THE LANGUAGE REVOLUTION:
BORDERBLUR POETICS IN CANADA, 1963-1988

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the emergence and development of a radical node of Canadian poetic activity known as the Language Revolution—that is, a movement concerned with the creation and proliferation of largely non-lyrical poetic modes by a number of Canadian poets whose careers mostly began in the 1960s and early 1970s. These poets include well-known writers like bpNichol, bill bissett, and Steve McCaffery alongside lesser-known but equally important figures such as Judith Copithorne, Martina Clinton, Gerry Shikatani, David UU, Susan McMaster, and Penn Kemp. As a loose affiliation, they gathered around shared values of poetic experimentation and small press literary culture, but they also actively pushed the boundaries of writing by exploring concrete poetry, sound poetry, and haptic poetry—the core topics of this dissertation's three chapters. These poets described their work as "borderblur," a term that acknowledges a broad range of poetic and artistic activity that seeks to dissolve boundaries between language, visuality, materiality, sound, and bodies.

Over the course of this study, I examine how the poets of the Language Revolution develop a borderblur-based poetic as a reaction to problems posed by the expression of feeling during a period when human life was being standardized by emergent telecommunication technologies, a rapid increase in consumerism, and major shifts—documented by Marshall McLuhan and others—in human psychic and social life. This is the rise of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri refer to as postmodernity and the formation of third-stage capitalism, ushered in by the transition from industrialization to "informatization." These poets produced work in dialogue with these conditions. They did so by working in deeply affective and expressive modes that were predicated on openness of poetic form, cultural production and circulation, community, and feeling. As a result, the Language Revolution figures as a significant, under-examined

movement in Canada's literary history that stands in stark contrast to the emergent mainstream of Canada's literary public that was formulating at the time. In effect, their poetic activities—at the micro-level of writing and the macro-level of publishing—radically blurred the borders of art, literature, genre, economy, and community in search of alternative modes for the expression and endurance of life and language.

For those I lost during this work

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"language means communication and that communication does not just mean language"

– bpNichol (1966)

Embarrassing Responses to Seemingly Scandalous Poetries

On 18 May 1971, a 27-year-old bpNichol received the Governor General's Award for Literary Merit for four titles that demonstrate Nichol's literary prowess for their humor, range, and experimentation. These texts include a small collection of lyric poems *Beach Head* (1970), the anthology of concrete poetry *The Cosmic Chef* (1970), the box of minimalist concrete poems *Still Water* (1970), and the fifteen-paragraph prose-work *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* (1970).[1] Nichol's controversial *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* tells the story of Billy, a "polite kid" (np) whose insecurity with his famously "short dick" (n. pag.) explains his self-destructive and violent behaviour. Hardly what Frank Davey refers to as "juvenilia" (*aka* 144), Nichol's narrative—with its Stein-like repetition and Freudian phallocentricism— effectively deconstructs notions of history, masculinity, truth, and the mythic image of the wild Western, gun-slinging cowboy. Despite the explicit content of Nichol's work, the news of his win was well-received by the literary community in 1971.

It was not long after the Governor General's Award ceremony that several politicians denounced the judges of the award—including University of British Colombia (UBC) professor Warren Tallman and Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) radio host Robert Weaver—and their decision to award Nichol the honour. On 10 June 1971, 22 days after Nichol received the

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[1] Nichol shared the award with his friend Michael Ondaatje for his book of prose poems *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left-Handed Poems* (1970), a book that was released at the same time, but seemingly unrelated to Nichol's work. Noting this, Stephen Scobie writes, the "reasons why these authors should choose this subject—rather than some roughly equivalent Canadian figure, such as Louis Riel, or even Paul Rose—are to a great degree personal. It is quite possible that bp wrote his book just for fun" ("Two Authors" 37).

award, Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Mac T. McCutcheon rose in the House of Commons to express his "displeasure with the award recommendations in relation to the work The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid" (*Hansard* 6554). Joining McCutcheon in his campaign against Nichol and the book, fellow MP W.B. Nesbitt requested that the government "take immediate steps to make appropriate changes in the personnel of the Canada Council in order to prevent future scandalous, ridiculous, and outright silly awards such as the one referred to" earlier that morning (*Hansard* 6557). Echoing similar sentiments, another MP, J.P. Nowlan, on 29 June 1971, refers to *Billy the Kid* as "nothing more than rude and pornographic" (*Hansard* 7458). These documented expressions of outrage had no formal impact on the procedures and processes of the Canada Council. No motions were officially passed nor did they have any noticeable impact on Nichol's career as a poet. These protests do, however, illustrate that Nichol's poems were stimulating enough to, surprisingly, cause a disturbance in the House of Commons where Canadian bills and legislation originate to potentially impact the entire country. The MPs found Nichol's work to generate feelings of "displeasure" (6554) and to be "scandalous" (6557); they attempted to use their personal reactions as grounds to intervene into the symbolic and material processes of the Canada Council and Canadian literary awards.

A similar but more consequential incident occurred that same decade, this time involving the work of Nichol's friend and peer, Vancouver-based poet and painter bill bissett. Starting in 1977, bissett began to receive similar public charges of depravity and pornography. By this time, bissett's output as a poet, artist, and publisher had maintained a steady flow since the publication of his first full-length book of poems, *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* (1965), published by Nichol's own Ganglia press. For its time and audience, bissett's work was challenging—it blurred the borders of art and literature; incorporated collagist techniques and textual overlay;

and employed a unique, self-composed orthography. bissett's work also sought to push the boundaries of sexuality and the body: he frequently used typographic experiments to depict the likenesses of nude bodies and genitalia (see Appendix A). His work as a publisher of *blewointment* magazine and blewointment press supported similar kinds of work, hence, most likely, the pornographic allegations.

Critics such as Don Precosky and Ryan J. Cox have produced sufficiently detailed overviews of the attacks against bissett, but his struggle with public opinion needs to be repeated here. On 2 December 1977, Conservative MP Bob Wenman addressed the House of Commons to express his outrage that "the Canada Council is supporting, with public money, individuals to write what anyone in this chamber would term as offensive and demeaning pornography" (*Hansard* 1487). After unsuccessfully attempting to pass a motion to have funding for the Canada Council reviewed, Wenman, as Precosky also notes, distributed the "unfortunate pornographic documentation" (*Hansard* 1495), asking the Speaker "would I, as a member of Parliament, be offending the House of Commons and my privilege as a member by repeating this kind of garbage in the House of Commons" (1498) to brand the poetry "as too vile for the ears of the people's elected representatives" ("Definitions" Precosky n. pag.).[2] His request to read the material was denied, not because of its supposedly offensive content, but because it simply was not relevant to the proceedings that day (*Hansard* 1498).

Only months later, following Wenman's comments, the attacks on bissett and the Canada Council from MPs began again. This time on 3 April 1978, Hugh A. Anderson identified blewointment press as "a degradation to the printed word in Canada" (*Hansard* 4084) and carried

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[2] According to Tim Carlson's essay "bill bissett," the debates "seemed to centre on" bissett's poem "a warm place to shit," which repeats this phrase nearly 40 times. In this case, the problem is more scatological than pornographic. That being said, the precise document in question is not actually revealed in the records of Parliament.

on to state that "if publications such as the one I mentioned by the Blue Ointment Press [sic] of Vancouver are published as a result of government funding, I suggest that a thorough examination should be made so that culture rather than Canadian pornography is advanced" (*Hansard* 4084). Significantly, Anderson takes this argument one step further to imply the necessity of censorship: "material which should not be published is being published under the auspices of the Canada Council" (*Hansard* 4084). To these kinds of comments, bissett humorously responds in 1978 in a conversation with Alan Twigg, that "If I was actually writing pornography, I wouldn't need grants" ("B.C. poet faces critics" 27). These opinions on bissett's literary practice, however, also circulated within public literary spheres.

bissett was attacked for his writing and publishing not only by Conservative MPs, but also by members of the literary community just prior to the attacks in the House of Commons. One such attack surprisingly came from Canadian poet, writer, and translator John Glassco, whose works were diverse (including pornography), and who "delighted in hoaxes," publishing "works of poetry and prose he attributed to others imagined or deceased" (*Canadian Encyclopedia* n. pag.). In a column for "At The Mermaid Inn" in *The Globe and Mail* entitled "Poet as Performer" (12 November 1977), Glassco denounces poetry as an oral art, and indirectly attacks bissett when he writes about "the direction poetry recitations may well be taking" which is the turn "toward the idea of poetry as a mindless emotional release, a kind of pentecostal 'service of witness'—with the poet as priest or shaman—or what is almost as bad, simply as pseudo cultural vaudeville, a form of bad showbiz" (6). Glassco's comments are clearly targeted at bissett, who is sometimes referred to as Canada's poetic shaman on account of his high-energy performances, which often incorporate song and chant.[3]

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[3] Discussions of bissett's appropriation of Indigenous chant will be discussed later in this dissertation.

While Nichol's own struggle with public opinion seemingly had little impact in any material or systemic way, the attacks from Conservative MPs and from the literary community made a significant material impact on bissett's career as both a poet and publisher between the years 1977 and 1979. As evidenced by annual reports of the Canada Council, bissett received no funding for blewointment press from 1978-79, which is undoubtedly, as Precosky also points out, a result of the campaign against bissett's work that had been advanced in the House of Commons and the press. To put this into perspective, from 1976-77, bissett received $9550 to support his publishing efforts—a significant amount of money compared to the zero dollars he received in the two following years. It was not long after, in 1983, that bissett sought to sell the press to recoup financial losses sustained during the earlier period. blewointment was purchased by David Lee and Maureen Cochrane who transformed it into Nightwood Editions, which still exists today and at times publishes work under a blewointment imprint.[4]

I offer these related anecdotes of embarrassing responses to seemingly scandalous poetries in Canada not only to highlight the relationship between two of the key figures of this study—Nichol and bissett—and the environment in which they were creating and publishing, but also as an introduction to the core topic of my dissertation. While these two stories highlight controversial debates concerning institutional bodies responsible for the production and dissemination of education, awards, and funding, they most effectively illustrate the intersection of literature, feelings, and the socio-material conditions in which they exist. The protestations expressed by Conservative MPs and seemingly conservative writers are important for drawing attention to a crucial point of this study. These anecdotes show one of the ways literature enters into the discursive dimensions of sociopolitical and material realms of Canadian politics and

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[4] bissett does not have a direct relationship with this imprint.

culture: through the opening provided by its potential for affective and emotional stimulation. Furthermore, and more specifically, these anecdotes demonstrate how feelings that correspond to negative feelings of "displeasure" (Hansard 6554) or that are deemed "offensive (Hansard 1487) are used as a rallying cry for intervening into the affairs of artists at the risk of oversimplifying the complex feelings and ideas these works actually may generate for a reader. These politicians use these feelings to galvanize a community of politicians to revoke the authors' access to government sanctioned financial support. Art and politics intersect here in significant ways: both the poets and MPs mobilize affects to engage the sociopolitical and material spheres of Canada's cultural industries.

In the following chapters I will explore how writers like Nichol and bissett, alongside a generation of other poets, who were inspired by countercultural activities and newly accessible technologies, developed a poetics based in affects and emotions as a response to the conditions of their time. Later in this Introduction, I will identify these conditions as the conditions of the "electric age," more commonly known as emergent postmodernity. The type of poetry by Nichol and bissett that, in the Canadian context is largely developed at this time, shares similarities with many of their contemporaries, including David Aylward, Earle Birney, Martina Clinton, Judith Copithorne, Paul Dutton, Penn Kemp, Steve McCaffery, Susan McMaster, Ann Rosenberg, Gerry Shikatani, David UU, and collectives like The Four Horsemen and Owen Sound (to single out a few of the figures and groups addressed in this study). These poets, many of whom became active in the early-to-mid 1960s, formed a loose affiliation that has been self-described as the Language Revolution—that is, a movement concerned with the creation and proliferation of largely non-lyric poetry. Instead, these poets sought to push the boundaries of literary writing by exploring concrete poetry, sound poetry, and haptic poetry, the core topics of the following

chapters, which will be defined later in this study. The poets described this work as "borderblur," a term that acknowledges a broad range of poetic and artistic activity that seeks to dissolve boundaries between language, visuality, materiality, sound, and bodies. In the context of mid-to-late twentieth century literary Canada, their work uniquely explores the possibility of linguistic expression at its limits with a special emphasis on language's look, sound, and feel. By practicing this unconventional poetic mode, the poets of the Language Revolution represent and react to the problems posed by postmodernity as it acted to standardize writing, communication, thoughts, and feelings in unprecedented ways.

Though borderblur largely remains at the fringe of official Canadian verse-culture, the forms explored by these poets formulated a literary counter-public—as evidenced by the above official Parliamentary decrees—that opposed national literary communities coming into formation during the 1960s until the late 1980s. My study proposes that the poets of the Language Revolution, true to their designation "borderblur," created a community around poetics that blurred national boundaries as they became enmeshed within international literary networks. More specifically, I examine how the poets of the Language Revolution develop a borderblur-based poetic as a reaction to problems posed by the expression of feeling during a period when human life was being standardized by emergent telecommunication technologies, a rapid increase in consumerism, and major shifts—documented by Marshall McLuhan and others—in human psychic and social life. McLuhan would refer to this as the "electric age," but in more contemporary discourse this is more commonly known as the rise of postmodernity. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri specifically refers to this period, beginning in the 1970s, as the rise of "*affective labour*" (292) and the formation of third-stage capitalism, which was ushered in by a transition from industrialization to "postmodernization, or rather, informatization" (280). In

this period, affect became a dominant component of the capitalist economy as, in North America, it transitioned to "informatization and the shift toward services" (286), which also meant a reorganization of affect in daily human life. These poets produced work in dialogue with these conditions. They did so by working in deeply expressive modes that were predicated on openness of poetic form, cultural production and circulation, and feeling. As a result, the Language Revolution figures as a significant, under-examined movement in Canada's literary history that stands in stark contrast to the emergent mainstream of Canada's literary public that was formulating at the time. In effect, their poetic activities—at the micro-level of writing and the macro-level of publishing—radically blurred the borders of art, literature, genre, economy, and community in search of alternative modes for the expression and endurance of life and language.

What is the Language Revolution?

Some of the key aspects of the Language Revolution are neatly exemplified when both bissett and Nichol appear as guests on "Modern Canadian Poetry" on CBC television to discuss borderblur poetics.[5] "Modern Canadian Poetry" was an interview-based television show hosted by poet Phyllis Webb. Twenty-six poets were featured over a period of thirteen-weeks as part of Canada's centenary celebrations in 1967, including bissett, Nichol, Margaret Atwood, Dorothy Livesay, A.J.M. Smith, and F.R. Scott. As Nick Mount notes in *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*, poetry in Canada was approaching a kind of critical turning point around this time and "Modern Canadian Poets" was investigating what poetry meant to the nation in that moment. For the

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[5] The Language Revolution in Canada should not be confused with the avant-garde manifesto "The Revolution of the Word" by Eugene Jolas (1929). Among the signees of that manifesto, none were Canadian.

purposes of the interview Webb, though clearly supportive and in-the-know, adopts the persona of an average Canadian reader and curiously probes bissett and Nichol about their practice. Sitting together around a table while sipping tea with visual poems and drawings hanging from the walls, the three discuss Nichol's and bissett's poetry and poetics, and the feelings they produce. "You can get high on that poem" says Webb after bissett reads "How We Use Our Lungs for Love" aloud ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol" n. pag.). They discuss the influence of Allen Ginsberg and strategies for approaching their seemingly difficult and non-conventional works, which they explain in simple and accessible terms. Most importantly, however, they discuss the conditions that have encouraged the emergence of borderblur poetry (without actually calling it that).

On this last topic, bissett discusses borderblur within the context of an emergent sense of the world. This sense is described by Marshall McLuhan as a "global village," a shrinking sense of the planet presented by fast-travel and telecommunication technologies that promise quicker and more direct access to other communities. Echoing these ideas, bissett says that their sense of poetry emerges from "not having the margins, not having the borders … Not being limited to a sentence construction or idea" ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol" n. pag.). In other words, bissett does not feel restricted to any nationalist or formalist ideas about literature. bissett's comments on borders is a pun that corresponds to his own poetics and the political spirit of the television show—a celebration of Canadian poetry as a nationalist art form. The borderblur poetic that is advanced by bissett and Nichol indeed destabilizes the conventional placement of borders on the page, but also transcends national borders. bissett sees the emergence of a formally innovative poetic in Canada as part of a global movement; he says, "to drop off the borders, ya know, yeah, and dropping off the borders like those poets, like, uh, Brazil, Belgium, uh, Holland, uh,

England, Scotland, you know, like, its not just a Canadian trip, Japan, like, everywhere that are

doing poems like this" ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol" n. pag.). bissett, here, is likely making

reference to global currents of concrete poetry, which was also being recognized in international

anthology collections that same year, including Stephen Bann's *Concrete Poetry: An*

International Anthology (1967) and Emmett Williams's *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*

(1967). Later in the interview, bissett makes his politics explicit: "literature is not the empire,

literature is words" ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol" n. pag.). This is not an a-political statement

that severs language from the political; rather, bissett is succinctly signaling his rejection of

imperialist and colonial attitudes that loom over Canadian literary culture at that time. In the

spirit of a show intended to shape national identity, he carefully articulates a poetry that is local

(unique to his own work and Nichol's), but also part of a global network. It is a mode of

composition that is liberated in both its poetics and national affiliations. bissett's comments are

markedly anticolonial and particularly poignant considering the nationalist sentiments of the

centenary that Webb's program celebrates.

The ideas in this episode linger five years after the airing "Modern Canadian Poetry" to

emerge again in 1972—the same year Margaret Atwood published *Survival: A Thematic Guide*

to Canada, which is known for defining Canadian literature by presenting "a reflection of a

national habit of mind" (5), but that also reduces "Canadian culture ultimately to catch-words"

such as "survival" and "victimhood," as Davey notes ("Surviving the Paraphrase" 3). Indeed, this

was another crucial time for determining Canada's national literary identity. The political

significance of their poetry remains to be an important and sensitive issue for both Nichol and

bissett. Just prior to the release of bissett's indispensable book of concrete poems, *pass the food*

releas th spirit book (1973), bissett writes an extensive twenty-five page, mostly handwritten

letter to Nichol. The letter regards an essay that Nichol wrote, which was intended for inclusion as part of the collection. The essay was ultimately excised from the final version of the book as requested by bissett, but later reworked for publication in *BRICK* magazine in the winter of 1985 under the title "PASSWORDS: The Bissett Papers." The essay attempts to situate bissett within a tradition of poetry that extends from and includes Earle Birney with whom, for Nichol (at least in this conversation), "the visual tradition in Canadian poetry begins," along with the Tish group and their "insistence upon a poetry whose notation on the page was linked to & inseparable from the poets [sic] breath" as well as Gertrude Stein, "who is probably bissett's biggest influence and certainly his starting point" (Nichol "The Bissett Papers" 6). Less directly, Nichol places bissett in contact with poets and writers like James Joyce (8) and Raoul Hausmann (9), among other European artists.

While Nichol's essay usefully contextualizes bissett's practice within a larger field of literary experimentalism, bissett, in his letter to Nichol, is adamant that his work exists separate from modernist predecessors and other non-Canadians who may share similar aesthetic or political similarities: "i meen a <u>new</u> line has startid like yu say in PASSWORDS. it dont fit in with anything els apriori really" (Ganglia Press archive "bissett to bp 1972" 3). Further down the same page, bissett writes,

> bt the part abt writrs in canada being trappd in language not xplooring in and only be sd by an englishman an amrikan or a rich canadian unless it was sd by a student at ubc who had amrikan prof who aktually led her to say to me that canadian writrs wer lazy and who wer they anyway that partikular prof hardly evr teeches canadian writrs an hees bin heer a long time. (Ganglia Press archive "bissett to bp 1972" 3)

bissett is critical of giving too much credit to British or American literatures as an influence on the work of poets like Nichol and himself. While he is eager to articulate his cosmopolitanism—as he does with Webb in 1967—he is also careful not to give himself over completely to other

established traditions. bissett's comments are undoubtedly hyperbolic and perhaps too narrow—consider, for example, the fact that both bissett and Nichol use the term borderblur to describe their aesthetic, a term borrowed from British poet, and Benedictine monk, dom sylvester houédard (dsh). However, it does underline what is at stake for bissett in these discussions: to ensure an openness and open perception of his poetics that is not part of the dominant Canadian literary mainstream and not merely a transplant of American or European modernism. Borderblur, for bissett, must be—as the name in implies—a blurring of borders between formal, historical, and national contexts. This spirit of openness—of opening poetic genre, identity, and nationality—is largely at the core of the Language Revolution.

The Language Revolution, yet unnamed, manifests earlier than 1967. Though it appeared in the same year as the landmark Vancouver Poetry Conference in 1963, bissett's *blewointment* magazine represents a starting point for this discrete poetic model.[6] *blewointment* began with the publication of writers and poets who came to be known, thanks to Warren Tallman and his article "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver during the 1960s," as the "downtown" poets, which included bissett, Copithorne, Clinton, Farrell, Gadd, and others who shared a similar aesthetic consciousness that sought to transcend disciplinary boundaries between poetry, visual art, music, and performance. These were writers and artists who, as bissett describes in the first issue of *blewointment* magazine, lived "outside the abstraction termed society" (n. pag.)—foregrounding bissett's resistance against recognized social bodies. According to Tallman, this distinction corresponds to the differences drawn between the various factions that comprised the Vancouver scene:

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[6] For more on the Vancouver poetry conference see Robert McTavish's film *The Line Has Shattered* (2013); Carol Bergé's *The Vancouver Report* (1964); Fred Wah's recordings of readings, lectures, and discussions from the conference on slought.org (1963/2016); Fred Wah's *Permissions: TISH Poetics 1963 Thereafter* (2014); and Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy's *Writing in Our Time* (2005).

> Two related groups were drawn into the vortex of energy swirling in the TISH place, one willingly, the other with a certain interested reluctance. The willing ones were a number of fractionally younger writers, Robert Hogg, Daphne Buckle (Marlatt), Dan McLeod, David Cull. The more reluctant but interested ones lived "downtown," Gerry Gilbert, Judy Copithorne, Maxine Gadd, bill bissett, Roy Kiyooka, John Newlove. (78)

Vancouver was also home to several left-leaning modernists such as Dorothy Livesay and Pat Lowther. While the Tish group and other modernists made significant contributions to the Canadian literary canon, *blewointment*, whose history is comparably less documented, offers a unique approach to editorship, aesthetics, and the politics of the little magazine.

bissett began writing and painting in the early 1960s. He developed an interdisciplinary practice by integrating language into his visual art and drawing into his poetry. By the mid-sixties, this had culminated in a hybrid poetic—an expansive and always-shifting practice that saw no distinction between poetry, sculpture, collage, drawing, and other disciplines. Tallman pinpoints the moment bissett flourished as a borderblur poet. Tallman claims it was in "1966, the year of the [Michael] McClure visit" which he recalls as the time "when bill bissett moves into word-mergings, soundings, chantings" (66). bissett's inclination toward a borderblur practice found a home in his magazine and press. This early activity demonstrates the proto-formations of borderblur and the beginning of the Language Revolution.

blewointment is one of Canada's most unconventional periodicals, and a premier publication for work related to the Language Revolution (though not exclusively billed as such). When the magazine was active, it proudly presented an anti-canonical reflexivity, and published a more diverse list of contributors than many other magazines at the time. In *Arrival,* Mount notes that *blewointment* was unlike other male-dominated magazines; he writes, "bissett's *blewointment* was a rare exception, publishing many now-forgotten women writers" (268). Unlike its competing periodicals, *blewointment* also showcased work that corresponded to

borderblur and featured visual and concrete poetry, lyric poetry, pattern poetry, collages, drawings, found materials and more. Predicated on countercultural principles of love, a rejection of taboos, and discontent with established arts and literary periodicals*, blewointment* cultivated a print-space that tested the limits of language, publication, aesthetics, coherence, and politics for an emergent generation of materially-conscious artists and poets. When considering this commitment to art and social issues, it seems to be hardly a surprise that the magazine would be named "blewointment," an ointment used to treat body lice (specifically sexually transmitted lice such as crabs), and other skin irritations and sensitivities. *blewointment,* perhaps, was perceived to be an antidote to the ills of art and poetry at the time.

Around the same time as *blewointment'*s inception, Nichol had begun to integrate himself into the Vancouver writing scene, but not quite as a downtown poet nor as a follower of the Tish writers. While he found inspiration in both, admitting to have been turned on by the poetry of bissett, and also being friendly with the UBC coterie, he had aspirations of his own—to cultivate a poetic praxis that was "less 'arrogant,' predictable, and intention-serving" (*aka* Davey 69), which garnered international attention from other practicing concrete poets. Not long after leaving Vancouver, Nichol brought what he found on the west coast to Toronto, where he arrived at a heightened awareness of visual aesthetic:

> I made a conscious choice to play. . . . Here I was. I was typing poems but I wasn't
> paying attention to the page. So I began to do it and I started with these things I called
> 'ideopomes.' They were very much that, very much based on typewriter things. . . . It's
> pretty early stuff, fairly el primitivo, but it sort of showed me the way in. (*Meanwhile*
> 237-38)

This "way in" led Nichol to a rich and well-sustained creative trajectory during which he produced numerous collections of poetry (visual, lyrical, kinetic) and prose, as well as records, comics, sculptures, essays, and more. Like bissett, Nichol saw little use in a hard distinction

between modes of literary production, but gave preference to sound, visual, and interactive poetries. In 1965, Nichol, along with David Aylward, began publishing borderblur work in Toronto via the short-lived *Ganglia* magazine, the first issue of which included bissett, Nichol, Copithorne, and others. *Ganglia* eventually became *grOnk*, edited by Nichol, David Aylward, David UU, and Rob Smith, which lasted for sixty issues. Nichol's intention was to build on the publishing models he found on the west coast of Canada, and to introduce that type of work to a central Canadian audience.

In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Nichol rationalizes the beginnings of his publishing endeavours, stating that "Toronto was not an exciting place to be in the early part of the 1960s, say 1963 to 1966" and explains further that "Not a lot of people were interested in what I was interested in" (*Meanwhile* 404). He says, "Several things influenced *grOnk*. The monthly publication (schedule) was directly borrowed from *Tish,* though the magazine had a different audience entirely. *Tish* was an inspiration for one notion — you didn't have to have subscribers. It could just be something you sent out if you thought the writing was interesting to people" (404). And while Nichol distinguishes his publishing from *blewointment,* "*grOnk* is also a more news-oriented press than *blewointment* was" (396), he admits to adopting a similarly subversive periodical ordering system to *blewointment* which "would have Series Eight, Number Five, followed by Series Eight, Number One" (405). Hancock also notes that the "focus of *grOnk* was entirely visual or experimental poetry with a sound bias" (399), effectively making its similarities to *blewointment* more apparent.[7]

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[7] While Nichol's and bissett's publications are not the sole focus of this study, it is their shared interest in borderblur and theorizations of the Language Revolution that encourages me to draw them so closely into a comparative context.

It was on the front cover of issue Number One of the Second Series (1967) of *grOnk*, that the phrase "the Language Revolution" seemingly first appeared: "distributed by mailing list all manuscripts concerned with the language revolution in poetry et al welcome" (n. pag.), thus formalizing the Language Revolution as an officially recognized and concerted literary effort. It is from this point that we can begin to build a categorical sense of precisely what kind of poetics were being explored under this banner. Previous to this invitation, the cover of Issue 1 in 1967 stated, "manuscripts concerned with concrete sound kinetic and related borderblur poetry welcome" (n. pag.). Despite this shift in descriptive language—from borderblur to Language Revolution—the magazine's aesthetic interest evidently did not change and continued to focus predominantly on concrete, sound, and kinetic works, suggesting an intrinsic connection between borderblur with the ambitions of the Language Revolution. Each works are not conventionally literary, they resist dominant poetic conventions, and focus on sensory stimulation.

Though it is not critically recognized or self-theorized in the same way as other literary movements, like Fluxus or Dada, the Language Revolution was indeed a loosely designed movement. Nichol offers a somewhat articulate conceptualization of the Language Revolution in an unpublished essay entitled "Tusket: A Domesday Book: Essays on the Language Revolution."[8] "Tusket" appears to be very much in-progress; however, it does offer insight into the ideas and problems that inform the basis of Nichol's borderblur poetry and its connection to the Language Revolution. For Nichol, the Language Revolution is a movement toward

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[8] I discovered "Domesday" late in writing this dissertation. However, the work itself is rather mysterious and while it is significant to this dissertation, I am hesitant to position the essay as a definitive manifesto on the Language Revolution. It has a title page that suggests it was planned for publication under *grOnk* (Series 8, No. 7); however, the work is mostly unfinished with some parts written by hand and then again typed. For this reason, "Domesday" strikes me as work that was very much in-progress. I must also respect Nichol's decision to have not published the essay. In a way, such a publication would be a manifesto for the Language Revolution, but it would also inadvertently repeal the movement's implicit call for openness.

borderblur poetry that responds to what he refers to in the "Prospectus" as the "language trap," which he implies is the closing down of language to reduce its potential for multi-directionality. In response, Nichol seeks to "open up those directions" of language and move "hopefully into a new language for all of us" (n. pag.), a phrase and concept that is reminiscent of another well-used Nichol quote referring to the opening of "entrances and exits" ("statement" n. pag) for the poem. Following the "Prospectus," Nichol offers more on the Language Revolution including several, rather sweeping paragraphs that articulate anxieties about the state of humanity as well as prose passages on language and illness, specifically mental illness. A substantial portion of "Tusket" also consists of many pages of quotations from cultural critics and psychotherapists that seem to inform Nichol's thinking; however, in "Tusket," Nichol does not quite make clear connections between his anxiety, his poetry, and the source material on psychoanalysis. It is clear from these fragments and quotations, that Nichol's work as a lay therapist at Therafields informs some of his ideas about the revolutionary potential of his writing.

Unpacking the relationship between Nichol and his work at Therafields, might be the subject of an entirely different dissertation. That being said, "Tusket" does offer some solid points to consider when determining what motivated the Language Revolution. Nichol is clearly interested in ideas related to human progress and is concerned with what he calls "evolutionary decline" and "the ripening conditions of a new dark age" (n. pag.). At the moment of writing this document, Nichol is critical of the "barbarism that is inherent in the sociopolitical systems" which is "capable of making us willing disciples of a Hitler again" (n. pag.). The directness of Nichol's writing is startling, linking his poetry to anxiety about the possible return of fascism and

the evils of World War II.[9] Nichol's poetry, and his mission to open new possibilities for language, is grounded in a response to Fascism's lingering spectre, and of the control fascists exercise over human life. In the face of these issues, Nichol offers a solution: "what is needed is a change far more basic then [sic] a change in the governments of the countries that seemingly control our destiny. what is needed is a change in the emotional orientation of man and nothing short of that can hope to be effective" (n. pag.). The point that Nichol is highlighting here lends support to the thesis I am developing for this study: that emotions and affects are a core value in the program of the Language Revolution's borderblur poetry. Nichol argues further on the next page and returns to emotion to suggest that "by failing to realize that damned up emotion is damned up energy, that wreaks havoc on the nervous system, we are slowly destroying ourselves" (n. pag.). In the remainder of "Tusket," Nichol does not explicitly link these ideas to his poetry; however, based on the subtitle of the work—"essays on the language revolution"—it is clear that his concerns for barbarism, human progress, and changing perspective on affect are the core of his thinking about poetry and revolutionary praxis.

In a 1974 interview with Nicette Jukelevics, Nichol publicly offers another succinct definition of the Language Revolution, but without noting his concerns about fascism. In doing so, Nichol would perhaps be closing down discourse around the Language Revolution, by pinning its motivation to a single problem. This an important point since Nichol used the idea of the Language Revolution as a banner under which he gathered a wide range of poetic work, and not all of those poets necessarily came to their work with the same fears despite employing a similar inclination toward openings. That being said, Nichol does confirm that affect, feeling,

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[9] In this section, Nichol roughly timestamps "Tusket" for us, stating that he is writing 25 years after Hitler's regime. So that means that Nichol is thinking about the Language Revolution here sometime around the late 1960s or early 1970s. Nichol moved to Toronto in 1964 to re-enter therapy with Lea Hindley-Smith in 1964.

and sensation are crucial elements to the movement. Jukelevics asks, "what did you mean by 'language revolution'?" to which Nichol replies "Well, I simply meant to provide as many entrances and exits as possible, to alter consciousness. To reconsider the value of words, the value of translation, a total reconsideration" (*Meanwhile* 136). This poetry, as Nichol suggests, attempts to see "whether or not you can get through into the person's emotions and stir them up" (*Meanwhile* 39). The distinct aim of this poetic, with its ambition to open up and access the audience's emotions, is distinct from less socially- and politically-oriented poetries. In assessing these poetries, critics tend to understand the poets of the Language Revolution as aesthetes who merely sought "to reconsider the value of words" (*Meanwhile* 136). This framing leads a continual return to issues of signification and semiotics, effectively sidestepping Nichol's comment about accessing the emotions of an audience, which fuses the affective and the political.[10]

In a 1971 broadside entitled "Letrabag," bissett inadvertently (or not) confirms that his conception of the Language Revolution is similar to Nichol's conception. bissett defines "th langwage revolushun" in a typical non-definition, but does seem to intersect with some of Nichol's concerns in "Tusket." bissett suggests that the Language Revolution is "one of many flames / uv th / trew / fire" (n. pag.) and confirms the Language Revolution's commitment to borderlessness; he writes,

> i aint defining it
> deifyin or generalizin
> it u cin dew it too

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[10] Few critics have attended to the Language Revolution as a concerted literary movement in a sustained book-length study. Several of the individual poets of the Language Revolution have been celebrated by small presses and little magazines—the countercultural forums that the Language Revolutions fostered. *Open Letter*, for example, has published a number of critical and poetical festschrifts dedicated to Nichol and McCaffery, edited by critics and poets including Stephen Cain, Frank Davey, Paul Dutton, and Lori Emerson. Stephen Scobie wrote a foundational book on Nichol entitled *bpNichol: What History Teaches* (1984). Guernica published a collection of essays and anecdotes, *bill bissett: Essays on His Works* (2002), edited by Linda Rogers. There is also Karl Jirgens' *bill bissett and His Works* (1992), part of a series that also published *bpNichol and His Works* (1992) by Douglas Barbour.

just frget all th rules
uv writing frr a spell
th gramamar th correkt spelling th
sumwhat obseen parts uv speech th sentens
suspend it and
and suspend th
centralve nervous
systems. (n. pag.)

bissett's non-definition draws attention to a few key insights. First, bissett's reluctance to define the Language Revolution projects his commitment, like Nichol, to radical openness onto the movement itself. Second, his remarks illustrate a preference for unconventional poetic forms and non-standardized writing, which, for bissett, would be concrete and sound poetry along with other hybrid forms. Lastly, bissett also invokes feelings as a crucial element of the Language Revolution. bissett's suggestion to "suspend th / centralve nervous / systems" may seem counterintuitive since it is, on the surface, a suggestion to deny rather than accept sensory stimulation. However, bissett's point here is not to cut off the brain from sensation, but rather to alter those processes. Doing so, it seems, for bissett, opens new possibilities for poetic art. On this point, it is significant to note that in 1969 bissett did in fact suffer a significant head injury after falling into a basement at a house party in Kitsilano. Following this accident, bissett was hospitalized; he suffered from paralysis and memory loss and required extensive rehabilitation. He had to relearn the alphabet, how to write, and paint, but afterward went onto publish some of his most radical and emotional work including his concrete poetry book *pass th food releas the spirit* (1973). Nearly a decade later, his work will enrage Conservative MPs in the House of Commons.

In these aforementioned documents, Nichol and bissett articulate the ambitions of the Language Revolution, and under this program they consciously sought to revolutionize the function of language visually, sonically, and performatively. As previously mentioned, they were

not the only poets enjoying the spirit of this activity. Writers and artists like David Aylward,

Earle Birney, Martina Clinton, Judith Copithorne, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery, Susan

McMaster, Gerry Shikatani, and others were also exploring the same poetic modes. These poets

read and published one another; attended retreats, symposia, and conferences together; supported

one another emotionally, intellectually, and financially; toured and performed together; and of

course, disagreed with each other. Not all of the poets included in this study would necessarily

acknowledge themselves to be part of the Language Revolution in any formal sense; to locate

poets under a single banner is more expedient than it is precise. However, these poets shared a

certain aesthetic and sociopolitical sympathy, and one could agree that Nichol's and bissett's

influence did much to embody a set of common presumptions around which many of these poets

gathered. The poets mentioned and examined in the preceding pages, more than any others, are

included under the revolutionary banner because they are aligned by their shared outlook and

energy that distinguished them from the rest of the writers in Canada at that time and, more

concretely, developed in close proximity to Nichol and bissett, either through publication,

friendship, performance, collaboration, or financial support.[11] Together, they may not have had a

tremendous impact on a molar scale to successfully alter the flow of capital through the arts nor

disrupting the formation of a Canadian literary canon; however, they did formulate a significant

poetic community whose reverberations continue to resonate for some writers and scholars

today.

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[11] The broad parameters established here easily invite criticism of non-Canadian artists who also became affiliated with Nichol or bissett, like UK-based Bob Cobbing or Czech Republic-based Jiří Valoch who both worked in concrete modes and had some contact with Canadian activities. However, I have chosen to focus on the Canadian practitioners to examine specifically how their work is unique in the Canadian context.

Affective, Emotional, and Postmodern Approximations: Criticisms

Critics have accounted for the activities of the Language Revolution by using a variety of critical discourses. Caroline Bayard's *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec* (1989), the first in depth study of the poets of the Language Revolution (without calling it that), investigates Canadian poetry of the time under the auspices of the "crisis of language" (7). Bayard focuses on main figures like Nichol and bissett but also offers brief critical perspectives on Aylward, Broudy, Copithorne, and Clinton as well as new wave feminist poets such as Daphne Marlatt, Nicole Brossard, and Lola Lemire Tostevin who were only tangentially connected to borderblur activities. Bayard's study is not an account of the Language Revolution, nor is it meant to be. Rather, by gathering a coterie of poets—similar to the coterie I gather in this study—Bayard articulates the emergence of avant-garde and postmodern writing in Canada. Bayard "wanted to observe and resituate" notions of the avant-garde and postmodernism in Canada "in the context of other literary and non-literary discourses" (5), including historical avant-garde movements and philosophical debates. To this end, she examines the work of visual and postmodern poetries in the mid-to-late twentieth century Canada by focusing primarily on the philosophical debates related to postmodernity, Saussarian linguistics, deconstruction, and mimesis to determine more precisely how they contribute to and develop the discourses of avant-gardism and postmodernism.

Gregory Betts's essay "Postmodern Decadence in Sound and Visual Poetry" (2010), in many ways, advances from Bayard's analysis of Canadian non-lyric poetry and its relationship to postmodern and avant-garde discourse. Betts, while making a brief reference to the Language Revolution, refers to the writing of poets like bissett, Copithorne, McCaffery, and Nichol as a form of radical literary activism. According to Betts, the poets of the Language Revolution

would "play literary games that revealed the systematic otherness of language … to overcome the divide between human subjectivity and language" (154). Tracing the development of the radical political spirit of the Language Revolution, Betts formulates a notion he calls "Canadian postmodern decadence," a concept "characterized by deviance" but that also "signalled a loss of faith in a revolution that could renew present conditions" (152). Betts's concept of postmodern decadence indicates "the liberating turn away from convention, order, and Western traditions [which] led to the hopeful embrace of so-called primitive cultural traditions, such as chanting, dancing, and oral awakenings, appropriating and deploying a distorted version of First Nations cultural forms and practices" (161). He describes it further as a "poetics of rupture" which "gleefully cast aside meaning, closure, and denotative signification" (161). Betts goes on to note that despite this inclination toward disruption, a "sense of possible redemption or even revolution, never quite formulated or realized, lurks behind a great deal of this activity" (161). For Betts, this kind of experimental poetic is exemplified in the visual and sound poetries of the 1960s which "began with a vague belief in the utopian potential of decadence and the possibility of revolution or reform" but "the idealism fell quickly to postmodern disillusionment" (173). Reassessing Betts's stringent notion of failure will come later in my study; however, his study, for now, usefully articulates the work of the Language Revolution on a molar scale as he accounts for the grand strokes of their revolutionary ambition. Both Betts and Bayard situate their understanding of the poets of the Language Revolution in relation to the tactics of postmodern poetry and radical politics; they comment on their poetic forms with a concerted interest in language without really delving into the inherently sensory-based—read: affective and

emotional—aspects of these poetic modes. This yet to be examined aspect of the Language

Revolution is where my study begins.[12]

Neither Bayard nor Betts really address affect in their analyses, yet feelings, emotions,

and affects are a crucial element to this poetry. Previous to this study, McCaffery comes closest

to an analysis of affect in this poetry when he describes bissett's writing as the "interplay of

forces & intensities, both through & yet quite frequently despite, language" in a flow of "non-

verbal energy" (93). Though he is writing in proximity to an affective discourse, McCaffery

privileges an analysis of bissett that utilizes the ideas of Georges Bataille, general economies,

and his considerations of excess, but does not fully engage the field of feeling as it relates to

bissett. McCaffery's attention to bissett's work as an "interplay of forces & intensities" (93)

directs me to pursue an analysis of the affective register of bissett's work, and works like his,

more thoroughly. Similarly, derek beaulieu extrapolates McCaffery's work on bissett and seeks

to characterize concrete poetry—a main mode of composition for the Language Revolution—as

a practice grounded in the discourse of affect. Working explicitly through Sianne Ngai's essay

"Raw Matter: A Poetics of Disgust" (1998) and implicitly through Roland Barthes, beaulieu

describes concrete poetry as the creation of an 'inarticulate mark' that "momentarily rejects the

idea of the readerly reward for close reading, the idea of the 'hidden or buried object,' interferes

with signification & momentarily interrupts the capitalist structure of language" (80). Like

McCaffery, beaulieu's characterization of concrete poetry places the praxis into proximity with

the discourse of feeling, but his understanding of disgust only highlights the ways concrete

poetry resists "one-to-one signification" (82) as opposed to language's typical usage as a way to

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[12] In his book *ABC of Reading TRG* (1999), Peter Jaeger examines affect and the work of Nichol and McCaffery from a psychoanalytic perspective. Jaeger's study focuses mainly on the work of Nichol and McCaffery as part of the Toronto Research Group (TRG) and not the Language Revolution; however, he does look at some of their earlier work, including concrete and sound poetry.

produce meaning for consumption. For beaulieu, feeling is merely a starting point for analysis that leads elsewhere. Like McCaffery, he returns to issues of semiotics, meaning, and excess without approaching the actual significance of feeling itself.

Both these approximations and openings presented by previous critical assessments suggest that my study of feeling and the Language Revolution is necessary and timely. In part, it was on the grounds of emotions that borderblur had been discounted in Canada as a poetic worthy of attention. The aforementioned, reactionary article by Glassco discounts borderblur poetry, describing it as an inclination toward "mindless emotional release" (6). Completely disavowing the new poetry in Canada, he complains, "for better or worse, we are still in the typographic era, and our final judgments should be literate rather than audio-visual" (6). Glassco's commentary makes apparent the intergenerational friction between the established, lyrical Canadian poets and a "new wave," as Jack David calls it, of poets who sought to blur the borders between modes of praxis including poetry, visual art, music, and performance. It was not only established poets like Birney (who later became a mixed media poet himself) and Glassco who acted as literary gatekeepers, denying this new generation validity within the discourse. Frank Davey hotly contested the validity of the borderblur in the first issues of *Open Letter*, wherein Davey refers to concrete poetry as "irrelevant," a comment I will come back to in the next chapter on concrete poetry (Davey "Letter" 3). Between these instances of denial and the lack of criticism dedicated to the feeling of the Language Revolution, there is need to attend to that crucial aspect of the movement.

An Affective Poetic and the Conditions of Postmodernity

As indicated by the criticisms summarized above, the activities of the Language Revolution can be accounted for in a variety of ways. The approach I offer here is surely not the only means of analysis. Focusing on feelings, emotions, and affects (terms I will soon elucidate) leaves many other aspects of the Language Revolution untouched and ready for critique. My own analysis of the Language Revolution as a distinctively affective mode is not incongruous to other critics who recognize these poets as postmodernist for their playfulness, a meta-consciousness of language, distrust of grand narratives and hierarchies, and penchant for textual fragmentation. The poets are, however, at odds with some assessments of affect in postmodern theory. For example, Fredric Jameson claims that the period is characterized by a "waning affect" (10) and is thought to be, as Rachel Smith Greenwald extrapolates, "tonally—and therefore affectively—cold" (423). Despite the lasting resonance of Jameson's hypothesis, I concur with other critical theorists such as Lawrence Grossberg and Rei Terada who reject this thesis. In distinction, Terada argues that "poststructuralist theory deploys implicit and explicit logics of emotion and … willingly dramatizes particular emotions" (3).[13] Taking a similar stance, Grossberg argues that postmodernity does not signal a waning in affect, but rather a "crisis in our ability to locate any meaning as a possible and appropriate source for an empassioned [sic] commitment" (222). My contention is much less theoretical. Despite sweeping claims regarding postmodernity and affect, I simply recognize that there is a surge of interest in the possibility of deeply affective poetic modes in the context of Canadian postmodernity. As evidenced by Nichol's and bissett's comments cited above, affects, feelings, and emotions are the motivating force for their visual, sound, and haptic poetries.

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[13] I do not mean to conflate poststructuralism and postmodernism by citing Terada; rather, I am acknowledging their close relation and Jameson's own poststructuralist influences.

In this dissertation, I employ both writings by affect theorists and theorizations of postmodernity to understand how the poets of the Language Revolution developed a radical poetics. I contend that the poetry of the Language Revolution generates complex feelings but also seeks to rethink human emotion as it is captured and codified by conventionally written and spoken language. As a key concept in the field of critical theory, the language of feeling is actively contested and seemingly fractured by its terminology. Among the various turns that have occurred within the last century—the linguistic and speculative turns, for example—the affective turn, as it is referred to by Patricia Clough, attends to the *in-between*, to that which is *transparent*, which we call intensities, emotions, and feelings. These are things that we cannot necessarily see, but that play a significant role in the shaping of the social, political, and material world. Political movements, protests, and even revolutions are often founded within an emotional ground as reactions to particular situations or conditions. In the introduction to their *Affect Theory Reader* (2009), Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth offer a useful definition of affect:

> an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (1)

Gregg and Seigworth's provisional definition is useful for articulating a general sense of affect and its meaning; however, we must turn to others who work with affect in other complex scenarios to get a more rigorous sense of its significance to poetics.

While it may seem to counter the spirit of the Language Revolution to pursue closed definitions of any term, I find highlighting terminological definitions useful for understanding the stakes of their poetry. Affect theorists like Terada and Sianne Ngai are hesitant to draw clear

lines between affect and emotion, recognizing that there is an inevitable slippage between the two terms:

> My assumption is that affects are *less* formed than emotions, but not lacking structure altogether; *less* 'sociolinguistically fixed' but no means code-free or meaningless; *less* 'organized in response to our interpretations of situations,' but by no means entirely devoid of organization or diagnostic powers." (*Ugly Feelings* 27)

It is precisely this slippage—the blurring of borders—that I find useful when articulating the Language Revolution's relationship to feeling that in turn gestures toward its radical project.[14] For this reason, Brian Massumi's distinction between "emotion" and "affect" is crucial to my understanding of feelings as they apply to the borderblur poetics of the Language Revolution. For Massumi, *emotion* is "a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal" (28). In this way, Massumi's definition of emotion relies upon the conscious apprehension of feeling through the process of linguistic codification. In other words, emotions are those feelings that, for Massumi, are reified, described, and communicated in language. *Affect,* on the other hand, does not correlate with "meaningful sequencing" (28) nor is it easily codified through linguistic processes. Affect, for Massumi, is preconscious and is registered in autonomic bodily responses. In other words, affects are less linguistically quantifiable, and seem to precede and succeed conscious apprehensions in language. For Massumi, however, the boundaries that separate the two are porous, which he calls the "seeping edge" (43). The poetry of the Language Revolution explores this edge.

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[14] At numerous points in this dissertation, I use the term "feeling" if I am referring to both emotion and affects. It is also important to note that not all critics ascribe to Massumi's distinction between emotion and affect as I have in this dissertation. Where necessary, I use the terminology employed by the critical theorist to respect their diction; however, when advancing my own arguments, I typically use the terminology and meanings described in this section.

As Rachel Greenwald Smith points out in her study of affect and postmodern fiction, the distinctions outlined by Massumi are especially important for considerations of affect in literature because it "perhaps more than any other art form, participates in producing and working that edge" between emotion and affect. She explains that literature is "Affectively exciting insofar as aesthetics stimulate sensory responses, but linguistically based and therefore inevitably codifying, literature stimulates and codes relentlessly" (431). Massumi's definition, as partially explained by Greenwald Smith, identifies one (of many) borders that are concerning to the poets of the Language Revolution—language's codifying of emotion and the ramifications of such codification during the emergent conditions of postmodernity. In large part, what this dissertation seeks to explore is how these poets work along the "seeping edge" (Massumi 43) or, maybe in terms closer to their discourse, blur the border between linguistic codification of feeling (emotion) and those feelings that are more complex and less quantifiable in language (affect). Each poetic mode—concrete poetry, sound poetry, and haptic poetry—that is examined in the following chapters of this dissertation are modes that attempt to renegotiate the relationship between sensory stimulation, feeling, poetry, and audience. Nichol's "blues," for example (as I will examine more rigorously in the first chapter), challenges assumptions about the meaning of the word "love," an emotion that suggests a deep commitment between a subject and another object or subject. As Nichol's typographic play with the word suggests, love, as a feeling, is also intricately bound with its perceived opposite "evil" (or "evol") as well as notions of "evolution." By drawing out this range of meaning, Nichol's poem reveals the complex-nature of love as a feeling in a way that is not quantifiable in its singular, codified usage. An appeal to feeling is useful since it and borderblur conceptually share a great deal: the ambition of borderblur poetics is to transcend the boundaries between bodies (human, non-human, systemic)

and feeling to "if only for an instant," as Teresa Brennan points out, alter "the biochemistry and neurology of the subject" (1).

Feeling also, as Sara Ahmed suggests, is crucial in the formation of collective bodies. Affect, for Ahmed, is not personal, but it is social and political: "Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, the individual and the collective" ("Affective Economies" 119). For Ahmed, "the individual subject comes into being through its very alignment with the collective. *It is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies"* (128). In this way, Ahmed is less interested in the slippage between emotion and affect and moreso focused on how emotions actually *do* things in the world with a specific emphasis on how they form social bonds. This is an important point to consider for this study since I am examining the work of poets interested in feeling and who developed many unconventional approaches to poetry, which often placed them in disagreement with other poets and literary bodies of the time. These were poets who saw social bodies form in favour and opposition to the work they composed both on the political level (like the House of Commons), the cultural level (Canada Council), and on the global scale as publishers in the United States and Europe recognized their work. More pointedly, however, Ahmed's argument demonstrates for us that affect and politics are intricately bound—and politics are deeply enmeshed in the radically-aspiring activities of the Language Revolution.

In the context of the Language Revolution, the social and political aspects of postmodernity and affect are deeply enmeshed. Under postmodern conditions, affect did not wane for many Canadian poets; rather, the emergence of postmodernity and "postmodernization" (Hardt and Negri 280) was a period of intense feeling. Nichol's comments regarding a feared

"totalitarianism" and bissett's total rejection of standardization—in life and art—indicate an

anxiety that also corresponds to the emergence of life under postmodernity. Michael Hardt and

Antonio Negri effectively highlight these changes in their writings on the postmodern.

