a text that doesn't have an appropriately anti-capitalist effect in a world pretty much beyond my control.

I don't think artistic production works along the lines suggested by this question. While they may and often do powerfully inform their work with political and other theoretical concerns, artists and writers are primarily concerned with a felt response to their universe (not whether it will be politically effective) and with extending the formal properties of their medium to convey that response in freshly meaningful ways. Often one finds that crucial meanings of a contemporary work are not visible even to the artist until the work is seen in larger contexts, particularly the rhythm of cultural pressures in the epoch.

Feeling this way and still irritated by the question, I began to wonder why I write innovative texts. What follows is my own idiosyncratic exploration of the literary geography this question opened for me, beginning with William Wordsworth and Ezra Pound who immediately came to mind as

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innovators and then focusing on four of my contemporaries, most of whom seem to agree that political effectiveness is not an appropriate measure of their artistic work.

Two hundred years ago, in times not unlike our own, of intense escalation of plunder, exploitation, dispossession, and a deluge of cheap meaningless entertainment, Wordsworth lamented the "multitude of causes . . . acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor" (104). In the face of this he set out to renovate poetic language. In 1798 he announced his *Lyrical Ballads* were mainly "to be considered as experiments" to show "how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes . . . is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" (100 n1). He argued that "a selection of language really used by men, . . . arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets" (102).

He eliminated the notion of a poetic language distinct from that of prose and proposed to rid poetry of regimented metre, hackneyed figures of speech, and abstract generalizations. The poet must convey lived thought and experience, not substitute for them contrived poetic minuets. Innovation was necessary because what was at stake was intelligence itself—the collective ability to sense and inquire in the widest and most intricate way into the actual conditions of human life: "Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge" (Wordsworth 108).

More than a hundred years later Pound published a book entitled *Make It New*. The "it" is something more permanent, however, than passing fashions or fashionability. In "A Retrospect" (first published in 1913), he comments:

> My pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. (*Literary* 11)

Pound echoes Wordsworth on the need for fresh language: "No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention and cliché, and not from life" (*Literary* 11). His list of Credos and Don'ts is legion, covering everything from images to rhythm to enjambment (*Literary*

4-9). But he's also calling for a connection to something enduring through centuries (the timeless movements of great art, or the eternal return of certain human experiences). Wordsworth wants to rescue knowledge; Pound wants to carry forward great art, though not without protesting the social injustices of cut-throat rapaciousness (e.g., "Canto 33"), which he particularly links to a perversion of language ("Canto 14"):

> Profiteers drinking Blood sweetened with sh-t
> And behind them . . . . . . f and the financiers
>   lashing them with steel wires.
>
> And the betrayers of language
>   . . . . . . n and the press gang
> And those who had lied for hire. (61)

Wordsworth's epistemological project and Pound's aesthetic project both require potent developments in language attuned to their particular historic epoch. The poet, Pound says, must make a language to think in. Discussing the translation of Guido Cavalcanti, he finds that although Dante Gabriel Rosetti is undoubtedly the man for the job, there was something of Cavalcanti that had escaped Rosetti's Victorian language (*Literary* 398). "What obfuscated me," he says, "was not the Italian but the crust of dead English, the sediment present in my own available vocabulary" (*Literary* 399). Just as one does not learn English, "one can only learn a series of Englishes" (*Literary* 399), so also the poet must create the language appropriate to her or his historical moment. But Pound frames this principle in ancient history and wisdom. "The silos were emptied / 7 years of sterility" says "Canto 53,"

> Tching prayed on the mountain and
>   wrote MAKE IT NEW
> on his bathtub
>   Day by day make it new
> cut underbrush,
> pile the logs
> keep it growing. (264-65)[1]

Making it new was not about describing new objects or ideas, but rather about opening new ways of perceiving: in the words of a "Russian correspondent," Pound "wish[ed] to give people new eyes, not to make them see some new particular thing," for to govern form or colour or music or symbol "with an ascribed or intended meaning is, usually, to produce very bad art" ("Objective" 148).

Wordsworth and Pound were undoubtedly political activists in the realm of literary form; they were not particularly political reformers of government. Strongly affected by the French Revolution, the young Wordsworth expressed his passionate support of equality and liberty in "A Letter to the Bishop Llandoff" (Duemer 316); however, later writings, such as "The Convention at Cintra," abandon these democratic politics in favour of conservative patriotic nationalism (Duemer 320). Pound (described by Leon Surette as beginning with economic radicalism and ending with anti-Semitism) was more steadfast and extremist in his beliefs and more willing to broadcast these and publicly campaign for them, much to his detriment. However they are both remembered mainly for their outstanding literary vision and not for having helped lead the way to political reforms.

Although it is hard to say how revolutionary some contemporary writers will look when history considers them from the same distance, we seem at first glance to find a stronger spirit of political activism in writers today (another hundred years later) such as Jeff Derksen and Roger Farr. Both of them adopt an explicitly revolutionary stance and readily cite texts like Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* with its famous description of revolutionary progress: "proletarian revolutions, . . . constantly interrupt themselves . . . to begin anew . . . until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*" (qtd. in Farr 1; referred to in Derksen, "A Conversation" 126). Farr explains that the Latin phrase "is often read as illustrative of the revolutionary moment itself: that point where the proletariat is compelled *to leap*" (1). Both argue that Marx's revolutionary process is no longer likely because neoliberal capitalism has so permeated our vision and our culture that although conditions still cry out for change, they are simply tolerated (Derksen 126; Farr 3). Change has become merely another market option, rather than a necessity.

To achieve actual change of social conditions, both also argue that writers must engage in countertactics in language. Derksen calls for an "anti-systemic" writing (*Annihilated* 230) that will rearticulate the world system. In the past he says, "opposition and resistance has imagined itself as being outside of the debilitating structures of power, . . . whereas rearticulation is about disarticulating and rearticulating linkages within systems, somehow rearranging structures from within. To be critical of a world system, you have to somehow imagine yourself within it, as opposed to barking at it from a local position" ("A Conversation" 131). Poetry, Derksen argues, is a prime

location in which to conduct such rearticulation: "In my more recent poetry I'm trying to heighten the contradictions of global capital. . . . Poetry is an effective form for that heightening because of the rapid semantic shifts that first started around ideas of voice" ("A Conversation" 132). He sees himself as an agent for making the "conditions" of his time visible: "I'd say that I'm determined by them [the conditions, as they cry out]. But then I would also give myself some performative role as an agent. Or indicate agency by revealing the contradictions. That's the first step towards rearticulation" ("A Conversation" 136). Poetry enables him to put the contradictions of global capital (e.g. requiring people to give to charities in order to deal with massive poverty while at the same time requiring they buy cheap goods which keep others impoverished) into rapidly shifting polyvalent contrasts: "I see extra textual rearticulations as a method to move texts or moments into a related problematic or field in order to read the effects of a text or formation, a methodological 'making it new' perhaps" ("A Conversation" 142).

Calling for the formation of a "cultural front" of resistance to neoliberalism, Derksen says that "poetry today can begin with the possibilities of language as such, but can also be nonconformist productions of knowledge based on research methods drawn from contemporary art, alternative scholarship and collective forms of knowledge" (*Annihilated* 255). He sees poetry "as a production of knowledge . . . that is more process based than generative of 'outcomes'" (*Annihilated* 255). Intervention in the toxic neoliberalist system, Derksen suggests, comes from adopting a procedural approach to writing (creation through predetermined procedures), rather than an expressionist approach. Such procedures would not feed into the production of consumer objects, they would not be aimed at outcomes, but rather at revised linkages between elements in the system, so that the system's toxicity might become more visible.

Farr likewise calls for a re-presentation of the world system, arguing that "Language, which we always knew was 'saturated with ideology,' is more precisely at this moment 'permeated by money.' The language of the news, entertainment, sports, weather, statistics, culture: here is the muted call of 'the conditions.' Here is 'the material'" ("Postscript" 3). Citing Vladimir Mayakovsky's proposition that poetic work begins in the "presence of a problem in society, the solution of which is conceivable only in poetical terms. A social command" (qtd. in Cabri 75), Farr calls for writers to form a

> poetic front—or perhaps a *bloc*— . . . charged not with the fatigued political work of "consciousness raising" or "altering perception" . . . but with weakening the

> command of the capitalist information field through the re-presentation of the empty volume of its own social facts. . . . A *dis-utopian* un-writing—one that avoids the old traps of "moral commitment, beautiful soul, ideological militancy, etc.," in favour of a "new realism . . . constructive punk realism, expressive violence shaking the techniques of mystification of communication." ("Postscript" 3-4)

Pound's "new eyes" and second-wave feminism's standby—consciousness raising—are characterized as worn-out tactics which amount to little more than "distribution of epiphanies and sensibilities" or "prepping a fresh citizenry in time for the next Federal election" ("Postscript" 4), little more than masking and legitimizing the holes in ourselves delivered by capital. Instead, Farr argues, poetry's role should be "*to joyfully render the present even more intolerable than it already is* while gesturing toward new forms of affinity, agency, and association. To provide accounts without tallies. Events without examples. Means without ends, by whatever means necessary" ("Postscript" 4).

Farr's poem "Hic Rhodus, Hic salta!" from a work called *MEANS* enacts this principle. I quote at length from the beginning of the poem in order that the reader may appreciate the relentless barrage which Farr has created somewhat in the manner of the relentless bombardment of advertising and profiteering so endemic to current times:

> If a large telecommunications
> Company fires several employees
> After a larger company takes control
> And the managers of private
> Unregulated pools of capital
> Back a certain candidate in
> The next Federal Election, then
> Canadians who are addicted to
> Technology will feel they need new
> Phones. If a national sports franchise
> Loses more games than it wins
> Despite the media's repetition
> Of its effective marketing strategy
> While a popular resort tries to shed
> Its out-dated image, then a television
> Show about men in a small town
> Who become full-time care-givers
> After their wives leave for a week
> Will be renewed. If a number of
> Officers are killed near the border
> And hunting whales is a tradition
> That links generations, then the

> State's attempt to make a large
> Military purchase will be thwarted
> By concerns about espionage. (n. pag.)

The poem continues with the series of "If . . . Then" sentences in two sections, each more than five pages long, and each one ending "*Hic Rhodus, Hic salta!*" It quite literally gives us a series of generalized events in neoliberalist culture that contain no specificity, no examples, and thus it recreates the monotony and emptiness of the logic (via its logical *ifs* and *thens*) of global capital perpetrated on humans. In this respect it is reminiscent of conceptual writings like those of Kenneth Goldsmith, noted for his accumulations of ready-written texts such his transcription of a year of weather reports or his transcription of all texts in the *New York Times* of September 1, 2000. Robert Fitterman and Vanessa Place argue that with conceptual writing "one does not need to 'read' the work as much as think about the idea of the work" (25). With Farr's poem we are invited to think about the forces of global capital, its relentless logic, acting on various disempowered groups of people. We are not particularly invited to enjoy pleasures in the language or structural textures of the poem. Nor are we invited to examine the terms of this discourse, which proceeds in the third person devoid of any connection to a speaking subject, in a manner suggestive of the faceless machine of global capital.

Derksen's recent poetry offers more structural variety, engaging readers with plays in the text through line clusters, line breaks, ironic cross currents. I quote the opening of section one of "The Vestiges (Or, Creative Destruction)":

> Linear tankers lie
> on the harbour's horizon.
>
> The speed
> of globalization.
>
> "Community-based
> crystal meth focus groups."
> Jog by.
>
> "China Shipping Lines."
> Rusty. Nature
> metabolized in the city. More or less
> separate under capital
>
> then laboured or louvred
> together.

At sunset
black crows crack mussels
on the concrete, murder

on referential architecture
in this speculative

part of the world.

"Above all" 10.8 million
on the edge of
the public park.

Excludes low-level boredom
as capital exhausts
options, spiraling
up, then

"who is not
for 'sustainability?'"

Outfitted. "Urban." Machine
in the garden (punks in the
park). Admirable

really.

"View corridors"
are public and imaginary. (33-34)

The terminology is specifically pressured by ironic enjambment of overused newsroom and public policy phrases like "community-based" and "focus groups" with underclass drug users who are ironically associated with the blissful unawareness of joggers. Flabby pastoralism is given a kick by associating "Nature" with something that has decayed, i.e., rust, suggesting the uselessness of such overworked terms, and inviting us to examine why and how. Sound patterns snap in a line like "black crows crack" with its series of hard edges, these then are merged with the semantic shift implied by the term "murder," recalling "a murder of crows" and also the more violent homicidal denotation of the word. What is murdered, however, is "referential architecture." This polyvalent phrase suggests on the one hand that our references, our meanings, are subject to an overreaching architecture, which may after all be murdered. On the other hand it suggests that building forms, say the aesthetics of high-rises, refer to something else: neoliberal economics. A few lines later, using phrases with similar rhythms, Derksen links "Machine / in the garden" with "punks in the park." Thus the work rejigs the discursive units of neoliberal logic, making its workings

visible through jarring connections. In Derksen's words, it "points to the gap between the language and promises of neoliberalism and the conditions that actual existing neoliberalism brews up" ("Poetry" 9).

These innovative writings of Farr and Derksen offer us a poetics of intervention and resistance. They set themselves against a projected neoliberal world system, attempting to undermine it from inside. In contrast, the highly innovative writings of Erín Moure and Lisa Robertson open a visionary field of playful experimental form in the locus of a gendered, embodied subject. Female subjectivity expands to take in all. A crossroads of clashing discourses, it is simultaneously a battlefield and pleasure field of experiences, languages, resistances, and excesses. Here neoliberal logic and other toxic ideologies such as patriarchy are not the total focus of resistance, but rather are threads within a fabric of linguistic pleasure where they are critiqued, played with, and subsumed. For example, Robertson writes in "Soft Architecture: A Manifesto," "We walked through the soft arcade. We became an architect" (*Occasional Work* 13). She plays here with the "we" that pretends to speak for all, ironically alerting us to its presumptuousness but at the same time presuming joyfully to become her own architect—not subject to an architecture, but designer par excellence. The architecture is not that of the hard-edged high-rise but the architecture that runs, like software, the soft parts (desires, bugbears) in our beings. Later in the same piece she states,

> The truly utopian act is to manifest current conditions and dialects. Practice description. Description is mystical. It is afterlife because it is life's reflection or reverse. Place is accident posing as politics. And vice versa. Therefore it's tragic and big. (*Occasional Work* 16)

Dare to reflect the myriad crosscurrents operating each moment of your existence, she suggests, throwing out the yo-yo of utopian projects and then spinning it back with a discussion of description. Why is it mystical? You see what discourses make you see. Intervene in the working of discourse and you will intervene in what you thought was your place, your accident of politics.

While Farr and Derksen in their discussion of poetics easily slide into the impersonal third-person voice—that masquerade of scientific neutral and objective truth which will be equally "true" for all—Moure and Robertson keep statements of poetics grounded in first-person subjectivity in the playful language of poetic acts, inventions, and pleasureful investigations. They construct woman-centred voices that challenge the man-centred rationalism through which neoliberalism is delivered to us. Robertson notes, "Descartes's new world, in which the 'annoying' and unproductive contingencies of history

are systematically forgotten, leaving the western male thinker in a primary confrontation with his own thought, is emphatically not a world I wish to share" (*PhillyTalks* 24).

"There is no politics of language without the subject," Robertson states, and by extension she suggests there is no politics of any kind without the subject: "To be interested in subjectivity as experimental form is also to be interested in politics" ("Interview with Kate Eichhorn" 379). Moreover, the subject as terrain of inventive and experimental writing is highly mobile and fluid:

> once you separate the subject from identity, it opens the subject to collective dynamics. I think many of the institutions that have shaped our current conceptions of the subject—the family, understood as an institution; the Church; the education system; the banking system—what all those institutions shape is the subject as identity, as seamless, as a fixed point that can be maintained on a taxonomic grid. Our institutions are interested in insisting that the subject is in need of identity, but if you look at the subject from the point of view of mobility, and the point of view of discourse, and the point of view of ethics, the subject opens as being one of the most exciting political terrains. ("Interview with Kate Eichhorn" 380)

Within the terrain of specific embodied experience criss-crossed by cultural demands, Robertson addresses both the micro-level of the text and the macro-level of globalized capital. Commenting on her "Soft Architecture Manifesto," she says, "I had this flash of insight about how I wanted to represent what globalism was doing to urban politics. . . . For me, a manifesto is a rhythmic propulsion, a direct agent"; she contrasts the manifesto as form with that of the poem, which she says "recursively investigates kinds of shapeliness and duration of thinking" ("Interview with Kate Eichhorn" 379). For Robertson, politics is "the construction of relationships between people . . . We make relations with language that we are giving to and taking from one another. . . . All of those relationships with language as a material rhythmics among people is what writing works with" ("Interview with Kate Eichhorn" 376). Materiality here invokes the tactile side of language—its full range of sound textures from the voiced and unvoiced fricatives, sibilants, dentals, velars, stops, plosives, etc., to the lilting rise and fall of phrasal and sentence intonations, and the bursts of conversation, stitched into pauses and silences, an idiosyncratic knitting of sense-making welded in flesh. This is a sense-making apart from referentiality, an intelligence not concerned with signification. It involves the shapes and the emotional undercurrents of the signifying act itself—how these reveal the character of utterers and how these shapes link speakers together rhizomatically.

Robertson's writing is dystopic and resistant to neoliberal ideology but nevertheless rich with playful cross-connections and insurgencies:

> within the capitalist narrative, the Utopia of the new asserts itself as the only productive teleology. Therefore I find it preferable to choose the dystopia of the obsolete. . . . When capital marks women as the abject and monstrous ciphers of both reproduction and consumption, our choice can only be to choke out the project of renovation. We must become history's dystopic ghosts, inserting our inconsistencies, demands, misinterpretations and weedy appetites into the old bolstering narratives: We shall refuse to be useful. (*PhillyTalks* 23)

This innovative practice, which specifically examines gender, uses what's old and out of date to "make it new"—to reinvent a language she can think in. An examination of male subjectivity, however, seems not to form a part of Derksen's and Farr's innovative practice. Whereas Farr and Derksen talk disembodiedly and disaffectedly, pointing to gaps between promises and delivery, or gesturing toward new forms of association or agency, Robertson embarks on the visionary task of imagining as part of her critique of global neoliberalism a place where her female body, thoughts, and investigations are welcome:

> My own nostalgia reaches for an impossibly beautiful and abundant language. Rather than diagnosing this nostalgia as a symptom of loss (which would only buttress the capitalist fiction of possession) I deploy it as an almanac, planning a tentative landscape in which my inappropriate and disgraceful thought may circulate. (*PhillyTalks* 23)

Much of her research has involved unearthing the voices of other women (such as Lucy Hutchinson or Mary Wortley Montagu) who together form a landscape where "history's dystopic ghosts" can, like prints in a darkroom, take shape and be heard—a legitimizing place where erased voices can converse, even play, as agents in their own right.

For Moure, too, subjectivity is the crucial terrain of innovative poetry: there must be a "subject enacting, or through whom something is enacted" (*My Beloved* 23). Poetry must neither "privilege . . . the author's voice, without self-questioning," nor "make the subject vanish" but rather include all the "edges, folds, and contradictions that feminism, radical feminism, blacks, lesbians, the working class, and the poor are talking about" (*My Beloved* 33). While Derksen styles his practice as anti-systemic, Moure inaugurates an "anti-anaesthetic" (we can read this as an anti-an-aesthetic, a corrective to that which denies her aesthetic) (*My Beloved* 21, 29). She says the poem, which she calls a "jewel," "is an enactment of linguistic sounds in which the relational (a folding?) pushes at order (the gaze?)" (23).

Following Kristeva, Moure argues that poetic language is "a return to the mother, to that unspeakable, non-extensible hole from where we are descended," but also a language that must act by disturbing "the Law of the Father (the social order, the republic, the polis)" (24). Poetic language creates "a leak out of meaning and a folding back on meaning" (25), an undoing of or escape from signification or denotative meaning; a "poetic structure" occurs rhythmically through cadences of sound—that other crucial form of meaning beyond dictionary definition (26-27). "If we are not perceiving the audible, . . . the sound of the womb, we are anaesthetized," Moure argues, "we become citizens of the Republic" (29). The comfortable certainties of the Law of the Father constantly woo the poet away from language's rhythmic memories outside signification and pull her into entropy and anaesthesia (the root word linking to non-hearing) (32-33). To avoid being erased by the discourse of the Republic, the poet must "take risks, and engage what coalesces, refracts, folds, enfolds, multiplies and digresses" (31). This involves a struggle but not a "battle or destruction"; instead Moure sees it as "a cherishing" that "entails 'the expression of longing / in & among / the collapse of social systems.'" We must, she says "take up the wager offered us by this longing, and refuse to *restrain ourselves*" (34).

Her poetic innovation involves searching out (hearing at the edges of sense) "connections between seemingly parallel things that haven't been enunciated yet because of flaws or 'closed sets' (flaws is a value judgement) in our ways of speech." Her innovative practice is specifically aimed at "break[ing] down the logical connections / structure of 'meaning' (referentiality)," and "break[ing] down the noun/verb opposition wherein the present so-called 'power' of the language resides" (*Furious* 93). She seeks to

> Make a fissure through which we can leak out from the "real" that is sewn into us, to utter what could not be uttered in the previous structure. Where we have not been represented, except through Dominant (in this case, patriarchal) speaking, which even we speak, even we women. (*Furious* 95)

She wants to "alter Naming (meaning). Because it is the force of language that maintains the power of its naming. In this way, the patriarchal structure (way-of-naming) of language, masculine language, is maintained by the noun/verb force" (*Furious* 95). She counters this structure with out-of-order prepositions, invoking a pre-positional stance which eludes both patriarchal naming and its force-field (*Furious* 95-96). Her investigations thus take her both literally and figuratively along the boundary or threshold of what is noise / what is sense:

Sounds attract feelings and aches, and vice versa. Sounds and words attract each other, and ideas, and worries. And dreams. And the thread of remembrance knitting the self over again, it's preposterous, it's hard to keep up with, do justice to, keep track of. The world is imbued with language and linguistic possibility, with bad and good expression, with hopefulness, with manipulation and trickery as well, with rationalizations and silence and gaps that alter, slowly, the structures of thought in the head. And poetry laughs at all of this at the same time as it confronts it, because poetry is entirely useless and owes no debts. It's a weightless possession, at the same time bearing the weight of responsibility and forgiveness. It's an object that is first a noise, that is still and ever a noise, a resonance of words that alters its noise over and over in the head, breaking through the pale corpse of "the image" and "the self." ("Erin Moure: Writing Philosophy")

The reader must listen carefully and repeatedly to hear beyond the safe bounds of cultural "sense"—the safe bounds of received knowledge. The vocabularies of poems like those of *Pillage Laud*, which were created from computer-generated sentences, appear at first to make no sense, Moure notes, but "through successive, repetitive contextualizations" the poems build "tension and emotional valencies" ("Note" 43). Here's the opening page of "Burnaby" from *Pillage Laud*:

What should memory write?
"They were the balls."

When a device was leather's insect,
what were my beauties seizing for their archive?

Girls were dramas between a regime and
a couch, and the girl was their bath.
May the doctrine distinguish the intention?

The vitamin inside a radio has burned.
In the orbit between a routine and the library,
you are her reports.

May a beach do?
A sun (chance) assigned your musk between the *boy* and
a little painter.

The hand: your vixen. Rhythm demands her glance.
To burn is cheek, can't the skin balance?
This cell dances

within the land's ventricle, where you wouldn't wipe
my prince. Since a size grips pressure, their friend
is owning the message. Could vengeance begin?

doctrine girl bath library essay discipline extend hotels. (38)

Thus making it new, for Moure, as with Robertson, means making new places to be, empowering places that are less toxic to women's subjectivities. They are dystopic but at the same time visionary.

As I write this essay, I'm only too aware of how much of its style presents the stage neutral of "objective" man-centred discourse, the hallmark of Western science and philosophy. Aware too that I long to have a chunk of the power that circulates through that discourse, even though I know that that voice disempowers my gender. How refreshing Robertson's "Forget the journals, conferences, salons, textbooks, and media of dissemination. We say thought's object is not knowledge but living" (*Occasional* 16).

One thing is clear from this discussion of innovative poetics: these innovations are not lightly undertaken. The works of these poets are not tossed off in an afternoon but informed by specific and rigorous investigations and wide-ranging explorations of philosophy and politics. They represent a small sample of contemporary poetic innovative practice. But how effective are these innovative writings as political activism for social change, given that no matter what the innovation, neoliberal capitalism will turn it to its own ends— it will, in Moure's words, turn innovation back into anaesthesia: "The discourse of privilege is infinitely absorptive" (*My Beloved* 34). Indeed, perhaps this kind of shift from living to dead language is part of the reason each generation must make a language it can think in.

For Derksen, an effectively interventionist poetics (and presumably what he is attempting in his own work), is one that moves "from the micro-aesthetics of the text to the macro-ideology of nation states" (*Annihilated* 162). This is the kind of poetry he finds in Bruce Andrews whom he notes "builds four functions, one for each level of his conceptual horizons." Andrews' poetry, Derksen states, first moves "toward a 'total grasp' of the articulations and contradictions of globalization"; second, "critiques domestic policies of the nation-state"; third, "hammer[s] away . . . at the subject as the site where these articulated domestic/ foreign (nation-state/globalization) policies and desires are internalized"; and fourth, examines "language as a signifying system" and "as the vehicle of the state aggression and containment" (*Annihilated* 157). However, Derksen is concerned that writing such as Andrews' is quickly refigured by the cultural (neoliberal endorsed) mainstream as "difficult" or "experimental," which seals it off in the category of the purely aesthetic and depoliticizes it (*Annihilated* 160). It makes the political effect "unintelligible" (*Annihilated* 160).

Similarly, the risk of Moure's wager is of course that poetic innovation will not be heard, or that arts venues like Olympic festivals will make it "too serious,"

not entertaining enough (*My Beloved* 35). Moure notes that the "difficulty" of her work causes people to complain that it requires "theory," to which she says,

> I always tell people that theory is just thinking. . . . If you don't think about thinking, the monoculture functions. If we could get a critical mass then we could do it, we could think ourselves somewhere else entirely, but forget it. You'd have a better chance of taking off in a spaceship. ("'Why not be excessive?': A Conversation with Erín Moure" 60-61)

Derksen too admits that as poetry enters the social sphere its critiques lack critical mass, with the result that "poetry's cultural capital has not been bullish" (*Annihilated* 162).

Since the inventions of innovative poetries are quickly usurped by the world-economic system and labelled as quaintly artistic, or used to sell us everything from cars to Viagra, we are driven to ponder whether poetic rearticulation or anti-anaesthesia are anything more than methods of tolerating the horrifying disempowerments and inequalities meted out by neoliberal ideology. If we really wanted to change the world, one might argue, it is exactly the least innovative language that is more likely to be effective since it will reach a wider segment of the population. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a melodramatic and sentimental story about a black family, sold 300,000 copies in the US in its first year (Kaufman 19), and another 165,000 copies in Britain the following year (Fisch 33). It was the best-selling novel in the nineteenth century (Robbins 76); the second best-selling book of the nineteenth century after the Bible ("*Uncle*"); and the bestseller of all time in proportion to the population (Kaufman 19). It was politically effective as a significant force in the anti-slavery movement, and some argue it "helped lay the groundwork for the Civil War" (Kaufman 18).

However, it also might be that if innovative poetry constituted any sort of actual threat to neoliberal world order, writers would be silenced as quickly as Julian Assange has been, or as quickly as Osip Mandelstam was for his formally innovative writing that dared to criticize Stalin's oppressive bureaucracy. But must we expect the language-forgers of our time to adopt an aesthetics of political effectiveness, with all its dangers of dogma and sloganeering? Moure believes that effecting social change is not the job of poetry: "Poetry should bug people," she says, "then *they* can change" (qtd. in Butling and Rudy 213). Poetry's job, she believes, is not to be "accessible": "The accessible, as I have always argued, as others have argued, is what we already know. And poetry operates beyond that. . . . So does life! All poetry whether it engages traditional forms or dictions or open forms, or conceptualizations, has to

press us just past the limit where our knowing ends" ("Interview" 223). What she offers us is an outside to neoliberalism and even the protest against neoliberalism. We find it at the limits of our senses, the limits of what we can hear, and in language's rhythmic memories that exceed the grid of signification. Similarly, Robertson refuses to produce a poetry that is useful to any cause but her own angry yet playful revamping of subjectivity, which trusts that changing the reader's relation to language is enough.

In each epoch, social conditions cry out. They wrench from all those living at the time not a message but a fabric of voices that often isn't fully understood for decades. By courting the quixotic half-formed rhymes and half-heard echoes in phrasing, expostulation, and intonation of vernacular utterance or public discourses, Robertson, Moure, Farr, and Derksen both invoke the heart that drives them to speak and begin to undo social controls binding them to injustice. They are making language new for some of the same reasons Wordsworth did two hundred years ago.

NOTES

1 In Pound's translation of *Confucius*, we find the following:

In letters of gold on T'ang's bathtub:

AS THE SUN MAKES IT NEW
DAY BY DAY MAKE IT NEW
YET AGAIN MAKE IT NEW. (36)

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Stephen Collis

New York Visitation

29 July 2009

In a museum we walk past the energy
Others have stored in their works
Photographs paintings and collages
An installation with repurposed sound
And light as though the ground
Were advertising its very existence
One mushrooming bulb after another

My brother speaks of obsolescence
That forms themselves are eventually used up
All those announcements of the death
Of this or that historical practice
A stretch of road somewhere west
Where no painting and no poem has progressed

I'm not certain I share his conviction
As we walk through a New York
Under frozen construction
Billboards and buildings going up or down
Capitalism caught at the moment
Its financial pants have hit the floor
Mid costume-change

Language—or is it grammar?—
Might just be the cops
And the market expressing its preferences
May be the unacknowledged legislator now
But haven't we made a game of obsolescence?
Everything must get old for something to be new
Or else how keep selling the system?

We walk past the Chelsea Hotel
Where a plaque marks a poet's drunken end
Such mellifluous tongues in its bricks
Everything dies—everything ends
Why should forms be any different?
We sold ourselves to *this* particular practice
At the moment we began to regard our genius
As the preciousness we could posses alone

Now everything reminds us of our energies
And the objects and hours where we spent them
But do we see the relations we have fashioned
Trying to get across the abyss
One simple thought or emotion
Uncontaminated—uncontained
From a mobile *here* to a fluid *there*
Where people have gathered—and go on gathering
As clocks stop and museums close?

Karl Jirgens

Neo-Baroque Configurations in Contemporary Canadian Digital Poetics

Innovative achievements in poetics are not always fully acknowledged or recognized by literary critics because such expressions move beyond the peripheries of their own established field. Contemporary digital poetics moves beyond print to screen, live events, and inter-media formats. Marshall McLuhan and D.F. McKenzie demonstrate that the *material form* of a text helps define its meaning. McLuhan's maxim "the medium is the message" resonates in McKenzie's *Bibliography and Sociology of Texts* where he defines "texts" to include oral expression, sound (voice, music, or audio sources), cinematography, radio, video, visual graphics, and excursions into electronic media. Contemporary poetics has moved beyond conventions of poetry, fiction, or drama. By "poetics," I refer to both literary discourse and theories of literary expression.

Digital poetics can be understood as a movement from a dominantly visual response to an engagement with both visual *and* aural dimensions. Such contemporary innovative literary expression invites broader aesthetic views of "poetics." Walter J. Ong in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* and McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* have spoken about the shift from oral culture to written culture with the advent of the Gutenberg press. Ong identifies three phases in the development of Western verbal communications media: 1) pre-literate or primary *oral/aural* and prior to the printing press; 2) chirographic-typographic or primarily *visual,* following the advent of the printing press; and 3) electronic, or what McLuhan and Ong identify as a secondary *oral/aural* phase. I suggest that this third, present phase, populated by radio, cinema, television, video, internet, MP3

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players, iPods, iPhones, YouTube, etc., is more accurately a combined or *integrated* visual *and* aural phase, and not just a new "aural" phase. We *have* experienced a greater emphasis on orality during the twenty-first century, but because of inter-media, we have arrived at a point where visual and auditory communications are more or less in *balance,* perhaps for the first time in recorded history. Our culture has been shaped by our privileging of visual modes of expression. For example, in recent history, performative expression has received less credence than printed texts. Over the past century, the Nobel Prize for Literature has been awarded over one hundred times but, of the authors honoured, only a handful were dramatists (notably, Shaw, Pirandello, O'Neill, Beckett, Soyinka, Pinter, Fo). In the twenty-first century, textual expression has expanded from print-oriented visual formats to include aural or combined aural/visual digital and inter-media formats, thus distancing itself from the literary canon. With the emergence of digitally-enhanced, language-based expression, and accompanying movements to audio, screen or performative formats, innovative forms of digitally-enhanced poetics have multiplied and transformed the literary landscape. We are riding the cusp of a global shift from primarily visual literary expression to combined visual/auditory expression. Such cultural changes take decades, but the electronic dimension is expanding more quickly than any other mode of expression in human history. It is predictable that this shift will transform the canon and transform our aesthetics.

We have already seen co-relative shifts in aesthetics during previous turning points in history. For example, early cinematic directors made the error of harkening back to theatre when rendering film productions in a "stage-like" manner. Eventually, they developed a sense of film aesthetics. Similarly, digitally-enhanced literary expressions have transcended conventions associated with print media or the codex, thereby generating expanded aesthetic modes. This is not to argue for a superiority of acoustic over visual poetics, rather, it is a recognition that there is an increasing connectivity of *both* modes when one moves into the digital realm.

The three Muses of *lexis* (language), *opsis* (spectacle), and *melos* (music), inspire inter-media performance. A "musicality" can be heard not only in language, but also through figure-ground interplays between the different media. For example, we may experience compositions of poetic vocalizations layered over physical movements, sound effects, visual presentations (e.g. video), and so on. The interactions of varied media create interactive counterpoints that can be interpreted musically. By considering performance

pieces by artists such as Robert Lepage, one can immediately appreciate the effects of inter-media layerings.

It is helpful to include discussion of inter-mediality through figure-ground relationships that can feature a range of compositional strategies including melody, accompaniment, harmony, recursion, multiple auditory lines, contrapuntal structures, juxtapositions, breaks, pauses, alternations, repetitions, oscillations, conjunctions or disjunctions, to name only a few. So, we can consider a rhetoric of composition that includes musical figures in inter-media performance including the articulation of time-space through pulse and rhythm. An acoustic rhetoric could include: 1) overall structure: clef, prelude, overture, motif, figure, cycle, *ritornello*, finale, etc.; 2) pace: largo, lentissimo, allegro, andante, etc.; 3) dynamics/intensity: forte, *sotto voce*, pianissimo, etc.; 4) recursion: vibration, frequency, iteration, repetition, percussion, periodicity, uniformity, pulse, pulsation, throb, flutter, palpitation, oscillation, echo, reverberation, resonance, echolalia, refrain, duplication, etc.; 5) harmony: medley, syncopation, euphony, eurythmia, etc.; 6) contrast: counterpoint, polyphony, heteroglossia, digression, tangent, punctuation, overlap; 7) rupture: cacophony, disjunction, interference, interruption, etc. These are only a few of the applicable terms; the language of musical interpretation is well established, although its application to language-based inter-media expression has been limited. Happily, one can recall that voice, and by extension, writing is an acoustic medium and there are intimate connections between language and music. For example, a "phrase" in music can be understood as a syntactical unit that features a cadence which forms part of a musical "sentence." The term "sentence," borrowed from language and applied to music, can be understood as being longer than a motif or phrase but shorter than a movement while still making a complete statement with some sense of resolution (or cadence). With musicians such as Schoenberg, the sentence need not come to a "period," but can instead establish a concept and initiate a development of one idea after another. So, there is no single grammar or rhetoric of music that is universally applicable. Or, as John Cage demonstrated, silence or interval can be understood as an organizational feature, hence, pauses, rests, ellipses, all generate meaning. Nonetheless, articulations of time-space, language, and musicality can be revealing when conducting a critical analysis of inter-media performance.

The Renaissance and Baroque articulations of space evident in the compositional strategies of Bach and Chopin establish shifting and often

multi-stable frames. Contemporary inter-media performances extend such shifting frames through flips in perception that feature shifting figure-ground relationships. In Canada, language-based expression that engages both visual *and* acoustic elements with electronic media is traceable to artists and artists groups including the Automatistes, Herman Voaden, Hugh LeCaine, Norman McLaren, and James Reaney. If one were to name only a few of those who have expanded conventional borders of language-based expression through contemporary, digitally-enhanced, media, then it is possible to identify artists or groups such as R. Murray Schafer, Carbon 14, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery, Penn Kemp, Nicole Brossard, Clive Robertson, Monty Cantsin (a.k.a. Istvan Kantor), Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, Stephen Ross Smith, Christian Bök, Darren Wershler-Henry, Vera Frenkel, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, Robert Lepage, George Eliott Clarke, Kateri Akiwenzie Damm, Lillian Allen, Gary Barwin, Richard Truhlar, Pierre-André Arcand, Frank Davey, W.M. Sutherland, Nobuo Kubota, Thomas King, Tomson Highway, M. NourbeSe Philip, Joy Kogawa, J.R. Carpenter, Janet Cardiff, and George Büres-Miller, to name only a few. While many of these artists have published books, all have moved beyond conventions of print culture into digital realms of expression. For example, Carpenter, the youngest in this group, produces non-linear, computerized, hyper-media narratives that invite audience participation by entering into embedded text and image caches throughout her digitally formatted online video presentations. Inter-media language-based creations of such artists are growing at an exponential rate.

While this innovative expression opens new literary frontiers, it continues to engage in meaningful socio-political discourse. Language-based artists and artists groups working with electronic media such as Carbon 14 (founded by Gilles Maheau), Nicole Brossard, Shawna Dempsey, Lorri Millan, and Robert Lepage forward powerful commentaries on sexual exploitation, gay or lesbian rights, homophobia, and autocratic abuses within a late-capitalist context. Language-based presentations by Clive Robertson, Hank Bull, Cantsin, and Frenkel satirize the socially debilitating effects of overt commercialism while supporting freedom of artistic expression. Frank Davey's digitally altered anti-war postcards, and Cardiff and Büres-Miller's walking tours with their backdrops of violence, murder and war, examine more subtle epistemological matters related to cultural identity as well as the psychic effects of imperialism or the threat of violent social conditions. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker have commented extensively on

socio-political ramifications of digitally enhanced literary expression for over two decades and, among other topics, have considered the effects of electronic media in reference to military endeavour, diverse sexual identities, cultural, economic and military imperialism, and psychological reactions to all of these. In very important ways, the bulk of such inter-media artists are *engagé* in the sense forwarded by Jean-Paul Sartre, that is, they are socio-politically engaged. So, while the digital front offers no solutions to a range of global crises, it does provide potentially greater access to wider audiences and extends the palette of possible modes of expression. Accompanying the combination of acoustic and visual fields, there is one more dimension that is helpful to consider.

Some, but not all inter-media performances and digital poetic expressions involve direct audience engagement, and so can be identified as having either cyber-textual or ergodic qualities. Espen Aarseth in *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature,* has defined as "cyber-texts" as texts or forms of literary expression which offer multiple paths, with too many branches or points of divergence for any individual to follow (3). This cyber-textual quality is evident in contemporary Canadian expression, notably, in pieces such as Darren Wershler-Henry's "The Apostrophe Engine" created in conjunction with Bill Kennedy. "The Apostrophe Engine" relied on a Google API program to execute search results based on any individual word appearing within an on-screen text. The original text that became the foundation for this approach is roughly a full page long and begins as follows:

> you are a deftly turned phrase, an etymological landscape, a home by the sea •
> you are a compilation of more than sixty samples overlaid on top of a digitally
> synthesized 70s funk groove (Wershler-Henry)

By clicking on any word within the body of the online text, a reader can start a search engine which generates an entirely different "poetic" body of text on screen, replacing the original. The project is currently being retrofitted. When operational, the optional choices in this piece are infinite and it is impossible to follow all possibilities. As such, the piece can be defined both as cybertextual and as "ergodic." Aarseth explains that "ergodic" texts are those that require significant extra-noetic responses, specifically texts that demand *direct* audience engagement apart from the simple reading and turning of pages or simple attention to a page, a stage, or a screen (3). Some genealogical tracing is helpful here.

The conceptual frame of "The Apostrophe Engine" finds a kinship with earlier ergodic texts such as Raymond Queneau's *One Hundred Thousand*

Billion Poems (*Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, 1961), which offers ten sonnets printed on flip cards divided into multiple parts (much like children's head/body/legs flip-books) thereby generating 10^{14} different poems (Rowe "Queneau's poems"). Queneau engaged the help of mathematician François Le Lionnais in developing the piece, which, incidentally, led to the founding of the Oulipo movement. So, while digital literary expression moves into the partially uncharted waters of electronic media, connections with earlier innovative, non-digital forms are still evident. Nonetheless, any demand for direct audience engagement shifts the literary paradigm slightly by increasing the degree to which readers actively participate in the generation of meaning. Rather than functioning purely as receptors, audiences can potentially become hybrid receptor/generators of meaning, but their engagement is typically limited by the parametres of the expression. So, with Queneau the limitation involves his flip-card format, and with Wershler-Henry, the parametre is limited to a mouse-click engagement. Nonetheless, this shift from a predominantly "receptor" mode, to a "receptor/participant" mode permits the audience to at least partly share the role of "creator" of expression with the principal authors.

In addition to cybertextual or ergodic properties, such forms of expression also result in a condition of *tmesis,* which Aarseth explains as a cognitive response to expressions that are physically impossible to grasp by any single recipient or participant because they include too many divergent elements (47). *Tmesis* (literally, to "cut"), is a notion originating with the ancient Greeks, but re-introduced and re-defined by Roland Barthes in his *Le plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*). Barthes speaks of *tmesis* in describing the way a "reader" will cut or skip through portions of any textual expression that provides too much information or too many diverging paths (10-11). As such these modes of expression typically privilege process over product, avoiding closure, and adopting positions outside of the conventions of "commodity." In addition, the manifold layerings, and the articulations of time-space in such inter-media forms of expression reveal features that find roots in the Baroque.

Canadians are part of a worldwide digital cultural expansion and one significant branch of that expansion can be defined as Neo-Baroque. A recent issue of *PMLA* (January 2009) features a section devoted to Latin and South American Neo-Baroque, but excludes North American proponents. Critics in that issue note that the Neo-Baroque adopts the multi-layered compositional patterns of the Baroque, while it reacts against earlier

imperialist models. William Egginton, in "The Baroque as a Problem of Thought" argues that the Neo-Baroque extends Immanuel Kant's pursuit of the epistemological questioning of assumptions of human knowledge. Egginton explains, "But this problem is not exclusively philosophical; as I have argued elsewhere, it imbued the skills and practices of generations of people who learned to express an anxiety about appearance's relation to reality in the way they enacted spectacle, read literature, viewed art, organized political power, and thought of space." (144) Egginton applies Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's strategy of theorizing a "minor" literature which de-territorializes conventions of expression. Put briefly, "minor" literature does not directly denote "minority" groups. Rather as Deleuze and Guattari explain in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1975) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), "minor" expression assumes an ethical response by positing itself against the "majority" and by taking measures to avoid becoming fascist, or part of a corporate elite. I will emphasize that this socio-political position is directly tied to Neo-Baroque articulations of time-space.

In a related analysis, Ronald J. Deibert in *Cyber-Diplomocy* notes that there are two prominent views of digital-electronic telecommunications or what he calls "hyper-media." In one formulation, we are told that the "information revolution" breaks down hierarchies, authoritarian regimes, and closed societies while generating openness, integration, freedom, and democracy. Recent events, including the use of social media during political uprisings in the Middle East, and the spread of information through WikiLeaks support this perspective. By contrast, an alternate perception of this same phenomenon warns that the suppressive and "panoptic" power of governments and corporations allows cyber-spatial tools of surveillance to penetrate the most private lives of individuals (27). Governmental reactions to WikiLeaks including arrests and new laws restricting the spread of electronic information support this second view. We are left with two *mutually exclusive* views of world order: 1) a "free" but globally integrated, hyper-libertarian system, and, 2) a tightly compartmentalized, state-centric, "corporatist" or "control" system. These two perspectives are irresolvable. Instead, digital culture has only served to polarize existing power groups, heightening rather than ameliorating global tensions. Within this political enfoldment, we find inter-media and digital literary expression typically forwarding anti-autocratic values, often rejecting, or even satirizing commercial conventions of mass consumer culture. Inter-media and digital poetic expression is not especially viable as a mass-market item. Artists who

work this field have chosen these modes for a reason. While they do not hesitate to reach out to large audiences using the digital realm (which in many cases extends through the internet), they do not privilege generating revenue for their expressions, and instead choose a "minor" stance outside of existing hegemonies. So, the struggle continues. Egginton helpfully observes that Neo-Baroque expressions typically react against imperialist models even as they raise epistemological questions, particularly when one considers the manner in which time-space is articulated in language-based, inter-media expression.

Deleuze's study, *The Fold,* speaks of the Baroque tendency to engage the senses as it de-centres or shifts perspectives (21). The enfoldments of interior and exterior spaces accompany manifold layerings of time-space just as they de-stabilize perception. Norman McLaren has worked with language and text, but perhaps the best representation of the Neo-Baroque can be seen in his film *Pas de Deux* (1967). Through its stroboscopic effects, *Pas de Deux* depicts cascades of layered time-space which find counterparts both in Baroque forms such as the fugue and in some contemporary poetics. Nicole Brossard's spatio-temporal leaps (e.g., *Baroque at Dawn*, or *Picture Theory*), or the montaged layers in Robert Lepage's stage productions (e.g., *Tectonic Plates*, *Zulu Time*, *Geometry of Miracles*, *Far Side of the Moon*, *Ka*, *Berlioz's Damnation of Faust*, or, *The Dragons' Trilogy*), as well as Cardiff and Büres-Miller's inter-media super-impositions of acoustic *mise-en-scène* atop visual *mise-en-scène* (e.g., *The Paradise Institute* or *The Missing Voice*) result in experiences that demand direct audience engagement even as they abandon more conventional or linear perceptions of time-space. Leibniz established that space can never be void, but always includes matter. In this he anticipated post-Einsteinian theories on physics as forwarded by thinkers such as Stephen Hawking. Although the Neo-Baroque frequently features post-Einsteinian views, including relativity, the uncertainty principle, probability theory, fuzzy logic, chaos and fractal theory, such expression finds roots in the Renaissance.

In his essay, "Renaissance Performance: Notes on Prototypical Artistic Actions in the Age of the Platonic Princes," Attanasio di Felice informs us that in Italy (c. 1450) during the reign of the Medicis, Neo-Platonic humanism, Artistotelian form and allegorical structure often characterized performance works:

> In Quattrocento Italy, once the liberating factor of a philosophical framework was established, artists manifested work in every form possible to the technology of

the day. From the design and execution of fountains to the production of spec-tacles for the courts, the artists of the Renaissance were encouraged in the pursuit of their pronounced multimedia concerns. Their normal activities included the creation of *trionfi* (triumphal processions frequently requiring the construction of elaborate temporary arches), *cortei* (court pageants), *grottescherie* (masquerades and bizarrely costumed participants), and *carri allegorici* (allegorical vehicles often used in jousts). (6-7)

Manifold layerings of time-space characterized both Renaissance and the Baroque expressions that followed. As far back as *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Deleuze develops a theory that rests on Baroque aesthetics. He considers the notions of difference-in-itself and repetition-for-itself in light of a transcendental empiricism which disorders the *a priori* Kantian faculties. Instead of the (neo-)Platonic notion of copies that refer to some higher ideal or original form, Deleuze suggests the notion of a repetition of simulacra without model or ideal. This permits a conceptual, non-representational idea of difference to emerge through layering effects. Deleuze's early works, including *The Logic of Sense* (1969), consider paradoxes of linguistic meaning, subjectivity, delirium, nonsense, and surface effects of signification as well as potential slides in polyvalent meaning. Deleuze and Guattari's argument in *Anti-Oedipus* helps decode or de-territorialize the limits of capitalism that result when artists scramble codes while gesturing to a world free of hierarchy and dialectical opposition. Yet, at present, it seems that hierarchies and dialectic oppositions are entrenching themselves further, even while paradox, delirium, surface effects of signification, and slides in polyvalent meaning increase. To go a step further, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* argues that we have devolved into an alienated state characterized by mindless industrial production, incessant growth, energy waste, and pointless transformation. Baudrillard argues that the resulting "white noise" of society or the "information overload" that McLuhan spoke of leads to dissolutions of identity, collapsing social classes, and blurred distinctions between actuality and representation. Much of this coincides with what Egginton has called "the problem of thought" evident in the Neo-Baroque. For many of the Canadian artists mentioned earlier, language-based inter-media performance frequently raises problems of thought through epistemological questions of identity, when individuals become swept up in the ever-multiplying Narcissistic folds and layers that constitute a culture of simulacra.

The notion of simulacra, the fractal-like repetition of repeated imagery, is fundamentally Baroque. While much of Baudrillard's argument applies, I question his suggestion that there is an ensuing collapse of social classes.

Instead, the opposite appears to be the case. There is an increasing stratification of classes; the upper classes are becoming ever more isolated, insulated and distant; the middle class is embroiled in its own struggle to survive; the working class is experiencing ever deteriorating economic conditions due to a global recession. Meanwhile, social outcasts, the "street-people," have even less leverage than ever by which to re-enter society. Given this situation, Deleuze's views on paradoxes of linguistic meaning, subjectivity, delirium, nonsense, and surface effects of signification, coupled with Baudrillard's discussion of white noise, *simulacra* and infinite regression as they relate to a schizo-culture, help illuminate a socio-cultural perspective of Neo-Baroque expression that positions itself against corporate models. On another level, the ambi-valence of Neo-Baroque expression helps point to its inherently epistemological position. In "Towards a Semiology of Paragrams," Julia Kristeva's notions of semiotics and paragrammatics (i.e., pattern recognition of conceptual networks with ambivalent or polysemous interpretations) offer a theoretical viewpoint that helps illuminate patterns of enfoldment in Neo-Baroque expression while recognizing its syncretist qualities.

As with the Baroque, so with the Neo-Baroque: we are faced with a syncretist breadth of vision and a multiplicity of expressive inter-media forms. So, to add to the aforementioned *PMLA* issue on Neo-Baroque expression and to extend the perceptions of Deleuze, Guattari, Baudrillard, and Kristeva, I offer that digitally enhanced Neo-Baroque poetics often feature the following elements: spectacle, *trompe l'oeil*, anamorphosis, *mise-en-abyme* (i.e., into the abyss, infinite regression, dream within a dream, as standing between two mirrors), manifold layering of stimuli, polyvalent meaning, multi-stable perceptions (e.g., auditory or optical illusions), self-similarity, reiterative patterns, multiple surfacing, inclusion of the quotidian, refusals of a metaphysics of depth, and plays of often ritualistic simulacra that are often synaesthetic. Syncretist expression combining auditory and visual space underlies the Neo-Baroque aesthetics of recent poetic innovations.

Vera Frenkel's satiric and language-based video installations situated in shopping malls offer an example of a syncretist approach that layers auditory and visual space in a deliberately anti-corporate manner, deliberately choosing a "minor" ethos that steps outside of the conventional "majority." For example, Frenkel's short satiric inter-media performance/installation, *This Is Your Messiah Speaking*, uses public audio address systems and large-format video screens strategically placed around shopping malls to convey several modes of language and representation, including English and

American Sign Language, to trace and disclose bonds between Messianism and consumerism, two conflicting romances of rescue. The following is a portion of the voice-over from Frenkel's installation:

> I KNOW (FOR EXAMPLE) THAT PEOPLE MUST SHOP
> FOR THE RIGHT MESSIAH AT THE RIGHT PRICE.
> WHERE REDEEMERS ARE CONCERNED,
> COMPARE GUARANTEES.
> ASK YOURSELF; 'IS THIS REALLY THE MESSIAH SPEAKING?'
> ASK YOURSELF (HE SAID),
> 'IS THIS REALLY THE BEST VALUE FOR MY MONEY?'
> "SHOP AROUND," HE SAID.
> "SEE FOR YOURSELF," HE SAID.
> "I'LL BE WAITING. (Frenkel 26-27)

Using guerrilla-art tactics with a digital interface, Frenkel co-opts and "theatricalizes" public space, thereby engaging audiences while challenging what Deibert calls tightly compartmentalized "corporatist" or "control" systems. She deconstructs consumerist public address systems with a parodic, libertarian challenge featuring rhythmic ambi-valent language, through use of interval, and multi-stable perception (i.e., for shoppers, the performance is interrupted by ordinary distractions in the shopping mall). The result is subtly but multiply enfolded layers of acoustic and visual stimuli that satirize the convolution of a higher spiritual ethos with quotidian commercial values. Audiences are free to ignore or attend to the audio-video installation. The a-rhythmic shopping experience mixed with the more rhythmic audio-video presentation results in an appropriately disjunctive contrapuntality that mixes interior personal space with exterior public space in typically Neo-Baroque fashion. This digitally enhanced expression is aimed at inspiring social and ethical change among shopping audiences. Like her contemporaries working with literary and digital media, Frenkel inspires a re-definition of individual and larger socio-cultural identities.

The manner in which syncretist and digitally enhanced, language-based, Neo-Baroque expression appeals to the senses helps it extend the borders of mainstream aesthetics. If the audience must choose between manifold paths of expression, as with cybertexts, or is asked to engage directly in the production of meaning, as with ergodic texts, then in both cases there is a subtle shift away from more conventional notions of commodity and exchange, accompanied by a re-definition of the traditional roles of artist, audience, and art as "product." Lepage's cyber-textual performances do not demand direct audience engagement, but do provide more stimuli than any

single individual can absorb, thereby leading audiences to a condition of *tmesis.* Cardiff and Büres-Miller take audiences a step further by integrating them with the artistic performance in a willing collaboration, thereby eroding the difference between "sender" and "receiver."

Lepage's syncretist performances extend the inter-media works of artists such as Laurie Anderson (see *United States*), or Robert Wilson and Philip Glass (see *Einstein on the Beach*). Lepage's many performances typically feature multi-layered physical actions, fugue-like layers of visuals and acoustics, often with rapid-fire movements of actors and props, contrapuntal interplays of digitalized slides, abrupt shifts from allegro to lentissimo, robotics, light-shows, cinematic cycloramas juxtaposed with acoustic contrapuntalities including voice, synthesizer, sound effects, and musical instrumentals, often presented within abrupt and disjunctive scene changes, punctuated with ellipses and silences. In addition, Lepage's Neo-Baroque qualities include manifold layerings of stimuli, *trompe l'oeil*, and fugue-like patterns of reiteration that engage the audience in synesthetic, multi-sensory, syncretist barrages that often parallel jazz forms, as in his *Needles and Opium,* which features an homage to Miles Davis and Jean Cocteau. Both visual and acoustic space is layered in oscillating "sheets" or patterns, superimposed one atop another, akin to the multiple layers of Baroque architecture. Given these manifold acoustic and visual layers it is impossible for any single member of the audience to observe and retain the entirety of a performance by Lepage. The resulting *tmesis* renders any such performance an incomplete *rebus,* much like a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces, thereby contributing to its ephemerality.

The ephemerality of Lepage's performative productions is also emphasized by the fact that, to date, very few have been put into print. So, the consumption of Lepage's performances remains within the combined visual/aural space of the theatre, but evades the world of print that is fundamental to our literary canon. Consequently, despite the praise his performances draw from international critics, none of Lepage's productions qualify for any of the major literary prizes in Canada, such as the Governor General's award. Thus, Lepage's digitalized inter-media performances deny corporatization and deliberately situate themselves outside the frame of conventional print-culture "literature."

Cardiff and Büres-Miller's performance/installation pieces are more subtle, but are highly complex when considering the poetics of their digitalized ergodic cybertext. Audiences become "co-creators" in Cardiff

and Büres-Miller's pieces and can add their own inspirations to the performances. It was *The Paradise Institute* that established Cardiff's and Büres-Miller's reputations as international celebrities at the Venice Bienalle (2001). More recently, their "Forty-Part Motet" toured internationally, featuring forty digitally recorded singing voices, channelled through forty small speakers set within a closed space that convolutes pre-recorded sound with the actual space, thereby generating a "*trompe-l'oreille*" or audio illusion. Arguably, Cardiff and Büres-Miller's "walking tours" provide the most remarkable advances in the poetic cosmos. Their inter-active (ergodic) digital performance-installation *The Missing Voice (Case Study B): An Audio Walk* (1999-2000), was commissioned by Artangel in London, UK, and is one in a series of walking tours. *The Missing Voice* piece is forty-five minutes long and uses sophisticated bi-aural digital recording systems set to mimic exactly sound reception by human ears. The multi-layered audio track is then transferred to a CD headphone set (much like those handed out at major art-galleries), and then is given out to audience members with an invitation to take a short "tour."

The Missing Voice offers a walking "tour" starting at a library in the Whiteshapel district with a pre-recorded "*noir*" audio soundtrack of a narrator-tour-guide directing audience-participants on a tour of the neighbourhood. The pre-recorded "Discman" audio includes what sounds like a "live" first-person stream-of-consciousness "interior monologue" by the narrator-guide evoking a desire to leave her daily business behind and simply "disappear" from her own life. Interjected is a third-person account of a missing woman, the voice of a "male detective" commenting on the missing woman, the audio-recorded diary of the missing woman (the sound "filtered" so it seems recorded instead of "live"), ambient sounds including insect noises, street music, police sirens, footsteps, church-bells, sounds of other people in the "background," audio-taped voices being re-wound and re-played, automatic gun-fire, air-raid sirens, whirling helicopter blades, accounts of heaps of dead bodies, a report of a woman's body found and identified as the one on the tape, melodious singing, and finally, the guide, regretfully departing due to a lack of time, leaving any audience-participants on their own far from the library to which they must return the Discman audio unit. Atop these fugue-like audio layers, one typically experiences one's own interior monologue, and atop that, the actual sounds of the street are difficult to distinguish from the pre-recorded "virtual" street sounds. There is an embedded sense of vulnerability and menace throughout the "tour,"

with references to assassination, murder and an awareness that you might be followed by a dangerous person through the former hunting grounds of Jack the Ripper.

The multiple acoustic layers are characteristically Neo-Baroque by virtue of their inclusion of the quotidian, multiple simulacra, auditory illusions, iterative sounds and comments, combining in a fugue-like pattern of inter-laid acoustic tracks to generate an unstable or multi-stable sense of perception. Cardiff deliberately blurs differences between the virtual (simulacra) and the actual (quotidian). On the sound track, the "narrator" often anticipates the thoughts of the audience by "answering" expectations and questions that typically might arise in the audience-participant's mind. By responding to the usual expected audience anxieties (e.g., "Is this the right way?"), Cardiff creates the sensation that she is actually within your mind. The audience as participant becomes an active agent directly engaged in generating meaning through this kinetic, inter-active, performance as ergodic "text." While there is a game-like aspect to this literary expression akin to "Simon Says," the audience still acts as agent, playing an active role in unfolding a narration in the form of a journey with its accompanying storyline. Surreal situations arise; for example, one hears rushing air and a revving car engine and is warned by the pre-recorded voice of the "guide" of a rapidly approaching automobile, but there is no car to be seen. Instead, it is a virtual digital audio illusion or a "*trompe l'oreille*." The quotidian street provides the setting for this syncretist and synesthetic poetic performance. In Neo-Baroque fashion, Cardiff's three-dimensional, interactive, multi-sensory, inter-media, digital performance generates an aporia between virtuality/simulacra and actuality/quotidian. There is a blurring between "interior" mindscape and "exterior" cityscape, or what Lacan calls *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*. Yet, if one attends carefully, it is possible to note that interior and exterior spaces are conjoined in the mind through a configuration like a Möbius strip. One becomes self-consciously aware of being both "audience" and "actor" echoing Shakespeare's notion that "all the world's a stage." This awareness results in a sense of *mise-en-abyme* and accompanies the disembodied experience of being "wired" (akin to William Gibson's notion of cyberspace), co-relative to a sense of being in two places at once. This spatial hallucination parallels Nicole Brossard's notion of "double-time" (see Lynn Huffer's interview with Brossard), and Barbara Godard's "parallax" effect (see "Producing Visibility for Lesbians.") The sensation is akin to the conditions of a schizo-culture as described by Deleuze and Guattari. Fredric Jameson expands this view in

"Postmodernism and Consumer Society" where he states that within a late-capitalist context, the individual is isolated and experiences a sense of being disconnected while facing multiple discontinuous signifiers which fail to link into a coherent sequence: "The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the 'I' and the 'me' over time" (119). In *The Missing Voice* signifiers connect, but incompletely, while the sense of self faces dissolution. Monica Biagioli comments on the spatio-temporal disorientation and disjunction in *The Missing Voice* with reference to schizophrenia: "In a schizophrenic way, Cardiff draws you into a heard experience, locks you into an erotic bond, and at the end of the trip, you are snapped back to reality" (3).

The *sotto voce* of the narrator, the rhythm of pre-recorded footsteps, and the overlaid narrative levels have a lulling quality that is in contrast to the *noir* subtext of stalking and murder. An "alienation effect" results and it is enhanced by the *aporia* or contradiction between virtuality and actuality which enhances the sense of displacement or disembodiment involved with being both manipulated audience and active agent. The inclusion of virtual and actual cityscapes extends the question of "textuality" insofar as one layer of the pre-recorded audio track offers what might be considered a reading of the city itself as a kind of text. Finally, the abrupt ending in mid-town, the abandonment of the audience member, and subsequent requirement to return to the starting point without directions extends the "text" of the performance in an *unwritten* way. All those who begin the journey must eventually return the audio equipment and choose how to do so, thus underscoring the ergodic nature of this piece. Cardiff extends the concept of cybertext, into cyberspace as a three-dimensional, interactive, synesthetic, inter-media experience.

In language-based, inter-media performance/installations created by artists such as Frenkel, Lepage, Cardiff, and Büres-Miller, manifold layers typical of Neo-Baroque expression generate cybertextual and ergodic forms that redefine the roles of artist and audience. These contemporary, language-based artists engage audiences directly in the poetics of inter-media expression, while assuming an anti-corporate ethos. The ephemerality of such inter-media expressions situates them outside of print-based conventions, offering expanded artistic horizons with unprecedented possibilities.

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Geordie Miller

"Shifting Ground"
Breaking (from) Baudrillard's "Code" in *Autobiography of Red*

> We can say that no writer who began in a rather lonely struggle against the power of language could or can avoid being coopted by it, either in the posthumous form of an inscription within official culture, or in the present form of a mode which imposes its image and forces him to conform to expectation. No way out for this author than to shift ground—or to persist—or both at once.
> —Roland Barthes, *Leçon*

> I don't think writing is an effort of control. It's an effort of collaboration with whatever insights are available there.
> —Anne Carson (to Kevin McNeilly)

In an essay on the ancient Greek poet Stesichoros that frames her *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* (1998), Anne Carson writes that "[t]here were many different ways to tell a story like this" (5). Her "this" refers to the tenth labour of Herakles, his killing the monster Geryon, which Stesichoros' *Geryoneis* and Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (*Red*) "tell" from Geryon's perspective in "different ways"—his in lyric fragments, hers as a verse novel with the rather odd generic tag, "autobiography." Ian Rae's work on *Red* amasses Carson's fragments into the concept of the "hybrid form" (*Poet's Novel* 232). Rae argues that she destabilizes the neat ordering implied by a single label.[1] For him, the "mysterious designation [of] 'autobiography'" best highlights her play with "fixed modes of representation and perception" (*Poet's Novel* 228, 234). Rae may be right to identify Carson's general interest in creating productive discomfort in her reader, but the autobiographical apparatus remains the most radical and beguiling aspect of her text. There are still "many different stories" to uncover with the following question: Why is *Red*—part academic essay, part classicist translation, part third-person account of Geryon's life—called an "autobiography" at all?

Three recent answers to the question of why *Red* is classified as an auto-biography indicate a developing trend in scholarship on the text. Critics invoke the insights of a major philosopher to distill Carson's project. Jacqueline Plante reads Carson's transgression of "categorical boundaries" in terms of Gilles Deleuze's notion of "becoming" (175); Stuart Murray aligns Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories about "perception and human subjectivity in the lifeworld" with her "autobiography of the autobiographical writing self" (102); most recently, Edith Hall calls "Heidegger's identification of time as the chief *locus* by which human subjectivity orients itself, [one] of the most important intellectual and artistic compass points that can help us read the poetic map of Carson's poem" (218). These are engaging readings that pull some fascinating threads out of *Red*, but all three decontextualize the generic classification, wrenching it away from its function for Geryon, not to mention his experience, within the text. Moreover, with the exception of Hall, they rely on extra-textual philosophical paradigms. My paper provides an interdisciplinary reading of the "autobiographical mystery" via the work of a thinker who has been curiously cast aside in these emerging critical examinations, Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's "Fetishism and Ideology" (1970) is quoted directly in *Red*'s opening chapter, "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" Baudrillard's essay argues that all representative acts obey an unseen "structural code" which "govern[s] both objects and subjects . . . subordinating them to itself" (92). Carson elides this disempowering consequence of a universal "*passion for the code*" (Baudrillard 92)—in her paraphrasing of Baudrillard—creating a subtext that challenges the supposedly liberating effect of the "difference" that Stesichoros makes. I argue that this subtext informs the complex negotiation of interiority, exteriority, and writing in Geryon's narrative. *Red* dramatizes its ambivalence about Stesichoros' "undo[ing] the latches" through its portrayal of Geryon's relationship with writing, which is explored in conjunction with allusions to the encroaching effects of the existential state of *Mitwelt*[2] and psychoanalytic mappings of desire (5). Since writing reproduces "conform[ity]" to the semiological system, Geryon's turn to the photographic essay as a medium, "shift[s] the ground," freely enabling his autobiographical impulse (Barthes 467). *Red* frames photographs as coded spaces between subjective interiority and objective exteriority. The valorization of photography in such a writerly text amounts to a tension, which Baudrillard's rubric of the "fetish" helps address, insofar as *Red* simultaneously recognizes and disavows the loss of our power over

language. The dialectic movement of fetishization, with its constant naming and negation, responds to the "structural code" of *Red*'s narrative in a way that posits the written as a necessary supplement to images, and vice versa.[3]

According to many critics, Stesichoros is the true hero—the acknowledged legislator—of Carson's *Red*. Indeed, Carson appears to make her debt to and admiration for the Greek poet clear in the opening section of *Red*, "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" Carson highlights his impressive rhetorical résumé: he reputedly freed language from the "fixed diction" popularized by Homer (4). Thus Stesichoros was able to invert, challenge, or otherwise shift the perspective in classical narratives, notably Helen's culpability for the Trojan War and Herakles' slaying of Geryon. One strategy for addressing the complexity of *Red* has been to read Carson's enthusiasm straightforwardly, aligning her with Stesichoros. For instance, Monique Tschofen writes that "Carson repeats" Stesichoros' gesture of escaping "a restrictive cultural logic" (49); Rae connects Stesichoros' "manipulation of genres" to Carson's "generic play" (*Poet's Novel* 233); and Dean Irvine notes that "[f]or Carson, as for Stesichoros, adjectives are the refugees of language" (281). All of these readings are attentive to individual details from the opening essay, but by merging Stesichoros and Carson, they miss (con)-textual clues that illustrate that she approaches his legacy with more caution. The most superficial of these clues is the wording of the chapter as a question, rather than a statement. This phrasing does not imply that Carson presents Stesichoros as having made no difference. She goes on to write, after carefully detailing his contributions, that "[y]ou can answer for yourself the question 'What difference did Stesichoros make?'" in reference to the fragments of his *Geryoneis* (6). Notice, though, that the question of the nature of Stesichoros' "difference" remains open. As such, her quotation from Baudrillard invites a contrapuntal position to the one celebrating Stesichoros' contribution.

The paragraph in Baudrillard's "Fetishism and Ideology" from which Carson draws her quotation is worth citing in full because her selective quotation constitutes an act of erasure, which leaves significant traces of the source material in *Red*. Baudrillard re-evaluates Marx's commodity fetishism as semiological:

> If fetishism exists it is thus not a fetishism of the signified, a fetishism of substances and values (called ideological), which the fetish object would incarnate for the alienated subject. Behind this reinterpretation (which is truly ideological) it is a *fetishism of the signifier*. That is to say that the subject is trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object. It is not the passion (whether of objects or subjects) for substances that speaks in fetishism, it is the

> *passion for the code*, which, by governing both objects and subjects, and by sub-ordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation. This is the fundamental articulation of the ideological process: not in the projection of alien-ated consciousness into various superstructures, but in the generalization at all levels of a structural code. (92, emphasis in original)

In other words, "what difference *could* Stesichoros make?" Consider how Baudrillard stresses that the processes of production (material "substances") and consumption ("the code") are entangled. Both create a fundamentally "alienated subject." In Marx's critique of capitalist modes of production, it is workers detached from the output of their labour; in Baudrillard's critique of representation, it is everyone distanced from the reality that the "signifier" supposedly discloses. So while Stesichoros alters the mechanics of production, importing adjectives "from somewhere else," he accelerates the consumptive alienation that Homer had first made manifest (Carson 4). "[W]omen" *are* not "*neat-ankled*," nor *is* "a child *bruiseless*" (4, 5). The output of the two poets has superficial differences, but on the deeper level of the "structural code," the outcome is the same—whether the signs used are "stable" (Homer) or "more complex" (Stesichoros), that they are used at all communicates subjects and objects "governed" by representation (4, 5). Since the concept of how language acts in an infinite sign-system is diffuse, an example is useful. Stesichoros signifies on Homer's representation of "blood [as] *black*," describing "killings" as "*cream black*" (4, 5). While Stesichoros' representation is more nuanced than Homer's, the shared adjective "black" emphasizes that the poets obey an identical "*passion for the code*." The possibly more radical step would be to describe "killings" using a blank space, without recourse to an adjective like "black." Of course, Carson does not ask this of Stesichoros. For her, he is notable for extending language's self-referential loop. Her reservations about this extension are embedded in her allusion to Baudrillard.

Carson compresses the above quotation from "Fetishism and Ideology" into the following: "'Consumption is not a passion for substances but a passion for the code,' says Baudrillard" (4). Not only does she leave out the aspect of "fetishism," she seemingly omits the regulatory property of the "passion for the code" he outlines immediately afterwards. Such a willful misquoting on Carson's part should be separated from her mock adaptations of quotations gauging Stesichoros' reputation, such as the one from "Suidas," which gushes that Stesichoros "'Makes those old stories new'" (4). What she omits from Baudrillard, she locates in Stesichoros. Whereas the Homeric regime was productivist in that its "fixed diction" connects to "'a passion

for the code,'" Stesichoros "release[s] being" into a consumptive economy that acknowledges language as an object (4, 5). As Baudrillard explains, however, it is impossible to separate production and consumption because both depend upon an associative order that is "factitious, differential, encoded, [and] systematized" to generate meaning (92). On a broader level, this tyranny of association operates through Carson's use of Homer to make sense of Stesichoros' importance. She invokes this associative order in an adapted quotation from Longinus, which states that Stesichoros is the "'Most Homeric of the lyric poets'" (4). On the surface, Longinus' words damn Stesichoros with hyperbolic praise, as they contradict the apparent distinction Carson's essay will go on to draw between the two ancient poets. However, a closer look reveals that Carson adopts and amends the Longinus quotation from an 1888 *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on Stesichoros. The entry cites Longinus labeling Stesichoros as "'most like Homer'" ("Steischorus" 543). Carson translates "Homer" into "Homeric," into an adjective affixed to Stesichoros. *Red*'s Longinus thus recognizes the mutually constitutive grounds determining Stesichoros appreciation—Homer and adjectives. Similarly, Stesichoros requires Homer in order to perform his inversion of the Geryon and Herakles myth. Without Homer's source-text, Stesichoros would have less "surface" to "study" (5). Homer's meaning had been to illustrate "the victory of culture over monstrosity," but Stesichoros' inversion signals the unleashing of a monstrous sign system on culture (6).

The key word for Carson in Baudrillard's characterization of this monstrous, associative system is "differential." The value of a sign lies in its difference from all the other signs circulating in the system. Stesichoros' *Geryoneis* is thus only marginally distinct from Homer's account; after all the results are identical—Herakles kills Geryon and his "little dog" too (6). Moreover, it is not just that the ends overwhelm the means here, but that the very choice of a different narrative is an illusion. The "passion for the code" dictates reproducing what the system requires, namely, that the hero wins. Any "hows" are flattened out by the fact that "what we consume," as Craig Owens points out in *Beyond Recognition* (1992), "is the object not in its materiality, but in its difference—the object as sign. Thus, difference itself becomes an object of consumption" (119). As a result, control over representation supplants control of the means of production as the locus of power. So again, "What difference did Stesichoros make?" He did not, as critics often claim on Carson's behalf, seize the means of representation; instead, he *made* difference reveal its service to the dominant ideology of serial production.

Carson develops her challenging reading of Stesichoros' legacy in "Appendix C" of *Red*, "Clearing up the Question of Stesichoros' Blinding by Helen" (18). "Appendix A" welcomes skepticism regarding the stated purpose of "[c]learing up" the facts, as it elucidates how Helen "made an object lesson of the poet Stesichoros," blinding him because "he began his poem 'Helen' with a bit of blasphemy" (15). The "blasphemy" amounted to drawing on "an adjectival tradition of whoredom" connected to Helen (5). She only restores his sight once he composes a "palinode," reprinted as "Appendix B," which is defined as "'saying the opposite of what you said before'" (15). The immediate irony is that Helen's censorship of Stesichoros cracks the patriarchal coding of the "adjectival tradition." There are several additional points of interest in light of the resistant reading Carson invites through her allusion to Baudrillard. Firstly, this story contextualizes how Stesichoros' break from Homer represents, in Baudrillard's words, a "decoy and ideological metamorphos[i]s of an unchanged order" insofar as he is subjugated by Helen's arbitrary exercise of power (98, n12). She singles him out purely for the purpose of "demonstrat[ing] her own power" (Carson 15). That the "by Helen" phrase is isolated on the last line in the titles of Appendices "A" and "C" reinforces her authority as a representative of the "unchanged [mythic] order." Carson hints that Helen is the author ("by Helen") testifying about the blinding incident, which explains why "Appendix C," as Rae observes, "clear[s] up nothing at all" (*Poet's Novel* 241). It is not in Helen's interest to demystify the operation of power. The rhetorical road of conditional "if" clauses leads nowhere truthful. Even the palinode, "by Stesichoros," is cryptically worded in double negatives, as in, "No it is not the true story" (Carson 17). The double negatives reflect, more than resist, the capriciousness of Helen's blinding. To see this mirroring as Carson's comment on the dominant-subordinate structure of the Helen-Stesichoros relationship, we need to be attentive to two interconnected extra-textual details. First, as Rae points out, "[t]he thrice-repeated 'No' in the left column of the palinode is unique to Carson's translation" (*Poet's Novel* 240). Carson transforms the negative into a double negative. Relatedly, in her *Economy of the Unlost* (1999), Carson writes that "the interesting thing about a negative . . . is that it posits a fuller picture of reality than does a positive statement" (102). Carson negates the negation by adding in the "no's" in order to accentuate the narrowness of the "picture" that Stesichoros is permitted to present.

Just as Helen teaches Stesichoros about the injustices associated with language acts, Geryon "learn[s] about justice from his brother quite early" (Carson 23). The lesson is no less blunt. Justice obeys the discretion of the

dominant party. Here, as the next line indicates, the arbiter is Geryon's "bigger and older" brother (23). Impatient with Geryon's "stupid[ity]," his brother suddenly abandons the responsibility of walking him to school (24). More unsettling is his sexual abuse of Geryon, an "Economy of sex," which is perpetrated on the basis of a hierarchy of desirable marbles (28). The notion that unequal power relations accompany sexual desire is demonstrated more extensively in Geryon's relationship with Herakles. One of the clearest demarcations of the brothers' dominant-subordinate subject-positions is when Geryon's brother asks him, "*What's your favorite weapon*?" (32). Geryon answers, "*Cage*" (33). His brother ridicules this response because he presumes a dominant position, more interested in offensive than defensive measures. Geryon unconsciously expresses the insight that the Stesichoros sections had intimated—if subjects are all in the cage of a structural code, perhaps recognizing this condition is the closest they can get to justice.

More consciously, Geryon imagines his interior as a site of resistance to forces like his brother. "Inside is mine, he thought" after he is first sexually abused (29). This "thought" encourages Geryon to begin writing his autobiography, in which he plans to "set down all inside things" (29). The utopian impulse to simultaneously "omit / all outside things" is in tension with the reification of Geryon's mother as a regulatory code governing expression in the early stages of his narrative (29). He relies on her, an "outside thing," to define meaning. When he comes across the word "each," which has no established material referent, his mother fills in the "space for its meaning" with the example of him and his brother "*each hav*[*ing*] [*their*] *own room*" (26). His belief that "Once she said the meaning / it would stay" is subsequently destabilized by the fact that Geryon has to move from his own room into his brother's (26). The fabric of "this strong word *each*" that "he clothed himself in" then tears (26). While this tearing does not undermine his positing of his mother's linguistic authority—he still thinks that the "wrong voice" of his babysitter reading to him could compromise the "words that belonged to his mother"—it prefigures his temporary shift to sculpture as the medium for his autobiography (32). His mother remains the ordering force. For example, Geryon gathers a series of found objects to create an image of himself—affixing "a cigarette" and the "crispy paper" of a ten-dollar bill "to the top of [a] tomato" (34, 35). That he uses items from his mother's purse illustrates how inseparable he views his life-story from hers at this early point in his life. At the same time, the money represents a distinct experience that Geryon tries to communicate to his mother. The

day after Geryon's brother first molests him, he gives Geryon "an American dollar bill" as a form of compensation and/or penance for the sexual abuse (29). Geryon's incorporation of money in his autobiographical sculpture constitutes a demand to have his trauma recognized, which his mother does not meet. The violence of her misrecognition is underscored by the fact that she tells him "*It's a beautiful sculpture*" (35). Even if Geryon's substituting of a ten-dollar bill for a one-dollar one is viewed as an act of sublimation, his mother's advice to "*next time . . . / use a one-dollar bill*," signals his failure to have his interior struggle acknowledged (35).

Geryon quickly leaves behind the medium of sculpture, briefly returning to writing, only to find an equally alienating code articulated by his teacher. Having learned the lesson of the deep untranslatability of figurative representation from his experience with sculpture, Geryon "set[s] down the facts" about himself (37). These are soon subjected to revision, though, when his teacher voices her mild disapproval of the story's sad ending to his mother on "Parent-Teacher Day" in the form of a question: "*Does he ever write anything with a happy ending*?" (38). In an echo of Stesichoros' palinode, Geryon has no choice but to comply with outside directives, and so gives his story a "*New Ending / All over the world the beautiful red breezes went on blowing hand / in hand*" (38). The dual imperative for and artificiality of this change captures Geryon as the "subject . . . trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object" (Baudrillard 92).

Geryon's initial turn to photography as a way to represent his autobiography and break from this coding coincides with, and is circumscribed by, his falling in love with Herakles. Geryon's first encounter with him recalls the Stesichoros-Helen storyline insofar as seeing Herakles "step off / the bus from New Mexico" is described as "one of those moments / that is the opposite of blindness" (39). The irony of this statement is dramatic, given what the narrative has already communicated about their relationship; namely, that Herakles will subjugate Geryon. "*I'm a master of monsters*," Herakles later brags (129). Geryon's desire for Herakles is thus predicated on his blindness to Herakles' dominant position, as fixed by the coding of myth. His desire reinscribes the code. The broader irony is that, at least in the Homeric system, Herakles' function as "master" would be on the surface; "unlatched," Herakles can be loved, allowing for a more insidious subduing through seduction. Carson shows Herakles' continuing alignment with the dominant position when he and Geryon graffiti buildings in the town. Herakles rubs out the "CAPITALISM SUCKS" tag in the same sequence as he

says to Geryon, "*All your designs are about captivity, it depresses me*" (55). In the same way that Geryon's brother could not see how a cage could be a weapon, and his mother could not translate Geryon's trauma, Herakles cannot understand Geryon's creative expression of his subordinate position. Nor can he access the intensity of Geryon's feelings for him. When Herakles ends their relationship, he tells Geryon, "*Freedom is what I want for you . . . / I want you to be free*" (74). What Herakles misses is that their relationship, however indirectly, *had* freed Geryon via the representational autonomy Geryon discovered in photography.