According to Hardt and Negri, the late 20th century saw a new form of power emerge. It is what

Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze separately refer to as "the society of control." Hardt and

Negri succinctly summarize Foucault's and Deleuze's definitions of the society of control as a

new model of power that "opens toward the postmodern" and which is generally characterized

"by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity [sic]

that internally animate our common and daily practices, but in contrast to discipline, this control

extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating

networks" (*Empire* 23).[15]

The arrival of postmodernity in the mid-to-late 20th century had a direct relationship to

affect. Hardt and Negri outline this relationship in the first installment of their trilogy, *Empire*

(2000), wherein they describe, in economic terms, the shift from industrialization to

"*postmodernization*, or better, *informatization*" (280). This shift signalled a transition away from

industrial modes of labour toward "service jobs (the tertiary), which has taken place in the States

since the 1970s," including health care, education, finance, advertising, and entertainment (285).

This same transformation, they note, occurred in "the United Kingdom, and Canada" around the

same time (286). Among the many implications of this shift, the role of feeling in social and

material life takes on a new role in later-stage capitalist countries. The arrival of

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[15] In contrast, the preceding model of power is a disciplinary society: a "society in which social command is constructed through a diffuse network of dispostifs or apparatuses that produce and regulate customs, habits, and productive practices … its mechanisms of inclusion and/or exclusion are accomplished through disciplinary institutions (the prison, the factory, the asylum, the hospital, the university, the school, and so forth). Disciplinary power rules in effect by structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice, sanctioning and prescribing normal and/or deviant behaviors" (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 23).

postmodernization is a rise in *affective labour*—that is, a mode of labour "characterized in

general by the central role played by knowledge, information, affect, and communication" (285)

and "marks a new mode of becoming human" (289). Hardt and Negri are not interested in

parsing the terminology of feeling; however, their points suggest that feeling—emotion and

affect—is now being utilized by the capitalist economy in unprecedented ways. Advertising is

perhaps the most obvious form of this emergent mode, a point I will return to in the following

chapters. In a few words, the rise of consumerist culture during this time also saw a rise in

advertising's use of emotion to motivate consumers and to direct and manipulate the trajectory of

their desire toward a product for consumption. In part, this transition may explain Jameson's

comments on affect and its wane: under postmodernity affect became more controlled by

external bodies and corporations. However, affect did not really wane; rather, it became a key

component of a mutating capitalist economy and served a specific purpose in the service of that

system as it came to more completely control the social, political, and economic aspects of

human life in late-capitalist countries.

Myrna Kostash confirms that the shift toward a new mode of capitalism, characterized by

affective labour, was felt by Canadians even before the 1970s. In *Long Way from Home: The*

Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada, Kostash identifies a significant shift in the work force

in the mid-1960s:

> As the Gross National Product (GNP) represented by government revenue grew greater
> and greater, so did the percentage of the labour force employed by the state: 12.6 percent
> in 1956, 16.3 percent in 1962 and 19.1 percent in 1966. Besides the processionals, these
> workers were the clerical staff and the service and support staffs. By 1964 the Canadian
> Union of Public Employees would be the second largest union in Canada after the United
> Steelworkers of America. (xvi)

Kostash traces similar changes in the economy as Hardt and Negri in their conception of

postmodernization. She carries on to write: "This was capitalism dominated by the expansive,

multinational corporation, by flexibility and self-correcting mechanisms" (xvi). Kostash's remarks clearly identify that the changes introduced by a shift toward postmodernization and postmodernity was felt by Canadians as early as the approximate starting period of this dissertation. What she calls "self-correcting" mechanisms corresponds to Hardt and Negri's description of control beyond the institutional setting. In Canada, just as elsewhere in advanced capitalist countries, these were the conditions of life: new forms of social and economic control that are subtly distributed among the mechanisms of day-to-day human life that demanded specific ways of feeling and expression.

The conditions of postmodernity, characterized by an emergence of modulatory mechanisms and transformations of affect, are at the core of this study. Feeling and its expression is a key issue of contention for the poets of the Language Revolution—including bissett and Nichol—as they confront the emergent conditions of postmodernity. The poets of the Language Revolution shared similar registers of feeling in the face of postmodern conditions—hesitation, anxiety, rage, excitement, alienation, and especially a concern for implications of codified and standardized language for expression of human feeling. Bound in this way, we see––as Ahmed recognizes—how "*emotions* do things" which is "align individuals and communities" to form an attachment, which is visible in the poetics (119). The poetry produced by these poets was their means of processing and resisting the arrival of postmodernity's model of power as it is exercised "through machines that directly organize the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and desire for creativity" (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 23). Considering this shift toward new modes of modulation over the

individual, Nichol's comments regarding a return to totalitarianism and bissett's resistance to standardization seem necessary and more timely.

By looking at theories of affect and characterizations of postmodernity in this way, I provisionally attempt to map a causal relationship that describes the emergent conditions of postmodernity as a catalyst for new realizations of the significance of feeling in art and life. For the poets of the Language Revolution, whom I will turn to more directly shortly, poetry was a creative outlet for processing and resisting these changes as they sought to navigate the relationship between feeling and language. Each non-lyrical poetic mode they explore is a means of renegotiating that relationship as it applies to the eye, ear, and hands; a means of interrogating that "seeping edge" between codified feeling and a scrambling of those codes. The writing of Hardt, Negri, and Kostash capture these issues in retrospect; however, their characterization of postmodernity and its conditions is hardly a retrospective imposition. In the next section, I turn to the writings of Toronto media-critic Marshall McLuhan and his accounting of these shifts as they unfolded in real time.

Postmodernity in Other Words: Marshall McLuhan and the "Electric Age"

The work of Canadian literary critic and media theorist Marshall McLuhan—who not only had an ear and eye attuned to the literary and artistic avant-garde, but also anticipated contemporary theories of feeling—assists in articulating the initial concerns of the Language Revolution. Writing in both spatial and temporal proximity to the Language Revolution, McLuhan's theories not only capture and criticize the emergence of new technologies and economies, and their impact on human life, but it is in his writing—works such as *The Mechanical Bride* (1951),

Understanding Media (1964), and *The Medium is the Massage* (1967)—that I find traces of affect theory that support my ideas related to the Language Revolution.

As Pierre Berton notes in his popular historical account of the year 1967, McLuhan became internationally recognized for his writing on communication, technology, and the modern age. McLuhan was featured in magazines, on television, and radio spots all over the world; he was offered office space by some of the biggest magazines in North America, and in that same year he was offered the Albert Schweitzer Chair by Fordham University in New York City, which came with the significant fee of $100,000. McLuhan came to be known for such popular maxims as "The Medium is the Message," which, in essence, turned the critical gaze to focus upon the means of producing content and meaning; "Hot and Cool media"—which designates the level of sensory involvement of any given medium; as well as his salient phrase the "Global Village," which recognizes the shrinking size of the world as global telecommunication technologies increased the speed of communication across long distances. This understanding of the world became crucial to both the corporate and counter-cultural worlds—for example, he was a consultant at Bell Telephone while making significant impacts on the arts and literary scenes across Canada. McLuhan's writing effectively captures a transition phase of Western capitalism, the movement from industrialism to what he refers to as the "electric age," a period typified by electric technologies, a rising dominance of information and data, and shifts in the way affect is part of human social life. In more contemporary terms, I understand McLuhan's conception of the electric age to be nearly synonymous with

"postmodern" and "postmodernization" that will later become part of authoritative academic discourse.[16]

McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Culture* (1957)—a then cutting-edge analysis of media (newspapers, advertisements, radio, and film) and its impacts on and modulation of human thought, behaviour, and desire—effectively diagnoses the mid-twentieth century. McLuhan's original preface articulates his criticism of the period from the outset:

> Ours is the first age in which many thoughts of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. To get inside in order to manipulate, exploit, control is object now. To keep everybody in the helpless state engendered by prolonged mental rutting is the effect of many ads and much entertainment alike. (v)

Influenced by the cybernetic theories of Norbert Wiener, McLuhan recognizes this impetus toward control to be a key issue as the Western world transitions from an industrial age to the new electric age (which he analyzes further in later works). McLuhan recognizes that this control manifests on various levels of everyday life in a capitalist society; he writes that the "Imagination flickers out," the "Markets contract" (22), it is monotonous and boring (22), inspires "conformity" (115) and inspired the rise of the "cult of hygiene" (60). For example, on conformity and the narrowing of desire, McLuhan observes that "Most people are terribly ill at ease unless they are 'in line' with their fellow men" (46); and regarding the cult of hygiene, he states, "implied in the cult of hygiene is a disgust with the human organism and "the puritan hatred of the body and detestation of bodily tasks" (61). Considering the resistant spirit of the Language Revolution, it should come as no surprise that the writers and artists of the time

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[16] For more on McLuhan more generally see *1967: The Last Good Year: 1967* by Pierre Berton (1997); *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* by Robert Cavell (2002); *Marshall McLuhan's Mosaic: Probing the Literary Origins of Media Studies* by Elena Lamberti (2012); and *Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye: Apocalypse and Alchemy* by B.W. Powe (2014)

responded to issues like these: they led a return to the body (see bissett's 1968 *Awake in th Red Desert,* Nichol's 1988 *Selected Organs*, or Judith Copithorne's 1969 *Rain*); they developed a disorder aesthetic in their concrete poems, which was embraced by bissett, McCaffery, and others; and writers like McCaffery and Nichol suggested that their writing practice sought to remedy society from its constraints by liberating language from its conventional usage. Though media is its object of study, *The Mechanical Bride* is mostly limited in its analysis to examining the ways messages (or content) of advertising and other media affect the individual. McLuhan is critical of the ways the messages of advertising manipulate the emotions and desires of individuals to coerce them into complacency, conformity, and capitalistic modes of exchange. Advertisements, to this end, use affects like fear, embarrassment, and shame to encourage consumers to purchase commodities. To suggest that the writers of the Language Revolution were solely responding to advertising media, however, would circumscribe my own analysis.

This attention to media and its impact on human life is further developed in McLuhan's later writings, which are just as influential as *The Mechanical Bride*. Roughly a decade and a half later, McLuhan deepens his analysis of the materials of media. He comes to recognize the affective potential of contemporary culture which inspires his well-worn phrase: "the medium is the message" (23), which opens his quintessential *Understanding Media*. The meaning of this equation is not as simple as it seems. McLuhan is not suggesting that the content of media be disregarded, giving prominence to the materials and mechanisms of the media itself. McLuhan's definition of media is more broad and inclusive: he characterizes media as "any extensions of ourselves" (23), which for McLuhan includes radio, television, newspapers, and film but also (but not limited to) cars, airplanes, games, typewriters, and weapons. This point is stated most succinctly in the introduction to *Understanding Media*: "after more than a century of electric

technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace," and further that any "extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex" (19). McLuhan's invocation of the nervous system here recalls bissett's comment on suspending the nervous system, mentioned earlier in this Introduction. McLuhan is interested in the ways media (old and new) alter how humans engage sensory data. While bissett playfully suggests that the nervous system be suspended, McLuhan is convinced that media significantly impact the way humans sense and feel—in other words, media impacts the way humans receive and generate feeling. Consider, for example, that television, a relatively new medium in the 1960s—delivered the horrors of the war in Vietnam directly into the homes of Canadians and Americans alike, likely (among other reasons) prompting such a strong backlash against the war. This point reminds us of the political ramifications of affect, via Ahmed, of how feeling articulates a social body—in this case, a counterculture movement steeped in anti-American sentiments.

While it is profitable to simply acknowledge that both McLuhan and the poets of the Language Revolution are united by a shared interest in exploring the possibilities of feeling within an evolving media landscape during the mid-to-late twentieth century, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that he was particularly influential over those poets, articulating for them their own sense of anxiety and apprehension about the new world. McLuhan's thinking was generally influential for the Vancouver's arts and culture community at the time; he "gave his first lecture in Vancouver at the Arts Club" in 1959, recalls Abraham Rogatnick in a conversation with Jamie Reid, and others. Later, during the 1965 Festival of Contemporary Arts, two days were dedicated to a special presentation referred to as "The Medium is the Message," a series of happenings curated by poet and visual artist Roy Kiyooka as well as Iain Baxter, Helen

Goodwin and others. In a press release, the organizers acknowledge the influence of McLuhan, "whose brilliant philosophy of contemporary communication media is helping us toward a new understanding of the cogent role these media play in shaping twentieth century life" (Miki et al. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery Archives 1). The event was comprised of a continuous cycle of events through which the audience would move and interact. The organizers hoped it would achieve what McLuhan has said of the age: "a re-focussing [sic] of aims and images to permit ever more audience involvement and participation" (McLuhan qtd. in Miki et al. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery Archives 1). This last point gestures towards McLuhan's interest in hapticity, which will be discussed later in this study.

Clearly, there was a mutual interest between McLuhan and the arts communities of Canada, but McLuhan also had various deep connections to the literary scene in Canada (and abroad) as well. The presence of McLuhan's theories is felt again in Vancouver four years later in 1969 in connection with an exhibition of concrete poetry at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery. In the catalogue for the exhibition entitled *Concrete Poetry: An Exhibition in Four Parts*, a folder contains an essay by Ed Varney, co-curator of the exhibition, which defines concrete poetry using McLuhan-esque language:

<div align="center">

C O N C R E T E   P O E T R Y
IS FORM AS CONTENT
MEDIUM AS MESSAGE
POEM AS OBJECT
(Is this phase 1 of a pure visual language?)
CONCRETE POETRY IS IMMEDIATE
ALLATONCENESS (n. pag.)[17]

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The exhibition featured 63 artists, including collages by Ray Johnson, letter drawings by Michael Morris, and a selection of works by international concrete poets. Included alongside this

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[17] This excerpt comes from Ed Varney's 1969 essay on concrete poetry. My re-production here does not contain the same fonts nor the precise typographical layout that is found in the folder.

international grouping of artists were also Canadian concretists such as Nichol, bissett, Copithorne, Gerry Gilbert, and Stephen Scobie.

Even though McLuhan's name is not explicitly used in the previously mentioned 1967 television interview between Webb, Nichol, and bissett, McLuhan's thinking permeates the conversation. bissett's mention of Canada within a global network of new poetry—Brazil, Belgium, Holland, England, Scotland, and Japan—is indicative of the new McLuhan-esque conception of the world as a "global village." Furthermore, both bissett and Nichol describe their poetics as "non-linear," another buzzword and concept likely borrowed from McLuhan. In his writings, McLuhan preferred a non-linear and mosaical mode of writing, preferring to write in short bursts with aphoristic density rather than the sustained flow and depth of typical academic writing. Most pointedly, however, are Webb's and Nichol's discussion of the reel-to-reel tape machine present during their interview. The tape machine is a device that Nichol experimented with as part of his sound poetry practice. During the interview, Webb asks Nichol about his tape machine experiments, "but you, yourself, do work more closely with it [the tape machine]. Is this just extending yourself or is it more connected with leaving the meaning out of the word?" ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol"). Nichol partially sidesteps her question and suggests that it is more about giving an "electric context to the word" ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol" n.pag), but Webb's use of the word "extending" in reference to the media of the tape machine is telling. It is a reference to McLuhan's notion of extension that he develops in *Understanding Media*. For McLuhan, media is an extension of the human. It is through this notion of extension, however, that Webb is inclined to understand the new poetry being produced by Nichol and bissett. It is no coincidence that Webb also interviewed McLuhan on her show CBC radio show "Ideas" in the 1960s. The interview is indicative of not only of McLuhan's influence on bissett, Nichol, and

Webb and their understanding of poetry and, demonstrates just how deeply McLuhan-esque

thinking and terminology had embedded itself into the cultural zeitgeist.

Connections between McLuhan and bissett can be found earlier than 1967. bissett

acknowledges McLuhan's theories to be an influence on his own writing in his short essay "wut

ium doing in these poems," at the beginning of his first full-length book of poetry, *We Sleep

Inside Each Other All* (1965); bissett writes,

> Marshall McLuhan sz we are poisd between th typographic individualist trip th
> industrial revolution & the electronic age we have been in for sum time, between
> a unique dis tance and alienation privacy well now iullbe in th study for th rest of
> th night with my nose in a boo k & th corporate image tribally we are a part of out
> [sic] extensions do reach now have been reach thruout all time th historical jazz
> consumd in th greater fire of mo vies t v & lo ve. (n. pag.)[18]

As a partial explanation of his poetics, bissett locates his writing at the theoretical vanguard,

articulating, through McLuhan, an awareness of the shifting nature of the mid-twentieth century

from the industrial age toward the electric age and postmodernization. It is not entirely clear if

bissett is positioning *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* as a response to McLuhan's theorization of

the age, for there is a sneering quality to his quip "iullbe in th study for th rest of th night with

my nose in a boo k" (n. pag.). bissett's tone, here, is unclear since he has a complicated

relationship with academic modes of thought and writing; however, a survey of bissett's poetry

from 1965 onward suggests that he is writing in response to many of the cultural maladies and

trends identified in McLuhan's writing.[19]

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[18] Since *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* was published by Nichol's Ganglia press. It could be said that Nichol, as publisher of bissett's book likely also had an early encounter with McLuhan's thinking. That being said, I will not be presumptuous and assume that Nichol had an intimate knowledge of McLuhan's texts. I merely would like to note the possibility of this early connection.

[19] While bissett largely eschewed academia—dropping out of both Dalhousie in 1956 and University of British Columbia in 1965—he did enjoy institutional support offered to him by UBC professors Warren Tallman and Earle Birney at various points in his career, especially letters of support for Canada Council grants.

Nichol engaged with McLuhan's work in a text written in 1982, but not published until 1989 in a special issue of *Journal of Canadian Poetry*. The text was originally intended to appear in a book on Marshall McLuhan, presumably edited by Fred Flahiff and Wilfred Watson, but was never published (Miki *Meanwhile* 480). The short piece that Nichol wrote for this book was entitled "The Medium Was the Message," and here demonstrates his intimate knowledge of McLuhan's work, with a particular interest in his use of the pun. Nichol writes, "No one punned more seriously than McLuhan. When he took his own aphorism 'the medium is the message' and punned it into a second volume entitled *The Medium Is the Massage* he was opening another door into another range of thots" (*Meanwhile* 298). Nichol continues to say that McLuhan's writing "is not trying to fix 'a' or 'the' reality — he wants to open realities" (299). Nichol's comments draw distinct connections to McLuhan's style of writing as a media theorist and his own poetics—both share an interest in openness and the use of the pun. A great deal of Nichol's work, throughout his career, employed and enjoyed puns. For example, his minimal, one-line poem "em ty" from *Still Water* hinges on the pun. Nichol's omission of the letter "p" from "empty" enacts the action associated with the word. Without the "p" the word itself is empty. However, taking note of Nichol's fascination with the body, the "p" is also a pun on "pee" (urine) thus indicating that this is also a scatological poem about bodily flows and the release of excess through the emptying of the bladder.[20] The opening of space between "em" and "ty" literally is an opening into a plethora of meanings, the same kind of openings Nichol finds in McLuhan's theoretical investigations. For both McLuhan and Nichol it is the process of arriving at this meaning, and not the meaning itself, that is most significant: McLuhan's statements "were also disposable vehicles … McLuhan is not attached to his thots in a possessive sense. They

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[20] This reading was partially developed in discussion with Gregory Betts during a directed reading undergraduate course on the Canadian literary avant-garde. Appropriate credit for his help is due.

were vehicles to get him places. . . . There is no point in building a career around landing . . . around one thot, one idea" (*Meanwhile* 299). Much of Nichol's work also hinges on the importance of process. Returning to *Still Water*, one can see that the act of composition is partially left open to the reader who, by his or her own process, moves through the box of loose cards in any order s/he desires, free to create meaning between the cards in any way s/he sees fit. The importance of openings plays out more broadly in Nichol's work, particularly related to his conception of the Language Revolution. Nichol sought to use language—especially the kind of openness of language he advanced in his poetry—to open up his readers to feeling: "get through into the person's emotions and stir them up" (*Meanwhile* 39), the core tenet of his revolutionary poetic ambition.

McLuhan's writing also proved influential to the critical understanding of the new poetry—especially concrete and sound poetry—that was emerging at the time. McLuhan's ideas helped form the basis of intellectual probing of John Robert Colombo's *New Directions in Canadian Poetry* (1971). *New Directions* is an anthology meant to be a teachable introduction to Canadian concrete poetry and includes work by Steve McCaffery, Judith Copithorne, Hart Broudy, David UU, Andrew Suknaski, bill bissett, David Aylward, and bpNichol—poets also included in this study. Colombo's anthology offers a variety of strategies through which Canadian concrete poetry can be interpreted. He offers perspectives on literature and modern art from the likes of Pablo Picasso and Paul Valéry to an unnamed "Eskimo" Stone Carver. He makes direct connections between McLuhan's criticism and McCaffery's untitled poem from grOnk publication *Broken Mandala* (see Appendix B), prompting the reader to consider it as a statement on communication technologies and literacy. Colombo asks, "Is the ape a man, or is man an ape? Is the ape man emerging from what Marshall McLuhan called 'the age of literacy'

into a post-literate age of electronic communication?" (39). More significantly, Colombo recognizes a connection between McLuhan and Canadian concrete poetry. He describes concrete poetry as a new direction in Canadian poetry and uses the McLuhan-esque term "probe," which Colombo understands to be "an exploratory vehicle that will take us into new macrocosmic and microcosmic worlds in order to understand our own world better" (32). To call Canadian concrete poetry a "probe" and "exploratory" seems at first to denigrate the radical ambitions of their project; however, implicit in this search is the search for new orders, a revolutionary project in itself. Colombo, then, maintains an understanding of Canadian concrete poetry that is similar to Nichol's poetics and his understanding of McLuhan's writing: these types of writings (creative and theoretical) seek to create new openings, new planes of knowledge and being yet to be explored.

All of this theoretical and background knowledge is necessary for understanding the ambitions of the Language Revolution as a concerted and revolutionary literary movement. McLuhan's writings and their resonance for this generation of poets make clear that problems of postmodernity and affect, posed retrospectively by Hardt, Negri, Kostash, and to some degree Massumi and Ahmed, were circulating through the Canadian literary zeitgeist.

The Revolution of the Language Revolutionaries

As a poetics that emphasizes affect and that responds critically to the conditions of postmodernity, the revolutionary aspect of the Language Revolution must be understood. What precisely were these poets revolting for or against? And how do they really come to embody revolutionary ideas? The use of the word "revolution"—a word that, as indicated by Christopher Hill's mapping of its early usage in "The Word Revolution," has undergone a complex series of

mutations in its meanings. Hill traces it from its meaning in astrology and astronomy as the "revolution of the heavens" as well as "any completed circular motion" (100) to its political usage, signifying an effort to revolt or rebel against an established order (116). For my purposes, however, I turn to Raymond Williams's entry "Revolution" in *Keywords* (1976), which clearly defines the term in its modern usage. Williams defines revolution as "the sense of necessary innovation of a new order, supported by the increasingly positive sense of PROGRESS" (57)— which can be broadly applied to both political and aesthetic contexts. Indeed, this definition, adapted from its employment during the French Revolution, can be usefully aligned with the Language Revolution. As evidenced by the work published in *grOnk,* Nichol, and bissett with *blewointment,* did seek to innovate and establish a new order by trying to make space for poets and creators who attempted to shift from established traditions.

Noting the revolutionary spirit of this movement provides a useful entry into the discourse of avant-garde modes of theorization, which will help to more acutely define the aims of the Language Revolution: How does art and writing advance a program toward a new order of feeling? I admit that I am making a slight conflation here: revolutionary art thus avant-garde. That being said, they are related terms. Both revolution and avant-gardism share an inclination toward radicalism with shared intent to alter the conditions of life. Proving to be an equally contentious term as revolution, the avant-garde in literature and the arts has been studied extensively, most notably in Matei Calinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity* (1977), Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), Charles Russell's *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries* (1985), and Gregory Betts's *Avant-Garde Canadian Literature: The Early Manifestations* (2013). Building on the work of Renato Poggioli (whose foundational 1968 book on the avant-garde has been superseded), Calinescu's theory articulates the avant-garde as a refined type of

modernism with its propensity for militancy, non-conformism, and exploration, but with a "revolutionary ethos" that seeks to act against "the oppressive influence of the past" (95). For Calinescu, modernism and avant-gardism are inseparable. While movements of the twentieth century avant-garde emerged in concert with modernism proper, certainly, it could not be said that the typographical experiments of Dada or the automatism of the Surrealists is in anyway an expanded vision of the pared-down, journalist-like fiction of Ernest Hemingway. In doing so, Calinescu's theory undercuts the potential of the avant-garde in at least two significant ways: 1) he makes it increasingly difficult to locate a revolutionary spirit outside of the modernist milieu and dilutes that spirit into various other categories including post-avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde; 2) while Calinescu demonstrates an acute awareness of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, to suggest that avant-gardism is an extension of modernity, he undercuts the ambition of avant-garde artists especially, as Bürger claims, if that intent is to intervene into material contexts to expose and destroy the art and literature as an institution.

Seeking to define the lines between a modernist tradition and the avant-garde, Bürger's and Russell's respective studies—emerging in close secession but not necessary in competition—assist to more distinctly delineate the avant-garde in arts and literature. Bürger's work emphasizes the avant-garde as an attack against bourgeois values, especially their institutionalization of aesthetics and art; he argues, "there is the intention of the historical avant-garde [that] was to seek the destruction of art as an institution set off from the praxis of life" and thereby demonstrate how "the weight that art as an institution has in determining the social effect of individual works becomes recognizable" (83). For Bürger, "Art as an institution neutralizes the political content of the individual work" (90) and this conception of the avant-garde lends itself to outline the significance of small press activities that emerged in Canada in the mid-to-

late 20th century, mainly the control taken by writers to produce and disseminate their own work. Many new small presses and magazines began to materialize: *Tish, blewointment, grOnk, Ganglia*, *Underwhich* and many more that were discontented by the oppressive aesthetic (and political) leanings of the already established presses and journals.

What we see in the emergence of these new forums for literary publication could be described as what Russell refers to, in his own study of avant-gardism, as "the concept of self-liberation–aesthetic, personal, and political" which "is both the generative principle of the specific avant-garde work and the goal toward which the work struggles" (34). For Russell, the avant-garde writer and artist maintains a critical and revolutionary spirit, and seeks to attack oppressive forces that shape aesthetic and political programs, but also, with exceedingly more optimism than Bürger, to affect the audience. For Russell, the avant-garde artist and writer is an activist who often sees to the merging of life and art, and whose "artwork [should] have an actual effect not only on the practice of art, but on the individual and collective perception and behavior, and on the quality, if not the structures, of social life" (24). Russell's comments here on the impact that art and literature has on individual and collective behaviours will be returned to with more depth momentarily, but what he reveals here is that there is an affective dimension to avant-gardism. Bürger is decidedly unoptimistic of the effects/affects of historical avant-gardism, especially as an interventionist or activist mode; he suggests,

> the intention of the avant-gardiste artist, who hopes that such withdrawal of meaning will direct the reader's attention to the fact that the conduct of one's life is questionable and that it is necessary to change it. Shock is aimed for as a stimulus to change one's conduct of life; it is the means to break through aesthetic immanence and to usher in (initiate) a change in the recipient's life praxis. (80)

Bürger continues, however, to admit that "The problem with shock as the intended reaction of the recipient is that it is generally nonspecific. Even a possible breaking through the aesthetic

immanence does not insure that the recipient's change of behaviour is given a particular

direction" (80). Though he is resolutely focused on shock as an affective vector of avant-garde

practices, the problem he has identified could be applied to affects in literature and the arts more

broadly. This sense of failure—the inability to generate lasting affects that do indeed

significantly alter human's emotions, patterns of behaviours, and desires—is a struggle even for

the writers of the Language Revolution.

Before proceeding any further, a little more mapping must be done, namely identifying

the type of avant-gardism that can be attributed to the Language Revolution. Typically, avant-

gardism is split into two camps: the political and the aesthetic. In *The Canadian Avant-Garde:*

The Early Manifestations (2013), Gregory Betts distinctively outlines the contours of both types

of radical activity: a political avant-garde which employs poetry as a tool supporting social and

political ideology and an aesthetic avant-garde that maintains the belief that liberating form

possesses the power to change and influence society. While these are useful distinctions, I am

reluctant to separate politics from aesthetics. I interpret aesthetics more broadly to understand

that an aesthetic *is* political. Working from definitions formulated by Jacques Rancière in *The*

Politics of Aesthetics (first published in English in 2004) and their subsequent development in

the essay collection *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (2009), I situate

these terms within the following parameters: 1) *Aesthetics*: Aesthetics extends beyond the realms

of beauty, art theory, and artistic praxis to describe more general modes of articulation between

forms of action, production, perception, and thought. Aesthetics is not the system per se but

describes a system, emphasizing its design and how it is perceived; 2) *Politics & the political*:

Politics is an established consensus within a community or, an established consensus between

people and their governing body (not limited to state bodies). The political resides in acts of dis-

sensus. It is when a subject (or collective body) become separate from society by challenging or resisting the consensus of an established politic. The aesthetic and political overlap—a political act is constituted by its emergence from an aesthetic framework or consensual mode of articulation and seeks to reconfigure the consensus within which a society seeks to organize themselves. With these definitions, I characterize the Language Revolution as an aesthetic avant-garde with distinctly sociopolitical aims. My assertion here finds resonance in some of the works by the poets themselves. In the poem "tell me what attackd you," for example, bissett writes,

> art is all use; only
> th technicians of a fragmented society
> interested in propagating such a nightmare
> encourage us to believe in realities
> that split our breath into filing cards (12-16)

Here, bissett indicates that there is a use value for art, an aesthetic mode of expression, and that plays a significant role in the social, political, and material worlds. For the poets of the Language Revolution this is to liberate the language of feeling (and of feeling itself) from codification. This liberation possesses the power to change and influence society and this is a political act in itself.

Though a typically polarizing mode of investigation for the study of arts and literature, avant-gardism, in this context, unites the three discursive strains that inform this dissertation. As mentioned in the paragraphs above, the avant-garde—no matter its aesthetic orientation—is typically an affective mode; it is born of discontent, political passion, and drive with the intent of shocking, confusing, or opening an audience to new possibilities of being (if even for a moment). Further, the avant-garde activities of the Language Revolution are framed in direct relationship to the conditions of postmodernity and as a critical response to problems posed by an emergent control society and the changing role of feeling amid processes of postmodernization, or what Marshall McLuhan refers to as the "electric age." Over the course of the following three

chapters, I examine three of the poetic modes explored by the poets of the Language Revolution to position their resistance to the conditions of the mid-to-late 20th century. The poets of the Language Revolution developed affective poetic modes to blur the borders between language, feeling, body, art, politics, and life.

Contexts and Parameters

The temporal parameters I chose for this study are between the years 1963 and 1988, which accounts for a span of time that occurs during and after the so-called CanLit Boom. Nick Mount's *Arrival: The Story of CanLit* (2017) chronicles the formation of the dominant literary public in the mid-to-late 20th century. This is a period he refers to as "the CanLit Boom" (1), the formation of a publicly recognized Canadian body of literature in and around the year of the country's centenary celebrations: 1967. Mount traces the emergence of Canadian Literature as a distinctive part of Canadian life: he narrates the emergence of Canadian literary personalities, the rise of Canadian literary prize culture, the establishment of Canadian presses and publishers, the flourishing of new Canadian bookstores, and the arrival of a Canadian reading public. While celebrating these crucial cultural milestones, Mount's narrative of the formation of a national body of literature problematically reinforces Canadian literary canonicity during a period when critics, readers, and writers are currently and actively trying to deconstruct the canon to better navigate Canadian Literature as part of the country's troubling and ongoing history of racism, colonial violence, gendered oppression, and regional linguistic tensions.

Shortly after *Arrival*'s publication, Paul Barrett recognizes Mount's shortcomings in his review in *The Walrus*; he describes the book as a missed "opportunity to link the historical

struggles of Indigenous, black, and immigrant writers with today's literary debates" (n. pag.).[21]

Barrett recognizes that "It says something, both about the sheer breadth of the CanLit boom and

Mount's own biases, when you realize that you could construct a similarly engaging

counternarrative to *Arrival* by focusing only on the writers Mount left out" (n. pag.). Mount

describes CanLit as it has been institutionalized by critics, readers, and some writers, leaving

invisible Canadian writers—especially Canadian writers of colour—who have been omitted from

the canon thus far. Repairing the damage caused by the exclusion of writers of colour from the

Canadian literary canon is very much a part of the discourse of Canadian Literature in 2017 and

2018, but this is not the first time writers and critics have challenged the formation of a Canadian

literary canon.

While no one book can be accountable for capturing every single author and event,

Mount also neglects—among many other writers—the poets of interest to my dissertation: the

poets of the Language Revolution who before 2018 actively opposed literary canonicity and

mainstream verse culture in an attempt to formulate an opposition to the circumscription of life

and expression during the CanLit Boom.[22] Studying aspects of the Language Revolution is surely

not an antidote to the maladies that effect contemporary Canadian literary communities. As I

note at various points in this dissertation, some writers fail to integrate concerns of race and

privilege into the revolutionary program of their poetry. Rather, the community that formed

around the idea of the Language Revolution was mostly, with some exception, white and

Anglophone but I suggest with more women practitioners than previous studies have reflected

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[21] Julie Rak later published a review of Mount's *Arrival* on *Hook & Eye* entitled "Another Dumpster Fire: an opinionated review of *Arrival: the Story of CanLit* by Nick Mount" wherein she offers similarly directed critiques of the book with an emphasis on Mount's writing of CanLit as emerging from "terra nullius," a concept that effaces Indigenous presence and thriving traditions of storytelling and oral cultures from the history of land.

[22] Keeping in the spirit of my critique, I recognize that my attention to the Language Revolution over many other worthwhile nodes of literary activity is reflective of my own "bias" for non-lyrical poetry with radical intent.

(more on that later). So, with that being said, this dissertation offers no drama of paradigm shifts; rather, it offers a significant glimpse at another period of literary activity characterized by anti-canonicity, interdisciplinary practices, resistance to literary gatekeeping, and intense affect which was happening before, during, and after the CanLit Boom. In a way, the subtext of this dissertation is not necessarily a counternarrative to the dominant narrative reinforced by Mount, but it does situate a range of practitioners who complicate notions of genre, nationality, literariness, and most importantly the idea of a dominant national literary cuture.

Arrival does not entirely exclude the assemblage of poets that are central to this dissertation. Mount mentions Nichol and bissett in *Arrival*, using their work as small press publishers (*blewointment*, grOnk, and *Ganglia*) as exemplary case studies for the importance of little magazines in Canada (see his chapter "Procedures for Underground"). Though they are in large part the architects of the Language Revolution, Nichol and bissett are not the sole members of the community I intend to account for over the next few hundred pages. Aside from the attention he pays these authors in his brief, star-based reviews, Mount pays little attention to their poetry and hardly mentions any of the other figures affiliated with those presses, poets with whom Nichol and bissett loosely formulated the concerted efforts of the Language Revolution. Nichol, bissett, and their contemporaries contributed to the proliferation of the little magazine and small press culture during the so-called CanLit Boom, yet their activities represent only a marginal portion of what is recognized by dominant Canadian literary studies today.

The period described by Mount is characterized by a diverse range of activities. At the start of this study, in 1963, the influence of American Beat counterculture had significantly affected arts and literary culture in Vancouver and Toronto, especially writers like bissett who was described by Jamie Reid as a "beatnik, a real one and really here in Vancouver" ("Storee"

14). Such cultural cross-over also led to a growing anxiety that American culture was overtaking Canadian culture since it was being broadcast over the airwaves and rapidly filling Canadian markets. These feelings permeated the Canadian literary culture. Critics and poets like Keith Richardson and Milton Acorn, for example, criticized what they perceived to be an American cultural invasion. One notable example of this American spill-over includes the famous poetic event of 1963, which was the landmark gathering of mostly established American poets at UBC (commonly referred to as the Vancouver Poetry Conference). It was organized by American-born professor Warren Tallman and poet Robert Creeley, who invited numerous American poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Charles Olson, Denise Levertov, Robert Duncan, and Canadian Margaret Avison for an intensive three-week program of discussions, lectures, and readings on and of contemporary poetry and poetics.

In that same year of 1963, however, Vancouver was home to another momentous event. bissett, along with his then-partner Martina Clinton and friend Lance Farrell, began publishing the aforementioned *blewointment* magazine, the same magazine that was denounced by Conservative politicians 14 years later. As Michael Turner notes, *blewointment* signaled the birth of a new literary spirit that was largely unseen in Canada up until this time. The arrival of blewointment in 1963 proved to be a formative moment for the development of non-lyrical poetry in Canada. The work produced by bissett in this forum inspired other writers like Nichol, who eventually carried these ideas eastward to Toronto, and also opened a path for other like-minded writers and publishers who started small presses and little magazines including *grOnk*, Ganglia*, Underwhich*, Coach House, and Nightwood. On the international level, *blewoinmtment* provided the necessary forum for the development of non-lyrical work that would eventually be welcomed by an international community of writers in the U.S., U.K., and across Europe.

My decision to end this project in 1988 is also significant, though heartbreaking. While I would have liked to declare that by 1988 the Language Revolution had successfully overthrown the literary establishment, had finally opened poetic discourse, or had at least successfully mitigated the arrival of postmodernity's more treacherous conditions, I would be overstating the influence of the Language Revolution. It was in 1988 that Linda Hutcheon published her *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) and only 3 years later that Fredric Jameson first publishes his cornerstone *Postmodernism, or, The Culture of Late Capitalism* (1991), both of which effectively hail postmodernity's lasting effects on North American critical and creative cultures. More specifically, 1988 marks the mid-way point of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's 8-years in office during which he deployed a neoliberal agenda in-sync with Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States, which signals the emergence of a new and exploitative socio-political system disguised as a blessing for the Western world. This, coupled with the rise of global capitalism, led to the failure of numerous leftist political projects including the Language Revolution. In the literary communities, writers were feeling this shift and, by this point, many of the writers who flourished in their youth as radical artists had slowed. The radical energy of the Language Revolution was losing momentum as a concerted—though highly unstructured—movement. As noted earlier, bissett sold blewointment press in 1983 to David Lee and Maureen Cochrane who transformed it into Nightwood Books. New generations of writers had emerged during this time with new literary projects, largely disconnected from the Language Revolution. 1988, for example, saw Erin Mouré win the Governor General's Poetry Award for her book *Furious,* a work charged by feminist thinking that foregrounds her later formally innovative poetry. *Furious* closes with an excellent and unusual finale of prose poems, "The Acts," that blur the borders

between theory, poetics, and prose, but ultimately foregrounds her deeper interest in polylingualism and translation. Furthermore, a slightly younger generation of writers like Stuart Ross, Gary Barwin, Margaret Christakos, jwcurry, Christopher Dewdney, Wayne Keon, Daniel David Moses, Lillian Allen, among many others—all of whom were directly touched by the poets of the Language Revolution in some way or another—would develop parallel poetic modes in their own surprising ways.[23] Interested in experimental modes, Ross and Barwin, for example, developed their own brand of neo-surrealism. As such, the year 1988 signals a variety of shifts in Canadian culture, politically and artistically. However, this study ends in 1988 because it was in this year, on 25 September 1988, that bpNichol died in hospital due to complications during a surgery to remove a tumor from his back. Alongside bissett, Nichol was a key figure of the Language Revolution who helped to define its contours in the mid-1960s and remained committed to expanding the poetic field to welcome as many voices into literature as he could. In the wake of Nichol's death, composer R. Murray Schafer wrote to David UU on 12 September 1992, confessing that "It has been different without Barrie around, I think we all feel it" ("Letter to David UU"). Nichol's passing—whose life continues to be celebrated today—left a tremendous feeling of loss in the poetic community that he served for so long.

Between these years, the Canadian literary experience is comprised of significant and often turbulent social, political, and cultural transitions that are related to but also distinguished from the rest of North America and the world. An examination of various memoirs and historical accounts that regard the period exemplify the ways socio-political happenings contributed to thinking and feeling during this period. George [Douglas] Fetherling's memoir *Travels by Night* (1994) accounts for the various "collateral connections" between counter-culture ideals and

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[23] jwcurry may well be the last poet to truly embody the spirit of the Language Revolution since much of his poetical works are festschrifts and homages to these poets and their revolutionary fervor.

Toronto's literary and educational communities. For example, the establishment of the House of

Anansi Press by poet Dennis Lee and Dave Godfrey in 1967 (118). Fetherling recalls the

beginnings of Anansi because they were unable to find publishers who would publish their work.

Lee, for instance, could not find a publisher for his forty-three-sonnet manuscript *Kingdom of*

Absence, which eventually became Anansi's first publication in 1967. Fetherling's portrait of the

time indicates that publishers had little-to-no interest in publishing the work of new Canadian

writers. Anansi was founded on an interest in the emergent: they published "chapbooks by Barry

Charles and Janis Rapport, two extremely young writers who prefigured Dennis's interest on

[sic] people at the first stage of their careers" (91). Lee and Godfrey's decision to establish an

alternative publishing venture is an indication of the sense of the times: a dissatisfaction with the

existing conditions, and the ambition to remedy these conditions through the search for

alternative cultural touchstones. Though Anansi was not the first to establish their own

independent press, their story highlights the ambitions and feelings of many emergent Canadian

poets at the time. As Mount details in *Arrival*, the foundational work of Lee and Godfrey has

come to definitively describe, in many ways, the Canadian literary zeitgeist for other writers of

that generation.

Similar searches for alternative venues have been expressed by many other writers and

publishers at the time, including Frank Davey and the Tish group at UBC. On the West Coast,

Davey's *When Tish Happens* (2011) notes various changes that had long term impacts on

Canadian poetry, including his own. Tish was founded largely as an alternative to writing at the

time—a shift away from the British colonial literatures that Davey and his precocious peers were

being taught during their undergraduate days at UBC. He recounts the tensions produced from

the influx of American literature professors present in Vancouver, and the ways American poets

like Robert Duncan and Charles Olson influenced students at UBC like himself, Fred Wah, and Daphne Marlatt. Some have argued, like Keith Richardson and poet Milton Acorn, that American poetic influence was merely another form of colonization, this time from the south of Canada's border.[24] Richardson's and Acorn's arguments portray the greater suspicion of America's influence over the shape of Canadian culture, which led to the designation of content quotas for Canadian publishing, radio, and television. The poets of this period also witnessed the 1970 *la crise d'Octobre*—the kidnapping and murder of cabinet minister Pierre Laporte by the Front de libération du Québec in the name of Quebec's sovereignty, the struggle for a new sense of Canadian nationalism, and tremendous shifts in governmental policies—from Pierre Trudeau's fight to ensure the privacy of citizens' marital and sexual relations to his egregious 1969 White Paper Policy to the election of Brian Mulroney with his neoliberal policies and his development of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement. Indeed, new opportunities to shape Canadian identity were opening up and during this period artists, writers, activists, and politicians were actively seeking to contribute to its formation. As evidenced by the continual shifts in Canadian policies, changes in cultural funding, and constant (but expected) shifts in Canadian literary culture, it seems that Canadian literary identity did not truly coalesce during the Boom as Mount seems to suggest; rather, it was hotly contested over and over again in the literature of the 1960s, '70s, and the '80s.

These literary events accompany the tumultuous period of postmodernization in Canada. To trace how the poets of the Language Revolution responded to these events, the subsequent

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[24] See Keith Richardson's *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish* (1976) or Milton Acorn's "Avoid Bad Mountain" (1972)

chapters will address three modes of non-lyric poetry that emerged between 1963 and 1988: Chapter 2 will focus on concrete poetry; Chapter 3 will address sound poetry; and Chapter 4 will attend to what I am referring to as haptic poetry. Though these poetic genres overlap in various ways—for example, a concrete poem can also be used as a sound poetry score—each mode has been rigourously and separately theorized by critics and practitioners, thus permitting a partitioned study as such. Furthermore, each poetic genre appeals specifically to a different mode of sensory experience—vision, hearing, and touch. Embedded within each chapter is my attempt to situate each poetic mode within the particulars of a literary and artistic discourse to draw connections between the work of the Language Revolution and other literary modes, both historical and concurrent. These connections do not always suggest a direct confluence or influence. Rather, I make these connections to demonstrate the discursive legitimacy of non-normative poetic modes and to offer a perspective on how the activities of the Language Revolution compared with other literary and artistic movements. The Conclusion of this study will briefly assess the successes and failures of the Language Revolution with a particular emphasis on recalibrating notions of "failure" as it relates to literary avant-gardism.

Chapter 2: Concrete Poetry

"In no other form of society in history has there been such a concentration of images, such a density of visual message"

– John Berger (1972/1973)

Introduction

The first node of poetic activity related to the Language Revolution to be examined in this study is temporally located around 1963. It appears geographically on the margins of the Canadian landscape in Vancouver, British Columbia, where "everyone's a poet," says bill bissett to Phyllis Webb in their 1967 interview for the CBC ("bpNichol and bill bissett"). Though there are precursors to the activity that proceeds from this moment, and certainly other co-existent clusters of poetic enterprise, activities in Vancouver opened toward a radical vision of poetic experimentation: concrete poetry—that being, a poetry grounded not in semantic usages of language, but rather a poetry that communicates by augmenting the visual aspects of language and writing such as shape, page layout, colour, spelling, etc.[25]

The landmark publication that generated what came to be known as the Language Revolution, and a Canadian extension of borderblur activity, was the newly created *blewointment* magazine. First published in 1963, the magazine began as a joint effort shared by poets and artists bissett, Martina Clinton, and Lance Farrell. After *blewointment,* came a new wave of little magazines and small press activity across Canada, but mainly in Toronto and Vancouver. New magazines emerged like *Ganglia*, *grOnk*, and *Spanish Fleye*, and presses like blewointment press, Ganglia Press, Fleye, Underwhich, Very Stone House, Anonbeyond, and Wild Press, which also influenced presses that followed such as Coach House. Special concrete poetry issues

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[25] Portions of this chapter will appear in a forthcoming article in *Canadian Poetry* entitled "'my body of bliss': Judith Copithorne's Concrete Poetry in the 1960s and 1970s." Selected portions have been adapted and re-shaped for this chapter.

of established periodicals appeared, like those published by *Alphabet* (Issues 18 and 19, 1971) and *White Pelican* (Spring 1971), as well as several anthologies like *The Cosmic Chef: An Evening of Concrete* (1970) and *W)here: the Other Canadian Poetry* (1974) and a variety of concrete poetry exhibitions in galleries like *Brazilia 73* (1968), *Concrete Poetry* (1969), and *Microprosophus* (1971). Though these were not exclusively spaces dedicated to concrete poetry, these were some of Canada's foremost forums for showcasing this kind of work. Predicated on countercultural principles, a rejection of aesthetical and social taboos, and shared discontent with established arts and literary periodicals, these forums cultivated creative spaces that pushed the idea of poetics to an extreme, testing the limits of language and visuality at the service of an emergent generation of materially-conscious artists and poets. It is within these spaces that one finds evidence of the thriving and dynamic Language Revolution: its propensity toward a new visual language and a search for alternative modes of communication and expression.

The Canadians exploring the visual components of language, like bissett and Nichol (who are mainly responsible for the early proliferation of concrete poetry in Canada), were at first unaware of the tradition they found themselves working within. While this is in large part due to the lack of concrete poetry being circulated by the Canadian literary community at the time, the nature of concrete poetry itself contributes to this problem. As an idiom that describes a distinctive mode of literary practice, concrete poetry is an elastic and porous term, shifting in its meaning depending on where and by whom the word is being used.[26] Prior to the explorations of Canadians, concrete poetry was consciously investigated by poets, artists, designers, and

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[26] For this chapter on visually-based poetics, I have opted for the term "concrete poetry" rather than other commonly used terms, including "visual poetry," "vispo," "ideopoems," "text-art," etc. I make note of this to ensure that concrete poetry in this chapter is not confused with other modes since some poets also referred to sound poetry as "concrete." As I shall demonstrate over the course of this chapter, choosing a name for this type of work is contentious for some critics and practitioners.

typographers across the world in places like Brazil, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Britain, and

Japan. Most critics, even those who have experimented with visual modes of composition, and

have anthologized such works—like Stephen Bann, Mary Ellen Solt, and Emmett Williams—

have acknowledged the difficulty of precisely identifying the correct terminology. Attempts to

understand the aesthetic and political dimensions of concrete poetry in any cohesive way, even

while looking back with a keen critical eye, seems to be a nearly impossible task.

In his introduction to *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967), Williams alludes to the

difficulty of defining concrete poetry and suggests that "Concrete poetry . . . is what the poets in

this anthology make" (v). He elaborates no further. Richard Kostelanetz offers a more useful

starting point for understanding visual concrete in his *Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes* (1993); he

writes, "Concrete Poetry aims to reduce language to its concrete essentials, free not only of

semantic but syntactical necessities" and continues to say that the

> true Concrete Poem is simply letters or disconnected words scattered abstractly
> across the page or a succession of aurally nonrepresentational (and linguistically
> incomprehensible) sounds. In his or her use of language, the poet is generally reductive;
> the choice of methods for enhancing language could be expansive. (45)

Though this is a more elaborate definition than the one offered by Williams, Kostelanetz's

rendering of concrete poetry fails to capture its many nuanced manifestations. Not all concrete

poetry, for example, is comprised of disconnected or scattered letters; some of it appears quite

connected. Likewise, a concrete poem is not necessarily reductive; concrete poetry can sprawl

across many pages to be combined into baroque, multi-panel works.

Though many definitions abound within scholarly discourse, the poets of the Language

Revolution came to their practice without these aforementioned definitions in mind. The poets

developed a distinctive mode of concrete poetry and only later integrated their work into the

global network once they had established, in some sense, a recognizable aesthetic and politic.

While no two poets composed concrete poetry in the same way—some poets preferred hand-drawn methods while others preferred typewritten modes—they recognized similarities in one another. This chapter's definition of concrete poetry, in the Canadian context, proceeds from considerations of concrete poetry posed by David UU (also known as David W. Harris), who published an article entitled "Beyond Concrete Poetry" in a December 1972 issue of *The British Columbia Monthly* (1.3). The piece is a transcript of a lecture he gave at the Vancouver Art Gallery in November 1971. UU maps out concrete poetry as it exists in Canada at that moment. Rather polemically, he suggests that what is practiced by Canadians and referred to as concrete poetry is in fact something quite different. For UU, concrete poetry begins with Concrete Art, the Bauhaus School, and artists like Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Joseph Albers, the latter of whom he calls the "real founder of the Concrete Poetry movement" (UU n. pag.). Concrete poetry, which UU suggests is the literary cousin to Concrete Art, is founded on principles of intellect, organization, and construction as opposed to disorder and chance. The principles of Concrete Art are at the core of earlier, international precedents of concrete poetry, like the cleanly and articulately composed constellations of Eugen Gomringer.

What is identified as concrete poetry in Canada, according to UU, is in fact the opposite of concrete poetry. For UU, Canadian concrete poets do not share the same values as Concrete Art (intellectual/constructive), but instead operate intuitively, characterized by "physical/destructive" tendencies (n. pag.). UU refers to this activity as "Canadada," acknowledging Nichol and McCaffery to be two of its leading practitioners. UU states the differences between concrete poetry and Canadada quite distinctly: the "Canadian poets in this field work on a completely intuitive level where chance is the major technique and disorder common." He goes further to state that "Concrete Poetry embraces the visual (image) while

Canadada is emotional and embraces the auditory (lyric)" and that "Canadada is an illogical search for no meaning in an ordered universe (a body without mind)" (UU n. pag.). While UU's characterization of Canadian concrete poetry is rather limiting—Canadian poets did after all produce carefully constructed and intellectually-driven visual works and, while concrete poetry does exhibit an aural element when performed, it is not necessarily lyrical—he does highlight the uniqueness of Canadian concrete poetry as an embodied and expressionist practice that is distinct from concrete poetry as it is more commonly recognized around the globe.