The inseparability of their relationship from photography, as well as the latter's momentary releasing of Geryon from the shackles of the linguistic code, is encapsulated in an exchange between Geryon and his mother that exceeds the clichéd brooding teenager-invasive mother dynamic. His mother asks him, "*So who is this new kid you spend all your time with now?*" (40). As a form of reply, Geryon photographs her. He does not verbalize an answer because "[h]e had recently relinquished speech" (40). For the first time, Geryon is able pursue his autobiography in direct opposition to the external expectations to which speech necessarily conforms. He keeps his affair his own affair, while realizing his goal of meaningful self-expression. When his mother presses on in the next sequence, "*So Geryon what do you like about this guy this Herakles can you tell me?*" his inner space is flooded with a "Thousand things he could not tell" (43). The freedom-from that photography engenders is perhaps most powerfully illustrated by the fact that the narrative also resists immediately identifying any of the content of the "[t]housand things."

What the narrative does clearly identify is the nature of photography's appeal to Geryon, first in the context of his fascination with a photograph entitled "Red Patience" (51). The photograph depicts a volcanic eruption from "*1923*" (46). Geryon asks Herakles' grandmother, the photographer of "Red Patience," a hypothetical question about the photograph, and is encouraged by her claim that he is "*confusing subject and object*" (52). For Geryon, who grapples with how to productively synthesize his interior and exterior worlds, such "confusion" is welcome, especially since the grandmother publicly supports and acknowledges it. Photographs are also not nearly as constrained by intentionality as speech or text. "Raising a camera to one's face," the narrative later declares, "has effects / no one can calculate in advance" (135). The inherent unpredictability of any photographic moment is dramatized in Geryon's "'If He Sleep He Shall

Do Well'" shot of "a fly floating in a pail of water" (71). Like Schrödinger's cat, the fly is both alive and dead in the "fifteen-minute exposure" (71). Photographs are receptacles of such spontaneous instances of liminality. Their capacity to capture the movement of being and time render them as the best, closest, answer to the "question that had long exercised Geryon," "'What is time made of?'" (93; see also 80). There is no correct answer, but the "truest" approach for Geryon is outlined below the question—it is the photographic medium. "Much truer / is the time that strays into photographs and stops" (93). This paradox of photography, its conjoined wandering and resting object-subject, is nicely articulated by Monique Tschofen. Photography "introduces motion into stasis," she writes, "and yet compresses the movement of time into an instant" (44). She does not go on to say *why* this paradox makes photography attractive to Geryon, but it is significant. Unrestrained motion is what enslaves Geryon in the sense that Herakles also moves across continents and narratives. With reference to his colonizing role and source-text position, Herakles is still the conquering hero in his modern relationship with Geryon. If, obeying the paradox of the photograph, he can be "compressed into an instant," his identity will remain constant, but he will be more attentive to the immediate realities of his co-presence with Geryon than his epic, encoded mission. The photographic effect offers Geryon the hope of cracking, rather than reinforcing, the hegemonic cultural code in consummating his desire for Herakles.

This hope is dashed when Herakles leaves Geryon. In response, Geryon goes into exile in Argentina. More importantly, he partially abandons photography as a medium for his autobiography and returns to writing. The return is marked by his first activity in Argentina, "s[i]t[ting] at a corner table of Café Mitwelt writing bits of Heidegger / on the postcards he'd bought" (82). The two postcards he writes in this section open with a line from Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), and the postcard in the next section opens with one from Heidegger's "What Is Metaphysics?" (1929).[4] Each Heidegger quotation explores a formal component of the existential state of *Mitwelt*—intersubjectivity, temporality, and moods. Edith Hall provides a succinct definition of *Mitwelt*: "It means the world that is jointly perceptible to the humans in it—all that the consciousness of each of us shares with the consciousness of others" (231). The "sharing" does not connote the union of subject-world (*Eigenwelt)* and object-world (*Unwelt*), as *Mitwelt* discloses Being's fundamental foreignness in-the-world. The form of the postcard, a tourist artifact, communicates Geryon's outsider status. The content of

the cards superficially overcompensates for this status with universalizing rhetoric. Each is a variation on the first one, which reads, "[T]here are many Germans in / Buenos Aires they are all / soccer players the weather / is lovely wish you were here / GERYON" (82). The subsequent substitutions of "psychoanalysts" and "cigarette girls" for "soccer players" are failed attempts to make sense of the new space he finds himself in (83, 85). Conversely, his foredoomed effort to capture the gestalt of Argentina with reference to the country's constituent parts successfully performs the task for which writing is uniquely suited—it reveals him to be an "alienated subject" (Baudrillard 92).

As the reference to "psychoanalysts" in the third postcard indicates, psychoanalysis has a prominent place in the narrative of Geryon's experiences in Buenos Aires. Critical attention tends to focus instead on Geryon's interaction with existentialism in this section, which is understandable given the allusions to Heidegger, and Geryon's befriending of two Skeptic philosophers. Nevertheless, the allusions to psychoanalysis are also notable in that the psychoanalytic conception of unconscious desire serves a purpose similar to that of Heidegger's *Mitwelt*—it magnifies the gap between Geryon's interior and exterior realities with the lens of writing. Two nights before he runs into Herakles, Geryon meets a tango singer who is also, she tells him, a "*psychoanalyst*" (103). Singing "*pays the rent,*" allowing her to pursue her preferred vocation (104). Geryon says that "*psychoanalysis*" is as much "*a fossil*" as "[t]ango" (104). His dismissal of psychoanalysis is in the same spirit as Herakles' grandmother's mention of "*Freud*" earlier on (58). She criticizes Freud for his response when learning that her dog drowned in Buenos Aires: he "*made a joke it was not a funny joke / having to do with incomplete transference*" (58). Even less "funny" is that his response is not a "joke," but a diagnosis based in the critical vocabulary of Freudian psychoanalysis. If there is still a punch line, it relates to the totalizing gesture to myth ("incomplete transference") as an interpretive key. Baudrillard's "Fetishism and Ideology" establishes similar grounds for doubting the veracity and disinterestedness of the claims of psychoanalysis, arguing that "[t]he myth of the unconscious becomes the ideological solution to the problems of the unconscious" (100). Despite the self-fulfilling nature of the "myths" of psychoanalysis, Baudrillard does not underestimate their currency, as he links the rise of psychoanalysis to "the transfer of social control to the domain of the irreducible" (100). Geryon's skepticism about psychoanalysis does not protect him from this "transfer."

An example of (t)his victimization in the context of the written word occurs after Geryon has reunited with Herakles. On a flight to Lima with

Herakles and his boyfriend Ancash, Geryon reads a novel he purchased in the Buenos Aires airport. Maybe it was a Freudian slip, but "[h]e had not realized until he found himself stranded in it high above the Andes / halfway to Lima that the novel he'd bought / . . . was pornographic" (118). He is estranged from his own desire, "furious with himself" for "be[ing] stirred by dull sentences like, / *Gladys slid a hand under her nightgown and began to caress her own thighs*" (118). One consequence of this "stirring" is that it arouses Herakles' attention, and he fellates Geryon while Ancash sleeps on. Irrational desire has placed Geryon again at the whim of Herakles, whose insensitivity and will to dominance have not abated over the years. It is "*Just like the old days*" they later agree, full of melancholy undertones (141). The narrative does not deny Geryon his "pleasure" during the encounter on the plane (119); therefore, the event is not simply an expression of Herakles' dominance. Nevertheless, the description of Geryon's moment of "pleasure" has two formal properties that support a more pessimistic reading. Full rhetorical emphasis gets placed on the phrase "Geryon gave himself up" by the caesura preceding it and the line break that follows (119). The enjambed "to pleasure" is subordinated because "Geryon gave himself up" suffices as an independent clause—submission does not always lead to pleasure, as Geryon knows all too well. What is most important about the encounter is that Geryon participates in the "Gladys" narrative—"He felt Herakles' hand move on his thigh"—against the stated wishes of his interior monologue (118). The narrative is careful to highlight through the title of the section ("Gladys") as well as the unattributed and emphatic last line, "Gladys!," that Geryon's interior reality has again been violated, this time by a psychoanalytically inflected re-vivifying of the Herakles storyline.

Text-based representation, whether in the form of a postcard, an autobiography, or an erotic novel, determines subjects by writing over their interior space in the code of the exterior world. It is only with the return to the "photographic essay" that Geryon generates an autobiography that most effectively balances the volatile link between interior and exterior worlds (60). Six of the last eight sections of *Red* are labelled as photographs. These photographs attest to the power of witnessing that is developed in the text's final instalments—a power strengthened through its association with local legend. Herakles, Geryon, and Ancash travel to Ancash's native Peru to record the sound of a volcano. Herakles and Ancash are including these recordings in their "*documentary / on Emily Dickinson*" (108). The recording process takes on added significance, and an added medium, when Ancash

sees Geryon's wings and identifies him as a "Yazcol Yazcamac" (128). "*These people*," Ancash explains to Geryon, "*saw the inside of the volcano*" (128, 129). According to the Jucu myth, as a reward for this witnessing, "*the Yazcamac return as red people with wings, / all their weaknesses burned away— / and their mortality*" (129). Ancash here provides Geryon with an empowering mythic identity and autobiographical purpose apart from his subordinate role in the classical Herakles story. Geryon eagerly assumes this new role, and begins photographing the journey into the mountains of Huaraz.

On the journey, the political unconscious of *Red* is mapped onto the landscape of Huaraz when Ancash informs Geryon that "*Nobody goes north of Lima / these days*" out of "*Fear*" (134). This "fear" is connected to Ancash's earlier locating of Huaraz as a hotbed of anti-governmental unrest when he tells the story of "*Guerrillas*" killing "*all the cats in Huaraz in one weekend*" in response to a television broadcast showing Peru's president "*with a cat / on his lap*" (123). Ancash's choice of the word "*Guerrillas*" communicates his sympathy with the anti-government forces which the president labels as "*terrorists*" (123). The distinction in labeling is not an innocent one. It shows that language simultaneously reinforces and reflects the binaries of political dialogue, imposing bifurcated visions of the proper functioning of reality. By contrast, Geryon's photographs of Huaraz portray a landscape unmediated by the limited range of signs associated with the Real of language and politics. Geryon's newly realized citizenship in Huaraz's indigenous population, a "Yazcol Yazcamac," thus takes on its full meaning— he expresses the autobiography of a subject not trapped in the discursive contest of linguistic and political symbolization. The key "[*q*]*uestion*" regarding photographs, as Herakles' grandmother says, "*is / how they use* [*silence*]—*given / the limits of the form*" (67). Geryon's photographic essay "silences" the noisy coding of assent and consent, commenting critically on the constricting complicity of linguistic and political horizons of the Self.

In *On Photography* (1977), Susan Sontag marks "the limits of the [image] form," which *Red*'s treatment of photography ultimately recognizes. Sontag writes that "images consume reality. Cameras are the antidote and the disease, a means of appropriating reality and a means of making it obsolete" (179). Unaccompanied by captioning or *Red*'s narrative, Geryon's photographic essay would efface the material significance of political struggle, rendering its "reality" "obsolete." However, the penultimate poem in *Red*, "Photographs: #1748," restores a significant supplementary task to the written word. Geryon fulfills his responsibilities as a witness and completes his autobiography by

photographing the interior of the volcano. The title of the poem, "#1748," and its last line, "'The Only Secret People Keep,'" invoke Dickinson in order to balance the reality of the photographic object, with the unreality of its subject matter, "Immortality" (145). As it is framed as "a photograph he never took," Carson suggests that photographic meaning cannot be fully accessed on its own, without the balance of text(s) (145). Remove language and individuals would "disappear" from the world, as Geryon feels himself doing when he "sp[ea]k[s] little" on the journey into Huaraz (135). Furthermore, without photography, "objects and subjects" risk being "delivered up to abstract manipulation" by a "structural code" that controls and consumes textual representation (Baudrillard 92). Taken together, text and photography challenge any act of settling on a single, stable meaning. Mediation occurs between representations, rather than being restricted to the coordinates of text or image and reality. Reexamined through a photograph, Dickinson's poem translates into the world it had scornfully populated with moralizing "*babbler*[*s*]" (22); after the photograph (of the) poem, Geryon's autobiography is completed with the image of him, Herakles, and Ancash wearing "immortality on their faces" (146). Writing and photography cooperate to confer and preserve immortality. In so doing, they convey how Carson fetishizes the loss of our power over the written word—naming its loss through the Baudrillerean resonances in the "once-upon-a-time" of Stesichoros' narrative, and disavowing this loss with her brilliant mobilization of words "*to do*," as Gertrude Stein declares in Carson's epigraph to the Stesichoros section, "*as they have to do*" (3).

Carson checks any inclination for a naive optimism about the capacity of writing to transcend the boundaries of reality in *Eros the Bittersweet* (1998), published in the same year as *Red*. She asserts that "[a] written text separates words from one another, separates words from the environment, separates words from the reader (or writer) and separates the reader (or writer) from his environment. Separation is painful" (50). Geryon's creative turn to photography as a medium for his autobiography suggests that capturing images can lessen the "pain" of this separation anxiety by re-orienting subject-object relations, making them more cooperative than antagonistic. The question of why *Red* is termed an "autobiography" lingers, despite the "shift" in attention from image production to the problematic of consumption that the allusion to Baudrillard effects. An undeniable playfulness shapes the autobiographical designation, as it comes from the same writer who opens her *Economy of the Unlost* with the declaration that

"[t]here is too much self in my writing" (vii). The label "autobiography" summons such excess, which is in tension with a narrative that confirms the hard work of representing any, let alone "too much," self. Above all, Carson's reference to Baudrillard anticipate Geryon's discovery of a more satisfying medium for self-expression, the photographic essay, in a world where words always seem to belong somewhere, or to someone, else.

NOTES

1 Rae discusses this multiplicity as part of an argument for "how Carson revises canonical narratives in order to allow the women's voices at the margins of her story to attain a place of prominence" (6). He expands on a point he makes in "'Dazzling Hybrids': The Poetry of Anne Carson" (2000), where, noting the build-up of allusions to Gertrude Stein and Emily Dickinson in *Red*, he writes that "Stesichoros looks on from the wings as the women's concealment drama takes centre stage . . . [and] finds himself listening silently to a duet of female voices, neither of which appears to command control" (37). By contrast, I argue that Stesichoros remains central and present on a theoretical level throughout the text.

2 *Mitwelt*, as first defined by Heidegger in his 1919-20 lectures at the University of Freiburg, refers to the "with-world, the people about one" (qtd. in Inwood 246).

3 Two recent articles on *Red* also take photography as their focus: Sophie Mayer's "Picture Theory: On Photographic Intimacy in Nicole Brossard and Anne Carson" (2008), and E.L. McCallum's "Toward a Photography of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*" (2007). My reading takes a different tack insofar as it interrogates the broader political function(s) served in putting classical scholarship, autobiographical text, and photographic image in dialogue.

4 The first line of the first postcard is "*Sie sind das was betreiben*," which according to John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson's *Being and Time* translation reads, "they *are* what they do" (Carson 82; Heidegger 163). The second postcard begins, "*Zum verlorenen Hören*" or "lost time" (Carson 83; Heidegger 316, emphasis in original). The third opens with a phrase from "What Is Metaphysics?," "*Die Angst offenbart das Nichts*," which D.F. Krell translates as "[t]he nothing reveals itself in anxiety" (Carson 85; Heidegger 104). Thank you to Anthony Enns for his assistance in translating these quotations and helping me to locate them in Heidegger.

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40 — Shaped My Voice

Shaped my melon baller love with a gurgle of blood like circling a square into origami cranes. In the sacred harp fasolah scale the English grammar is a penny whistle crossbred with a baritone sax *spherically* like a sledge hammer driving a square peg into perfect harmony. Into the patted fronds of a flute, Catherine stole my answer. My friend about to have surgery to remove one of her vocal chords may have something to do with shaping the ooohs and ahhhs watching spectacular fireworks displays around a telephone pole.

Paul Vermeersch, Joseph Brown, Warren Dean Fulton, Catherine Heard, Andrew Waldie Porteus, Brian Bartlett, Eric Richards, Kathleen Betts, Lesley Ball, Nicole Collins, Susan Shone, Neil Hennessy, Tom Cull

Sonnet L'Abbé

"Infiltrate as Cells"
The Biopolitically Ethical Subject
of *sybil unrest*

Rita Wong and Larissa Lai's book-length, collaborative poem *sybil unrest* is a witty, often trenchantly funny repartee on maintaining a resistant spirit in an environment of aggressive globalized consumerism. When they declare that their mission is to "[throw] the enlightenment individual 'i' into question and hopefully expose its ideological underpinnings," however, Wong and Lai demonstrate the seriousness of their project and their commitment to an activist, radical poetics in the avant-garde tradition. "Into this unstable subjectivity," they write, "we attempt to reinject questions of gender, race and class, as well as geography, power and hope" (127).[1] In their pursuit of a strategy of ethical (self)-representation, however, Wong and Lai creatively exceed their own critical framing of their work and produce a critique of "human" as *the* species and *the* identity category whose ideological underpinnings inform and are informed by Euro- and androcentric post-Enlightenment humanist values.

Lai and Wong's poem is a sharp critique of twenty-first century local-global scales of capital flow. Engaging specifically with the avant-garde strategy of using the lower-case "i" as a destabilized proxy for the lyric "I," Wong and Lai bring the techniques of avant-garde formalism and the sensibility of the transnational subject together in their project to "re-subject" (53) the "i," and provocatively propose the figure of the Asian female body as a more robust figure of humanist universality than, say, Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man.[2] This playful provocation is not quite a call to a representational *coup* (which might see a well-proportioned "Huaxian Woman" suddenly appear on the covers of anatomy textbooks

around the world), but an illumination of the cultural specificity of holisms underwriting discourses of species and interspecies interaction.

In this paper I read Wong and Lai's *sybil unrest* as contending that media depersonalizations of the flesh, spectacularized through images of particular raced and gendered bodies, are a refraction of the relation of capitalist discourse to living material. *sybil unrest* investigates "the personal" and "the multiple" at manifold scales of technoscientific and linguistic taxonomy, and interrogates the relationship of the lyric and humanist "I," the avant-garde resistant "i," and the collaborative "we" to other terms that delineate holisms of living form, such as "the cell," "the organism," and "the human," holisms which they then fold back into marked terms like "she" or "Asian." Wong and Lai start from a shared ethical vision in different literary discourses and build toward the "defiant drag" of their cell-level politics (126). By seeing the dynamics that socially construct subject-object relations inherent in constructions of the boundary of organism vis-à-vis organic and inorganic "material," I argue, Wong and Lai destabilize the frame of the "human" as containing a single self, or single organic unit. They ask how the human organism survives despite being relentlessly "organized" into capitalist systems by language and other media in a race-, class-, and gender-inflected late-capitalist geopolitical landscape.

Cumulatively, *sybil unrest* proposes political action and resistance as occurring at the moments where the subject literally composes herself—nutritionally, affectively, and narratively—as living material, functionally interdependent on and with all other living material on the planet. In *sybil unrest* Wong and Lai suggest that human relation needs to be thought at the scale of intracellular relation, and that collaborative poetry stages this human relation as energaeic flow between bodies and text, resisting conceptual closure around the terms organic and inorganic.

"i" resurrect "oui": communities behind the "i" as a Wong-Lai joint

"This poem began in renga spirit," Wong and Lai tell us, referring to the ancient genre of Japanese poetry in which two or more poets contribute stanzas to a sequence of "linked verses" (127). Inspired by a collaborative piece the authors encountered at a Kootenay School of Writing event in 2003, *sybil unrest* is a "back and forth conversation conducted by email over the course of several months" (127). This "conversation" develops the authors' shared response to witnessing, over international news broadcasts in Hong Kong, the catalytic beginnings of both the SARS crisis[3] and the American

invasions of Iraq. But the book is not simply a conversation between two writers; it is a conversation between conversations—particularly between the question of voice and formal innovation in avant-garde poetics and the question of voice and the political audibility of the subaltern. I will sketch out *sybil unrest*'s location amidst these discourses before pursuing the analysis of how the book's take on subjectivity advances them both.

A reader might assume that the page breaks in *sybil unrest* indicate where one author's voice ends and another's begins, but the text offers no confirmation. Some stylistic choices stay constant across the page divides, like the critically astute, yet irreverent and paronomastic tone:

> overdetermined and overseen
> seer sucker
> the unstitched garment puckers
> the subaltern cannot peek
> . . . .
> her futures gambled on the casino market
> stuck in the loop o
> stealth martins, lockheed dupes
> bombard e-bay
> trickle down eco-anomie (10-11)

The form of *sybil unrest* is a "unified dialogue" where the "voice" of the poem is imaginatively dispersed across two authorial bodies, a strategy which raises the question of where boundaries of voice, identity, and authorship lie. The extended to-and-fro meditation blends the "cyborg poetics"—addressing discourses of technology, citizenship, reproduction, biopower, and global capitalism—for which Lai is known, and the "ecopoetics"—connecting issues of land and water use, First Nations political representation, environmentalism and linguistic and cultural alliance—for which Wong is recognized. I hesitate to parse the distinct preoccupations of each author, as I don't wish to suggest that either author's earlier work "lacked" an appreciation for the "other" concerns I tag to each respective name. My hope is to demonstrate that in its skepticism about the integrity of the "I," *sybil unrest* embodies not simply a dialogue between two subjects or sets of discourses, but is a simultaneously occupied space in which *audiences* that might have understood themselves or their spaces of reception as distinct (say, sci-fi readers and eco-critics) might recognize themselves in the company of unexpected fellow readers.

With its "collaborative, conversational values and a patience for duration," the book enacts what Joan Retallack calls a "poethics," an approach to innovation in poetics that "recognizes the degree to which the chaos of

world history, of all complex systems, makes it imperative that we move away from models of cultural and political agency lodged in isolated heroic acts and simplistic notions of cause and effect" (3). Wong and Lai join a number of Canadian and American poets, including M. NourbeSe Philip, Myung Mi Kim, and Harryette Mullen, in extending the avant-garde tradition by using its formal strategies to advance a feminist and resistantly racialized politics, and like these women, find their concerns often overlapping with those largely feminist-identified poets, including Rachel Zolf, Sina Queyras, Jena Osman, and Juliana Spahr, whose formal innovations and investigative poetics engage critically with this century's networked structures of power, economics, and politics.

Wong and Lai's work also follows the feminist collaborations of the previous generation of Vancouver poets like Betsy Warland and Daphne Marlatt, who once perplexed critics with "the fact that [their] individual authorships are not clearly marked in the text" (qtd. in Mix 293). Like Warland and Marlatt's, Lai and Wong's collaborative writing "subverts other cultural constructs of self and other, inside and outside" and "by occupying this in-between space, is inherently political, calling attention to the processes of marginalization and canonization" (Mix 293).

Lai and Wong are further deeply informed by Roy Miki's important interrogation of how to practise effective literary and political agency when working to have a voice within institutions and media networks that are themselves "sites for domestication and normalization" of the challenge to homogenizing political systems and aesthetic norms (118-19). Lai and Wong's "attempt" is a practice of Miki's concept of "Asiancy," which called for "a critical methodology . . . that can articulate difference in such a way that the very notion of 'otherness,' which Western thought has used to centralize 'selfness' as source, hierarchically prior, becomes obsolete as a way of defining people and culture" (123). Wong and Lai's poetic grappling is a critical grappling with how such agency functions when practiced by women who have secured some position and influence within these systems and institutions. One of *sybil unrest*'s secondary questions is "[h]ow is 'Asiancy' different in this moment than it was a decade ago?" (Lai, "Labour" 164).

Expounding their own collaborative ethics, Marlatt and Warland declared that "action, political action, calls for a sense of 'we'" (qtd. in Mix 295). A generation later, Wong and Lai declare: "'We' gesture to how the personal sparks this dialogue" (127). "They" put scare quotes around their "we" to mark their hesitation to employ the usual pronoun for the deindividualized,

dialogic process of their poetic and human interaction. Wong and Lai are, *après* Miki, looking for something beyond the redress of racist disenfranchisement within a national politics or for inclusion in the Canadian Anglocentric canon. Ambitiously, they play at "redressing" the very flesh of the body, by pointing to the cultural tailorings of that body's "selfness" and "humanness," and suggest that the conceptual deunification of "the self" that has been, in many ways, the triumph of postcolonial theory and avant-garde literary practices, might be brought to bear on the category of the biological human.

By beginning with a quest to "expose the ideological underpinnings [of] an enlightenment 'i'" (127), Wong and Lai take up one of the main aims of the poetic avant-garde[4] and engage with Roy Miki at the moment of his textual question: "am 'I' the subject of this sentence? Or am 'i' sentenced by its historicity?" (200). Lai and Wong's conversation enacts an ethical singularity, a pair of "i's" testing out the politics of saying "we" and a "we" reflecting on the conditions of its coming-into-being. Miki, following Judith Butler, reminds us that both an unproblematized "I" and an "i" articulated through the discourses of postcolonial theory or avant-garde aesthetic are each expressions of a discursive limit that "precedes and conditions" the "subject," and that "the limit is never static and inflexible but always 'subject to' reinscriptions that disturb and transfigure the social relations of power" (200).

The heart of Wong and Lai's project is a staging of that subjectivity and an attempt to intervene in those social relations. They take their turn at confronting the "profound complications posed by creative and critical methodologies that attempt to encounter and represent subjectivity," while keeping in mind Gayatri Spivak's exhortation to subjects to establish an "ethical singularity" with the fellow subjectivities one encounters and enter an ethical relation involving both "responsibility and accountability" (Miki 199).

> Bell tolls in thrall
> It rings for 'we'
> Our i's make a circle
> · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
> Subject flourishes
> A 'they who can't see'
> By the dawn's early light (81)[5]

Wong and Lai use recognizable strategies of "unmarked" avant-garde poetic movements, that is, strategies developed through poetic discourses that theorize subjectivity without attention to the human subject's uninterruptable performance of race and gender. They use formal approaches like a disjointed

"projective" sensibility in line and breath, intertextual collage, and a fragmented, documentary-style reportage in their own grappling with relations of subjectivity, language, and power. The aim of the avant-garde has never been to absolutely negate the subject, as Mario Moroni has written, but to change the way subjects perceive themselves and others: "One may say that the avant-garde questioned Western subject-centred reason, but not to criticize it abstractly as a philosophical notion, rather in order to transform it constructively, in the prospect of a socio-anthropological change from idealistic self-assured reason to intersubjective reason" (4-5). Wong and Lai's successful simultaneous development of two threads of engagement with the terms of Enlightenment subjectivity, the broadly postcolonial and the formalist avant-garde, one marked "formally resistant" and another marked "formally innovative," suggests the possibility of a compatible vision of ethical relation stemming from both, despite the deeply differing politics of language informing Moroni's unmarked "intersubjective reason" and Spivak's "ethical singularity."

Looking for "we" in a "*recovery of our collective / cyborg consciousness*"
The ethical and conceptual productivity of *sybil unrest* emerges from the intertwining of two personal reactions to the explosive global spread of both military violence and the SARS virus. If Lai reacts in line with her penchant for investigating the far limits of the subject and its agency, and Wong reacts in keeping with her deep curiosity around how subjects share the experience of subjectification,[6] their multiple, restless subject emerges amidst their shared perspectives on the body as a kind of limit-space moving through the borders of the militarized and globally corporatized world. Whether we track Wong's lookout for the natural, which she discovers is everywhere and nowhere, sprouting forms like genetically-modified crops, mutated fish, and telecommunicative blackberries, or Lai's personal disinclination to abandon identity politics completely in her taking up positions in racially unmarked discussions of writing and technocorporeal interface, their conversation makes visible a constructed, yet unmappable boundary between categories of organic or natural material and technoscientific product. Lai and Wong talk themselves into a linguistic jam, a communications snarl, somewhat similar to where Donna Haraway found herself when she tried to "tell" her social reality and the reality of women's experience in the late twentieth century and found she needed an ironic fiction, the non-myth of the cyborg, to reproduce her reality as an idea. Haraway remarks:

> In the traditions of "Western" science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. (*Cyborgs* 150)

The textual "i's" in *sybil unrest* flicker in and out of understanding their own selves/bodies/"i's" as cyborgs and as commodities. Like Haraway, Wong and Lai understand imaginative freedoms and possibilities for reproducing both bodies and idea(l)s to be at stake in the relation between organism and machine, or put another way, between natural and technoscientific, and want to dream of a relation between these concepts other than the usual border struggle.

> nerves want a happy ending
> organism organizes
> orgasmic orangutangs
> dreamt the experiment was a just a dream
> dreamt i was a butterfly drowned in butter
> dreamt i was man
> codes switched
> helix froze over
> i dream of genes (12)

Their "i" is an "organism [that] organizes," a dreaming orangutan, wondering where the boundaries of her own policing must lie in order keep the possibilities for her own material survival and material influence alive. What is at stake in thinking of oneself as an organism, or as an orangutan, or as a human? What language is there for understanding ourselves as organisms other than species discourse—or religion—to differentiate the human organism from other organisms? Suddenly the border war shifts to a front that seems to have less to do with technology than with taxonomy, one that seems to invoke the very mythic, ontological act of naming: the borders, perhaps enacted by nothing more powerful than The Word, between conceptualizing the human as a form and "other" living beings as forms.

In her 2004 essay "Future Asians: Migrant Speculations, Repressed History and Cyborg Hope," Lai describes the problem of trying to grasp the complexities of politics and of the relation of the subject to "the international capitalist new world order" as similar to the plight of the blind men in the familiar story, who try to know an elephant, when each man can only reach out and touch one distinct part of its anatomy, and that "there's the added handicap of looking through the eyepiece of a video camera, in the sense that everything we perceive is what the mass media gives us" (170).

sybil unrest takes up the challenge of not only representing but also "unsettling" that elephant. The "i"-as-organism, who might be the "i"-as-Asian, is considered against the backdrop of "the influx of Asian capital, goods and populations into the urban core of Canadian cities" while also pushing to "consider the flow of capital, goods and populations marked 'Asian' within a larger geopolitical context." By so doing, the "i's" boundaries, that is, the boundaries of personal identity, are illuminated as motivated by the same self-organizing, incorporating interests as national borders, which themselves function like "membrane[s] that [are] sometimes shamelessly porous, and at other times viciously and unfairly impermeable" (219).

The outcome of their experiment brings the subject into relief against a world order envisioned through a posthumanist lens. Wong and Lai's vision of power relations, and of the multiple scales—ranging from global to cellular—at which state power is enacted, is informed by the Foucauldian idea of biopower, which sees hegemonic or state interest intervening in the lives of subjects at the level of their familial and sexual relations and their access to the means to life (including food, clean water, or medical treatment). Following posthumanist theorists like Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Giorgio Agamben, Wong and Lai poetically theorize the politics by which the biopolitically self-aware subject can stage resistance and move into more ethical and productive intersubjective relation. They do so by staging an "i"-aware, intersubjective response to their perception of global movements of virus and violence, a perception mediated through the privately-owned, segmented space of mass-media narrative.

"i'm f---'d / i'm loving it": the ambivalently multiple subject of Wong and Lai's *i-topia*

Lai and Wong embrace the avant-garde technique of collage, including bits of text from a broad spectrum of cultural production, to represent the subject's perceptual relation to word and form: "Phrases and rhythms, sometimes skewed, float in and out of *sybil unrest* from many places" (127). Sound bytes and memes culled from such diverse sources as Chuang Tze, The Rolling Stones, Roy Orbison, Judith Butler, Northrop Frye, and from nursery rhymes and commercial jingles, are selected, sometimes modified, and woven into the stream of dialogue:

> I cry and I try and I cry and I try
> I can't get no truce
> But don't get stuck in sad inaction
> . . . .

Love the spin you're in
Anything you want
You've caught it (90-91)

The fragmentary aesthetic of collage works in a tradition of avant-garde leftism that values a democracy of literary reference points, originating anywhere on the spectrum from "low" to "high" culture. This strategy traditionally addresses its readership as a broad collectivity, an anti-elitist but literate "we," hailed as such by the breadth of cultural discourses in which the reader is invited and assumed to participate. Against this collectivizing formal gesture, Wong and Lai's ambivalent semantic "we" signals the crisis of strategies of belonging in a shifting media and political landscape in which corporated, technologized interfaces mediate social network formation and participation.

In *sybil unrest*, the string of textual fragments mimics the fragmented nature of narrativized subjectivities and is a refusal to produce the effect of a singular and knowable authorial univocality. It also formally signals the logic of deunification, of action on the body at multiple scales, by which corporate and state communications in late capitalism exert a biopower over subjects.[7] Wong and Lai hesitate to invoke the term over which both Obama ("Yes We Can") and the Kielburgers ("From Me to We") have effectively established a kind of brand dominion. A majority of media consumers have already been exposed to and brought into relation with these "we's." Wong and Lai's readership and non-readership have already been addressed into a collectivity, and the use of collage in this context reframes the technique as a savvy mimesis of the barrage of fragmented, interpellative textuality (one could read *sybil unrest* as an aggregation of tweetable intelligences) through which twenty-first-century media literacy and subjectivity emerge.

Wong and Lai nonetheless resist one ideal of collage and fragmentary poetics. By bringing poetic language onto the same page as language from advertising, political theory, scientific, and historical discourses, they are not levelling all utterance to a fully "democratized" state of relation. For Wong and Lai, there is still a political, or at least ethical, primacy to the personal: "'We' gesture to how the personal sparks this dialogue," they insist (127). Lai and Wong are sensitive to the violence, neutralization, or augmentation of political significance that de- or re-contextualizing fragments of text can engender, especially when divorcing or devaluing writing from its personal contexts. "I found the notion of the death of the author particularly annoying," Lai has written, "as it seemed to be widely in play at precisely

the moment many marginalized people were finally beginning to find their voice" ("Future Asians"). Wong has noted, commenting on her own practice of incorporating fragments of different texts into her work, that it is important to think "about the power differentials between writers and texts," so that "we can draw a line between what is appropriation and quoting" (qtd. in Eichhorn and Milne 347).

The fragmentary strategy allows the personal "i" to alight in the text as inattributable to any particular person, or even, necessarily, to human form, while "i" still remains indicative of a state of consciousness and spatiotemporal uniqueness that expresses itself as such. Other subjects of the sentence fragment modify verbs as though they themselves were "subjects" (for example: "nerves want a happy ending" (12), "we wave our fronds" (18), "ruptured cell cooperates" (106), and "every environ atoms its national interest" [110]). Personified and sitting in sufficiently similar fragmented syntaxes and lateral associations to the "i's" of *sybil unrest,* organisms and organs are "fragments" of the body and of the environmental whole that act with a stimulus/response agency mirroring, and metonymic of, the encounter of the human subject with her environment.

Moroni might describe the text's resistance to a default human-to-object relation in its subject-to-object syntaxes as "simultaneism" or an Apollinarian "orphism." This resistance codes a proposed position of the subject in respect to the sphere of external objects in the tradition of the avant-garde:

> The presence of the subject—or in the case of written texts, of the poetic "I"—at the moment of naming the object, is characterized neither by a sense of self assurance and centrality, nor by a total dependence on a chain of signifiers, which would leave no room for an understanding of the object itself. The subject becomes, rather, "pluralized,"—one may also say "dynamically multiplied" in many points of view which, all at the same time, approach the object. (7)

Lai and Wong, ever aware of power relations, use simultaneism to divest their observed objects and subjects, including gender and racial markers, from naturalized perceptions of intersubjectivity shaped by syntax. The point is not to restage the relationship between two words and their setting-in-relation by language as completely arbitrary, or call for a syntactical radical anarchy, but to perform the relation both as dynamic and obviously ideologically structured. What is the relation of "i" to another "i" in this economy when the "I" is but "a tissue a tissue [and] we all fall / for the dollar" (67)?

The subject-object relation is for Lai and Wong an assertion, in constant potentiality for reassertion and reification. This dynamic is, on another

level, their statement around poetic form and politics: as key poetic and political social formations are in constant flux, poetic form and the potential for political subversion are themselves in a relation in constant need of reassertion and reconstruction. Further, Wong and Lai suggest that the multiplicity of the subject in the context of capitalist consumerism is a multiplicity of moments of subjectification/identification constituted by encounters with things and brands as much as with other people.

> hailed wonder of being several
> while she goes on dispensing
> business-as-usual
> another she sits
> in silent mourning
> another she
> actively seeks distraction (58)

"i'm fido," (55) says someone speaking of mobility, "i joy my fake id," (34) says another. And elsewhere: "bulls and purses blink an i" (11). The flickering "i" arises in moments of ambivalent acceptance of the points of agency within a system of capital flows impossible to escape: to purchase, or to resist purchasing? That is the question. Or, in other words, "if you don't play, you're still playing" (112).

One man's "⟶" is another man's "i": the avant-garde subject as globalized consciousness

This mass-media mishmash of information and capital flows, pulsing through superconductors and capillaries, is Wong and Lai's *now*, "reconstituted," as Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy called for, "into rhizomatic formations that embrace difference" (26). Butling and Rudy's use of the term rhizomatic invokes the call of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to dehierarchize our psychological and linguistic models of intersubjective relations. Much of Wong and Lai's strategy can be understood as rhizomatic, building "transversal communications between different lines [which] scramble the genealogical trees" (Deleuze and Guattari 12). One of the "trees" they scramble is the rooting of power in networks of Western European white male bodies, exposing that structure of thinking as "a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier or a corresponding subjectification" (Deleuze and Guattari 9).

In *sybil unrest*, easy alignments of racialization with identification, or marginalization, are knotted and tangled as articulations of racialized and gendered experience inform declarations of power and engagement—as

well as disaffection—within a global economy. Here Asian "girls" are both silenced images and "the one who speaks" (124). Here subalterns "yowl against catcallers," and though they dwell "in the prison house of language" (116), they nonetheless "love the spin [they're] in" (90). Wong and Lai move us through assertions ranging from full-on anti-capitalist tirade to ironic admissions that "our beloved amazon / gushes effusive / i'm loving it," in a space where "goddesses sign in triplicate / the pleasures of being multiple" (57).

Charles Bernstein has famously written that

> the problems of group affiliation (the neolyric 'we') pose as much of a problem for poetry as do assertions of Individual Voice. If poems can't speak directly for an author, neither can they speak directly for a group . . . Each poem speaks not only many voices but many groups and poetry can investigate the construction of these provisional entities in and through and by language. If individual identity is a false front, group identity is a false fort. (8-9)

What for Bernstein is a question of aesthetics and a critique of "authenticity" is for Wong and Lai further complicated by the challenge of producing work that acknowledges the material consequences of marginalization from these "false forts" without being accused of constructing new ones:

> this little piggy loves the free market economy
> in the guise of democracy
> cries we we we
> all the way to the bank (16)

Exposing the same "we" that describes the collaborative movement of *sybil unrest* as a term masking individualist profit agendas under a common sign, Lai and Wong confront the provisionality of collective identity that Bernstein identifies as a problem too easily solved by the brand-loyalty logic of late capitalism. *sybil unrest* suggests that amid shifting post-9/11 geopolitics, ethno-nationalist identities are commodities of shifting value, marketable and wearable as signs of moment-to-moment big brand affiliation. The lower-case "i" becomes the mark of the "individual" wired-in consumer when that upstart (start-up?), anti-proprietary glyph gets "bought out" by big multinational re-presentation.

Further, Lai and Wong's engagement with Hong Kong as consumerist landscape expands the "larger geopolitical context"—the "we" in which avant-garde investigation of the "I" locates itself. Lai and Wong's attention to the circulation of Asian and female images and labour in a global economy and in the Western imaginary demonstrates their awareness of inhabiting positions of simultaneous social privilege and dislocation. They reintroduce

into the avant-garde imaginary the imaginary of a post-unification Hong Kong, signalled by the 一, 二, and 三 that mark the three-part organizing structure of *sybil unrest*.

This gesture in geopolitical context radically reorients the terms of power and subjectification subsumed in the history of deployment and rejection of the "I." Suddenly, the avant-garde's anti-"I" idealization of "self-presence under erasure" is revealed as the position always already assumed by the linguistic outsider, the ironic position inhabited by a robust global multiplicity of subjects misread by a culturally "self"-centred aesthetic. The oppositional vector of Wong and Lai's art aims itself not simply at Canadian or American centres of cultural or identity production, but more forcefully at the multilingual discourses of capital flow, including the community of readers for whom 一, 二, 三 are basic marks of meaning.[8] At this historical moment, that community, that consumer and labour force of a billion-plus bodies is anything but politically marginal.

The lower-case "i" still appears in *sybil unrest* as a self-diminutizing gesture in sympathy with working-class and radical poets of the 1960s who decapitalized the Eurocentric humanist "I" and rejected the Romantic, individualist poetic genius. But in the geopolitical space articulated by the poem, this diminution also camouflages the viral potentialities of this little "i's" enthusiasms, the threat of its social connectedness, undetectable or at least unregulated by media of mass visibility, and the self-awareness of this "i" as itself a node in an "iconomic" (13) system. Suddenly, to hold 一, 二, 三 at ninety degrees is to see the capital potential of an aggregation of ｜ ｜｜ ｜｜｜'s. Suddenly the ideological underpinnings of the humanist "I" are the ideological underpinnings of an English-language "｜" which must be theorized in another orthography, iconography, and grammar entirely. Suddenly, any language-based critique of global capitalism that confines itself to an English-language episteme must acknowledge its own limitations in addressing, either conceptually or affectively, the transnational and translingual space of the postmodern subject and its art.

Wong and Lai foreground the gendered, sexualized subject in the rhizomatic media saturation of *sybil unrest*'s now and produce an intense, affective reader engagement without deploying a strategy of personal narrative—there is no one "voice" to sympathize with—yet they still point to the individual, perceptive presence in each body. *sybil unrest* understands the indistinguishable logics of domination and commodification that operate on and through bodies, logics that constrict or compel the movement of wage slaves, migrant labourers, sex workers, factory workers, and domestic labourers alike.

"More than bodies arrive": "redressing" the human(ist) subject as mark(et)ed anatomy

sybil unrest's formal strategy, enacting such clear allegiance to the forms of avant-garde practice, allow Wong and Lai to place the Asian female's "marketed anatomy" (43) into a discourse already historically supportive of working-class resistance to an elite class. In solidarity with such movements, Lai and Wong expose the "sadomarketism" (11) of the global economy by considering the ideological work borne by the figure of the Asian female. She is both "mistress masters secret sex" (8) and the "napalm naked" (125) icon of suffering, submission, and infantilization (especially as rendered in Nick Ut's Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of Phan Ti Kim Phuc). Lai and Wong locate the authorship of these images not in the abstract space of ideology but in the legal person of a corporation: "Dow [who] sold napalm [and] bought union carbide . . . belongs to these icons," they write (125).

Wong and Lai expose the "marks" of Asianness or femaleness as relations to a Western individualist ideal, but in response they neither work to modify avant-garde poetic form to reconstruct this relation, nor decry the centring of that ideal on a Western male body. Rather they model, through syntax and semantics, the refraction of logics of objectification and commodification that operate on and through vulnerable bodies of all races and genders through multiple nodes of global power. Co-opting the humanist logic by which one body stands in for the human, the "unmarked" body of *sybil unrest*'s now is the mark(et)ed body, signalled by "girl" and "she" as much as by "i," and stands in for multiple subjectivities aiming for agency in the global economy:

> from TSE to BSE
> the bull market
> surrounds
> her tender lips . . .
> vengeance
> of the dispossessed
> flash angry breasts
> fossil fuels erotic offer
> venous on the half shell (92)

The mark(et)ed body performs a work supplementary to the agential productivity channelled into alienated labour; the mark(et)ed body constrains its own energies into a presentation of being available for another's consumption; of a non-resistance that verges on strategic submission: "what [else]'s a girl to do?" (92). The lower-case "i" here signals both the self-demotion from consumer to consumed and the non-resistance, the "flash [of] angry breasts"

that seeks to accrue capital through self-styling as a luxury commodity. The shrewd subject survives by a bringing a performance of "I"-lessness to market forces, in a kind of auto-fetishization that cultivates a pose of goddess-like unattainability and self-as-consumable delicacy.

This survival tactic is not the reasoned surrender of a self-interested agency to the greater self-interest of cooperation and incorporation, or a humanist ethic of selflessness, by which "I" sacrifice an economically productive agency to an agency of service. The mark(et)ed anatomy is the body identifying as *contained* by the boundary constructed as "personal" within the discourse of "human capital," that is *suppressed* through the term personal by a discourse that wants "the labour without the body" (20). It is the body and network of dependencies that produce, but do not appear on, a resumé; it is history that enters systems of capitalist information flow as medical data; it is the body and network of dependencies that produce the particular relation of language to human body called literature.

An epigraph from Rachel Zolf's *Human Resources*, lifted from the *Harvard Business Review*, reads as follows: "Because literature concerns itself with the ambiguities of the human condition, it stands as a threat to the vitality of the business executive, who must at all times maintain a bias toward action" (3). The language suggests the "super-human" status that executives enjoy within the late-capitalist economy, *the* dominant status in the economy of sado-marketism that is vitally threatened by a self-consciousness of their inclusion within the full breadth of the human taxon. The body that knows itself to be conduit of and consumed by the system through which "anger markets man-agement to white collars" (59), whether that "white collared" body be a racially white male or Asian female; the body that maintains an identity informed by literature's dual interest in demythologizing (capitalist) fictions of the ideal self and reminding "how the personal sparks . . . dialogue" (127): this is a body in the space that capitalist resource discourse resentfully marks "human."

For Wong and Lai, the "human" is a place imagined through the cladistic logic of biological taxonomy and is yet somehow beyond and constituent of the cladistic logic of corporate organizational structure. These are tree logics whose branches they snap and reorganize through their paronomastic play into new, Deleuzian "lines of segmentarity" (for example, the semantic units of their conversation) and "lines of deterritorialization" where units like "she" become aggregates of cells, or organs, or entry points for viruses. Lai and Wong remind us that evolutionary species discourse in the capitalist communications machine is variously deployed by cultural, genealogical,

and teleological narratives supporting capitalist economic values. Whether as a "tree of life" constructing "human" as its highest-reaching branch, or tree of Darwinian survivalism, in the elimination match of species, the "human" has been constructed as top competitor. For Wong and Lai, the "top of the food chain" is an obsolete ideological construct of centralized power to be exposed and critiqued, a fictional position in a naturalized narrative of transcendence and domination.

"Immunoglobin's internal rehearsal mirrors / external encounter": letting it all say "I"

"i think therefore i ham," wisecracks Wong and Lai's minx (83), but her laughter "spills hunger greater than the sum of its larks" when the real practices of sexualization and objectification of the human in late-capitalist economies are considered. Cognizant of the problems of a poetics of giving voice as Bernstein described them, Wong and Lai choose to grant a posthumanist awareness to their flirtatious subject, to the mark(et)ed anatomy behind the "glossy crotchshot" (43). She is human and a (non- or species-) human: at once both Descartes' thinker and a wry, punning observer aware that she is yet, from many angles, just a piece of meat.

In the final pages of the third section of *sybil unrest*, which builds toward its end with a rising, symphonic tension, Lai and Wong make a decisive move around the question of subjectivity and voice:

> the one who speaks is not the girl in the picture she is
> every fish the acid river coughs up every eater of fish every arsenic atom pulsing or
> poisoning every breath you take . . . every mushroom . . . every mycorhizzal
> mat . . . every every (124)

"Fragmentation" already describes both the strategic diffusion of global flows of biopower, and the sense of dislocation and dispersal of loci of capitalist coercion on and through the body that Lai has developed in her work (Lee 94). By locating speech and a kind of human/ist wholeness, or unified voice, (the newly repersonalized "i") in the mark(et)ed body, *sybil unrest* ironically disperses that wholeness through an already dis-organized terrain, through a human body that in late-capitalist logic is already nothing but organs and cells and muscles and breasts and genes.

Wong and Lai's "i" is this dispersed "I," an agency distributed at a cell level through the body of the "human," which exists in a *now* where there is "no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism" (Haraway, *Cyborgs* 178). The "i" leaks out into the machines

the body uses, leaks out into the water that passes through the body, into the flesh that moves from animal to human, and to excrement in the same digestive operation. When the mark(et)ed body speaks, the organism speaks, organs speak, flesh speaks. When flesh speaks, meat speaks. When meat speaks, grass and hay and water speak. The global economy of *sybil unrest* is the global ecology. The human in this configuration is a "nervous organism" (44) in "collective forms sentient incident" (104) that is the *now*. Human is but a biological long now, or as Jeff Derksen might put it, "a long moment" (4), a temporality, an evolutionary radiation "from minuscule origins / to mysterious ends" (Wong and Lai 95).

By suggesting that the figure of an Asian female can stand for the unmarked "human," and by suggesting an equivalence in the relation of unmarked-to-marked and humanist-to-nonhuman, Wong and Lai's conversation in *sybil unrest* exposes the power politics at the heart of constructions of species identity. The question remains of how a human identity naturalized not as species dominance or evolutionary telos but as a particular form of "i" can inform an ethics of individuated experience and interaction.

Wong and Lai's strategy involves thinking through intersubjectivity at the level of the sensorial boundary of individuality and asking where then to draw the smudged lines that suggest the ecotones of subjectivity. When a host of organisms and organic units, some of which constitute part of the human organism, are given "subject status" in the sentence, what might be read as "mere" poetic anthropomorphism becomes a syntactical manoeuvre that snarls and folds the limits of anthropos into an incogitable tangle that nonetheless aims toward a good:

> condensation nuclei
> defy the odds
> and even the temper's blows (95)
>
> generations to instant message the future cell by cell
> microbe by mycelia, vertebra by xylem
> zygote by eukaryote, carapace
> by axial stalk
> critical mass
> amends (119)

Cells and nerves, viruses and pheromones, mycelia and mitochondria are all agents of the hope and defiance—the immunoresistance—of this poem. Healing potential lies in the possibility of spontaneous transmutations, meioses, and metamorphoses.

The human subject imagined in *sybil unrest*, inhabiting a fragmented set of socioeconomic and identity positions, is "radically multiple" and "deeply enigmatic even to herself. . . . A population inhabits [her] consciousness . . . composed of the 'folds' Deleuze describes in every body. . . . [I]nfinitely porous, spongy or [having] a cavernous texture without emptiness," this subject still experiences singularity through her own "steady and indifferent pulse" (Craig 3). Philosopher Megan Craig, in her study of the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas and William James, turns to Deleuze to describe the psyche of the Levinasian ethical subject who "finds herself inherently plural and entangled in a multifaceted world" (3). While tracing Craig's full reading of Levinas' ethical subject and its parallels to Wong and Lai's subject is beyond the scope of this paper, I share Craig's sense that a Deleuzian model of porousness is useful for imagining the subject of *sybil unrest,* created wholly through its intersubjectivity. Like Juliana Spahr's "everyone with lungs," Wong and Lai's subject breathes in and breathes out, has pores, and is "under subjection to everything, as a supporting everything and supporting the whole" (Craig 15).

Of course, Deleuze is not describing a human subject, but rather "the pleats of matter" in *The Fold.* By affirming the cellular composition of the mark(et)ed anatomy that stands as their model of subjectivity, Wong and Lai affirm both the multiplicity and fluidity of the subject's sociopolitical identity and the subject's porousness *at the level of matter*, of the microbiota, of cell membrane and the boundary of organism/environment—that is, at a biopolitical level.

The "weft of soul's fabric / absorbs chemical affect" (96), they write. For Lai, the biopolitical is the set of economies existing at superscales and subscales to the level of consciousness that says "i," where "free flowing capital under a neoliberal agenda mobilizes populations and politics as statistical entities to be manipulated, bypassing the 'individual' of enlightenment humanism at both macro (population) and micro (medical and biological manipulations such as organ donation, genome mapping, genetic engineering) scales" (Lai, "Community" 116). In the biopolitical sphere, the time scales of political action shift from the scales of party or nationalist politics, as each moment of consumer decision-making opens onto the long tails (the micro long moments) of biochemical processes triggered in the body and the cumulative, discrete witness of invisible data aggregators.

This subject's intersubjectivity occurs not only between human bodies but also between forms and identities sharing the space of her own body, as "she" relates to "her" antibodies and antigens, "her" emotions and

thought processes, negotiating tensions of hunger and restraint, impulse and counterimpulse. "Her" proprioceptive agency, "her" ability to perceive and respond to "her" population of cells, takes place in an environment of competition to own control of her desires. "[T]he personal is maniacal wants breakfast at the pump" (110), if "she" allows her "self" to say yes to that manufactured desire. The personal is the process of negotiating permeable, multiple boundaries through which substances and ideas pass, are allowed to pass, and are obstructed from passing into and out of cell and feeling structures. The ethical personal is the sense of individuation this negotiation engenders in the cell and feeling structure called "human."

In this model, *sybil unrest*'s dialogue/text, produced through digital and print media and vocal exchange, is a Spivakian ethical singularity and Deleuzian nomadic singularity, an overall back-and-forth movement of flows and free intensities between and through mark(et)ed bodies. "How the personal sparks dialogue" (127) is not simply a question of identity articulating its participation in a collective politics but the species-level, call-and-response dynamic of a singularity experiencing itself individuated over two points in (shared) space. Two sets of similar proprioceptive reactions to external events, the catalyst of shared response, and a choice made in "renga spirit" sets this flow in motion. The bounding off of what, at the level of cell and energy is like both birdsong and the spontaneous production of good weather, *sybil unrest*'s occurrence happens at the littoral zone of Wong and Lai's interaction. The book is an ecotone of "them," a mutual semination, a shared "infiltration as cells," where:

<div style="text-align:right">cell culture's defiant drag</div>

<div style="text-align:center">modifies mitochondria</div>

joy ride to synthetic natural

<div style="text-align:right">parachute catches air to hold human aloft (126)</div>

NOTES

1 The writers' framing of their "attempt" as merely a "reinjection" of racialized and gendered terms into the avant-garde critique of subjecthood under late capitalism risks limiting critical reception of *sybil unrest*. It is tempting to be guided by their framing, but Wong and Lai "reinject" nothing that ever was, in the first place, extricable from a frame of analysis unwilling to divorce the subject from its materiality.

2 Donna Haraway calls the Vitruvian Man the "Man of Perfect Proportions . . . a figure that has come to mean Renaissance humanism; to mean modernity; to mean the generative tie of art, science, technology, genius, progress and money. I cannot count the number of times

[he has] appeared in the conference brochures for genomics meetings or advertisements for molecular biological instruments or lab reagents in the 1990s" (*Species* 7).

3 News of an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory System (SARS) first hit Canada in early March 2003. For analyses of how the popular media's representation of the risk of pandemic and its geographic origins contributed to the racist backlash experienced by Chinese and other East- and Southeast-Asian communities, see articles by Leung; Ali; and Kinsella.

4 For a helpful summary of the history of the avant-garde critique of voice, authorship, and the lyric "I," see Perloff's introduction to her now-famous consideration of differences in formal approach in anti-expressive poetics.

5 *sybil unrest* is full of punning allusions such as those evidenced in this passage, which of course echo Meditation 17 of Donne's *Devotions on Emergent Occasions* and US national anthem "The Star Spangled Banner," the lyrics of which come from Frances Scott Key's "Defence of Fort McHenry" (1814). Wong and Lai treat textual and lyric phrases like "memes," that is, like cultural units that (according to Richard Dawkins) are biotransmitted between minds much like the manner in which genes or viruses pass between bodies. Echoes of the authors' exposure to mass culture permeate their dialogue, producing a playful, media-savvy tone *and* an eery dramatization of the subject's formation through language, whereby self-expression always includes elements of mimesis, and can verge on the uncritical reproduction of earlier media consumption. Tracking the sources and reading the play of the most productive allusions in *sybil unrest* would be great fun—but I leave that for another essay.

6 Lai's recent preoccupations with the limits of the subject are signalled in her essay on Stephen Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things,* in which she summarizes Foucault's formulation of biopower as exerting one power over the body as a machine from which labour can be extorted and another power over the "species body" of the human by way of regulatory controls: "I want to show how the anatomical and the biological are intertwined and managed in ways that shatter the bounded agency we call 'individuality'" (69). Wong articulated her politics of interdependence in a recent issue of *Canadian Literature,* where she writes: " . . . my own survival is intimately connected to the survival of indigenous peoples and their cultures. Through dialogue and thoughtful action we may shift away from the colonial norms that have been violently imposed upon this land toward a sense of interrelation and interdependence, not only with humans but with the plants and animals and minerals to which we owe our lives. That is, 'cultural diversity' extends beyond the realm of the human into 'biodiversity' if we are careful listeners and learners" (115).

7 See Hardt and Negri for a discussion of how communication organizes the movement of globalization and how "we must consider communication and the biopolitical context coextensive" (32-33).

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Sean Braune

Enantiomorphosis and the Canadian Avant-Garde
Reading Christian Bök, Darren Wershler, and Jeramy Dodds

▌ want to consider enantiomorphosis as one of the dominant forms of experimental translation in the poetics of the Canadian avant-garde. This analysis focuses on Christian Bök, Darren Wershler, and Jeramy Dodds, and uses a variety of theoretical approaches including those of Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan, the Toronto Research Group (TRG), translation theory, McLuhan, Baudrillard, and Žižek in order to better apprehend the implications of enantiomorphosis for avant-gardist experiment. Definitions of enantiomorphosis are not initially receptive to an association with problems of translation; however, I will demonstrate that enantiomorphosis is an unrecognized strategy of Canadian avant-gardist practice by first considering it as a modality of the mirror, and subsequently as a modality of translation.

Enanti means "facing" and is from *en* (in) *anti* (against) and *morph* (form). "Enantiomorph" is a term used in chemistry and crystallography that describes the relation between two crystalline or geometric forms that are mirror images of each other. Related terms in this context are "enantiomer" and/or "optical isomer." Deleuze and Guattari extend the word's meaning beyond its scientific sense:

> This is the sense in which Canetti speaks of "enantiomorphosis": a regime that involves a hieratic and immutable Master who at every moment legislates by con-stants, prohibiting or strictly limiting metamorphoses, giving figures clear and stable contours, setting forms in opposition two by two[.] (*Plateaus* 107)

Deleuze and Guattari use the Greek *enantio*, "to oppose" (*Plateaus* 528), to render the term from Elias Canetti's German word *Entwandlung* (as opposed to *Verwandlung* which means "metamorphosis"). Deleuze and Guattari's use

of the term is restrictive insofar as it renders the term prohibitive; I would like to combine this prohibitive definition of enantiomorphosis with Bök's more ludic definition of *enantiomers* found in *Crystallography*: "Crystalline forms that mirror each other through an axis of symmetry are called *enantiomers*. . . . Words form enantiomers of each other only when one *translates* into the other through reflection" (150, my emphasis). Therefore, enantiomorphosis, as I use it, is related to opposition—"setting forms in opposition two by two"—and also textual translation achieved via reflection. This essay considers how such a concept, which is both scientific in the sense of optical isomers and philosophical in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, can be related to a Canadian poetic tradition which has remained marginalized in the popular poetry scene.[1] Reading the Canadian avant-garde through the lens of enantiomorphosis offers a useful way to speak of the intent of a translation (repetition with difference), while speaking to the contingent status of a subjectivity that is signified through language (vis-à-vis Lacan) where, as Craig Owens argues, the "dispossession of the subject by the mirror" can be considered "a law of language" (82).

Christian Bök and The Mirror of Canadian Poetics

In the process of doubling, enantiomorphosis sets two variables against each other while questioning the very nature of such an opposition. If there is any opposition against the specular image, as there would be for the subject during Lacan's mirror stage, then this opposing force would be enantiomorphic. To clarify the type of oppositional doubling intrinsic to enantiomorphosis, I would like to refer to the section "Enantiomorphosis" found in Bök's *Crystallography*:[2]

> The Catoptriarchs (AD 711-777), a Slavonic sect of Christian Gnostics, advocated the Enantiomorphic Heresy, which declared that all earthly existence was but a fleeting reflection in a looking glass unveiled in the gardens of the Heavenly Father. Catoptriarchs expressed their *contemptus mundi* by refusing to gaze upon the world unless it was reflected in a mirror; any disciple of this sect was easily identified by his periscopic obsession with a sheet of silver plating, which he always carried with him in one hand and from which his glance never strayed, even when riding on horseback. (142)

By utilizing the discourse of a Borgesian historiography, Bök emphasizes the strictly narrative aspects of history, speculating on the impossibility of authenticating historical events, while vicariously positing an imaginary space of fictional plenitude within which to construct his narrative of the Catoptriarchs. The name itself is a play on "catoptric" which means "of

or relating to a mirror" from the Greek *katoptron* ("mirror"). Also, the word acoustically and paragrammatically suggests "Coptic" which is the liturgical language of the Coptic Church. The significance of this may be the association of "patriarch"; that is to say, "Coptic-patriarch" (or the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch or Pope of Alexandria) who is the head of the Coptic Church and can be considered representative of a "hieratic and immutable Master." In a less specific perspective, the acoustic resonance of "patriarch" is related to power and institutional structures that utilize hierarchical bias. An additional association of the "iarch" suffix could be to Borges' "heresiarchs" who feature in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

In "Enantiomorphosis," Bök writes of a crystallographer named Christian Weiss who purchases "a medieval treatise on the use of mirrors in the game of chess—a treatise that he found at an antiquarian bookstall on the verge of the ghetto" (145). Bök wrote *Crystallography* in 1994, but this reference cites a book from 1983: Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. Eco comments in his fictional preface: "as I was browsing among the shelves of a little antiquarian bookseller on Corrientes, not far from the more illustrious Patio del Tango of that great street, I came upon the Castilian version of a little work by Milo Temesvar, *On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess . . .* " (3). In my correspondence with Bök, I inquired about the Catoptriarchs and he informed me that I would find information about them in a book by Milo Temesvar entitled "On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess" ("Re: An Enantiomorphic Query"). Bök ended his e-mail with "Pataphysically yours" leading me to conclude that the email message (as well as the section from *Crystallography*) was a ludic puzzle. His reference to 'Pataphysics (Jarry's "science of imaginary solutions") is already a hint about his compositional style in the *Crystallography* excerpt.

In the "Postscript" to *The Name of the Rose*, Eco talks of the poem that inspired the book's title. The title came from Bernard de Morlay's *De contemptu mundi* (505). Bök alludes to this title in "Enantiomorphosis": "Catoptriarchs expressed their *contemptus mundi* by refusing to gaze upon the world unless it was reflected in a mirror" (142). Eco explains that in order to feel "free" to write about the sleuthing of a Franciscan monk in the Middle Ages he had to mask his historical distance from the topic by hiding his authorial voice behind "four levels of encasement": "My story, then, could only begin with the discovered manuscript, and even this would be (naturally) a quotation. So I wrote the introduction immediately, setting my narrative on a fourth level of encasement, inside three other narratives: I am saying what Vallet

said that Mabillon said that Adso said. . . . " (512). This fictionalization of narrative hidden behind the prose style of academic scholarship bewitches the reader, who falls prey to the rhetoric of historical discourse.

The purpose of an enantiomorphic compositional approach is related to *contemptus mundi* (or "contempt of the world") where the world's reality is constructed through the fictional narrations of an epistemic structure. Martin Jay argues in "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" that the dominant epistemological model of visual knowledge is Cartesian perspectivalism—a theory of perspective that considers how "[t]he transparent window that was the canvas . . . could also be understood as a flat mirror reflecting the geometricalized space of the scene depicted back onto the no less geometricalized space radiating out from the viewing eye" (6-7). Mirrors traditionally have acted as the conventional symbol of realist narration; enantiomorphosis, on the other hand, has come to be used in the avant-garde tradition to privilege the *concave mirror* of the baroque instead of the *flat mirror* of Descartes. The Cartesian mirror is the hegemonic mirror that privileges a "monocular subject" (12), whereas the avant-gardist use of enantiomorphosis privileges the "anamorphosistic mirror, either concave or convex, that distorts the visual image" (17). Martin Jay reminds us that in modernity each scopic regime is available for use by artists in a "plurality" (20) of possible visual techniques. It is important to contextualize the avant-garde within the scopic regime that enantiomorphosis matches most closely; that is to say, the regime of the baroque mirror. The Catoptriarchs are a literal fabrication, but the style in which Bök writes the passage alludes to their "real" existence; he writes about them as a chronicler of history, not as a poet telling a story. This is the purpose of enantiomorphic writing: it relies on the author's *contemptus mundi* to ground the creation of fictional world that mirrors the real one, but mirrors it in a reversed form (like a real mirror). This mirroring causes the reader to question the reversion, thus opposing the reader's own textual perceptions. Enantiomorphosis is a postmodern technique of literary production because it fictionalizes the world while satirizing the self-reflexivity of writing (as in the academic mimicry of Bök and Eco) or it undermines hegemonic conceptions of "reality" while satirizing the nature of writing itself.

Enantiomorphosis can be considered an effect of a *contemptus mundi* insofar as an enantiomorphic approach can be motivated by a differing philosophical view of the world: this is what is found in the work of Jorge Luis Borges. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (1941) begins with the narrator

saying: "I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia" (17). The narrator finds the "*Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*" in a mirror where "the mirror was watching us; and we discovered, with the inevitability of discoveries made late at night, that mirrors have something grotesque about them" (17). He continues, "Bioy Casares recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had stated that mirrors and copulation are abominable, since they both multiply the numbers of man" (17). This moment from Borges' story may provide another possible definition of enantiomorphosis: an unsettling experience of doubling that has a "grotesque" quality due to the destabilizing effects of enantiomorphosis on hegemonic conceptions of "reality." This opposition in relation to reality hints at Bök's argument: "all earthly existence was but a fleeting reflection in a looking glass unveiled in the gardens of the Heavenly Father" (142). What is seen in Borges can also be seen in Bök. To list Borges' many references to an enantiomorphic *contemptus mundi* would be tedious; instead, let me draw the reader's attention to a crucial example: "For one of those Gnostics [Uqbar heresiarchs], the visible universe was an illusion or, more precisely, a sophism. Mirrors and fatherhood are abominable because they multiply it and extend it" (18). Mirrors and fatherhood (or, a "patriarch") extend the illusion of the "visible universe." In Bök's story, the Catoptriarchs attempt to circumvent this problem by looking at the world ("reality") in the reflection of a mirror. The Catoptriarchs are attempting to see what could be called a "paravisible universe"—the universe *beside* this one—or whatever exists within the 'pataphysical potentiality of the inversion of a hegemonic constraint.

Darren Wershler and a Technology of Enantiomorphosis

By tracing the history of the typewriter in his doctoral thesis, Wershler prefaces his own poetic achievement within programming (the most famous example is no doubt his co-"authored" book *apostrophe* with Bill Kennedy). Wershler's 1996 text, NICHOLODEON: *a book of lowerglyphs*, finds its current home on the Web as NICHOLODEONLINE (1998), on Wershler-Henry's personal website.[3] NICHOLODEON and NICHOLODEONLINE are homages to bpNichol's poetics, but they also display the conceit of an enantiomorphic practice. The primary example of this can be seen in one of Wershler's translations of bpNichol's "Translating Translating Apollinaire." In "Translating[n] Apollinaire 1: Enantiomorphabet," Wershler utilizes a bizarre symbolic language to pay homage to bpNichol:

icharus   winging up
simon the magician from judea   high in a tree
everyone   reaching for the sun
                    great, vessel of stone
built by the aztecs; tearing their hearts out
to, for them; wet and beating

                    mountains;
cold wind; maybe this hiding in the sun
afraid for centuries

cares whispering by; sun
thru trees passing; a dozen
news, axe flames; flickering
on driveways; glasses

flat on their backs in the grass
dozen bodies, lowly turning brown

sun glances of the pageons; jolly
con conbe::: colos in my window
flat on my back on the floor
becoming aware of it
for an instant

(*NICHOLODEON* n. pag.)

Wershler describes the writing process of this poem in "Surplus Explanations" (found in *NICHOLODEONLINE*): "This was written in 1990, on my first computer, with a then-powerful but now-obsolete painting program, and output to my 9 pin printer. It shows" (n. pag.). Wershler is transposing an enantiomorphic symbology overtop of bpNichol's original translation which begins:

Icharrus   winging up
Simon the Magician   from Judea   high in a tree,
Everyone   reaching for the sun (146)

However, I would suggest that Wershler's "Enantiomorphabet" can be considered a page taken from René Just-Haüy's imaginary diary in *Crystallography*. Bök discusses the "incunabulum thought to be the Latin transcription of a manuscript originally written by a Catoptriarch. The Latin was enciphered by an anonymous monk, who wrote using an unusual alphabet inspired by the diffraction patterns that sunbeams make when passing through either prisms of rock quartz or layered panes of glass" (Bök 142). According to Bök's history, Just-Haüy's diary "reconstructs . . . the prismatic alphabet of his lost text" (144). I would suggest—after having laboriously attempted to read the enantiomorphabet through a prism—that

Wershler's translation of bpNichol's "Translating Translating Apollinaire" may well be the only remaining fragment of Just-Haüy's diary, thus engaging in a conversation with Bök's own oeuvre.

Wershler's choice emphasizes computer technology and speaks to a different sort of mirror: the computerized mirror that faces us when we check our email, surf the web, do research or compose written work. By publishing a book like *NICHOLODEON* online, Wershler is producing the gestural aspects of his enantiomorphic interests as a very real experience for the reader. The reader addresses the text through the medium of the computer and reads the words and sentences through the stark delineation of the computer screen, itself a form not unlike a mirror; however, whereas a mirror simply reflects, a computer screen also projects, rendering a visual space that nonetheless mirrors the enantiomorphic semblable of a subject working at a computer. Žižek argues that, "the interface screen is supposed to conceal the workings of the machine, and to simulate our everyday experience as faithfully as possible (the Macintosh style of interface, in which written orders are replaced by simple mouse-clicking on iconic signs" (131), and, Žižek takes this one step further by arguing (in a similar vein as Cartesian perspectivalism) that consciousness itself is its own frame or interface (132). It is possible that the enantiomorphic interface/mirror may also speak to society's McLuhanesque state of technological immersion where, as opposed to McLuhan's emphasis on the film and television screen, the dominant screen has become the computer. It addresses us and indeed interpellates us in a manner not unlike Althusser's ideological critique of "hailing": "the Subject's interlocutors-interpellates: his *mirrors*, his *reflections*" (53, original emphasis). The computer "hails" us as a technological force, pulling us into the mirror of its own construction while acting as a cornerstone of enantiomorphosis, which risks switching our identities with that of a computerized imago.

Earlier I mentioned the connection between enantiomorphosis and translation; in much the same vein Wershler describes his process in *NICHOLODEON* this way: "[m]any of the poems in this book, including these treatments of Nichol's first published piece, are what the TRG refers to as 'homolinguistic translations,' texts in which the emphasis lies not on semantic import but on the formal procedure of the translation's development" (n. pag.). The TRG, formed by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, write about "homolinguistic translation": "In speaking of translation we are referring to a possible activity both *homolinguistically* based (which is to say as a transmittance and reception within the same language but issuing from discrete speech

communities) and *heterolinguistically* (i.e., between two different languages)" (27-28). I should mention that this avant-gardist appropriation of the term "heterolinguistic"[4] runs counter to the current definition used in Translation Studies.[5]

Heterolinguistic translations are of little interest to the Canadian avant-garde (either in McCaffery's use or in the terminology of Translation Studies); rather, the use of homolinguistic translation is a prevalent conceit in avant-gardist experimentation as seen in everything from bpNichol's translations to the manipulations of source texts by Ronald Johnson in *Radi Os* (where Johnson excises elements of Milton's *Paradise Lost* to create a new text from the negation of the existing one) or Tom Phillips' *A Humument* (which treats the original text of W.H. Mallock's 1892 novel *A Human Document* to similar Johnsonian excisions).

Returning to a Canadian context, as well as to the purview of Translation Studies, Sherry Simon points out: "[t]ranslation in Canada is quite properly a rite of passage, a process of transformation . . . which guarantees passage from one identity to another" (96). In a moment that seems to hint at enantiomorphosis, Simon avers: "as literature becomes understood to be less inspired creation of genius than a text made up of other texts, translation loses much of its devalorized 'secondary' nature to become a figure for all writing and a privileged player on the postmodern scene" (106). The "postmodern scene" conventionally includes the avant-garde, thus including the more experimental approaches so prevalent in avant-gardist practice.

Enantiomorphosis is an essential tool in the act of homolinguistic translation. Take the example of Nichol's "Translating Translating Apollinaire" and Wershler's enantiomorphabetic translation: if both texts are placed across from each other, then a dialectic is created between original/translation, source text/adaptation, real/copy, and self/other. However, the self/other binary is unfixed, allowing both versions to circulate within each other. Wershler's version is a cryptogrammic mirroring where the text is taken word by word, but the font is altered to create a dissonant reading experience. The original version no doubt belongs to Apollinaire; however, the various translations only enrich the canonic trajectory of such a poetics, adding textures to the texts created via mirroring. The texts mirror each other in the same way as Milton's *Paradise Lost* mirrors Johnson's *Radi Os*, but in this mirroring there is no ur-text—only doubles are reflected.

Dr. Jules Verrier, the fictional physician from Bök's enantiomorphic history, claims (in his insane state) that his mirror reflection has replaced

his real being. Verrier is "insane" because he has gone into the 'pataphysical world of enantiomorphosis. Mirrors, when properly placed reflect each other creating a fractal illusion where the reflection represents an image at an ever-smaller scale, diminishing into the nothingness of a *mise-en-abyme*. The story of Jules Verrier is an application of the apperception of Lacan's mirror stage that originates the dialectic of self/other: "the real image formed thanks to the concave mirror is produced inside the subject, at a point which we call *O* [or Other]" (Lacan 165). As Bök writes of Jules Verrier: "*Le Monde* reported in its morning edition on the same day as this academic symposium" (149)—at which Lacan delivered his "seminal essay" on the mirror stage on 17 July 1946 (148)—"that Dr Jules Verrier, a clinical psychiatrist, had gone insane while trying to escape from an elevator that had trapped him alone overnight between the floors of his office building. Verrier had apparently screamed for almost seven hours straight, all the while clawing away at the mirrored interior of his compartment, before firemen finally rescued him" (149). Connecting Verrier's case with with Lacan's talk implies the negativity of the communal uproar from psychiatrists at the newfound prominence of Freudian psychoanalytic principles taking hold in France due to Lacan's "return to Freud." However, that is only one possible interpretation; the other possible interpretation regards the full implications of Lacan's theory taken from the perspective of an adult who is long past the "*infans* stage." Lacan's theory introduces a simulacrum of imaginary (and unseen) mirrors all around us. At no point should his theory be seen to talk about actual mirrors; rather, his theory introduces the inclusion of a potentially spectral realm of wraiths and ghosts, objects which function beyond the purview of human control and mirror back semblables that act as *homme-onyms* only—mirroring our own subjectivities, forcing us to react and address our own subjective constructions in the face of reality and a social order of intersubjectivity. Lacan suggests that reality as such is a simulated construct, built in the mind of the subject, reinforced with countless mirrors; therefore, reality becomes, through Lacanian theory, an artifice somewhat akin to an elevator with a mirrored interior, in which we are all forced to dwell, trying desperately to address the Other but coming up short with the narcissistic impression of our semblable.

Bök continues:

Sources close to the scene testified later that the psychiatrist had behaved quite hysterically, insisting to authorities that he had become involved in a case of mistaken identity, that he was the wrong person taken into custody, since his

reflection in the mirrored wall of the elevator had somehow traded places with him. His reflection had suddenly refused to imitate him and had stepped out of its frame so as to force him to occupy the space vacated in the glass. (149)

This is the anxiety experienced during the mirror stage, the irrational fear that the other (and the Other itself) can replace the imaginary being, that something gets lost during the moment of recognition where whatever it is that is seen to "anchor" the self to sanity becomes unhinged by something as simple as a glance in the mirror. Looking in the mirror is essentially a journey inward, a narcissistic experience that exposes the face, risking the sort of self-hypnosis experienced by Narcissus at the edge of the lake, as McLuhan explains:

> The Greek myth of Narcissus is . . . from the Greek word *narcosis*, or numbness. The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system. (41)

Verrier responds badly to his treatment for his enantiomorphic narcosis: "he insisted that this world was itself the very world beyond the mirror, a world from which his reflection had escaped, tearing itself free so as to wreak havoc upon the true reality. Medical authorities at the asylum diagnosed the patient as a paranoid catoptrophobiac, but confessed ironically that they now preferred to exit buildings via the stairs" (149). The breakdown of Jules Verrier is foreshadowed by his very name which connotes both *verre* (or glass) and *verrier* (a glassmaker or craftsman of glass): his name is an image of fragility where the glass of Verrier's consciousness is shattered by its own reflection, becoming the "servomechanism" that induces a feedback loop of self-reflection and self-refraction. Earlier in *Crystallography*, Bök writes in his poem "Glass": "Glass represents a poetic element" (29), that leads to "the misprision of transparency" (33). Enantiomorphosis is an attempt at misprision that questions itself via transparency, thus revealing whatever knowledge is concealed through its opposition.

Eerily, Lacan seems to narrate a step-by-step process of Verrier's breakdown: "We have placed the subject at the edge of the spherical mirror. But we know that the seeing of an image in the plane mirror is strictly equivalent for the subject to an image of the real object, which would be seen by a spectator beyond this mirror, at the very spot where the subject sees his image" (139-40). To put this idea another way, Craig Owens writes of the "dispossession" that occurs when one is confronted with the specular

image: "The mirror accomplishes both the identification with the Other and the specular dispossession which simultaneously institutes and deconstitutes the subject as such" (77). The institution and deconstitution of the subject is what McLuhan intimates in his reading of Narcissus—a breakdown of meaning that is simultaneously the feedback loop of a closed system while also functioning as an extension of consciousness through either a mirror (as in Lacan) or a computerized imago (as in Wershler).

Jeramy Dodds and the Sublime in the Enantiomorphic

Dodds, critically acclaimed author of *Crabwise to the Hounds*, is fascinated by the potential of enantiomorphic translation. He is currently translating the *Poetic Edda* from Old Norse to English. This translation project is arguably more traditional (or heterolinguistic) than some of his translational experiments in *Crabwise*. Dodds explains some of his thinking on translation during an interview with Clarise Foster: "Typically a finished, 'translated' poem has gone through a bit of a telephone game, and I am definitely exploring that distance in these translations" (17). Dodds' poem "Glenn Gould Negotiates the Danube in the Company of a Raven" is a translation of Gould's recording of Bach's Chromatic Fantasy in D Minor. Dodds describes the process of the poem's composition here: "Using an invented, baroque and highly suspect form of hieroglyphics and/or tablature, I have attempted to translate the fugue into English" (68). Dodds further expands on his approach in conversation with Clarise Foster:

> I slowed down Gould's recording of Bach's "Chromatic Fantasy in D-minor" using an audio program on my computer. I proceeded to map the recording on the Bristol board using an overly simplistic set of symbols. Each symbol eventually grew written footnotes and other more elaborate symbols each time I listened to the piece. I listened to the piece too many times at varying speeds, attempting to get between the notes, until I had this poem spread out like a historic timeline poster, but a timeline of Gould's recording. (11)

Dodds' translational procedure in this example is highly complex and cannot be categorized as either heterolinguistic or homolinguistic translation because the process is not one of language-to-language or sign-to-sign, but rather translates two different media. This process is close to what Roman Jakobson calls "intersemiotic translation" (Jaeger 241). By translating a piece of music into a poem, Dodds is engaging in a sort of Dick Higgins experiment within an intermedium that interrogates the difference between music and poetry. Any classically trained musician has to translate musical notation into a physical expenditure of energy to create the acoustic experience of music.