I do not find UU's term "Canadada" to be useful. The descriptor is not well-suited since Dada only fully came into Canadian consciousness after the Language Revolution began (a point I will come back to later in this chapter) nor is it useful to dislocate Canadian concrete from critical discourse by eschewing the term used most frequently by global practitioners. UU's distinctions are noteworthy, but they did not adhere nor did they redefine the direction of concrete poetic experimentation. UU's definition is most useful for how he identifies Canadian concrete poetry as an expressionist and bodily art form grounded in emotion and affect. While similar vectors of materialist experimentation are driven by logic, order, and cerebral-indulgence (like earlier manifestations of global concrete), the Canadian practitioners explore language and its relationship to emotions and intensities and frequently do so to mobilize disorder as a key element of the work. More than anything else, UU's efforts to distinguish Canadian activities in this way reduce Canadian concrete poetry as though it were a resurgence of modernist avant-garde movement Dada, which would inadvertently overshadow the new path Canadian concrete poets were carving out for themselves amid the conditions of postmodernity.

My argument, then, is that concrete poetry—as one aspect of the Language Revolution—did not surface as a mimetic strain of international concrete poetry, nor any other European

avant-gardism—nor was it solely a practice that wrestled with theories of language (as suggested by structuralist and post-structuralist criticisms of the Canadian concrete poetry). It was, in fact, a unique attempt to develop an ocular-centric, textually-based site of resistance to the conditions of postmodernity. The period was characterized by conventional uses of language and media to, as McLuhan says, "get inside in order to manipulate, exploit, [and] control" the emotions and desires of individuals, coercing them into complacency, conformity, and capitalistic modes of exchange (McLuhan *Mechanical Bride* v) and that some scholars of postmodernity suggest is characterized by a flattening of affect. In capitalist visual culture, this corresponds to what John Berger referred to at the time as "publicity" (132), a word he uses to describe advertising culture and the way it manipulates feelings of persons to encourage consumerism. These are the conditions which the Canadians of this study resisted. For the Canadian concretists, language, along with its material components, is an integral part and extension of the body and mind; it is a technical apparatus through which we define and redefine our emotional, physical, and intellectual selves. The work of the Canadian concrete poets demonstrates a heightened awareness—a metaconsciousness perhaps—that navigates the relationship between material world, feeling, and poetic language. It is important then, for these artists to deny the prescriptive conventions of standardized language and its media and thereby its control over processes. Canadian concrete poetry, then, is the manipulation of language, its visual materials and technologies, to mobilize feeling for the purpose of investigating what Massumi calls the "seeping edge" (43), which attempts to navigate the porous partition that divides emotion from affect, and in so doing poses a critical response to the flattening and standardizing conditions of postmodernity.

From here, this chapter proceeds to articulate Canadian concrete poetry as a related but distinctive branch of the international concrete poetry movement with its own set of radical aesthetics and politics, and distinguished by its purposeful generation and mobilization of affect. As I demonstrate in the first two sections of this chapter, Canadian concrete poetry was not a by-product of global concrete and can only tangentially be connected to the European avant-garde. The section following my brief outline of global concrete poetry's formation maps the confluence of writers, artists, and ideas that influenced the emergence of concrete poetry in Vancouver and its proliferation eastward to Toronto. These sections largely handle the chronological aspects of Canadian concrete poetry while also highlighting, where possible, the pertinence of affect to these activities. I follow my chronology with a brief engagement with the reception and criticism of this activity in order to then pivot into my own consideration of Canadian concrete poetry with a specific emphasis on the affective discourse I hope to embed within the scholarship. The penultimate section examines a number of works by poets affiliated with the movement. In my analysis, I pay particular attention to works that resonate with emotions and affect. I analyze how both their form and content brings feeling to the forefront as they explore the "seeping edge" between the codified and de-codified language of feeling. The final section analyzes the affects these works have generated by looking at numerous print outlets such as *Canadian Forum*, *Saturday Night*, and *The Globe and* Mail with reviews on the poetry.

Predecessors: The International Context

Instead of formulating itself as a mutated version of a pre-existing movement, Canadian concrete poetry was established discretely and only then embedded itself within a rich tradition of visual

literary experimentation. Scholars typically locate the beginnings of visual concrete at the turn of

the twentieth century, beginning with materialist experiments with language championed by the

European avant-garde: the mimetic, shaped poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire and his book

Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War 1913-1916 (1918) that depict poetry in recognizable

shapes, and that are evocative of the pattern poetry of ancient civilizations like that of Roman

Serenicus Sammonicus (c. 200 A.D.) and the early modern, pattern poetry like George Herbert's

religious "Easter Wings" (1663); the multipage, esoteric Symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé

and his spatially cognizant, multi-page poem *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard* [*A

Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance]* (1897), notable for its use of free verse,

disjointed syntax, and unconventional typographic arrangements; the "Courage, boldness, and

rebelliousness" of Futurists such as F.T. Marinetti who advocated for a spatial and typographic

poetry that imitated the "fervor of factories and shipyards" of the "modern capitals" and sought

to enrich the world "by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed" (Marinetti "Founding

Manifesto of Futurism" n. pag); which finally leads to the colourful typographical experiments

and collagist anti-art of European Dadaists like Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters, Hannah Hoch, and

Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven that was, as Tristan Tzara states, "born of a need for

independence, of a distrust toward unity" ("Dada Manifesto 1918" n. pag.).[27] This narrative

could comfortably couch a number of other co-existent schools including movements distinctly

located within the visual arts such as Vorticism, Konkrete Kunst, deStijl, Bauhaus, Lettrism,

Russian Futurism, and Cubo-Futurism as well as academic studies like Ernest Fenollosa's *The

Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* (1936). Pattern and spatial poetry, along with

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[27] For examples, see "Beyond Concrete Poetry" (1979) by David UU, *BP Nichol: What History Teaches* (1984) by Stephen Scobie, or *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-Modernism* (1989) by Caroline Bayard.

other strains of the European avant-garde, are key poetic nodes of experimentation with language and its materials that comprise the conditions of the international artistic and literary zeitgeist from which concrete poetry as an international movement emerged.

Before the Canadians found themselves within the intercontinental nexus of concrete poetry in the mid-1960s, the genre had already circulated among other international communities for just over a decade in a variety of formations. Like the difficulty critics face when locating a precise definition of concrete poetry, it is equally troublesome to identify a precise point of genesis for the term itself. There are narratives and counter-narratives that contribute to and dispute its beginnings, and are further complicated by the elasticity of the term itself, maintaining a myriad of significations depending on location and artist. As the story goes, concrete poetry, as a significant and noticeable vector of poetics, seems to have simultaneously developed in discrete geographies—Sweden, Switzerland, and Brazil. To resolve some of this confusion, it is useful to distinguish between concrete poetry as a term and concrete poetry as a movement. Simultaneously emerging in 1953, two nodes of concrete poetry were discretely articulated in the writings of Swedish multimedia artist Öyvind Fahlström and Swiss poet and graphic designer Eugen Gomringer. Unbeknownst to one another the two shared a fascination in the creative manipulation of language and its materials. Solt recollects this concomitant development thusly: "when Gomringer published his first 'constellations' in 1953 and his first manifesto "from line to constellation" in 1954, he was not aware of the existence of other poets who shared his concerns or that Fahlström had published "Hätila ragulpr på fåtskliaben" ["Manifesto for Concrete Poetry"] in Swedish in 1953" (8). Fahlström's and Gomringer's manifestos, though appearing around the same time, and sharing a similar vocabulary and ideas—a desire for newness in

poetry and a renewed attention to the structure of both form and content in language—were distinct.

Establishing the context for his project, Fahlström suggests that what he calls concrete "is partly a way for the reader to experience word art, primarily—partly for the poet a release, a declaration of the right of all language material and working means" (78). To execute this, Fahlström imagines a poetry that is "created as structure. Not only as structure emphasizing the expression of idea content but also as concrete structure" (75). Fahlström demanded that poets then "SQUEEZE the language material" to take hold of its constituent parts. He writes, "as soon as possible begin with the smallest elements, letters and words. Throw the letters around as in anagrams. Repeat the letters in words; lard with foreign words" (78). This meant several things for Fahlström. On the one hand, it necessitates new meanings that could be given to the elements of language or, on the other, language becomes defamiliarized by "putting well-known words in such realized strange connections that you undermine the reader's security in the holy context between word and its meaning" (77).[28] Conversely, Gomringer's "From Line to Constellation" is generally acknowledged as the foundational statement in the development of concrete poetry as a global movement. Like so many other distinctive strains of poetry in the twentieth century, Gomringer aims to formulate a new poetic movement distinguished from preceding poetry, especially the lyric poem. Hence, the title of the essay "From Line to Constellation" fully

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[28] Having published concrete poems as early as 1952, Fahlström is included in several of the major concrete poetry anthologies published in the 1960s; however, the credit he receives for his contribution to concrete poetry as a movement is less pronounced in comparison to Gomringer. In part, this is because his "Hätila ragulpr på fåtskliaben" was first published privately thus enjoying only a small circulation. Secondly, in "Concrete Poetry: From the Procedural to the Performative," critic Jamie Hilder reminds us that "the kind of poetry [Fahlström] was proposing was different from what would eventually be understood as concrete poetry; it had more in common with concrete musique which, though not unrelated, has a different trajectory and relationship to language" (112), a point that Fahlström also considers upon closing the manifesto. For these reasons, critical acknowledgment of Fahlström's contribution to the global concrete poetry movement is often circumscribed; instead it is Gomringer who critics and poets have decidedly come to acknowledge as the progenitor of global concrete.

summarizes the initiative: the move from the line as the basic unit of poetic composition toward what Gomringer refers to as the "constellation." Describing this shift, Gomringer writes, "the new poem is simple and can be perceived visually as a whole as well as in its parts. It becomes an object to be both seen and used: an object containing thought but made concrete through play-activity (denkgegenstanddenkspiel), its concern is with brevity and conciseness" (Gomringer "From Line" 67). In particular, the constellation is comprised of four main components: 1) a word or a group of words are enclosed to form a cluster; 2) the cluster forms an arrangement that is a "play-area of fixed dimensions;" 3) this area is ordered by the poet, who determines the possibilities within that field; and 4) through the formation of this constellation "something is brought into the world" which Gomringer describes as a "reality in itself" (67). While Gomringer's statement clearly establishes a program for his new poetic, he does not actually use (according to Mike Weaver's translation into English) concrete as a term, privileging instead constellation. Solt explains that "Gomringer chose the name "constellations" rather than "concrete poetry" for his new kind of poem because he was thinking in terms of clusters of words coming together in response to a particular creative impulse. The concept of line requires unnecessary words to fill in the pattern" ("A World View" 9). It is not until 1956, following a watershed meeting in 1955 between Gomringer and one of the Brazilian Noigrandes poets, Decio Pignatari, that the term concrete poetry was used more broadly by poets in the field.

Like the aforementioned poets in Switzerland and Sweden, the Brazilian poets and designers, too, were fascinated by the potential of experimenting with the materials of language in the early 1950s. Tracing their origin story, Solt recounts the beginnings of the group: "In 1952, the year Gomringer wrote his first finished constellation 'avenidas,' three poets in São Paulo, Brazil—Haroldo de Campos, Augusto de Campos and Decio Pignatari—formed a group

for which they took the name *Noigandres* from Ezra Pound's *Cantos*" (12). As a group they sought to develop a concept for a new form of poetry. They immediately began to publish a magazine of the same name, and by the middle of 1953 Augusto de Campos had produced a suite of colourful, systematic poems that "gave body to the new formal concept" (12). These poems were "intended for both eye and ear. The colors function as directions for reading (male and female voices in 'eis os sem senao os corpos') . . . and to designate word themes" (12). It was not until 1955, the year of the meeting between Noigrandes poet Pignatari and Gomringer, that the research and writing of the Noigrandes poets became globally recognized.

Stephen Bann narrativizes this meeting in his Introduction to his anthology of concrete poetry; he writes, "The international movement of Concrete Poetry owes its origin to a meeting which took place in Ulm in 1955. It was in this year that Eugen Gomringer, then working as a secretary to Max Bill at the Hochschule fur Gestaltung, made the acquaintance of Decio Pignatari . . . Both were already active in the field of experimental poetry" (7). The meeting was important, according to Bann, for several reasons: "The meeting in Ulm not only opened a channel of communication between Gomringer and the Noigrandres poets, but also led to an agreement that their work should henceforth be identified by one common title" (7). This "one common title" was "poesia concreta" ["concrete poetry"]. Historians of concrete poetry generally acknowledge this moment of convergence of two separate traditions to be instrumental to the founding of the global movement. Following the meeting, both poets returned home and gained increasing recognition as they advanced separate but concerted manifestos for concrete poetry. In 1956, Gomringer published his statement "Concrete Poetry." According to the statement, it is the "visual aspect" that differentiates concrete poetry from previous materially-based poetic movements: "Concrete language structures either do not follow the traditional verse and line

order or they follow it in such a limited way that one is not reminded of traditional forms" (Gomringer "Concrete Poetry" 67). Developing what Gomringer calls, a "contemporary scientific-technical view of the world" (68), he argues for a poetry that privileges form as part of the poetic mode: "Content is, then, only interesting for the concrete poet if its spiritual and material structure prove to be interesting and can be handled as language" (68). Two years later, Noigrandes poets (Decio Pignatari, along with brothers Augusto de Campos and Haroldo de Campos), published another defining statement entitled "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry." They echo Gomringer's denunciation of the past in the opening sentence: "Assuming that the historical cycle of verse (as formal-rhythmical unit) is closed, concrete poetry begins by being aware of graphic space as structural agent" (71). Like Gomringer they "appeal to nonverbal communication. Concrete poem communicates its own structure: structure-content. Concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/ or more or less subjective feelings" (72). These statements offer a sufficient definition of concrete poetry that exceeds the national zones of Sweden and Brazil. Together, Gomringer and the Noigrandes poets coordinate the emergence of a global concrete poetic. Revolutionary in spirit, concrete poetry is a break with the past and represents a new creative spirit with a focus on the materials of language. In step with the scientific and technical developments of the age, they, too, propose a technically innovative poetry that demonstrates how form and content are interrelated. Most importantly, however, is the shared and universal desire for unity, poetry made not of disparate and separate entities but as a singular form: "a general art of the world" ("Pilot Plan" 72).

As a movement, global concrete—especially the classical concrete produced by Gomringer and the Noigrandes Poets—share common features. The global concrete poem, a distinctly non-emotional poetry, concentrates on the physical material of the poem to create an

object to be perceived rather than read, that highlights the structural and atomistic elements of language. With their shared desire for unity and universalism, the concrete poetry of Sweden and Brazil, among other places are influenced by a lingering modernism—which also represents a desire for newness and unity in the face of a changing socio-political and technological world. Concrete poetry, Solt claims, "is in step with the new directions in which our society is moving" (11). In part, the Noigrandes group and Gomringer are responding to many world-wide social, political, technological changes. Jamie Hilder proposes that "the international anthologies of concrete poetry that came out in the mid- to late- sixties and early seventies enact the poets' project of international connectivity" (Hilder "Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Art" 582). It should come as no surprise that concrete poetry, in the wake of World War II—a war that divided the world, and ravaged countries politically, socially, and economically across the globe—that a new poetry emerges seeking unity and wants to present the world with a globally accessible and "useful object," as the Noigrandes poets put it in their "Pilot Plan," in a complex and shifting time when the world is actively being restructured. The approach of this movement, however, is fairly distinctive when compared to the Canadian strain of concrete. This first wave of global concrete poetry, as the Noigrandes poets put it, was unconcerned with "subjective feelings" (72). In contrast, the concrete poetry that emerged in Canada is much more concerned with feeling, especially as a response to the conditions of their own time and place.

Ground Work: The Canadian Context

The rather orthodox narrative of global concrete poetry's rapid growth summarized above narrowly engages the aesthetic and sociopolitical conditions within which Canadian concrete poets later find themselves enmeshed. Marjorie Perloff's comments on the politics of global

concrete poetry are important to consider here. Perloff writes, "the 1950s experiments in material poetics was ideologically suspect—too 'pretty,' too empty of 'meaningful' content, too much like advertising copy" ("From Avant-Garde to Digital" 50). For Perloff, global concrete poetry too closely resembles the aesthetics of their time, thereby replicating and perpetuating the conditions of capitalist consumerism. These conditions really only intensified in Western countries in the decades following global concrete's emergence. This is precisely the culture that Berger criticizes in *Ways of Seeing* at its peak concentration. He laments its effects: "All hopes are gathered together, made homogenous, simplified, so that they become the intense yet vague, magical yet repeatable promise offered in every purchase. No other kind of hope or satisfaction or pleasure can any longer be envisaged within the culture of capitalism" (153). Aesthetically replicating conditions like these, as many global concrete poets did, seems counter to any attempt to transform society.

As with global concrete poetry, there is no single point of genesis that bore forth the genre in Canada. Scobie notes that, like international practitioners, the Canadians "came to concrete poetry first of all from their own experience" (*What History Teaches* 32). Nichol suggests that the avant-garde Canadian poets of his generation "were operating much like amnesiacs" (Coupey et al. *Meanwhile* 153), unaware of the poetics that preceded them. He says, "There's a whole tradition [of the avant-garde] that went through, which up until very recently, the last five or six years, was literally undocumented. I mean the stuff existed, but in private libraries all over the place; it was not accessible" (*Meanwhile* 153). Therefore, young Canadian poets had to rely on the literature available to them from libraries, bookshops, and visiting authors. Canadian poets who came to concrete poetry, then, did so by finding influence across various histories, geographies, and disciplines—it seems that no one poet came to it in the same

way or at the same time. Perloff's comments suggest that global concrete largely came into being in concert with their conditions of their time, adapting the visual aesthetics of consumerist capitalism for their own purposes. In Canada, concrete poetry emerged, almost wholly, as a concerted resistance to the aesthetics and visual rhetoric of consumer capitalism that was intensifying with the rise of postmodernity.

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972/1973) confirms that some people felt anxiety and skepticism when faced with the conditions of consumer capitalism and its intensification in the mid-to late-twentieth century. Berger claims, "In no other form of society in history has there been such a concentration of images, such a density of visual message" (129). Like McLuhan, he recognizes the bind that arises with this optically-centred consumerist culture that he refers to as publicity: "Publicity is not merely an assembly of competing messages: it is a language in itself which is always being used to make the same general proposal. Within publicity, choices are offered between this cream and that cream, that car and this car, but publicity as a system only makes a single proposal" (131). Advertising culture, then, presents the illusion of free choice but only a limited range of choices that are intended, of course, only to benefit the corporations, a point that speaks to McLuhan's own concerns for strictures imposed on human life. Publicity works, according to Berger, primarily by motivating and manipulating affects: it works "on a natural appetite for pleasure" (132), "upon anxiety" (143), and "cannot exist without personal social envy" (148). In his most scathing remarks, he claims: "Capitalism survives by forcing the majority, whom it exploits, to define their own interests as narrowly as possible" (154) and thus a reduction of a person's feelings to desire, envy, and anxiety to draw them into capitalist modes of exchange. This is old news to us, but this is a major concern for poets and artists of the time.

McLuhan's writing provides further evidence that these were common feelings about visual culture that coursed through the Canadian context. Canadian concrete poets sought to transform the way language and communication in poetry and technology can be conceived and to resist the controlling mechanisms that Berger saw unfolding before him. These are very similar problems to those cited by McLuhan, which I also outline in the Introduction to this dissertation. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri succinctly confirm, with the advantage of retrospection, the conditions that Berger and McLuhan had sensed were emerging in their own time. These are symptoms of postmodernization—the transition from an industrial to service-based economy, which includes "entertainment and advertising" and is "characterized in general by the central role played by knowledge, information, communication, and affect" (91). These are among the key points of contention for the poets of Language Revolution and concrete poetry was one of the modes used to combat the circumscribing and standardizing effects of capitalist visual culture.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the moment that this activity began for the Language Revolution occurred the same year as the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference: it was that year that bissett published the first issue of *blewointment* magazine. The magazine remains one of Canada's most innovative and unconventional periodical publications. It showcased work representative of a borderblur aesthetic, featuring concrete poetry, lyric poetry, pattern poetry, collages, drawings, found materials, and more. It was not exclusively a space dedicated to concrete poetry; however, *blewointment* was one of Canada's foremost publications for showcasing this kind of work.

Though first published the same year as the UBC conference, *blewointment* was not directly a response to the poetic confluence that occurred at UBC. As indicated by the first issue,

the magazine initially serves as a response to two filmmakers, Léonard Forest and Jack Long, who came to Vancouver to make a film entitled *In Search of Innocence* (1964) for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), which focuses on Vancouver's artist communities.[29] The first issue of *blewointment* opens with a three-page open-letter by bissett, consisting of a thoughtful reflection on the making of the film:

> In a gestalt of montage wgich [sic] dug in
> further and further into us you reveald the questions
> of all our lives
> what can we know
> what is eternal, outside us
> what can we do
> artists poets, outside the abstraction (n. pag.)

blewointment then begins as a response, not to poets or to literary history, but to visual culture and its connection to artists. The first issue of *blewointment* complements the film, featuring several Vancouver-based artists and poets including bissett, Clinton, Judith Copithorne, Gladys Hindmarch, and Lance Farrell—none of whom were in the film. The magazine itself (perhaps unwittingly) parallels the film's free-form, narrativeless structure — a "gestalt of montage" — as its aesthetic. In this way, *blewointment*, and its ethos, is more influenced by film than literature, thus further legitimating bissett's claim to Nichol that "a new line has startid" with the work he did in Vancouver in the early 1960s (bissett "Letter to bp, 1972" np). While *blewointment,* at this stage, may not pose itself as an affront to visual culture, it is in dialogue with it, a relationship that deepens over time.

Credit is usually given solely to bissett for *blewointment*'s aesthetic. Ken Norris, for example, states that "*Blew Ointment* [sic] reflected bissett's experimental and organic poetics"

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[29] The first issue of blewointment is published in 1963, but *In Search of Innocence* is not released until 1964. This is why I say "reflection on the making of the film" and not on the film itself.

(*Little Magazines* 144); however, *blewointment* and its aesthetic was not developed by bissett

only. In fact, *blewointment* began as a shared venture between bissett and his then partner,

Martina Clinton. Discussing the beginnings of *blewointment*, bissett recollects in an interview

with Barry McKinnon, that

> Me and Martina Clinton were working the press together for the main part of the mid-sixties – 63-67. Before starting, ie. the press, we would take all night, all day, in going over how we wanted to present the language on the page, paper, to let – have the poem to be a map for a mood / statement, show and tell of feeling message, articulate space between words for pause-emphasis-measure visual presence of that poem. (bissett "blewointment" 74)

bissett's comment on the first issues of blewointment is significant for several reasons. Clinton

evidently played a significant role in the development of its aesthetic, a point that has received

little critical examination. bissett says: "we talked a lot about poetics, what later became known

as poetics" (74). While it's difficult to precisely determine how involved Clinton was in the

development of blewointment, her poetry regularly appears in the magazine until the early

1970s—after that, her contributions become less frequent and she stops publishing in

blewointment before the magazine and press run their course circa 1983.

Recounting his memories of *blewointment* in '67 and '68, Patrick Lane describes being at

bissett and Martina's home. He writes, "We walk around the room and talk about poetry as we

collate the pages of blewointment. They are stacked on tables and chairs and we go in a long

slow circle picking up page after page of poems until we have a single issue of the magazine then

we staple it" (85). Lane's comments suggest that *blewointment* was at the centre of bissett and

Clinton's life, taking up a large portion of their home space. It is important to note, too, that

bissett confirms the important role his partners have played in his creative work. In a recent

documentary by CBC broadcaster Sook-Yin Lee, entitled *Where Have All the Poets Gone?*

(2015) he confesses that his life has always been devoted to whomever he was living with and

that only now, since he has been living alone, the "template for his life is art, writing, and painting." bissett's poignant and candid comments to Lee suggest that his art in those early days was inextricably bound to his life with Clinton, influenced by her companionship and their relationship.[30]

The disappearance of figures like Clinton from the locus of *blewointment* is rather mysterious, though it could be explained by the fact that bissett and Clinton concluded their relationship at some point in the late 1960s, when bissett seems to be mainly in control of the magazine. Nichol partially explains this in a letter to UU in 1971; he writes:

> re the thing with bill all of what you say is understood but history is an objective fact we cannot change tho … objectively very early on her [Clinton's] work & lance's when bill first brought blew ointment out (& i was around then) were as powerful an initial influence as bill's the difference being of course bill is a genius and stuck with it whereas they fell by the wayside. ("Letter to David UU" David W. Harris Fond, n. pag.)

Acknowledging Clinton's involvement with the magazine re-opens the narrative around the development of borderblur and concrete poetry in Canada. It certainly, for that matter, prompts critics to reconsider arguments about bissett's borderblur aesthetic and its connection to blewointment. Steve McCaffery, for example, describes bissett's poetry as a "sheer libidinal will to power" that he also finds in the early output of Blewointment Press. His comments closely relate bissett's writing to his publishing, identifying them both to be a unique aspect of bissett's work. McCaffery's point, however, gives no credit or acknowledgement to Clinton's involvement with *blewointment* and the "libidinal will to power" of her own work. *blewointment,* unlike what previous critical readings suggest, was not a singular affair—which of course, is a pertinent point considering the magazine's adoption of montage and collage. bissett and Clinton included a wide range of works—each issue becomes a little more daring than the last with an

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[30] The starting date of bissett's period of "living alone" is not stated in the interview.

increasing number of unconventional non-literary materials. Clinton and bissett wanted "each poem to be different than any other poem" (bissett "blewointment, Open Letter" 76). The magazine eventually developed into a collagist magazine, decidedly featuring poems different from one another, but in the materials too. It included cut-outs, paintings, drawings, photographs, poems, short stories, essays, and so on. Overtime, the magazine also became increasingly less-standardized in format, including a variety of kinds of papers of varying sizes, and found materials.

While Earle Birney acknowledges *blewointment* to be the "only genuinely experimental/contemporary mag in Canada" (n. pag.) on a postcard to bissett dated 1 July 1966, the magazine is important for another reason regarding the development of concrete poetry in Canada. The August 1964 issue (2.3) features the first full intermixture of text and image, produced by Judith Copithorne in what will become her signature hand-drawn, cursive style (see Appendix C). The first of three images consists of a nude woman with flaming hands and text integrated into the lower-half of the graphic:

> This was
> drawn
> last year
> yet until I dreamed of it
> this afternoon when
> I laid with
> you in the sun
> I never knew what I had done! (Copithorne "untitled" n. pag.)

Ironically, the poem is reflective of Copithorne's unexpected impact on the magazine's aesthetic. From 1964 onward, *blewointment* features an increasing amount of this type of work. It is important to note too, that it is not until 1966 that, as critic Warren Tallman recounts, bissett finds his own poetic voice and "moves into word-mergings, soundings, [and] chantings." Copithorne was already exploring her own word-mergings prior to bissett—the language on the

page emerges from a body-like figure, foregrounding the importance of corporeality and sensuality to Canadian concrete poetry. Copithorne's poem here is also prophetic in terms of borderblur's complex emergence in Canada. Like the perplexing chronology stated by the speaker, the poem "was/drawn/last year" but only understood later when the speaker "dreamed of it" (Copithorne "untitled" n. pag.). Similarly, Canadian poets exploring a borderblur aesthetic would only come to call it that years later.

It was not too long after the first few issues of *blewointment* had appeared that a like-minded publication appeared in Toronto: *Ganglia*, which, like *blewointment*, featured pattern and spatialized poetry, collagist poetry, and other similarly explorative modes of composition. *Ganglia* is generally acknowledged to be the first manifestation in Canada of concrete poetry outside of Vancouver. The name itself, *Ganglia,* foregrounds its networked connection to Western Canada and concrete poetry's interest in affect. *Ganglia* was meant to be a site of multiple voices, of conversation, communication, and community as implied by the name chosen by Nichol's collaborator David Aylward: a "ganglion is a connection in the brain, a synaptic connector" (Hancock *Meanwhile* 398).[31] Indeed, from the beginning, *Ganglia* was based on the concept of community, an extension of the poetry community Nichol found in Vancouver among bissett, Copithorne, and others. In biological terms, the ganglion is a network of cells that forms within the nervous system, the deep bodily space wherein linguistic and affective communication

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[31] Nichol advances himself in front of some of his collaborators at various points in this interview, both Aylward and, then, a few moments later with David UU: "Once again, it's safe to say that it was my idea. David UU was in there for sure [one of the editors for grOnk], and the others were in there for friendship reasons, but it wasn't a driving force for them" (Hancock *Meanwhile* 399). By pointing this out I do not seek to position Nichol as a writer who speaks to his own sense of self-importance. I make this point merely to suggest that perhaps comments like these have contributed to the critical climate that has thus largely ignored other important Canadian concretists.

is received and transmitted. In this way, the title of *Ganglia* encapsulates the spirit of borderblur and its concern for the possibilities of communicating feelings.

Through *Ganglia*, Nichol delivered concrete poetry eastward. Nichol left Vancouver in 1964 for Toronto to "re-enter therapy" with lay therapist Lea Hindley-Smith (Davey *aka* 48).[32] Though Aylward was initially skeptical of concrete poetry, Davey recounts that Nichol "and Aylward decided in the fall to begin publishing a magazine to be called *Ganglia*, which would be open to various kinds of new poetry including concrete" (Davey *aka* 75). *Ganglia* initially began as a "forum in eastern Canada for those like bill [bissett] and judy [copithorne] who were doing concrete," says Nichol to Nick Power and Anne Sherman (*Meanwhile* 163). The first issue of *Ganglia*, appearing in 1965, featured work by bissett, Aylward, Copithorne, and Nichol along with James Alexander, Margaret Avison, George Bowering, Nelid Holloway, David Phillips, and Arnold Shives (most of whom lived on the West Coast). *Ganglia* was similar to *blewointment*, perhaps even derivative in these earlier issues, as it featured numerous of the latter magazine's contributors, and giving preference to concrete poetry and other unconventional lyrics.

Ganglia, which was also the name of the press founded by Nichol and Aylward, grew into *grOnk*—an expressive neologism by a dinosaur character in American comic strip *B.C.*, thereby emphasizing the magazine's sound, visuality, and primal feeling in poetry—a less formal and increasingly irregular periodical that was distributed for free.[33] The main concerns of *grOnk* include "concrete sound kinetic and related borderblur poetry," stated the cover of the 1967 issue

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[32] In addition to poetry, Nichol pursued a career as a lay therapist as part of Therafields, a psychoanalytic community headed by Lea Hindley-Smith. For more on Nichol's involvement with Therafields, Davey's biography *aka bpNichol* is worth reading, which focuses heavily on psychoanalytic elements of Nichol's life. For more on Therafields in general, see *Therafields: The Rise and Fall of Lea Hindley-Smith's Psychoanalytic Commune* (2010) by Grant Goodbrand.

[33] *B.C.* was created by illustrator Johnny Hart and was first published in 1958. It continues to be published today by his daughter Perry Hart and his grandsons Mason Mastrioanni and Mick Mastrioanni.

(1.1) by its editorial board, which now included David Aylward, bpNichol, David W Harris (later known as David UU), and rah-smith. One year later, the editorial team was expanded again now to include editors in both Toronto and Vancouver: Nichol, Aylward, rah-smith, and John Riddell in Toronto; bissett and Harris in Vancouver (Harris relocated to British Columbia sometime in late 1967), and in even later issues Steve McCaffery joined.

By the beginning of Series 2, the language of *grOnk* had become explicitly radicalized. On the front cover of the September 1968 issue (2.1) the editors write, "all manuscripts concerned with the language revolution in poetry et al welcome" (n. pag.).[34] For the duration of *grOnk*, it remained a dedicated space to the aesthetics of borderblur, featuring a motley assortment of emerging Canadian artists and poets experimenting with the visual elements and limits of language, including Copithorne, Hart Broudy, Andrew Suknaski, Stephen Scobie, David McFadden, and Gregg Simpson but, also, in the spirit of borderblur, practitioners from the United States like Barbara O'Connelly, D.r. Wagner (California), d.a. levy (Ohio) and international contributors like Bob Cobbing, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Cavan McCarthy (UK), Jiří Valoch (Czechoslovakia), and Pierre Garnier (France). This shift in language—from borderblur to language revolution—is important. No change had been made to the magazine's overall aesthetic; it continued to publish work that was concrete, kinetic, and sound-based, which indicates a new revolutionary belief in the poetry of borderblur. For the poets of the Language Revolution, borderblur was revolutionary.

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[34] The statement pertaining to the Language Revolution does not appear on all issues of *grOnk*, but it does appear on a number of publications, including Copithorne's *Rain* (1969) published by Ganglia. Notably, the statement appears on one of the final issues, Volume 8, Number 5, which stated: "grOnk is dedicated to the language revolution & edited by bpNichol with steve mccaffery, bill bissett & david uu   david aylward is now our editor in exile in japan" (n. pag.).

Canadian little magazines and presses were not the only forums that sought to establish a sense of the concrete poem in Canada. There were several important exhibitions that demonstrated concrete poetry's ability to stimulate readers and audiences not only in the codex form, but on the walls of the gallery as well. In this way, concrete poetry is demonstrated as an art form that blurs the borders of artistic disciplines with capacities to stimulate audiences in a variety of contexts. The first of these exhibitions was co-organized by UU and Gerry Gilbert in 1968, a year after the centenary of Canadian Confederation, and titled, "Brazilia 73: An Exhibition of International Concrete Poetry," at the Mandan Ghetto, which featured Ian Wallace, UU, bissett, and others.[35] Several years later, UU organized an equally ambitious show at the Avelles Gallery in Vancouver in 1971, entitled *Microprosophus: International Exhibition of Visual Poetry*, which ran 9 September to 28 September 1971. The press release for the show describes visual concrete as "not so much an isolation of the parts that make the whole as it is a desire to experience the elements of literature and communicate this in a world which is besieged by electronic media and no longer understands the importance and progression of tradition," and it featured "30 contributors from 11 countries, it is centred around Vancouver artists who have influenced or been influenced by the movement. These include: EARLE BIRNEY (the pioneer of visual poetry), BILL BISSETT, JUDITH COPITHORNE, PIERRE COUPEY, GARY LEE NOVA, MR. PEANUT, GREGG SIMPSON, EDWIN VARNEY, IAN WALLACE*"* ("Press Release" *Microprosophus*, Harris Fonds n. pag.). UU was not the only curator of such shows.

In 1969, the University of British of Columbia was host to the *Concrete Poetry Festival*, curated by visual artist Michael Morris and Alvin Balkind, occurring 28 March to 19 April 1969. Like *Brazilia 73*, the exhibition featured an international roster of poets and artists including

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[35] Some detailsDetails for *Brazilia 73* come from Gregory Betts'sBetts' *The Vangardes*.

Canadians such as bissett, Nichol, Copithorne, Edwin Varney, and Stephen Scobie as well as international practitioners such as Hansjorg Mayer, Tristan Tzara, Carlo Belloli, dsh, Bob Cobbing, Ian Hamilton Finlay, and more. The show incorporated a wide variety of media such as prints, computer poetry, correspondence art, on-site installations, and sculpture. The opening statement of the exhibition catalogue is yet another typically amorphous definition of concrete poetry:

> Most essays and articles on concrete poetry start with some such phrases as 'Concrete poetry is a form of experimental . . . . " or "Concrete poetry is a name given to . . . . " Simplest of all, Emmett Williams' definition in the 'Introduction' to the Something Else Press Anthology of Concrete Poetry: 'Concrete poetry is what the poets in this anthology make.'
>
> But really, the best possible essay on concrete poetry would concentrate on what all these definitions have in common, and state the most important fact in three words:
>
> Concrete
> poetry
> is. (n. pag.)

Though not helpful in determining what concrete poetry meant in the Canadian context, these vague definitions permitted the poets to broaden the field as they saw fit, resulting in a range of media being incorporated into the exhibition. More to the point, the emphasis on temporality and presence—the "is" of their definition—speaks to the timeliness of concrete poetry itself as a response to the current moment. Both of these sentiments are succinctly summarized in a statement by Nichol on the language revolution in a letter entitled "THE RETURN OF GRONK" that appeared alongside the first issue of series 2 of *grOnk* in September 1968; Nichol writes, "aren't we all a little sick of seeing our old standards being anthologized right and left. we've only laid a very brief and flimsy foundation. The big breakthroughs are to come" (Nichol n. pag.). Concrete poetry, in this way, is identified as a somewhat revolutionary poetic practice, oriented toward a new future of literature in Canada.

I find the overview above to not only provide a useful snapshot of the major forums and activities of concrete poetry, but also to foreground Canadian concrete poetry as a distinctively affective mode. As Nichol suggests, he and others took up small press publishing as a result of discontent with the Canadian literary scene as it was in 1968. Nichol's framing indicates that activities of the Language Revolution were born out of negative feelings and a desire to create literature—and the community that surrounds literature—differently. Their experiments across media and venues speak to this ambition.

The fluid movement of concrete poetry as it circulates through book, journal, and gallery is indicative of the Language Revolution's rejection of literature's codification of feeling on the level of form. As Greenwald Smith notes, literature is (as quoted earlier), "Affectively exciting insofar as aesthetics stimulate sensory responses, but linguistically based and therefore inevitably codifying, literature stimulates and codes relentlessly" (431). While semantics codify feeling in language through the process of sequencing and standardizing linguistic expression, form codifies feeling and sensory experience in its own way. Books, for example, typically rely on sequential pagination and left-to-right eye movements from the top of the page to bottom (in English) thus building in expectations for the optical engagement of text. In this way, the book relies on codes—it is the codex, after all—as it shapes not only knowledge but the method of transmission for feeling-based content. In this way, the poets of the Language Revolution seek to continuously de-codify and re-codify literature to reform how literature stimulates. In this way, concrete poetry's multifaceted activities work along Massumi's "seeping edge" (*Parables* 43) between emotion (semantically codified feeling) and affect (feeling beyond semantics) since this movement between forms is also implicitly a renegotiation of the relationship between sensory stimulation and poetry.

Reception and Criticism

The activities of Canadian concrete poetry have been accounted for in various ways, but it has not really been critically situated to foreground its intersection with ideas related to both feeling and postmodernity. Previous studies have offered significant critiques that effectively navigate the complexity of the movement. Critics have accounted for Canadian concrete poetry's proliferation as it connects to historical avant-gardes, especially nodes of activity in Sweden, Brazil, and England as seen in writings by Stephen Scobie and Lori Emerson. Critics like Gregory Betts and Caroline Bayard have examined Canadian concrete poetry in relation to various theories of postmodernism with an especial emphasis on avant-gardism, deconstruction, and poststructuralism. Before garnering this attention, concrete poetry in Canada was at first rebuffed from critical discourse. In the mid- to late- 1960s, poets, critics, and readers in Canada disparaged concrete poetry, lambasting it for its resemblance to visual art. The debates that occurred at the time demonstrate concrete poetry's inflammatory relationship to other poets in the field.

In 1966, Tish-alumnus Frank Davey fulminated against concrete poetry in the pages of *Open Letter*, his own periodical dedicated to the development of poetics and theory. Davey complains, "McFadden and Nichol send visual poems-- which mode I still find irrelevant to what I know as poetry. For me poetry is of language, and language is still sound with rhythm in stress and pitch, and is not just visual shape" (Davey "Dear Fred" 3). Davey's comments, made in issue two (March 1966), provoked a debate that would recurrently erupt in the pages of *Open Letter* until 1967. Nichol responds to Davey in issue four, defending the genre by pointing out that Davey "is excluding . . . another kind of relationship between words—the visual one," stressing that language possesses visual rhythms too: "objects in related patterns" ("Dear Frank Davey" 7).

Davey weakly retorts Nichol's argument in the same issue, returning to his previous declaration that concrete poetry "is not a language art form, & seems to have no direct connection to poetry" because "the visual poet sees shapes as an end in itself & not as an aid to vocalization" (7-8). In issue six, David UU jabs at Davey: "Didnt ya knoe enuff iz editor dictator con trolling con tent & then magazeen contributorz tooe belongz not editor. But time on radio will ya not uze mei poems telling everywun this iz what frankdavey thinkz bout concrete (yah frank we all knoe now)," and laments that there is "noe room for poemz" ("Dear openletter" 24) in *Open Letter*.

The *Open Letter* debate around concrete poetry suggests a limit of tolerance in the Canadian poetic field. In these emotionally charged-discussions, I find the significant ways that feeling, as Ahmed points out, aligns a collective of bodies ("Affective Economies" 119). Trying to rectify this schism, Douglas Barbour finely points out: "We are still, most of us (pace McLuhan) poetically involved with a Gutenberg Galaxy, one that is paginated" and points out that visuality on the page assists the oral dimension of the poem: "isn't that what Olson was talking about, too?" he asks ("Dear Ted Whittaker" 33). Barbour's comments seem to offer a compromise to either side of the debate, arguing for a connection between lyrical page poets and concrete poets. The page—according to Barbour—is the common ground. That being said, Barbour's comments also seem to anticipate a change, implied by his word choice "still," which is likely suggestive of McLuhan's noted shift from the page as dominant media toward electric media. Barbour's comments, inadvertently or not, identify concrete poetry to be indicative of transition. This transition could be figured in a variety of ways—a technological shift that Barbour invites by citing McLuhan as well as a shift from modernist to postmodernist conceptions of poetics. Davey's comments (and the comments of others) in these early issues of *Open Letter* represent an obstacle to this transition. His reluctance to recognize concrete poetry's

validity, as a metaconscious mode of writing that dwells on the materials and shapes of language, suggests that his poetic consciousness lingers in the old world of American and European modernism.[36]

The modernist inflection of Davey's commentary in the early *Open Letter* debate is carried over into more official forums of criticism that are much less contentious. Stephen Scobie's chapter "Visual Poetry" from his *bpNichol: What History Teaches* is significant for not only presenting a rigorous account of Nichol's concrete poetics, but because his analysis also articulates concrete poetics as a discursive field. To understand Nichol's work, Scobie maps a constellation of activity that includes Gomringer, Pignatari, de Campos, Solt, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Hans Arp, and Max Bill, poets and artists who in one way or another are largely affiliated with modernism. For Scobie, concrete poetry—not just Nichol's concrete poetry—emerges from two main considerations: "the idea of treating language as a concrete material, in and for itself, stressing its visual and aural properties rather than its referential function; and a decreased reliance on, often amounting to a complete abandonment of, syntactical linear construction" (31). From these two points, concrete poetry, according to Scobie, is developed in radically different ways in various parts of the world: the classical period lasted between 1955 and 1970, after which there was a "general dispersal of activity, with many of the major practitioners" (30) who developed their own personal styles. Among the Canadian practitioners, Scobie attributes himself along with Nichol, bissett, Copithorne, UU, and Ed Varney to be poets who variously and uniquely engaged these ideas of concrete poetry.

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[36] Since these discussions, Davey has changed his mind on concrete poetry and has published scholarship on the subject. He is also now known as one of Canada's foremost postmodern poets and critics.

In terms of criticism, Mike Weaver's differentiation between "constructivism" and "expressionism" appears to be Scobie's preferred way for differentiating types of concrete poetry. Weaver's first category is expressionist concrete, a mode that "is determined by the impulse to mimic or enact the sense" that typically uses typographical experimentation to communicate "highly emotional states" (35). The, second, a constructivist mode, wherein "the form of the poem is determined by structural principles, often abstract or arbitrary, which emerge from the visual or aural *material* of the words rather than from their expressive content" (35). Following this dichotomy, it is apparent that modernist concrete can be described as constructivist for its highly structured qualities, while the expressionist mode is reflective of many Canadian practitioners such as bissett, Copithorne, and McCaffery. For this reason, it seems strange that Scobie would discount expressionist techniques as "little more than gimmicks (and are in fact widely used as in commercial advertising)" (35). In so doing, Scobie's articulation of concrete poetry in the Canadian context wholly sidesteps how Canadian poets were reacting to postmodern visual culture as well as the very emotional quality of Nichol's poetry, and this is a quality that its practitioners, like UU, recognized to be a defining feature of Canadian concrete.

Bayard's *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-Modernism* builds on Scobie's study to offer perspectives on bissett, Copithorne, Clinton, McCaffery, and Nichol as well as David Aylward, Hart Broudy, Lance Farrell, Rob Smith, and Andrew Suknaski, as well as postmodern writers in Canada such as Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt, and Lola Lemire Tostevin. However, Bayard's study also seems to privilege a largely cold, non-emotional rendering of Canadian concrete poetry. To understand this work, Bayard employs the discourse of postmodern theory and criticism, which Rei Terada recognizes is typically used to

describe—especially poststructuralist theory—"a blank, mechanistic world" (3).[37] Bayard

proceeds from these theories of linguistics and semiotics, beginning with the "Kratylian"

problem of language wherein the key topic is the correctness of names given to objects in the

world. The debate is presented as binary: 1) names are correctly given to things in the world

versus 2) names are arbitrary signifiers for the things in the world. This is a philosophical

problem that Ferdinand de Saussure takes up in *Cours de linguistique générale* [*Course on*

General Linguistics] (1916), in which he argues that the relationship between sign and signifier

is essentially arbitrary or, in other words, words do not naturally represent things in the world.

Bayard's theory of concrete poetry develops from this issue, positioning various kinds of

concrete on either side of this debate. The modernist concretists (Gomringer, Noigrandes)

arguably sought to develop a mode of linguistic expression that unified signified and signifier,

while the Canadians, according to Bayard, sought to resist unifying the signifier and the signified

by embracing notions of deconstruction, and exploding the relationship between name and thing.

In this way, Bayard is eager to re-examine Canadian concrete poetry's expressionist qualities;

however, like Scobie, she largely sidesteps the implicit emotional registers that inform the work,

likely due to the perceived non-expressiveness of poststructuralist theory.

In his contribution to *Re: Reading the Canadian Postmodern*, Betts explores the politics

of the Language Revolution to understand how poets like Copithorne, bissett, McCaffery, and

Nichol might be considered radical activists. Building on Bayard, Betts recognizes the work of

the Language Revolution as "the embodiment of and radical manifestos for emerging

postmodern tropes like deconstruction and postmodernism" (157). Tracing the development of

the radical political spirit of the Language Revolution, Betts formulates a notion he calls

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[37] In *Feeling in Theory*, Terada contends with this description of poststructuralism; however, Bayard's analysis largely corresponds to a more intellectual analysis rather than an analysis of feeling.

"Canadian postmodern decadence." Betts describes the Language Revolution as a "pale utopian fire" that signals a "falling away from established norms of language-use without falling toward anything—a systematic derangement of the senses" which "represents an embrace of the end of order, the end of stability" (158). In this way, the radical work of the Language Revolution is a resistance to the modernist desire for unity, which is replaced for a desire for radical openness. This configuration points to the discursive strains that are essential to my understanding of Canadian concrete poetry (and the Language Revolution): postmodernism, avant-gardism, and feeling. Ultimately, Betts seems interested in tracing the Language Revolution from radical ambition toward disillusionment with their own language-based activism; however, his invocation of the sensorial derangement as part of the radical project indicates that there is much more to be said about sensation and feeling than is said in his essay, or any other essay preceding it.

Bayard, Betts, and Scobie each offer critical framings for understanding the activities of the concrete poetry as one part of the Language Revolution; they offer historical perspectives (Scobie), map its contributions and parallels with postmodern critical theories (Bayard), and articulate its radical activism (Betts). None of these assessments, however, satisfactorily engage the aspects of feeling that are essential to the movement. As noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, Steve McCaffery and derek beaulieu approximate the discourse of feeling in their theorizations of concrete poetry, but do not apply their considerations to the Language Revolution itself. As noted in my introduction to this chapter and my dissertation, considerations of emotion and affect—how it is expressed and the work it does in the literature—are crucial to the development of the Language Revolution as a project. With this in mind, I build upon this

scholarship and turn toward theories of feeling to assist in building a new definition of concrete poetry in Canada.

Anthology as Manifesto: Toward Another Definition of Canadian Concrete Poetry

As indicated by the criticism above, there is no one way of understanding the multifaceted activities of the Language Revolution. This could be partly explained by the fact that Canadian concrete poetry had no single, definitive manifesto. I turn, then, to other sources to develop a critical sense of Canadian concrete poetry.

There were several anthologies published in the early- to mid- 1970s—when concrete poetry was reaching its peak in Canada—that assist in articulating a sense of Canadian concrete poetry as a distinctive strain from what was happening globally that was concerned with the expression of feeling. It is useful to consider here Jerome Rothenberg's notion of the anthology as a collection that works "to present, to bring to light, or to create works that have been excluded or that collectively present a challenge to the dominant system-makers or to the world at large" (15) thereby formulating a clear sense of related, but yet undocumented nodes of activity. From Rothenberg's perspective, the anthology can serve at least three valuable functions: it can be (1) a manifesto; (2) a way of laying out an active poetics—by example and by commentary; and (3) a grand assemblage: a kind of art form in its own right" ("Anthology as Manifesto" 15). To this end, there are three key anthologies worth consideration in absence of the manifesto as an articulation of Canadian concrete: Nichol's *The Concrete Chef: An Evening of Concrete* (1970*)*, Colombo's *New Directions in Canadian Poetry* (1971), and Eldon Garnet's *W)here?: The Other Canadian Poetry* (1974). Each of these fulfills Rothenberg's criteria, offering us a glimpse at understanding precisely what was going on at the time.

Of the three, *The Cosmic Chef* and *New Directions* are both identified as anthologies of concrete works by their respective editors. Both offer a cross-section of practitioners and brief explications on the works. The explications, however, are useful in only small ways, if for no other reason than foregrounding the resistant spirit (in Nichol's case) and historical complexity (in Colombo's case) of Canadian concrete. Suitably, no real definition of concrete is offered by either.

In "some afterwords," at the end of *The Cosmic Chef*, Nichol's objection to definition is clearly signaled; he suggests that he has put together a "book still in flux" (n. pag.), resisting any impulse to fix ideas related to the poems in the collection. Evading the word "concrete," Nichol refers to it as a "nebulous term" (n. pag.), though he acknowledges the work in the collection to be concrete (as indicated by the collection's subtitle). Instead, he prefers to use the term borderblur, a neologism that he employs with more certainty:

> by way of an introduction let me simply say that this whole book is best described by the term dom sylvester houedard coined BORDERBLUR everything presented here comes from the point where language &/or the image blur together into the inbetween & become concrete objects to be understood as such . . . all of them suggest possible directions that language and your mind could take in the years ahead. (n. pag.)

Nichol's reluctance to precisely define concrete poetry demonstrates his general unwillingness to standardize language, preferring instead signification to flow more freely than a precisely defined word would allow.

The poems in the anthology are aligned with Nichol's sense of borderblur in various degrees of aesthetic fidelity. He selected works by a number of poets, including Aylward, bissett, Clinton, Copithorne, McCaffery, and UU alongside unexpected—but aptly selected—poets such as Margaret Avison, Phyllis Webb, Michael Ondaatje, and George Bowering. Nichol's curation effectively blurs the borders of aesthetics, age groups, and career positions (including both

established and emerging poets), poetic ideologies, as well as of disciplines by including visual

artists like Barbara Caruso and Greg Curnoe. This inclination toward borderblur is emphasized

by the anthology's structure: none of the works are attributed to an author (except in the list of

contributors). The works themselves effectively blur together, liberated from the singularity of an

author's designation and from the deterministic-nature of a bound codex, which typically guides

a reader toward a linear experience of the work. These ways of playing with the structure of the

codex were not uncommon to other concrete-identified works, a tactic used by other poets like

bissett and UU. The radical aesthetics of the Language Revolution are distilled in the content

selected by Nichol as well as the creative decisions he made in devising its form that brings

principles of openness and heterogeneity, resistance to tradition, and an awareness of materiality

to the fore.