Dodds' experiment is quite different from say, a violinist's or cellist's, in that he is inverting the traditional methodology and is creating a notation out of a sonic code in order to render an English poem from that symbology. Dodds' experiment is more aligned with the task of a composer where the poet occupies the place of both Bach and Gould. Dodds chooses to translate Gould in free verse, eschewing stanzas or regular metre. This choice suggests a stream-of-consciousness aspect to Gould's playing that itself translates the constraint-based notation of Bach's original score. The structural method that Dodds uses to re-encode Gould's playing of Bach acts as a sort of mirror where each of the semblables (Bach-Gould-Dodds) become interrelated in the lines of flight of a translational servomechanism that both extends meaning and constricts the immanence of each iteration in a closed system.

I also want to consider Dodds' translation of Ho Chi Minh's phone call. Dodds claims that "The Official Translation of Ho Chi Minh's August 18th, 1966, Telephone Call" "has been 'transliterated' from so-called CIA cassette tapes of a wire-tap I bought over the Internet. As far as I know, none of the lines are accurate translations of the Vietnamese; however, they are true to cadences in the recorded speech" (*Crabwise* 68). Dodds describes his process in detail here:

> The Ho Chi Minh piece started as an exercise to hone the transference of recorded cadences to written English. The cassette tapes were of a single recorded voice—they were only one side of a phone conversation—and so were quite different from the complexity of Gould's Bach recording. I didn't need to slow the voice down; I would just listen to it as I drove to and from work each day . . . I still don't know if it's really Ho Chi Minh on the tapes. ("Interview" 12).

Dodds bought the recording from eBay and he himself admits that he does not know if the voice actually belongs to Ho Chi Minh. This ignorance of the authenticity of the source material is essential to Dodds' translation. Obviously, Dodds does not know Vietnamese; however, he responds to the sounds of the monologue to create an enantiomorphic translation of it. By recording only one part of a dialogue-based telephone call, the poem takes on an aspect of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Soliloquy* where Goldsmith walks around New York recording everything he says during a week. Dodds' experiment is different from Goldsmith's insofar as Dodds is engaging in a collision between heterolinguistic/homolinguistic translation; he translates Vietnamese into English based on sonorous vocalizations and his own auditory impressions. This returns to orality an emphasis on the physical experience of speaking, with its sonorisms, vocalizations, fricatives, breath, etc., and renders the acoustic (and the acoustic only) into a chance-based

poem of English signifiers, including sounds occurring in the background that take on the quality of stage directions:

> *[On the tape he leaves the telephone and you can hear the sound / of latches tumbling, sheets flapping on the line, a match striking. / He coughs in the distance before returning to add:]*
> If, by the time you get here, the telephone
> is dangling from its carriage
> and emptying into the room, it is
> because I have gone outside to repair
> the night through a colander of stars. (30-31)

Dodds effectively raises questions about the authenticity of translation, reminding the reader of the spurious distance between original/copy in a sort of Baudrillardian poetics of the simulacrum. The enantiomorphic, during the experimental act of translation, requires an imaginary mirror between the original and the copy and it is this imaginary mirror that forces the poem (original and copy) to engage in its own mirror stage, with the new iteration becoming a semblable after the process is complete.

Bök and Rimbaud: Additions to *Eunoia*

The recent 2009 edition of *Eunoia* has added material to the section entitled "Oiseau." The additional material centres on Bök's various homolinguistic translations of Rimbaud's "Voyelles." In the first edition, the cover image was a visual poem by Bök called "Of Yellow," which was a polychromatic transcription of "Voyelles." The new cover image features the title with bands of six colours extending up from each letter; these colours correspond to the instructions given in Rimbaud's poem that *A*=black, *E*=white, *I*=red, *U*=green, and *O*=blue. The lone consonant of *N* appears as grey (which corresponds to Bök's original transcription in "Of Yellow"). The additional addenda of the "Voyelles" translations correspond to interesting enantiomorphotic experiments.

Bök begins with Rimbaud's original and contrasts it with his various translations. I will do the same, but will focus on the first stanza of the sonnet each time. From Rimbaud's original poem, "Voyelles":

> A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,
> Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes:
> A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
> Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles (84)

Bök's first (and most straightforward) translation of "Voyelles" maintains Rimbaud's rhyme structure, measure, and meaning. It is called "Vowels":

> A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: the vowels.
> I will tell thee, one day, of thy newborn portents:
> A, the black velvet cuirass of flies whose essence
> commingles, abuzz, around the cruellest of smells (85)

The second translation is more complex in that it still sustains the sonnet form by retaining the original measure and rhyme scheme, and also preserves the *exact sequence of vowels* which originally appear in Rimbaud's "Voyelles." This translation is entitled "Phonemes":

> Phantoms, infernal,
> without refuge or return—phonemes.
> We will hark if such
> resurgent souls ordain a dreamt verse:
> A (offspring of perfect
> murders, so unseen that stranglers (86)

The second experiment is already nearing a mirroring where the original version is becoming directly imbedded in a new poetic formation: by maintaining the exact progression of vowels from the original, Bök is beginning to question the essence (if such a word could be used) of Rimbaud's original. Because the second translation features the same progression, it is more closely related to a direct re-writing of Rimbaud; more precisely, it is a re-writing veiled behind enantiomorphic reinscription.

Bök's third translation maintains the sonnet form by maintaining the original measure and rhyme scheme, but here he has anagrammatically re-permuted all the letters from the original French poem. Therefore, the poem is—in terms of its letters—an *exact copy* of Rimbaud's; however, the order of the letters has changed. This poem is called "Vocables":

> Eternal, you beguile love or ruin—vocables.
> Jejune vassals quote ten codas in reliquaries:
> A (the ceaseless verses at occult monasteries;
> requiems of dust, bound to nebulous particles (94)

Bök has always been a 'pataphysician as well as a poet, and this third iteration draws attention to a linguistic atomism of the written word. Essentially, Bök is engaged in an experiment of atom-smashing where every letter can be analogically considered as an unsplittable entity. A letter is to language what an atom was originally thought to be to matter for science.[6] Therefore, Bök re-permutes Rimbaud's original as if it were a molecule being re-composed or engineered in a laboratory. The third poem is a mirrored reflection of the original (if only a re-permuted reflection) and it is this incantatory experiment that emphasizes the imaginary distancation between an original

word and its translated semblable. Since the third translation consists of exactly the same letters as Rimbaud's, the "translation" is in essence a reflection. It is this interest in the components of language that allows Bök to continually interrogate the essential ideological/mythological prejudices that exist within the very words we use, and in the discourses created therein. I have argued elsewhere that "[t]he primary impetus of Bök's inverse-lipogram is the epistemological question of meaning or the interrogation of the different ways in which mythologies are formed" (146), and I would argue that the various re-permutations of Rimbaud's "Voyelles" constitutes this same engagement with potential meanings that remain dormant within language, only to be revealed when pressurized through constraint-based experimentation.

In their poetics, Bök, Wershler, and Dodds implicitly deal with problems of enantiomorphosis. There are, no doubt, other examples of this in the Canadian canon; however, I hope that this essay is an early consideration of this problem. The correlative of enantiomorphosis (beyond doubling and translation) is the relation between enantiomorphosis and identity. I would suggest that the avant-garde's interest in the mirror is a retroactive nostalgia that can be located in the late Middle Ages where the cheap mass production of glass by Venetians gave rise to "a new Hamletic consciousness, a post-Cartesian increase in reflexiveness of thought" (Joseph 410). I would like to leave the question of enantiomorphosis and identity open-ended and conclude with a passage from Bök's *Crystallography* that epitomizes the problem of mirrors and mirroring raised in this essay:

> Each mirror
> infects itself
> at every scale
> with the virus of its own image.
>
> Each mirror
> devours itself
> at every point
> with the abyss of its own dream. (24)

NOTES

1 Recently, the tension between the "normative poetry scene" and the "avant-garde scene" in Canada came to a head during the unfortunately named "Cage Match of Canadian Poetry" which pitted Bök against Carmine Starnino in a recorded debate on the merits and future of Canadian poetry. I do not want to consider this debate at length; instead,

by gesturing toward it I hope to contextualize this essay in relation to a contemporary dialectic regarding such a poetry and poetics. The "Match" took place on November 26, 2009, at Mount Royal University. Watch a version of it at the following URL: http://vimeo.com/7963755.

2   The section is reprinted in the anthology *Imaginary Numbers* where it is called "Enantiomorphosis (A Natural History of Mirrors)." See pp: 267-73 in the William Frucht anthology and 142-50 in the original.

3   Wershler's website can be found at the following URL: http://www.alienated.net/.

4   The term "heterolinguistic" is reminiscent of Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia."

5   Reine Meylaerts reminds us that "heterolingualism" is a term that originates from Rainier Grutman in his study of the Quebec nineteenth-century novel in which it "refers to the use of foreign languages or social, regional, and historical language varieties *in* literary texts" (4). Translation Studies considers "heterolinguistic translation" a translation that deals with creating a monolingual text from a polylingual (or heteroglossic) text. As well, what McCaffery and bpNichol call "heterolinguistic translation" would be called "interlingual translation" in Roman Jakobson's tripartite categorization of translational types, and "homolinguistic translation" would be called "intralingual translation" (Jaeger 241).

6   Based on the etymology of atom that comes from the Greek *atomos*, meaning "indivisible."

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Oana Avasilichioaei and Erín Moure

Translation, Collaboration, and Reading the Multiple

Who is translating whom? Who is writing whom?

Where and how is the threshold? When do we cross it? Are we thresholding?

Is there a border between us and the audience? When writing and translating, aren't we both writers and audience at once?

Content is plastic. Language even more so. Plurality wonders me into writing. Tongues migrate me across.

What first spurred *these* chimærical expeditions? An unfinished poem by Paul Celan in Romanian. I wanted to finish it, though I was not sure how; it was my impulse to translate or write into what was not yet there.

That intrigued me, so I had to interrupt, or help, or make sounds, or who made those sounds?

Elisa Sampedrín? When I saw the English poem Elisa had translated from Nichita Stănescu, though she knew no Romanian, I was urged to read it, and then translate it into another Romanian.

Or another English. But who were you translating, Sampedrín or Stănescu? And who was I writing? Who is who?

OA: *Civic* comes from Latin *civicus*, from *civis* (citizen), yet the original use was the *corona civica*, a garland of green leaves and acorns given in ancient Rome to a person who saved a fellow citizen's life. So to enact the civic means to be accountable to another, to another body.

   I thought much about this when writing *feria: a poempark*. *feria* works against the palimpsest of a real park and uses a landscape's transient architectures to explore the ephemeral space where we enact the civic, where our private selves face other private selves in a public space, a space of

leisure and nature, though also a troubled space where much is constructed, torn down, constructed over. There is also an exploration of remnants left behind physically and imaginatively in this space once the civic is engaged. And remnants demand a kind of translation. Here landscape is a clamorous crossing of voices/bodies who are not only accountable to each other but to the environment they inhabit and possibly impair. So when I embarked on the *Expeditions*, I entered their tumult not as *author* but as *citizen*, joyously accountable to the other voices met and created within their frontiers.

EM: In *O Cidadán*, the citizen is one who enables passages across borders, where bodies act or enact, and do not enclose but open, in order to *be*. The paradox of borders is that their primary job is not to keep out, but to let in. My practice more and more involves translation. It is a movement across borders in poetry and language that came to me as surprise and accident when I started translating Fernando Pessoa, because I realized I could read Portuguese (as well as French, English, and Galician). Translation, I began to comprehend, involves permeability, not equivalence. It involves the formation and reformation of identities. Translation is always already unstable. And thus *fruitful.* And political, because even to make these claims for translation solicits a discomfort, a backlash, from those who would rather see translation as static, foreign, an administrative action alien to poetry and poetics.[1]

The border, and translation, also link with the notion of "seams," which are folded borders, and can be related to Gilles Deleuze's fold or *pli*, as well as to Jean-François Lyotard's idea of the libidinal band, both of which have echoes in Judith Butler's work on the "inside" and "outside"—intense work on the formation of identity in and through language.

OA: My poetic work has developed *in companionship* with work in and through translation. Because my primary writing language is not my first language, I am in a sense always in the constant act of self-translation, and thus aware of the space *in-between* the lexicons, music, structures, histories of different languages. Often, I think I compose out of this in-between space, allowing, for example, my written English to be affected by the rhythm of oral Romanian, or by the structure of French, and in so doing not only altering the very materiality of my English but also that of the Romanian or French.

Over time, my writing practice and translation practice, because I also translate the work of others, have become more and more intersticed, or rather, they always were, but I have become more aware of the interstices, and can thus use these more consciously, as tools. My upcoming book *We,*

Beasts emerged not only out of interstices in time and between languages, but also between genres, the folk/fairy/wonder tale and poetry, in particular, and the possible crossings between the oral tale and the inscribed page.

As I began translating the work of Nichita Stănescu a decade ago, I knew from the start that I needed to *write* his poetry to be able to *translate* it. For me, writing and translation begin with the materiality of language, how the architectures of page and text interact, and how language, which is sound and music, is handled bodily in the throat and the chest and the belly. Furthermore, both language and the tongue that forms it are not neutral places but loaded sites of histories and permutations. To leap from a *cuvânt* in Romanian to a *palabra* in Galician to a *word* in English, new pathways and contexts must be forged. "Context," by the way, comes from the Latin word *contextus*, from *con-* "together" and *texere* "to weave," thus to weave together, thus the text and what is outside it, its context, its support, are inextricably woven. And so to traverse any text from one language into another language, the text and its context undergo a dismantling and then a remounting into the other language; they are unwritten and then re-written in the new language.

EM: There is a sense in which any reading of English—or another language—by any one reader is already translation. There is no one way to read that is determined solely by the text; the body of the reader is necessary. And the body of the reader exists in culture, is always already, in a sense, *inscribed* on a support outside its strict biological casing. We're back to the idea of *citizen* here, as a response to an other, to the other and the embodiment of the other.

Given this dynamic relationship of reader to culture—the exterior circumstance that conditions the reader's reception of any text read (and in fact conditions their very subjectivity and its formation)—it's clear that we don't really have access to a pure original. That's a myth, though we do like to embody or "ensoul" the text we read with the "intentions" of an "author"—a single human who "authorizes" or "authenticates" the text. When we do this, *we* create the original. The process is so natural (i.e., we don't think about it or question it) that we see it as subversion when poets or translators or writers work textually in other ways. We still "authenticate" that poet as author of "an original," even in work that attempts to depart from such notions, such as Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day*; here the copy of the newspaper in the form of a book, which may or may not have been copied word by word by one human named Kenneth Goldsmith, functions as a new original, and its author is recognized; authorship is acknowledged. The "authenticity" process is not interrupted.

OA: The effect of this kind of thinking on translation is that in North America, by and large, a "good" translation still means smoothness, domestication and easy readability, as the translator is supposed to disappear so that the author and their original can be more visible. On the other hand, Jacques Derrida in an essay titled "Des Tours de Babel" speaks about "the necessary and impossible task of translation, its necessity *as* impossibility" (223). To my mind, translation is impossible because there are no equivalences between languages, the bodies that utter them and their contexts, only counterparts and digressions, and necessary because there are no equivalences, only counterparts and digressions.

    In our shared work in the poems of *Expeditions of a Chimæra*, we foreground the interruptions and digressions that are always ever part of translation, and not just this smoothness that is identified with a "good" translation. We multiply the author and translator positions and make them equally visible and equally unauthentic. The text can no longer be "ensouled" with any one person's intentions, but is instead constantly interrupted and bent to rearticulate the concerns of language in another way, and, in part, we do this simply through the act of reading.

EM: As readers we always only have access to *markings.* To a materiality we process through *our* subjectivity, through the entire cluster of social, cultural bandings that make us cohere as individuals. Without the body of the reader, which involves the *civis*, the markings rest on the page, ink, and cellulose. If there *were* an original—a set of intentions fixed on the page and in no need of translation—then study or conversation would be superfluous. Nothing would be moot.

OA: One of the things I realized early on, as I was first encountering a second language, is that my only limits are the limits of language, and that language is an encounter which can and must occur again and again. Language belongs to no one in particular; it is material, sometimes *marked* on a page or a screen, material whose intentions can never be fully assumed and which is palimpsestic in nature.

EM: As a reader of five languages, I tend to read in "language," just in language, not in English. All languages just seem like reading language to me. I translate this language I read on the page into my language, the language I am thinking in at that moment. Sometimes this means I translate English into English.

    There are other instances of translating a language into its same idiom. There is Ronald Johnson's *Radi Os*, a kind of fetish text for both of us, written in the very lexicon and *mise-en-page* of *Paradise Lost*, translating *Paradise*

Lost into English. In *O Cadoiro,* there are the bands of text in French across the English poems. These are texts compressed, played, selected from snatches of Derrida's *Mal d'Archive* in a reassembling and breaking. When I finished, I found it was still Derrida or, really, because I had bodily intervened in it, it was a *translation* of Derrida from French into French. All these actions disturb English in beautiful ways, and disturb the authenticity process.

OA: Another example of translating from one language into that same language is Jen Bervin's *Nets*, where she bared Shakespeare's sonnets into "nets" where the holes catch words to form her poems, paradoxically both paring down and amplifying Shakespeare's language. In *feria: a poempark,* I wrote a long poem in which I took historical extracts from newspaper articles, park board meetings, letters, etc. and placed my body before them and unfocused my gaze, the way one does before an abstract formalist painting, until certain forms and words emerged. It is not simply a matter of erasure. It is occupying a text, deconstructing it into parts, having the body traverse those parts, to then reconstruct and transfer them onto another page, into another context, another time. In this movement, authorship is multi-dimensionally fractured across contexts, pages, time. Furthermore, when dealing with historical documents, their historicity is disturbed, because they can no longer simply "document"; their assumed authority is both mined and undermined, and ultimately translated.

EM: Which brings us back to reading as translation, and to our tasks in *Expeditions of a Chimæra.* I don't understand Celan or Stănescu in Romanian, nor you Elisa Sampedrín in Galician, but we heartily engage with these voices and these languages in these Chimæras. We do something objectively impossible and claim a place for it as translation: translating from languages we don't know.

How do I read a language I don't understand? Romanian, for example? I use other aspects of poetic art, in a sense. I am obliged to read Romanian as absolute material, as material markings and shapes on the page. I see where the language repeats, what syllables it takes up again, how one syllable leads to another because of a look or sound; I intuit rhythms and structures that subtend it. I make connections using the languages that I do know, and I literally witness my own mind at work concatenating "sense." Not knowing the language means the semantic level takes a different seat, yet it doesn't vanish: rather, I see things I know, still, but they are differently exposed. A lot of what we call "understanding" is based on assumptions about meaning, and not about objective correlations. When the text breaks from these assumptions, when it refuses to give us what we assume, we have to

invent new tactics. Paradoxically, we rely not less but more heavily on the text itself, its materiality. We also engage more of our own cultural/social cluster that constitutes our subjectivity, in "unauthorized" ways. There's an ethos of space and body, sound, reaction to sound, to the way a word looks in any of five languages: a *polyphonicity*. I am reading through my own subjectivity, and mine, like any given subjectivity, is a coalescence or banding that is social and cultural—I know other languages and they inflect my English. And my subjectivity is dented and moved by what is proximate to it, in this case, the unknown language Romanian and, in *Expeditions of a Chimæra*, the fact of you working along beside me actively in the text.

In the end, in working on the unknown language, there's a beautiful paradox that blows apart conventional considerations: *Meaning happens without understanding.* And the reverse holds as well, and this really intrigues me: *understanding takes place without "meaning."*

OA: We seem to always get so stuck on the *is-ness* of language, how this language is and how that language is, as though a language is static, instead of exploring its movement, its passage, its ways of crossing from here to there. Language exists because of the necessity of dialogue between two beings. Language *is* only because it *moves* from me to you to her to me, etc. It is its motions and arcs that one attempts to translate/read into/write into, rather than its *is-ness*.

Language is always also in *flux*, it is not syntactically or grammatically intact or whole, and this becomes most evident and obvious when writing out of and across languages. Caroline Bergvall, herself a multilingual writer/performer, spoke of this in a recent essay: " . . . a multilingual or second language writer cannot rest nor trust the ideal of a complete, motivated, monological and pre-Babel language, at one with a Nature that writing might uncover" (8). So we fell in with these *Expeditions*, in this flux between languages and bodies, because our individual practices and cultural relocations had already shown us that an unconfused, complete, pre-Babel language does not exist and that this is enriching, prismatic, and infinitely explorable. We don't have one *natural* language to *protect* and so we are free to listen to the other standing before us, making language.

In this doubled, tripled, ever multiple embodiment that is collaboration, listening becomes acute. One must listen with the whole body, not just the ears. Listening is an active act—involves response, for you have to sHow you are listening—and an agreement to constantly risk the unknown, to feel destabilized and out of this instability be willing to create new connections, to build into a rhizome, to be rhizomatic.

Listening in the Chimæric work demanded of me that I forge other ways of perceiving/receiving/creating. We have such a learned tendency to organize information into systems, but within a collaboration, in this space of receive and respond, the rational and the systematic quickly become inoperative. In their place a dialogic/responsive/instinctual/bodily listening occurs.

When responding to another person, another embodiment, I cannot construct what I am listening to based on my expectations, and if I do, I am proven wrong, because I can never anticipate what the other might do. Some might think that, after a while, based on experience, or prior tacit agreement, I might come to have some sort of accurate expectation of what the other might do. In practice this proves to be false. Early on, I once told Elisa that "I am so tentative when giving you clues." This tentativeness arose out of the idea previously held in my body that these clues would be cues, and thus would not only influence, but somewhat control what she was about to do next. But then I realized that since, every time, each person is responding anew based on what has come before, and since what has come before is constantly changing, the context is slightly or greatly altered, and thus the response unpredictable, and the listening acute.

There is clamour, reverberation, a cumulative chorus of voices, that arise out of and through two voices, which are really three voices, or four or five.

EM: Some decisions about what to do next come out of a bodily response to those conditions. We have to watch posture, detect from where the voice is emerging. There is a relationship between gesture and word. The materiality becomes four-dimensional: two bodies (three-dimensional) over time (because there are two).

I think this responsiveness evolved, as well, because we wrote these pieces over time. The writing of subsequent pieces was not only informed by the writing of prior texts but by the public performance of those texts, and by the decisions we would make in performing, in translating between voices, in being attentive to the different registers of these voices (due to different embodiment) and to how the voices themselves could be combined or overlapped aurally. This knowledge would then be folded into the composition of subsequent pieces. Here body and embodiment are inescapable factors in the aural text and impact writing. Affect is an inescapable factor. Agamben's definition of friendship as a "purely existential con-division . . . without an object" is a close parallel as well (7).

The process of growing each work as written text, and interfering in the text of the other, is different than working with constraints or writing

through constraint. Most constraints are enacted "passively," from above, i.e., they are set out in advance and followed. They are "striations," to use a Deleuzian term. But in *Expeditions*, the process is active, not passive. It emerges from below. The constraint, if you will, in *Expeditions of a Chimæra*, was not just working with Stănescu or Celan, it was confrontation with the subjectivity and incorporation of the other: admitting that language takes place outside me as an individual and that this is writing too, and is, curiously, "my" writing.

Our process accepts from the outset that the other person will interfere in whatever text I set down, and the other person's text is there for me to interfere in. This derails what we conventionally think of as individual expression. Rather than try to pretend we've made subjectivity vanish, it is doubled, then doubled again—and across the folds, various subjectivities, or "subjectivity-figures" operate. In *Expeditions of a Chimæra,* I contribute to a textual flow or folding, signing myself to a text that is already on the page, or on the page before the page I write on. And because I've heard you read the text and syncopate words—for we performed earlier texts as we were writing later ones—I can challenge or try to interrupt that as well, interrupt what I might see as your possible readings of whatever text I put down, in advance of your seeing it. I fold space before you get to it, as you do for me.

OA: Perhaps the notion of the hinge could help amplify some of what we are saying. On the hinge hinges an opening, a potential. The hinge is also a crack in time or time suspended; time for a moment perceived as possibly nonlinear. The hinge is time all unto itself: a beautiful collision. The question becomes how to create such hinges so that the work can shift into unpredictable spaces and simultaneously *be* this movement and these spaces. So that time can begin to loosen its yoke of linearity.

One hinge is you, Erín, writing O.A. and me, Oana, writing E.M. and Elisa writing both, and the readers writing us as they read, for they will urgently need to, for we play. We lie, thus we are true. I write E.M. and sign it as O.A. or you write E.S. and sign it as P.C., and in fact it is really Elisa writing us all.

The only one creating the original is the reader in the act of reading. The author is a prank in that the author is a fabrication. Collaboration taught me this most fully. I discovered that I could not only play/write my own author but also the author of others. And how liberating to see it for the game that it is and actively engage with it, mess with its rules or invent new ones, rather than "naturally" and "passively" assuming that a subjective "I" and an "author" are exactly one and the same being. While the subjective "I" may be a living, breathing being, at least in the moment of speaking—the I is a

speaking position, not necessarily "the person" who occupies it—the author is a role, a mask. And thus can be occupied by more than one person, or no one.

EM: We could mention Jorge Luis Borges here, who refused to give primacy to any text as "original," and who insisted that every text is a translation, including the original. Or Samuel Beckett, who translated himself and whose attitude toward translation was that the purported original was a draft and subject to being improved upon, and that any translation was just a subsequent version.

Of course there's Michel Foucault as well, saying—in short—that the author is an eighteenth-century phenomenon that arises to shut down plurality of meaning, also as a place to assign blame. It is an exclusionary structure. It is there to add veracity to a text, but it is important to remember that the "author" is a textual move, i.e. a move in a textual game, in the game that is text. What's fun is that when we're actually working on a text, the author is the last thing on our mind; we just started to play in language, in listening, in hearing. We invent the characters we need in order to maintain the momentum of the work as we are doing it, for the momentum is a "rush," is an energy that seems to surpass any one of us as individuals, and it is a *textual* energy.

On the other hand, I don't think this lets us avoid subjectivity. Some writers have said that part of the thrust of their compositional practice is avoiding subjectivity (that messy "I"). Yet avoiding [it] is a fallacy. A subject still decides. Even the rewriting, word for word, of one day's edition of the newspaper starts with a decision to start, and continues because the subjectivity articulated from above the text does not say "stop." All work passes through a body, and thus through a subject. The subject in such a text is visible as striation or banding rather than field/flesh, but it is still operative. That authenticity process is still at work. I think, rather, that the striations must be admitted, examined and allowed to emerge.

At the other extreme, "subjectivity in flux" is not adequate as a description of what we do, either; subjectivity itself is always subject to alteration and failure and denting. Just as a dented car is still a car, a dented subjectivity is still a subjectivity! What's interesting are the intersections and not the "flux" in isolation (this flux *is* subjectivity, which is always in formation). The pressures from above/below in the process of writing turn out to be flexible; inside and outside can change places as they do in the fold. Because a subjectivity is not possible without this flexible and ongoing movement, "subjectivity in flux" belabours the point.

OA: In that light, our insistence and admission that we made no prior decision to "collaborate" makes sense. Collaboration is the name that came afterward,

when we looked at the text and acknowledged we were all guilty parties in its confabulation. When we could look at it as readers. At the moment of writing, we are not collaborating, we are just *writing*, or *answering*, or at play in the material; we are subjects encountering subjects, regardless of what language they speak.

EM: Yes, an absolutely material response and provocation: the prompts come from the language itself. The subjectivity of the "author" is not split or fragmented between us, as there is not yet an "us," just language and listeners, responders who are in *play*, both playing with language and—need I say it—giggling!

That's why I want to refer to *Expeditions of a Chimæra* as our shared work, rather than as a collaboration. We shared work in a material field, both inscriptive and aural. Earlier, I mentioned Deleuze's fold, his *pli*. Clearly one of our Expeditions is a poem that physically folds—and must be unfolded by the reader. It walks right out of the book. As well, in "C's Garden," each part of the text is a fold, and within each of these folds, there are more folds: the line can be folded. We found this out in performing it. Even "Prank" has folds, vertical ones—in terms of the repeatedly "translated" texts—and horizontal folds, with the footnotes—which are composed as part of the text, and aren't really footnotes at all.

In *The Fold,* Deleuze invokes Gottfried W. Leibniz. "The multiple is not only that which has many parts but also that which is folded in many ways," says Deleuze (6). Or as Leibniz wrote: "The division of the continuous must not be taken as of sand dividing into grains, but as that of a sheet of paper or of a tunic in folds, in such a way that an infinite number of folds can be produced, some smaller than others, but without the body ever dissolving into points of minima" (112-14).

The process of writing *Expeditions of a Chimæra* (which are also the *Chimærae of an Expedition*) was not simply improvisational or homophonic, but involved working with distribution and resemblance, smoothness and striation, propagation and momentary occupation. There was the crossing of the written and the spoken in the composition process, facing the necessary linearity of the spoken (because we have to say one word before another) and working consciously in performance and in writing to disrupt that linearity, to fold and put stress at the points of folding, to move through constraint by stressing or folding it. All of which is subject to embodiment and certain features of embodiment, such as the differential construction of vocal cords in a human being, which affects the timbre of the voice and its potential for interaction with another voice. All these movements, to us, are political

gestures as well, as they are provisional and enactive: they move and open subjectivity and subject formation in ways that acknowledge our con-divison and intervention as affective subjects. Ah, the *civis*!

> Have we crossed the threshold?
> Did you lose your watch?
> If your passport expires, while you are on the border, can you call across?
> I want to extend the reading experience.
> You have already made people walk on text!
> How else to material a word's meat?
> Enter foreign and indigenous, across a text?
> Exit indigenous and foreign.
> All poetic text lets the texts of future poets enter.
> Who is who?

NOTE

1 An example: http://www.ualberta.ca/~transday/index_files/2009abstracts.htm of the type of backlash that refuses, even, to consider Moure to be a translator; here she is accused of "impersonating a translator"!

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Olam Habah

The avant-garde and the World-to-come, or the failure of art and the art of failure[1]

Robert Majzels

Rav Nachman asked R'Yitzchak: Have you heard when Bar Nafli will come? R'Yitzchak said to him: Who is Bar Nafli? Rav Nachman said: The Messiah. R' Yitzchak asked: Do you call the Messiah Bar Nafli? Rav Nachman answered: Yes, for it is written: The hall of David that is fallen. Bar Nafli is the son of the fallen kingdom of David, the Fallen One. Hence, the Messiah is the Fallen One. The numerical value of Bar Nafli is 372, and so is the value of Ben Yshai, the son of David. How shall we know when the time of the Messiah is near? These are the signs. When you see a generation that is dwindling, expect the Messiah. When you see a generation upon which numerous troubles come like a river, expect the Messiah. Troubles and harsh decrees will be constantly appearing anew. Before the first trouble is over, a second one will hasten to appear. If you see a generation in which the number of Torah scholars has decreased, expect the son of David.

> When Artaud writes "all writing is shit," this is not a rejection of writing, but merely a procedural description and a statement of the relation of writing to the body and to the world. Notwithstanding the cacophobia we call culture.

> After Duchamp, art that succeeds as art is not art. Art that thinks of itself as avant-garde not only fails but, in order to succeed at all, it must fail. Indeed it must fail if it is to be art at all. All art is already a failure: not in the commonplace sense of the artist's failure to fully realize her idea, but because art itself is the enactment of a failure and the work is the report of that failure: the failure by any combination of means, artistic, political, or otherwise, to attain Olam Habah, the World-to-come.

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[1]In the interest of full disclosure, the publication of this article will contribute to the increments awarded me annually (numbers that are translated into equally incremental salary increases) by the institution that employs me, and will be added to my curriculum vitae, a document that contributes to establishing my position in the international academic order.

The places of study will be emptied of scholars and serve as brothels. Corruption will have become so rampant that those few who remain truthful will have to band together and leave the general society. As for the rest of the people, their eyes will become worn out from grief and anxiety. This is the result of a long time yearning that ends in frustration. "I am in wonderment!" said Yad Ramah (12th century C.E.). "According to these signs, why has the son of David not come in this generation of ours?" The seven years immediately preceding the coming of the Messiah is the period of the travail of the Messiah. In the first year, this verse will be fulfilled: I will bring rain on one town, and on one town I will not bring rain. In the second year the arrows of famine will be sent forth. In the third year there will be great famine. Men, women and children will perish. And so will pious people and people of good deeds. Torah knowledge will be forgotten by its students. In the fourth year there will be a sufficiency but not a complete sufficiency. In the fifth year there will be a great sufficiency. People will eat, drink and rejoice, and Torah knowledge will return to its students. In the sixth year there will be sounds. In the seventh year there will be wars. Following the seventh year, the Son of David will come. Rav Yosef said: But there have been many such seven-year periods, and the Messiah did not come! Abaye said to Rav Yosef: Were there sounds in the sixth year and wars in the seventh? And did the events to which you refer occur in this order?

Even representational and profane art — the landscape, the portrait, the well wrought lyric — most firmly entrenched in the quotidian, in the world as it is, or as the artist wants to claim it is, even such a work is founded on a messianic impulse to capture something beyond, if only to regret the great absence of that to-come beyond the world as it is. The work is always about the work that has been done in the failed attempt to attain the World-to-come. This is so much more the case for the avant-garde. The work of art that thinks itself as avant-garde gestures toward the future, because it attempts to think of itself ahead of its time, in a time to come. Futile gesture that must always fail. The World-to-come, the future remains always beyond reach. The work is always reaching beyond itself.

The scripture states: That your enemies have taunted, O Hashem, that they have taunted the footsteps of Your Messiah. If a verse mentions the word "time" three and a half times, then this means a total of 1400 years. Someone else said: On the third day God will raise us up in the World-to-come. By our acts, or by our failure to act, have we let slip by yet another preordained date of redemption? Must we repent of our own accord for the redemption to come? Or will it come whether we repent or not? If we show merit, will the Messiah come early? Will he come with the clouds of Heaven or on the back of an ass? R' Yehudah says: In the generation when the Son of David will come, the meeting place will be used for licentiousness, the Galilee will lay waste and the Gavlan will be desolate. The people of the border will wander from town to town and not be granted favour. The wisdom of scholars will decay, those who fear sin will be despised. The face of the generation will be like the face of a dog. Truth will be formed

The art of failure takes the form of paradox. "One of the paradoxes of the messianic kingdom is, indeed, that another world and another time must make themselves present in this world and time…. Here we are confronted not with a compromise between two irreconcilable impulses but with an attempt to bring to light the hidden structure of historical time itself."[2] The problem of the Avant-garde is one of time. To establish the relation of the profane order to the messianic is what Walter Benjamin identified "as one of the essential problems of the philosophy of history." Benjamin, in his critique of historicism, argues that "[t]he concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous time."[3]

into groups and go away. Scripture states: For Hashem will judge his people when He sees that the hand is going, and no one is being protected or helped. The Son of David will not come until the informers have become numerous, until the students of Torah have become few, until the perutah has gone from the purse.

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[2] Fuck the MLA, its annual dues and Masonic handshake; google it: Giorgio Agamben, "Benjamin and the Demonic," in *Potentialities*, p. 168. And, while we're at it, fuck consistent grammar and spelling.

[3] Google Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Note the credibility gained within the political economy of Academia by citing Benjamin.

He will not come until the people despair of redemption. When? For precisely this reason, it was said: three things come when they are not expected: the Messiah, a windfall, and a scorpion. Rav Katina said: For 6000 years will the world exist, and for 1000 years it will be destroyed. This he deduced from the verse: Hashem alone will be exalted on that day, knowing that one day of Hashem is equal to 1000 days for us. The Gemara registers a dissenting view from Abaye: For 2000 years it will be destroyed. This he deduces from the verse: After two days He will revive us; the the third day He will raise us up and we will live in his presence. However, in accordance with Rav Katina's view, it was taught in a Baraisa: Just as the Sabbatical year causes cessation, and the land lies fallow, one year out of seven, so too the world ceases (it is laid waste) one millenium out of seven. Rav Katina therefore calculates that human history will last six millenia from Creation to the end of the Messianic era, after which will follow the Ressurection of the Dead, the Great Day of Judgment, and the period of Destruction, which will last for 1000 years.

> "The aesthetic debris of the avant-garde (pictures, film, poetry, etc.) have become both desirable and ineffectual. What is undesirable is the complete reorganization of the conditions of life such that the basis of society is altered. Once the products of the avant-garde have been neutralized aesthetically and brought upon the market, its issues — directed as always at realization through all of life — must be split up, talked to death and side-tracked... [T]he creators of new values are no longer shouted down by the protectors of culture, but are assigned designations in specialised fields... [A]rtists are expected to... take payment for providing society with the delusion that there is a special kind of cultural freedom... Social snobbery would prescribe for the avant-garde a particular place, which it can't leave without giving up its respectability... Yesterday's avant-garde is old hat. The problem with the artistic, political left today is one of truth: 'A Truth only lives to be ten years old' (Ibsen)."[4]

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[4] Helmut Sturm, Heimrad Prem, Lothar Fischer, Dieter Kunzelmann, Hans-Peter Zimmer, Staffan Larsson, Asger Jorn, Jørgen Nash, Katja Lindell & Maurice Wyckaert, "The Avant-garde is Undesirable," trans. unknown (1962), in *Situationist International Texts*: http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/.

Subsequently, the world will be reconstituted on a much higher spiritual level, the World-to-come. According to the Gemara, as interpreted by the great medieval scholar Rashi, during the thousand years of Destruction, the righteous will be given wings like eagles and they will float above the water. They will undergo a progressive purification until they shed their physical nature and are become pure spirit. This is the view of Rav Katina. There are however dissenting views. Some say the Destruction will be total and the world will be returned to the state of absolute nothingness that preceeded Creation. Rabbeinu Bachya argues that the Destruction will be partial during the seventh millennium, and that this partial destruction will recur every seven millennia until the fiftieth millennium, when the world will be completely destroyed. This 50,000-year cycle will be repeated many times. Others, coming after Rashi, suggest Rav Katina's statement is meant figuratively. It may be that Rav Katina refers to the sixth millennium as a period of terrible persecution of the Jewish people. Alternatively, the Destruction may refer to the Destruction of evil inclination. According to this view, by Destruction is meant that during the seventh millennium it will become easier for humans to overcome Man's evil inclinations. There is also some disagreement regarding the sequence of events leading up to the World-to-come. Some, with Rashi, say that the 1000 years of Destruction will follow the Messianic era and precede the World-to-come. Rabbi Menachem Meiri (1249-c.1310) offers two approaches. In Meiri's first approach he concludes that the period of Destruction will precede the Messianic era. In his proposed second approach there is no clear indication of the sequence.

Olam Habah is not a temporal period situated at the end of history, but rather a constantly deferred time. The present can be thought, with Benjamin, as the "time of the now shot through with chips of Messianic time."[5] The avant-garde is like the beggar whose function was to sit at the gates of the city waiting for the Messiah. His (even the avant-garde beggar is masculine) role is to keep watch and announce the coming of the Son of David to the inhabitants of the city; in the meantime, the city dwellers drop an occasional coin at his feet.

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[5] Benjamin, 263.

Some Rabbis more modestly attempt merely to fix the earliest and latest possible dates for the advent of the Messiah. Because the exile following the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.) was decreed to last a minimum number of years, and the Messiah will not come during that period, the earliest date for the advent of the Mes-

Once having parted with that teleological hand-puppet, how should we act?

siah is the end of that era. From that point on, the Messiah may come whenever the people have sufficient merit. The latest possible date, the End, is sometime after the divinely fixed end of the period of exile. Between these two dates, there are several possible times when the redemption is likely to come. Medieval Rabbi Moses ben Nachman Girondi, whose Catalan name was Bonastruc ça Porta, who is often referred to as Nahmanides, and who is cited by his acronym Ramban, says: Many dates were preordained for our future redemption. However, due to our failure to change our habitual behaviour, these dates passed without redemption. Each generation has its own appointed End, depending on the unique challenges assigned to it. The prophet Elijah taught that the world is des-

How should we act? is the question at the heart of that Talmud. The passage of time used to be nothing more than waiting for the Messiah. When is Master coming? Today! Suddenly, we are all each other's Messiah, each one bearing the messianic task and its responsibility. "For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter."[6]

tined to exist for 6000 years. The first 2000 years were nothingness. This does not mean there was no life, but rather that there was no Torah. From Scripture we can deduce that 2000 years after the creation of Adam, Abraham was 52 years old, and began to teach the Torah. The second 2000 years were of Torah. 48 years after Abraham began teaching Torah at the age of 52, Isaac was born. When Isaac was 60, Jacob was born. Jacob was 130 when he brought his family down to Egypt. The Egyptian exile lasted 210 years. The First Temple was built 480 years after the Exodus from Egypt. Calculating the reigns of kings, we deduce that the First Temple was destroyed after 410 years.

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[6] Benjamin, 264.

The Second Temple was built 70 years later, and stood for 420 years. This totals 1,828 years. Thus, the second 1000 years, the years of Torah, ended 172 years after the destruction of the Second Temple. After the death of Rabbi Judah Hanasi, redactor of the Mishna, in the year 3952 (220 C.E.), the conditions of exile worsened and centres of Torah study declined. The third 2000 years should have been the days of the Messiah. Why has he not come? Because, Yad Ramah reminds us, our sins have prevented it. Rabbi Samuel Eidels, whose commentary is referred to as Maharsha in the Talmud, claims that the final two millennia are the travail of the Messiah, and that he can come anytime during this period. Many scholars of the Talmud agree that the prophet Elijah has revealed the date of the Messiah's arrival. In the Gemara it is written: Elijah said to Rav Yehudah the brother of Rav Salla the Pious: The world is destined to exist for not less than 85 jubilee cycles. In the final cycle, the son of David will come. A jubilee cycle is equal to 50 years. Therefore, the world will last for 4,250 years. Why 85? In the Torah (Numbers 10:35-36), Moses prays that God will rise, disperse His enemies and reside among the Jewish people. These verses are bracketed from the rest of the Torah text by an inverted letter nun before and after the passage. In the Shabbos tractate (115b-116a) this passage is referred to as a separate book, indicating that it contains a message of its own. The letter nun has a numerical value of 50, the number of years in a jubilee cycle. The Torah indicates here that in the 85th jubilee, God will arise, disperse the enemies of the Jewish people and reside among them. All this Elijah explained to Rav Yehudah (Sanhedrin 97b).

the time of the provisional avant-garde (provag) is always yet to come

the provisional avant-garde (provag) is a no-man's land

the provisional avant-garde (provag) recalls the troops

Whenever there was a drought in his days, Rav Yehudah would merely remove his shoe as a sign of affliction and rain would come immediately, whereas we cry out profusely in prayer and NoOne pays attention to us. Now follows a difficult and hotly contested discussion. Rav Yehudah asked Elijah: Will he come at the beginning of the last jubilee cycle or at its end? According to one version, Elijah replies: I do not know. Rav Yehudah asks: Will the final cycle have ended by the time the Messiah comes or will it not have ended? Elijah replies: I do not know. But if Elijah has already replied that he does not know if the Messiah will come at the beginning or the end of the Jubilee, why does Rav Yehudah ask him the second question? Furthermore, since Elijah has already prophesised that the Messiah will come during the final jubilee cycle, why would Rav Yehudah ask if he might come after the end of that cycle? According to Maharsha, Rav Yehudah's question is rather whether the date predicted by Elijah is the earliest date for the coming of the Messiah or the latest. Rav Ashi suggests that this is what Elijah answered: Until then do not expect the Messiah; from then on expect the Messiah. According to this reading, the year 4,250 (489 C.E.) is the earliest possible date for the coming of the Messiah. But Elijah has already been cited in the Gemara as saying that the Messiah could come any time during the final two millennia, hence anytime after 4000. And here, Elijah tells Rav Yehuda not to expect the Messiah before the year 4,250. A negligible discrepancy you might say of only 250 years, but not for someone reading in the year 4,150. An additional computational complication: if, as Yad Ramah concludes, the actual earliest date for the coming of the Messiah is indeed 4,250, then the period within which the Messiah could come is actually only 1,750 years and not two complete millennia. The confusion here may be due to the fact that the Baraisa is treating a majority of a millennium as a millennium.

> the provisional avant-garde (provag) unwraps and rewraps its bandages one by one rather than all at once, in case it should be urgently needed

Rav Chanan bar Tachalifa sent a message to Rav Yosef: I met a man in whose hand was a scroll found among the hidden treasures of Rome and written in Ashuri Hebrew. And on it was written: 4291 years after the world's creation, the world will end. During some of those years there will be wars of great sea creatures. And during some of them, there will be wars of Gog and Magog. And the rest will be the days of the Messiah. And the Holy One, Blessed is He, will not renew His world until after 7000 years. This particular Baraisa confirms Rav Katina's prediction that the world will be destroyed after 6000 years. The seventh thousand years will be years of Destruction after which will follow the World-to-come. However, Rav Acha the son of Rava, and therefore a respected authority, said: After 5000 years is what was stated in that scroll.

the provisional avant-garde (provag) wears pigtails

This means that the scroll predicts either 5000 years or, if Rav Acha meant to correct only the first digit in the prophesy, 5291 years. R' Nassan says: this verse pierces and plummets to the depths! For there is another version of the appointed time; it shall speak of the end and it shall not lie. If it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not delay. Thus it is contrary to our sages who expounded the verse: until a time, and times, and half a time, to determine the date of the redemption. This argument is also contrary to

the provisional avant-garde (provag) is peer reviewed

R' Simlai, who expounded: You fed them bread of tears; you made them drink tears for a third to determine the date of the redemption. And it is contrary to R'Akiva, who expounded: There shall be another one, it shall be slight, and then I will shake the heavens and the earth, to determine the date of the redemption. In fact, the verse expounded by R' Akiva refers to a different matter altogether — that is, that after the second Temple is built, the First Jewish Kingdom will last 70 years, the second Jewish Kingdom will last 52 years, and the kingdom of Ben Koziva will last two and a half years. The Gemara discusses the verse cited at the beginning of the Baraisa. What is meant by: It shall speak of the End, and it shall not lie?

R' Shmuel Bar Nachmani said in the name of R' Yonasan: May
the very essence of those who calculate Ends suffer agony! For
they say: Since the date of the End that we calculated has arrived
and the Messiah did not come, he will never come. Rather one
should wait for him. Lest you counter that we are awaiting the
Messiah but God is not awaiting him. Scripture therefore states:
And therefore Hashem waits to grant you favour; and therefore
He is exalted to grant you mercy. And if you ask that since we are

the provisional
avant-garde
(provag) shot
Kenny Goldsmith

awaiting the Messiah and God is
awaiting him, who is preventing
his arrival? The answer is that the
Divine Attribute of Justice is pre-
venting him from coming. And if
you ask that since the Divine At-
tribute of Justice prevents him
from coming, why do we await

him, the answer is that we await him in order to receive reward,
as it is stated: Fortunate are all who wait for him. Here a dilemma:
we have a stricture against calculating the advent of the Messiah
and the World-to-come, and numerous examples of sages advanc-
ing precise dates for these events. Various explanations for this
paradox have been advanced. Some argue the setting of a time for
the coming of the Messiah within a generation's lifetime serves
to focus minds and encourage rectification. Ramban suggests
claims for an exact date are forbidden, but speculation is permit-
ted. Others ex-
plain the sages'
warning against
calculating the
precise date of the
Messiah's coming
by the fact that

if it looks like the avant-
garde it's not the provi-
sional avant-garde

these sages did so at the time of the destruction of the Temple,
when redemption was clearly far from imminent. The Gemara
forbids calculating the time of the End. Since we cannot know
when the Messiah will come, to pine for that coming will only
make one heartsick. In any case, the advent of the Messiah comes
when we least expect it; by awaiting that time, we only postpone
its coming. Perhaps there are many possible dates ordained for
the Redemption, but these moments have come and gone without
Redemption because no generation has yet been worthy.

Is this difficulty what prompted King Yehoiakim to say: The earlier ones did not know how to anger God. And he proceeded to blaspheme and declared: Do we need God for anything other than his light? And on the matter of that which they found upon him, let us say the Amoraim disagree. Some say Yehoiakim tattooed the name of a pagan deity on his organ, and others say he tattooed the name of God. The Gemara discusses what is required for a generation to be considered worthy. Abaye says: The world is comprised of not less than 36 righteous people in each generation who received the countenance of the Divine Presence. The number 36 is derived from the Mishnaic statement: Fortunate are all who wait for Him. The numerical value of the letters in the word Him (ולֹ) is 36; hence 36 is the number who will be fortunate enough to attain the highest place in the World-to-come. There is no disagreement about

the provisional avant-garde (provag) is not a device for marketing poetry

the number 36; however, the sages offer different readings of its significance. In the Succah Tractate of the Talmud, a different version of the same verse implies that only 36 people in all the generations will be sufficiently righteous to attain the highest level in the World-to-come. But, argues the Gemara, Ezekiel 48:35 states: The row before the Holy One, Blessed is He, is 18,000. Even if Abaye's calculation means that there will be 36 righteous people in each generation, that does not amount to 18,000 in the 6,000 years of this world. But

the provisional avant-garde (provag) is an asymmetrical lyric

this may not be a contradiction, since Abaye states not less than 36. Here the Gemara digresses into a long discussion of the number of righteous people and the degrees and levels of redemption.[7]

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[7] The above calculations and discussions are cited in the Tractate Sandhedrin, volume III, of the Talmud Bavli, Shottenstein Edition (New York: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1995).

Brainchild of poet Margaret Christakos, "Influency: A Toronto Poetry Salon" began in fall 2006 as a ten-week course offered by the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies. Each salon consists of eight poets "from a diversity of traditions and schools of writing": one poet speaks about another poet on the roster, who then reads; an hour of discussion follows, facilitated by Christakos. The aim? "It might benefit all of us to read more frequently across our more usual paths of influence, to in fact attempt to cross whatever artificial divides there might be among us" (Influency Salon website). In April 2010, a companion website was launched, hosting a range of poetry and commentary, with Coach House Books as a "launching pad" and the collaboration of the TransCanada Institute (University of Guelph). So far, its online magazine has published three issues. By presenting poets from many of the micro-communities in the city's literary scene and beyond, "Influency" creates the opportunity for social and intellectual interaction, and builds a sophisticated audience for contemporary poetry in general and Toronto's "multi-traditional literary culture" in particular. On 25 May 2011, this series, this "flow chart," this "intertextual parade" featured Erín Moure speaking on Rachel Zolf's *Neighbour Procedure* and Zolf speaking on Moure's *Pillage Laud*. These two talks, revised for print publication, appear below.

"Like plugging into an electric circuit"
Fingering Out Erín Moure's Lesbo-Digit-*O!* Smut Poems

Rachel Zolf

It is truly an honour for me to be invited to engage with the poetry of Erín Moure and associates, avatars, heteronyms.[1] There is no other sensory-poetic aggregate in Canada whom I admire more, whose bodies of work I have followed for over twenty years with intense awe and pleasure. Indeed, it is a daunting task to even consider writing on distributed multiplicities held in such high esteem for so long, but that task is made slightly less harrowing with the knowledge that I now have the privilege of counting the E(i)r(í)ns among my disturbingly lively friend network. This also means that they, the E(i)r(í)ns, may feel entitled to smack me upside the head later when I get everything wrong. Which would be fine, and even, perhaps, pleasurable.

Erín Moure has had much success writing lesbian sex poems, even when literary critics have chosen to ignore that Moure is writing "hi-toned obscurantist lesbo smut," as she once called her work (*Wager* 145). Given that the main, shall we say, *thrusts* of Erín's work relate to inter/intrasubjectivity and the bloom and rush of encounter and *jouissance* across languages, cultures, and bodies—specifically women's bodies—the contortions that critics must have gone

through to bypass these aspects must have been strenuous. The lines that follow strive to tussle with Erín's swerving subjectivities as they manifest in her "lost cult item from the last century,"[2] *Pillage Laud: Cauterizations, Vocabularies, Cantigas, Topiary, Prose*.

One intriguing aspect of *Pillage Laud,* a book of poems supposedly "written by a computer" (back cover), is that "Erín Moure," the so-called "biological product in the usual state of flux" (109), not to mention in big scare quotes, is not alone in her little writer's garret dreaming up these sexy mechanized *cantigas* for her lesbian lover. She has cohorts in the production, co-authors, you might say, one being the sentence-generator program MacProse, and the other being MacProse's monster-father-programmer, Charles O. Hartman. We also can't forget *Pillage Laud*'s originally accented "Erin Mouré" from 1999, and probably the other E(i)r(í)ns too, with or without scary quotes and accents, and, who knows, maybe even Elisa Sampedrín in utero.[3] Truly a distributed cybernetic network is this pillaged laud to plugs, bottoms, whips, wanks, vaginas, and harnesses, a "powerful infidel heteroglossia," as Donna Haraway, one of Erín's continuous muses, would say in her infamous "A Cyborg Manifesto" (181). Or "I was a front" and "We are my veils," as *Pillage Laud* would say (32, 14). Or, as perhaps only my friend Erín would get the engine to say, "My identity had grinned" (*Pillage* 88).

No queer reading of a book of Erín's should be overly invested in blood relations or lineage, but I don't think we can properly engage with *Pillage Laud* without mucking around at least a bit with the sperm trace of the donor that contributed to "Erín Moure"'s functional existence and poetic effluvia. In this spirit, I contacted Charles O. Hartman, aka "Daddy" in S/M parlance (this ex-girlfriend of mine would go apoplectic with laughter when I used the term "S&M" to denote sado-masochistic sexual encounters, supposedly that's just not cool, it's "S/M"). I told Hartman that *Pillage Laud* was being reissued and asked what he had thought of the book on reading the copy Erín sent him when it was first published in 1999. He said he couldn't find his copy and didn't "remember much detail" but "remember[ed] liking the book, as well as finding it interesting" (Hartman "Correspondence"). I did manage to extract one useful piece of information from him, however. Contrary to what the back cover of *Pillage Laud* attests, MacProse has not been completely relegated to the dustbins of cybernetic redundancy. Hartman directed me to an updated version of the MacProse program called PyProse, which contains the original dictionary "Erin" worked with. Eureka, I thought, I can check how she cheated, because no matter how dead "Erín Moure" the author is or was, or how pure her machinic composition processes, I knew that her living avatars would add their own impure traces to the computer-generated stream. That's just what the E(i)r(í)ns do. So I downloaded PyProse from Hartman's website and started sniffing.[4] PyProse, and MacProse before it, generates sentences that, according to Hartman, are:

> random in two ways: the syntactical structure of each sentence is constructed from phrase elements recursively chosen at random from an editable grammar; and the word-slots in the resulting sentence template are filled at random from an editable dictionary arranged by word-types. ("Programs and Programming" n. pag.)

According to the PyProse instruction manual, the program also "massages dictionary items, conjugating verbs and pluralizing nouns" and "can manufacture words, for example by conjugating 'to be' or 'to have' in accord with any constraints the sentence has already established" (Hartman).[5] All that constraining ontological massage sounds pretty sexy already, but here's how

the manual defines PyProse's flow:

> Pressing the spacebar produces a sentence, which appears in the left-hand, "output" panel. In the right-hand "tree" panel you'll see the nested structure of randomly-chosen rules that built the sentence.
>
> You can also generate a long stream of sentences by selecting "Until mouse-click" from the Sentence menu. A click anywhere in the output window will stop it.
>
> You can save the whole output you've produced as a plain text file, by selecting "Save output" from the File menu. (Hartman, "Manual" n. pag.)

So, starting at the end, as the back end is often the most fun, one can see that the last poem in *Pillage Laud*, "to exist is reading," is an example of the "Until mouse-click" and "Save output" functions, with "Erín Moure" stopping the joyful stream at about three pages and printing it out (*Pillage* 107). Here is one small halt in the flow:

> Sacrifices expect to rest, and to move happens. Fates knew her trial. So vicious a visit fell. You want to vent us. The impression is every sketch, and so seasonal a harmony is your view without excess. Because you may climb, matter cannot spell the border, and a current can pause. To form rolls. <u>When to exist is reading, can listener stop?</u> He who followed them discussed it. Schemes: the frequencies' sets. Musicians—whom have they checked? What are you releasing? Whom were we blaming? We stopped, and to spread was vacuum. (*Pillage* 106)

One could argue that the poem here consists of the sole intervention into the pleasurable spill, the underlined selection that furnishes the poem's title, "to exist is reading." I am reminded of "*du liest*" in Paul Celan's final poem, which translates as both "you read" and "you gather" or "glean" (Felstiner 285). It seems that "Erín Moure" made the *Pillage Laud* poems by selecting whole sentences from the program output and placing them in proximities and contiguities that made

sense to her own internal biological mechanisms. "To underline her tress in me . . . upended" (15). "What had so meaningless a book sheltered? / Film will remove the chemical region between the valve / and the message" (60).

In a vain attempt to decipher an indecipherable text, I spent an inordinate amount of time looking up words from *Pillage Laud* in the PyProse dictionary; I wanted to figure out if they were engendered by Daddy or "Erín" or "Erin" or someone or something else altogether. I started with the "Vocabulary Grid" on page seven of *Pillage Laud*. "Fist," "feeling," "vagina" and "flow" seem to bear particular significance—I wonder what that would be—since they dare to show up twice in the vocabulary list, and also appear in the PyProse dictionary. "Thwack," "tissue," "whoosh," and "harness" show up in the vocabulary list but not in the PyProse dictionary, so we are in impure territory already. "Vocabulary is the phantom. / Any fist—a session—" (*Pillage* 32). "Do the dawns of coinage warn the lovely vessels? / Like duh" (64). Who is speaking thus? Forgive me, Barthes' author always seems to pop up from the grave unbidden. "A dictionary especially rules. / . . . when am I entering?" (26).

Before I discovered Daddy and PyProse, I was at a loss for how the sentence-generating machine behind *Pillage Laud* functioned. My first thought was that the vocabularies running across the bottom of the page were search terms that "Erín" would input into an engine (maybe I was too clouded by my own writing processes, not to mention the title of Erín's earlier book, *Search Procedures,* which also has a bust of the Virgin Mary on the cover, but with the head and hand slightly shifted, sort of like the accent on Erín Moure). Mildly desperate to penetrate *Pillage Laud*, I asked Erín if the words were search terms, and she said no, they're choruses; she added that "each chapter or suburb has its chorus

. . . the relation of the chorus to the poem is choral . . . like a small girl making alphabetic letters on a page, while nearby her mother makes soup" ("Correspondence"). Then she directed me to Theodor Adorno for what she means by the choral:

> The concept has definable *flaws*. That leads to corrections through other concepts. The hope of naming lies in the *constellation* of concepts that each gather around itself for the purpose of that correction. (Moure "Correspondence")[6]

We could get into the intricacies of this hi-toned queer reference to Adorno, the choral and mom's soup, but I'm more interested in sexy concepts such as, "To come is conception between the pistol and the vampire" (*Pillage* 106). Seriously, in an essay published after *Pillage Laud* appeared, Erín herself acknowledges Adorno's concept of the concept, but with her own inimitable spiral twist: "My writing process is a constellative progression outward and sideways (at times in vain), not dialectical for dialectics disallows too many other types of determination" (*Wager* 152). Speaking of the choral, it's interesting that Charles O. Hartman aka Daddy's first digital project happens to have been a program to harmonize chorales (Hartman, *Virtual* 9). "What was I influencing? To form / is the music between your restriction and my industry" (*Pillage* 30).

Elsewhere, Erín speaks of coalescences, in my associative mind another form of constellation held together via sticky affects[7] and the constant linguistic motions of attraction, repulsion, and errancy. She writes:

> I call the reader's attention in my work to missing words, repetitions, misspelling, and jarring representations—or not representations but designations: machine struggles, coalescences, constructing selves that collide, molecularize, pine, adopt, enjoy, and confront a wide range of emotions and desires. (*Wager* 95)

Or in other pillaged words that laud:

> After we are certain plants—coalescent— the wheel's umpire shakes. To read was the ribbon of girls; (*Pillage* 22)

> Where we are these emotions, we are those errors, and we contribute. (*Pillage* 14)

Perhaps not desiring to be too errant within the machine, Erín also gestures in the e-mail to the almost novelistic site-specificity of each "Pillage Laud" section, calling the poems chapters and the chapters suburbs, each with its own chorus. I had naïvely wondered if the "chapter" titles pointed to short-short stories of lesbians having sex everywhere, even in the suburbs, but I suspect some of these places, other than the holey gendered moon (Google is a good place to identify the different suburbs) were simply sites she happened to be in when her book machine spit out the sex poems. Landscapes for perverted topiary, cyborgian sculpture/composition by field/feeled/fealty. Like Gertrude Stein imprinted with all those patterned lines her eyes devoured from the window on her first flight over "America"—lines and grids that are also rhythm and stress and fidelity to sense and sensation. Thus, Oakland may have a more industrial smell and taste for "Erín" than the cows uttering in High Prairie, and she may have selected her sentences to enact situated sensations like these, however dispersed. In the same essay wherein she invokes constellations, Erín again channels Haraway's "network ideological image" ("Cyborg" 170) and writes:

> In this age, we as bodies, as coding devices, also extend over virtual spaces. Which is to say that, with computers and digital processing, any locality, including a body, is extensible over and through what we know as the old boundaries of physical space. (*Wager* 153-54)

Erín also draws on Wittgenstein's famous maxim, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (*Wager* 152),

torquing it into "the limits of my phrase regime are the limits of my world" (*Wager* 154). Indeed, in the world of *Pillage Laud*, "Erín Moure" is not only limited by what she can and can't do with words and phrases and sentences, but also by the MacProse dictionary, to return to my favourite bugbear, vocabulary, and those missing words, repetitions and jarring representations she called on the reader to notice. It's interesting to me that "vulva" and "vagina" are in the PyProse dictionary, but not "penis" and "testicle." "Baseball" and "football," but no other balls. Is the dictionary sexist? Fascinating question, even if "sexist" doesn't appear there, while "sex" and "sexual" do. I also happen to know, via a nonchalant conversation with the author, that "Erín" changed all the spat-out generic "he's" to "she's," interrupting the engine's patriarchal inclinations via a few short keystrokes. Neither "lesbian" nor "dyke," nor even "queer," is in the dictionary, but good to know that "utopia" points to a possible Brossardian spiral flourishing, along with "whip," "zombie," "stroke," "citizen," and "intention." However, "Erín Moure," I mean the 1999 "Erin Mouré," chooses to add "wank" and "harness" and "metronome" and "riposte" and "contusion" and even "bandoneon," "fecund," "anomalic," "ligature," "alignment," "envy." For what end beyond spilling her poetic DNA trace as impure flow in the network? I'm not sure. Just as I'm not sure why "Erin's" 1999 limited edition "Her insertion" page, meant to nestle suggestively between the suburbs of Burnaby and Rachel-Julien, has also been relegated to the cutting-room dustbin in 2011. Are we meant to know? "The intention melted. / Strokes can allow her" (*Pillage* 79).

Indeed, as *Pillage Laud* affirms, "a computer is plaster," raw material from which to frame and shape a not necessarily containable linguistic, philosophical and affective topiary (*Pillage* 17). The translation always leaves something behind, to use a trope that appears in *Pillage Laud* and recurs in Erín's work. Translation becomes part of the composition and meaning-making processes of gift, receipt, loss; guest, host, *hostis*. Here among the constraining bits and bytes, "*obrigada*" (*Pillage* 27) doesn't appear in the PyProse dictionary, but "thanks" does; "demeure" (*Pillage* 13) is nowhere to be found, but "residence" and "remain" exist, and even thus the handshake fragments of "what" "remains" of thinking and thanking. Via homolinguistic slippage, PyProse's "agriculture" transforms into *Pillage Laud*'s "cultures," and "hipboots" curve into "hips"; one of "open," "penny" or "pencil" becomes the "pen I last wrote you with"; and the separately marching "band" and "wagon" jump on "Erín's" noisy, sticky "bandwagon." M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* comes to mind, in which the author proliferates words within words to impurely, momentarily, shuck off the shackles of constraint-based composition, not to mention unspeakable social limits and disavowals, via sometimes irrecuperable vocabularies. These our infidel mothers, this our heteroglossalia: Vocabulary starts the flow. Vocabulary is where I enter. Vocabulary clings to alterity.

Vocabulary is what gets altered, and even Daddy gets in on the action. Not content with occupying the stance of proverbial ghost in the machine, Charles O. Hartman also enters into poesis, writing poems using the PC version of the generator, "Prose," and titled "Seventy-six assertions and sixty-three questions" (*Virtual* 129). In contrast to Erín's approach to the machine, he openly and happily "alter[s] [Prose's] impromptu output to suit [his] own poetic sense" (*Virtual* 83). Citing the influence of Coleridge's "poetry is the best words in the best order," Hartman not only added a lot of superlative "so's" to the Prose grammar structure, but his ordering and ordered trace as author, or what he'd call "editor," is much more obvious than "Erín's"—and much less memorable (*Virtual* 81). Where

Hartman cuts into and recombines the sentence elements in a perhaps vain quest for the even more purely best words, "Erín" employs the MacProse sentences as intact units of composition (and emotion) in all their rough, awkward beauty. Even as she seems to give up control of her weedy, repetitive phrases, it is apparent that no one but Erín could have selected—written— these gleaned cantigas. Erín's multivalent voice (I'll resist the scare quotes) trickles through the registers—the trace or hand of the poet (like the hands that reappear on Erín's book covers) is never completely erased, even as, according to Hartman, "the computer's intervention can make the poet and the reader aware of the peculiar objectivity of language" (*Virtual* 107). Indeed, "every word we speak was once spoken for the first time by somebody, and it didn't exist until then . . . even the dictionary has an author" (*Virtual* 107). Perhaps Hartman could be deemed the author of the Mac/Prose dictionary, which when he first started programming, contained the 5000 most common words in American English usage (in printed form, mostly via newspapers) and produced a poetry-generating program "whose terminal boredom," he claims, "was partly due directly to vocabulary" (*Virtual* 80). While writing *Human Resources,* I dealt with a similar boredom using the WordCount database of the most common words in the British version of the English language and was glad to discover the "vagina america bitch cat" vocabulary strings that QueryCount generated. Hartman wasn't so lucky as to have access to such flowery verbiage blooming from the dirty minds of online users, and bemoaned that among his original 5000 words, "not much was likely to crop up that would testify to the poetry inherent in the American soul" (*Virtual* 80). To remedy this pressing issue, and perhaps, in the footsteps of William Carlos Williams, in order to approximate the infamous "speech of Polish

mothers" or other burbling sounds from an essential American vernacular, Daddy Hartman cut words from the Prose dictionary that, according to him,

> felt like irredeemable bureaucratese: *accordance, recommendation, facilities, nonspecific, marketing*. In general, any words that pushed a sentence too hard toward abstractness were better omitted: *personality, negative, growth, velocity, location, intervention*, and dozens of others ending with -tion. But also, inappropriately concrete words had to go, such as most names. "Dave" and "Orleans" are among the first five thousand, but they don't help the reader's sense of *focus* in random prose. They're just disorienting. (*Virtual* 80)

Other so-called "good" words had to go— for example, he claimed that "urge requires a complicated object" (*Virtual* 81). (The *Pillage Laud* lovers can attest to that). "Dumping" words eventually brought the vocabulary list down to 1000, to which he promptly added new words that he:

> hoped would have positive effects on a reader's sense of coherence or purpose in the sentences. I began with concrete nouns: *elephant, Bebop, calico, muffin, pewter, clarinet, oak*. Earlier I had gathered for other purposes a special lexicon of words derived from poems I was working on. Many of these words—*checkmate, Babbage, metabolism, Turing, computation*—would serve. (*Virtual* 81)

Hartman also decided to add words that present special challenges to an automatic speech recognizer, and "the whole group of about two hundred covers the field of English phonemes very thoroughly . . . *asterisk, gung-ho, weed, typhoid, sleuth*" (*Virtual* 81). While Hartman may have been gung-ho in his urgent bureaucratic desire to intervene and use vocabulary to sleuth out a kind of nonspecific clean coherence in computer-generated poetry, Moure's irredeemably disorienting Bebop abstractions elude the dictionary's grasp while

recommending always provocative readings: "What may accuracy plant? . . . Would you please be done with 'that' before my adolescence" (*Pillage* 19, 12).

Back to our own fumbly-fingered sleuthing, after a *bissel* of elementary deduction, it becomes apparent that the 2011 *Pillage Laud* contains poems that have been revised from the party-on 1999 edition. For example, the poem on page 92 has a number of cuts and some reordering, perhaps because it wouldn't fit on the smaller page layout in the new edition. One remarkable change, however, is in the second-last poem of the reissued book, where the final pronoun in the poem shifts from I to we: "Though to vanish openly escapes you, / We didn't end" (*Pillage* 102). Could it be that the "you" of the pushy audience "expect[ing] affections" (*Pillage* 102) and the formerly loner "I" now distributed "we" of the writing machine, and the S/M dykey lovers, and Charles O. Hartman aka Daddy, and the tightassed MacProse grammar and dictionary are all connected via lungs and proliferating I/eyes, ears and other leaky-clangy prosthetic netherparts? It's undecided—just like the former "Erin Mouré," of the first *Pillage Laud*, not only whose name but whose author bio transformed somewhere in the basement of the BookThug Department of reissue. Like one of the ghosts in *Pillage Laud*'s machine, though "To intend forms me" (*Pillage* 69), "Erin Mouré has not separated out 'intent' yet." The latter sentence was the bio line on the back cover of *Pillage Laud* in 1999, which mysteriously disappears twelve years hence. Perhaps in the interim the author found a place for her intent outside the book machine and its procedures: "The violet of force compels my intention. / To stay reflects. They listen" (*Pillage* 31).

Intentional or not, another interesting slippage in the 2011 *Pillage Laud* is the disappearance of the epigraph from Jacques Derrida's book *Demeure* (that word again, the vocabulary fragment that wasn't in the PyProse dictionary, while "what" "remains" of translatability endured). Here is the excised epigraph:

> Allow me, since there's not much time, to blurt it out: without the *possibility* of this fiction, without the spectral virtuality of this simulacrum and, as a result, of this lie or this fragmentation of the truth, no accurate testimony, as such, would be possible. (*Pillage* 1999, iii)

I assume "Erín" simply had to cut an epigraph because of the shorter page layout, but it is interesting that she chose this particular epigraph to cut, rather than the one from Deleuze, Beckett, or the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*. Perhaps a random choice, like in a computer program that generates sentences via algorithm. Perhaps "Erín" was stuck on the dictionary (as we both seem to be) and cut the next largest epigraph. Perhaps she no longer believes in the "spectral virtuality of this simulacrum" that is also *Pillage Laud,* this book's uncanny ability to cleave testimony into polyvocal coalescence and constellation and embody the person as "a sensory aggregate" (*Wager* 104). But I doubt this was an epistemic crisis; it was probably just the page length. In *Demeure*, the lines that precede the cited epigraph refer to the "fiction of testimony," so this is likely the fiction referred to in the excised epigraph, the full and fully haunted multiplicity of testimony (and poetry), never reducible to the univocal (Derrida 72). As Giorgio Agamben reminds us in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, not only is the living witness to the disaster never singular or complete, but the etymological roots of "author" are vendor, one who persuades, and *witness* (148). The *Demeure* lines that follow the excised epigraph are: "Consequently, the possibility of literary fiction [and fiction here encompasses poetry] haunts so-called responsible, serious, real testimony. This haunting is perhaps the passion itself, the passionate place of literary writing, as the project to say everything" (72).

Indeed, the *Demeure* epigraph haunts the re-issued *Pillage Laud,* as *Pillage Laud* haunts *A Frame of the Book* or *The Frame of a Book*, the book of Erín's that also appeared in 1999, a book not generated by a computer, so thus, in common parlance, closer to the so-called truth of the so-called author-vendor-persuader-witness; yet, it is a book just as haunted by incomplete testimony and unanswerable questions as is the *Pillage Laud* writing machine. According to Hartman, "The [Mac/Prose] grammar . . . stresses questions because I've found they have an especially evocative effect on the reader" (*Virtual* 80). He also refers to American Language poetry, and in particular Ron Silliman's seminal essay on the "New Sentence," the paratactical sentence as unit of composition in a good portion of the most interesting poetry being written in the United States since the 1970s (which is, in turn, influenced by Gertrude Stein's singular use of the sentence long before). Hartman is particularly interested in Silliman's thirty-page prose poem, "Sunset debris" in his book *Age of Huts*, a poem made entirely of sentences that end in questions. Hartman writes, "This massive consistency shifts our attention to the nature of questions themselves. Each sentence, rather than asking something (like questions in conversation) begins to *exemplify questioning*" (*Virtual* 23). One definitely gets a sense of the flow of questions enacting a space of thought in the section of *A Frame of the Book* entitled "The Her Sensorium" (71). I am reminded of Edmond Jabès's book of frames, thresholds and unanswerable questions at the limits of language and thought, while also becoming fixated on how many of *A Frame of the Book*'s questions may have been cribbed from MacProse. "Whose feature was an implicit groin?" (84). Nope. "Is a grammar also a 'bonyness'"? (92). Nope. "Is there a hybrid correlation for 'life'?" (92). Not in PyProse, but definitely in the various "E(i)r(í)n Mour(é)s" not

yet killed off like Pessoa's heteronym in the opening of *Pillage Laud*.[8] Haraway's cyborg haunts—"a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction" ("Cyborg" 149). Perhaps Haraway's "leaky distinction between animal-human (organism) and machine" is like the leaky distinction between fiction and so-called truth or testimony in *Demeure* ("Cyborg" 152). Perhaps *Pillage Laud* is just as much made of and from Erín as *A Frame of the Book* is; perhaps the excised I haunts the we that entered that poem near the end of the 2011 *Pillage Laud.* This is the singular newness of *Pillage Laud,* particularly at the time its digital sex poems appeared in 1999; instead of simply ejaculating language from a Markov chain and a generator of ones and zeros, the book enacts and re-enacts "the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading [and I would say *gleaning*] the world" ("Cyborg" 152).

Through his own theorizing of digital poetry's meeting of machine and organism in *Virtual Muse*, Hartman also touches on some of the basic thinking behind a broad range of writing more focused on the materialities of language than on the narrative of the self. Hartman draws not just on Silliman but on John Ashbery's writing style:

> Ashbery obscures his references to the nonlinguistic world we think we all know in common. Yet the sense of the language, its internal relations of syntax and semantic categories, remains largely intact. . . . So this kind of language is a little like music, which refers to nothing but which no one would call meaningless. (*Virtual* 20)

Hartman claims that "though some of [Prose's] products seem quite strange, they are all grammatically correct, with all the urging toward sense that that implies" (*Virtual* 79). This reminds me of one of

the most important things Erín taught me, or maybe it was Bob Majzels—sometimes I can't separate them (Bob also used MacProse to compose some sentences in his remarkable fiction, *Apikoros Sleuth*. And while we're in the social, Bob smartly opined that MacProse was incapable of generating a cliché because it has no culture and has never met anyone—a quip that Erín later happily stole from him[9]). Anyway, either Erín or Bob helped me notice how a line of poetry can be syntactically correct but semantically slip out of grasp, how that elision enhances the impact of sentences as units of composition in literary writing. For the machine behind *Pillage Laud*'s mask, mesh, net, text, tissue (of quotations), "Nouns are its gears, and fabrics are your brushes" (*Pillage* 17). *Pillage Laud* succumbs to the caress—of cloth, ornament and encounter; lover/reader reaching across the gaps, even among all that rough leather. "My text is grieving, and these belts finish every arrangement" (36).

More than Silliman's or Ashbery's subject-verb-predicates, Stein's inimitably emotional sentences as units of constellative concept and composition seem more in tune with Moure's *Pillage Laud*. Here are just a few Steinian bon moments:

> "A sentence thinks loudly." (Stein, "More" 375)
> "A sentence is not natural." (366)
> "A sentence is not not natural." (374)
> "A sentence is primarily fastened yes as a direction, no as a direction." (Stein, "Sentences" 164)
> "A sentence is made by coupling meanwhile around to be a couple there makes great dubeity named atlas coin in a loan." (115)[10]

Erín invokes Stein's continuous play with repetition and difference via her own disjunctive digital chorus: "Each of her can verge: tissue should form. / (the code) has stumbled" (*Pillage* 36). Recall that "tissue" (that close etymological relative of net, text,

mesh and mask) appeared in the *Pillage Laud* chorus but not in the PyProse dictionary. "In general," Erín writes,

> my work constructs texts whose lines are "planes" or "planar components" linked proximally in scenes that act in turn as a kind of figure, which itself often repeats, backtracks, jumps, is partial, twists, impedes. (*Wager* 116)

Derrida similarly circles and re-circles around and though different meanings of the word "demeure" in his deconstruction of Maurice Blanchot's fiction—repetition and *différance* producing polyvocal testimony that opens and opens. Jonathan Culler suggests that "[Derrida's] *Demeure* carries a questioning of stability to the heart of memory, of what remains" (871). *Pillage Laud* suggests that "An archive comforted me // I was a front / My label between every chief and the sex exposed you" (32). Like Adorno's notion of non-identity, there are concepts that exceed the grasp of thought and sensibility; there are limits to this phrase regime and this world, limits where it's plenty fun to play in, against and around.

Speaking of exposure, excess and excision, in the reissued *Pillage Laud* there is an interesting erasure of "*secret de la rencontre*" as the title for the opening section of the book, which in 1999 included the epigraphs, the Vocabulary grid, and the Pessoa dialogue. With an encyclopedic memory or a little dexterous Googling, one can discover that this phrase is excerpted from Paul Celan's "Meridian" speech. Here is the relevant section in English (Erín must have read it in French translation from German):

> The poem is lonely. It is lonely and *en route*. Its author stays with it.
> Does this very fact not place the poem already here, at its inception, in the encounter, *in the mystery of the encounter*.
> The poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it.

For the poem, everything and every-body is a figure of this other toward which it is heading. (Celan 49)

Even as the 2011 *Pillage Laud* erases this secret, it heads toward its own persuasive response:

When we were your dances, so perma-nent a way was every curling woman without its chapel, and we were persuading it. She who has run matters. (103)

Since to advance is so consistent a waste, we should wait for someone; and her speaker won't reply. Events: grasses. (94)

"What are the limits of individual con-sciousness?"—Erín asks in an essay on *A Frame of the Book* (*Wager* 104). (She doesn't mention *Pillage Laud* in this essay, but *Pillage Laud* haunts). I'm drawn back to that email exchange she and I had on Adorno, the choral, the mom, and the soup. According to Erín's email:

Pillage laud selects (well actually an indi-vidual consciousness, i for short, selects... first, decides when to start the sentence generation, decides when to press stop, then performs actions within the gener-ated text ("selection" more or less)) *from computer generated sentences...*

She also wrote "the relation of the chorus to the poem is choral . . . like a small girl mak-ing alphabetic letters on a page, while nearby her mother makes soup." Interestingly, the next line is "the i.c. is both the s.g. and the m." The individual consciousness is both the small girl and the mom. Now the reader can know the limits of this world we go toward, bespeak, in grasses. Yet the E(i)r(í)ns' non-identity keeps grinning, as do their sparring with stinky presence and flirtation with the anti-aesthetic:

Their sentence—had each of them destroyed the rank of presence?
The stress is analysis.
So iron a father vaccinates beauty.
(*Pillage* 14)

The fiery, passionate and sometimes ugly digital lashings could lead to cauterization or another mutually wounding process, "Its suture presence (ventricle) was skin." As Erín asks in her essay on *A Frame of the Book*,

Does the skin still demarcate the borders of identity when we work with a computer, when we no longer see our interlocutors? What is the effect of distance on the human body, on a woman's body, on rela-tions between women? Is distance also an inevitable effect, thus a fact of the text? In what ways does the text act like a skin, like a libidinal band (after Jean-François Lyotard)? (*Wager* 104).