Nichol's sense of concrete poetry is complemented by Colombo's slimmer and equally

eccentric anthology that appeared one year later. In distinction, Colombo's *New Direction*

rigorously historicizes and contextualizes a "new direction" for poetry in Canada by focusing on

concrete poetry. To do so, Colombo composes an abundance of paratextual materials, including a

"Preface," a two-part section entitled "Probes," and two closing sections entitled "Poetic

PostScript" and "Where to Turn Next." Only eight poets are included in the anthology—

Aylward, bissett, Broudy, Copithorne, McCaffery, Nichol, Suknaski, and UU. The paratextual

materials overwhelm the poems, perhaps to assist a general audience as they venture into this

challenging poetic terrain. Each poem is accompanied by a footnote which is meant to prod the

reader into an engagement with the text. Colombo asks, "Are the phrases in the branches of the

tree related to growing things?" and further, invoking McLuhan, he asks, "Why is the message

appropriate to the medium?" (46). Colombo's anthology is less disorienting than *The Cosmic*

Chef and certainly more rigorous in all of its pseudo-academicism, yet, like Nichol's anthology, it does not offer a clear definition of concrete either. In lieu of a definition, Colombo describes the works as "extremely playful" texts that "make us aware of the materials of the art, the motives of the artist, and our own responses" (32). His selection of poems, which is intended for a highschool audience, reflects these core principles.[38]

Eldon Garnet's *W)here?: the other Canadian poetry* (1974)—another anthology from the peak period of Canadian concrete but one that is not exclusively focused on this one mode— confirms that there is indeed an affective element to concrete poetry. Of this writing, which includes works by UU, Nichol, Copithorne, bissett, Gerry Gilbert, and Victor Coleman, Garnet maintains the stance toward radical openness that we find in the other poems: "*Boundaries* are not allowed. To set up fixed parameters is to deny openness" (7). He goes further to identify the emotional and affect work of the new poetry, including concrete poetry: "The sounds they produce are discordant to the public ear" and further that "What they channel into the public ear is disturbing, inexplicable" (10). Garnet confirms that these works do, as Colombo predict, cause some displeasure to their audience. Garnet focuses on the complex negative feelings of concrete poetry (and unconventional poetry more broadly). For Garnet, poetry must at first generate negative feelings that repel the audience of the mainstream and the poets must "alienate themselves from the cheering crowd" (10). These comments echo Charles Russell's theorization of disorientation as meaningful affect for the avant-garde. While these affects are useful to describe the work of concrete poetry in broad strokes, this purposeful alienation is a starting point for a larger project. It is in effect an effort to clear space for other modes of engagement

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[38] Sean O'Huigin's *Poe[try]*: *A Simple Introduction to Experimental Poetry* (1978) is another notable text targeted toward students. Though O'Huigin's text does contain a selection of concrete poems, it is not an anthology of concrete poems. It is a textbook. The selections are mostly limited to concrete poems by O'Huigin and Ann Southam as well as a number of children in grade school.

with language, poetry, and feeling. Nichol's own figuration of the Language Revolution, confirms this, which I will restate here: "I simply meant," says Nichol, "to provide as many entrances and exits as possible, to alter consciousness. To reconsider the value of words, the value of translation, a total reconsideration" (*Meanwhile* 136). I will look more closely at the actual feelings experienced by readers in the final section of this chapter; however, since each of these critics highlights affects, emotions, or feeling in some way or another in their writing it seems to suggest that they were affected by the work.

Each of these anthologies guides us toward some conclusions about Canadian concrete poetry as a mode of practice. From the first two texts, it becomes clear that the Canadian poets who led this movement are the poets already mentioned in the pages of this study: Aylward, Birney, bissett, Clinton, Copithorne, McCaffery, Nichol, UU, and others.[39] Their eagerness for exploration and experimentation, coupled with their opposition to borders (between the linguistic and non-linguistic, poetic and artistic, etc.) is representative of another aspect of Canadian concrete poetry—the notion of openness and heterogeneity, which emerges in this poetry in numerous ways. For the Canadian concretists, there is no one right way to create a concrete poem and the anthologizers respect this point.

The selection of works included in these anthologies employ a wide-array of approaches including lyric and pattern poetry, typestracts, glyphs, comics, asemic writing, permutation poetry, and collages while using a wide variety of media including the typewriter, copying machines, dry transfer lettering, markers, pens, pencils, and more. These poets broadly engage the materials and media of the present, often misusing them, and liberating from their

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[39] The poets producing these new works are fairly young—many under thirty years of age in 1971, according to Colombo. Many of whom who were also published in *grOnk*, the self-identified magazine of the Language Revolution, and/or the other magazines associated with its editors, ie. *blewointment* and *Spanish Fleye*.

conventional uses (more on this in the next section). No two poems in these anthologies look alike (this is an important point to consider in the context of arguments made by critics who seek to develop a stable discourse for Canadian concrete): Canadian practitioners are both intellectual and intuitive, deconstructive and reconstructive, minimalist and maximalist, lyrical and not. To respect the spirit of Nichol's resistance, I reject a closure of the discourse and, in doing so, preserve the open resistance of the movement. The radical vision of these poets was not singular, as each poet approached concrete poetry with her or his own aesthetic and political project in mind. More than anything else, concrete poetry emerges from feelings of discontent and attempts to overthrow literature's conventions to cultivate openness for a new future for the literary arts.

Amid these various openings, a subtext emerges from a close reading of these anthologies: concrete poetry as an expressionist practice. Though they do not explore the implications or significance of feelings in concrete poetry, both Nichol and Colombo acknowledge Canadian concrete poetry to be concerned with feeling. Unlike the classical global concrete of Gomringer or the Noigrandes poets, Canadian concrete poetry foregrounds feelings in striking ways. First, and as a fine example of the way textual materiality can generate feelings of disorientation: Nichol's unconventional structuring of *The Cosmic Chef*—its lack of pagination, binding, and lack of author attribution—generates disorientation by a typical reader––a crucial feeling produced, according to Charles Russell, by avant-garde artists in their search for "the concept of self-liberation–aesthetic, personal, and political" (Russell 34) so that the audience may "perceive things of previously unimagined beauty, or experience states of abruptly expanded consciousness" (35). The anthology becomes an unfamiliar object but one that is indeed liberated. The directional flows of the bound codex—from front to back cover—and author names that affix identity and meaning are removed. The reader is now in control of her or

his movement through the book, released from the conventions of linear reading patterns. Without a defined reading pattern, the reader is encouraged to wander through the text without orientation, which radically opens the possibilities of meaning making for any reader. This provides a small margin of freedom and serves as a metaphor of resistance to postmodern control mechanisms as the anthology attempts to offer textual space that de-codifies linear literary experiences.

Similarly, Colombo and Garnet demonstrate an awareness of the affects generated when poets experiment with forms and structures. In *W)here,* Garnet recognizes the "disturbing" quality of concrete poetry. Developing similar ideas, Colombo writes,

> At first sight, the poems appear to be little more than pictures, designs, doodles, word-plays, letter-forms. 'Nothing serious here,' I can hear one reader say. 'That's not poetry,' another mutters. 'I could do as well myself with my eyes shut,' says a third. I am not going to argue with these three readers (whose reactions in my own mind I brand, alternatively, unadventurous, doctrinaire, egocentric) . . . There is another kind of reader who, when he flips through the pages of this collection will react positively. 'Oh, isn't that beautiful!' one says. 'I love that,' another exclaims. 'What fun!' exclaims a third. (2)

Colombo anticipates at least two vectors of experience on behalf of the reader when examining concrete poetry: 1) disgust/disappointment or 2) pleasure/enjoyment. Colombo's hypothetical scenarios limit the range of feeling to a binary; however, it also highlights what would likely be the initial sites of emotional engagement for many readers. As poems, these works do not offer the conventional critical footholds for readers—lacking the familiar rendering of semantics, parataxis, line breaks, rhythm, and rhyme. As a visual poetic mode, these ideas are reconfigured or altogether eschewed in search of a new literary experience. Readers then are prompted to return to the primal realm of feeling by way of seeing to begin to find their way through a concrete poem.

Building upon these various implications, I suggest that Canadian concrete poetry is primarily an affective and emotional practice. It is a means of recalibrating feeling, especially as a counter-point, a counterpoint to the rise of "postmodernization." As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest, the capitalist economy is shifting during this period of "postmodernization" and is motivated by affective labour. This is the labour wherein feeling becomes a primary component that drives economic and social interactions—services, advertising, communication, etc. This is a period dominated by the work of "publicity," as Berger calls it, wherein the manipulation of feelings and desires of Western subjects (via image and text) drives the consumerist economy. Amid a visual culture prescribed by the functional imagery of advertising and the modulating mechanisms of "publicity," an optically-based poetics of openness seems to be an appropriate response so as not to circumscribe any reader's potential relationship with a poem. Their poetics, then, serves as an affront to the conditions of publicity's role in triggering and manipulating persons as part of late stage capitalism. Further, it is striking that Canadian poets and critics aggressively sought to situate their poetic communities by way of the anthology. Nichol's, Colombo's, and Garnet's anthologies were published in close temporal proximity to one another (within four years), each with a similar vision of Canadian concrete poetry. In this way, the seeming aggressive anthologization is an affective labour in itself. The anthology becomes a point of contact and communication for both poets and readers, to situate an alternative and open vision of poetics amid a culture of postmodernization. This point seems pertinent, considering Nichol's description of the Language Revolution, which is driven by a desire to offer points of connection between people and poetry, people and language, and people with people.

Compositions of Feeling: Examples of the Work

The starting point for my survey of affective concrete poetry is none other than one of Nichol's most recognizable visual poems: "Blues" (see Appendix D). Minimal in its exploration of a single four-letter word, *love*, and puzzling in its asymmetrical, constellation-like structure, the poem has proven to be immensely attractive. The poem blurs the borders between constructivist and expressionist modes of concrete since it closely resembles modernist concrete poetry in look, but explores the content of feeling. "Blues" is frequently taught in classrooms and anthologized many times, appearing in Columbo's *New Directions* as well as Gary Geddes's *20th Century Poetry and Poetics (1969),* and Jack David and Robert Lecker's *Canadian Poetry* (1982).[40] Outside the borders of Canada, "Blues" became representative of Canadian concrete to an international consortium of concretists. In the mid- to late- 1960s, the poem had appeared in two major international anthologies of concrete poetry: Williams's *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* and Solt's *Concrete Poetry: A World View*.[41]

"Blues" has also generated substantial scholarly interest that suggests love is not an emotion that simply connotes bonding nor is it an emotion to be employed in the service of publicity or a consumerist economy. Love, according to "Blues," is a much more complex feeling. Critics like Colombo and Bayard have analyzed the poem, identifying a binary at work that emphasizes a single permutation of the word: "evol," an alternative spelling of evil, a seeming opposition to love. Nichol, however, speaking through another poem, refutes dualistic readings of "Blues." In "Captain Poetry in Love" Nichol writes,

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[40] Credit is due to Stephen Voyce and his conference presentation "Love in Precarious Times: bpNichol's Poetry of Re-Invention," which has directed me to numerous resources that are essential to my reading of Nichol's "Blues."
[41] Narrowing down my selection of textual examples for this section proved to be a challenging task due to the number of authors and the sheer volume of works to choose from. As a result, I've elected to focus on a handful of authors whose work are connected to notions of feeling and affect. My selection examines a mix of both major and minor publications from both major and minor figures in Canadian concrete. All omissions are regrettable.

> love
> spelled backwards
> is evol / is
> 'natures way' (i've
> overworked it
> in a dozen
> poems) has
> nothing to do
> with evil
> but rather evolves
> new themes. how
> impossible
> to overwork them. (40-54)

At least by 1970, the two words (love and evil), for Nichol, became a means of resisting binary

oppositions that the English language and conceptions of the Western world are built upon:

man/woman, male/female, etc. The poem in this case contains at least a triad of meanings: love,

evil, and evolve.

In my analysis of Nichol's "Blues," I turn toward its treatment of feeling. Stephen Voyce

astutely notes that love for Nichol, especially in his early writing, "shares an operative logic"

with borderblur (Voyce "Precarious Times" 5). To arrive at this conclusion, Voyce looks upon a

passage from "Journeying," one part of Nichol's poem-kit entitled *Journeying & the Returns*

(1967) in which he writes,

> love is some sort of fire
> come to warm us
> fill our bodies
> all in these motions
> flowing into each other
> in despair – the room –
> one narrow world
> that might be anywhere. ("Journeying" n. pag.)

Love as a concept for Nichol is, as Voyce rightly suggests, "an integration of subjects, bodies

flowing into one another, into the space between" (Voyce 5). Love, then, embodies the core

principles of borderblur: a means of overflowing a space, transcending borders—genre, meaning,

discipline, and materials. This point is unsurprising since, as Nichol writes on the back cover of "Journeying" that "we have come up against the problem, the actual fact, of diversification, of finding as many exits as possible from the self (language/communication exits) in order to form as many entrances as possible for the other . . . The other is the loved one and the other is the key" (n. pag.). Nichol demonstrates this clearly in the arrangement of a single word to offer at least three ways into and out of the poem.

First, Nichol is not so naïve to suggest that love overcomes evil. Rather, the poem acknowledges love to be intricately bound with evil. "Blues" highlights love's misgivings. In the context of romantic love, one must acknowledge the negative feelings that attachment can generate: jealousy, possession, and insecurity. Similarly the poem's invocation of "evolution"—via "evol"—suggests that love is a feeling that is always in flux—it expands and dissipates over time. We come to love others and our love can leave them too. Love, then, is a process, and embedded within it is a series of its own entrances and exits to the self and to the other. In these ways, "Blues" works the "seeping edge" (Massumi 42) between emotion and affect. For Nichol, love's meaning exceeds its conventional definition as a positive feeling to connote affection and deep social bonding. With all of its additional negative affect, it denotes a concept of feeling that is not easily consumed. Love is complex and multidirectional; it is comprised of both positive and negative arrangements of feeling.

These affective elements gesture toward a political project, which can be glimpsed first in the way Nichol's poem is also a nod to music. This nod toward music also suggests that the poem is, in a way, multisensory. In his 1986 essay "The Pata of Letter Feet," Nichol identifies the sonic dimension of the poem: "Blues" is a "purely visual poem that depends on a sound reference" (*Meanwhile* 361) to Blues, the musical genre emerging from African-American

communities in the southern United States. He explains further that he's paraphrasing a common

Blues refrain: "love, oh love, oh careless love – to slant the reading of 'evol' towards 'evil' and

support the visually derived blues moan" (361). As a poet interested in providing as many

entrances and exits into and out of language as possible, Nichol further develops a complex of

possible meanings. However, it is in this invocation of the Blues genre that we can also find

Nichol's political project of community building: the concrete poem as point of contact. As a

musical genre, Blues is a cultural form of expressing personal pain (often caused by love or its

absence). However, the Blues song is not merely sung to emphasize the singer's feelings, but to

use those feelings to motivate a connection between singer and audience, to remove oneself from

isolation into community. The Blues song structure is derived from African forms of song which

typically employ "call and response," wherein the singer issues a call and the audience responds.

The Blues song, then, is not only an expression of feeling but also demands that the audience

respond to those feelings and—through song—work affectively to build a momentary

community.

  In "Blues," Nichol seizes upon this "call and response" format. The physical layout of the

poem gestures toward at least three different words: love, evolve, and evil. Each of these words

is in interplay and the opening can be interpreted (as suggested above) by examining their

relationship. Any interpretation of the poem is entirely contingent on affect—in essence, the

reader's response to the poem. The poem does not guide the reader toward any one

interpretation. The letters are laid out in columns and the eye can run along these columns

vertically, horizontally, and diagonally, or by whatever order the eye desires. The layout of the

poem mimics a call and response form, since the audience is beckoned by the poem to respond to

its layout with whatever feeling that prompts her or him.

In the ways mentioned above, "Blues" highlights love as a foundation for social bonding and connection between individuals and collectives. However, community does not always connote positive feelings. Sara Ahmed identifies the problematic nature of love. Ahmed describes love as a concept that can also be co-opted in the name of any cause by any ideological faction to bind a group. Love is a means to reproduce "the collective ideal through producing a particular kind of subject whose allegiance to the ideal makes it an ideal in the first place" (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 123). Unfortunately, this means that love is a social affect that can also be the binding affect for 'hate' groups, which "claim they act out of love for their own kind, and for the nation as an inheritance of kind" (123). Nichol's poem alludes to this too, since one part of the poem's permutation reveals: evil. In Nichol's time, words like love and freedom were also co-opted and used to justify such egregious causes as the war in Vietnam or the rapid increase of arms during the Cold War. Accordingly, then, the concrete poem is the ideal format for an exploration of these various functions—an attempt to blur the borders around rigid and polarized meanings around feelings of love, to remind us of the power they hold in socio-material contexts, especially for defining the political and social projects of a community.

While Nichol's poem encapsulates a problem around affect and language in his day, the concrete poetry of Copithorne is also interested in concepts of love with a focus on gender and the woman's body. Copithorne, whose hand-drawn work provides some of the most compelling examples of borderblur poetry, effectively represents another way that love and concrete poetry are used in the service of a radical and expansive project. Her work often meditates on desire, domesticity, women's sociality, and formulates a compelling point of inquiry when considering the affective dimensions of language and gender within the context of male-dominated concrete.

If love for Nichol is about the formation of community around affect, then Copithorne's work asks how does the woman, her body, and concerns for femininity fit into a community?

In her early concrete poetry, Copithorne uses graphic design tools such as sketching pencils and calligraphy pens, which require precise and fluid movements of the hand. Her employment of these tools combines her training in poetry, visual art, and dance. These poems demonstrate Copithorne's acute attention to language, design, and movements of the body. Copithorne's hand-drawn aesthetic produces texts that actively navigate the relationship between the legible and illegible as a response to patriarchy and its attempted control over women's social and corporeal powers. Copithorne's bodily concrete poem-drawings confront issues of patriarchy and opens a creative space that expresses women's bodies and their affects. According to Bayard, Copithorne's texts are "more than a transmitter of lexical meaning, each letter is carried across the page as a trace, as aesthetic and graphic energy of a specific mood, of a specific feeling" (142). Offering a different perspective on these works, Betts notes that Copithorne's work "bring[s] the body back into the text by breaking the monotony and standardization of type" (167). Similar threads connect Bayard's and Betts's criticism: both draw attention to the importance of the body—its movements, feelings, and affects; however, gendered implications of these observations demand more sustained critical attention.

Central to Copithorne's work is the depiction of chaos and disorder. Copithorne identifies this to be a transgressive quality in her work; she writes, "there seemed to be a quite strong feeling at that time here in Vancouver that to do anything that might represent [what] might seem to be disordered was at least a foolish thing to do and perhaps crazy or at least not 'proper' and perhaps even 'bad'" (Barwin n. pag.). The sense of disorder mentioned by Copithorne is created by distinctive abstract line-work or, asemic writing (wordless writing), that adorns the pages of

her less formally experimental linguistic expressions. For example, in the first visual poem from her 1970 collection entitled *Runes,* there are scatterings of short phrases such as "Peace – Love – Good Health – May the War End and until it does I love you" or "Hypnotic Rhythm of Tiny Bells Ringing" (n. pag.). Sporadic explosions of crosshatching as well as abstract lines and dots extend in multiple directions to connect these phrases. I read this blend of semantic and asemic writings to be another means of investigating that bleeding edge between linguistically and non-linguistically quantifiable content.

In her pursuit of disorder, Copithorne's poetry also defies conventional reading practices; the poems cannot be read by following strict left to right, top to bottom reading patterns. Instead, the eyes of the reader are permitted to the multidirectional pathways offered by strings of along semantic language and other strands of hand-drawn abstract textures and shaping. As a result the reader's eyes shift between language and non-language. Copithorne's disordered compositions anticipate Barbara Godard's theory of transgression and women's writing. Godard describes what she calls "text de femme" which is writing that is "diffuse[d], disorder[ed], circular, multiple, unpredictable, unstructured and uncensored" ("Ex-Centrique" 64). This kind of women's writing, occupies a "de-centred position [which] allows, indeed ensures, that their gestures, language and writing will be ex-centrique, ex-perimental" (58). Copithorne's texts occupy this de-centred location in an extreme way and she is aware of this positioning. Summarizing a conversation she had with Copithorne, Lori Emerson writes on her blog: "she replied to me something to the effect that back in those days, dirty concrete was considered pretty 'out there' and women were already having a hard enough time getting noticed for less

'out there' work" (Emerson, blog).[42] Not only is Copithorne's work de-centred because concrete

poetry was not yet accepted by a mainstream, but further because she is a woman writer amid a

male-dominated scene.

Copithorne's work more broadly rejects gendered norms that pervade the 1960s. In

Release, she expresses dissatisfaction with conformism and stereotypical roles for women in an

untitled work (see Appendix E); she writes, explicitly addressing women in a hand-drawn script,

"Little girl you've become a fuss budget, a worry wart, a harried house wife, Let it all go, Let it

all go, Let go / fly free" (5). The language she uses such as "fuss budget," "worry wart," and

"harried" denigrate women in these roles and illustrate the ways these words demean and

dehumanize women, reducing them to a vague quantity of material, a benign growth, or a

burden. In response, the poem encourages the implied reader to "Let go" and to "fly free" (n.

pag.), anticipating Godard's theorization of radical women's writing as that which occupies an

excentricity, both as eccentric and external to the norm. The desire for escape is genuine;

however, the form of the poem complicates the notion of flying free. The asemic aspects of the

work are dense and reflective of a labyrinthine structure. These thick lines claustrophobically

encapsulate the semantic text, suggesting that the possibility of escape may be difficult to

accomplish. The poem reveals a tension between the speaker's mind that seeks freedom from the

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[42] Emerson makes a significant contribution to the discourse of Canadian concrete poetry by resurrecting a term
Canadian concretists formerly used to describe their work: dirty concrete. In her "Typewriter Concrete Poetry as
Activist Media Poetics" (2014), she describes dirty concrete as

> a deliberate attempt to move away from the clean lines and graphically neutral appearance of the concrete
> poetry from the 1950s and 1960s by Gomringer in Switzerland, the Noigrandes in Brazil, and Ian Hamilton
> Finlay in England. Such cleanliness was thought to indicate a lack of political engagement broadly
> speaking, and, more specifically, a lack of political engagement with language and representation. (99-100)

roles assigned by patriarchal order and those restrictions placed upon the speaker's body, reflective of the precarious position of women artists within a patriarchal literary community.

Copithorne's "Wild Flowers," from the same collection, addresses similar concerns of patriarchal dominance and stigma. The speaker expresses an uneasiness with the way she is perceived by the gaze of a potential lover; she writes,

> Would you
> love me
> if you knew
> how many men
> I had had?
> Would you feel sad?
> Things are no
> longer the same
> young girls
> are changing
> or were they
> always
> that way? (n. pag.)

The speaker expresses fear that the other would not find her desirable because she has been with an untold number of men (perhaps many, but not necessarily so), drawing attention to the stigma of "slut shaming" and to the fallacy that one man should own the sexuality of a woman. Furthermore, as a poem written from the perspective of an older woman (represented by the contrast between "I" and the "young girls" who are "they"), Copithorne also challenges stereotypes of innocence and chastity among young girls. The last question "or were they / always / that way?" (12-14), challenges this perspective and suggests that women's sexual desires and identities are not necessarily changing, but that patriarchal perceptions of desire have always been false. Copithorne's final lines suggest that women have always had more agency than many men have been willing to acknowledge.

Copithorne's chapbook-length poem *Rain* (1969) is an exemplary representation of her investigation into notions of love and community. I read *Rain* as a suite of related poems that oscillate between a hand-written semantic text and hand-drawn asemic script. These movements from the semantic to the asemic (and back again), speak to the affective dimensions of the text's content, especially an unspeakable sadness that marks the beginning of the text. The chapbook opens with the repetition of hand-drawn words "Rain" and "Pain" in textual-overlay with the word "sad" in the same script at the bottom of the page (see Appendix F). The visual movement of the piece is suggestive of rain falling, since the stems of the letters are vertically exaggerated. The thin lines invoke the speaker's sense of fragility: not all lines of the letters connect, looking as though a pen is running out of ink. There is a pun at play here, too: the rhyme of rain, pain, and *pane* which effectively establishes a pathetic fallacy, suggestive of an emotionally pained speaker looking out a window at rainfall. This page is followed by four separate pages of asemic clusters indicative of an unspeakable sadness, as the text moves from semantic meaning into purely visual, asemic script (see Appendix G). Finally, on the sixth page, semantic language re-emerges and a question is posed to an unidentified lost lover, the person who rejected the speaker's body: "Can I say you were wrong when you stopped loving me?" (n. pag). These lines are written in a calligraphic script, with some incomplete stems and other overwrought letters. The speaker later probes their feelings of pain and alienation in assertive capital letters; she writes,

> BRIGHT
> FLASH
> IN DARK
> NIGHT
> SOS
> SOMEONE
> HOLD ME
> I NEED WARM FLESH (n. pag.)

The last line is a call for someone to comfort the speaker, which is clarified on the next page: "not anyone / but you who / ever you may / be" (n. pag.). The page that follows consists of the word "love," thickly scrawled on the page that starkly contrasts the other scripts of the chapbook. It is at this point that the speaker takes a turn. This is not the love for someone else, but love for the self. With no other voice present in the text, the speaker turns inward and questions herself: "What are you like when you are alone? What are you like inside?" until, through this process of rhetorical questions, the speaker learns to access pleasure without the other. In dialogue with herself, she says;

> Oh please
> yourself
> please
> and go easy
> soft soap
> and elbow grease
> after all it's only
> your
> own self
> who can say (n. pag.)

Following this realization of independence and the possibilities of self-pleasure, the speaker emerges from her pain and overcomes her sense of alienation (see Appendix H). The penultimate page of the book opens with the lines: "A shore / at last / reached" (1-3). This sense of alleviation is only achieved once the speaker explores her own body and her own abilities to pleasure herself and realize that only she is the one "who can say." As a text of hand-drawn concrete poetry, *Rain* enacts this trajectory toward self-pleasure since each page—with its own unique script—is an exercise in exploring the relationship between aesthetic, material, and bodily movement, as Copithorne explores the various ways the complex and personal feelings of pleasure, alienation, and desire can be rendered upon the page.

Love was evidently on the mind of other Canadian concrete poets affiliated with the Language Revolution. Love is also at the centre of David UU's *Touch* (1967), published by *Ganglia.* The title itself directly invokes notions of feeling—touch, the means by which one person can reach out to another, and impress themselves upon the body and mind, to mark the surface of another's body, to generate bodily sensation in the skin and nerves.[43] Except in this case, the other body is a textual body—a staple-bound chapbook, delicately wrapped in a slightly mottled, deckle-edged cover paper. Like Nichol, UU puts his faith in language and the poem to reach out and impress itself upon the reader with a capacity akin to human touch. UU's conception of the poem, and its invocation of love, is suggestive of affective labour as an important consideration of the moment. The touch of the poem is a point of contact for community. The short collection of poems is accompanied by a forward written on 20 March 1967 that foregrounds love as the central feeling to the work. With a somewhat romanticized tone, UU claims that "all poemz arr lessonz tooe love" and further advances love as an alternative to the dissatisfaction of the day: "lets forget our social insurance number maybiy therr iz noe god eor tooemorroe but therr iz love" (n. pag.). Like Nichol and Copithorne, UU imagines love to be an inherently more complex feeling than typically considered.

UU's conception of this effect is richly demonstrated in the last few poems of the collection in a series entitled "a story," one of UU's most striking sequences. The poem is a narrative-driven four-page suite of concrete poems consisting of a single quasi-phonetic spelling of the word "luv," composed using a mask-method to create perfect circles which are overlaid one another. The poem sequence depicts the movement of two circular figures, both created from

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[43] I return to a more in depth examination of affect and touch in the final chapter where haptics are the main component of the poetics.

the repetition of "luv," running in straight lines—vertically, inside of one circle and horizontally, in the second. Poised as if in intense attraction, the two circles are side-by-side, just barely not touching. The remainder of the poem depicts the movement of these two formations succumbing to the magnetism of the other, at first just overlapping then fully over-laid upon one another until in the ultimate page of the sequence the two figures are situated side-by-side once again but this time enveloped by a larger circle also composed of the same word (see Appendix I and J). If we were to ascribe a narrative to this sequence, as the title suggests, then this is a story of attraction, desire, and the erotic meeting of two figures—a "luv" story, if you will.

As evidenced by UU's other writing he is fascinated with these types of collisions. Another poem, his "LIEBESTOD" (LOVEDEATH) for example, is a pattern poem consisting of the names Tristan and Isolde in the shape of a dagger, which resonates with the tragic story of two lovers that ends with both their deaths (see Appendix K). The writings of philosopher and quasi-surrealist Georges Bataille share UU's fixation on the relationship between love and death. In *Eroticism* (first published in 1957), Bataille writes that "eroticism is assenting to life even in death (11) and that "Eroticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals" (18). In this way, stories of eroticism symbolize the dissolution—or figurative death—of the self and its established relationship between itself and a social order. UU's poem is reflective of this dissolution. The two figures are composed of their own patterned repetition of "luv" and, as they merge their patterns become unrecognizable in the throes of their ecstatic meeting—the letters of each pattern are over-laid and the language becomes unrecognizable.

McCaffery, building on Bataille's philosophical writings, has come to employ this thinking into his own analysis of concrete poems, describing such illegibility as an excess that temporarily escapes language and its order (an order that also organizes the world). Love for UU, however, symbolizes more than an escape. Returning to the introductory note to *Touch*, UU suggests to the reader: "lets forget our social insurance number maybiy therr iz noe god eor tooemorroe but therr iz love" (n. pag.), suggesting that love is a site of communal resistance. The UU-avatar asks the reader to join him in this rejection of the social order, making it a communal act; just as in "a story," it is the communion between two figures that creates their own escape. Love then is a radical site of communal resistance against the mechanisms of the state. The last page of the poem, depicting the two figures enveloped within a larger figure, suggests that love, as a radical affect, can be taken one step further. Love as suggested by the final page of "a story" is a transformative affect—it is a process that breaks down the self, but also from which new entities are formed.

Love, sex, and transformation are one of the consistent themes in bissett's work even at the earliest stages of his career. bissett's writing remains largely interested in the mobilization of affects, especially in service of social and political causes. This is a thread several critics have addressed when handling bissett's work. For example, in Betts's analysis of bissett's poem "awake in the red desert" (1968), he finds connections between love, death, and transformation. He describes the poem as a "narrative of a visionary desert experience that provokes an awakening to life, death, and sex" ("Postmodern Decadence" 162) that "provides an example of the redemptive possibilities of increased linguistic consciousness" ("Decadence" 161). Like UU's "a story," bissett's collagist poem—composed of both text and a hand-drawn mandala— speaks to love's capacities for transcendence: "it is love is flesh / nd blood flashing is all /

together naked nd immaterial" (n. pag.). For bissett, the moment of love is a moment of

transcending materiality and the unpleasant conditions that come with it.

Like Betts, McCaffery also partially addresses the affective dimension of bissett's work

in his essay "Bill Bissett: A Writing Outside of Writing" (1978). McCaffery describes "a single

aspect of Bissett's work: the aspect of excess and libidinal flow, of the interplay of forces and

intensities, both through and yet not-quite frequently despite language" (92). McCaffery's

analysis of bissett's work approaches the discourse of feeling, focusing on intensities, desire, and

libidinality—language that anticipates theorists like Massumi and Ahmed. McCaffery's essay on

bissett highlights the aesthetically radical dimension of his work: his desire to exceed limitations

of all sorts in publishing, poetry, and life. However, this image of bissett as a radical seems

typically elided by less radical imaginings of bissett's work. Other critics have referred to bissett

as an "angelic insouciance, palpable aura of sweet charisma" (Reid "storee" 16) and as a

simplistic, merry prankster, an image of bissett that Susan Musgrave also paints in her 2002

essay "When We Get There Can I Smoke?" This latter image of bissett remains in the critical

imagination, overshadowing the radical nature of his work and perhaps leading scholars away

from other dimensions of bissett's writing.

In what appears to be this critical schism in the assessment of bissett's persona, both sides

share a sense of his work that is grounded in emotions and affects. bissett's writing is excessive

and energized by his libidinal drive but also attractive and endearing. However, like bissett's

blewointment, his personality is constantly evolving and shifting in resistance to singular notions

of the self. I seek to add to this mosaic and draw attention to another persona found in bissett's

writing: bissett the angry, radical, reactionary. He is not just someone driven by intensities that

exceed the "mechanisms of grammar and classical discourse" (McCaffery "Bill Bissett" 93), but

a political radical too. This is the bissett who is discontented and disgusted with nationalism, poverty, drug laws, and restrictions of sexual identity. This anger is a key emotion that charges bissett's concrete poems.

Rush: What Fuckan Theory / A Study uv Language (1972/2012) articulates the strong feelings that charge bissett's poetry. This two-part book was a reaction to a request by Nichol to write a book of theory to be published as a joint *grOnk* and *blewointment* book. bissett responded with *Rush,* a work that blends concrete poetry, essay, art book, and manifesto to proclaim his rejection of literary theory and the institutionalization of his poetics. Blending each of these genres, *Rush* is arguably more than a book of concrete poetry; however, the concretist elements are clearly foregrounded by bissett's use of space, hand-drawn images, and collagist techniques. Over the course of the book, bissett expresses his dislike for the linguistic standardization of expression:

> yu dont need correct spelling
> yu dont need correct grammar
> yu dont need the margin
> yu dont need regulation use of capital nd lower case etc
> yu dont need sense or skill
> yu dont need this
> what dew yu need (47)

For bissett, following the grammatical, orthographic, and semantic rules of language implicates any person into complicity with egregious systems of oppression: "meaning is langwage in self defense   releas us from the territorial imperative" (11) and later, in the second half of the book "a study uv language," he angrily decries colonial projects:

> th british were pigs in indonesia ndwer
> elswhr south afrika along with othr european powrs
> etc th long history ub imperialism and now th
> amrikans tryin to destrot [sic] Cambodia   not only for
> th oil offshore Vietnam but fr th knowledge they
> can have as nashun ego (95)

bissett is enraged by the atrocities of colonialism, government oppression, American political influence, and each of these projects are tied to language and its capacities for control: "am i usin' langwage to control yr emotional environment as yu read" (91), he asks. bissett's concrete poetry, then, characterized by its multidirectionality, unique orthography, hand-drawn images, and brazen political content is an expression of discontent and an attempt to liberate himself (and to encourage the reader to liberate themselves) from this complex of issues.

For example, bissett takes aim at the processes of communication by way of information technology, in what is one of bissett's most clear responses to the postmodern conditions of control: *IBM (saga uv th relees uv huuman spirit from compuewterr funckshuns)* (c. 1972). *IBM* is an oversized, staple-bound book consisting of handwritten poems. The book loosely follows the progression of the alphabet from A to Z, and each page (or series of pages) roughly corresponds to a different letter. Around each letter bissett explores a series of symbolic associations with the individual letter, capturing what their shape and sound inspires in bissett's mind. The resultant book is a space wherein bissett, freely as possible, seemingly spills words onto the page in a way that is reminiscent of automatic modes of writing. While free-association is certainly a key feature of bissett's writing, hand-written poems are less common for bissett whose signature by the early 1970s is primarily based on the misuse of the typewriter. This book by bissett, then, is clearly a momentary rejection of communication machines, their standardizing logic, and the promise they hold for the future.

The IBM in the title of bissett's book refers to the American multinational technology company whose unabbreviated name is the International Business Machine Corporation. The name alone indicates bissett's concern for the various ways that American influence seeps into other cultures by way of economic trade. bissett's title for the collection clearly identifies the

company as his target of critique; however, the title is also a scatological pun on a specific type of bodily "relees"—the B.M. also known as the bowel movement. In so doing, bissett's title privileges the body and its functions over computing systems—an oppressive realm for some who see the computer as a means of divorcing the body from the mind, or worse for someone like bissett, funnels human thought and emotion into specific and rigid computational logic. Much of bissett's poetry up to the early 1970s (and beyond) aggressively resists and rejects the machinic standardization which overwhelmed the 20th century as developments in information technologies accelerated. bissett, for example, tested the limits of the typewriter, finding ways to express his complex affects by relentlessly misusing the machine. bissett's *IBM* is hardly a misuse of computer technology; rather it is a total rejection of the computer's systematization that soon after facilitates and nurtures the rise of postmodern logic. Instead, bissett relies on the movements of his hand—leaving traces of his body on the page. Each page of the book adheres to its own free-flowing logic. While the computer relies on specific patterns of code to function (much like conventional language), bissett's writing releases thought and feeling from those restrictions. The resulting poems consist of symbolic associations, loosely based around each letter of the alphabet—its shape, sound, and the words it can spell. For example, bissett writes a sequence for the letter "C": "see / sea / c / si / eeee" (n. pag.) and further elaborates his expression around the letter with a hand-drawn image. Or, in a sequence for the letter "F" bissett writes: "f / if / efe / even / aftr / befor / FUCK THE WORLD" (n. pag.) (see Appendix L). It is this total rejection of "the world," or what I'm reading here as the incubation of postmodern capitalist logic, that energizes the spirit of the Language Revolution. It is a rejection of the world as it was coming to be, and the search for a means of opening perception as postmodern logic takes hold, discarding the human body for the exigencies of the machine.

Anger and frustration are emotions that bissett shared with his former partner, Clinton. Their shared venture into publishing, *blewointment* magazine, indicates a shared discontent with the state of poetry publishing in Canada since no one else would publish them. Like bissett, Clinton was inspired by this discontent and dissatisfaction to write. In 1981, Maxine Gadd offers a stark portrait of Clinton: "Martina – her rebellion is so extreme that it leads to her not publishing at all. She's a fine poet" (*Lost Language* 175). Gadd's description of Clinton not only highlights the anger at the core of her work, but also helps us understand why Clinton published so sparsely outside of periodicals and a limited number of chapbooks. Clinton's anger and discontent was so strong that it led her away from poetry. Select poems from Clinton's chapbook *Yonder Glow* (1971) provide other compelling examples of concrete poems that are expressive of these feelings. *Yonder Glow* contains pattern poems, composed on a typewriter, using minimal diction and relatively simplistic structures on the page. Like Nichol's "Blues," some poems in Clinton's *Yonder Glow* more closely resemble constructivist concrete poetry that explore expressive content.

The first is a pattern poem in the chapbook, which consists of the word "crap" repeated to formulate the shape of a cross. Though it consists of a simplistic structural arrangement and is minimal in its diction, the poem works on numerous levels. Perhaps most obviously, the poem poses a critique of religion by depicting a crucifix using a crude signifier. Somewhat juvenile in this way, the poem dismisses organized religion as a human excess: "crap" (see Appendix M) The history of pattern poetry, however, is also steeped in considerations of order and the divine. Dick Higgins suggests that, historically, pattern poets believed that a "sacred power was attributed to letters … The process of forming words became, then, a very sacred one indeed" (8). Clinton's crap-poem then parodies this belief in the divine order of language, denigrating it,

too, as "crap." The poem is expressive of a frustration with conventions and logic of language, like bissett. This point is further developed in a second untitled poem composed in a gyre-like structure of the words "everything," "isn't," "crap." The poem is not a retraction of the previous statement. The circular movement of the poem shifts the meaning of the words, composing phrases such as "isn't everything crap" as well as "crap isn't everything" and "everything crap thing isn't," with other similar permutations (see Appendix N). By using this structure, Clinton effectively unsettles divine notions of language as a sacred, and ordered magic, and instead highlights chaos as the more potent agent.

The desire for chaos is also foundational to the concrete poetry of McCaffery, whose work "resolutely resist[s] categorization and containment," notes Stephen Cain (Cain "Introduction" 5). McCaffery's oeuvre is exemplary of borderblur. In his work, he explores concrete poetry, sound poetry, translation, collage, prose, and more. However, for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on what is considered to be a magnum opus of concrete poetry in Canada: McCaffery's *Carnival*—specifically, *The Second Panel* (1978). The work has been described by Marjorie Perloff as "essentially cartographic; a repudiation of linearity in writing and the search for an alternative syntax in 'mapping'" ("Signs are Taken for Wonders" 111). To this effect, the poem is multi-directional, coloured with both black and red typewriter tapes and the additional employment of rubber-stamps, xerography, hand-lettering, and stencils. Adding to this disorder is the frequent use of textual-overlay and totally incomprehensible shapes on the page, usually created from heavy overlay or fragmented lettering. To read the text as intended, a reader must destroy the book by removing each page and then, following the instructions provided with the text, assemble the panels to create a largescale work. In effect, *Carnival* "challenges" not only "the sequentiality of the book" but of syntax and conventional reading

processes. Similarly, Emerson describes McCaffery's writing as a "means for his attempts to achieve a calculated annihilation of semantic meaning" ("Typewriter Concrete" 114). Indeed, *Carnival* is indicative of McCaffery's interest in thought and feeling that precedes linguistic apprehension.

Of the critiques of McCaffery's *Carnival*, perhaps one of the most compelling is Andy Weaver's reading in his "'the white experience between the words': Thoughts on Steve McCaffery's *Carnival, the second panel: 1970-75*." Weaver's essay usefully foregrounds the problem of the political art project in relation to issues of identity politics, which provides a useful starting point for my analysis of affect in the work. Weaver's reading of *The Second Panel* recognizes the problem of white-male privilege that is inherent to the text. It is McCaffery's white, male body that composed the work. In his Introduction to the text, McCaffery suggests that one can enter the text using one of many definitions of the word, "CARNIVAL" which in this case comes "from Med. L. **carnelevale,** a putting away of the flesh and hence a prelental language game" (*Second Panel* n. pag.). This compromises the political project of *Carnival* because, as Weaver notes, McCaffery's text is a call for "moving past the physical body, towards an ideal relationship between mind and language" (Weaver 135). The validity of McCaffery's political project becomes problematized since this negation of the body ignores the conditions that deny other bodies—visible minorities, disabilities, queer bodies etc.—the luxury of simply leaving their corporeality behind. These bodies are effectively locked within the social conditions that stigmas against their bodies have produced. *The Second Panel* thereby ignores "the socio-political and economic differences that cause real strife in the world, an oversight that leaves the text dealing with ethereal problems at the expense of offering any thoughts on

practical matters" (Weaver 136).[44] This is an important consideration, but I do not think that McCaffery's oversight negates the radical capacities of the text.

Like Weaver, I seek to begin my analysis in the productive pitfalls of McCaffery's conceptualization of *The Second Panel*. The first pitfall rests in the problem of putting away the "flesh." The whole body is not composed of "flesh"—flesh is one part of the body which is also composed of skin, bone, nerve endings, and blood as well as emotions, affects, and ideas. These latter elements, as Sara Ahmed notes, play a role in the formation of the body. Furthermore, McCaffery's seeming attempt to negate the body by placing the "reader, as perceptual participant, within the center of his language" (McCaffery n. pag.) seems to be mere provocation. The body, language, and affects are intricately and totally assembled; they are inseparable. McCaffery himself describes the bodily aspects of language in processes of enunciation and vocalization: "Voice is the polis mouth, lips teeth, tongue, tonsils, palate, breath, rhythm, timbre, and sound" ("Voice in Extremis" 161). Similarly, the production of concrete poetry is an assemblage of bone, cartilage, and muscles; movements of the hand and eye. From these two points, I offer a complementary reading that builds on the opening observation of Weaver's essay: the text's relationship to notions of disorientation, an affect that turns our attention back toward the body. This is a move that might be counter to McCaffery's conceptualization of his own work; however, I think it is only fair to analyze his writing on its own terms. If *The Second Panel* is a text within which the reader "confront[s] [language] as material without reference to

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[44] The problem of identity is an important one, especially considering the revolutionary poetic context I am developing here. Many of the poets in this study are white, some of whom may be considered middle-class, and most of whom are men. I find solace, however, in the open-endedness of the Language Revolution. It does not have a clear, overarching revolutionary aim (unlike other avant-garde movements). Instead, authors define their project in their own writings, sharing with their colleagues a common interest in unconventional poetics and releasing feeling from strictures of language. These include Copithorne's exploration of the female body; Nichol's and UU's related explorations of love and community, and so on. The Language Revolution allows identities to flow and be their own, not in service of another's political project.

an author or to any otherness'" (n. pag.) then McCaffery, too, must be banned as authorial referent.

I propose that *The Second Panel's* call to move away from the body could be also understood not as a movement away from flesh into the abstract, but deeper into the body—into its feelings and intensities. In bold, rubberstamped text an elongated form of the word "PLUNGE" moves across the first page—signifying not a movement away, but a movement deeper into the body. In the assembled form of *The Second Panel*, the movement of the word PLUNGE actually draws the reader's eye further into the centre of the text, not away from it (see Appendix O). A similar sentiment is expressed on page six, perhaps summarizing the project of *The Second Panel*: "the message being that we are all poets one and all as long as we have lungs the moving into the body's ritual of repeated semaphore / a perception of clarity beyond all measure of meanings" (6). Again, there is a distinctive invocation for the reader to move *into* the body—not away from it. I can only assume that the "message" is the poem itself. This message, as indicated by Weaver's analysis, could rightly be characterized by disorientation, an affect that this chapter has found most useful for discussing concrete poetry in the Canadian context. It is also useful to recall Russell's point regarding the use of disorientation by avant-garde artists in their search for "the concept of self-liberation–aesthetic, personal, and political" (Russell 34) so that the audience may "perceive things of previously unimagined beauty, or experience states of abruptly expanded consciousness (35). Indeed, *The Second Panel* is deranged, mobilizing disorientation with the intention of offering a possible place within which the individual may find liberation, even just for a moment. As a receptive reader of *The Second Panel*, one invites the text into our body, and allows our sense of language to be disrupted, opening up new

possibilities of writing and reading.[45] Language is a key component in the ordering of our world––not just our external world, but our internal world of feeling. By reading this poem our "body's ritual of repeated semaphore" is disrupted and that disruption is important. It opens our sense of language to new possibilities of configuration, movement, and how we as emotional and feeling beings can relate to it. *The Second Panel* has no project beyond disorientation—just as its meanings are "alive, vital, and unmastered" the poem does not seek to impose mastery or meaning upon the reader, it merely seeks to open the reader up to new possibilities. In this way, *Carnival* is similar to Nichol's "Blues" and Copithorne's various asemic writings wherein an engagement of the work is contingent upon a reader's response to the work. The reader's eye is encouraged to wander through the work, guided by their own feeling of the text. *Carnival,* then, explores the far side of the "seeping edge" (Massumi 43), aggressively seeking out ways of escaping the confines of being as it is typically rendered in language, and instead seeking to create work that stimulates a reader beyond linguistic apprehension.

Paul Dutton, like McCaffery, cannibalizes his writing tools in the *The Plastic Typewriter* (1993; composed in 1977), which is created from "a disassembled typewriter plastic-case typewriter, an intact typewriter, carbon ribbons, carbon paper, metal file, and white bond paper" (n. pag.). McCaffery and Dutton share an interest in exploring the communicative functions of the writing machine by using its parts that are not designated for the production of typed language (see Appendix P).[46] In this spirit of borderblur, the text is more explicitly thematically linked to notions of song and music. For example, lyrics from "Certainly Lord," a traditional

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[45] For more on McCaffery's consideration of these ideas, see his essay "Writing as a General Economy."

[46] Perhaps a little more nuance would be helpful here. The typewriter is an assemblage, thereby all its parts in interplay are designated as some part of the process of producing the typewritten word. However, I am recognizing the separate functions of different parts, i.e. the carbon paper or the letters themselves are more integral to the production of language than, say, the aligning scale or the spool cover.

spiritual commonly sung in churches and adopted in the 1960s as a civil rights anthem, is imprinted onto some of the pages. In another case, Dutton's contribution to the *Sound Poetry Catalogue* (1978), is entitled "Flamenco Sequence / 1977," an excerpt from *The Plastic Typewriter*. Dutton's thoughts on poetry elucidate the work of these poems; he writes, "Poetry consists of language; and language consists of sound and sight, of idea and emotion, of intellect and body, of rationality and irrationality" (44) and explains further on in his discussion, that one should "Work with it, play with it, act on it. And most of all (ultimately, hopefully) enjoy it" (46). And perhaps, a work like *The Plastic Typewriter* is just that simple: a text wherein readers should find pleasure.

The expression of feeling in concrete poetry is a central concern for poets well into the Canadian poets well into the 1980s. A chapbook like Sha(u)nt Basmajian's *Boundaries Limits and Space* (1980) indicates that affect and visual, materially-based poems remain a charged zone of poetic investigation. His minimalist, concrete poem sequence "Personal Traumas" is structured with five horizontal lines and six pronouns in varying arrangements: "me," "him," "her," "she," "they," "them," and adjective "alone." The horizontal lines, reminiscent of a musical staff, depict this type of movement between the subjects as though it were a score. Each character is a note on a staff, producing visual rhythms. The poem captures the speaker's romantic fixation with a woman who is in a relationship with another man, and a repeated disappointment with his inability to get close to her (hence the melodramatic reference to "trauma" in the title). The poem, which is composed across six pages, places these words in arrangement to describe the speaker's varying successes (or failures) in approaching the woman––sometimes quite close, and other times blocked by another suitor. The poem ends with a penultimate "Breakdown" that uses overlaid text that communicates the speaker's anguish—as

though the word "me" were falling or collapsing into itself—and then ends with the single word "alone."

The affect at work in *Boundaries Limits and Space* is not love but infatuation, since the speaker does not seem to have any kind of actual, personal relationship with the subject "her." Nichol identifies this important distinction in his analysis of another work by Basmajian, "POEM" from *Quote Unquote* (c. 1978), wherein he identifies the same affect at play: "infatuation which is so often taken as love, emoted as such in the rock & roll radio wave world we live in. 'Infatuation,' with all that emotion's impermanence, where signifieds slide below the signifier" (*Meanwhile* 194). Indeed, the movement of characters, as well as the poem's melodrama, speaks to the idea of infatuation as a precarious feeling. The shifting arrangement of the characters is testament to the inherent magnetism of the feeling itself: its power to drag the speaker to various locations in space as he follows the object of his infatuation. Basmajian's calculated arrangement of so few words succinctly captures the power of this allure, and also, through the use of textual overlay the despair of rejection. Further, Basmajian's poem articulates significant problems of language, communication and their relationship to affect. The poem depicts the speaker's difficulty to express his feelings to "her," since no words between them are represented on the page. Rather, their relationship is represented physically in spatial relation. The poem captures the ways that emotions can effectively stifle speech and expression, resulting in a communicative silence or breakdown as depicted by the end of the poem.

In *The Bee Book* (1981), Ann Rosenberg deftly approaches similar themes in a 200-page hybrid text that fully embraces the spirit of borderblur. Seen through the press at Coach House by Nichol, *The Bee Book* blends together novel, play, poem, collage, and drawing to create a sophisticated meditation on female attraction and sexuality. The novel's nine sections are each

driven by narrative prose that are fragmented by elements of concrete poetry, which are integral

to the book's structure, including hand-drawn images, photographs, diagrams, musical scores,

asemic writings, and typographic arrangements of text that resemble waves, lips, and genitalia.

Over a series of connected vignettes, *The Bee Book* follows Habella, a bee-enthusiast and Natural

Science teacher, as she navigates the complexities of human sexuality as a young woman raised

mostly on Catholic principles and traditions. To do so, Rosenberg relies on the lives and

language of bees, with a special emphasis on their mating patterns and internal hierarchies as a

counterpoint to Habella's understanding of human relationships. In part, the novel follows

Habella's trials through relationships with men as she tries to understand what she needs and

wants emotionally, physically, and intellectually in partnership. *The Bee Book* traces Habella's

shift from her belief in patriarchy and her desire for marriage toward self-reliance and

matriarchy, an echo of Copithorne's *Rain*. In this way, *The Bee Book* is located at a key juncture

of interest for the concrete poets Language Revolution: feeling, visuality, and liberation (which

would also explain why Nichol appears to have been a steward for the book).

The text employs image in a variety of effective ways; however, text and image is used

most strikingly in places where conventional language does not fully capture feelings and ideas

being conveyed. As it is used by other concretists of the Language Revolution, the visual aspects

of language are used where consciously apprehended language fails. For example, in chapter

three, "The Drone," Habella courts a man who claims his name is Solomon and works as an

Egyptologist. She very quickly becomes infatuated with him and chooses her first time to have

sex to be with him, a decision she later regrets. Their brief courtship is described via narrative

prose, which is fragmented by the interjection of images. As they flirt, they draw hieroglyphics

and diagrams of bee dances to impress one another with their knowledge (58-9). They dance

together to suggestive music, which is described in typographic arrangement of morphemes "UHHHH," "MMMAHHHH," and "oooooo" (59). When they finally have sex, Rosenberg conveys this encounter with a typewriter concrete piece that consists of the letters n, m, and o in repetition and a letter-based depiction of a penis and vagina (61). This final, somewhat crude depiction, is augmented by the language used to create these images: "I want to," say both Solomon and Habella, which leads to "why why/do you cry habella/oh what damn it is" (61), says Solomon insensitively. Later in the book, when in conversation with her close friend Matthias, she expresses tremendous feelings of regret: "Damn it, damn it. I I'm so ashamed. I I gave up my virginity to someone I I'll probably never see again. I I just lost my head" (86). On the one hand, this expression is enough to convey Habella's feelings in the moment of encounter with Solomon—overwhelmed, impassioned, infatuated. However, the fragmentation of narrative flow by the incorporation of concretist image effectively depicts Habella's feeling as she lost her head in the moment. This feeling is heightened and passed onto the reader who, in a similar way, is disoriented by the intermixture of text and image, which simultaneously breaks the logical flow of narration and augments the feeling of those moments of Habella.

The Bee Book ends with the liberation of Habella's desire. Eventually Habella marries a man named Fred, with whom she raised several children. Over time, Habella grows unhappy in her marriage. She is bored of Fred and seemingly disgruntled by her children. She begins to seek a way out of the reality she has found herself, which is largely the result of her fulfilled desire to be married: "why can't I *create* my own dream and *choose* the people who live with me? Why can't I become in charge of my own reality?" (188). From this utterance, the story dramatically shifts toward the surreal. Habella proceeds upstairs and begins to build a "hexagon in room with one side open" with furniture where she feeds "herself on Royal Jelly" (188). In so doing,

Habella has taken on the life of the bees, transforming herself into a queen bee. In this way, Habella has fully embraced the lives of bees that she has admired so deeply all her life. Near the end of the text, Habella's son Harry seems to voice to Habella's valuation of bees "when he announced for some reason with ten-year-old earnestness that he would build a colony where workers shared equally in labour and where there would be no sexual rivalry" (189). *The Bee Book* ends with Habella leaving her hexagon, transformed into a queen bee. Once the narrative confirms Habella's flight, the text ends not with language but with photographs of an open sky, indicative of Habella's new found freedom.

On Seeing Canadian Concrete Poetry

For the range of feelings that are manifested in the small selection of poetry focused on above, there remains, for now, one question: historically speaking, what feelings did these texts stimulate and how did those feelings manifest? Many of the presses that published concrete poetry were small operations. Some works were published in limited runs that were no larger than 500 copies in some cases. The periodicals, too, had a limited audience—*grOnk*, for example, was distributed to subscribers and, at times, sold in only select bookstores such as Toronto's Village Bookstore. Canadian concrete poetry circulated among micro-communities and was a deeply personal investment—often funded out of the poet or publisher's own pocket. In other words, concrete poetry flourished as a result of affective labour—intimate interactions between poets and audience and its emphasis on communal operations, direct person-to-person interactions—quite literally to reach "the other thru the poem" ("statement" 18). The small scale of the Language Revolution, however, also presents an interesting problem when considering the effectiveness of this work. This is coupled with a complication common to all reading: an

interaction between the work and its reader is a deeply personal experience, and typically more affective on the individual plane than on the level of the mass. The questions posed, then, are rather difficult, for how does one account for the feelings generated by Canadian concrete poetry, especially since access to it was already (and remains) difficult? On the one hand, we can say at least, that concrete poetry is a noticeably attractive mode of composition: it began on the West Coast and spread Eastward, becoming variously mutated in the hands of each practitioner who brought her or his own skill-sets and technologies to the task—creative typewriting, calligraphy, graphic design. Concrete, then, peaked the curiosity of numerous Canadian poets, who presumably found it at least somewhat satisfying for their drive toward a liberated expression of life where consciously apprehended ideas and feelings fail.

The same cannot be said of all critics and book reviewers who engaged concrete poetry in periodicals like *The Globe and Mail*, *Saturday Night, Canadian Forum*, and *The Toronto Daily Star.* Based on a survey of issues in the 1960s up until the late 1970s, concrete poetry in Canada seems to have garnered diffuse reactions. On the more receptive end of the spectrum, some concrete in Canada seems to have provided reviewers, like A.A. Bronson (of the art collective General Idea) with pleasure: "Visual poetry knocks my socks off," he declares and encourages readers who are tired of conventional poetry that, "visual poetry might be just the thing to put poetics back on your reading list" ("Of Frogs" 41). Similarly, Ken Adachi, with seeming reverence, describes bissett's poetry as "opaque and eccentric on the printed page" but which "becomes brilliantly alive; the ideas are turned into muscle and sinew" ("B.C.'s 'porno' poetry" D4). Adachi's metaphor subtly gestures toward ideas of affect as the poems transition from ideas on the page to register within the body.

On the opposite end of the critical spectrum of reactions are those critics who were displeased and even infuriated by the works. In 1979, for example, an unimpressed Anne Montagnes describes McCaffery's and Nichol's *In England Now That Spring* (1978) as having a "scattered and stoned effect" ("Gustafson" E15). In the case of a review by Colombo, who also admired the work of bissett, he admits to finding bissett's writing both "effective and infuriating" ("Three Poets" 41). Other reviewers, however, were more volatile in their reactions to concrete poetry. For example, Michael Hornyansky recommends that readers put Nichol's *The Aleph Beth Book* (1971) "Far away at the joke end of the shelf" ("Poetry" 328), denigrating concrete to be little more than low-brow writing. This point is amplified in a particularly scathing review by Len Gaspirini, who in 1969, wrote on ephemera produced by Ganglia, including works by David UU, David Aylward, and Nichol. Gaspirini denounces the movement: "I have a feeling that concretism is nothing more than a poetic hoax; an esoteric comeon [sic] to squares and purists alike" (21), which illustrates his anger and irritation with the texts. None of these reviews, however, are particularly insightful into the actual ways these texts generate affect. Perhaps this is merely a failure of the genre of the review: books are often weighted by the degree of pleasure the reviewer enjoys. For me, knowing a reviewer's level of enjoyment is not particularly useful for understanding concrete as an affective mode of composition. However, the comments from these reviewers effectively elucidate McLuhan's arguments regarding complacency and affect; that media in the electric age narrows the range of affect, manipulates the emotions and desires of individuals to coerce them into complacency, conformity, and capitalistic modes of exchange. As a result, these reviewers were seemingly unable to register deeper or wider feelings about these texts beyond the poles of pleasure and revulsion, feelings easily encapsulated by conventional language. It was not the art of the postmodern period that saw a flattening of affect,

but its criticism. The project of moving beyond these poles which is central to the Language

Revolution was lost on many readers.

Despite these flat and somewhat unhelpful reviews, other reviewers were at least aware

that concrete had an affective dimension to it. Of bissett's writing, Peter Stevens writes that his

poetry "in a sense attack[s] the reader" ("Creative Bonds" 33) and Douglas Fetherling writes that

a book like bissett's *Fires in the Tempul* (1966) "has that aura of urgency that drags the reader

off the sidewalk and into the alleyway" (184). Colombo, too, reflects upon affect and visual

concrete in a McLuhan-esque way when he is quoted in an article in the *Toronto Daily Star* that

"Concrete poetry's real purpose is for training the senses—like a TV test pattern" (Beker "Sound

not Sense" 57). Most pertinent of all, however, is George Bowering's reflections on his own

sensual encounter with Nichol's assemblage *bp* (1967):

> bp is a poet of the senses – he goes through the senses to unspoken feelings. This is so in
> the normal West Coast style poems. As for other items in the package, the sense of touch
> is brought forcibly and pleasurably to poetry, and I was even sniffing the contents – very
> gratifying. I have heard parents say that the record delights their kids. It would be a good
> remedy in school literature courses. The poetry itself is well written, though not
> outstanding. The poems attend to the songs to be found in speech, as they tell of a young
> man finding his whole self – physical, emotional, moral. (Bowering "Lyrical Boom"
> A19)

Bowering's comments suggest that a poetry that explores the senses, typified in *bp*, is common

to the West Coast, where many of the poets in this chapter lived and practiced. While some of

the poems in *bp* may as Bowering suggests "tell of a young man finding his whole self" (A19),

the poems are a place within which the reader, too, can find their "physical, moral, self" (A19)—

through their own experience of the unconventional text. For example, Bowering's own

encounter provided him with pleasure, but also caused him to engage with the materiality of the

book in new ways—smelling it, for example. The search for new ways of interacting between

self and text, author and other, is part of the point as Nichol saw it. It is worth returning once

again to Nichol's mantra that defines his life-long poetic project as search for "as many entrances and exits as possible from the self (language/communications exits) in order to form as many entrances as possible for the other" who, he continues "is emerging as the necessary prerequisite for dialogues with the self that clarify the soul & heart and deepen the ability to love, I place myself there with them [. . .] who seek to reach themselves and the other thru the poem" ("statement" 18). The repetition of this mantra has strongly affiliated this concept solely with Nichol, but the project of opening the poem, language, and communication as a site of complex feeling are not just his project; it is, implicitly and explicitly, the project of many of the aforementioned poets, demonstrated by both their poetry and their communal engagements.

From the beginning, the project of concrete poetry was about the search for these openings—new pathways of communicating and traversing the border between emotional expression toward the less expressible realm of affect. In the poetry, one can see efforts to generate openings in works like Nichol's "Blues"—a poem that, in my reading, articulates the precarious nature of love as an affect used to mobilize communities. Similarly, McCaffery's *The Second Panel* mobilizes shock and disorientation to open the reader to new possibilities of communication beyond the strictures and logic of classical discourse. Similar efforts can be seen in the small press activities that concomitantly emerged with the development of visual concrete in Canada. For bissett and Clinton, *blewointment* began as a place where the new poetry they had been producing could be made public. Similarly, the efforts of Nichol and Aylward with *grOnk* and Ganglia began as an opening through which a Toronto audience could experience West Coast authors, like bissett, Clinton, Copithorne. Both of the magazines were founded upon principles of "mutual support" (Norris *Little Magazines* 144) and a "sense of community" (149). Each of these projects is, in some way, an alternative exploration of communication, a searching

for a way outside of conventional modes of linguistic communication—on the level of written word, existing publishing models, and the use of communication technologies. These poets, like McLuhan, recognized that the way these things get used has a profound impact on the shape of our physical and emotional lives, with material consequences. As McLuhan would suggest, media comes to define who we are. If we use those communication media as they are intended then we also ascribe to the hegemony of the electric age, permitting it to control our affects, emotions, and desires. Thus Canadian concrete poetry and its stimulation of small press activities can be described in terms of an alternative affective labour, that serves as an alternative to late stage capitalist marketplace. It is in their radical efforts as producers of cultural artifacts and alternative forms of cultural exchange that we see efforts to affect both the individual and their conception of their own emotional and physical lives, but also the systems that come to define their emotional and physical relationships to the material world.

Chapter 3: Sound Poetry

"To make sound is to participate in the original unconscious urge to shape within the voice"

– R. Murray Schafer (1984)

Introduction

While concrete poetry proliferated in Canada, thriving from the mid-1960s and well into the

1980s, the Language Revolution's project of liberating the word and mobilizing the complexity

of feeling that dwells in and outside of signification concomitantly metamorphosed into other

modes of radical practice. By 1966, the poets of the Language Revolution—namely bill bissett,

bpNichol, and David UU—began experimenting, as they did with the visual components, with

the constituent sonic elements of language and oral communication. In the context of Anglo-

phonic Canadian poetry in the 1960s, sound poetry grows out of concrete poetry as a

performance of the visual poem as though it were a score for composition. In their "Preface" to a

special 1984 sound poetry issue of *The Capilano Review*, Steven Ross Smith (then known as

Steven Smith) and Richard Truhlar trace the emergence of sound poetry in the Canadian context.

They write that for bissett sound poetry "was the realization that his visual, typographic

experimentations could be sound that led to his first attempts at isolating sound" (5). Similarly,

Nichol's foray into sound poetry "started with the realization about the syntactic permutational

play of his early concrete poetry" (5). They both, according to Truhlar and Smith, are largely

responsible for pushing sound poetry into the literary community.[47]

McLuhan's comparisons of the written and spoken word in *Understanding Media* (1964)

assist to elucidate Nichol's and bissett's respective turn toward the performative utterance of the

sound poem. For us, he highlights how sound became a necessary advancement of the Language

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[47] Portions of this chapter have previously appeared in my 2014 article published in *Forum* entitled "'the killing of speech': The Sonic Politics of the Four Horsemen." Selected portions have been adapted and re-shaped for this chapter.

Revolution's radical project to reconfigure and mobilize feelings to reimagine the ways in which

emotions and affects constitute daily social and political lives. McLuhan writes:

> Although phonetic writing separates and extends the visual power of words, it is
> comparatively crude and slow. There are not many ways of writing 'tonight,' but
> Stanislavsky used to ask his young actors to pronounce and stress it fifty different ways
> while the audience wrote down the different shades of feeling and meaning expressed.
> Many a page of prose and many a narrative has been devoted to expressing what was, in
> effect, a sob, a moan, a laugh, or a piercing scream. The written spells out in sequence
> what is quick and implicit in the spoken word" (82).

McLuhan's considerations here directly foreground the shift toward the oral presentation of

concrete poetry in Canada. If Canadian concrete poetry sought to directly reach out to the other,

to open the other's sense of language, communication, and feeling, then oral transmission,

according to McLuhan, is the more immediate and flexible means of doing this.[48]

As Canadian sound poetry evolved and gained some recognition as a literary practice it

maintained a complex relationship with its visual counterpart. Some performers like bissett

continued to use their concrete poems as scores for sound poetry. The ocular and oral versions of

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[48] Building on comments made by Steve McCaffery and Nichol, critic derek beaulieu has argued against the voicing of concrete poetry in readings and performances. Reflecting on his own concrete poetry practice, beaulieu states that his refusal to perform his work "is a means to complicate the exchange value of poetry. While 'value' & 'commodity' are never completely escaped, its transferal can be troubled by the removal of the verbal from the communication equation" (beaulieu "Afterword" 88). beaulieu's framing of concrete poetry specifically follows an anti-capitalist model wherein, for beaulieu (and arguably many of the poets of the Language Revolution), concrete poetry is a rejection of capitalist standardization of language—in essence, they produce art and poetry that exceeds conventional uses of language thereby resisting its easy absorption into the capitalist market place. The equation positioned by beaulieu's statement, however, is rather perplexing: concrete poetry transposed into sonic registers surely does not equate capitalist commodification. By no means, does the vocalization of a sound poem necessitate its conversion into capitalist standardization. The sound poem, even the sound poem performed as a reading of visual concrete, is partially characterized by spontaneity and improvisation—rarely is there a single, standardized performance. On the contrary, the vocalization of the visual poem actually further advances the radical project of the Language Revolution wherein it offers another contact zone of experience for the audience. If, as Massumi argues, "Affect as a whole then, is the virtual co-presence of potentials … [wherein] [h]aving more potentials available intensifies our life" (*Politics of Affect* 5) then sound poetry, like concrete poetry's expansion and reconfiguration of affective experience, is a similar manifestation of concrete poetry's goal but transposed onto sonic registers. Indeed, beaulieu is right to recognize capitalist standardization as an enemy. So, too, did the poets of the Language Revolution. However, the definitive rejection of the concrete poem in performance really only comes under threat of standardization when the sonic performance of this work enters the capitalist marketplace. I am not convinced that it ever really did.

bissett's poem "awake in the red desert," for example, effectively illustrates the ways he departs from and improvises alongside the visual version of his poetry, thus highlighting the open-ended nature of his work. For some poets, however, like the sound poetry group the Four Horsemen (Nichol, Steve McCaffery, Paul Dutton, and Rafael Barreto-Rivera) there was a desire to find more malleable modes of composition. As Nichol writes in the Introduction of *The Prose Tattoo,* the Four Horsemen "wanted to find a way to write down certain more complex pieces we had ideas for where, tho elements are improvised, other elements were fixed" (n. pag.). Pursuing similar desires, sound poets begin to take various and distinctive approaches to notation and the composition of the sound poem: grid-like composition structures became a staple for groups like the Four Horsemen, while scores for individual works by poets like Truhlar and Dutton "are often relatively minimal, suggesting little of their dynamic interpretation" (Smith "Unconscious Notation" 44). Smith notes, too, that there are also times when a score did not exist anywhere except "as a vibration in the Poet's imagination" (44). This indeed proved to be the case for duo Re: Sounding (Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie). In a 2002 interview with rob mclennan, Barbour recounts: "Stephen Scobie and I think in terms of jazz, improvising something different each time on the more purely sound pieces, and even on the ones that are all words (for two voices) finding ways to make each performance at least slightly different" ("Interview with Douglas Barbour" n. pag.). To this day, there is little consensus on the legitimacy and efficacy of notation and score in sound poetry, and how to interpret its relationship to the concrete poem.

The line between sound poem and visual concrete poem is effectively blurred. Reflecting upon this relationship, however, Nichol usefully comments on behalf of the Four Horsemen that

> Many of our grids & optophonetic scores can be read as secondary visual poems, visual poems that are by-products of group performance, much in the same way that many visual poems, originally intended for the eye, have generated secondary oral readings. Much of the reader's experience with visual poetry can be brought to these scores; in

addition, the reading of scores as visual poems can extend the reader's [s]ense of the possibilities of visual poetry in general: imaged sound can fertilize visual poetry in much the same way as visual conventions have stimulated recent performance art. We will be pleased if we have opened doors to further developments in visual poetry thru our performance work. (*The Prose Tattoo* n. pag.)[49]

While Nichol's comment invites an investigation of this relationship, it is crucial to remember

that in large part the sound poetry score "can be read as secondary visual poems, visual poems

that are by-products" (n. pag.) thus maintaining the primary importance of sound as an audience

and critic engages the work. This chapter will proceed with this in mind, but focus primarily on

the sonological significances of the sound poem rather than its inscriptive qualities. Doing

otherwise would neglect the truly radical and disruptive elements of sound poetry practice that

these poets strove to cultivate.

As indicated by the varying approaches to sound poem composition, there was no

doctrine for a sound poet, nor was there one manifesto that declared and determined the aesthetic

and political behaviours of those who explored the practice. That being said, there were many

manifesto-like statements, and many of which (maybe all) are connected to notions of feeling as

emotion or affect. Sound poetry, perhaps more than concrete, was the Language Revolution's

most widely-lauded and recognizable mode among international literary communities. Both in

groups and as solo performers, Canadian sound poets performed their works not only across

Canada but at international readings, festivals, conferences, and symposiums as distinguished

leaders in the field of an orally- and aurally-based poetics, gaining recognition that few poets of

the Language Revolution were afforded for their page-based works. Like visual concrete, there

seems to be no single catalyst for the activity that reverberated throughout two of Canada's

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[49] Optophonetics, a type of notation developed by Dada artist Raoul Hausmann, "used typographic variations in size to indicate proportionate variations in pitch and volume. "Optphonetics," as McCaffery explains, "is an open code, of low denotation that nevertheless permits a wide range of imaginative interpretation. It is in current use today [1978] with many text-sound composers" (*Sound Poetry* 8)

predominantly English-literary metropolises–Vancouver and Toronto. The first practitioners were largely unaware of sonic experiments with language both historically and happening elsewhere. Owen Sound notes in their booklet for album *Meaford Tank Range* (1977) that "Although sound poetry began fifty years earlier with the Dada movement, the literature and theory of sound poetry today [in 1977] is scant. The group had to makes its own discoveries" (n. pag.). Though there is no single and decisive point of genesis for sound poetry, it did not prohibit Canadian poets from developing their own unique genus of sound poetics, transforming Canada into a vital zone of radical sonological experimentation.

The relationship between sound and poetry has been, according to some scholars, regretfully under-examined. In *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound,* Marjorie Perloff suggests that "however central the sound dimension is to any and all poetry, no other poetic feature is currently as neglected" (1). Perloff's claim possesses an especially poignant resonance in a Canadian context since there are few academic studies that gather activities related to the topic, and only a few critical examinations of Canadian sound practitioners, aside from those on Nichol, bissett, and the collaborative work of the Four Horsemen exist. And yet, sound poetry has been one of Canada's most recognized avant-gardes. In addition to their range of international appearances, Canadian sound poets released their sound works on record labels like Allied Record Corporation (which also released albums by the Nihilist Spasm Band), were featured in films that also included such celebrated performers as Tom Waits, Allen Ginsberg, and Anne Waldman, and toured across the country and internationally in places including England and the United States. So how do we explain these critical lacunae? Perhaps Steve McCaffery has misled critics when he declares that "the very attempt to write a history of sound poetry is a doomed activity from the very outset" (6), a statement he un-ironically positions at

the outset of his own history of sound poetry in *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue* (1969), thus

discouraging critics from pursuing a task he has already completed. More likely, though, this

critical lacuna can be explained by a problem of the definition of sound poetry, and the ways in

which it mutates according to geographical and temporal location.

Like concrete poetry, sound poetry is difficult to precisely define due to the plethora of

possible approaches to the genre. Stephen Scobie (one half of the sound poetry duo Re:

Sounding) points out that sound poetry does not "[deal] with sound *per se* but with sound *as an*

aspect of language" and that its practitioners "are called, properly, poets" (*What History Teaches*

56). Put differently, Richard Kostelanetz identifies sound poetry as "language whose principal

means of coherence is sound, rather than syntax or semantics" (Kostelanetz "Text-Sound Art"

61). The sound poem—unlike the lyric poem—is created by consciously exploring and

manipulating the sonic aspects of linguistic and vocal expression to create new sonic poetic

compositions with less concern for semantic meaning—in this way, sound poetry already seems

to be a way out of the codification of language. Sound poets do this in a variety of ways,

sometimes using recognizable words to communicate semantic meaning or, as in other instances,

to change, extend, obliterate, or accentuate its meaning by repeating or chanting the words

(Scobie 56). Sound poets, too, explore a range of non-language sounds including breath,

laughter, bodily noises, which, when employed in the context of poetry, effectively challenge the

limits of sense, meaning, and communication. I suggest, however, and this is a point I illustrate

throughout this chapter, that the aim of sound poetry—especially in the Canadian context—is not

to simply extend the possibilities of expression in language and communication; rather, one of

the core tenets of its practice is to extend the complexities of feeling outside of conventional and

codified modes of expression. Surprise, humour, and shock are some examples of feelings that

can be quantified in language, which also open the audience and poet beyond that range of

feeling and sensation. This is one part of their radical poetic program that intervenes into, and

disrupts, the standardized phenomenon of proscriptive human life as the conditions of

postmodernity arrived.

Coupled with its elusive definition, critics face a unique challenge when assessing

Canadian sound poetry since few available recordings of sound poetry (both live and studio

performances) exist. The Four Horsemen, for example, have publicly issued four recordings:

CaNADAda (1972), *Live in the West* (1977), *Bootleg* (1981), and *2 Nights (1988)*, and were

featured in Ron Mann's film, *Poetry in Motion* (1982), which exemplifies some of their essential

qualities but is inconsistent with reports of typical Four Horsemen events.[50] The Four Horsemen,

especially McCaffery and Nichol, have denigrated the recording, and privileged the live event as

the most effective way of experiencing sound poetry. The recording—a term, here, that includes

records, tapes, scores, and transcriptions—according to McCaffery produces the problem of

"schizophonia," a term originally coined by Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer, which

identifies "the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic reproduction" (*Soundscape*

273). Nichol highlights the stakes of this problem in the "Introduction" to *The Prose Tattoo*

(1983); he writes, "phonograph recordings and tapes run this risk [of falsifying their group

identity], as they remove the living performers from the audience's presence, and freeze what

should be an ongoing process" (n. pag.). For sound poets like Nichol and McCaffery the sound

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[50] Regarding this inconsistency: The Four Horsemen often eschewed the prospect of being videotaped or recorded, perceiving it to be a form of transcription that they sought to circumvent. The Four Horsemen privileged the live, embodied event over recording. In the video recording the group is performing in front of three microphones. Most writing on The Four Horsemen explicitly notes that they avoided the use of electro-acoustic aids. Nichol appears to be acting as conductor. In an account of the group's praxis, James Saunders and Mark Prejsnar note "no one really is the leader/composer" (56). I assume that the group compromised their praxis in these ways for the sake of capturing a high-quality sound/video recording for a tight timeslot.

poem is intricately bound up with notions of subjectivity—concepts that are also important to this chapter. To clarify, I look toward Hardt and Negri's consideration of language and subjectivity; they write, "Language, as it communicates, produces commodities but moreover creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them" (33). Thus, the sound poem is a time-based experience that aspires for the liberation of the individual, and only has the capacity to approach that goal (however unrealistic) in its most intensive mode: performance. As such, the sound poem is an experiential moment that reconfigures subjectivation for a fleeting moment. Social politics aside, these kinds of decisions regarding documentation and dissemination are common in Canadian sound poetry of the period and contribute to the difficulty in critically assessing their work.

An equally challenging obstacle is the problem that, in some instances, recordings of sound poems from this period simply do not exist. This is true in the case of Gerry Shikatani, who "has been performing sound poetry since the 1970s, when he was active in the Kontakte writers-in-performance series in Toronto that included bpNichol and the Four Horsemen and Owen Sound" (Zolf "Travailing" 8). One of the only "existing documentations of Shikatani's sound work," which is unfortunately outside the temporal parameters of this study, "is a collaboration he did with filmmaker Philip Hoffman in 1990s" (Zolf "Travailing" 8).[51] This same problem is true for Re: Sounding, whose only publicly available recordings are contained on *Carnivocal* (1999). John Havelda, writing about the Four Horsemen, has identified a similar complication: the very limited availability of existing recordings. According to Havelda, the Four Horsemen's *Bootleg* received an incredibly limited production run of 35 copies because "McCaffery felt it misrepresented the group's performances" ("Against Preconditioning" 102).

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[51] *Carnivocal,* a compact disc anthology of Canadian sound poetry, also contains one of few audio recordings of Shikitani's work; however, that recording was released in 1999, also outside of timeframe.

Even in the case of a group like Owen Sound, who released four recordings, or bissett, who continues to release recordings of his sound poetry and lyric poetry today, these works are difficult to acquire, and usually are only available through rare book and audio dealers (often expensive), private channels, or in some rare cases, academic libraries and archives. I am suggesting, then, that criticism of Canadian sound poetry suffers, in part, due to problems of materiality and accessibility: these recordings only exist in libraries, private collections. Some material can be found on online archives PennSound and UbuWeb, but one must be careful of the latter forums since some of these recordings can be low-quality "rips" or have been accidentally mislabeled by their uploader (not to mention that these resources are only available as long as institutions are willing to host them).

Critics, then, have, perhaps, been deterred by the material conditions of Canadian sound poetry, or may have appropriately demonstrated an awareness that audio and video recordings might lead to a misrepresentation of their work. However, I proceed from a slightly different perspective. McCaffery's claim that it is necessary for an audience to experience the live performance is valid, but perhaps only for certain sound poets. As evidenced by Underwhich's catalogue of sound poetry cassette tapes, recorded audio was an acceptable medium for some poets; thus the available recordings are satisfactory representations of these sound poets' performances. McCaffery, for example, restricted *Bootleg* for being a misrepresentation, but not the other Horsemen recordings. By this logic, I understand the available recordings to be suitable representations of the group's performances. Going forward, I acknowledge here that engagement with Canadian sound poetry recordings possesses a plethora of complexities, and in dealing with these works, I am engaging, at times, with a quasi-form of their work: the quasi-sound poetry event.

Scholars such as Scobie, McCaffery (in his role as critic), Gregory Betts, Caroline Bayard, and Frank Davey are among the few literary critics who have written on the Canadian sound poetry that is relevant to this study. Much of this criticism discusses Dada, the visual and graphic qualities of sound poetry scores, and linguistic deconstruction. The lack of deep critical engagement with the actual sounds of sound poetry highlights a rather crucial problem with criticism which corresponds to the interdisciplinary nature of sound poetry: a poetic that consciously blurs the borders between poem, performance, song, noise, mantra, prayer, and child-like utterances. How then should one engage it? Furthermore, when examining a sound poem, the typical toolbox of the literary critic becomes less useful—especially because literary criticism is contingent upon reading/seeing. In poetic discourse, devices like rhythm, meter, and repetition are applicable but their meanings need to be transformed or expanded in order to resonate with the sound poem in a significant way. In other cases, a whole new vocabulary must be deployed to develop a critical taxonomy within which the sounds of sound poetry can be understood. In this way, sound poetry works against the possibility of critical commentary, especially commentaries posed by the literary critic. That being said, what I am identifying here as a problem for critics reveals itself to be one of sound poetry's strengths as a radical poetic: sound poetry disrupts academic discourse and conventional critical approaches to literature. Sound poetry is a site of resistance to conventional scholarship that codifies a poem and becomes a catalyst for the transformation of literary criticism, even if it is slight.

To develop this new academic rigour, this chapter, in part, swerves from conventional modes of literary criticism to, as best as I can, avoid the problem posed by the necessary academic writings of Bayard, Davey, and Betts. Their criticism might be recognized by sound theorist Steve Goodman as a critical circumscription, symptomatic of what he refers to as

"linguistic imperialism," which "subordinates the sonic to semiotic registers" (82). I locate my own study along a similar vector of philosophical discontent, drawing on theorizations of vocality and possibilities of expression beyond logocentricism. In particular, I draw upon theorizations and manifestos of voice, sound, and materialism developed by McCaffery, Nichol, Schafer, Goodman, and Adriana Cavarero, whom I find useful in articulating the affective potentialities of sound poetry and its radical ambition for material socio-political intervention within the conditions of the electric age.

I contend that sound poetry—as another crucial aspect of the Language Revolution—was sonically-based poetic grounded in feeling. The sound poetry performance and recording are radical sites of resistance to the conditions of postmodernity with its methods of control, its standardizing capacities, and its co-optation of human life. For the Canadian sound poets, language, along with its sonic material components, is an integral part and extension of the body and mind; it is through language's vibrations that we define and redefine our emotional, physical, and intellectual selves. Canadian sound poetry, then, is the audible manipulation and remanipulation of language and its sonic elements to mobilize, recalibrate, and expand feeling for the purposes of intervening into the totalizing effects of postmodernity. Shattering linguistic homogenization is the radical act of decodifying thoughts and feelings—in doing so, sound poetry is intended to liberate the individual from the control mechanisms of postmodernity and its shaping of the individual. Though not every listener and audience member that's situated within the folds of a sonic event will respond to the poem in the same way, it serves as an alternative space wherein auditory communication is unlike that of hearing the radio (with its clear transmission of sound) nor is it likened to listening to the rhythm of a well-constructed and grammatically correct speech. In large part, the sound poetry event may be a way to experience,

within a designated zone, the possibilities of polyvocal expression and a multiplicity of voices, wherein affect is foregrounded instead of comprehensible, semantic transmission of emotional content. Liberated within the zone of the sonic poetic event (both in real life and the recording), these individuals are able to vibrate differently, to experience new frequencies, but most importantly—even if each person experiences the sound event differently—they are offered an affective grounding in sound which becomes an alternative basis for collective, communal experience contra the homogenization.

From here I advance a necessary history of sound poetry (especially as it relates to the Canadian context), followed by the theoretical framework that underpins my understanding of sound especially as an affective sonic practice. I will then turn to the question of the Canadian context itself wherein I will map the emergence of sound poetry in Canada, and the various ways this practice manifested in Vancouver, Toronto, and Ottawa and its various pathways into international contexts—tours, festival features, conferences, symposiums, and other events. To this end, I seek to develop a narrative and to identify those who have made significant contributions to its development—solo artists like bissett, UU, Nichol, Penn Kemp, and Gerry Shikatani as well as collaborative efforts like those made by The Four Horsemen, Owen Sound (Michael Dean, David Penhale, Steven Ross Smith, Richard Truhlar), Re: Sounding (Stephen Scobie and Douglas Barbour), and First Draft (Susan McMaster, Andrew McClure, and Colin Morton). With this context in mind, I seek to effectively capture the heterogeneous (albeit predominantly white and male) spirit of sound poetry that spans the English-Canadian context, and develop an acute sense of how sound poetry proliferated in Canada.[52] By listening to the

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[52] Canadian women poets of the time have also recognized—as Copithorne does in the context of concrete poetry—the problem of sound poetry as a male-dominated practice. Gadd reflects upon this in the context of literary sound communities on the west coast: "we were trying to do our own little band . . . but basically the guys saw the women,

various recordings produced by these poets and collectives, the penultimate section examines a number of works by poets affiliated with the movement. In my analysis, I pay particular attention to works that resonate with the affective discourse I hope to embed within this discussion of Canadian sound poetry. I analyze how their performative work brings emotions, affects, and intensities to the forefront instead of linguistically quantifiable communication. The final section will analyze the material and corporeal effects of these affective works by looking at a few print outlets such as *Only Paper Today*, *New York Times*, and *The Globe and Mail* within which reactions and feelings about the works have been located.

Canadian Sound Poetry Within a Global and Historical Context

Sound poetry is distinguished from other, more conventional, modes of poetry in significant ways. The lyric poem, for example, primarily relies upon its transmission of meaningful semantic or paratactic content to accumulate signification—i.e. the wisdom, insight, or argument of a poem. Arguments are frequently made about the inseparability of content from form (which includes some sonic features such as rhyme and meter); however, the sound of a poem is often relegated to a substratum of literary significance. Charles Bernstein identifies this problem when he recognizes the popular "presumption that the text of a poem—the written document—is primary and the recitation or performance of a poem by the poet is secondary and fundamentally inconsequential" (*Close Listening* 8). In perhaps a more generous comment, Bruce Andrews sympathetically suggests that sound in poetry "is traditionally domesticated in the melodiousness and semantic underlining of representational writing (grounded in the lyric subject's voice or

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as you know, 'whose chick are you?' So if you didn't sort of belong to somebody you were actually sort of invisible" (Gadd n. pag.). Gadd, along with two other women, attempted to start a band called The New Moon Pythian Sistrem. Little documentation on the band seems to exist and, sadly, Gadd has not responded to emails with a request to discuss her work.

imagist observation)" ("Praxis" 73). Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, but as both Bernstein and Andrews recognize, reading poetry is commonly a search for meaning rather than for the sonic sensations that the performance of language and its sound may offer.

Sound poetry confronts this problem, staging a return to poetry as a genre of public performance, and highlighting the poem's oral and aural culture within which it is historically rooted. It does so by creatively utilizing the audible dimensions of language and vocalization and rejecting preferences for semantics and conventional forms of communicative meaning-making. Like visual concrete, sound poetry is an open-form that welcomes experimentation with orality and aurality. To discuss the various ways this occurs, I have repurposed a taxonomy imposed by Mladen Dolar in his book *The Voice and Nothing More* (2006). The first of three taxonomical designations is "linguistic soundings," a category which is comprised of components like words and sentences as well as morphemes (a grammatical element including prefixes, suffixes, prepositions, or conjunctions) and phonemes (a unit of sound in language that cannot be anatomized into smaller units) that create speech. The other two equally important taxonomical designations are "prelinguistic and postlinguistic sounds," such as coughs or hiccups (in the former) and abstract forms of song and chant, often devoid of semantic content (in the latter). Both pre- and post-linguistic sounds are outside of speech but not necessarily outside of communication. These sounds, when vocalized, can communicate meanings and feelings that exceed standardized modes of linguistic communication—primarily through the expression or connotation of emotional content. The phoneme "grrrr," for example, typically connotes aggression or anger. We hear dogs make this sound, typically, when they seek to protect themselves or someone else. Similarly, postlinguistic sounds like abstracted forms of chant, for example, continue to express interpretable, emotional content based on key—a minor key

connotes sadness while a major key typically connotes contentedness.[53] In this way, I concur; I find Dolar's argument partly convincing. Certain non-linguistic sounds are indeed codified by human comprehension; however, this is not always the case. There are many instances, especially in sound poetry, wherein the sounds made by poets are not interpreted into logos and exceeds a codified meaning.

It is important to note, too, that the linguistics of the voice are also comprised of elements such as intonation, accent, volume, and timbre. Sound poets typically explore this range of soundings, creating dynamic and complex performances that refuse conventional communicative transmission. These terms are important to the following discussion for a few reasons. First, these terms are useful to discussing sound poetry in itself, a mode of poetic output that typically exceeds conventional scholarly discourse. Literary studies assesses the visual text and, typically, meaning conveyed in semantics, thus posing a challenge for literary scholars to critically engage the sonic registers of literature (as outlined earlier). Second, situating the terminology in this way foregrounds Canadian sound poetry's aversion to conventional semantic communication and highlights how, in their nonconventional use of linguistic elements, affect is so deeply integral to the expressive work of Canadian sound poets of the time. By circumventing semantic and conventional modes of communication (poetic and non-poetic), sound poetry is a creative mode

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[53] Here I use the same terminology as Dolar in his book *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006); however, my analysis of sound poetry advances discretely from his argument. To my understanding, Dolar argues for a logocentric conception of the voice wherein the voice always signifies. My take on this sidesteps the logocentricity of his argument to suggest that vocal sounding does not always correspond to quantifiable language. Avoiding what is distinctively quantifiable language is precisely the goal of the poets of the Language Revolution. After all, Nichol reminds us that "language means communication and that communication does not just mean language" ("Statement" Nichol). Thus, these types of sound might be reflective of linguistic content, but do not necessarily correspond one-to-one in language.

wherein the complexities of affect can be expressed most expansively without being circumscribed by linguistic standardization.[54]

According to McCaffery, sound poetry has advanced in three distinctive phases. The first-phase is the earliest and longest stretching period, encompassing ancient and popular oral forms of communication, song, chant, and ritual. McCaffery refers to this period as the "paleotechnic era" of sound poetry ("Voice in Extremis" 163), which is characterized by "the many instances of chant structures and incantation, of syllabic mouthings and deliberate lexical distortions" as well as the "folkloric strata manifesting in language games: the nonsense of syllabary of nursery rhymes, mnemonic counting aids, whisper games, skipping chants, mouth music and folk song refrains" (163). This eventually led to the second phase, which comprised of a number of mainly modernist artists and poets (who actively and creatively explored the non-semantic and sonic material properties of language as their core unit of composition like the Zurich Dadaists as well as the Russian and Italian Futurists). The third phase is contemporary to McCaffery and other Canadian practitioners with whom they would at times share the stage. This phase begins in the 1950s and signals a shift, according to McCaffery, in the development of sound poetry, characterized by a stark division regarding the role technology plays in the composition and performance of sound poetry: those who extend the capacities of the body through recordings, amplification, and other electro-sonic-manipulations and those who actively reject them, preferring instead to challenge the limitations and rhythms of the body without

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[54] As with all borderblur poetry there comes a problem of distinguishing the generic boundaries that this dissertation installs as part of its organizational apparatus. For this chapter, there is the blurry line between a pure form of vocalic sound poetry and then the collaborations these poets shared with musicians thereby embedding the human voice within ecologies of non-human instrumentation. Though the latter are important, and surely shaped sound poetry to some extent, these collaborations have been mostly left out because they may be more effectively analyzed as music. Richard Truhlar's Tekst, for example, invokes literariness in their name (which plays on "text"); however, it is often referred to as an "electroacoustic chamber music ensemble" and not a sound poetry group (Truhlar n. pag.).

assistance. The emergence of this third phase, and the divergent paths its practitioners take regarding the application of sonic technological advances, is partly explained by the accessibility of new technologies. Much in the same way that print technology became more accessible in the 1960s, so too did audio technology like the cassette tape in the 1980s. The proliferation of these technologies in large part offered an access point to which sound poets could respond with their own social and political orientations.

As one of the key nodes that comprised the vibrant poetics of the Language Revolution, sound poetry in Canada emerged with a degree of complexity akin to concrete poetry. In Canada, sound poetry began as a way to vocalize and perform the concrete poetry that was being produced by poets at the time. As Nichol notes in his introduction to *The Prose Tattoo* (1983), "A great deal of contemporary concrete poetry has been created primarily for the eye, but readers have found ways to vocalize it, converting into sound what was originally intended as image" (n. pag.). In part, the transposition from page to reading performance is simply a natural progression for these poets. In addition to producing works on the page, many published poets read their work, despite its seeming to be a "secondary and fundamentally inconsequential" function (Bernstein 8).

McCaffery argues that in Canada "things start not with Bill Bissett or bpNichol, but with Montreal Automatiste Claude Gauvreau" (*Sound Poetry* 16), who, along with his peers like Thérèse Renaud, explored an extension of European Surrealism entitled "Automatisme" or "automatic writing," a mode of writing that enables a person to produce written words without any intentional meaning to the language. Instead, words rise from the subconscious or from a spiritual or supernatural source. Gauvreau's writing offers one of the most extreme examples of this type of work. A work like "Trustful Fatigue and Reality," for example, is a short,

characterless, set-less play consisting almost entirely of non-sense sounds with a word-like quality, comparable to the sound poetry of Dada poet Hugo Ball. McCaffery's point very well may be valid in a formal sense, and is an important one because it acknowledges the significance of the oft-overlooked Quebecois literary avant-garde. However, McCaffery's positioning of sound poetry in Canada, in *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue*, problematically neglects the first phase of sound poetry and effectively effaces the presence of non-white, Indigenous cultures from this history. McCaffery's delineation of sound poetry in Canada does not account for the presence of a first wave, thereby occluding oral cultures of Indigenous populations.

In an international context, American poet, critic, and editor Jerome Rothenberg has worked extensively on the poetries that comprise a first wave of sound poetry, culminating in his 1968 anthology *Technicians of the Sacred,* which serves as a useful preliminary source-text of archaic, indigenous, and non-western poetries from around the globe in translation. Rothenberg's anthology collects poetry from North American, African, Asian, and Oceanic cultures among others. As he puts it in 1984, the anthology serves as a response to the "inherited view" that the "idea of poetry, as developed in the West, was sufficient for the total telling" ("Preface" xvii). On the one hand, I find it necessary to resist the critical urge to subsume these poetries under the heading of "sound poetry" to avoid the problem of categorically determining and defining poetry from cultures that are temporally, culturally, and geographically dislocated from my own study. On the other hand, Rothenberg's anthology of non-Western poetries with many non-White contributors was a timely publication and the poetry contained within it was influential for studies of sound poetry in the 1960s through to the 1980s. The anthology was originally published in 1968 and, as Rothenberg points out, resonated with "the sixties maelstrom." It "confronted an audience that was already waiting for it, often with more preconceptions about

the 'tribal' or the 'oral'" ("Preface" xvii). From Rothenberg's understanding of non-western

"Poetry," we see that it "appeared not as a luxury but as a true necessity: not a small corner of

the world for those who lived it but equal to the world itself" ("Preface" xvii), and this is a

fundamental belief that many of the poets of that generation shared.

Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred* assists in reminding us of the necessary

importance of acknowledging Indigenous cultures in Canada, and their influence on the

development of sound poetry, especially chant, song, and prayer. The influence of Indigenous,

non-urban, and tribal cultures influenced theoretical writings at the time. McLuhan, for example,

describes the conditions of the emergent electric age using similar metaphors like his phrase

"global village," which identifies with pre-industrial communal formations. More pointedly,

bissett's identity as a poet is frequently linked to concepts of Indigeneity. For example, he is

frequently referred to as a shaman by his peers, a title more appropriately bestowed upon healers

and visionaries in tribal communities. bissett's sound poetry is often thought to emulate

Indigenous forms, employing chant and the percussive hand-shaker as key components of his

performances. Scobie points out in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* that "the oral

is important, as his [bissett's] readings demonstrate—especially the chants, based on Native

chanting as much as on the tradition of sound poetry, and conveying a mesmeric, meditative

effect that provides one of the foundations of his vision" (n. pag.). This designation is likely a

corollary of Jack Kerouac's misidentification of bissett as a "little Indian boy" in *The Paris

Review* (Summer 1968). bissett does not claim an indigenous heritage, but his adoption of chant

is very clearly a form of cultural appropriation. While his proclivity toward Indigenous poetic

practices is not malicious, that does not make his borrowing any less problematic. bissett's

oversight, in this case, is in direct conflict with his anticolonial attitude and this reveals a larger

issue regarding assumptions of universality embedded within some aspects of the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[55]

While tracing the similarities between bissett's sound poetry and Indigenous song and chant is one way of examining the development of his practice, it is equally useful to consider the influence Gertrude Stein has had on his sound poetry and the sound poetry of his peers, since chant is a kind of repetition—a key element of Stein's work. Carl Peters has pointed out that Stein "is, without question, the single-most important influence on the work of bill bissett and bpNichol—themselves the two most important and innovative Canadian avant-garde poets" (71). Noteworthy, too, McCaffery has also written homages to Stein such as his *Every Way Oakly* (1976/2008). In agreement with this statement, bissett admits that Stein "was an important person for me" and carries onto describe her work:

> 'Stanzas on Meditation' is the first work I experienced by Gertrude Stein. That's where she started to sit up at night to see what would come through her and she actually saw it as a kind of automatic writing, not too far from the area of spiritualism. . . . She was looking for language to come through her in a way so that she could just let it happen. So that words could be in a sense things, and one could simultaneously experience the 'not-thingness' of the word. So that they would be like colours for the painter. (qtd. in Jirgens, originally in an audio-taped interview, Oct. 1986)

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[55] In the conclusion to this study, I address this issue again to assess the Language Revolution's problematic relationship to race. There, I suggest that the lack of sensitivity to racial issues to be a failure of the movement. For now, I will note that bissett's identity—especially as it relates to images and tropes of Indigeneity and colonialism— is much more fluid and complex than some writers like Kerouac have identified. Maxine Gadd, for example, credits bissett for influencing her poetry and the incorporation of both cowboy *and* Indian imagery into the titles of her work: this is "The influence of bill bissett," she says to Daphne Marlatt, "And the attempt to get the hell out of being just a weak, miserable, near-sighted, undernourished, physically rundown, feeble city intellectual. Just a fantasy, you know, to be someone sexual and primitive, glorious and well-decorated, lots of fun, good singer" (*Lost Language* 179). Considering Gadd's comment here, it is important to recall Terry Goldie's argument in his *Fear And Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (1989): "the signifier, the image here presented, does not lead back to the implied signified, the racial group usually termed Indian or Ameridian, but rather to other images . . . the referent has little purpose in the equation" (3-4) thus when critics identify bissett's poetry as being aligned with tropes of Indigeneity they are applying tropes which, as Goldie suggests, have little to do with actual Indigenous cultures, and that have also been predominantly developed by white writers. As far as I know, there have been no criticisms of bissett from Indigenous critics or artists.

bissett's characterization of Stein, in this instance, also resonates with the way other critics have characterized bissett's spiritual or shamanic elements, access to otherworldly planes of human existence. Stein, of course, was influential for a number of other poets, like McCaffery and Nichol, the latter of whom wrote extensively on Stein.[56] In addition to sharing a similar treatment of language, bissett's and Nichol's sound poetries have been influenced by Stein's writing, particularly her use of repetition, prominently featured in a work like *Geography and Plays* (1922) and *The Making of Americans* (1925). Repetition, as Peters points out,

> is insistence, and insistence is emphasis. Each repetition is necessarily the same, and also remarkably different . . . In each case, it makes the reader backtrack and read the same word or phrase differently than the way they read it the first time" This intentional 'double-take' that her repetitions impose on the reader again and again is in fact one of the most important hallmarks of her 'style.' (*Textual Vishyuns* 91)

He later points out that "Repetition also, as insistence, dissolves the 'standardized' image and sound of words" (98). Furthermore, it is worth noting McLuhan's description of Konstantin Stanislavsky's exercises with his students that hinge on oral repetition as an exercise of exploring the affective possibility of a single word or phrase. Stein's inclination toward repetition approaches a similar mode of accessing affect. In repetition, the word as a unit begins to break down into phonemes, the word sonically warps, creating new sounds, and generating new communicative and affective possibilities for language and its constituent elements. Though not a sound poet, Stein's writing and her interest in sound parallels a variety of other Modernist avant-garde poetries that proliferated around the same time. These poets would be identified as part of McCaffery's second-wave of sound poetry, which he suggests was comprised of a number of movements in the European avant-garde that were active between 1875–1928. These are artists and poets who actively and creatively explored the non-semantic and sonic material

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[56] See McCaffery's 1976 *Every Way Oakly*, a homolinguistic translation of *Tender Buttons* and Nichol's essay "some beginning writings on Gertrude Stein's Theories of Personality" in *Meanwhile* (2002). Ed. Roy Miki.

properties of language as their core unit of composition. This phase of sound poetry is found

predominantly in the poetry of Russian and Italian Futurisms, and Zurich Dada.[57]

Though the latter of the three is certainly the most important to the development of my

own study, Russian Futurism must be acknowledged. In their manifesto "The Word as Such,"

Russian Futurists V. Khlebnikov and A. Kruchenykh focus on language as an object itself,

veering away from ideas of it as a referential signing system: "We think rather that language

must be first of all language" ("from *The Word as Such*" 61). Kruchenykh's call for a liberated

language emphasizes the individual's role in renaming objects in the world, rendering previous

signifiers defunct. In doing so, individual expression is freed. Kruchenykh's example (bear in

mind this is in translation): "I call the lily, 'euy'—the original purity is established"

("Declaration of the Word As Such" 67). In the process of renaming objects in the world he

emphasizes the imperative of attending to sound: "It is better to replace a word with one close in

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[57] As a distinctive strain of avant-garde with notable explorations of sound in language as poetry, Italian Futurism has proven to be the least influential in the Canadian context. However, as one node in the global sonological constellation, I will briefly acknowledge it here: The poetic concept of Parole-in-Liberta ("words-in-freedom")—") — designed by Italian Futurist F.T. Marinetti—, with its visual qualities outlined in the previous chapter — was not solely an ocular-centric poetic that exploded syntactic structures thereby liberating language from the linearity of the page. It was in fact, also, an attempt to unbind the sonic forces of language itself. The work produced under the banner of Italian Futurism was not simply about capturing the velocity and mechanization of the early twentieth century, but also the sounds of the arriving modernity: "the swirling propeller told me," writes Marinetti, acknowledging an orality in machines, to reject the strictures of writing and in turn speech. The sonic dimension of this work is highlighted by the work itself in various ways. As McCaffery points out, in "performance Marinetti laid heavy stress upon onomatopoeiac structures" (7). There is, however, an aural dimension to the concept. "Parole-in-Liberta," is also referred to as "wireless imagination" by Marinetti, and this title is indicative of a shift away from corporeality and materiality—an imagination liberated from the page and body and, in effect, a detached language. Marinetti's description also corresponds to the rise of a sonic communication technology: the radio. As a source of inspiration for Futurist works, the radio highlights aurality, transmitting the data of language in a way that exceeds the tactility of the book, or the visual experiences of reading thus providing the illusion of disembodiment and the dematerialization of language. This detachment of language interests Marinetti, who writes, "That hand that writes seems to separate from the body and freely leave far behind the brain, which, having itself in some way become detached from the body and airborne, looks down from on high with terrible lucidity upon unforeseen phrases" (Marinetti "Response to Objections" 20). For Marinetti, then, the concept of liberated words in the aural context signifies the data-fication of language, the conversion of language into a force or an energy that guides the audience toward the unforeseen —the future—which for the Futurists is fast, violent, but also, and most important the sound of modernity.

sound than with one close in meaning (bast-cast-ghast)" (67-8), suggesting that transrational language as a kind of ludic mode of poetic translation for objects is more oral/aural rather than graphic. In 1917, Khlebnikov and Krunchenykh along with David Burliuk and Vladimir Mayakovsky, wrote another manifesto entitled "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," another cry from the Russian Futurists to declare their resistance to the state of art, a commitment to inventive uses of language, and an investment in alternative communal formations. On the latter point, they demand poets to ensure that they "stand on the rock of the word 'we' amidst the sea of boos and outrage" (n. pag.). While Canadian sound poets are directed by divergent aesthetic and political programs—especially on the commitment to technology—the Four Horsemen profess some interest in the work of at least one Futurist, the manifesto's co-author Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose last name is used as the title of one recording on their album *Live in the West*. The Four Horsemen and the Russia Futurists are aligned, not by their socio-political disposition (for the Futurists were notoriously aggressive and prone to conflict), but by their commitment to novelty in art and writing. More importantly, though, especially in the case of the Four Horsemen, sound poets share a commitment to providing alternative modes of communal belonging. Like the Futurists, Canadian sound poets stood upon the "rock of the word 'we'" (n. pag.), from which they resisted tumultuous social and political pressures, hence the privileging of the live performance over other forms of experience.