Here I could root around beneath Lyotard's libidinal skin, but perhaps I'll leave that for intrepid investigators to Google in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. As Haraway affirms and "Erín" enacts, "the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" ("Cyborg" 151). Derrida advocates the "possibility of an innocent or perverse literature that inno-cently plays at perverting the distinctions" among fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury (29). Yet, the cyborg is, accord-ing to Haraway, "oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence" ("Cyborg" 151). And yet, Erín's cyborg is a complicated "we" that "were these (shelved) utopias" (*Pillage* 19)—multiply partial, ironic, and perverted, but also resolutely uncommitted to the cliché of the lesbian utopia:

I want to go beyond utopic portrayal or distopic or atopic portrayal (all of them meaning "not a place") to what I call, wonderingly, *to*-pic. . . . the problem is how to evoke a lesbian imaginary that *acts across boundaries* without falling into the utopic or the banal, an imaginary that, as well, resists commodification, and works without slipping into a solipsistic version of tenderness. (*Wager* 94)

Drawing on Adorno, there is a distinct sense throughout Erin's work of "cognition

[as] wounded healing," evident here among this sculpted topiary of tender cauterizations, the brand mark of multiple S/M author-practitioners burning traces in the surrounding white space (53). The cautery destroys some tissue in an attempt to mitigate damage. The line of creation is the same as the line of destruction. "Harm didn't verify us. / The vaccine of music was a gate" (*Pillage* 17). Thankfully there is "wit inside wounds" (15) . . . "so pleasant a prison" (30). "The vested interest balanced. A master had slipped / A riposte her contusion" (15). Even while the fevered archive of encounter in and on the marked body of the text evades the reader's—and writer's—reach: "The tragedy of flesh was / my summary between the vehicle and an archive. I can't repair it" (91).

Though we can't, and don't want to, repair the gaps in presence and meaning and certainty and identity and authorship and testimony and archive and confession in and among these happily perverted pillaged lauds, we can draw on the E(i)r(í)ns's beloved Gilles Deleuze for a pithy final moment of close reading and exegesis: "There is nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It's like plugging into an electric circuit" (*Wager* 15). Or perhaps we can get inspiration to go on, and on, from Hartman aka Daddy sperm, whose last line of *Virtual Muse*, is "We live most when we live in flux" (109). Alas, for me and my buddy MacProse, it seems all that remains of our fingered-out path through the thick, wet forest of Erín-cy is: "We were these comments. / You were swelling. The rest is radar" (*Pillage* 46).

NOTES

1 This paper is a slightly revised version of a talk I was invited to give on Erín Moure's *Pillage Laud* (BookThug, 2011; Moveable Ink, 1999) for Margaret Christakos's Influency salon at the University of Toronto, May 25, 2011. Influency is an important pedagogical experiment in long-form conversations between Canadian poets. In tandem with this talk, Moure gave a talk on my book, *Neighbour Procedure*, that also appears in this issue of *Canadian Literature*. In this paper, I deliberately retain the talk's open tone and structure, as this form—close unreading, fingering before figuring—is best suited to the thinking and knowledges that *Pillage Laud* generates.

2 According to the back cover of the 2011 BookThug edition of *Pillage Laud: Cauterizations, Vocabularies, Cantigas, Topiary, Prose* by "Erín Moure." This edition is a slightly revised reprint of the 1999 Moveable Type books edition, written by "Erin Mouré." Subsequent references to *Pillage Laud* refer to the BookThug edition, unless otherwise noted.

3 Erín Moure has published under several heteronyms, including Erin Mouré, Eirin Moure, Elisa Sampedrín, EM, "Erin Mouré" and "Erín Moure," the latter two monikers corresponding respectively to the 1999 and 2011 editions of *Pillage Laud*. For the rest of the paper, I will use the singular Erín Moure to designate the writer (or "indicator of a social structure projected onto this organism," *Pillage* 109) as she primarily appears in the present. Her other derivations appear when clarity is necessary.

4 To download *PyProse*, go to http://oak.conncoll.edu/cohar/Programs.htm.

5 "PyProse Manual" is downloadable at http://oak.conncoll.edu/cohar/Programs.htm.

6 This seems to be Erín's own translation (and italics), but similar wording can be found on page 53 of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*.

7 In thinking associatively of the desiring relations among writer, text, reader (and context), I here draw on Sara Ahmed's book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*: "Stickiness is what objects do to other objects—it involves a transference of affect—but it is a relation of 'doing' in which there is not a distinction between passive and active, even though the stickiness of one object might come before the stickiness of the other, such that the other seems to cling to it" (91).

8 There are a number of lines cribbed from MacProse in Erín's subsequent, supposedly non-machine-made book, *O Cidadán*.

9 Or maybe it was the other way around. Suffice it to say that Bob and Erín translate together and read each other's work and influence each other. Indeed, Bob engaged in "the first quiet reading" of the *Pillage Laud* manuscript (1999, 99). They have also both been important mentors and colleagues to me.

10 I am drawing on Lyn Hejinian's important "Two
    Stein Talks" (in *The Language of Inquiry*) in com-
    posing this list of sentences.

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On Zolf's *Neighbour Procedure*

Erín Moure

Introduction

Jean-François Lyotard, in 1979, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, articulated what is, to me, a beautiful proposition: that in our times no final authority—ecclesiastical, secular, or cultural—lays down the overriding rules (or metanarratives) for discourses. Discourses, rather, emerge in action, in the process. They move in and through and touch each other. They "incomprehend" each other, to coin a word. There is often a temptation, in dealing with such "incomprehension," to insist on a single discourse, one that simply overrides that of the other. To Lyotard, and to me as well, political imposition of a *discours unique* is one thing that leads to fascism and to an "expulsion of the other" that can't help but be dangerous.

Expulsion always enacts a border. Just as voracity/anthropophagy[1] effaces one. *What does a border mean, provoke?* A border between countries or polities is always an imposed thing, not "natural" or "a priori." It is, in itself, perhaps, the *risk* of expulsion. The geographical location of the risk of hurt. That harm, or expulsion, could potentially occur is what situates us at a border.

The line at a border is not actually thin,

but thick. And some borders are thicker than others. The people on the other side of the thin line we use to represent a border, the people from the other side, are also part of us, part of this side, part of the border. The sides of a border are interpolated.

Yet, yes, we still inhabit locales, places that can be located precisely, but places are also themselves traversals, carrefours, and thus "citational," "citations," and they both site and cite us, in our being, and in our relation with others.

All this points to or from a book I wrote, *O Cidadán*. I point back to it, and will, because my own capacity to think the spaces of Rachel Zolf's *Neighbour Procedure* come from my work on that book, at that time— its bundle of citations, acknowledged, its citations from public and anonymous speech, unacknowledged, its use of generated sentences from MacProse to create philosophically sound discourse and to generate forms (documents) for the book.

My consideration of Lyotard in and through *O Cidadán* propels me to examine how Zolf deals with matters of conflicting phrase regimes, phrase regimes, and naming in *Neighbour Procedure*, an enormously beautiful, various, and provocative book of poetry.

2

Let's call *Neighbour Procedure* by Rachel Zolf an Infection Procedure: one that invades the known borders of Genre, Copyright, Citation, Book, Ethics, houses of language, languages, pages in order to attach names to deaths, in order to name houses, all in crossing and residing at the overlapping border between Israel and Palestine. And this, because (here we must reread Judith Butler's *Precarious Life*, to which *Neighbour Procedure* explicitly points us, and thus *obliges us* to consider) naming is essential to grieving, both our loss and our vulnerability as human, a loss and vulnerability that is tacit and that, perhaps

is constitutive of the human. As Butler says, " . . . without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence" (xviii). This border, this entity "Israel" and this entity "Palestine" are borders that are in us as well, and are borders—within and outside us—for which we are responsible, for which we too must assume responsibility.

Or nothing will change.

Perhaps it is in the form of poetry, and in the form of the BOOK of poetry, that this critical and unavoidable mourning can be constituted, that the bond between the epistemic (a priori) and the metaphysical (a posteriori or contingent) can be revealed and sited/cited if not ever settled: the bond between what we know without experience, and the contingency of "if" that must be explored if we are to inhabit these bodies of ours in less dangerous ways.

Extremely essentialistic nationalism/s (those examples of *discours unique*) that have affected and still affect us, that are reactive rather than active, work to efface the border between neighbours as interpenetrable, making it instead a line of fire, of injury, of blasting through the house in order to reach the Other. When the state gets involved in the border between neighbours out of singular purpose or imposition or defense of a *discours unique*, it damages it. *Infarctus, infect.* It destroys houses in order to defend citizens (excuse me but no, this makes no sense). Setting up an impenetrable border between people creates a border (of house or nation) that can then be forced (a porous or interpenetrable border can't be forced) . . . and thus be used to injure.

Zolf's *Neighbour Procedure*, in contrast, uses a procedure I might call "border jamming," not in order to muck up the distinction between borders or force them, but to show by citational crossings and constructs that they are always already false, and always already overlapping, and that these crossings involve human voices and

human address, in all its contradiction and also its suppleness, its frank look upward.

As well, inside the borders, where what is *is*, Zolf shows that what *is* is always borrowed, taken, subsumed, consumed, cannibalized, leaky. Pizza joint and fairytale, shoot and weep.

The question is: what ethics guides this leakage? What leakage ethicizes this guide? What guide leaks this ethics? How can we know?

Who is our guide? Guide-language? Guide-breakage? How can we know? How can we know anything, have a ground to stand on?

3
Our world is one where capital and the movement of capital, labour, and products, and the agreements governing them, mean that borders cannot any more be said to be strictly owned by "nations," or "nationals." In any case, borders of states do not and never did make "national" sense. The rise of nation states in Europe and then in Africa and South America from the time of the French Revolution—with its ideas of sovereignty residing in the people instead of in the elites—gave rise to problems wherever there were/are overlapping border zones (which occurred in many places). Who were the people? Was everyone that lived on a territory "the people"? Or did some have to be extirpated, either by expulsion and death or by educating their children to assume another identity? It arrived both ways, but in both cases, only a singular adherence to a national and centralist ideal created the nations we know today. It also helped spur or fuel, at its extreme, the fascisms of twentieth-century Europe.

Even in benign cases such as France—home of the *croissant* and the *pain au chocolat*—with its Flemish border, its German border, its Basque border, its Andorran border, it was the overdetermining insistence on the French language, which was only spoken by 25% of residents of the Hexagon at the time

of the French Revolution, i.e., the first formation of a secular, non-aristocratic state, that made the country and nations into *France*, at the expense of many other languages and internal cultures. In part, this overdetermining insistence on a single idiom acted to inculcate an essentialist (and enervated) understanding of what it was to be "French" that later helped, in my view, to make atrocities possible, for it fuelled the anti-Semitism that allowed people to turn their backs on the deportation of 66,000 French Jews in World War II to Nazi concentration and death camps. In any case, borders do not make sense in terms of nation; rather, the constructed nation acts to make "sense" of the border. And yet, paradoxically, inside and outside are not absolute but self-reinforcing; they are also reception mechanisms and as such, it is the crossing and permeability of borders that helps solidify the notion of "inside" (something I learned in my work on *O Cidadán* in 1999-2002).

Neither are borders of persons clearly definable (I explored this in my own procedure, *Search Procedures*); we know this when we think of the ache of love and that ache in the face of the loss of individuals to death, and how our insides are torn, are "not us," are in a state of lack. Even ducks miss their dead partners and display the characteristics of depression and loss of place and self that are associated with grief. Love itself is *unmemntioable* or *biutiful*—to be expressed it has to be spelled wrong, its word border pressed upon. Sometimes a border is not a line but a piercing agony. Our physical boundaries, even: the skin and the limbs are naturalized and reified as if they were identical with the boundaries of the person, but this is not so.

The border thus exhibits in its very constitution a fraying related to politics and morality. Perhaps a border is not a line but a fraying . . . thus, as in *O Cidadán*: the harms. To quote Butler again: "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at

risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (20).

The harms, however, harm not citizens (who have abstract bodies) but individuals (who have real flesh and blood). As I read in Butler: " . . . the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own" (26). As such, and even moreso, it is impossible to pit one person's suffering against that of another. All humans when they suffer suffer as individuals. And deserve a break.

So on the Israeli-Palestine border that is not a border but a set of contested sites, histories, leakages, there exist individuals who *deserve a break.*

This fact or facet of individual suffering cannot help but produce a differend, dif-ferends—and Zolf's book is a book of differends: irresolvable disputes involving language. Yet people also suffer in families, in shared houses, in neighbourhoods. Colonizations of minds and spaces are never simple, are multiple. Appropriation-borrowing, and crossing or blurring the borders of texts, have their good side, and their difficult side.

4

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document16 (search and replace)

To read 'dignity' where 'desire' is. "We cannot rejuvenate it with grey on grey, we can merely know it" (Godard, *Allemagne Année 90 Neuf Zéro*). The singularity both of pain and of solitude. To arrive is nature, and you are her cut. Yet the social is the context upon which this pain is screened. Or 'mouth.'

The choice of value: so gentle a keyword. Whom are pupils surveying?

To verge changed you, my vagabond. Elected conscience.

A walking magnitude where cattle had frozen or burned.
The heap of legs and torsos where the
    barns "went up"
(that's it).
Sitting up and down where the ventricle
    is open.

And if the vireo still said 'dignity'?

O girls my countries.

The relation between "dignité" et "souveraineté."

"swan upon the wound"

That last line or phrase in that poem (itself from *O Cidadán)* comes from René Char's poem "Liberté": "cigne sur la blessure," which is homophonically also "signe sur la blessure," sign upon the wound. Which surely describes that which poetry is in *Neighbour Procedure.*

5

The notion of "différend," this Lyotardian notion, refers to the presentation of a case in one phrase regime that does not make sense to those using another phrase regime. Phrase regimes, to Lyotard, are where knowledge is built and where it crosses, traverses, and conducts itself. To build and conduct oneself within a phrase regime is to make possible the building of concord-ances and truths. As Lyotard writes in *The Differend*, "To learn names is to situate them in relation to other names by means of phrases" (44).

The Israeli case, as we know, does not make sense, or often does not make entire sense, to those using our phrase regime, or to those using the phrase regime "Palestine."

But what happens when phrase regimes cross and meet? Ah. The famous example of this, used by Lyotard in *The Differend,* is that of "Auschwitz" and of the Holocaust. I cite this (and site it) now because the Holocaust lies behind and within the word Israel, and at its borders. Part of the mean-ing of the name Israel comes from a certain

understanding of the word Holocaust, inside and outside Israel. I will also add that, in my view, our common understanding of "Holocaust" and "Auschwitz" are based on a small variety of phrases so often repeated that we are in the realm of the simulacrum and at risk of no longer thinking at all! I'll bear the risk here.

What can a Holocaust survivor bear witness to? In Lyotard's view, it is the "unpresentable," unpresentable in any phrase regime. Thus it is subject or suspect, and at risk of being denied. In terms of the differend, which is an absolute spacing beyond spacings, it is in a language that shares words with other languages, but in its phrases, its development and movement of phrases—its phrase regimes—, it shares nothing, corrodes any possibility of judgment without force. And this corrosion is . . . normal. Sadly, normal. The survivor speaks (because the dead can't) and we don't hear. I speak, and you cannot hear me.

I've spent a long time considering these matters of spacing and the absolutism of spacing, and the harm it does, to the collectivity, and to the human person. For this reason, *Neighbour Procedure* is an important book to me.

6

In Zolf's book, I see the ethical effort to move toward a different kind of consideration of spacing. This effort does not deny differends; it takes differends as its starting point. It conducts a micrology of spacing: observing and reenacting, enacting, dynamiting and enacting, in the most positive and rigorous way—a way only possible in the forms, non forms, of poetry—the spacing between languages, sounds, meanings, histories of those sounds. It *conducts* these spacings, both as orchestra conductor but also as particle field that allows electric current to pass. Particles, citations, quotes, ordinary public speech as recorded in newspapers and online, are used in the construction of the poems: spacings, movements, rhythms, are built by Zolf as she does this poetic construction. Repetitions inside poems are built and tensions between poems are also built. Differends are built on the micro level into poems, and into the macro level, all using shared speech, public speech, published speech.

All this occurs with the intention (expressed) of making names visible. As Lyotard says in *The Differend*, "To learn names is to situate them in relation to other names by means of phrases" (44). In Zolf, the poem "Grievable" holds the names of people, and is preceded, necessarily, by the names of places in "The Capacity to Give Names."

Spacings between languages are always (here and outside-here) also proximities. They are self-proximating and proximating through human beings, through the ear and eye. Thus phrase regimes, in Zolf, come to meet, diverge, and converge simultaneously. By using/selecting from public speech, Zolf locates and presents us with certain cadences we easily recognize and wear, while at the same time constructing spacings that alert and disturb us.

Zolf starts the book with a border clash in the poem "a priori": a poem title employing the very two Latin words that constitute a phrase regime we cannot question, the words "a priori." A priori forms are, as Kant says, transcendental, not experiential; they are, however, necessary for experience to form, to coalesce. To be articulable. And this articulableness, the capacity to be able to be articulated, this spacing that precedes speech (an echo of Agamben here) means that in some ways—to Kant for example— a priori forms constitute the human subject. They are epistemological; they tell us something about what it is to "know."

In Zolf, what follows from the initial title of the first poem in the book, "a priori," however, are not transcendentals, and are not solely epistemological or relations of knowledge: they are figures that are

contingent, the beginnings of contingencies. They thus depend on relations, which is to say, on contracts, which is to say that there is always something outside the known that is being brought into the known, which act always, always, leaves (or creates, or makes evident) a fissure. Zolf's book begins, under that first poem title, with a set of phrases beginning with "if." They are semantic or logical phrases, and presented as phrase structures, as semantic representations: they are not completed phrases. It is as if the a priori actually cannot be known first without experience . . . or as if experience always already infects knowledge, what we call knowledge. Or as if the foreknowledge of experience we do not have yet infects us. Talk about porosities! Time/space is porous.

Experience absent, we can't complete any of her phrases. Experience and knowledge (the fusing of epistemes with metaphysics) are what make judgment possible, which concomitantly opens—again, or ever—a fissure, fissures. With Kant, understanding Lyotard's differend is easier. As Kant wrote in his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, "Judgment is . . . the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it" or "All judgments are . . . functions of unity among our representations, since instead of an immediate representation a higher one, which comprehends this and other representations under itself, is used for the cognition of the object, and many possible cognitions are hereby drawn together into one." And "one" can be exploded (the fissure admitted).

The first poem of *Neighbour Procedure* is one example of Zolf's engagement/exposure of differend not just to contrast but to intercalcate the phrase regimes which give rise to representations: here, the transcendental and the experiential. The epistemological proves to be empty without the metaphysical, the contingent, the contingently true, the hinged.

I'll take up another poem, "A Failure of Hospitality," and read you wee word excerpts from each line: *dreams peace body luxurious light future guest sacred water living purity chocolate offer pleasant.* The poem embeds and puts these individual vocables at risk and in contrast with the actual amalgam of phrases in the poem, which suggest danger, not pleasure. As the ensemble of the lines is read, a rhythm emerges, and this sense of danger and failure; along with it, there is also a counter-discourse of pleasure that moves transversally in the poem, through the words I already cited you, providing an opening to other phrase regimes that touch but cannot speak in the poem. This transversal movement creates a gnawing tension in the reader. Its framework is triangular but each line belies a plane that is twisted or torqued: the framework of the whole poem is torqued across more than one plane. It's hard to see without 3D modelling, which would twist the surface of the figure, and which I can't use, but perhaps you can imagine it:
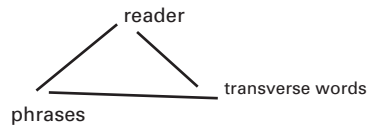
The pieces in the first forty percent of *Neighbour Procedure*, in the section *Shoot and Weep*, are, roughly, in the form of single line stanzas, or in the form of long poems interspersed line by line with silent lines, thus all one stanza. Following that, there is a movement into a form that seems scattered on the page, bracketed with two mixed language postage stamp texts: *The Book of Comparisons.*

But what is being compared here? In *The Book of Comparisons,* we are given numeric clues (titles), extended vowel sounds, and again, overall, spacings that inject the words with new boundaries and that break the boundaries of phrases. How can there be phrase regimes here when there are no phrases? Does comparison push at the phrase regime? Space itself? Language's fissure?

The spacings between light and dark on the page are insisted upon most radically here, in the comparisons, and in two poems in a further section of the book that speak "erasure" and that, I think, in some ways, fail in the erasure (which is not erased). Or: it is my own expectations that fail until the text alters them and me. This is the best kind of failure (we need more failure). Looking at these poems, "Messenger" and "Mixed Crowd," and the isolated but disconnected words that arise from the whole, I begin to think of the signal-noise ratio, of weak signal communication—that kind of communication using radio signals emanating from or embedded in natural noise . . . that of signal generating systems, of the sky itself, of the antenna and receivers at any given time, of the path signals take (path loss). Signals rise scarcely above this noise "floor." Text scarcely emerges. The reader is pulled, by this "no text" on the surface, down into the older text beneath, which lays out the covenant and compact (and its relation to death) in one phrase regime, with pinprick words that lead nowhere, until, at the end of the poem, the other phrase regime, the mixed crowd of nations, is allowed its say. I realize now that this is language's fissure, an overlap, a silencing that is necessary to make a line, and a reactivation of language.

In *Neighbour Procedure*, the background from which language's figure/fissure does not detach is that of the Israel-Palestine border, both that physical and geographical border and the one inside ourselves. But how can an outsider, a Canadian poet, reactivate language for those inside a physical border? In fact, it is an impossible gesture. But it is a necessary one, in order to open up our consideration of the stakes of borders, again, in language. To open up that differential spacing that allows the fissure between phrase regimes to be visible. Thus permitting us, if we dare, to think past it.

If we, outside the physical border, can

think of Israel/Palestine differently, we can enable more people to think differently, and activate movement again in something that is stalled in differends.

Through this movement, Zolf reactivates the neighbour that I once believed to have failed, making neighbour space possible, and grief in the grievable, in the names, as well. As Butler asks us in her *Precarious Life*: "What counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally, *what makes for a grievable life*?" (20).

7

This book that started with the *a priori* ends with a section called *L'éveil*, the awakening, a word in French, a language that has only slightly infiltrated the book thus far, a language that appears like small echoes from other discourses. The title is a word that contains an accent (a way of speaking, the shibboleth), and the word "veil." The accent: an alternation of rhythm, intonation, emphasis, or phonemic distinction. Rhythm of the veil. To avail oneself of rhythms or emphases. "Accent" is most often used to distinguish the one who is foreign to one's own valley. The word "Éveil" in Zolf also evokes, in its strangeness in this context (for as I have said there is no other French here), the foreign.

Neighbour Procedure is engaged in the best of what poetry can do, I think: that is, it is engaged in the production of forms of strangeness, for the ethical—that movement of judgment, where judgment is possible, plausible—is played out not in familiarity but in strangeness. Affect, too, is played out in strangeness and crosses the amygdala in the brain, just as does intellectual thought that puts thought itself at risk. Rachel Zolf opens up consideration of the role of the poet: to move outward in the forms, in the creation and presentation of forms, and in the presentation (leaky) of content or "content" (what is content but context-bridging . . . providing links between phrase regimes,

differend). The creation and presentation of content does not always involve simply producing word orders out of the "imagination," for the imagination itself is socially conditioned and bound to phrase regimes. It consists in extending and breaking the phrase regimes themselves.

8

To end, I return to Butler's "grievable life" and "what counts as a grievable life" in relation to Giorgio Agamben's *Sacrament of Language*: "Western reflection on language has taken nearly two millennia to isolate, in the formal machinery of language, the enunciative function, the ensemble of those indicators or *shifters* (*I*, *you*, *here*, *now*, etc.) by means of which the one who speaks assumes language in a concrete act of discourse. What linguists are undoubtedly not in a position to give an account of, however, is the *ethos* that is produced in these gestures and that determines the extraordinary implication of the subject in his word. It is in this ethical relation that the 'sacrament of language' takes place. Precisely because, unlike other living things, in order to speak, the human being must put himself at stake in his speech, he can, for this reason, bless and curse, swear and perjure" (71). And write poetry. Which is to say: read poetry.

To finish, I just want to read the whole poem "Liberté" by René Char, written at the end of World War II, by a poet who had fought fascist occupation in the French Resistance. I can't print it here as Gallimard, Char's publisher, did not answer our request for permission. So you will have to imagine it, and imagine my translation, which exists in the ether that writing really is, unprintable. Char's poem in French names "cette ligne blanche," which literally means "that white line" but means "that blank line" or "that pale line" as well. To me, it always refers to the line of poetry. The line in the process of being written. And, the "swan upon the wound" that arrives by way of that pale line is also, homophonically—"cygne" and "signe"—"sign upon the wound." As writing is, as *Neighbour Procedure* is.

The sound of the poem occurs here, if you can hear it.

NOTES

1   Anthropophagy is cannibalism. The Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) has appropriated it as a way to understand and create culture as the avid and voracious ingestion of influences that reemerge as part of your own creation. Culture, for de Andrade, is anthropophagic, especially in New World countries like Brazil where conflicting and clamourous influences are all about, and the pressure of wholeness from history (those metanarratives) is uncoupled from the actual content of the influences . . .

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Becoming Woman

Louise Dupré; Erín Moure, trans.
Just Like Her. Wolsak and Wynn $17.00

Jennifer Still
Girlwood. Brick $19.00

Reviewed by Amanda Lim

Just Like Her by Louise Dupré and *Girlwood* by Jennifer Still are poetry collections that discuss mother-daughter relationships and the challenges of womanhood. Both books recall French critic Simone de Beauvoir's famous argument that one is not born a woman but, rather, becomes one. As such, they illustrate the social construction of gender identity and the interconnectedness of politics, personal relationships, and societal norms of behaviour.

Just Like Her, originally written in French and performed as a play, is translated by Erín Moure in this English edition. The text, divided into three acts and a series of "tableaux" presents scenes about a relationship between a mother and daughter. Instead of formulating a single coherent narrative, *Just Like Her* presents this relationship as a complicated set of interactions in which glib explanations and easy redemptions are not offered. Illustrating the heritage from mother to daughter and the development from daughter to mother, the book highlights the legacies of expectations, pain, habits, attitudes, and emotional barriers that are passed from generation to generation. The book's themes include motherhood, expectations of femininity, family, identity, generational gaps, and communication.

Through the use of skillful repetition, unflinching declarations and questions, and subtle shifts in tone, Dupré indicates how mothers and daughters are equally entangled within the network of societal expectations surrounding femininity, motherhood, and family. She emphasizes that human behaviour is both social and personal, and that humans are contradictory, complex, and flawed. The repetition of particular phrases and syntactical structures underline the linkages between the generations of women represented, as well as the constant struggle to define the individual self apart from the mother.

Girlwood, a collection of poetry by Jennifer Still, similarly talks about mother and daughter relationships and, more broadly, the development of girlhood into adulthood. The book traces a rough trajectory from young girlhood to adolescence to adulthood, showing the various ways in which gender expectations and norms are produced, constructed, manipulated, reinforced, and resisted. Still addresses a variety of themes in this collection: societal expectations, duties in the domestic sphere, the performance of identity, the exploration of sexuality, friendships, romance, conformity and rebellion, imitation, and alienation.

Although the book traces a (roughly) chronological timeline, it illustrates how girlhood is a "girlwood," a complicated and unpredictable terrain with various diversions, obstacles, and circuitous routes. Still's unique imagery, unusual word pairings,

and bold declarations encourage the reader to see familiar phases of life in fresh ways. She borrows the idea of "tracks" from Lyn Hejinian's quote in *My Life*, organizing the book by "tracks" and using the numbered squares of a hopscotch grid as a visual motif. Her inclusion of quotes from well-known poets such as Lyn Hejinian and Robert Kroetsch indicates the multiple influences in her own writing and how identity is shaped as a multi-layered, multi-directional concept that constantly changes.

Wry, startling, and brutally honest by turns, Dupré and Still capture adroitly the myriad complexities, tensions, and contradictions in the construction of femininity.

Composing Nature Decomposing

Ken Belford
Decompositions. Talonbooks $16.95
Mark Truscott
Nature. Book Thug $15.00
Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

Occasionally, a book appears for review that wants not to be reviewed. Ken Belford's *Decompositions*, full of stanzas dense as rainforest understory, and Mark Truscott's *Nature*, full of lines sparse as recently clear-cut fields, want not to be defined as poetry in any conventional sense. They ask, in uncertain terms, to be something else. So, what is a reviewer to do?

Don't trust these books. One is full of words that erase a life's singular trajectory, the certainties of certain narratives. One is full of space that circles words the way a doughnut (a cruller, say) makes holes. One reveals nature's cruelness. One, crueller, revels in nature in/as language. One "I" wonders "Who / says good writing conveys / a strong sense of place?" One "I" "wonder[s] / if the / space this / creates will / hold it." One, you see, decomposes lyric narrative,

prosing it up, posing alternative ecological paradigms as personal history. One, you see, lacks composure, belies a calm position from which to, say, essay. But lack, you see, is the point.

Decomposition is nature: history.

One (*Decompositions*) ends strong, if strong eludes autobiography to plant seeds of arboreal wisdom: "the cottonwoods grumble / and the spruce whistles its gliding pitch" in the time "before a rain." Decomposition: consider "the consequence of reading / a poem" to be "unpredictable." Suspect your previous dependence on tools and compose yourself: "It seems / the acceptance of risk is a science." But risk, you see, is the point. What risk? Poetry and plants. Words and weeds. "Poetry can make something more / dangerous than its parts," and it's probably "a good idea to burn the GE crops." To "leave words," as leaves leave trees bending in wind, to "cause to be, and come apart again," is what we're left with.

Nature is decomposition: entropy.

One (*Nature*) ends strong, too. If strong strengthens what comes, ineluctably, before. Before: words afloat in/as doughnut holes, making space for/as nature as/in language. "Infinity":

one
two
six
ten

Or:

Things
fall
where
they
may

Others bother with specifics. Numbers are specific, though. Specific what? Exactly. During: "that this" and "that that" inhabit, generally, "that page" and "this page." Not this page. Not that page, either. Pay attention. After: Words "mark," "occur," "abut" on the way to forming and failing. Nature?

One is Laurel. One is Hardy. One is Bob. One is Doug. One is Fat Man. One is Little Boy. One is dangerous. One is danger. One is dang. One is da. One is fort. One is fort-ress. One is buttress. One is but.

One suggests: "Many critics seem to be / disembodied drovers teaching / image recognition." One suggests: "a word," "the word," "these words" risk composing "a thought," "the thought" that "begins," "that starts" "to falter," "to falter," "to falter." Don't trust this review.

Lost in the Staging

derek beaulieu
How to Write. Talonbooks $16.95

David Hickey
Open Air Bindery. Biblioasis $18.95

Adam Seelig
Every Day in the Morning (Slow). New Star $16.00

Reviewed by Ryan Fitzpatrick

Taking cues from the work of American writer Kenneth Goldsmith and his ideas of "uncreative" writing, Calgary writer derek beaulieu's *How to Write* is a series of conceptual larks that attempt to throw into question or crisis the idea of authorship in an age of sampling and repurposing. Each piece in *How to Write* refashions already available textual material according to a strenuous constraint or procedure. For example, the title poem that closes out the book gathers sentences containing the word "write" or "writes" from 40 public-domain works of literature. *How to Write* acts as a kind of strange microcosm of beaulieu's previous work, containing in turns the playful and gentle humour of *Frogments from the Frag Pool* (2005), the surprising juxtapositions of *Chains* (2008), and the eyeball-clawing tedium of *Flatland* (2007). For me, beaulieu's work is at its best when it is able to exceed its constraints, making us pay attention to the details of the text in addition to its clearly outlined scaffolding.

At its high points, *How to Write* provides a tentative model for not only authorship, but also for readership, as beaulieu traverses the junk of the past and present, allowing us the opportunity to reflect on the possible ways that we can read and write.

P.E.I. writer David Hickey's second collection *Open Air Bindery* is a far more modest collection of poems than beaulieu's but traffics in a similar interaction of past and present. *Open Air Bindery* is a collection of short lyrics that explore the tensions between the contemporary urban (paying particular attention to the suburban) and a nostalgia for a past known mainly through representations of it. In "Open Voyage," the opening poem of the collection, Hickey describes a painting of a woman sailing down the Nile, the narrator of the poem wishing that the boat would break the frame and continue sailing along the wall. This desired conflation of past with present lends Hickey's best poems a kind of charge as, in "Short Lives," he claims himself "lost in the staging of the twenty-first century"—the slip here revealing an inability to let go of the twentieth century. Simply and thoughtfully, Hickey contemplates a world that fails to remain static.

Adam Seelig's *Every Day in the Morning (Slow)* forwards itself as a kind of cross-genre experiment, marrying, if we are to believe the copy on the back cover, the novella and the long poem. Seelig's book largely encompasses the first-person monologue of Sam, a failing composer whose thoughts meander from anxiety to anxiety, worrying in turns about money, the state of the world, and his relationships with his partner and his father. Layered on top of this is a compositional style that scatters the otherwise linear narrative across the page in a way that is perhaps interesting because of the way it slows the reader down (as suggested by the use of the word "slow" in the title). Seelig's treatment of masculinity through the emasculated Sam is problematic, but Sam's

thoughts are despicable enough that he's difficult to take seriously or empathize with. That said, the treatment of masculinity here feels very much of the last century, with its Oedipal winks and commie panic. Seelig's book raises the question for me, perhaps intentionally, of whether there are ways to stage masculinity otherwise in the twenty-first century.

News from New Star

Roy Miki
Mannequin Rising. New Star $21.00

Donato Mancini
Buffet World. New Star $21.00

Stan Persky and Brian Fawcett
Robin Blaser. New Star $21.00

Reviewed by Meredith Quartermain

Miki's fifth book of poetry, *Mannequin Rising*, turns on three sequences of poems and photo-collages (totalling ninety pages): "Scoping (also pronounced Shopping) in Kits," "A Walk on Granville Island," and "Viral Travels in Tokyo." Mannequins and manikins and all their various cognates and implications (models of human bodies, dwarf-sized humans, shop-window displays) haunt these poems and collages with consumer capitalism's commodity fetishism. "'Could commodities speak,'" Miki muses (quoting, but slightly shifting, Marx's chapter on "The Mystery of the Fetishistic Character of Commodities"), "'we would say: / . . . / What belongs / to us is our value. Our natural intercourse as / commodities proves it. Now listen how we / speak through the mouth of the economist.'" In the blink of an eye, it is "we" who are speaking, not some object we freely manipulate. *We* are the commodities, the mannequins—our social life an intercourse of prefabricated slots, dictated by an economist, in which we have "ruse value." "Is a choice / a ruse"? Miki asks, in a playful/critical series of questions on Lululemon: "Is a brand / a friend"?

These poems trace the struggle of human consciousness and desire to escape the relentless pressure of commercialized images through which we communicate, a struggle to find something outside "an all expense paid cruise / through the discourse of your choice," something outside we as manikins. But how does the poet speak when language itself and its formal occasions are loaded with the very things that make us mannequins? Miki is rightly suspicious of what "con / joins" us, rightly suspicious of mannequinism gone viral in quotidian life. Thus his carefully crafted poems resist easy absorption in sensory appeal of concrete imagery; he keeps language constantly jarring against its assumptions, the better to enable readers to escape "trendy bundle[s] of crossed purposes."

Also attacking consumerist culture, Mancini's *Buffet World* (with its nifty play on the name of the US business magnate) offers us a sardonic smorgasbord of kitsch food pictures beside poems such as "Tang Dynasty," "Air Raid Over Fields of Bacon," or "On Behalf of the Potato Chips Industry I Would Like To Wish You A Very Happy Birthday," which pillory food habits and food marketing strategies. These poems critique the form and content of information, showing so-called facts and science as corrupted with commercial, exploitative motivation, and questioning the blizzard of factoids (news we didn't need to know) commonly used in marketing campaigns:

> we would need
> 5,400,000,000,000
> 45 gram packets
> to transform Lake Vostok
> into Tang
> the vitamin-c rich
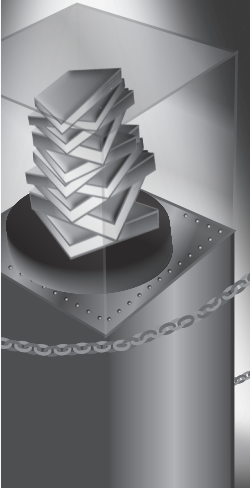> powdered orange drink
> taken on every Apollo mission

The longer food poems are tours de force, some side-splittingly funny as they document spreading human mindlessness, others chillingly noir, like "TDJC Reel"

which explores food habits and views on food of death-row criminals. Shorter pieces with less oomph include conceptual works (designed to point up their theorizing rather than for simple enjoyment in and of themselves), e.g. "NYSE: ZAP," a two-page list of acronyms like "YUM," "WAG," "DOO," "VOX," "MOO," etc. Other pieces hark back to concrete poetry, such as eleven pages of variations on the four arithmetic signs.

Persky and Fawcett's tribute marks the passing in 2009 of one of Vancouver's most influential literary voices—the scholar, professor, poet, mentor and "great companion" of poets and poetry, Robin Blaser. Disappointingly, Fawcett's half of the book concerns mostly himself and the New American Poetics spurred by Charles Olson, rather than news about Blaser. Persky's essay, however, is a real gem—a moving account of his literary companionship with Blaser and a sensitive and thoughtful reading of Blaser's early work, which makes a good introduction to Blaser's oeuvre. He contextualizes *Cups*, *The Moth Poem,* and *Image-Nations*, providing useful close readings and linking their thought to Blaser's opera libretto *The Last Supper*. Beginning readers of Blaser will find here a very helpful articulation of his approach to paratactic thinking and his eye for the wonder in things. The essay also sheds much light on the complex interrelationship of Blaser, Spicer, and Duncan, who even at the height of their not-on-speaking-terms quarrels still read each other's poetry. Companionship in poetry, Persky shows, must transcend gossip and petty intrigues. The essay is, as Persky comments, a defense of poetry as a way of thinking at a time when this is sorely lacking in public life. It is also a defense of poetry as a way of living, showing, as Blaser did, that politics, thought and physical bodies are inextricably entwined and must be allowed to be so in all realms of human activity.

Copy Paste Publish
On Appropriation

derek beaulieu and Gregory Betts

In this dialogic e-mail exchange, beaulieu and Betts discuss the politics of appropriative writing and some potential new directions for poetry. beaulieu is the author of eight books of poetry and prose including three appropriative and conceptual collections. beaulieu's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (2007), with an afterword by Marjorie Perloff, was followed up with *Local Colour* (2008) and *How to Write* (2010). Betts coined the term "plunderverse" in 1999, after John Oswald's "plunderphonics," to describe an appropriate writing strategy that sculpts new poems from source texts by "inserting deletions" and peeling away words and letters until a new poem with a new voice emerges. The texts Betts creates, including his book-length plunderverse of William Shakespeare's Sonnet 150 in *The Others Raisd in Me* (2009), simultaneously speak with and against the original.

BETTS: In a parable of moral (and religious) crisis, Dostoyevsky writes "everything is permitted" (Pt. 4, Book 11, Ch. 4). It's a line that has stuck with me as a kind of ominous warning, particularly against some of the morally relativistic implications of postmodernism. It has also echoed in the back of my mind as I tread some of the politically charged grey waters of appropriative writing. Your texts have always been boundary crossing, but your most recent book *How to Write* makes what I believe is your furthest foray into the potentially illegal world of literary appropriation. I wonder if you have a line where something, some literary appropriation, is no longer permitted, and how you determine that point?