As McCaffery notes, "It can be safely said that the sonological advances of the futurists have been unfairly eclipsed by the historical prominence of the Dada sound poets" (*Sound Poetry Catalogue* 8); however, Zurich Dadaism was evidently the most important node of European avant-garde sound poetry for the Canadian context, especially Ball, to whom Nichol pays homage in sound poems such as "Dada Lama," and in the dedication on the Four Horsemen's

first recording *CaNADAda*. Ball is often credited for inventing the idea of sound poetry, which

he termed "Lautgedichte" ("sound poem"). In 1916, in a diary entry, Ball describes the practice

of sound poetry: "I have invented a new genre of poems, 'Verse ohne Werte' [poems without

words] or Lautgedichte [sound poems], in which the balance of the vowels is weighted and

distributed solely according to the values of the beginning sequence" (Ball *Flight Out of Time*

70). Sound poetry for Ball began as a response to popular and conventional uses of language for

clear, communicative purposes: "In these phonetic poems we totally renounce the language that

journalism has abused and corrupted. We must return to the innermost alchemy of the word, we

must even give up the word too, to keep for poetry its last and holiest refuge" (71). Thus,

formally begins sound poetry as a recognizable literary practice. Ball's "gadji beri bimba," for

example, is a quintessential figuration of his type of sound poetry:

> gadji beri bimba
> glandridi lauli lonni cadori
> gadjama bim beri glassala
> glandridi glassala tuffm i zimbrabim
> blasssa galassasa tuffm i zimbrabim (70)

The poem, as Scobie points out, consists entirely of "invented words with no assignable meaning

in any recognizable language," but also that "many of these words are clearly onomatopoeic"

since the poems received titles that are "of a referential subject matter." For example, Ball's

sound poems—though usually devoid of recognizable words in the poems themselves—usually

bear titles that reference actual subject matter such as his poem "Seepferdchen und Flugfische"

(1916), a title that roughly translates to "Seahorses and Flying Fish." Scobie's reading of the

poem highlights second phase sound poetry's relationship to language wherein the language

necessarily guides the audience's interpretation of the poem.

Scobie's analysis remains centred on the linguistic aspects of sound poetry. However, Ball's sound poetry is also an affective sonic nexus at which point poetry, sound, and sensory experience intersect in profound ways. Like Dadaism's experiments with typography, one of the key tenets of Dada sound poetry, too, works to mobilize shock. Their sound poetry was intended to shock its audience, consisting of primal and, at times, aggressive sounding non-sense vocalizations. Ball's performances and his explorations of poetry in sound, however, could be more accurately described in terms of the production of divine experience—an approximate linguistic quantification of an affect that, perhaps is more elusive than, say, the linguistically quantifiable feeling of shock. Ball refers to sound poetry in proximity to a religious discourse: sound poetry is "the holiest refuge" (71). Ball's approximation of religion with art is an affinity he shares with Nichol, who in his own writing—especially in his later serial work *The Martyrology*—confronts ideas of faith and redemption in his poetry. In fact, Nichol acknowledges his bond with Ball on the opening track of *CaNADAda*, entitled "Dada Lama," wherein Nichol sings with uplifting and anthemic bravado, "I dreamed I saw Hugo Ball" (n. pag.), signaling a dedication to Ball's legacy in sound poetry. Ball's own perception of language and communication parallels Nichol's in profound ways; anticipating Nichol's own claim that "language means communication and that communication does not just mean language" ("Statement" n. pag.). Ball writes in his diary in 1916, that "Language is not the only means of expression. It is not capable of communicating the most profound experiences" (*Flight Out of Time* 76). Scobie more acutely identifies another dimension of interest that Nichol and other Canadian sound poets share with their seeming progenitor. Scobie writes that Ball's "insistence on alchemy, magic, the evocation of irrational, primitive, Dionysiac emotions through the destruction of the rational content of language, all sounds remarkably close to the tone of

McCaffery's 'for a poetry of blood' manifesto" (Scobie "I Dreamed" 218). It should come as no surprise, then, that Ball's conception of art, language, and activism resonated so strongly for Nichol and his peers.

The third wave of sound poetry begins, if we follow McCaffery's model, in the 1950s and is representative of precisely this desire for a dispersal of artistic energies among a network in North America and Europe. Up until this moment, McCaffery argues that sound poetry "is still largely a word bound thing. For whilst the work of the Dadaists, Futurists and Lettrists served to free the word from its semantic function, redistributing energy from theme and 'message' to matter and contour, it nevertheless persisted in a morphological patterning that still suggested the presence of the word" (*Sound Poetry* 10), suggesting that the word persists despite the programs of these movements. The fifties, however, represent a new phase in the development of sound poetry which McCaffery refers to as "an external revolution" (10), which was partially facilitated by the rise of electroacoustic and audio recording technologies. This is the dynamic sonic network into which the Canadian sound poets become enmeshed. This larger network is comprised of a plethora of practitioners and facilitated a number of communal gatherings, including the 1968 three-day international festival of text-sound composition at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm, organized by Fylkingen (a Swedish music organization), which included performers from France, England, Germany and Sweden. This particular festival "was designed to present material which would not be allowed at a conventional poetry reading or a concert of contemporary music such as an electronic or tape music concert" (Wendt "Sound Poetry" 12). This is very much the spirit of other sound-based poetry events. Subsequent festivals were hosted in Toronto in 1976 and New York 1980, which saw with each installment, as Larry Wendt notes, an expansion of the festival's interest to include music and performance

art. In agreement with McCaffery, Kostelanetz also recognizes that this phase of sound poetry is divided by "the use of electronic machinery, for native [North American] text-sound art at its best is either more technological or less technological than European" ("Text- Sound Art: A Survey" 71). Kostelanetz identifies the two key-strains: those who use either multi-tracking, sound-looping and microscopic tape-editing to achieve audio tape effects that technically surpass European work and those who do not. Figures that practice the former type of work include musicians such as "Steve Reich, Charles Amirkhanian, Glenn Gould, Charles Dodge, Jerome Rothenberg, Charles Morrow, John Giorno, and myself [Kostelanetz]" alongside the "other strain of American text-sound artists [which] consists of those who have largely avoided electronic machinery, except of course to record themselves in permanent form: John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, Norman Henry Pritchard, W. Bliem Kern, Bill Bissett, Emmett Williams, Charles Stein, Michael McClure, and the Four Horsemen, a Canadian group" (71).

For examples of these latter types of work on the international scale, one might look to a poet like American Jackson Mac Low, who composed systematic chance-based poems that he referred to as "Asymmetries." These are grid-based scores intended for multiple voices that loosely guide the performers from one phoneme to the next, permitting them to pause and improvise that sound as part of the performance in simultaneity with others. Another French sound poet, Henri Chopin operated at the opposite end of this spectrum and "makes the decisive break from a phonetic basis to sound poetry and develops his self-styled 'audiopoems'" (McCaffery *Sound Poetry* 11) by working with the tape recorder. McCaffery writes that Chopin's early work

> comprised the decomposition and recomposition of vowels and consonants. Still connected to the word, these pieces can best be described as technological assaults upon the word. The word is slowed down, speeded up and superimposed up to fifty times, whilst additional vocalic texture is provided by a variety of respiratory and buccal effects.

Later, Chopin discovered and used the 'micro-particle' as the compositional unit of his work, abandoning the word entirely. This marks the birth of 'poesie sonore', which Chopin distinguishes from 'poesie phonetique.' (11)

McCaffery describes this latter mode of sound poetry by using a term coined by R. Murray Schafer, "schizophonia," which refers "to the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic reproduction" so that it "can be restated at other times and places" (*Soundscape* 273). The emergence of this possibility is marked by the fact that "The body is no longer the ultimate parameter, and voice becomes a point of departure rather than the point of arrival" (10), which has significant implications: "Technological time can be superadded to authentic body time to achieve either an accelerated or decelerated experience of voice time. Both time and space are harnessed to become less the controlling and more the manipulable factors of audiophony" (11). While McCaffery's distinction here is a useful and important one, to which practitioners around the globe responded to variously, Schafer's description of schizophonia represents an anxiety regarding the separation of the organic body from sound, which is facilitated by rising prominence of and increasing access to recording and telecommunication technologies in the mid-to-late twentieth century.

In the Air: Canadian Sound Poetry

Before embedding itself as a part of what McCaffery refers to as the third wave, sound poetry in Canada emerged independently of the international networks. On the rise of performance-based artistic practices in Canada, Caroline Bayard may over-simplify this multifaceted convergence when she argues that, "What happened during the 1970s and 1980s was symptomatic of the trends which shaped avant-garde poetics in Canada. Nichol displaced his creative energies from the magazine to the performances of the Horsemen; and bissett moved along similar lines" (109). Bayard's comments suggest that it was not until the 1970s that sound poetry developed as a

recognizable practice, signaling a shift away from concrete poetry. Evidence indicates that this may not actually be the case.

The active performance of sound poetry emerged in Canada over a half-decade earlier than 1970 with three familiar figures: bissett, Nichol, and UU. *Past-Eroticism: Canadian Sound Poetry in the 1960's, Vol. 1* (1984), contains recordings dating back as early as 1964 with Nichol's "Beach at Port Dover," which is also likely to be his first recorded sound poem. As indicated in the liner notes of *Past-Eroticism*, the 1964 version of this poem was recorded on the beach. Nichol recounts his experience of writing the poem on that beach to an audience at the Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University) Reading Series in 1968:

> There's things that I try to be absolutely very, very personal [inaudible] thing I ever wrote. I wrote it at Port Dover, in, on Lake Eerie. It's one of those days when I was flaked out on the beach, covered up because I get vicious sunburns and just peel the whole summer, and in the background was playing [inaudible] "Over the white cliffs of Dover" and [inaudible] Pussycats juxtaposed, there was sprawled over the beach was this weird phrase "Podunk" and these two cats were playing football overtop of my head. So anyways I felt very sort of, weird, and wrote the following poem. (n. pag.)

The poem is written in response to a particular combination of site specific affects—the confusion produced by two simultaneously playing songs, and the competing senses of relaxation while lying in the sun and the heightened awareness needed to track the football traversing the space above Nichol's head. The poem reveals Nichol's characteristic fascination with language play since most of the content of the poem pivots around a "puh" sound. At a fast pace, Nichol works through a sequence of paratactic soundings and varying rhythms: "um pa pa […] perch peach park […] paper cup paper cup […] pitter patter pitter patter pit pat pit pat […] um pa […] po dunk […] part diver […] port dover" (n. pag.). Nichol's voice is virtually overwhelmed by the throbbing background bass of a song by whom he identifies as "Pussycats"

blended with another song entitled "Over the White Cliffs of Dover."[58] This version suitably captures Nichol's pursuit of sound poetry and his emphasis on improvisation and spontaneity. Significantly, this seemingly chance assemblage between poet, environment, and sonological nexus foregrounded the trajectory of Canadian sound poetry and its inclination toward affect.

Two years later, in 1966, Tallman points out that bissett "moves into word-mergings, soundings, [and] chantings" ("Wonder Merchants" 66), the same year that Michael McClure visited Vancouver to read at the psychedelic Tripps Festival hosted at the Garden Auditorium of the Pacific National Exhibition, organized by Linda Crane, Ken Ryan, Doug Hawthorn, and Sam Perry.[59] Around this time, McClure developed a type of poetry akin to sound poetry which he referred to as "beast language" and prominently located in his book *Ghost Tantras* (1964). The poems are comprised of an animalistic language: "Grahhr! Grahhhr! Grahhhrrr! Ghrahhr. Grahhrrr" ("Tantra 49"). McClure's writing proved to be formative for Nichol who recalls that "his work opened up new possibilities for me" (*Meanwhile* 134). The influence of McClure highlights the fact that sound poetry in Canada followed a similar pattern of proliferation as concrete poetry, beginning on the west coast in Vancouver and travelling eastward toward Toronto with Nichol, identifying him again as an indispensable figure for the development of avant-garde poetics in mid-to-late twentieth century Canada. In part, this pattern highlights the importance of Vancouver as a crucial nexus for literary avant-gardism in the 1960s for much of Canada. This point undermines claims that Vancouver, as a literary metropolis, was of marginal importance to Canadian writing because of its geographical distance from Toronto and Montreal. Instead, noting the importance of Vancouver as an incubator for unconventional and unorthodox

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[58] Nichol's mention of the The Pussycats (as documented in the 1968 recording of his reading at Sir George Williams University) is likely the Norwegian rock band The Pussycats who were active from 1964-1967.

[59] For more on the Tripps Festival see http://www.greggsimpson.com/soundgallerymotionstudio.htm

literatures should prompt a recalibration of this claim: Vancouver was not of marginal importance, but rather a crucial hotbed of literary inventiveness.

In the same year of McClure's 1966 visit to Vancouver, UU was evidently experimenting with chant-forms in poems such as "Variation on Themes 1 & 2," "Toronto" and "Song for a Beggar," all of which were composed that year.[60] In 1967, as documented by Phyllis Webb's CBC interview with Nichol and bissett, it is clear that both poets had been seriously experimenting with the possibilities of sound poetry for quite sometime—beyond Nichol's site-specific recording of "Beach at Port Dover." Nichol, describing borderblur to Webb, references "the things that bill is doing in the Sound Gallery with the strobe lights and as many speakers as possible" ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol" n. pag.), a comment that is shortly followed by a prayer-like chant poem performed by bissett. In the same interview, Nichol admits to having worked with tape "pretty closely" which he suggests is a way of "giving the voice a different context within which to be heard, giving it an electronic context, and seeing what happens to it" (n. pag.). Nichol then proceeds to play a tape with an excerpt from "Scraptures Fifth Sequence," which features Nichol's layered voice, modified by electroacoustic effects reverb and echo. These electronically-based sonological forays were not superfluous, but active and thoughtful engagements with the sonic elements of language and language in performance. Perhaps the trend that Bayard identifies in her comment above, about sound poetry's emergence in the 1970s, is the concern for language and feeling that more deeply permeated sections of Canadian literary culture at the time—one that is represented in the growing acceptance and creation of concrete poetry, sound poetry, and haptic poetry. The premises of the Language Revolution infiltrated segments of poetry in Canada and had come to be a mode in itself for many poets, some of

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[60] These sound poems were later recorded on 15 February 1983 at 141 East 27 Street in North Vancouver and included on his Underwhich cassette *Very Sound* (1984).

whom were not involved with the earlier experiments of blewointment, *grOnk*, or Ganglia in the 1960s, but came to occupy similar aesthetic and political positions.

Of this early activity, one other figure should be acknowledged within this matrix: Jim Brown, who was testing the pliability of borders between sound, poetry, and music at the same time as Nichol, bissett, and UU. In 1968, Brown undertook the curation and production of what was intended to be a record-magazine entitled *See/Hear*, an ambitious project that ultimately lasted only two issues. Brown intended to produce a quarterly series of

> recordings of contemporary sound arts. Contemporary sound arts are usually discussed in terms of certain categories such as electronic music, experimental acoustic music, sound poetry, projective verse, chance music, improvised forms and so on, however what should probably be recognized is that sound arts are continually evolving and to create categories only restricts the way in which we think about sound. Mixed media, combinations of sound and visual arts, or combinations of different modes of sound art, are easily seen as results of our electric environment, and are as valid as the already accepted sound forms. (n. pag.)

Though not exclusively dedicated to sound poetry, the first issue of the record-magazine has a mix of both electroacoustic spoken word poetry like that of Lionel Kearns and his permutational poem "The Woman Who," that uses stereo panning to produce the effect of multiple voices in conversation as well as a rare electroacoustic work by bpNichol, which sounds as though it contains nothing but mid- and high-pitched machinic frequencies. The second issue consisted of contributions only by Brown, Wayne Carr, and Ross Barrett (all of whom appeared on the first record-installment). Despite its mere two issue run, the magazine anticipates both spoken and electroacoustic poetic experiments that would be more deeply explored in the decades following. The short duration of *See/Hear* magazine is unfortunate, but the sound work of bissett, Nichol, and UU, who quickly became principal figures in the scene, endured. They each went on to

pursue a diverse range of sonically-related activities including performances, album recordings, and group collaborations, and were very much involved in the sonic undertakings of the time.[61]

If the latter half of the 1960s was an incubation period for this work, 1970 proved to be among the most momentous years in the development of sound poetry. By the 1970s, poets were actively exploring the affective elements of sound poetry. It was in 1970 that Toronto was host to what has been referred to as "The World's Loudest Poem," at City Hall. This event was first held in 1969, but deemed a failure. The subsequent attempt in 1970 supposedly saw somewhere between 300-600 attendees. At noon on Saturday March 21, George Swede (with a permit) organized a "Scream-In" at Nathan Phillips Square. It was meant to be the world's loudest sound poem with people screaming for one whole minute from 12:00 pm to 12:01 pm. This was held for two reasons: "to herald the arrival of spring and to seek the elusive [Canadian] identity" ("World's Loudest" Swede). Swede explains that "Screaming establishes contact with the subconscious mind that well-spring of all activity. It lets the flower within us grow" ("Two Articles" Swede). The gathering for "The World's Loudest Sound Poem," and its intent for subjective expression and psychic connection, foregrounds some of the concerns of numerous sound poets and sound poetry collectives of the Language Revolution. The poem foregrounds affect in at least two ways: first, the intended volume of the poem as "loudest" corresponds with affect in the way that high volumes stimulate human hearing with an aim to shock or surprise someone. Second, the intent of the poem is a search for collective identity, which resonates with

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[61] Though not directly related to sound poetry, Vancouver was the site of at least one other notable sound project: Schafer's World Soundscape Project, which was founded at Simon Fraser University in the late 1960s and carried on into the 1970s. The project foregrounds Schafer's interest in aural perception and noise pollution. This project undoubtedly shaped Schafer's later theoretical and critical writings on soundscapes, but also invited the involvement and attention of Vancouver poets like Brian Fawcett, author of numerous books of poetry and fiction, and publisher of periodical *NMFG* (*No Money From Government*), which circulated among the same small press network as *blewointment, grOnk*, and *Ganglia.*

Ahmed's notion of "contingency" (a point I return to in the context of haptics in the next chapter), which describes a form of affective attachment that "connects us to this place or that place" (*Cultural Politics* 28) through the event of emotional expression. The live sound poetry event, that was privileged by poets like McCaffery and Nichol, sought to offer this kind of contact and contingency in real-time.

The collective screaming of some 300-plus persons unleashed a sonic wave that numerous Canadian poets would find themselves enveloped by for the next two decades. It was in the same year as the "World's Loudest Sound Poem" that Canada's most influential sound poetry collective formed: the Four Horsemen, comprised of bpNichol, Steve McCaffery, Paul Dutton, and Rafael Barretto-Rivera.[62] There are competing accounts of the formation of this group; however, Butling and Rudy confirm that shortly after they met in 1969, Nichol and McCaffery performed as a duo, and were joined soon after by Baretto-Rivera and Dutton, both of whom were involved with the Therafields community, where Nichol worked.[63] They began

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[62] The date I've selected as a starting point for the Four Horsemen seems to be the most likely. In his "Not Just Representation: The Sound and Concrete Poetries of the Four Horsemen" Davey identifies 1972 to be the beginning of the active phase for the group. In the following year, they released their first recording *CaNADAda* (1973) with Toronto's Griffin House. The liner notes to their 1988 release *2 Nights*, however, claims that the group formed in 1970.

[63] McCaffery denounces critics' attempts to connect the work of the Four Horsemen to Therafields. McCaffery tells Peter Jaeger that Nichol "tended to live a double life (that certainly was my experience) in which his creativity and the public life that that entailed were kept separate from lay-analytic practice ... at Therafields. I remember no discussions that linked sound poetry and energy (a la the Olsonian projective) to the bio-energetics, psychodramas, and abreactive methods practiced at Therafields. He told me that he was introduced to sound poetry by bill bissett who turned him on to Indian chants." ("Interview" 88-9) Despite these comments, Davey insists that Therafields is important to consider in the origin story of the Four Horsemen, and I agree with Davey on this point. The Four Horsemen in fact performed at the Therafields Commune, confirms Grant Goodbrand in his *Therafields: The Rise and Fall of Lea Hindley-Smith's Psychoanalytic Commune* (2010) with photographic evidence. The Four Horsemen maintain an ongoing relationship with figures from Therafields throughout their collective careers. Nichol maintained his position as Vice-President of the Therafields commune; however, another Therafields member, Robert Hindley-Smith, son of Therafields founder and close friend to Nichol, is listed as Producer on the Four Horsemen's *CaNADAda* and *Live in the West*. From 1979 until 1983, Therafields rested in the hands of Robert Hindley-Smith. Of course, this is tangential evidence, providing no clear indication that Therafields influenced the work of the Four Horsemen; though it does prompt a reconsideration of McCaffery's comments regarding Nichol's "double life." For Davey, there are connections between Nichol's practice as a lay-therapist and his attempts to

workshopping poems, and by 1972 were performing as a group, internationally and nationally, in settings like Vancouver's The Western Front and Toronto's A Space and Music Gallery, school auditoriums like York University's Curtis Lecture Hall, and at festivals like the 1982 Summer Solstice Festival in Damrosch Park, Lincoln Centre, New York. By 1973 the Four Horsemen had released their first studio-recording, *CaNADAda,* and quickly became identified as leaders of the field in the Canadian setting. Marq de Villiers describes a performance by the Four Horsemen, in *The Globe in Mail* in 1973:

> there is nothing quite like them elsewhere, in Canada or abroad. Waiting for a moment to begin. Then, quietly, a humming began in the front row of the audience, a nasal droning. It grew louder. The audience craned its neck to see; it was coming from a tall blonde man in a blue suede jacket. The humming broke into separate sounds, resolved itself: it was [Nichol], and he had seemingly plucked the words from the minds of the crowd: he was chanting very softly . . . "We are waiting for the moment to begin to begin we are waiting for the moment to BEGIN TO BEGIN…" and by the end, when the beginning was done, The Four Horsemen had the audience uproariously chanting their own phone numbers while they themselves gibbered and danced up and down and neighed shrilly into the wind and gave off harsh baboon barkings … images glowed and faded and slide into each other, none staying long enough to be called, really, a poem… (20 October 1973, A6)

De Villiers's comments here capture both the excitement and the infectiousness of a performance by the Four Horsemen: the audience, overcome by the performance, become part of it, thus highlighting the affective dimension of their work. According to de Villiers's description, the performance expertly foregrounds affect and emotion as part of the work. The Four Horsemen utilize anticipation as part of the work itself—the feeling that combines excitement, impatience, and suspense as an audience waits for an event to begin. In this case, the Four Horsemen push this feeling to the fore of their work by chanting "We are waiting for the moment to begin to

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develop poetry that "lets the emotions out," which highlights, if nothing else, the affective dimension of sound poetry as a practice.

begin we are waiting for the moment to BEGIN TO BEGIN" (A6). This heightened awareness of

feeling as part of the sound poem is integral to Canadian sound poetry practice, during this

period at least. De Villiers's comments also highlight the sound poem as a nexus of feeling

wherein not only the poets express themselves, but the audience finds themselves—voluntarily

or not—swept up by the energy of the moment and expressing themselves in unconventional

ways. The Four Horsemen, however, not only affected their audience, but affected their own

generation of poets, trailblazing a path upon which more would travel.

     Inspired by the Four Horsemen, Michael Dean, David Penhale, Steven Smith (now

Steven Ross Smith) and Richard Truhlar, in 1974, began workshopping sound poetry

explorations in a Toronto framing studio on Dupont Street operated by poet and framer Brian

Dedora. Dedora was initially involved in these explorations, but did not become a member of the

group. They eventually become known as Owen Sound, performing privately until 1976, when

they held their first performance at Fat Albert's Coffee House on Bloor Street in Toronto. Owen

Sound, like the Four Horsemen, became a popular collective and performed across Canada and

internationally in places like "Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, Amsterdam (Stedelijk

Museum), London, UK (Canada House and the National Poetry Centre), and even in Owen

Sound, Ontario" and released a series of albums on vinyl and cassette ("PennSound"). The group

stayed together until 1984, but several of its members (notably Richard Truhlar) explored the

nexus of sound and poetry in various capacities in other parts of their life (notably electronic

chamber music).

     Like Owen Sound, a second group of poets were inspired by the Four Horsemen: a duo

comprised of Stephen Scobie and Douglas Barbour, who first began working together in

Edmonton, where they both taught at the University of Alberta: "In the best Canadian tradition of

The Four Horsemen (not to mention The Rolling Stones)," Barbour says, "we gave ourselves a group name — Re: Sounding" (Barbour *Jacket2* n. pag.). Referred to in *Music Works* as "Canada's undocumented sound poetry group," ("Improvising Sound" 10) they travelled the same pathways as Owen Sound and the Four Horsemen, performing together "in Canada, the U.S., Austria, Denmark, Sweden, West Germany, Germany, and Australia & New Zealand, and at the 12th International Sound Poetry Festival in New York, 1980" ("Douglas Barbour" n. pag.), and later in 1999 compiled an essential anthology of sound poetry, *Carnivocal: A Celebration of Sound Poetry*, which featured a younger generation of outstanding sound poets including W. Mark Sutherland and Stephen Cain.

The Four Horsemen, Owen Sound, and Re: Sounding often preoccupy the critical narratives regarding Canadian sound poetry; there are, however, numerous less frequently acknowledged figures whose vibrations were felt by the sonic community. Toronto-based Sean O'Huigin, for example, a Scottish-Canadian poet who helped co-organize the Eleventh Annual Sound Poetry Festival in Toronto and attended the Eighth International Sound Poetry Festival in London, England in May 1975. Prior to the formation of Owen Sound, and just as the Four Horsemen were gaining critical notice, O'Huigin had been experimenting with sound poetry and seems to have come to this practice as a result of his interdisciplinary collaborations with musicians like Ann Southam and artist Aiko Suzuki.[64] O'Huigin, in collaboration with electronic musician Southam, released a record entitled *Sky Sails*, for which Nichol wrote the liner notes:

> there is no sense here of a poet reading with musical accompaniment there is only the
> piece itself   that this is possible is only because of the years these two people have

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[64] Ann Southam was a Canadian composer and electronic musician and a graduate of the Faculty of Music of Toronto where she studied composition with Samuel Dolin and electronic music with Gustav Ciamaga. She was an instructor in electronic music at the Royal Conservatory of Toronto. She released numerous albums over the course of her career including. *Sky Sails* was her first. She died November 25, 2010.

spent working with one another & their sensing of where the other is   that this search
this struggle towards community in a context of isolation should be (& i hesitate here to
use this term) the theme of their album seems right. (n. pag.)

The two documented their collaboration once more for *Poe [Tree]*, which included their work on
the B-side of a split 7-inch *Appendix*. Like O'Huigin, Gerry Shikatani was an active member of
the Toronto poetry community, and experimented with sound poetry as part of his practice, and
who has received scant critical attention. The reason for this unfortunate oversight, at least in the
context of his sound poetry, can partially be explained by, as in the case of Re: Sounding, lack of
documentation of his sound work even though he "has been performing sound poetry since the
1970s" (Zolf 8).

The activities of the 1970s continued to grow well into the 1980s as Canadian sound
poets continued to perform, tour, and release recordings. This period also saw the emergence of
two other important sound poets: poet Penn Kemp and a new collaborative group in Ottawa
called First Draft. First Draft first formed in 1980 and comprised of core members Susan
McMaster, who studied with Barbour at the University of Alberta in 1972. She formed the group
with Andrew McClure and Colin Morton. First Draft was a multimedia performance group that
explored the sounds of poetry, and on various occasions collaborated with visual artists, dancers,
and musicians. It was not until two years later when First Draft seemingly made its entrance into
the larger Canadian sound poetry scene. In 1982, the 7th annual "Great Canadian Writers'
Weekend" was held at the Cranberry Inn in Collingwood, Ontario. It was attended by many
poets, including members of the Four Horsemen like bpNichol as well as First Draft.[65] In her
autobiography, McMaster recalls the moment she came to know Nichol: "I've just seen the
Horsemen perform, and am still quivering from the excitement and energy of their presentation

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[65] For more on the Writers' Weekend see: Cherry, Zena. "Poetry Meet 'Liberating'." *The Globe and Mail (1936-Current)*: 11.

… bpNichol is *it* in sound poetry in Canada" (*Gargoyle* 23), she writes. It is on this weekend that McMaster introduces herself to Nichol: "I can't stay away: the power of the performance, the clearly visible warmth and kindness of the man, the fact above all that he is doing a version of what Andrew and I are working on in First Draft in our wordmusic – working with many voices together as sound as well as meaning – draw me towards him" (23), thus initiating a friendship and constellating First Draft as a part of Canada's sound poetry community. First Draft, however, seems to have eschewed the masculinity of other sound poetry collectives like the Four Horsemen and Owen Sound. First Draft was not a group of men exploring the limits of their sounding bodies like Owen Sound or the Four Horsemen; rather, their sound poems rely upon working and carefully develop a working relationship between both men and women. First Draft is, as McMaster claims, "a feminist, a humanist, adventure, in which I and other women involved are there not as ornaments or organizers and then men are there not as Cool Lukes or *artistes*. We are all collaborators on equal terms" (*Gargoyle* 26).

Another poet who began working outside of the direct influence of the dominating masculinist sound poetries is writer Penn Kemp—a friend of Nichol—who began publishing in 1972 with her *Bearing Down*, launching a rich and ongoing career of diverse activities including lyric, sound, concrete poetry, drama, prose, teaching, and publishing. This first book, published by Coach House, places her and her work directly into the mesh of Canada's experimental writing community comprised of writers like Nichol, McCaffery, and others. Of all the sound poets, Kemp is perhaps the best documented, since she continues to publish recordings of her work to this day. Since 1972, she has actively explored the sonic-literary nexus; many of her books contain accompanying audio material, much like bissett's *Medicine My Mouths On Fire* and Nichol's *Journeying & the Returns*. Much like McMaster, Kemp rigourously pushes the

boundaries of not only poetry, but sound poetry itself, collaborating with musicians and theatre performers, but always with the sounds of language as the core of her practice. One of her earliest recordings includes *In Spirit Trees* (1977) containing numerous sound poems, and has since then published well over a dozen recordings including, most notably, *Ear Rings* (1987) which was published by Underwhich Editions as part of the Audiographics series. Kemp's solo sound poems and McMaster's collaborative work are important to consider amid a poetic field that is otherwise dominated by masculine personalities. If sound poetry is, in part, the expression of feeling through the performance of the sounding body, then Kemp and McMaster intervene into this context. Kemp, as I will show later, uses her sound work to explore ideas related to motherhood and female pleasure.

Kemp's and McMaster's invitation to musicians to become integral to sound poetry corresponds with a significant shift in the development of sound poetics in the 1980s, namely, the shift toward an openness toward instrumentation and experimentation with electroacoustic devices. Numerous tracks on First Draft's *Wordmusic*, for example, contains numerous recordings that are pure musical—piano and singing voice. Truhlar, too, formed electroacoustic chamber music ensemble Tekst in 1980 which explored the interface between writing and music. They released four recordings of their compositions. Similarly-minded collaborations emerged soon after. Around this time, McCaffery and Truhlar released electroacoustic sound work on cassette entitled *Manicured Noise* (1981). 1986 saw the release of *Phenomenonsemble* by Phenomenonsemble as part of the Underwhich Audiographica series, and formed by core members Kathy Browning and Nick Dubecki. In 1989, Paul Dutton joined free-improvisation band CCMC (formulated by a rotation of members including Michael Snow, John Oswald, Graham Coughtry, Bill Smith, and Nubuo Kubota and others) bringing to them the oral qualities

that he also lent to the Four Horsemen. bissett, too, around this time, had left Vancouver and headed east toward London, Ontario where he started collaborating with rock band the Luddites.

There were numerous conditions that nurtured Canada's radical sound poetry, beyond the sheer energy and dedication that many of these poets gave to the practice. By the mid-1970s, Canada was an important zone for the development of sound in poetry. In 1975, Richard Truhlar founded the Kontakte Writers in Performance Series, which featured readings and performances by most of Canada's foremost experimental writers. The series ran for a total of 10 years and featured over 100 artists, including sound poets like Nichol, and the aforementioned French sound poets Chopin and Heidsieck. Of the forums that were established in tandem with the proliferation of Canadian sound poetry, the most notable and noted of these was The Eleventh Annual International Sound Poetry Festival, hosted in Toronto, Ontario and organized by Steve McCaffery, Sean O'Huigin, and Steven Ross Smith in 1978. As Rudy and Butling have noted, "This is an annual event that began in Sweden in 1968, and this was the first time the festival was held in North America. Performers came from eight countries," and is recognized for the prominence it gave to group and collective performance (*Writing in Our Time* 13).[66] In conjunction with the festival, McCaffery and Nichol published *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue*, the flagship publication of Underwhich Editions. In the Winter of 1979, a seemingly dissatisfied Chris Butterfield reviewed the festival for *MusicWorks* magazine; where he wrote, "the 11th International Sound Poetry Festival took place in Toronto last October, and lasted a week. It was

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[66] The complete roster of attendees include: bpNichol (Can.), Bob Cobbing (U.K.), Charles Amarkanian (U.S.), Kirby Malone (U.S.), Charles Doria (U.S.), Ellen Rosen (U.S.), Chris Cheek (U.K.), Bill Griffiths (U.K.), Paula Claire (U.K.), Charlie Morrow (U.S.), Arrigo Lora-Totino (Italy), Sean O'Huigin (Can.), Henri Chopin (France), Larry Wendt (U.S.), Sten Hanson (Holland), Michael Gibbs (Holland), Rafael-Barreto-Rivera (Can), Doug Barbour (Can), Eugene Williams (U.S.), Dick Higgins (U.S.), Bernard Heidsieck (France), Lawrence Upton (U.K.), Shant [Sha(u)nt] Basmajian (Can.), P.C. Fencott, Steven Smith (Can.), Charles Levendosky (U.S.), Steve McCaffery (Can.), Bliem Kern (U.S.), Michael Dean, David Penhale (Can.), Jerome Rothenberg (U.S.), Paul Dutton (Can.), Jackson MacLow (U.S.), and Richard Truhlar (Can.).

organized by members of Owen Sound and the Four Horsemen, Toronto-based sound

poetry/performance groups. The price of admission was high, the attendance low" (2).

Butterfield lamented the festival's emphasis on acoustic sound poetry (though he questions that

term itself) over electroacoustic sound works, expressing discontent with Canadian groups Owen

Sound and the Four Horsemen. He writes,

> Instinctively I question Owen Sound's works – there seems to be, in the good sound
> poets, an extraordinary amount of interdisciplinary experience, coupled with a
> thoroughgoing classical education, that lends to the simplicity and completeness of
> conception that was somehow lacking in the Sound's performance. Not that they weren't
> engaging – one can see with them, the possibility of sound poetry as a popular
> entertainment, an enviable condition. (3)

In the Four Horsemen, he found "a slightly different problem" (3), suggesting that "they too go

towards the idea of entertainment" (3). In both Owen Sound and the Four Horsemen, Butterfield

claimed that "one could almost see the return of vaudeville" (3) but admitted that it remains an

intellectual entertainment.

Despite Butterfield's rather cranky review of the festival, it remains a high-watermark for

sound poetry in Canada. Butterfield's comments implicitly highlight a few significant critical

points. In general, Butterfield's account confirms that the Eleventh Annual International Sound

Poetry Festival was not only a crucial nexus at which an international array of practices and

practitioners gathered, it also foregrounded (like other festivals), the importance of community as

a major component of sound poetry practice—both in the coming together to collaboratively

compose and perform the sound poem but the persistence of collectivity among festival attendees

for, at this point, eleven iterations of the festival had occurred. Butterfield's comments in

MusicWorks also highlight one of the key differences between Canadian sound poetry

practitioners and the majority of other contemporaneously practicing sound poets of McCaffery's

identified third wave. It seems that Butterfield attended the Canadian installment of the festival

with the expectation that this iteration would be similar to previous festivals with an especial focus on the intersection of sound, music, voice, and technology. Larry Wendt recalls that the 1968 festival, then referred to as the International Festival of Text-Sound Composition, "was the first one to deal exclusively with works utilizing modern technological developments in the manipulations of vocal material" (Wendt "Sound Poetry" 12).[67] The divide here designates the categories of "acoustic sound poetry" versus "electroacoustic sound poetry"—the former being unassisted sound poetry and the other being a technologically assisted sound poetry. The Canadians, as indicated by Butterfield, are recognized to be largely practitioners of the former designation—Canadian sound poetry is largely acoustic and emotional with an especial emphasis on the mobilization of affect.

The Eleventh Annual International Sound Poetry Festival made clear the distinctions between Canadian sound poets and other sound poets of the third wave. Mac Low and his work, present at this festival, offers a fine counterpoint to the Canadian sonic poetic zeitgeist. Though equally interested in an aesthetic of borderblur, his work clearly departs from the Canadian sound poetic practice. Consider "the eight-voice stereo canon realization" of the *Black Tarantula Crossword Gathas* (1975) by Mac Low, a systematic chance-based poem composed for eight voices in simultaneity. Realized for audiotape, the work relies on the stereo function of audio recording and playback. The recording is comprised of "4 over-laid performances that begin on channel one about 20 seconds after they begin on channel two: a "4-against-4" canon)" (*Pennsound*). The stereo function fixes an audible perspective within the work, providing the illusion that some voices are moving from background to foreground and from left to right, thus Mac Low's voice sounds multi-directional, verbalizing a slow barrage of letters, words,

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[67] The shift away from technological intervention toward a more body-based poetics for the festival occurred in 1974, when the festival also changed its name to the International Festival of Sound Poetry.

phonemes, hums, and whispers. The dependence upon audio technology as a key component of his work, along with other works that McCaffery identifies as a "complex interweave of multiple voice and tape" (*Sound Poetry* 15), thus distinguishes Mac Low from the Canadians practicing a largely non-technological sound poetry. Mac Low's sound poetry also relies on other non-auditory systems composed and performed from systematic chance-based operations, wherein the performer systematically moves through words, sounds, and expressions written on a grid—often in tandem with another voice—these are referred to by Mac Low as Gathas. Though the performer has some control over intonation, speed, and volume, their trajectory through a work is largely determined by a grid-like map, thus limiting the scope of improvisation. Mac Low's sound poetry is distinguished further by his work's relationship to affect—the affects and energies it produces and mobilizes. A work like "Phoeneme Dance for John Cage," performed 11 August 1975 at the Naropa Institute, bears a striking sonic likeness to some of the phonetic based poetry of Canadians (especially Nichol and bissett); however, this work, despite its similarities, does not mobilize the same kind of emotional sonic content that the Canadians explore. Mac Low's work is calculated and often monotone, reflective of a more meditative quality. These chance-based operations, distinct in themselves from the more expansive improvisations of bissett and the Four Horsemen, also serve to effectively reduce expressions of the performer's ego in the auditory transmission of the work, a key differential when compared to the unrepressed expressions of the self in the wild and intensely communicative soundings of the Canadians.

Also in attendance at the Eleventh Annual International Sound Poetry festival was Henri Chopin, who, like Mac Low has a similar interest in poetry produced by systems and sound technologies, but produces sound poems (aka "audiopoems") that sound drastically different

from anything produced by Mac Low or Canadians of the time. In comparison to Mac Low,

Chopin rigourously explored the possibilities of the recorded sound poem. His employment of

technology as part of his practice is extreme—at times, he would layer so many electroacoustic

effects and manipulate the voice so dramatically (speeding up and slowing it down, bending the

pitch) that the original source of taped sound is almost totally obscured. A piece like Chopin's

"La civilisation du papier" (1975) is a seemingly collagist sound work composed of voices and

samples that presents a chaotic soundscape of swirling machinic, animalistic sounds, drones,

hums, and high pitched synths with a modified and modulating human voice that periodically

enters the fray to repeat "la civilisation du papier." The result is a work that not only blurs the

borders between poetry and music, but also pushes those mediums to their extremes. In the live

setting, Chopin performs the work using tapes, effects, and recordings of his own voice. He will

play these sounds backwards and forwards, layering in effects and manipulating the speed at

will. Chopin's work, like many sound poets, tests the limits of our bodies' extension into

performance and into the recording, pushing the recorded audio of the body until it becomes

defamiliarized; however, unlike the Canadian poets, Chopin does so with a futurist-like faith in

the technology that's at his disposal, whereas the Canadians tend to test the limits of their bodies

capability to project sound.

Like the festival, artist-run centres were also crucial meeting points that supported this

type of offering of alternative non-standardized experience. The artist-run centre, in principle, is

an alternative creative and presentation space created as a refuge from the big galleries and

corporately-managed creative spaces. Among these spaces, there was The Western Front and

Intermedia, in Vancouver; A Space, in Toronto; and Véhicule Gallery, in Montreal. Adding to

this list, important but lesser known spaces like Vancouver's Mandan Ghetto (which was created

by bissett, Joy Long, and Gregg Simpson), and Sound Gallery (also founded by Simpson), as well as Toronto's Music Gallery where borderblur events (including sound poetry performances) were often held should also be acknowledged. There are few publicly available recordings of performances in these spaces, though notable ones include the Four Horsemen's performance, at the Western Front in 1974 and 1977 (both of which are semi-publically available) as well as bissett's 1978 reading in the same space. These were important spaces that did more than offer "a public venue and supportive environment for play and experimentation" (Butling 68), they were instrumental for the growth of borderblur. Not only did they provide an environment for unconventional poetries, but the artist-run centre fostered the intersection of poetry and many different art forms. Intermedia, for example, where bissett shared a studio with the Al Neil Trio, helped foster the growth of *blewointment*.[68] The space also saw special intersections of dance, music, and film, as in the case when poet Copithorne improvised "a dance which evoked flying to one of the Trio's melancholic ballads, with Perry's projected film of an actual flying bird playing over her" (Simpson "The Sound Gallery" n. pag.). These intersections undoubtedly fostered the growth of sound poetry as an interdisciplinary practice between poetry, sound, and performance art. The gatherings at these performance spaces are largely undocumented, outside of memorable anecdotes and the few recordings in circulation, thus leaving the critical imagination with little more to do than speculate upon these events.

Canadian sound poetry, however, was not solely performed in the alternative spaces provided by the artist run centres; in fact, Canadian sound poets actively embraced the

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[68] Al Neil is a musician, composer, artist, writer and key figure in Vancouver's arts and literary scene. He began playing bebop in Vancouver clubs in the late 1940s. Among his many contributions, his performance with American poet Kenneth Patchen at the Cellar Jazz Club is of particular note since it serves as evidence of an early interest of the cross-over between music and poetry in the Canadian context in the mid-twentieth century. This gig was recorded by CBC radio in and later released as an LP album on Folkway Records entitled *Kenneth Patchen reads with Jazz in Canada* (1959).

possibilities of performance in institutionalized spaces as well. Sound poets and sound poetry

groups frequently performed in university classrooms, on radio stations, and in larger gallery

spaces like the Harbourfront Centre. On the one hand, such a gesture may signal an

institutionalization or transition of sound poetry toward a more mainstream audience. Indeed, at

this point it may seem as though sound poetry did enjoy some degree of popular success, yet this

enjoyment was fleeting. Despite this brief flirtation with institutional settings, Canadian sound

poetry remains outside of the literary canon. It is perceived more as a novelty than a serious

mode of poetic expression.[69] On the other hand, sound poetry in institutionalized space might be

seen as a unique though fleeting opportunity for poets to disrupt conventional expressions of

thought and feeling in standardized language, but also the spaces wherein that language is

exchanged. Even before sound is emitted, a sound poem has material demands; it reimagines the

social use of the environment and the bodies within it. In public, the performance space is

organized by the promise of sound. Like any poetry reading, the sound poetry event requires a

specific spatial layout and a positioning of bodies, but it also subverts the social expectations and

uses of the space. Speculating upon the Four Horsemen's performance history can elucidate

some of these ideas. If the Four Horsemen were to perform on the radio such as the CJRT—

where they performed "Seasons" on 22 September 1979—the station may need to make minor

spatial modifications to accommodate the performance of four eccentric and energetic men for a

radio-listening audience. According to James Sanders and Mark Presjnar, the group almost

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[69] On this note, I also wonder about why and how some sound poets were invited into institutional spaces. It seems likely to me that sound poetry was not wildly popular but appreciated by a small few who had access to institutional space thus invited sound poets to perform. Sound poet Richard Truhlar, for example, worked at CJRT radio station where he produced two programs: *The Art of Sound Poetry*, and *Canadian Poetry in the 1980s*. CJRT was by no means a conventional station, having been established in 1949 by Ryerson University as an "experimental broadcaster" and later became, in the 1990s, licensed as "other special FM." Additionally, both Nichol and McCaffery had connections to York University where the Four Horsemen performed. McCaffery received his M.A. from York in 1970. Nichol began teaching at York in 1980.

always performed in spaces used for the "conventional poetry reading: colleges, radio stations, poetry festivals, art galleries, rehearsal areas" (60), spaces that are institutional or intended for formal use. The Four Horsemen "did not do random performances in public places" (60). The choice of venue is significant. York University's Curtis Lecture Hall, for example, where they performed in January 1973, is typically a place where speech is used as a passive container for thought, logic, and meaning.[70] The lecturer communicates thoughts to the students; the students are often expected to record those thoughts and reciprocate in a meaningful way. A Four Horsemen performance functions radically different from that of the lecturer. Similarly, the typical radio station broadcasts speech that communicates information (news, weather updates, traffic reports, etc.) or music and commercials to entertain and promote products. In fact, the same night in September 1979 when the Four Horsemen were featured on CJRT's "Music and Literature" radio show, the station had broadcast pieces by Bach and Vivaldi previous to the show and followed it by Big Band recordings.[71] When the work of The Four Horsemen was featured at night on 18 February 1979 by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), CJRT was broadcasting readings of selected writings by Mark Twain, Will Rogers, and Charles Laughton.[72] While all of these broadcasts are related by their fundamental sonic properties, the more conventional programming is incongruous to the sonic praxis and politics of the Four Horsemen. Instead, the Four Horsemen—and other Canadian sound poets—take over these spaces and the airwaves, disrupting the flow of speech, logic, and entertainment to redefine and subvert the sonic and material compositions and meanings of these spaces.

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[70] See "Around Toronto This Week." The *Globe and Mail* 19 Jan. 1973: T2. Print.

[71] See "FM Radio AM." The *Globe and Mail* 22 Sept. 1979, Schedule sec.: D79. Print.

[72] See "FM Radio AM." The *Globe and Mail* 17 Feb. 1979, Schedule sec.: E44. Print.

Though the materialistic dimension of Canadian sound poetry in itself has been denigrated as an impure representation of the art, audio recordings are one of the few ways sound poetry continues to enjoy any cultural currency in Canada. The vinyl record, for example, was important because many Canadian sound poets released 12- and 7-inch discs as well as flexi-discs, but the production of these sonic repositories was largely out of the hands of the poets. Underwhich Editions began to rectify issues of control over the production and dissemination as it pertained to audio materials: it began, in part, "to publish free from the kind of business and economic constraints that tend to dictate size of publication, format, etc" (Nichol, *Underwhich Checklist* n. pag.). Underwhich "was formed in Toronto out the remnants and struggles of four little presses" and was founded circa 1978 by Dean, Dedora, Dutton, McCaffery, Nichol, Riddell, Smith, and Truhlar (Nichol, *Underwhich Checklist* n. pag.). It specialized in producing a "wide range of media and formats–including books, broadsides, chapbooks, one-folds, cassettes, vinyl, and other such" (Dutton "Underwhich and the Radical Tradition" n. pag.). As part of Underwhich's publishing program, they initiated the Underwhich Audiographics Series, which focused on the production and dissemination of cassette tapes (and later compact discs). This series was initiated by McCaffery—and other editors including Truhlar, Smith, and Nichol—and began to inform and shape the series" (Nichol, *Underwhich Checklist* n. pag.). Truhlar eventually came to be the dominating influence over the series "thru his publication of numerous new music cassettes and his efforts to get the entire series better known in the alternative press" (Nichol, *Underwhich Checklist* n. pag.). Underwhich largely relied on the audiocassette tape—a medium that Sumanta Banerjee refers to as "the user medium"—an undervalued but important audio material for registering sound poetry activities in Canada. Rising to prominence in its popular form in 1963 (preceded by the open-reel recorder), the audio cassette opened new possibilities

for sound poetry because of its "compactness, simplicity, and low cost" (Bannerjee 11). Of the nearly fifty cassettes produced as part of the Audiographics Series, *Research on the Mouth* (1978) by Steve McCaffery was the first; the series continued on to include poets like Canadians bissett, UU, Owen Sound as well as Paula Claire (U.K.) and many more. Underwhich took advantage of the accessibility of the cassette tape; they were very much DIY affairs, seemingly dubbed using home recording systems onto store-bought tapes.[73] Underwhich's Audiographics Series, however, was one of the only attempts to archive performances and compositions. To date, Re: Sounding has released only one recording of their work, which is outside the temporal purview of this study.

Though groups like the Four Horsemen denied the significance of the recorded event, in part for the way it re-inscribes economic value onto the sound poem, other groups like Owen Sound, and First Draft, and especially Kemp did not make the same distinctions. Though commodities, recorded poems do not circulate in the capitalist marketplace in the same way that mass-produced products do. Instead, these recordings circulate among the small press networks or through the gift economy, modes of exchange that were established as a resistant response to the conditions of the capitalist marketplace. There is an affective dimension to the work of distributing these tapes, which Antonio Negri's and Michael Hardt's notion of "affective labour" reminds us of: "affective labor produces … social networks, forms of community" (*Empire* 293). As the commodity exchanged within the small press network, these recordings were crucial to the contribution of affective bonding and communal function. The small press network and its principles of gifting, that I will explore more deeply in the next chapter, is grounded in affect.

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[73] Age has revealed that UU's *Very Sound* (1984), for example, is recorded on a store-bought cassette. The original sticker issue, indicating Side-A and –B of the cassette has worn through revealing the AMPEX-brand label beneath it.

First, it is reaction invented from feelings of discontent with the dominant mode of exchange. Second, as my invocation of Hardt implies, communities are formed through processes of affective bonding. It could be said that shared affects are necessary for a cohesive community to be formed, thus the sound poem—as a rare object that is exchanged in these face-to-face moments—becomes an integral object that contributes to the affective bond.