BEAULIEU: Funny that you come to that line through Dostoyevsky, I come to the same result through William Burroughs: ("nothing is true, everything is permitted"). Dostoyevsky's quotation starts with "When there is no God . . . " which changes the matter only slightly from Burroughs refrain. But that said, I think that appropriation does have some controversies—especially when it comes to the issues of voice, ownership, and representation. Vanessa Place has really challenged what can be done with appropriative writing by quoting statements from rape and sexual abuse trials—the "ordinariness" of language is set upon its head —so then, what lines are appropriate to cross? I think that what conceptual writing has highlighted is not the idea of writing or voice, but rather the issue of CHOICE. So, then, as Dworkin has said, "the test of poetry [is] no longer whether it could have been done better (the question of the workshop), but whether it could conceivably have been done otherwise" (n. pag.) Authors are now judged not by the quality of their writing but by the infallibility of their choices—WHY have you appropriated THIS text instead of that? Why in this way? Within what framework? To what end?

Politics and representation does enter into

these decisions, and the author must be able to justify his or her actions. What would it mean, for example, for a white author to have written [M.] NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*, to use the language of slave-ship legal proceedings?

So then, one measurement—along a different set of requirements—is that if the text exists online, it is de facto public domain, everything reproduces infinitely online, and any attempts to control the internet will only turn into a punchline on boingboing.net. So then, online everything truly is permitted. At its base, the net is a Borgesian library of perversions and pornography whose only redeemable feature is the card catalogue itself.

And you—what would you say are the limitations of your own appropriative practice; what are the mapable edges of the plunderverse universe?

BETTS: Place, no question, is working at the far edge of current practice. I read with her in Los Angeles and witnessed infuriated, offended people walking out of her reading in protest. The problem they had with her writing, as I understood it, is similar to the old voice-appropriation debates from the 1980s and 1990s that questioned the re-victimization of disempowered people by such texts. Where, I believe, Place avoids the moral quagmire of someone like W.P. Kinsella, to pick a familiar Canadian example, is in how her text reproduces public documents verbatim, without aestheticizing the victimization, drawing attention to the extremely political and personal and charged nature of the language in these public forums. Furthermore, the common law legal system—used in English-speaking Canada and United States—follows the doctrine of stare decisis meaning that precedence determines future court decisions. Decisions are arrived at through consideration of the facts of a case. In other words, testimony such as that represented by Place as poetry influences de facto law by influencing the outcome and implications of a particular case. As this precedence becomes general law, the testimony can be said

to have had enormous and widespread implications beyond the personal experiences of trauma that she documents. Her poetry works in a realm where private experience (and language) codifies public space.

For me, an important line between Place and Kinsella, or other less controversial appropriative writers (Jen Bervin, say, or John Robert Colombo) and other less notorious voice-appropriators is that only the latter exploit bad feelings between people, perhaps enhance them. To be blunt, and while intentionally avoiding the debate about whether Kinsella's texts are in fact racist documents, a racist person could potentially take satisfaction from a Kinsella story in a way that a sex offender could not from Place.

I completely agree with you about the nature of information dissemination in this day and age. It was true before too. I grew up in the community that fostered and helped create the Copyleft movement. I've never been interested in the grand myth of the ownership of language—which I equate in my mind with the attempt by Monsanto on the prairies to own all of the wheat, suing farmers if "their" wheat seeds are blown by the wind into unlicensed property. Language blows freely too. When I steal or plagiarize, though, it also seems a useful part of the narrative of the text to document where the language comes from. Plunderverse is explicitly oriented towards that narrative.

I notice that you also include all citations of your appropriated texts. How important was their inclusion to you—or was that even your decision? I think of the case of David Shields who was pushed by his insistent publisher to include full citations—which he did, along with a note explaining that the citations were included under protest.

BEAULIEU: The decision to include the citations was—unlike Shields'—my own. I wanted to include the sources as a nod to my own bibliographical impulses (I love reading bibliographies and works cited lists, it's often the first part of a book I read), my

own interest in literary archaeology. I like your idea of including in a poetic narrative the original source of the text.

Talonbooks didn't ask specifically for the bibliography to be included, but was concerned about the inclusion of texts that were potentially in copyright. I saw the texts I used—which are, with a few exceptions, entirely available online—as fair game, being that they were posted online. Shields' book doesn't *need* the bibliography, and I do like the "cut here" line he's included in the finished book, but I do also, admittedly, like the resource they provide. I also think that including the citations allows the original texts to slide more readily into an uncanny space of familiar yet not . . .

As academic writers we are in a quandary to an extent—there's an acceptance of producing work without citation when that work is creative, but not when the work is academic . . . but where's the line between the two? So Shields requires citation, but Markson does not?

In terms of Copyleft, did you consider releasing *The Others Raisd in Me* under Creative Commons license? I was talking with Jonathan Ball around his book *Ex Machina* which he released with an attribution-non-commercial-share alike license—is that something you've considered?

BETTS: It was for no particular reason that *TORIM* wasn't registered under Creative Commons. To be honest, considering the kinds of experimental/appropriative work that I've done, I've always assumed that anybody who wanted to do anything experimental with my writing would automatically know that it was okay. I'd want to know about it simply because I'd want to know about it, but it didn't really cross my mind that anybody might be slowed down or discouraged by my not making that opportunity explicit.

That said, my next project (a sampling of which was recently published by No Press) has been registered with Creative Commons to formalize its stand against the policies

and machinations of the Facebook corporation. That project, working under the running title of *Exquisite Corp*, emerged from a simultaneous disgust with the privacy policies of the Facebook corporation and with witnessing the illegal police activities in Toronto during the G8/G20 rallies. The thing that struck me about both of those events—both of which erode privacy and citizenship—is that they are encoded with a banality, as if we've all grown accommodated to such impingements. Creative Commons and the Copyleft movement are part of the development of a third way that is an alternative to the eternal stalemate of either being inside the system and changed by it or else outside the system and irrelevant to it. I am always looking for new ways of sharing language and ideas without contradicting the openness of language.

The explicit use of already-written language in plunderverse or appropriative language to speak or to write seems to access an alternative and new solution to this problem. Language works within a system that constantly recycles shared words, even ideas and feelings, but the system falters when somebody attempts to arrest the flow. The problem, as Derrida outlined a while ago, is fundamental to language and makes our proprietary rules on language-use absurd: "There would be no cause for concern if one were rigorously assured of being able to distinguish with rigor between a citation and a non-citation" (58). I think we cite in academic papers because the identity of the authors and the history of the specific texts (including such editorial backroom mechanics as editions, versions, translations and so on) that we refer to are significant to how we use and respond to their ideas, even if we happen to think as Derrida, and as our creative work suggests, that language is more complex than is implied by the ownership of words and ideas.

He draws a line between "citational" language and "performative" language, but I think

appropriation proves the lack of an edge between these types. Language can be both if it is written through the simultaneity of reference and speech act. I wonder if this moves into your work on the idea of poetics as objects?

BEAULIEU: *Poetics as Objects* was a workshop I gave a few years back through Calgary's TRUCK Gallery's *Camper Project* by which participants could earn an imitation boy-scout badge for creating visual poetry and handmade books. My aim was to try and increase awareness of the physicality of writing and publishing. My own writing treats text as a physical object, something that can be manipulated much as LEGO . . . and is often quite gestural in terms of creation. In terms of "citational" and "performative" writing, I argue that my novels, *Flatland* and *Local Colour*, and prose collection, *How to Write,* are in fact transcriptions of reading practices. And that's where the searchable text and PDFs come in—non-narrative or non-plot-driven reading is now much more possible . . .

BETTS: Computers do change everything about reading and writing, and we are still so early in our collective encounter with this radically new technology that we likely cannot yet even imagine its eventual impact on the idea of literature. I feel like we must be in a moment similar to that period shortly after the printing press arrived, but before writers really knew what to do with it. So, naturally, they tried to use the new technology to replicate the old practices. Our first reaction to the computer has been to rather flatly import page-based writing online.

It does seem somewhat ironic to me that while concrete and visual poets were true pioneers in introducing, even, creating a radically new graphic consciousness through their work with the page and with the typewriter, visual poets today tend to be many steps behind rather commonplace explorations of software by visual artists and industry hacks. Brion Gysin's famous line that Kenneth Goldsmith and Christian Bök like to quote

is that literature is fifty years behind visual arts, but the problem for visual poets today is that they are now suddenly thrust into the same (digital) terrain as the visual artists in an era gone graphic mad because of the visual orientation and possibilities of the computer. Consequently, visual poetry is not nearly as shocking as it once was, nor as disruptive of our sensory biases: it has become somewhat symptomatic.

A similar problem haunts all of the old avenues of experimental writing. New ways will emerge to incorporate medium consciousness, including things like search functions—which out of all technologies have probably had the biggest impact on how I read. Copy/Paste has been the biggest impact on how I write. There are so many directions that new medium-conscious writing could go, and I suppose right now it is anybody's guess. Appropriation and the conscious sculpting of source texts seem like useful applications of new software. I've also been thinking lately about all of the software that archivists and editors have developed to track and trace the genesis of a text. These applications have started to change how we read canonical writers, most forcibly Shakespeare. When you can see his source texts exposed on the same screen as you read his plays, they start to seem like the work of a masterful proto-collage artist, which of course he was.

All of which is to say that, yes yes yes— let's let the physical act of writing and publishing be constantly in mind, and let that self-consciousness infuse and inform the art. That still seems to me to be an ample exit door out of the narrowing psychosocial conditions of life in the transnational capitalist bubble. Which raises a danger, of course, in the extent to which innovations in textual practice are determined by access to expensive technologies and tools. I do worry that the rush to discover the new spaces concocted by digital writing has sacrificed some self-consciousness to technological determinism. I mean, I suppose, that I still

think of writing as an act on—and to a certain extent against—writing and language itself. Play too passive and you risk losing writing as a radical space. In this moment, just before computers become more accomplished than humans in producing emotive texts like lyrics, poems, and genre prose, writers can keep their relevancy by keeping medium-consciousness in their works. There doesn't seem much point in writing anymore without that sense.

BEAULIEU: So then Olson's dictum (via Creeley) that "form is never more than an extension of content" (240) carries forward? I've had extensive discussions with kevin mcpherson eckhoff about form and content, wondering if the dictum could be reversed that "content is never more than an extension of form." Our discussions brought us to Beckett's defense of Joyce's *Work in Progress* in which he writes "[h]ere form is content, content is form . . . this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. . . . [this] writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*" (503).

It takes the emphasis off of semantic content on to the physicality of communication. That the form—the HOW of writing—dictates the WHAT of writing (as opposed to Creeley and Olson's position that the WHAT dictates the HOW). That's what bumps it against Beckett's statement—that writing is not about something, it is that something. I'm interested in writing which doesn't necessarily try to discuss any sort of emotional position, it simply evokes form—so the basic unit of composition isn't the sentence, the phrase, the line, the word . . . it moves down the chain to the level of letter or mark

BETTS: The "something" you identify, perhaps the very kernel of contemporary / conceptual writing, seems like a writerly thinking or a form-consciousness that I suspect has been accelerated by computers and the experience of writing in the digital age. The new writing has become more akin to enacting a reading strategy by breaking a work

down to the parts (its HOW) that create its meaning (its WHAT). Your *Flatland* seems to go even farther along this line, by actually reconciling form and content in an older text that lacked this equilibrium. It certainly seems to read a macro-oriented text through its micro particles, thereby making it that "something" the original text describes—the 2-dimensional world. By contrast, *TORIM* derails the WHAT of Shakespeare's sonnet by exploiting the surfeit meanings embedded in the HOW—the language—of the text. From this vantage, both of these projects seem less like appropriations in the plagiarism sense than malapropisms, creative misreadings. Do you ever consider how the author of your source text would react to your project?

BEAULIEU: I like the idea of creative misreading—I think its a very generative term. I haven't considered the response of a source text's author before I've constructed a piece (I wonder if that's a useful distinction, "constructing" instead of "writing"?) but I did contact Paul Auster when *Local Colour* was published and sent him a copy. I heard back from a secretary that he was initially bewildered but eventually flattered and thrilled by the resultant text. I have to admit that I would find it strange for an author to be anything but flattered.

BETTS: I agree that there is a gesture of homage in the act. Appropriative writing captures and repurposes the excess creative energy in all texts—what Lévi-Strauss called the "overspill" meaning (62)—but that excess is especially present in the rich language of open texts. Whether created by constructing or writing or creatively misreading, it is a tribute to linguistic density of the author. Conversely, in the hands of a satirist like Rachel Zolf in *Human Resources* (which appropriates advertising copy-text), we get the pun of a source author's density. I suppose her work highlights more creative anti-readings than misreadings. We seem to be at a crucial juncture, though, as the range of

applications of appropriations is just opening up now to a widening field of possibilities. There seems to be a useful affinity between the political and the formalist implications of appropriation. I wonder how long this affinity will last? Is a conservative engagement with appropriation even possible?

BEAULIEU: I don't think that a conservative engagement with appropriation is impossible—in fact, it's happened in poetry pretty consistently across poetic style—whether that be Pound or Eliot . . . originality is actually quite unoriginal and unoriginality ain't original either.

BETTS: And it is good to know the limitations and potential dangers of work in this direction as well. Appropriation, though, always disrupts by restaging and recontextualizing. A seed catalogue, a legal transcript, or a weather report repackaged in a poetic text breaks the original work by drawing attention to surplus meanings at play in that language. Even Shakespeare's plagiarism built new contexts, new plays, for borrowed/stolen words. Such creative/uncreative acts begin precisely in their failure to conserve or preserve the original, creating a dynamic tension in the slippage. There remains a potentially radical and disjunctive irony in that breach whether it is realized or utilized or not.

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Noone Bears Witness

Rachel Zolf

I am here today[1] to make a claim for the "Noone" who "bears witness for the / witness" (Celan*, Selections* 104). Negation is never as it seems in Paul Celan. Yes and no are unsplit neighbours housed in abrasive proximity in the noem. That alien traumatic kernel of *Das Ding* in the *Nebenmensch* adjoins and hystericizes me, yes, but also wakes me to the both/and that exceeds and opens thought. As the pure products of America go crazy, Noone arrives to witness and adjust, Noone can drive the car.[2]

Giorgio Agamben posits the "living dead" *Muselmann* figure (or *figuren*) of the Nazi camps as the "complete witness" to the disaster, the witness who can't speak and bear witness, the subject who literally undergoes catastrophe (44). Thus he says, "the witness, the ethical subject, is the subject who bears

witness to desubjectification" (151). The "author," whose etymological origins include vendor, one who advises or persuades, and yes, witness, is also always co-author. "The survivor and the *Muselmann*, like the . . . creator and his material are inseparable; their unity-difference alone constitutes testimony" (150). The survivor's testimony is adjoined to the one who cannot speak, the "Noone"—or, via another translation of Celan's *Niemand*, "Nobody"—suspended in a third realm between life and death (Celan, *Breathturn* 193). The unsaying is always present as a remnant in the saying, as "the human being is what remains after the destruction of the human being" (Agamben 134).

For Agamben, "poets—witnesses—f[ind] language as what remains, as what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking" (161). Speaking for myself, I do not trust the poet as direct transparent witness; I do not trust the "modest witness" as ethnographic fieldworker. I do not trust the speech of "I was here," so I am entitled to speak. Always-authored testimony has its roots in the master's testes.

But I do sort of trust Noone, the polyvocal, multi-focal, desubjectified or maybe just "bad" subject[3] who bears witness for the witness who bears witness to the *Muselmann*'s catastrophe. I do think there is a way that poetry can partially reclaim the gaze of the witness from an intersubjective non-triangulating "third" or more remove, without succumbing to colonization. Perhaps not incidentally, the presently absent *Muselmann* is German for Muslim, and catastrophe in Arabic is *nakba*, the term Palestinians use for the "ethnic cleansing" they endured in 1948: "If you do not want to talk about Odradek, Gregor Samsa and the *Muselmann*, then shut up about your love for a neighbor" (Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard 7). The transcendental ethical two (me and you, reader-writer, reader-text, writer-text) tends to founder on the shoals of the spiraling out political three. No one, no two, but *peut-être* a futurity of three or

more, in an act of imagination that brings together present absences, absent presences and so-called "present absentees." Borrowing from Jacques Lacan, "It's only because we can count to three that we can count to two" (Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard 71).[4]

Near the end of Agamben's argument on the *Muselmann*'s unsaying speech, he makes a concomitant argument for interstitial knowledges in time:

> In the concept of the remnant, the aporia of testimony coincides with the aporia of messianism. Just as the remnant of Israel signifies neither the whole nor a part of the people, but rather, the non-coincidence of the whole and the part, and just as messianic time is neither historical time nor eternity, but, rather, the disjunction that divides them, so the remnants of Auschwitz—the witnesses—are neither the dead nor the survivors, neither the drowned nor the saved. They are what remains between them. (163-64)

I'd like to posit this liminal space of what remains as precisely where the multifaceted Noone of innovative, avant-garde, whatever-you-want-to-call-it poetry can do its interruptive, interrogative work, burrowing in the gaps between calcified knowledges to release and circulate what I call the "mad affects" that can both hinder thought and set it alight. Something like chips of Walter Benjamin's messianic *Jetztzeit*—"now-time"—that flash up as unarchived, effaced remembrances of suffering that interrupt and reorient this time. Or Jacques Derrida's profane "messianic hope . . . without content" (qtd. in Cheng and Guerlac 15) that can manifest itself as an urgent injunction to act in the present, much as democracy or justice *à venir* may never come. Maybe it will, *peut-être* it won't.

To offer one slant anecdote, I went to Palestine-Israel for the first time in January 2009 for a research trip that ended up coinciding with that horrific war on Gaza. Yet, I deliberately did not write about my direct

experiences on that trip. Instead, I used collage, disjunction, parataxis, dissonance, and other aspects of form in an attempt to engender "mad affects" within other people's Orientalist and thanatourist narratives and other people's first-person testimony. As Shoshana Felman writes, "The more a text is 'mad'—the more, in other words, it resists interpretation—the more the specific modes of its resistance to reading constitute its 'subject' and its literariness" (254).

It is of course not new to use artifice to generate unreadable effects and affects in an attempt to shift the molecules in the brain—modernist avant-garde and post-structuralist "language" and "languagey" poetries have toyed with this process masterfully by way of "fragmentation, quotation, disruption, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on" (Spahr 49). But, much as I'm not interested in neoliberal notions of what's new in poetry, there is another element that emerges with the author's attempt to witness and persuade and sell by adjoining her/himself to the *Muselmann*'s impossible speech; or to that of the *homo sacer* not considered human enough to be sacrificed, but whose bare life can be extinguished at will. There is poetry/performance from Juliana Spahr, M. NourbeSe Philip, Laura Elrick, Kaia Sand, Jordan Scott, kari edwards, and others that enacts this "speaking silence" through affective gestures, that attempts to conjure the deracinated spectre or golem of the Noone and stick her/his "'Oriental' agony" (Agamben 70) to you like shame, instead of evacuating the desubjectified subject on the altar of the language game. Speech happens at the threshold of the human and the inhuman, at the hyphen adjoining I and Thou, but it indeed may be mad and indecipherable: "Odradek is the form which things assume in oblivion" (Benjamin 811). The text reaches a limit, but perhaps better to go there than stand by and deny we have responsibility as authors. Or pretend we're not authors at all.

The Noone is someone, many ones, a social "structure of feeling" (Raymond Williams 131) that can be powerful when harnessed. I feel this with my compatriots on this panel, a common politics and sociality that are part of what keep me going. As I struggle to write these ten minutes, Israeli troops have killed at least nine unarmed people and wounded scores of others on a humanitarian ship carrying ten thousand tonnes of food, medicine, building supplies, and toys to Gaza. Can poetry do anything about a tragedy like this? No. And again I wonder what the hell's the point. But I still feel called to fail well in the catachrestic effort to listen to what is unsaid and beyond knowledge in the testimony of the witness who bears witness for the *Muselmann*'s "bare, unassigned and unwitnessable life" (Agamben 157). "They crowd my memory with their faceless presence" (90), says Primo Levi. Like the Guantanamo detainees risking US national security by shamelessly scratching thousands of lines of poetry onto Styrofoam cups with their fingernails. "No more sand art, no sand books, no masters" (Celan, *Poems* 14). In 1982, after the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon, Emmanuel Lévinas was asked if the Palestinian was not the consummate other to the Israeli. Lévinas demurred, saying that's not what he meant at all, that the other was neighbour, who could be kin, but was at least a friend vis-à-vis a discernible enemy. Perhaps, as Slavoj Žižek suggests, in an effort to transcend the friend-enemy binary we should restore the grotesque face to the faceless *Muselmann* neighbour, whose infinitely vulnerable call is neither legible nor audible, but can only be hauntingly felt, an infinitely unreasonable impress-ion on and in me, engendering a set of mad affects that I can't turn away from, that stick to my bones. In Arabic, *shahīd* means martyr and witness, as in witness to the truth. Unthinkable truth of living experience—there is no certitude in testimony, and the poem is untranslatable. The two can only

be created by passing through the three.

During a suicide bombing, the body, in an act of sublime necropolitics, becomes the ballistic weapon, and the primary target isn't the victim/enemy but the witness who must attempt to make meaning from shards of bodies melding in a precarious we. In Latin, the roots of testimony are not only the master's *testis* but *terstis*, the one who is present as a third. For philosopher Kelly Oliver, subjectivity *is* witnessing as response-ability. For psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, the intersubjective third is a mental space where responsibility begins. Perhaps the truly radical call, beyond reason or recognition, is to witness that alien thing in the excessive neighbour beside me and you—Freud's strange *Zug* (a trait, but also a line or mark or remnant) in the Muslim's absent present face. That *punctum*, the accident that pricks, wounds me, can render me capable of renaming a body grievable, as Judith Butler has called us to do. "Negation is at the heart of testimony" (Lyotard 54)—and Celan's no-poem, the noem, is also noesis, the heady nous, and even yes, *nous*, we. Noone is an interpenetrative many. In the same bony ash-strewn poem that contains "Noone / bears witness for the / witness" (Celan, *Selections* 105) the speaker stands "at the threeway" (104), the impossible fork in the path, and calls out in apostrophe to "you threeway / hands" (105). Much as witness and testimony and experience and feeling and presence and even Celan may be bad words in our hallowed post (Post)-modernist/structuralist/breakfast cereal circles that may sometimes include Reznikoff but not Forché and friends, perhaps "something / is given off" within us, a response-ability to the mad address, an impossible handshake "in isolate flecks" as "No one" madly adjusts the gears (W.C. Williams "to Elise" 55). As the consummate formalist Victor Shklovsky said, facing the dearth of aesthetic options after the Russian Revolution, "There is no third path and that is the one we're going to take" (Rose 14).[5]

NOTES

1 This is a slightly revised version of a paper I gave at the "Rethinking Poetics" conference, Columbia University, New York, June 12, 2010. Panel title: "Affective Economies and Prosodies," with Jeff Derksen, Lisa Robertson, and Chris Nealon. I have preserved the markers that frame this piece as an oral performance for a specific time and audience.
2 See William Carlos Williams. Also, *Das Ding* (the Thing, *la Chose*) and *Nebenmensch* (a fellow human being, the one next to and adjoining me, the neighbour) are terms theorized by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.
3 For more on the "bad subject," see Althusser.
4 Citation comes from Lacan's *Les non dupes errent*, but re-contextualization in Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard is important.
5 This is Jacqueline Rose's paraphrase of Shklovsky.

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Afterword
21st-Century Poetics

Guest Editors: Clint Burnham and
Christine Stewart

To begin, we warmly thank those who contributed to this thick double issue of *Canadian Literature*. The work chosen for the collection illustrates the high quality of engagement across Canada (and beyond) of scholars and writers, often one and the same, with the practice and study of innovative or avant-garde writing. At this point, instead of offering a summary of these works—which speak strongly for themselves—we would rather use this opportunity to consider some of the issues, reading practices, and polemics that we have engaged with during what has been, for us as the guest editors, a productive period of putting the issue together.

For us, Slavoj Žižek's *The Fragile Absolute* (2000) contains a number of formulations that speak to this issue's agenda with respect to the avant-garde in Canadian writing—even if, as we shall see below, we have certain reservations. If "there is no Christ outside Saint Paul," or no "authentic Marx" outside Lenin (xxx), then, too, perhaps, there is no literature outside the avant-garde. If psychoanalysis "entails the acceptance and admission that all our discursive formations are forever haunted by some 'indivisible

remainder,' by some traumatic spectral 'rest' that resists 'confession' . . . that can never be redeemed-delivered, laid to rest, pacified/gentrified" (90), then, too, the avant-garde's program surely entails deliberating on the indivisible remainder *qua* language's materiality, which resists both confession (a synecdoche for both confessional poetry and the lyric) and its pacification/gentrification (retaining all the colonialism, and neoliberalism, respectively, of those two terms).

However, rather than applying psychoanalysis as a rubric for "clarifying" or explaining the avant-garde, we use some of Žižek's ideas in that chapter "Of Stones, Lizards and Men" (75-83) as a way of engaging some useful problematics. Leading into that chapter, he makes the argument, reading Heidegger, that our derangement upon entry into the Symbolic—into language—is constitutive of its own erasure, of an ontological "vanishing mediator" (another name for modernism). Then, this "ex-timate kernel of truth" (75) posited by the modernist explosion of language (a turning back of language onto itself: that is, language as the social order that is not personal, not intimate) is itself gentrified by the fantasy of literature—or poetry—as a proper pursuit, a fantasy that entails the properly fetishistic disavowal to be found in the argument *I know very well that formally innovative poetry calls into question the very capacity of language to signify or communicate, nonetheless one can still discuss it in terms of the canonical traditions of the literary*.

Žižek gives other examples of such fantasies, for example, the fetishes of anti-Semitism, and it is important to note the sorry history of modernism with respect to this and other ideologies of hatred (for which see Meredith Quartermain's essay in this journal). Žižek also connects such fetishism to Marx's notion of commodity fetishism: again, we can argue that it is only a writing practice which breaks with that commodification that is an avant-garde writing practice, in that it

breaks with realism (a commodified literary form), and thus constitutes a nonfetishistic, and hence truly literary, practice. Literature, then, is a name for writing that is un-settled (not merely the canonical/dominating/institutional—here the debates in the 1970s over realism as commodified aesthetic, usefully documented in Ron Silliman's *The New Sentence*, are key).

But let us hew to the straight path here, as a way of coming to some preliminary conclusions and a reading of a recent work of poetry. Following these ideas of derangement and fetishism, Žižek turns to one of his great Freudian themes, melancholy, arguing (in a discussion of Fellini's *Satyricon*), that pagan melancholy bears "witness to the fact that they somehow already have the premonition that the true God will soon reveal Himself, and that they were born just a bit too early, so that they cannot be redeemed" (80). That is, Žižek makes the Hegelian (and arguably post-colonial) argument that "we are not dealing with the Paradise which is then lost due to some fatal intrusion—there is already in paradisiacal satisfaction (in the satisfaction of the 'naïve' organic community) something suffocating . . . a desire to break out—life in Paradise is always pervaded by an infinite melancholy" (80). Surely this reading of the pre-Symbolic must stand alongside Žižek's work on post-colonial melancholy (in *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*) as a warning against the reading of any past—be it national, linguistic, or conceptual—as a Golden Age.

With this conceptual apparatus in place, one text that might lead to productive thoughts on the relationship between language, place, and subjectivity is Nikki Reimer's 2010 book *[sic]*. The title's allusion to a pedant's or proofreader's finickyness already indicates a "lost language" (to allude to the title of one of Maxine Gadd's feminist avant-garde works). But we also see (or taste) the brio of Reimer's poems, as they

veer from vegan protestors to chronic diseases, from gentrification to hipster greeting cards, from geographies of scale where it's "five hours from the kitchen to the living room" (48) to the absolutely not self-pitying "overmedicate me with thorazine" (87). Surely Reimer's work is, to run through Žižek's checklist, an example of that "traumatic spectral 'rest' that resists 'confession' . . . that can never be redeemed-delivered, laid to rest, pacified/gentrified" (90)—that is to say, first of all, her poetry is a matter of confession to language itself. Here, then, the "vanishing mediator" is any certainty about the relation of form to the political:

> i'd like to write because i think it will get
>   me laid but i've
>   always been left-handed
> after discarding the feminine subject
>   position age six chose
> to disavow any knowledge of domestic
>   responsibility (39)

For Reimer, or for the text at this moment, the semantic shift from "left-handed" to politics (the left) and the body (the hand, getting laid) is never certain, but certainly always in play. But, to stay within the context of the Canadian avant-garde, we do have some qualms: Žižek's reading of Pauline Christianity in *The Fragile Absolute* is compelling but also problematic. If it is important for post-colonialism to state that there never has been a Golden Age, it would be equally important to make clear that neither has there been a naïve organic community—one of Žižek's terms for "pagan." One could also argue that, in fact, there have been many fatal intrusions, and even if we should not theorize "a lost language," we know many languages have been lost—or rather—destroyed by colonization and globalization. That is, Žižek's strictly psychoanalytic and universalist terms (that see any subjectivity as constituted around a lack) illustrate how certain conceptual structures restrict what it might be otherwise possible to consider.

In this case, while Žižek's position speaks strongly to the concerns and even formal engagements of the avant-garde, his universalist position (which is a universalism of lack) problematizes its engagement in current and historical circumstances in Canada. That is, in explaining and advocating for Pauline Christianity, Žižek argues that we should "unplug" ourselves from the organic community into which we were born. According to Žižek's reading, this (traumatic) break from our communities gives every individual access to universality and is the foundation for human rights and freedoms (120). Žižek's reading of Pauline Christianity is thus resonant with an avant-garde poetics. In a letter to Kevin Killian, the late Nancy Shaw notes of her own writing practice, "I am a bibliophile before I am a family member" (88). Shaw's poetics echoes what Christ demands of his followers, as illustrated here in Žižek's citation of Saint Luke's gospel: "If anyone come to me and does not hate his father and his mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (111). Just as Christ requires that his disciples follow the word of God before all else, even (and especially) before their familial connections and obligations, the avant-garde writer typically eschews the expressive I (and familial relations) in favour of language systems (language as social order)—from which identity ultimately comes. Žižek notes that such familial obligations stand in metaphorically not only for "the entire socio-symbolic network"—and the ethnic substance *qua* identity politics (111), but also for the "*implicit spectral obscene supplement*" of the Law (120); he argues that such an unplugging is also what is demanded by Buddhism (111). Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument suggests that the importance of relations and relationships (familial and otherwise), central to many Indigenous world-views (and thus their philosophical and legal systems),

are also "the implicit spectral obscene supplement."

Žižek's reading of Pauline Christianity does allow for many insights into the avant-garde. For example, their shared requirement of breaking with one's embedded relations might explain what has always been inexplicable for some secular leftists: the attraction of Christianity—and what has always compelled us—the idea of the radical break from tradition that is intrinsic to the avant-garde. Yet it might also explain why so few non-Indigenous avant-garde writing communities in Canada have yet to enter into any extended dialogue with communities of Indigenous writers, philosophers, and artists, or, even raised within their own avant-garde communities the question of their "colonial footprints" (as Rachel Zolf would say). Nowadays, although many Indigenous communities are Christian or have been deeply/direly influenced by Christianity, what is important to many is the reclamation or repositioning (from underground to above ground) of pre-Christian traditions.

However, according to Žižek, these traditions are antithetical to Pauline Christianity—necessarily locked in a suffocating system of cosmic balance in which derailment is deemed catastrophic and even evil. Reading Christianity, according to Paul, or according to Žižek as based on rupture and not connectivity, Žižek's argument opens a radical divide between Christianity and Indigenous pre-Christian traditions. (It should be noted that much of Žižek's (Leninist) reading of Paul is indebted to Alain Badiou's brief and incendiary *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* [xxix]). Does the same hold true for the avant-garde? And if, as Stacy Doris suggests, "[w]riting poetry is a way of living in the world of our time," and so needs to address and participate in the "issues of our time" (113), how can non-Indigenous avant-garde poetic communities acknowledge some of the most pressing and urgent

issues of our time, of our place—such as the living conditions of Indigenous communities across Canada; treaties and treaty negotiations; the vitality of Indigenous cultures, languages, and philosophies and their complex historical and contemporary intersections with and radical interventions into white settler logic; neoliberal notions of multiculturalism; and capitalism?

One of the more obvious problems with Žižek's case for Pauline Christianity and its (or our) application to the avant-garde, is that it is based on a formula that lumps all non-Judaic Christian and non-Buddhist viewpoints together into one circuitous and claustrophobic condition. It seems that Žižek simply does not know. But he could read John Borrows' discussion of Anishinabe culture and law in *Drawing Out Law: A Spirit's Guide* (2010) for a non-Christian worldview that is not based on the "pagan" practice that Žižek calls "crushing the derailed element" (121). Or, to stay only within one First Nation's philosophy, he could think about Anishinabe political theorist Dale Turner's argument in *This is Not a Peace Pipe* (2006) that it is only by developing conceptual frameworks *in Indigenous languages* that Aboriginal intellectuals can meet the full force of Western tradition. Or, to extend our circumference, Blackfoot scholars Narcisse Blood and Ryan Heavy Head, who trace Blackfoot influence in the work of American psychologist Abraham Maslow, suggesting that Indigenous languages already meet the full force of Western tradition with their own conceptual frameworks.

In not knowing, in not reading these scholars, is Žižek's argument, and by extension this understanding of the avant-garde, bound by a limited discursive system that actively retains colonial, and neoliberal thinking? Would reading and knowing be enough? What kind of labour would it take to unbind these ties? While the question of how "post-colonial" or not Žižek's position

is (notwithstanding his important work on ethnic violence in the Balkans in the 1990s), his argument reveals something about why so few non-Indigenous avant-garde writers or communities take on the colonial or the post-colonial (in a Canadian context) as sites necessitating investigation and intervention. And if the excitement of working on this issue of *Canadian Literature* (not least with the journal's team at UBC, and especially with our longtime friend and mentor Margery Fee), and thinking about the critical and poetic work that goes on in avant-garde Canadian writing, is not to be misread (or fetishized), then these sites, these investigations and interventions, must continue to draw our attention.

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Articles

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Gregory **Betts** is the author of *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* (UTP, 2012) and four books of experimental poetry. He is the Director of the Centre for Canadian Studies at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Sean **Braune** is a PhD Student at York University. His poetry has appeared in *ditch, Poetry is Dead* and is forthcoming in *Rampike* and his criticism in *Studies in Canadian Literature* and *Journal of Modern Literature*. His play *Leer*, was performed at Ryerson University in April 2010; he directed the short film *An Encounter* (2005), which won the award for excellence in cinematography at the Toronto Youth Shorts Film Festival in 2009.

Clint **Burnham** teaches at Simon Fraser University, and has worked at UBC, Capilano College, and Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. His latest books are *The Only Poetry that Matters: Reading the Kootenay School of Writing* (Arsenal Pulp) and, co-edited with Lorna Brown, *Digital Natives* (Other Sights). *The Benjamin Sonnets* was published in 2009 (BookThug). You can follow him on twitter @Prof_Clinty.

Alessandra **Capperdoni** holds a PhD in English from Simon Fraser University. She has published on Canadian feminist poetics, experimental writings, feminist translation, transgenderism and transsexuality, and Black diaspora. She is preparing a monograph entitled *Shifting Geographies: Poetics of Citizenship in the Age of Global Modernity*.

Sarah **Dowling** is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Pennsylvania; her work concerns the turn to languages other than English in contemporary Anglophone poetry. Dowling has published a book of poetry, *Security Posture*, her poetry is included in the anthology *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*, and an article has appeared in *GLQ*.

Ryan **Fitzpatrick** just started his doctoral studies at Simon Fraser University. He is the author of *Fake Math* (2007).

Karl **Jirgens**, editor of the literary journal, *Rampike*, and former Head of English at the University of Windsor, has four books in print and has published over 100 articles.

Sonnet **L'Abbé**, a doctoral candidate in English at the University of British Columbia, is working on hylozoism in North American experimental poetry. Her dissertation focuses on the botanical poetics of American poet Ronald Johnson. L'Abbé has written many reviews for *Canadian Literature* and writes extensively on Canadian poetry for the popular media.

Geordie **Miller** is a doctoral candidate in English at Dalhousie University. His dissertation accounts for the investments the MacArthur Foundation makes in creativity through its "genius grants."

Erín **Moure** is a Canadian poet and translator with one foot in Montreal and one in Kelowna. In her recent *O Resplandor* (2010) and—with Oana Avasilichioaei—*Expeditions of a Chimæra* (2009), poetry is hybrid, and emerges in translation and collaboration. Moure has translated Nicole Brossard (with Robert Majzels) and Louise Dupré from French, Chus Pato and Rosalía de Castro from Galician, Andrés Ajens from Chilean Spanish, and Fernando Pessoa from Portuguese. Her essays, *My Beloved Wager* (2009), chronicle 25 years of writing practice. She performs and speaks internationally on poetry and translation, and her work has been honoured with many awards. *The Unmemntioable*, an investigation into subjectivity and experience in western Ukraine and Alberta, will appear in 2012.

Scott **Pound** is Associate Professor of English at Lakehead University. His research focuses on the intersection of poetics and new media in the twentieth century. He is currently completing a study that examines cultural impacts of new media through the lens of twentieth-century vanguard poetics, parts of which have recently appeared in *boundary 2* and *English Studies in Canada*.

Katie L. **Price** is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Pennsylvania completing her dissertation, "'The Tangential Point': 'Pataphysical Practice in Post-War Poetry." In 2010-2011, she co-coordinated UPenn's Poetry and Poetics group, acted as an associate editor for the Electronic Poetry Center, and taught "Writing and Modern Technology."

Meredith **Quartermain** is an award-winning poet who has published several books of poetry; her work has appeared in literary magazines across Canada. She is the co-founder of Nomados, a small literary press. Before becoming a full-time writer, she taught in the English departments at UBC and Capilano University.

Susan **Rudy** is a Professor of English at the University of Calgary in Alberta and the author of three books: *Women, Reading, Kroetsch: Telling the Difference*; *Writing in our Time: Radical Poetries in English Canada* (with co-author Pauline Butling); and *Poets Talk: Interviews with Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Erin Mouré, Dionne Brand, Marie Annharte Baker, Jeff Derksen, and Fred Wah*.

Christine **Stewart** works at the University of Alberta in the Department of English and Film Studies where she writes and teaches experimental poetry and poetics and teaches Indigenous literature. She also works at the Boyle Learning Centre in Boyle Street Community Services in a creative writing literacy research programme that focuses on experimental poetic forms. She is a member of the Institute for Domestic Research and is presently conducting poetic research for the Under Bridge project. Two forthcoming publications: *The Humanist* (Red Nettle) and *Virtualis: Topologies of the Unreal* (BookThug), co-authored with David Dowker.

Rachel **Zolf**'s fourth book of poetry is *Neighbour Procedure* (Coach House, 2010). She has received the Trillium Book Award for Poetry, among other honours. Zolf's work has been widely published and translated into French, Spanish, and Portuguese. She is presently an Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Calgary.

Poems

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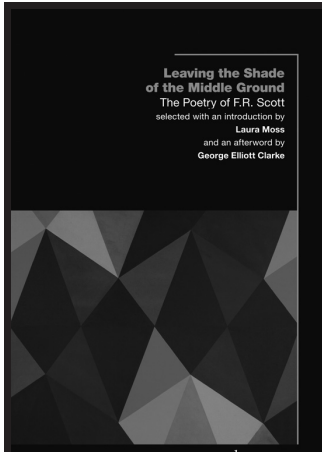
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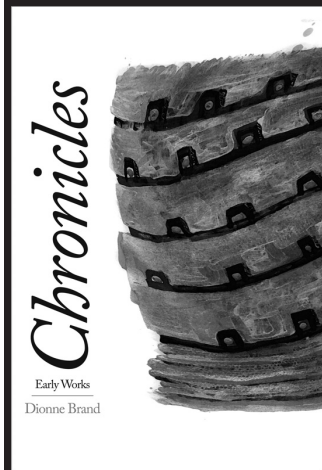
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