The private space becomes redefined by these recordings in ways similar to the social and material demands of the public sound poetry event. At home the listener may listen through speakers or headphones, thus engaging with an assemblage of audio interfaces which requires time, energy, and again a specific arrangement of bodies and apparatuses in the home space. More significantly though, the introduction of sound poetry into the home space redefines the acoustic sociality of these spaces. The domestic space is no longer composed of its regular rhythms, vibrations, and soundings and instead now sonically redefined by the linguistic, non-linguistic, and post-linguistic soundings of sound poets. All sounds—to some degree—redefine space, but all sounds do so in certain ways.[74] In terms of the home space, the sound of language and vocalization typically operates and is employed with particular purpose: communication and enjoyment between occupants. Similarly, a crying baby who is using post- and pre- linguistic sounds is doing so to communicate a particular desire or need. We expect this of a baby. Sound poetry in the home environment deploys language-related soundings in ways that are alternative to the norms described above. The domestic space is no longer composed of its regular rhythms, vibrations, and soundings and instead now sonically redefined by the linguistic, non-linguistic,

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[74] For example, a shopping mall might play muzak (background music based on top 40 songs, without lyrics) to keep customers in a good mood as they shop. A domestic space is the sight of all types of sounds and noises, but most commonly serves as a refuge from the uncontrollable soundscapes outside.

and post-linguistic soundings of sound poets, which in turn has significant impacts on the affective composition of the space.

Like audio recording, notation, too, proved to be a contentious archival method for sound poets. According to Nichol, in "acoustic sound poetry there is no fixed tradition of notation" ("Introduction" *The Prose Tattoo* n. pag.), thus leading to a visually striking and diverse range of forms of notating the sound poem on the page. In 1982, *Open Letter* dedicated at least two issues to the subject of notation (not solely focused on the sound poem), inviting numerous contributors to describe their individual endeavours in notating their work, which comprised a wide range of opinions and approaches. More generally, sound poets (many of whom were also visual poets)— like bissett with "awake in the red desert" or McCaffery with *Carnival*—merely read their concrete poetry aloud, assigning an acoustical value to the letters, spaces, phonemes, morphemes and shapes on the page. Other poets have adopted a range of strategies to notate their soundings using grids, drawings, diagrams, instructions, and even adopted musical staffs to score their voice. For example, groups like the Four Horsemen, who collectively published two books of sound poetry scores, nonetheless disparaged the idea of notation:

> In an historical sense then this collection runs the risk of falsifying our history, but then print is an inadequate medium for our ultimate goal. Even phonograph recordings and tapes run this risk, as they remove the living performers from the audience's presence, and freeze what should be an ongoing process. This is part of why we insist that the texts are simply scores, simply the tracking of an oral intention, not, in their intention or most basic form, visual poems. The individual group members as improvisers are what bring the pieces alive, much more so than any 'composer' we could identify. (Nichol *The Prose Tattoo* n. pag.)

According to Nichol, the impetus behind the publication of sound poetry scores is because they function on a secondary level as visual poems: "Much of the reader's experience with visual poetry can be brought to these scores; in addition, the reading of scores as visual poems can extend the reader's sense of the possibility of visual poetry in general: imaged sound can fertilize

visual poetry in much the same way as visual conventions have stimulated recent performance art" (Nichol *The Prose Tattoo* np). The considerations of the Four Horsemen, in this respect, do not describe the majority.

There were poets who considered notation to be an important and necessary practice. First Draft produced scores of their work like *North South: Performances for One to Seven Speakers* (1987) that were simple but "rich enough in information to make wordmusic reproducible" to ensure that "performers who have never met the writer of a piece, who have never heard it before, [could] recreate it in its fullest form—alive and vibrant before an audience" (n. pag.). These differing approaches to the score and the idea of a score reveal opposing views on the sound poem. In the case of the Four Horsemen, they are the sole performers of their poems, privileging the uniqueness of the live experience and the communal moment they are capable of providing as crucial to the experience of the sound poem. First Draft, on the other hand, privileges the sound poem as an entity that is repeatable to encourage, perhaps, a different type of communal spirit around the work since their scores invite other performers to engage their work. The discourse on the function of the sound poetry score is wrought with these differences, each of which has its own unique set of implications, especially in terms of affect. The performance, as the nexus between poet(s) and audience concentrates an intensity of feeling that probably would not be present when an audience (or even a prospective sound poet) feels when examining a score. The score transfers—at least upon first glance—the affective experience from the ear to the eye. The score only becomes sonically affecting once the score is activated through sounding. That being said, the remainder of the chapter is not focused on the sound poetry score, but rather the sound of the sound poem and its affects.

Theorizing a Canadian Sound Poetic

At the formal level, Canadian sound poetry practice can be divided into two distinctive modes that can be broken down into further subsections. The first is "Acoustic Sound Poetry," a mode that is composed and improvised without the aid or accompaniment of electric instruments or devices; the second is "Electroacoustic Sound Poetry," that, in contrast to the former category, employs electric and electronic devices and instruments as a core component of its aural manifestation. The most common mode of sound poetry among Canadian practitioners is "acoustic sound poetry" and, in the context of the electric age, the gravitation to one side or another of the Acoustic/Electroacoustic divide subtly suggests political connotations for the practice in the poet's orientation toward uses of technology. For example, early in his career, Nichol experimented with the possibilities of an electroacoustic sound poetry using tape, sound effects and filters, and even a megaphone to extend his voice into an electronic context, a project that Nichol soon abandoned. Instead, Nichol privileged the exploration of the voice at its bodily limits. Similarly, McCaffery denigrated recordings of Four Horsemen events as a form of transcription which thereby re-inscribes value into the economy of sound poetry (the recording becomes a material artifact that can be bought and sold within the capitalist market place, a point that I contend with above). This opposition to technological incorporation opposes the spirit of détournement at the heart of concrete poetry, which largely saw the integration and effective creative misuse of writing and printing technologies as part of the practice. The poets on the other side, those who explored the possibilities of recording electroacoustic technologies, saw radical possibilities in them. Owen Sound, for example, uses extensive panning effects which manipulate the acoustic perspective of a recording and have the effect of populating various points of a room with different voices. This electroacoustic distribution of voices among a room

is suggestive of a possibility of rethinking a space through sound as it shapes our sense of space. Similarly, and this is especially true of the tape player, the recorded sound poet advances a means by which the private space of the home may be invaded by sounds that frequently do not vibrate in those spaces thereby shifting the aural constitution of the private space as an increasingly sterile space.[75] These recordings, too, invoke a different kind of affective process, one that is divorced from the performance setting, but that does not mean that these sonological repositories, when played, cannot affect the emotional and cerebral configuration of a person in that moment.

These categories—though fairly self-explanatory—describe the different kinds of solo and collaborative efforts that occurred in Canada at the time: there were solo and collaborative efforts that were comprised of vocalizations only; collaborative efforts comprised of vocal and acoustic accompaniment like string instruments or percussion; and lastly, solo and collaborative efforts characterized by the intersection of the human and nonhuman electroacoustic instruments and devices. These categories can be characterized even further by noting which of these are notated and improvised, and which blur the boundaries between the two. It's important to note that this chapter does not recognize all poetry performance to be sonically-engaged poetry, especially in the case of collaborations between poets and musicians like Earle Birney's three-

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[75] Baudrillard's early writings, positioned as an extension of McLuhan's theories are useful to reflect upon the increasing sterility of the age. Baudrillard imagines the homespace, with its increasing number of screens and networks (televisions, computers, radios etc.) as though it were a control room: "The increasing cerebral capacities of machines would normally lead to a technological purification of the body" (37), he writes. This inclination toward cleanliness becomes an omen for Baudrillard: "In the rituals of transparence one must include the entire prosthetic and protective environments as substitutes for the natural biological defenses of the human body . . . [the] bubble child is the prefiguration of the future, of total asepsis, the elimination of all germs, which are the biological form of transparency. He is the symbol of existence in a vacuum" (36). Though recordings are undoubtedly enmeshed within this vaccinated technological framework, these recordings often contained oral/aural ecologies that exceed the recordings usually found in the private space. What I am trying to suggest here is that the sound poetry recordings are subversive in the ways they sonically reconfigure the private sphere through the emissions of unconventional assemblages of linguistic, non-linguistic, post-linguistic, and even electroacoustic soundings.

volume collaboration with Toronto-band Nexus, which sounds more like incidental

accompaniment to Birney's reading of his poetry than a true intersection wherein the non-vocal

soundings and the acoustic instrumentation are deliberately interwoven as a compositional unit,

as in the collaborations of O'Huigin and Southam. These characterizations acknowledge the

diversity of sound poetics in Canada at the time, from which we can impart that groups like the

Four Horsemen—who have garnered the most critical attention—are not emblematic of all

Canadian sound poetry activity.

The Canadians who endeavoured a sonological poetics of the voice through these various

approaches (or in combination) did so within a mutating sonic mediascape that introduced

significant changes akin to those imposed upon the written word in concrete poetry. McLuhan

traces the changes underway at the time in his attention to the emerging conditions of the electric

age, a period sonically-typified by the disembodied voice as a result of the prominence of electric

auditory networks and recording technologies like the telephone, radio, gramophone, reel-to-reel,

and cassette tapes. The return to tribal communal formations—necessitated by, according to

McLuhan, the rise of the electric age—ushered in a return to an oral/aural culture thus

foregrounding an argument about the social production of community and space through acoustic

agents.[76] McLuhan is acutely aware of the power of acoustics. For McLuhan, sound is an

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[76] Media critic Richard Cavell develops this argument in his book *McLuhan in Space* (2002), recalling that "McLuhan had been writing extensively about orality and literacy since the early 1950s, when he was co-editing *Explorations*. In these articles, McLuhan stressed that he was writing in a transitional moment, when a primarily literate culture was experiencingexperiences aspects of oral culture as they were being retrieved by electronic media" (137). Here Cavell is working toward an understanding of how McLuhan's theories of communication can be fused with considerations of spatiality. His critical emphasis on space in McLuhan's writing poses "an inquiry into the technologies of spatial production" which gesture "toward a social theory of the production of space. McLuhan sought to examine not only how society produces space but also how technologies of space produce society" (30). Jamie Hilder fortifies Cavell's criticism, stating that "The drastically altered mediascape that arose at mid-century alongside electronic media is what led Marshall McLuhan to theorize the experience of space as acoustic rather than visual" (194). The arguments advanced by Cavell and Hilder deepen McLuhan's theories of orality, identifying the intricate and oft-overlooked linkage between sound, corporeality, and materiality.

affective agent with the capacity to shape human life in profound ways. In *Understanding Media*,

he writes,

> If the human ear can be compared to a radio receiver that is able to decode
> electromagnetic waves and recode them as sound, the human voice may be compared to a
> radio transmitter in being able to translate sound into electromagnetic waves. The power
> of the voice to shape air and space into verbal patterns may well have been preceded by a
> less specialized expression of cries, grunts, gestures, and commands, of song and dance.
> (83)

McLuhan's point demonstrates an understated awareness of the capacity sound has in

formulating the individual as well: "The spoken word involves all of the senses dramatically"

and he continues on to say that "in speech we tend to react to each situation that occurs, reacting

in tone and gesture even to our own act of speaking" (82). McLuhan's understanding of the word

highlights the affective dimension of sound: the way it envelops the senses and compels listeners

to respond in distinctive ways, eliciting from them bodily and sonic gestures of their own.

Working, in part, from McLuhan's writing (in particular *The Gutenberg Galaxy*), Canadian

musician and sound theorist R. Murray Schafer, who worked closely with a number of Canadian

sound poets like McCaffery and Nichol, identifies McLuhan's treatment of sound "as a 'thing' in

space" (128) with an affective function in his book *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and

the Tuning of the World* (1977) (more on the Four Horsemen's relationship with Schafer in the

next chapter). Schafer writes, a "sound event is symbolic when it stirs in us emotions or thoughts

beyond its mechanical sensations or signaling function, when it has a numinousity or

reverberation that rings through the deeper recesses of the psyche" (169). To this end, Schafer

highlights particular affects: "sound is vibration [and] it affects other parts of the body as well.

Intense noise can cause headaches, nausea, sexual impotence, reduced vision, impaired

cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and respiratory functions. But noises need not be intense to affect

the physical state of humans during sleep" (184). For Schafer, "the general acoustic environment

of a society can be read as an indicator of social conditions which produce it and may tell us much about the trending and evolution of that society" (7).

Schafer laments the sonic metamorphoses of the Western world's soundscape, resulting from technological advances made by the "Electric Revolution" and the rise of electric audio technologies: "Modern man is beginning to inhabit a world with an acoustic environment radically different from any he has hitherto known" which has alerted researchers "to the dangers of an indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every corner of man's life." In large part, Schafer is concerned with two interrelated problems. First, Schafer is concerned with the impact electroacoustic technologies—like the telephone, radio, phonograph––have on human life. In particular, Schafer is concerned with the problem of "schizophonia," the separation of sound from its original context because of these technologies' capacity to record, store, and transport these sounds around the world. Schafer deems schizophonia unnatural, but more importantly, as Schafer points out it leads to "the territorial expansion of post-industrial sounds [which] complemented the imperialistic ambitions of Western nations" (91). Second, electroacoustic technologies contribute to the problematic blending of lo-fi and hi-fi soundscapes. The lo-fi soundscape is overcrowded by signals, which are obscured and lack sonic perspective (the acoustic foreground and background, if you will). In contrast, the hi-fi soundscape is less crowded, sonically sparse with a clearly defined acoustic perspective. These two problems, resulting from the proliferation of electroacoustic technologies, create one single but crucial problem for Schafer: "the overkill of hi-fi gadgetry not only contributes generously to the lo-fi problem, but it creates a synthetic soundscape in which natural sounds are becoming increasingly unnatural while machine-made substitutes are providing operative signals directing modern life" (91). For Schafer the changes imposed upon the sonic environment have

tremendous impact on human life, altering our sonic interaction with it. "Touch is the most personal of the senses," Schafer writes, and "Hearing and touch meet where the lower frequencies of audible sound pass over to tactile vibrations (at about 20 hertz). Hearing is a way of touching at a distance and the intimacy of the first sense is fused with sociability whenever people gather to hear something special" (11). Implicit to Schafer's study, replete as it is with considerations of affect, is a fear that the new electric soundscape will detrimentally alter the sociability of listening. In essence, Schafer is concerned about the ways the electric soundscape organizes and distributes sound in unprecedented ways. Schafer's argument, regarding "machine-made substitutes … providing operative signals directing modern life" (91) is particularly noteworthy since it highlights how sound—especially machine-made sound—is considered to be a mechanism of control in the mid-to-late twentieth century. It is important to recall here, Hardt and Negri's characterization of the postmodern period as characterized by the arrival of the "society of control" (*Empire* 23). As indicated by Schafer's writing, control and sound are intricately linked, thus he is suggesting that the postmodern crisis of control mechanisms is not unique to visuality in the advertising culture explored in the second chapter. The postmodern crisis of subtle control over human manifests, too, in aural culture, especially from the rise of mechanical sound. Schafer's writing—with its proximity to the Canadian sound poetry context—suggests that the crisis of postmodernity and sound is deeply entwined with the work of the Canadian poets who respond to these issues in a variety of ways.

Canadian sound poetry hardly explored audio technology to such extremes—a stark contrast to concrete poetry, which saw the détournement of a plethora of print technologies to create the works. Even the electroacoustic work of a sound poet like Truhlar with a group like Tekst is more properly experimental music than it is poetry or sound poetry for that matter. Other

poets and groups, like First Draft and select recordings by Penn Kemp, which employ non-vocal instrumentation, typically employ acoustic instruments rather than electric ones. That being said, while international sound poetry is typified in large part by the use and abuse of sonic technology as part of the art, Canadian sound poetry is equally in tension with the aesthetic and political frequencies that international practitioners sought to access despite its lack of technological composition. Sound poetry, as a mode of poetic practice, and especially the sound poetry of the mid-twentieth century, is the pursuit of language and communication beyond conventional means; it is the transmission of thoughts and feelings in unconventional ways, but there is also a stirring up of thoughts and feelings that a listener may not have known they had. In Massumi's terms, this is "affect" par excellence, an opening of possibilities of experience beyond what is codified by language. For example, in the pursuit of such expansion, sound poetry—both in its technologic and acoustic iterations—indulges in the creative composition and mobilization of noise: bodily non-linguistic sounds (such as unintelligible screaming, hollering, burping, coughing, hiccupping), cacophony produced by simultaneous voices, unintelligible speech as well as dissonance, disharmony, electrostatic, heavily-layered electroacoustic effects, filters, and so on. Jacques Attali's 1977 book of sonic theory, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music,* describes music as the aesthetic organization and distribution of sound, or in other words, the organization of harmony, melody, dissonance and so on. This aesthetic rendering of noise is political. Music is a "tool for the creation or consolidation of a community" (Attali 6)—it is an aesthetic configuration that develops consensus. In other words, sound—which encompasses everything from noise to music for Attali—is a means through which control is exercised and order is established. Attali's language here, like Schafer's, also corresponds to Hardt and Negri's description of postmodern conditions and notions of control, suggesting that even in the 1970s

and 1980s this lack of autonomy is a deep concern. Attali describes the affect of sound using an

admittedly outmoded binary model, positioning noise and music as oppositions. Noise, in

Attali's model, corresponds to notions of chaos and disorder while music corresponds to civility,

order, and aesthetic fulfillment. For Attali, sound, in the form of music or noise, can be deployed

as a tool that cultivates experiences on either end of the spectrum—order or disorder. In the

context of sound poetry, I am employing a similar binary model that understands conventional

poetry as a kind of music and the unconventional genre of sound poetry as a kind of noise as it

eschews semantic codes (that which orders meaning in language). According to Attali, noise's

radical impact is its ability to, as I articulate using Rancière's terms, create "dissensus"—and

disrupt the ordered assemblage as a form of protest or resistance. In this way, the sound poem

offers a temporary liberation from the restrictions of semantic codes to enjoy the disorder

provided by noise—especially vocal noise—by which the audience is affected, thus changing the

listener's perception of order in that fleeting moment.   From this conceptual apparatus,

Canadian sound poetry—especially the radical sound poetry of this study—can be considered as

a carefully positioned practice of resistance to the electro/acoustic conditions of the postmodern

era. Of the Canadian sound poets who were active during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, McCaffery

has perhaps most directly addressed part of this problem in his theorizations of sound poetry

practice, beginning with his 1970 manifesto "for a poetry of blood," in which he articulates an

"utter faith" in sound's "liberating" and transformative capacities: "EITHER YOU

TRANSFORM OR YOU / DESTROY" (275). Adopting a McLuhanesque vocabulary,

McCaffery's manifesto offers an extensive consideration of sound and its value over language

and poetry. For McCaffery, poetry and sound share the same basic qualities: "rhythm & pulse,"

and it is through sound, and its affect, that one achieves "the successful assimilation of your own

[biology] into another biology" (275). This creative undertaking can also be understood in Nichol's description of his own poetic projects that seek expression beyond logocentricism: "language means communication and that communication does not just mean language" (18). His visual and sonic experiments, like McCaffery's manifesto, seek to transcend the limitations of singular corporeality and linguistic homogenization, or in Nichol's terms seeks to find "as many exits as possible from the self (language/communication exists) in order to form as many entrances as possible for the other" (18). Sound poetry is not simply the disruption of linguistic convention, but rather a means of transcending the singular self to materially and corporally affect the social world.

For McCaffery, linguistic expression is intricately bound with capitalism and its problematic program of homogenizing and standardizing the subject; he writes, "Capitalism begins when you / open the dictionary" ("Lyric's Larynx" 178) and, in a separate context, suggests that "Language … functions like money and speaks *through* us more than we actively produce *within* it" ("Diminished Reference and The Model Reader"13). McCaffery and his contemporaries such as Nichol and bissett believed that language had been systematically regularized to the extent that expression of the self became imitative of the power structures that alienate, suppress, or deny individual expression. This is the same crisis of control that McLuhan identifies in his discussion of the rise of the electric age, which is later echoed in Hardt and Negri's characterization of postmodernism and the society of control, and further emphasized by Brian Massumi's and Rachel Smith Greenwald's considerations of emotion as a codified feeling versus affect as that which exceeds conventional language. As noted in the previous section, media advertising, for example, relies on clear, standardized communication so that the target-audience may easily understand the product and can be persuaded to purchase it. The language of

advertising is intended to appeal (or provide the illusion of appealing) to the individual's needs and desires, guiding them toward the product. The accumulation of products in a society characterized by capitalist modes of exchange comes to define the individual subject.[77] The project of standardizing, in this context, is a subtle means of modulating what the language of desire means and does, especially in relation to objects available for purchase. McCaffery illustrates these connections most clearly when he situates sound poetry in dialogue with Bataille's concept of the "General Economy," wherein he figures sound poetry as a total excess: "sound poetry is a poetry of complete expenditure in which nothing is recoverable" that exceeds "semantic order" and "shatters meaning at a point where language commits its move to idealization" that consequently "puts the subject into process" (214-15).[78] This process contests conventional capitalistic formulations of the self as a total, effectuated project that is thereby serviceable to capitalist society—a crisis that this wave of poets sought to oppose. Poets like Nichol, McCaffery, bissett and others, then, confronted this crisis and formulated a mode of sonic poetic expression, aware of language as a means of exchange, and sought to finds ways of expressing themselves outside of this system. In other words, these are poets who sought to disrupt capitalism by reimagining forms of language and communication.[79]

While McCaffery eventually comes to deny the possibility of radical, non-linguistic vocal communication later in his career, this problem is of central importance to Adriana Cavarero's 2005 book *For More Than One Voice*. Cavarero distinguishes voice from logocentricism because logocentrism "radically denies to the voice a meaning of its own that is not always

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[77] I touch on some of these same ideas regarding advertising and McLuhan in my previous chapter on concrete poetry.

[78] The subject is both poet and audience.

[79] While these are admirable aspirations, these are just that: aspirations. No systemic change—that I know of—has truly come about in the Western context as a result of poets experimenting with new combinations of phonemes and morphemes.

already destined to speech" (13). For Cavarero, voice, sound, and vocalization are intricately bound in ontological experiential formations of the self that exceed linguistic figurations or, as she puts it, the "voice is sound, not speech" (12), it "communicates the elementary givens of existence: uniqueness, relationality, sexual difference, and age" (8). Cavarero develops these ideas from Hannah Arendt's concept of the "human condition" which is concerned with "the uniqueness that makes everyone a being that is different from all others" (3). Though "uniqueness" is a concept that informs neoliberal hegemony, stimulating a culture of competition that fuels the capitalist marketplace, it must not be maligned. Human subjectivation is comprised of a series of processes that create each individual. We are all unique assemblages of shared and non-unique elements. The concept of "uniqueness" has been co-opted by neoliberal hegemony, but it can be situated outside of this in a way that does not have to correspond to the production of value in the capitalist marketplace. The poets of the Language Revolution were aware of this very trap. Uniqueness only becomes troublesome when the capitalist marketplace uses ideas related to subjective experience to ensure that any person remains an agent of capitalist hegemony. The standardization of language is one of the ways this process occurs. The drive toward uniqueness—the demand for every subject to be recognized as unique—is weaponized by postmodernity as a subtle form of manipulation to encourage all subjects within a capitalist marketplace to constantly reinvent their identity. Cavarero's theorization of the voice usefully assists in locating the voice as an integral point of inquiry into this problem; however, her theory is mainly limited to a consideration of vocal ontology.

A new question, then, emerges from this discussion: how does one move "from ontology to politics" when considering the voice and its sonic qualities (Cavarero 16)? Steve Goodman's *Sonic Warfare* (2009) offers an answer to this problem in his theory of a vibrational ontology.

Drawing from affect theory, Goodman's thinking about sound probes deeper into the sonic

sphere to identify uniqueness to be vibration, a foundational element to all things. Indeed,

objects, sounds, speech, and vocalizations all possess unique frequencies: "All entities are

potential media that can feel or whose vibrations can be felt by other entities" (82), he writes. For

Goodman, we are not language-beings; we are vibrational-beings. While Goodman is mainly

concerned with infrasonic sounds—sounds that are beyond/below the vocal range of sound

poets—his theorization usefully highlights the social and material properties of sound. Sound

may often be invisible to the human eye, but it still can affect the world in a material way.

Goodman draws attention to this fact: "Vibrating entities are always entities out of phase with

themselves. A vibratory nexus exceeds and precedes the distinction between subject and object,

constituting a mesh of relation in which discreet entities [ap]prehend each other's vibrations"

(83). To push this further: as vibrational-beings, we are routinely exposed to the unique qualities

of all entities within a soundscape. For example, if Nichol startles the listener by screaming

"MAYAKOVSKY!" two-thirds of the way through the sound poem of the same name, a listener

receives both the linguistic and sonic-materials of that sound as it engages the nervous system.

The sound poetry event is the "vibratory nexus" (Goodman 83) at which a listener receives

unique vibrations transmitted through vocalization. This process of vibrational transmission is

purely affective and this transmission is political.

The political here is employed in terms analogous to Jacques Rancière's sense of the

word: the political resides in acts of what he refers to as "dis-sensus"—when an entity becomes

separate from a community by challenging or resisting the consensus of an established politic. It

is useful to think of the sound poetry event as providing a type of disruption necessary to create a

sense of disorientation, which in turn allows the audience to experience alternative states of

being—it is in this alternative experiential state that radical possibilities can begin to emerge. McCaffery's manifesto for sound poetry is a striking anticipation of Goodman's theorization of vibrational ontology and sonic affect. Both describe a process of sonic affective transmission. McCaffery has referred to this affective process in distinctly McLuhanesque terms, referring to "sound" as "the extension of human biology" ("poetry of blood" 275), echoing the subtitle of McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. With Goodman's consideration of vibration, and his convincing accounts of vibrational engagement, the potency of McCaffery's "for a poetry of blood" is revitalized. Re-inscribing the overwhelmingly evident, but neglected affective properties of sound usefully reintroduces political value into "sound poetry," thereby retroactively re-validating the ambitions of McCaffery and many of his peers.

These considerations of McCaffery, in tandem with the sonic theories of McLuhan, Schafer, Attali, Caverero, and Goodman testify to the important socio-political work that sound plays on both individual and collective planes of being. Listening and the formation of subjectivity—individual and national—had particular importance to Canadian poets. For example, listening was of utmost importance to Toronto poet Dennis Lee, who addressed nationalist concerns in his "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space" (1974).[80] In this essay, Lee articulates the problem of a period of writer's block or, what he calls silence, that he endured beginning amid Canada's centenary celebratory year, 1967. For Lee (who was not a sound poet), the problem was not simply personal but also national. It was the absence of a distinctly Canadian language in the face of colonial pressure and influence from America and England. The language that Lee found himself using was not his own. Instead he found himself

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[80] Lee is not a sound poet though sound in poetry is certainly a major concern for his practice. See, for example, his *Alligator Pie* (1974), which revels in the rhythms and rhyme of language: "Alligator pie, alligator pie,/ If I don't get some I think I'm gonna die" (1-2).

penetrated by the language of imperial nations: "the sphere of imperial influence was not confined to the pages of newspapers. It also included my head. And that shook me to the core, because I could not even restrict the brainwashing I began to recognize" ("Cadence" 158). This resulted in his own period of authorial silence, unable to produce work that he felt was authentic and worthy of pursuit. Lee finds the solution to this problem in listening to what he describes as the cadence: "What I hear is initially without content; but when the poem does come, the content must accord with the cadence I have been overhearing or I cannot make it" (152). The cadence "is the medium, the raw stone. Content is already there in the cadence. And writing a poem means cutting away everything in the cadence that isn't that poem" until the "poem is what remains; it is local cadence minus whatever is extraneous to its shapely articulation" (153). Lee's solution of listening to the cadence of the local is one way of overcoming the apparently crippling problem of imperialistic pressures, and producing a poetry carved out of the cadence seems an adequate response to Schafer's similarly articulated problem of "the territorial expansion of post-industrial sounds complemented the imperialistic ambitions of Western nations" (*Soundscape* 91). Working from the local, as Lee points out, cadence "seeks to issue in the articulate gestures of being human here" ("Cadence" 168).

While Lee sought to project a nationalist Canadian identity through his writing— i.e. writing the landscape by listening to its sounds—sound poetry in Canada vibrated differently. Sound poets in Canada resisted the conditions of postmodernity and its control, but also resisted the impulse to formulate a nationalist identity through their soundings. The radical gesture in their work is to intervene into conditions of postmodernity, on both individual and nationalistic planes to, much like concrete poetry, open up new possibilities of community, necessitated through sound. Canadian sound poetry sought the formation of an alternative sonic assemblage

that opposes the vibrations of postmodernity—the increasing industrial and urbanized sounds of the day-to-day, the sounds of standardized speech for the purposes of consumption as new media proliferates, but they als resisted narrow conceptions of Canadian nationalist identity amid the rise of postmodernity.[81] Sound poetry in Canada—as a disruptive sonic poetic—still offers, in a sense, an exit strategy from these social and political modes of being. Within the fold of the sound poetry event, in the face-to-face sonic encounter, the affective potential is heightened, but the space also becomes a temporary alternative community in itself. Massumi reminds us of this point: "One always affects and is affected in encounters; which is to say, through events. To begin, affectively in change is to begin in relation, and to begin in relation is to begin in the event" (*Politics of Affect* ix), a point the Canadian sound poets already knew. Though not everybody within the event will respond to the event in the same way, they would, as Massumi points out, "have unfolded from the same suspense" (56). What occurs, then, is what Massumi calls an "affective attunement" which is "a way of approaching affective politics that is much more supple than notions more present in the literature of what's being called the 'affective turn,' like imitation or contagion, because it finds difference in unison, and concertation in difference" (56). The sound poetry event then—especially in the Canadian context—is the space in which vibrations usher persons toward a disillusionment of sameness and standardization.

Many of the sound poets operating at this time advanced their own sound poetic with a somewhat analogous conception of sound and politics—namely, sound poetry as an affective practice with radical potentialities that engage the self and others in a process that exceeds conventional linguistic, intellectual, and affective experiences. In addition to McCaffery's "a poetry of blood" and Nichol's concept of "exits and entrances" (both noted above), there are

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[81] See Milton Acorn's essay "Against Bad Mountain" (1972) and Dennis Lee's "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space" (1974).

numerous other statements of sound poetics that complement this conceptual constellation. For example, McCaffery and Nichol's theorization of sound poetry agrees with another member of the Four Horsemen, Dutton, who in his "Preface" to *Right Hemisphere, Left Ear* (1979), which is included in *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue*, advocates for borderblur poetics, arguing for more fluid forms of expression: "if some ineffable emotion demands recourse to human sounds beyond the realm of conventional verbalization or if the communication of a particularly pleasing rhythm is hindered by the imposition of intellectual or verbal constructs, then let the everyday words depart to make way for that which is most immediate" (*Sound Poetry* 44). Dutton's comments here align with McCaffery's rejection of standardized modes of expression and the ways in which they deny and obfuscate expression, especially, for Dutton, the expression of affects. Since they were influenced by the Four Horsemen, members of Owen Sound congruously postulated their practice: Dean suggests that "In sound-poetry we give form to the unspoken communication between things" (50). Penhale argues "Sound-poetry as we know it is based in our language experience, in our emotional experience" and later that, "Sound without ideation is emotion. The first registration our work has on an audience, beyond the initial shock, is emotional. We are speaking to them in a non-image work manner yet with a good deal of communication" (50). Most pointedly, Truhlar directly links sound, affects, emotions, and processes of expressing the self: "Sound must be encompassed into an organic process which is greater than the sound itself ... Emotion is the expression of a life deeply felt and experienced. One emotes thru sound. We then must make a conscious link for ourselves between our sounds & our lives" (50).

Developing linkages between sound, poetry, process, and affect seemingly stimulated more than just the Canadian sound poetry establishment. Sean O'Huigin, for example, foregrounds sound poetry as process, not only for the performer but also the audience:

"performing alone or collaborating with ann southam and her synthesizer in live concert to find the presence of the text allows the viewers to identify with and become much more involved in the performance" (60) and in another context, highlights the materiality of sound:

> sound poetry began to develop in my mind as a fabulous means of exploring language. I began to visualize words as something you could crawl inside and explore, stretching the sounds to see if they actually could tell you something about the word, repeating the sounds, repeating the letters to discover rhythms in the word, rearranging letters, picking the whole word up and throwing it into your imagination, exploring what happened when it landed. (*Poe [try]* 9)

O'Huigin's comments demonstrate a keen awareness of the materiality of sound and vibration, the sound poem as a "vibratory nexus." The involvement of the audience, which he invokes, is not an involvement as a performer, but rather one who is engaged by the sounds, vibrations, and the affects that sounds stimulate. The audience, in this way, undergoes an internal, sensory performance that enters through the ear and affects the listener's imagination, alters their rhythms, and expands their perceived use of language. Similarly, in an interview with Nichol for *Music Works* magazine, Shikatani describes his sound poetry practice as a process of working "more with sound trying to absorb the silence. And the way I've been trying to do that is usually thru rhythm and thru what I see as energy fields between components of regular words" (11). These ideas of energy recall McCaffery's notion of economies wherein energies (libidinal and otherwise) circulate. Shikatani carries on to describe his sound poetry process as "picking up on the vibrations, in the quote 60's terminology, *the vibes*" (11), a seemingly unsuspecting comment that should be weightily considered in light of Goodman's elaborate appreciation of the political and ontological functions of vibrations.

For sound poets like Kemp and McMaster, sound poetry is a crucial mode for the formulation and expression of their own subjectivity outside of a male-dominated tradition of linguistic expression. In a profile for *Cross-Canada Writers' Quarterly*, Patricia Keeney

highlights that affective dimension of Kemp's work: "Kemp is an accomplished sound poet, expressing emotion that goes beyond logic or syntax. Sound was first and sound is last, From breath and cry to keening, From gasp to gasp" (8). In the same article, Kemp tells Keeney that "All my books are about the many aspects of being a woman'" (8), a statement that can be extended to her sound work as well. Similarly, McMaster identifies that from an early point in her career that she conceived of poetry as being intimately linked with emotion, a consideration that she inherited from Douglas Barbour, one half of sound poetry duo Re: Sounding:

> At the time when I started coming out of the closet as a poet – which was late sixties, early seventies – poetry as I understood it was very intense, lyrical, the moment captured. I had some excellent teachers at that time – W.O. Mitchell, for example, and Doug Barbour – who told me 'Don't tell the story, don't tell the story, make it the pure emotion.' And my poems got shorter, and shorter, and very formal, and non-narrative. (80)

As part of her practice with First Draft, this drive toward emotion became, for McMaster, a mode of feminist practice. Situating herself within the sound poetry scene, she writes,

> bp, like Colin and Alrick and Peter and Claude, is a friend simply, so that at one point I think, my life is full of men and I'm not sleeping with any of them. A change from the wild girl who was. In that way, First Draft is also a feminist, a humanist, adventure, in which I and other women involved are there not as ornaments or organizers and then men are there not as Cool Lukes or artistes. We are all collaborators on equal terms – people, in fact. (*Gargoyle's* 26)

These statements, from both Kemp and McMaster, highlight both the affective and radical dimensions of sound poetry as a means of accessing alternative modes of expression and subjectivation—the process of formulating subjectivity. This is an especially potent manifestation considering that the 1980s in Canadian literary culture was a crucial period in the development of feminist poetics—as evidenced by the theoretical and creative writings of Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Nicole Brossard, and others. Kemp's and McMaster's work is

aligned with this emergent feminist literary zeitgeist in the ways not only that they write the body but also how they sound the body.

The Sounds of Feeling: Examples of the Work

I pursue my analysis of examples of Canadian sound poetry with an acute focus on sound poems that demonstrate an awareness of sound's affectivity and foregrounding of the material elements of sound. As a group, the Four Horsemen's collaborative acoustical sound poetry is aligned with the radical material and affective project outlined in the previous section. Their work, often improvised, is demonstrative of the ways in which sound poetry resists and responds to the conditions of the electric age since as part of their work they denigrate the role and importance of the recorded sound poem, and also refrain from incorporating electroacoustic devices into their work. Their resistance to these conditions and standardized communication is clearly audible in their sound poem "Assassin" from *Live in the West* (1977). The piece opens with hissing sounds from several of the members, accentuating the "ss" sound of the word assassin. Nichol's voice emerges from the hissing with a buoyant and repetitive song: "sin sin sin-a-sin sin sin," repetitively playing with the phonemes of the word until the group begins to ecstatically chant "AH-SA-SIN." The tempo of this chant accelerates with each repetition until the synchronicity of voices breaks apart followed by sporadic sounds of hyperventilation, which are quickly silenced by a cry. This sequence is repeated and silenced once more. Here the Four Horsemen become assassins themselves, destroyers of standardized language. They deconstruct the title-word "assassin," spilling out its morphemes and phonemes—words such as "sin" and "ass" as well as its pre-linguistic sounds including hisses, screams, shouts, inhalation and exhalation. The Four Horsemen charge through these sonic elements, stripping the word of its singular meaning

and open it to find "as many exits as possible" (Nichol 18). This is the kind of linguistic analysis critics often employ when discussing sound poetry: a focus on the deconstruction of language and logic that results in a discourse of negation, aligning their work with earlier twentieth century experiments performed by the Dadaists. McCaffery, in his 1970 sound poetry manifesto, denounced this kind of assessment to be a "misinterpretation" ("a poetry" 275) of their work. On the one hand "Assassin" is the creative realization of this metaphorical killing of speech through the destabilization of the word. However, I would also like to suggest that this piece is an anticipatory creative realization of Cavarero's argument that "voice is sound, not speech" (12). In this way, the poem is a creative process of accentuating, and thereby, revealing innate sonic elements that are outside of language, but integrally part of an experiential, material, and corporeal vocalized event.

The work of the Four Horsemen does not simply signal a turn away from language to emphasize vocalization, affect, and sonic materialism, but also offers an experiment in formulating alternative sonic communities. The Four Horsemen events were opportunities to rethink models of community and the conditions that bind us together (material, corporeal, and otherwise). In "Mischievous Eve," another recording from *Live in the West,* communal and affective sonic properties are approached in a variety of ways. "Mischievous Eve" begins with a maniacal laugh repeated by one of the members that is soon accompanied by the group. As the laughter reaches its peak among the performers, laughter is also heard to be coming from the audience. Nichol's voice emerges singing "Remember, remember the fifth of November" and very quickly the song enters into a series of chant-like rhythms anchored by the quiet, sustained repetition of "remember" with accompanying non-referential squeals, hums, alveolar trills, and guttural sounds. This continues until McCaffery announces himself through a didactic,

authoritative speech entitled "History of North American Respiration." The clarity of

McCaffery's voice and speech begins to wane as Dutton and Barreto-Rivera's chant, "one voice

alone still cannot say what two voices together saying one thing can," increases in speed and

volume until they overpower McCaffery's voice. When McCaffery's voice re-emerges he no

longer has the voice of didacticism, but instead chants "get them speaking your way."

McCaffery's vocal transformation and re-alignment with Dutton and Barreto-Rivera's bi-vocal

chant signifies the powerful influence of increased sonic qua vibrational magnitude. Considering

both the allusion to Guy Fawkes Day, a British holiday commemorating the radical plot to

explode Parliament, and the biblical story of Eve—who transgresses the command of God—

critic Stephen Voyce argues that these allusions "collude in significant ways: both involve a

transgression against property by figures whose traditional status as villains is challenged" (234).

From a sonic perspective, "Mischievous Eve" engages notions of transgression and property in

interesting ways. Here it is the voice and its affective sonic material that transgresses the borders

of the body, the property lines of the self. The group employs the sound of laughter at the

beginning of the work as a cathectic mechanism, a means of unifying or tuning the audience into

the piece, the performers, and each other. I say "sound of laughter" because there is no obvious

joke or other comedic prompt: the sound itself is contagious. Laughter, here, is a transferable

sonic-thing that spreads throughout the audience's nervous system, inciting pleasure, and briefly

drawing the audience into assemblage. Alternatively, the sound of laughter in "Mischievous

Eve" is a sonic extension of the self into a larger body of organisms. Sound as an affective

contagion is thematized even more explicitly by the exchange between McCaffery's didactic

voice and the chant of Barreto-Rivera and Dutton. Barreto-Rivera and Dutton do not chant

meaningfully to the didactic McCaffery to convince him to speak their way, but do so by

exemplifying the power of their unified voice. The chant-like rhythm overwhelms his singular, sonic-being to unite their forms of vocalization.

It was not uncommon for the Four Horsemen to encourage audience participation during their performances either. Most of these performer-attendee interactions were "person-to-person" (Sanders and Prejsnar 56), integrating the audience into the sonic event and creating a truly communal happening. While the presence of sound itself always establishes a "vibratory nexus," these cases of audience participation most effectively demonstrate Goodman's notion of a "vibratory nexus" where sound transcends the distinction between performer and audience to create a "mesh of relation in which discreet entities [ap]prehend each other's vibrations" (83). It is within the space of the Four Horsemen's sound poetry events that sonic forces provide a communal basis instead of linguistic communication; it is here that the community vibrates differently from the controlled conditions of postmodernity.

Owen Sound, in part, originated as an imitation of the Four Horsemen. They are another group consisting of four men, most of whom were (and still are) practicing poets. Their first recording, *Meaford Tank Range* (1977)—named after a military training-base and actual tank range near Owen Sound, an allusion that aligns their work with militaristic notions of the avant-garde—explored the same sonic properties and vocal possibilities of sound poetry, employing chants, polyvocal arrangements, heteroglossalia, and a range of guttural, primal, and song-like soundings. Like the Four Horsemen, Owen Sound thrived as a performance group in live settings, touring similar circuits in Canada and abroad. The B-side of *Meaford Tank Range*, contains the single track "Kesawagas," which solidifies the importance of affect in their work and develops these ideas further. The track name "Kesawagas" signals a return to the idea of McLuhanesque neo-tribal formations ("the global village"). The word "Kesawagas" describes, as

Rothenberg points out in *Technicians of the Sacred,* "a [dance] ceremony performed by four drums, the smallest of which 'plays the complex rhythms that serve as instructions to the dancers and that can be identified and repeated speech patterns'" (598).[82] The sound poem is by no means a traditional kesawaga, but it engages the idea of the ceremony and its formal features. The poem employs four voices (instead of drums) and uses complex rhythms and repeated speech patterns. The track begins with two voices in a cannon-like sequence repeating "mah mah mah bayoopah mahjamah" followed by a vocal drone that quickly transforms into a rapid, free jazz style vocal imitative of drum sounds. The invocation of "kesawaga" affiliates the sound poem, too, with notions of ritual, a sonic space of communion prescribed by a specific ordering of actions to reach a sequence of affects and effects. "This is a lecture on composition," a voice ironically states, "it cannot be repeated" ("Kesawagas" n. pag.), which speaks to the sound poem's possible (and likely) spontaneity, but also, in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek way, points to the sound poem as a new form of composition—perhaps not just for poetic or musical composition, but also a new community.[83] If Owen Sound's "Kesawagas" were to be considered a ritual, it might fittingly be described as a cleansing ritual, a poem that cleanses the listener's palette, effacing preconceived notions of the poem and the way that one can gather around the idea of poetry.

Exploring the limits of sound, poetry, language, and communication is the driving force for sound poetry compositions of Owen Sound. A later poem, "A Spiral of Forgotten

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[82] Rothenberg's definition of kesawagas is presented in an endnote related to a suite of poems, entitled "Three Drum Poems," presented earlier in the book. These three poems are from Papua New Guinea; however, Rothenberg does not explicitly say that the Kesawagas originate Papua New Guinea; however, the wording used by Rothenberg implies this to be true.

[83] I recognize that by 1977, the sound poem is not truly a new form nor would the sound poetry event be a new form of communal formation, especially since in the English-Canadian context sound poetry became a point of communion as late as approximately 1965. However, sound poetry, even by 1977, remained to be a somewhat of both a novelty and alternative, having not yet broken into a mainstream (and remains outside of a mainstream).

Intimacies," composed by Steven Ross Smith and Richard Truhlar and performed and recorded at the Kontakte Writers in Performance Series in Toronto on 23 February 1985, intersects with notions of affect most directly. The work consists of a single speaking voice, accompanied by a pulsing electroacoustic voice modulator producing a slight, rasping echo. The poem does not engage the usual range of non-linguistic and post-linguistic soundings found in other Owen Sound sound poems, as heard in the alien sounding "She Was a Visitor."[84] In this way, "A Spiral of Forgotten Intimacies" is a nexus point that investigates the human acoustic voice within the context of the electric age. The voice recites a lyric poem that meditates on natural images, feelings of alienation and confusion, and the limits of language: "What boat has brought me here / living within the walls of language / within a perplexity of cells / in an atmosphere of contained apartments / the everyday cuts in, lurking / within walls of false language" (n. pag). The poem adopts the tone of a lament amid a disintegrating world: "we are deaf among worn stones, some former image muscle, bone, dissolving as the senses fade" and the natural world becomes nothing more than "Green memories" (n. pag.). The poem, in a sense, highlights the rise of schizophonia and the loss of the world's natural sounds and rhythms. The electroacoustic effect has a spectral presence, distorting the natural qualities of the voice and lurking behind it as though threatening to overtake it, much in the same way the mechanisms of the electric age and postmodernity co-opted processes of subjectivation and threaten the autonomy of the subject. The speaker describes the natural as "a location left behind" but, more importantly, as they recall the natural world, "a spiral of forgotten intimacies" (n. pag.). The invocation of "intimacy,"

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[84] "She Was a Visitor," from their 1980 *Beyond the Range: Owen Sound 1976-1979*, possesses a mysterious, otherworldly tone, consisting of alien soundings as though they were from a science fiction TV series. Though somewhat campy, the poem effectively highlights the inherent ontological strangeness of the voice and communication, indicating an awareness of the voice's inherent qualities that indeed exceed genuine and accurate description. The poem invokes mystery, but also questions the affective capacities of the voice itself when it is divorced from scripted conventions of clear, linguistic communication or, say, in music, following a scale and key.

characterizes the human connection with the natural world not as a chance encounter, but one of deep feeling, sensation and intensity: an affective bond. Goodman's theories of vibration and Schafer's ideas of tuning are useful to consider here: the world is comprised of vibrations that are constantly affecting us whether we are conscious of their affective capacities or not, and the vibrations of the natural world are being consigned to the past. In this way, the poem approximates neo-romanticism in its seeming longing for a return to a natural world—with its rhythms, vibrations, and acoustical order.[85]

Owen Sound, like the Four Horsemen, compose and perform sound work, for the sake of creating a vibrational, sonic forum for themselves and their audience. Their sound forms the basis for communal interaction, offering a way of sonically reaching out to the other. Recordings of Owen Sound that took place in a live space (as opposed to a studio space) provide evidence that this is indeed the case. A sound poem like "Kinderspielgesange," performed and recorded at 11th Sound Poetry Festival in Toronto on 16 October 1979, exemplifies this. "Kinderspielgesange" is a ten-minute sound poem consisting of high-pitched squealing, gargling, whistling, and animalistic sounds accompanied by harmonica, percussion, and deflating balloons. The title of poem "Kinderspielgesange," roughly translates from German to "children's game song," highlighting the poem's focus on pre-linguistic and post-linguistic soundings, but also, since it uses a German title, may also acknowledge the beginnings of sound poetry with German artist Hugo Ball. The poem itself pushes the limits of what we consider voice, language, and sounding as part of this strange, seemingly improvised soundscape. One such effect of this type

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[85] To suggest, though, that Owen Sound's solution to the responding acoustical world, as a result of the shifting technosphere was a form of ludditism would misrepresent their politics, especially someone like Truhlar who continued to explore his interest in sound through vocally sourced electronic compositions with groups like Tekst. However, Owen Sound more often than not, like the Four Horsemen, refrained from employing electroacoustic devices as part of their sound poetry.

of work, however, is not necessarily alienation or confusion but is the production of pleasure and joy, affects with the potential to affectively bond a community. Throughout the performance of "Kinderspielgesange" one can hear, numerous audience members giggling and laughing intermittently, perhaps in the same way one may delight in the non-linguistic utterances of a young child. More than other affects—more than, say, anger or rage—laughter operates to bind individuals to one another.

Individual performances of sound poetry operated in similar ways. For Nichol, the sound poem was one of the fastest and most effective ways for him to access feelings. At the beginning of his poem "A Love Poem for Gertrude Stein," on the 1971 cassette *bpNichol*, he states: "My name is bpNichol, and I'm going to approach this tape the way I would any poetry reading, and for me the best way, the thing that gets me the fastest into the poems, into the feeling, into my own breathing body is to begin with some of my sound poems" (n. pag.). The breath, body, and feeling are what guide Nichol through his sound poems, not an imposed, formal logic. Nichol's "The Incest Song," from his 1968 *Motherlove*, illuminates his concern for sound, language, communication, and systems in the electric age. The stereo panning effect shifts Nichol's vocalizations from left to right speaker (or left to right headphone) and foregrounds the process of movement and exploration in sound poetry which he explores. Nichol's poetry is one of movement that rejects systematization. Hence his preference to get into "the feeling" and not into the logic or meaning of a poem. "The Incest Song" is composed using the sonic components of the word "system." Nichol breaks apart the word into its phonemes, resulting in a hissing sound from "sys" which is repeated and prolonged variously throughout the poem, as well "stem" and then the full word "system." The poem opens with a prolonged "sysssssssss" followed by the same sound in repetition, imitating white noise as though the poem begins *in media res* as part of

a communication breakdown. If the communication devices of the electric age have broken down, we are left with nothing more than sounds that exceed conventional linguistic communication: static and word-fragments as the voice struggles through the electric apparatus. Nichol's poem on communication technologies is trapped within the system he seeks to criticize: it relies on the panning mechanisms of the machine to mount the critique itself thus expressing an implicit reliance on the system. Considering this ensnared critique of the poem, it should come as no surprise that Nichol's interests in electroacoustic sound poetics were quickly abandoned after his early experiments.

The systematization of language persists as a concern for Nichol in his sound poetry in a poem like "Son of Sonnet" from *bpNichol* (1971). Instead of engaging the conditions of the electric age, Nichol is instead engaging poetic form itself as a way of organizing expression, especially "love." The invocation of "son" in the title conjures a kind of oedipal drama, a conflict between past and present and a struggle for power: the son (Nichol's poem) seeks to escape/overthrow the authority of the father (the tradition of the sonnet). The sonnet, of course, is a rule-governed poetic form, typically associated with expressions of love as typified in the works of Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. Nichol's poem intersects with the tradition of the sonnet—as indicated by the title—yet it discards the sonnet's conventions entirely. Instead, it consists of largely pre-linguistic and post-linguistic sounds: shouts, chants, trills, and song. On a very basic level of analysis, this poem offers a rejection of codified expressions of love and affection, and, if this is indeed a love poem, offers a totally alternative and non-codified way of voicing that expression. Significantly, too, the sonnet's rhythm is dominated by iambic pentameter. Nichol's poem, too, rejects this notion of a body's natural rhythm from the outset, and instead continually alters the rhythm of his vocalizations to sound both rapid and frantic, as

well as slow, elongated, and sonically spatialized. Nichol's poem recognizes that the body has no "natural" rhythm, just as love exceeds conventional poetic expression.

bissett's sound poetry uniquely intersects with considerations of bodies, sound, and what constitutes the idea of "natural." Though his sound poetry continues to evolve, even to this day, I will here look at two distinctive phases of his sound poetry: 1) sound poetry that can be situated among McLuhanesque considerations of technology as an extension of humankind; and 2) a return to nature through vocalization (akin to Owen Sound's previously mentioned lament for a lost world). Both phases, which overlap one another, stage radically different responses to the conditions of the electronic communication technologies. By 1967, bissett had been exploring the intersection of technology and language. This was evident with his concrete poetry—his explorations of the typewriter and printing technology; however, this can be heard in his sound poetry too. In other words, bissett's sound poetry exceeded the vocal chanting and word-merging that Tallman notes around the time of McClure's visit. In places like Vancouver's Sound Gallery, bissett was experimenting with sound and lights as part of his performance, and in collaboration with Lance Farrell and Martina Clinton with tape machines ("Bill Bissett and BP Nichol"). These experiments indicate that bissett did not reject sound technologies in the same way as Nichol.[86]

bissett's book-record *Awake in the Red Desert* (1968) best represents the range of his sound poetry, and the various ways his work intersects with the conditions of the electric age. The audio-portion of *Awake in the Red Desert*, a 12-inch vinyl record, consists of fourteen

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[86] Unfortunately, there are no public recordings of bissett's early experiments with tape or multi-sensory environments that I have been able to find.

recordings that include a range of sound poetic practices: solo acoustic sound poems ("aoba"), collaborative acoustic sound poems with accompaniment from string instruments and percussion ("awake in the red desert" and "my mouths on fire"), and electroacoustic sound poems ("i heard ya tellin" and "she still and curling"). A poem like "she still and curling," for example, is driven by the repeated phrase "supremely massage," that perhaps alludes to McLuhan's *The Medium is the Massage* which was published only a year earlier. The poem itself operates by simultaneously exploring several planes of sonic intensity. There is the lethargically repeated phrase "supremely massage," which is followed by the same phrase looped backwards. This repetition is accompanied by a continually shifting modular synthesizer (I think), and the reading of an erotic text. These various sonic layers shift in acoustic perspective as the volume of each layer is increased and decreased to accentuate the various elements of the sound poem. Kostelanetz regards most poems on this record to be "widely uneven" and suggests that the instrumentation is "unnecessary, if not detrimental" ("Text-Sound Art Survey, Part 2" 80). Presumably Kostelanetz would find "she still and curling" to be guilty of such an offence. bissett's sound poem, however, perfectly exemplifies the affective complexities of his own time. The poem consists of low- and high-pitched sounds, muffled and clear voices, a mixture of linguistic, post-linguistic, and pre-linguistic soundings, natural and synthetic sounds, along with quickly and slowly enunciated phrases. These elements are accompanied by the literal subtext of eroticism, a key affective component of the poem. Indeed, considering these characteristics, the poem might seem uneven, but so is the soundscape of the electric age, according to Schafer. bissett's "she still and curling" captures the confusion of sonic perspectives that prohibits the listener from situating his or herself on one plane of intensity, creating a sense of disorientation (the affective outcome). As listeners, I suggest, we expect to be able to locate ourselves along a

particular sonic intensity. Hence, so much lyric poetry tends to follow sonic trajectories that do not thwart a listener's expectations. In other words, the affective potential of the lyric poem is limited by its sonic registers by not exploring those outside of the typical spoken voice—in essence, conventional lyric poetry results in the standardization of affect.[87] bissett, here, uses the sonic characteristics of the electric age to create a poem that embraces the possibilities of re-locating and reconfiguring the self by using sound technologies to create a complex sonic environment that thwarts a listener's expectations for a coherent sonic environment. In this way, bissett's poetry does not necessarily embrace the conditions of the electric age, but rather employs its characteristics to mobilize its heterogeneity of affects to create an autonomous zone within which the listener can explore and understand their own response to a complex arrangement of intensities, offering them a chance to determine their place within it and against it.

bissett is best known for his sound poetries that explore chant and song structures using one acoustic voice. Indeed, Kostelanetz prefers these solo acoustic pieces such as "is yr car too soft for th roads" from *Awake in the Red Desert*. Poems like this one or "a o b a," from the same album, employ repetitive chant structures to openly explore the sonic dimensions of the words, phrases, and letters, recalling O'Huigin's explorations of sound poetry as a way of "stretching the sounds … repeating the sounds, repeating the letters to discover rhythms in the word" (*Poe [tree]* 9). bissett's poetry, then, sees beyond letters as things that orient an audience toward an object or signifier. bissett's chant-based poetry largely focuses on letters, single words or,

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[87] The vocalization of a lyric poem, for example, follows the action and emotion implied by its content (if the reader even goes so far to do so).

sentence fragments to push their communicative function away from representational and logocentricism into an affective field. bissett's chants are permutative, exploring potential of letters, words, phrases and their sounds beyond their prescripted and expected function in order to mobilize an expanded experience of language's materials. Instead of listening through the letters and words toward a signified object, bissett rightly locates the possibility of affect in the materials of language itself. Letters, words, and fragments, for bissett, are abundant with affect; hence, even when bissett is reciting from a written work, he improvises his way across the page, leaping from section to section, repeating parts more or less than the page dictates. On the one hand, in a poem like "a o b a," bissett's chants draw attention to the aural similarity between words like "heart" and "artery," that are also, of course, physiologically connected by the body's circulatory system. More significantly, though, bissett's soundings do not guide the audience toward any particular affect—"a o b a" does not tell or imply to the audience how to "feel" about the heart. Rather, bissett's chanting opens a sonic field wherein sounds of the ghostly, animalistic, alien, machinic, and human commingle in song, whispers, stutters, shouts, and speech pivoting around the sounds of the three letters in the title. Using the "Ahh" sound of the "A" as a refrain, bissett chants his way through letters, words, syllables and fragments, continually returning to the repeated sound "Ahh." In a way that's similar to bissett's "she still and curling" and its opening of a sonic zone, his " a o b a" presents opens up the potential for experiences—*deeper* experiences— of feeling in linguistic art. The poem becomes more than a lyrical expression. It offers a different exploration of language's multidimensionality; the sound poem for bissett is a means of exploring not semantics which control, guide, or manipulate an audience into feeling or thinking, but opens language sounds as an zone for exploration of those aspects of human life—especially sensorial human life—that exceed linguistic expression.

McCaffery's solo sound poetry in some respects is very similar to bissett's, especially in their shared exploration of ancient vocal tradition—for bissett this is chant; for McCaffery this is the creative translation and re-reading of ancient script. At the 1978 "Sound & Syntax International Festival of Sound Poetry," McCaffery performs an untitled piece that he describes as a "found-sound" poem, the score for which is based on Babylonian cuneiform text that he treated to "bring out the sound qualities in it" (n. pag.). McCaffery uses the text not to represent something of Babylonian culture or cuneiform script, but rather uses his outsider status—he is obviously not an ancient Babylonian—to access feelings and expressions that exceed conventional language, that push him deeper into himself. McCaffery's performance of the piece consists of a full range of purely prelinguistic sounds—inhalation, exhalation, panting, squeals, barks, whispers, trills, screams, and grunts. In this same performance, McCaffery performs another sound poem, entitled "Anti-Face: A Pronoun Remnant" in which he masks himself with a single piece of paper and draws a face onto it. The piece then consists of a series of sobs, shrieks, and moans until finally he bites through the paper, bursting through it while laughing maniacally.[88] The piece ends as he slowly removes all visible sign of emotion from his face and closes his mouth. Both of these works, as well as *Carnival Panels 1 & 2*, highlight McCaffery's interest in the carnivalesque and an escape from standardized existence toward alternative modes of expression for those feelings and sensations that cannot be easily represented by logic and standardized communication. What these works, perhaps, most effectively exemplify, however, is the way in which McCaffery seeks to mobilize affect, not only to express the intensities that register within himself, but to generate surprise and shock in the audience, feelings that are

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[88] For another description of this performance see page 26 of *Performance in Canada, 1970-1990* by Alain-Martin Richard and Clive Robertson.

necessary to his own radical project. Producing sound with the aim of mobilizing feelings of surprise and shock is an attempt to jar the audience and listener out of their normalized emotional states or, to adopt to the language of his manifesto "a poetry of blood," to liberate and transform them from the mundanities of day-to-day life.

Liberation and transformation were also important elements of sound poetry for Kemp and McMaster. While McCaffery's sound poetry vaguely sought release for humankind, women poets like Kemp and McMaster (as part of First Draft) pursued a more precise sociopolitical project: sounding the woman's body. Penn Kemp's cassette *Ear Rings* (1987), released as part of the Underwhich Audiographic Series, is demonstrative of these ambitions. The title of the cassette itself immediately establishes relationship between the body (ears), listening (or hearing), and femininity (Kemp has elected "earrings" to be a symbol of femininity). Kemp, on this album, delights in this kind of language play—using repetition, puns, fragments, and a whole range of linguistic, prelinguistic, and postlinguistic sounds in the service of her feminist project. The opening track, "Re Solution," which consists of an acoustic voice and accompanying violin, suggests this outright. Kemp incrementally repeats and builds morphemes into a complete sentence: "we're going to begin writing some time when electric light descends from fingertip onto computer keyboard and sets us freeeeeeee… may— be—" ("Re Solution" n. pag.). The sound poem acknowledges its sociohistorical location—amid a period of electric technologies, and also indicates a belief (though hesitant) that writing can be a liberating exercise. To this end, this album meditates on a number of subjects, but, most importantly, it is one of the few albums of sound poetry of its time that expressly focuses on issues of women's sexuality, motherhood, family, and birth.

Kemp's concern for liberation is much more focused than many of the other sound poets at the time. While McCaffery and bissett produced work that unleash their body's affects respectively—free-flowing acoustic streams of intensities—Kemp's sound poetry seeks to release her womanly body and affects. The second sound poem, "All the Men Tall," from *Ear Rings* effectively demonstrates this, as Kemp works through a series of puns on the title phrase: moving from "All the Men Tall" and "Ele Men Tal" to "In Cre Men Tall" until finally "All Men" and "A men, Amen," "ahh, ahhh ahhhh" ("All the Men Tall" np). As Kemp works through the language and she approaches the final series of "ahh ahhh ahhhh," her voice takes on a more pleasurable tone, perhaps an expression of orgasmic pleasure through sexual intimacy with a man. In this way, Kemp rejects prudish taboos regarding the permissibility of women to express the pleasure of bodily functions in public. This type of work continues in other poems on the album. In a work like "Her Mind Set," she states at the beginning of the sound poem, is a "feminist creation myth," (n. pag.) and a poem like "Matter Matters" continues to delight in puns to foreground issues of motherhood as she transforms the title of the poem into "Mater Matters" and "Mother Matters" (n. pag.). These sound poems are public expressions of a woman's agency, sexuality, and desire—resisting the patriarchal oppression felt by poets like Gadd, who felt displaced and alienated in a literary community dominated by masculine personalities. Kemp uses her sound poetry to oppose these conditions, and instead expresses her emotions, affects, and desires in her recorded sound poetry.

Arguably, First Draft is not purely a sound poetry group, hence their own self-designated title as composers and performers of wordmusic. Indeed, some of their works are pure music with instrumentation and singing as heard on select tracks of their cassette *Wordmusic* such as "Spring Over" which features piano and soprano singer Paula Quick. In other cases, their

recorded compositions might be categorized as spoken word or dramatic monologue alongside pieces that closely resemble the chant-based sound poetry of bissett or Nichol. Perfectly indicative of a borderblur poetic, First Draft fit no single genre or mode; in fact, they actively resist this type of singularity. That being said, they were welcomed into Canada's literary community. Nichol ushered their first book *Pass this Way Again* into publication via Underwhich Editions, and they performed across Canada in libraries and at universities. A work like "ABCD" from audiotape *Wordmusic* is one of their most striking pieces for its exploration of individual letters, word fragments, and words at varying intensities by incoporating shouting, whispering, and hissing into their composition. McMaster begins the sound poem, speaking plainly: "And such divine nonsense." Her words are immediately followed by the three performers in turn, repeating letters "A B C D A B C D A B C D" in varying vocal inflections. Following this sequence, they transition into a repetition of morphemes, with occasional words emerging from the sequence like "abracadabra" followed by the varying repetition of "dada" until McMaster, McClure, and Morton collectively shout. The poem nears its end as they collectively chant "DNA" and ends with a play on the opening phrase "such nonsense, divine" (n. pag.). Like other sound poems produced by their contemporaries, this work too, explores the sonic capacities of individual words and letters while carefully and precisely exploring how the sounds relate to one another. The section of the piece during which each member exaggeratedly enunciates multisyllabic words that start with the letters A, B, C, and D such as "ambergris," "antinomy," "arsenic," "Beelzebub," "Circes," "cinnamon" "demon," effectively foregrounds the texture embedded in the sound of each word. The poem is informed by the idea of a "divine nonsense," which the seemingly disconnected but calculated babbling of the group effectively demonstrates, and is perhaps a reflection upon the arbitrary nature of the sign and signified.

As indicated by these recordings and my descriptions of them above, First Draft's soundings are incongruous to the largely spontaneous and eccentric sound poetries of other groups like Owen Sound and the Four Horsemen. First Draft is much more calculated, rehearsed, and seemingly without as much interest in nonlinguistic sounds. That being said, their work is united with other Canadian sound poets by an interest in affect. The aforementioned "ABCD," for example, seems to revel in the pleasure of the alphabet itself and the possibilities presented by the permutational and associational capacities of language. A sound poem like their "This is then grief," however, could be located on the opposing end of an affective spectrum, exploring feelings of grief, loss, and longing. The poem blends spoken semantic language repeated by three voices (presumably Susan McMaster, Andrew McClure, and Colin Morton) with non-linguistic sounds. The poem begins with a series of quick gasps and sighs that develop into a chant of the letter "I"— "Iiiii" and "I-ya" in repetition for the first part of the composition. The second part consists of the three voices speaking together, each part speaking over one another gently: "Oh don't leave me," repeats McMaster. The poem addresses the impact grief has on the ordinary aspects of life: "holding a pen" or a "cup of coffee," but also the difficulty of expressing your grief. The second part of the poem consists of all three voices speaking mostly in fragments— sentence fragments or word fragments. Each voice speaks over one other, which distorts the perspective of the voices for the listener, thus creating a potentially disorienting effect. All of this is performed vocally with flat affectless tone, perhaps indicative of melancholy. Each of these sonic elements parallels the difficult feelings and difficulty of feeling during the grieving process.

Like Kemp, McMaster and her work with Ottawa-based First Draft is situated, by her, as a feminist project. I recall, again, her claim in *The Gargoyle's Left Ear*: "First Draft is also a

feminist, a humanist, adventure, in which I and other women involved are there not as ornaments or organizers and the men are there not as Cool Lukes or *artistes*" (26). Though they explore themes and ideas related to female subjectivity and womanhood less explicitly than Kemp does in her sound poetry, for McMaster, First Draft's feminist politics lies in the act of collaboration itself. McMaster writes that in First Draft, "We are all collaborators on equal terms – people, in fact" (*Gargoyle's Ear* 26). The writing and performance credits on pieces included on recordings such as *Wordmusic* (1986) indicate that each member shared the writing and performance process. They shared the labour and they collectively enjoyed the results. In the case of many pieces, it appears as though the poem is written by McMaster and then Andrew McClure, most frequently, would compose the wordmusic. In turn, that work is performed by McMaster, McClure, and Colin Morton. Though a piece may be written by one group member, there does not appear to be an onus on a single member to produce the work, and the men in the group do not appear to overshadow McMaster or the other women-identified members of the group. Of the members, McMaster seems to be the most active in the literary community, even today. Evidently First Draft pursued an open and equal collective formation. This ambition for equality is most strikingly foregrounded in the sound poems themselves. Works like "Dream Song" and "Death of a Youngish Man"—both of which might be more accurately recognized as spoken word pieces—use multiple voices, often speaking simultaneously. In both pieces, however, no voice dominates the other. Instead, they all remain at relatively the same volume, intonating using subtle inflection and stress. Furthermore, in these works, the performers do not strive for dissonance but for consonance: for example, two or more performers will speak the same lines in unison with a pleasurable, song-like harmony. The voices of First Draft operate more as though

they are in thoughtful and calculated dialogue rather than in sonic chaos, evidently seeking to find a way of constituting a creative sonic community wherein all belong.

On Hearing Canadian Sound Poetry

The ethereality of a seemingly immaterial art form such as sound poetry poses interesting questions regarding the actual effects of Canadian sound poetry. What were the effects of such ambitious sound-based projects? Were Canadian sound poets successful in their ambition to reach out to the other through sound? To what degree did sound poetry become a liberating and transformative force? Did they really intervene into the socio-political conditions of the electric age and its standardizing capacities? Working with what little historical evidence there is, this section will briefly attempt to suggest that they achieved many of these goals to some significant extent. Before carrying out that work, it's important to consider the material conditions and the socio-political significance of the sound poetry event. In other words, what is engaged within the vibrational nexus of the sound poetry event?

Though there seem to be few reviews of such performances, writers for Canadian periodicals such as *Only Paper Today* and *The Globe and Mail* confirm that Canadian sound poets were indeed offering their audience a transformative communal space and a radical, affective sonic experience. On 20 October 1973, Marq de Villiers reviews his experience of sound poetry in performance for *The Globe and Mail*; he conveys an account of a reading given by bissett:

> He is screaming, haunted by schizophrenic images, like all poets. Phrases ring: 'Water falls in your mind and you get wet through . . .' 'Your irises spin and give off sparks . . .' 'All the land is fall is falling into flames . . .' The audience hoots. A child in a red diaper dragging on the ground, dances in the aisles. The poet swings his arms, making the child part of his . . . act. The audience sighs. The poet is now whip tight, in complete control. (Villiers A6)

De Villiers effectively captures the enthusiasm, animation and dream-like quality of this performance. He also highlights the affective dimension of bissett's performances: the entrancing quality of his chanted words and the contagion-like transference of energy between poet and audience, causing them to "hoot," "dance," and "sigh" in-sync with his performance. These words from de Villiers precisely demonstrate the way sound affects a body, illustrating how sound poetry, in Goodman's terminology, creates, a "vibratory nexus [that] exceeds and precedes the distinction between subject and object, constituting a mesh of relation in which discreet entities [ap]prehend each other's vibrations" (83). De Villiers suggests that within the intensity of this moment, the poet attracts the audience, engrosses them, and holds their attention with a "whip tight" grip. Joined by this experience, the sound poetry event is a space outside of standardized everyday life in the electric age and momentarily becomes a suspension of capitalist time and space wherein the audience is momentarily a subject that exceeds and precedes what they perceive to be themselves.

The Four Horsemen and Owen Sound were also reviewed in periodicals. In *Only Paper Today*, Steve Ross Smith recalls a performance by the Four Horsemen by stating that "I have watched / heard them many time in their nine year existence, and have always been shaken, moved, and inspired" (Smith "The Four Horsemen in Performance at 31 Mercer Street" 19). Smith continues on to give a fully detailed review of the performance, highlighting some of the most striking portions of the performance. In some cases, though, popular periodicals denigrate Canadian sound poetry, as in the case of a review of Re: Sounding in *New York Times*; they simply get dismissed as "a team of two poets from Canada, [who] made mouth-music, some of it interesting, some of it, to these ears, rather infantile" (Palmer "Music: Sound and Poetry" 47). Reviewers struggle to articulate just what occurred on the stage of a sound poetry event, often

offering little more than basic descriptions of the sounds they heard and actions they saw. In 1978, for example, Adele Freedman, a writer for *The Globe and Mail*, reviews a performance by The Four Horsemen and Owen Sound. After taking the reader through various highlights of the performances, Freedman admits that "It's impossible to isolate individual performers and compositions. The magic of the evening was cumulative" (A13). Echoing similar sentiments, on 9 July 1982, in an article entitled "Poetry event rich in variety," Ann Jansen reviews a night of "rock and reggae poets, sound poets and performance artist poets" (E8) at a small club called Scuffers in Toronto. She describes The Four Horsemen's performance to be "as electrifying as it is indescribable" (E8).

The language that writers like Freedman and Jansen use in their reviews of sound poetry performances is admittedly vague, but they effectively describe two possible and likely experiences of these events. Describing an event as "magical" or "electrifying" seems to be common for popular discourse around events that exceed conventional linguistic description: these reviewers are unable to codify in language what they actually saw thus they use vague descriptions to articulate the event. This type of language declares, in some ways, the success of Canadian sound poetry events. These writers are not using populist expressions in lieu of more accurate diction, but are actually articulating the enchanting qualities of these events. Sound poetry events are electrifying, using sound to charge the audience with thrilling and delightful energies. They are magical, empowered with the ability to shift local consciousness through the use of a seemingly unnatural force: sound. These qualities are crucial to events that are intended to resist the conditions of postmodernity and its program of disaffectation and the standardization of all things. The sound poetry event, like that of The Four Horsemen, re-inscribes the radical

possibilities of alternative—call them magical, electrified or whatever you like—material and corporeal realities outside of the electric age's totalizing homogenization.

On the other hand, the reviews written by Freedman and Jansen that use "magical" and "electrifying" as descriptions of sound poetry might also represent genuine inability to intimately grapple with the sound poetry event, a discursive problem I outlined at the beginning of this chapter. This lacking discourse, however, is not a failure—it is neither Freedman's nor Jansen's fault that they cannot more effectively capture what it looks, sounds, and feels like to be at a sound poetry event. Rather, this inability to truly capture the feeling in conventional prose articulates to us just precisely how radical sound poetry actually is: the sound poetry of the Language Revolution sought to communicate those thoughts and feelings that exceed language. Therefore, how can writers be expected to re-inscribe that event? In fact, re-inscription, (qua recapitulation) is what sound poets largely sought to circumvent. The sound poets of the Language Revolution, then, effectively created an affective sonic poetic that, to this day, remains on the fringe of literary and musical culture, and critical discussions. The lack of demand for the audio materials and recordings of sound poetry speaks precisely to this lack of interest of a larger audience. Furthermore, the lack of accessible material from this movement confirms that, despite the claim made by beaulieu about how vocalization inscribes value onto the poem, the sound poem never really transitioned into the mainstream nor did it truly become part of the postmodern capitalist economy. The lack of interest I cite here is not a result of Canadian sound poetry of the Language Revolution being bad or uninteresting—that's certainly untrue—but because it does not align itself with the conditions and desires of the status quo, of the electric age or postmodernity. The sound poetry of the Language Revolution, then, with the improvised non-linguistic and post-linguistic soundings of the Four Horsemen, the feminist-aligned

expressions of First Draft and Penn Kemp, and the polyvocal chanting of Owen Sound

effectively situated radical sites of sonic resistance, places of refuge from the sonic and vibratory

conditions of the electric age wherein the goal is not necessarily to transmit a coherent meaning

or message to the audience, but rather to trigger a feeling or to initiate an affective unfolding in

the audience, using the sound poem as site of suspense from which this occurs. In doing so, the

Canadian sound poetry of the electric age is both a site into which the audience can momentarily

escape the conditions of the electric age as they are encouraged to feel differently, but are also

invited to take that experience within them, back out into the world, and engage with the

conditions of their life in new, creative, and radical ways.

Chapter 4: Haptic Poetry

"syntax equals the body structure"

– bpNichol (1982)

Introduction

In a 1982 conversation, Roy Miki, Daphne Marlatt, George Bowering and others ask bpNichol to

elaborate on a statement he made in a previously published interview in *Outposts* (1978) wherein

he suggests that "syntax equals the body structure" (*Outposts* 27). Admitting that the statement

he made in 1978 was "over-condensed," Nichol elaborates on his comment in this conversation:

> I discovered – and this is what the statement comes out of – that emotionally and
> psychologically speaking we learn that we often armour the body, the easiest illustration
> of which is: if I live in a house with a low doorway, I'm probably going to end up
> walking like this a lot. (Hunching) I've seen tall people do this when they've lived in
> situations where the ceiling is low. You get an armouring of the body. I discovered that
> the order in which I wrote my poems allow certain contents in and keeps other contents
> out, i.e. the syntax that I choose, the way I tend to structure a piece, form per se, permits
> some contents and excludes others. So what I was trying to find, because that is part of a
> larger thing I've been working towards, is a way to increase my own formal range
> (something I'm still trying to do), and therefore not merely be stuck, shall we say, by the
> physical limitation of my body at that point, i.e. just because I'm walking around with my
> shoulders up like this, if I can learn to relax I can see the world in a slightly different way
> and so on. If I can keep moving the structure of the poem around, hopefully I can
> encompass different realities and different ways of looking at things. (*Meanwhile* 276)

Nichol's explanation positions a relationship between the body, spatial boundaries, and creative

processes. He suggests that "armouring the body" is a means of shaping the body's range of

physical movement and extension; a low ceiling, Nichol points out, effectively limits a person's

vertical extension of their body.[89] Similarly, the form of a poem shapes linguistic expression and

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[89] Nichol's idea of "armouring the body" is likely derived from Wilhelm Reich's psychoanalytic concept by the same name, developed in his book *Character Analysis* (1945). Reich describes this armouring as a plethora of "neurotic character traits" that serve as a "compact defense mechanism against our [therapists] efforts" (48). It is the task of the therapist during character analysis, according to Reich, to break down this defensive armour—which blocks therapist from patient—as part of therapy and to open communication between patient and analyst. In part, Nichol's use of the metaphor offers more evidence of, perhaps for a different critical study, a connection between Nichol's profession as a lay therapist and his poetic practice. However pertinent this linkage, Nichol's primary

limits the possible extension of words in comparable ways: a rigorously formal poem—say, a sonnet or renga—is a type of poetic armour or container which requires linguistic content to be manipulated in a particular way to fit within the poem. Nichol's practice as a poet, in part, seeks to explore a wide range of poetic forms to extend the limits of his poetry.[90] In other words, by employing and exploring manifold poetic structures, Nichol's poetry can be more expressive and expansive. In doing so, Nichol also invites the reader into his poetry in a plethora of ways to include elements of the world—materials, bodies, movements, and sensations—as integral parts of the poem.

Nichol's comments above reveal a belief in the fundamental linkage between language and the body. For Nichol, language instructs and influences the engagement of bodies in and with the world, shaping their understanding and feeling of reality. One can interpret Nichol's suggestion that "syntax equals the body structure" (*Outposts* 27) as a rationalization of his indulgence in many unconventional poetic forms; however, such an interpretation would regretfully elide the processual relationship between body and poetry that Nichol's statement effectively highlights. While the concrete poetry and sound poetry of the Language Revolution situate a crucial body-language interface, these poetries subordinate a holistic engagement with the body's capacity for movement, feeling, and sensation. As a result, the previous chapters have elided a plethora of unique and under-examined poetic activities that emerged as part of the Language Revolution in Canada, poetries that often exceed conventional representation on the page, stage, cassette, and vinyl record.

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concern here is the poem and its connection to the body. For more on Nichol's relationship to Reich's theories of psychoanalysis see Davey's *aka bpNichol: A Preliminary Biography* (2012).

[90] Nichol, of course, explored a wide range of poetic forms in his writing, and in some cases invented his own. He explored the possibilities of the concrete poem, sound poem, long poem, prose poem, translation and much more.

This chapter emphasizes the bodily, material, and affective dimensions that inform Nichol's statement "syntax equals the body structure"; however, Nichol was not alone in his pursuit of a holistic bodily poetic. Many poets of the Language Revolution—like Nichol, Steve McCaffery, Gerry Shikatani, John Riddell, R. Murray Schafer, Susan McMaster with First Draft and others—pursued similarly body-focused poetries. They did so by producing two main types of poetic interfaces: 1) intimate and unconventional encounters with the codex; and 2) the public encounter of the performance and installation, especially those that are immersive and interactive. With these two types of encounters at its centre, this chapter examines how these poets continue to search for alternative forms of affective expression by attending to the individual ways the body (their own body and the body of the audience) figures into the poetry itself.[91] In so doing, they develop a poetic mode that I am referring to here as *haptic poetry*. My usage of the term haptic poetry effectively describes a range of poetries—structured in a variety of ways—including performances and 'happenings,' installations, site-specific and time-based works, interactive and game-like works, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Haptic poems, rooted in concerns with language and its materials, highlight crucial—and thus far overlooked—concerns of the Language Revolution that directly engage the body, environment, time, movement, performance, and language materials. The haptic poem, perhaps, most directly issues an answer to the question Nichol first posed in 1965: "how can the poet reach out and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress?" ("Statement" 18).

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[91] As a quick illustration of Nichol's commitment to the connection between formations of the body and poem I turn to his song-poem "Pome Poem" (1982), wherein Nichol chants "What is a poem is inside of your body body body body" (n. pag.), and then proceeds to locate the poem at various specific points in the body: eye, toes, head, etc. Nichol's emphasis on the body highlights the interconnectedness of body and poem, but also in the repetition of "your" acknowledges that the poem mutually structures both the poet and reader/listener.

As this chapter will demonstrate, the answer to this question reveals literally how the body is structured—specifically, how the body's surfaces, tissues, and muscles *feel*—when the literature of the Language Revolution affects the reader. I argue that haptic poetry is one more crucial aspect of the Language Revolution that exceeds the purely visual and sonic elements of poetry by putting the body in direct interface with language and its materials. The body—the primary site of haptic engagement—is also one site of subject formation, the underlying foundational point of Nichol's concept of "armouring" (i.e., the subject and their relation to space literally, though not entirely, determines the shape and movement of the body and its relation to the world); thus, in its effective blurring of life and art, the haptic poetry of the Language Revolution can be critically figured as radical sites of resistance to the conditions of the electric age and the conditions of postmodernity. These works open the possibilities of bodily experience in the face of a period that is characterized by control, modulation, and standardization which limits the affective range of individuals, thus coercing them into complacency, conformity, and capitalistic modes of exchange. In haptic poetry, the materials of the work are most literally an extension of the body, mind, and feelings and their involvement in the world. For these poets, it seems, the conditional reality of the electric age is temporarily shattered within the zone of the haptic encounter. Though the effects are not necessarily long lasting, the haptic encounter is another, alternative means of modulating one's experience to permit individuals to, for a fleeting moment, perceive the corporeal and material worlds differently, to experience language and communication through alternative means—as texture, movement, perception, and sensation. The haptic, then, offers an affective grounding that becomes an alternative basis for collective, communal experience in the face of the conditions of the electric age.

From here I consider the relationship between the materially-focused work of the

Language Revolution and the movements, sensations, and physical feelings that a reader may

experience during the process of reading/engagement. I first establish the theoretical framework

that underpins this chapter by outlining both the critical problems related to haptics in poetic

discourse and the theorists who are crucial to my conception of the poetic. Following that, I offer

a historical survey which highlights key nodes of global activity that have—inadvertently or not–

–effected and influenced the emergence of a haptically-focused poetic in Canada. I then turn to

the question of the Canadian context itself wherein I map a network of activity in Canada,

attending to publishers, events, and organizations. With this context in mind, I seek to effectively

capture the spirit of haptic poetry that spans the English-Canadian context, and to develop an

acute sense of its proliferation.[92] I look to poets such as Nichol, R. Murray Schafer, McCaffery,

Michael Dean, Susan McMaster, John Riddell, and Gerry Shikatani as key figures who have

produced outstanding and illustrative works. In my analysis of their works, I pay particular

attention to works that resonate with the affective discourse I hope to embed within this

discussion of haptic poetry. I analyze how their multifaceted work brings emotions and affects

and to the forefront instead of linguistically quantifiable communication. The final section will

shift focus from the poetics to ways these poetries are circulated within an alternative economic

system: the gift economy. Here, I suggest that the spirit of haptic poetry—with alternative

methodologies that privilege the face-to-face encounter—informs the economic structuring of the

community of the Language Revolution.

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[92] I should note that practitioners of haptic poetry within this community were mainly male. Indeed, and troublingly so, Canadian avant-garde literary communities were welcoming and appealing to mainly other men. In an interview with Lorna Browne, artist Carole Itter recalls the difficulty she had as a young artist involved with avant-garde collective Intermedia (more on Intermedia later). She admits feeling like "eye candy" for the space and suggests that "as a woman artist it was very hard to break into the other areas of Intermedia" (n. pag. *Ruins in Process*). Itter's point is representative of the feeling of other women artists working at the time. My previous chapter makes note of similar sentiments felt by Gadd.

Toward a Theory of Haptic Poetics

When compared to other poetries explored thus far in this dissertation, haptic poetry is a type of literary text that engages the body more holistically. While sound and concrete poetry, to some extent, engage the body, their goal is to engage the ocular and cochlear realms of human experience. Haptic poetry foregrounds a necessary but different aspect of sensorial engagement: the somatic encounter with language and language's materials through the poem. The definition from which I am building my notion of a haptic poetic is composed of several other terms that also require nuanced definitions: "Of the nature of, involving, or relating to the sense of touch, the perception of position and motion (proprioception), and other tactile and kinaesthetic sensations" (*OED*). To unpack this terminology, I rely upon critical theorists such Sara Ahmed, Brian Massumi, and Marshall McLuhan whose writing lends itself to the context of poetry and poetics. Their understanding of these terms, as will be explained below, populates my own thinking about the haptic and how a theory of haptic poetry—as part of an affective materialist poetic—may be situated. Their writing assists to approximate necessary questions such as: How do these poets prompt us to reconsider the limits of affect—especially bodily sensation—in literary texts? And, what affects are generated when the literary text—the physical materiality of the literary object or performance itself—emerges as part of a direct, bodily encounter with an audience? These important questions inform the shape of my analysis, but before I seek answers to those questions I will constellate the terminology that comprises my notion of the haptic poetic. These terms have been usefully applied to discrete critical contexts, but less so in Canadian poetry discourse. Since these three terms—*touch, proprioception, and kinetic*—are at the core of what follows, they bear some defining.

Touch is often conflated with tactility, the perception of an object (person or thing) through direct physical contact between the perceiving subject and the perceived object. This type of sensorial engagement can be unfurled across at least two different planes of bodily experience: first, its common usage, which describes the physiological sensation (also known as tactility) that flashes through the body and nervous system when skin comes into contact with textures, vibrations, and temperatures also known as tactility. Second, I take up McLuhan's consideration of touch in *Understanding Media* when he rhetorically inquires if touch is "not just skin in contact with things, but the life of things in the *mind*?" (105). McLuhan's rhetorical question offers a metaphorical extension of the word "touch," which invokes affects—to touch someone not just physically but also emotionally and psychically. My sense of touch, as part of haptic poetry, then, implies tactility but is not reduced to it; it involves the body without necessarily making a physical impression upon it (though physical impressions do at times occur).

Ahmed articulates the political and affective dimensions of touch in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000). With concern for personal and political borders, Ahmed writes "The skin allows us to consider how boundary-formation, the marking out of the lines of a body, involves an affectivity which already crosses the line. For if the skin is a border, then it is a border that feels" (45). She continues to point out that "while the skin appears to be the matter which separates the body, it rather allows us to think of how the materialisation of bodies involves, not containment, but an affective opening out of bodies to other bodies" (45). Though her writing focuses primarily upon the other produced by colonial logic, Ahmed recognizes that the skin itself, as malleable as it is, demarcates the body's material and corporeal conditions—shape, size, position, and so on. The skin, for Ahmed, is a point of

interface—an opening—between body and other body, body and world: a "border that feels," she says. In part, Ahmed's discussion of the body's border resonates with similar points made by Nichol in his description of body "armouring." It is precisely the interface of the body's border and the border of the work that Nichol sought to blur with his first publication *Journeying and the Returns*: "how can the poet reach out and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress?" ("Statement"). Nichol sought to directly engage the sensorial realm of touch to produce an opportunity for openness that Ahmed describes above. The poem offers a chance for the commonality between the reader and poet, through the physicality of engaging the work through touch. The haptic poem, then, when touched, is a zone of contact or a concentration of affect from which a sense of community can emerge.

Ahmed addresses touch and community in her later book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). She maintains that even in touch's metaphorical sense—i.e., to stimulate someone not physically but emotionally and psychically—it creates social bonds. Ahmed traces the etymological root of contingency, which she recognizes to have the "same root in Latin as the word 'contact' (Latin: contingere: com, with; tangere, to touch)" (28*)*. Ahmed describes contingency thusly:

> the sociality of being 'with' others, of getting close enough to touch. …. So what attaches us, what connects us to this place or that place, to this other or that other is also what we find most touching; it is that which makes us feel. The differentiation between attachments allows us to align ourselves with some others and against other others in the very processes of turning and being turned, or moving towards and away from those we feel have caused our pleasure and pain. (28)

For Ahmed, whose thinking resonates with McLuhan's point above, contingency—as a form of physical contact or emotional touching—is what binds persons to places, things, and other persons. It is the affect from this touch that allows a person to form an attraction (personal or political) to another or, conversely, to be repelled by it. Hence, a poet like Nichol, and many

poets of the Language Revolution who reject singular ideas of a poetry's form, seek to offer as many pathways into and out of the poetic work as possible, to open as many channels for communication, and to offer the audience as many zones of contingency and attachment as possible.

While touch is a means by which the body experiences a plethora of haptic sensations, another means for the body to experience these haptic sensations is kinetics. Etymologically, in the Western tradition, the word "kinetic" comes from the Greek word κῑνητικός meaning "moving," and is defined more precisely as that which pertains or relates to motion (*OED*). The term itself is commonly associated with the sciences, namely kinesiology and physics; however, as Massumi reminds us in his introduction to *Parables of the Virtual* (2002), the study of movement as it relates to cultural issues is necessary. For Massumi, the lack of attention to movement as a key element of cultural studies privileges "ideological accounts of subject formation," which results in a grid-like structuring of the subject's identity: "an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. A body corresponded to a 'site' on the grid defined by an overlapping of one term from each pair. The body came to be defined by its pinning on the grid" (2). The grid-like structuring of subjectivity resonates with the struggle of the poets of the Language Revolution. They sought to resist the ways that the mechanisms of the electric age sought to produce standardized subjects for the capitalist marketplace. The static, grid-like structuring of the subject does not account for the fluidity of identity nor the subject's ability to move between positions on the grid itself thus—as we see in the work of the poets of the Language Revolution––the grid and its structure must be challenged. This lack of critical attention to movement permeates various nodes of study related to the field of cultural studies, and literature is one of

those fields. Rarely do literary scholars consider the significant ways a book modulates the physiological, kinetic or, even tactile dimensions of reading—the movement of eyes from left to right across the page; the sensation generated when the finger runs along the stapled spine of a 25-page poetry chapbook; shifting thumbs at the base of the page as they struggle to uphold a 900-page hardcover epic; the movement of the tongue, lips, and jaw when reading aloud. These aspects are not usually concerns of literary analysis, and are more often than not left to the scrutiny of scholars in fields of media studies and book history.[93]

Kinetics, as it relates to literary studies, is usually associated with "kinetic poetry," a poetry wherein the words themselves are literally in motion. Kinetic poetry is a term almost exclusively ascribed to poetic subgenres of video and digital poetry. In both digital and video poetries movement can occur since these types of poetry are founded in media with the ability to capture and depict motion through film, programming, or animation. Notable examples of this kind of work include Augusto de Campos's *poema-bomba* (1983-1997), an animated poem which depicts a forward zoom motion through a field of letters, accompanied by a cacophony of sound (the repetition of the title and dissonant synthesized music); Ana Maria Uribe's *Animpoems* (1997-2003)*,* minimalist poems that extend the principles of 1950s modernist concrete poetry into cleanly constructed animations that blink, move, dissolve, transform, and shift in repeating structures; and, Jim Andrews' hypertext poem *Seattle Drift* (1997) which investigates connections between the digital hyperlink, sadomasochism, and issues of pathway control in the digital environment. Most relevant to the context of this study, of course, is Nichol's *First Screening* (1984), which consists of a suite of twelve poems programmed in the

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[93] For example, see Terje Hillesund's "Digital reading spaces: How expert readers handle books, the Web, and electronic paper" (2010), which "seeks to explain the main differences between digital and paper–based reading" (np) with an emphasis on "the physical handling of reading matter" (n. pag.).

Apple BASIC programming language on an Apple IIe computer. This brief list of examples could be significantly expanded, thereby illustrating how digital poetic discourse has occluded critical discussions of non-digital kinetic poetries.

My employment of the term kinetic, however, as one component of a haptic poetic, precedes digital contexts to examine poems that utilize movement as an essential part of the poetic encounter and anticipate the prominence of digital tools. Returning to the basic definition of kinetics—as pure movement—discursively re-engages the field of kinetic poetry to include works that require no electrical or digital interface. In so doing, the field opens to include a plethora of texts by poets of the Language Revolution such as Nichol's flip-book poem "Wild Thing," wherein pages must be flipped in quick succession to see the movement of letter shapes, as well as a number of game-based works by John Riddell, like the Xeroxed-book *A Game of Cards* (1985), which consists of image overlays to be cut out and applied to an existing deck of cards to include textual elements during play. The poets of the Language Revolution, however, extended their concern for movement beyond the codex by composing performative works that similarly highlight movement and interactivity. McCaffery's 1985 piece entitled *Renting an Apple*, for example, required participants to rent an apple for $5, a work that folds together textual references to both the Biblical mythology of "Genesis" and Swiss folk-hero William Tell.[94] The apple is accompanied by a "choose your own adventure"-type pamphlet which contains a series of possible performance scenarios that could be carried out with the newly leased piece of fruit. Each of these works—both codex-based and performative texts—exceed the typical scope of traditional literary analysis, yet each piece foregrounds a linkage between

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[94] For more on these performances/projects see *Performance in Canada, 1970-1990,* edited by Alain-Martin Richard and Clive Robertson (1991) and *Rampike,* Vol. 5, Issue 2, 1986, pp. 8-12.

language, language materials, movement, and participatory interaction as integral parts of their composition.

With movement comes another important conceptual consideration for this chapter, which is the individual's perception and awareness of their own body in both position and movement. This sense of awareness is commonly referred to as *proprioception*. Proprioception is similar to touch in the way that both terms describe the registration of sensation, a feeling or awareness that is external to language. Like touch, proprioception requires an engagement with the perceiving subject's body, but is distinguished from touch by the fact that the actual interface of the perceiving subject and the perceived object need not actually make surface-to-surface contact. Referring to it as the unrecognized sixth sense, Massumi provides a succinct definition of proprioception in *Parables of the Virtual*; he suggests that proprioception is "defined as the sensibility proper to the muscles and ligaments as opposed to tactile sensibility (which is 'exteroceptive') and visceral sensibility (which is 'interoceptive')" (58) and further that it, "folds tactility into the body, enveloping the skin's contact with the external world in a dimension of medium depth: between epidermis and viscera" (58). Lastly, for Massumi, "Proprioception is a self-referential sense, in that what it most directly registers are displacements of parts of the body relative to each other" (179). In other words, proprioception is a subject's inner-sensibility of one's body in relation to its surroundings and movements—the subject's ability to sense the place or movement of a limb or digit as well as the subject's ability to sense the body as it moves through space. For example, a tall person who registers the height of a low-hanging ceiling by hunching as they move below it. This chapter's interest in proprioception, as a means of accessing and understanding the literary engagements of the Language Revolution, is founded in the way haptic poetry makes us aware of the position and movement of the body—especially the

reader's body—in the same way that touch makes us aware of the sensations at the literal zone of contact.

Proprioception, as it applies to the literary works of the Language Revolution, is fundamentally closer to the physiological usage of the term than previous literary uses (more on Charles Olson, Tish, and their "proprioceptive writings" later). The proprioceptive poetry of the Language Revolution is less about the introspection of the writer, and more about the poet's and audience's awareness of their body in relation to the literary work, i.e. how a literary work shapes, positions, and moves the body. Proprioception is important to consider in analyses of performative works of the Language Revolution, especially those which are immersive for the audience, like Dean's "The Imagination of Aldo Breun" or Shikatani's "Sans Titre," both of which invite the audience into locations designed with language, interaction, and space as the key elements of the work. In addition to proprioceptive poetics, two other distinctions must be made. Haptic poetry, as I am articulating it within these pages, shares characteristics with breath poetics as well as embodied poetics for their emphasis on the somatic registers as it is represented in writing; however, haptic poetry is distinct from both modes.

Olson is an important figure for proprioceptive writing as well as development of a concept he refers to as "composition by field," a poetry which is the field of interactive perception and relies on the typewriter and its ability to express upon the page the breath and breathing of the poet. As Olson envisioned it, the idea of composition by field sought an expansion of poetic form that deviates from traditional structures of the previous centuries. Rather than sonnets and sestinas, Olson argues that the new poetry of the mid-twentieth century should be founded in the poet's breath: "Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of *essential* use, must, I take it, catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the

breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings" (n. pag.). The breath, then, rather than the structures of formally restrictive poetry becomes the guide for the poet. The poet's breath is said to allow "*all* the speech-force of language back" (n. pag.) into the poem. To do so, the breath of the poet is registered on the page by the typewriter. The typewriter, as a primary tool of the poet in the mid-twentieth century, often imprints the page using a monospace font thus if the "poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it," writes Olson, "he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time (n. pag.). The typewriter, then, allows the poet to guide the reader's breathing through line lengths and line breaks. For Olson, breathing should only occur at the line break, thus if lines and line breaks are shorter, the reader breathes more rapidly. Likewise, if the space after the line break is long the reader's breathing should be slowed down. The poem, guided by a poetics of breath, seeks the direct transference of the poet's living-breathing self onto the page. In this way, the somatic aspect of the poet is emphasized in the poetry, thus drawing it into proximity with what I am calling haptic poetics. "Composition by field" might best be described as a proto-haptic mode. In "composition by field," the poem is a metonymic representation of the poet's body on the page as it engages the mechanical operations of analog writing technology. In that case, however, the reader of the poem, if they read the poem aloud and precisely, are partially recreating the author's bodily processes, not their own. So, while this may be haptic in that emphasizes the physicality of the breathing body, it is an author driven experience, which differs from the liberatory and openness of haptic poetics as it is later realized by the poets of the Language Revolution.[95]

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[95] I will return to these ideas in the next section. Olson's poetics were crucial to the development of Tish in early the 1960s.

Likewise, embodied poetics denote poetries grounded in the somatic, but deviate from haptic poetry in ways similar to "composition by field." Embodied poetics, in this instance, refers to specific feminist poetic practices that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the writings of Canadian and Quebecoise poets like Nicole Brossard and Daphne Marlatt. Embodied poetics refers to a writing of a particular kind of body—the woman's body. This movement in poetics, in part, developed from the 1976 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" by French critical theorist Hélène Cixous, wherein she proclaims: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing" (875). Cixous's call resonated with poets and critics in Canada, who took up this premise. Canadian critic Barbara Godard, for example, wrote her touchstone essay "Excentriques, Ex-centric, Avant-Garde: Women and Modernism in the Literatures of Canada" (1984), which describes what she calls "texte de femme" and employs specific adjectives to describe women's writing. She describes it as "diffuse[d], disorder[ed], circular, multiple, unpredictable, unstructured and uncensored" ("Ex-Centrique" 64), and finds these characteristics in the prose of Sheila Watson, for example. Similarly, the question of how to write women's bodies became a contentious issue for many writers by the late 1980s, including Daphne Marlatt, Lee Maracle, and Jeanette Armstrong, who debated how and why this writing must be done at the 1988 "Women and Words" conference.[96] Embodied poetics, as a movement in Canada, developed concurrently with the activities of the Language Revolution, and certainly, in some cases, crossed over into distinctively affective materialist poetries. However, embodied poetics is distinguished from haptic poetry because, like "composition by field," it is a *representation* of the body on the page in language. It captures the poet's sense of the body in language, but it does not literally engage touch and materiality of language and its materials.

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[96] See *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures* (1990), Edited by SKYSky Lee et al.

Embodied poetry may register the rhythms and affects of the body in language, but it does not necessarily formulate a literal zone of contact by invoking touch, kinetics, or proprioception.

Each of these experiential constituents—touch, kinetics, and proprioception—and all of the nuances that accompany these terms inform the haptic poetry that emerged as part of the Language Revolution. Haptic poetry is composed with thought given to how language can shape and impress itself upon the reader's body (touch), encourage the reader's body to move (kinetics), and impress an awareness of the reader's body and its movements upon the individual (proprioception). This is a type of poetry that centres on a different type of output: the output of a feeling that sends sensations to the surface of the skin, to the muscles, and relies upon specific positioning and movements as the core of interaction with the literary work. The process of this engagement—like concrete poetry and sound poetry—is a creative mode of literary output that purposefully subverts standard literary conventions such as grammar, syntax, spelling, narrative, and, at times, language itself by directly engaging the somatic realm of haptics. Just as concrete poetry is composed of the visual materials of language and sound poetry is composed of the sonic materials of language, a poetry of haptics is embedded within the materials and space in and around the poem. Further, haptic poetry is embedded within the poem's materials to produce tactile and embodied sensation: it is located within the movements and velocity that a poem requires of a body; it is in the awareness of a body and its muscles, tissues, and ligaments as it engages the literary object, performance, or space. Haptic poetry is a poetry that directly impacts the body's relationship with language, materiality, and space recognizing that a poem can be an open interface. While not using language in a conventional way to communicate distinctive semantic meaning, a haptic poem still effectively communicates—especially in its capacity to generate, stimulate, and transfer affects from one body (human or nonhuman) to another—

textures, ambience, and muscle movements become literary. The haptic poem only requires the audience to fully engage the work.

Before concluding this section, some initial concerns regarding haptic poetry must be addressed. Critical discussions of poetry that can be located within a haptic discourse—especially the haptic poetry of the Language Revolution—risk falling into a variety of traps. The first problem is similar to the problem that I, and other critics evidently, confront with sound poetry: the problem of materiality. In most cases, the materiality of these works pose interesting problems: for example, The Four Horsemen's game *Andoas* (1979) was only released as a set of instructions, which requires players to make their own pieces and board. Furthermore, a game like *Andoas* is entirely dependent upon the production of variable outcomes of the game itself or, in other words, how the players choose to pursue an endpoint (if they even to decide to pursue an endpoint at all).[97] With four persons simultaneously playing this literary game, the emotional outcome can differ in dramatic ways: for example, a player has very different feelings about a game that is lost versus a game that is won. Similarly, some works like R. Murray Schafer's "The Listening Book" are entirely dependent upon user interaction, and how they choose to follow the instructions. A work like "The Listening Book," must be partially destroyed to be engaged (pages are ripped and folded), which consequently affect any type of later re-engagement with the work. A number of these works, too, are site-specific, such as the sporadic happenings put on by Ed Varney, Maxine Gadd, and Judith Copithorne in the early 1970s, Gerry Shikatani's 1981 "Sans Titre," and Michael Dean's November 1981 installation "The Imagination of Aldo Breun" which was included as part of the *The Symposium for Linguistic*

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[97] Note, too: *Andoas* by the Four Horsemen was never fully published. The instructions for the game were published in 1979 in *Only Paper Today*. Based on these instructions, however, the game is largely reproducible and playable.

Onto-Genetics. These works can never be fully recreated outside of the small geographical and temporal windows within which they were realized and exist only now on the periphery of Canadian literary culture; they are documented in books, periodicals, and online, recalled in essay or photo-essay formats, and live on in the memories of performers and audience members. They are not materially, corporeally or experientially accessible in the present moment. This chapter, then, relies on these types of secondary materials, knowing that they cannot replace the primary. In some cases, carefully considered speculation is necessary for understanding these works. Furthermore, as with sound poetry, some literary objects, like Nichol's "Wild Thing" in his *Journeying and the Returns* (1967), are less accessible—available only from rare booksellers or institutional archives. Going forward, I am conscious of the complexity posed by these problems as I piece together the narrative and my accompanying criticism. As in my chapter on sound poetry, I acknowledge that in dealing with these works, I am engaging, at times, with a quasi-form of the work.

Second, it is important to pause and consider issues of ableism and ability as these issues relate to the poetics I am situating here. In his essay on *Carnival, The Second Panel: 1970-75*, Andy Weaver points out an important problem about McCaffery's considerations of the body in that text. Weaver writes "McCaffery's call to leave behind the body […] at first glance seems like a call for everyone to engage equally, on a level playing field," and further that, "the text disregards any physical difference – gender, race, physical differences – as well as economic disparities and sexual orientations as unimportant" ("Thoughts on Steve" *Open Letter* 136). Weaver's point is important, and it is especially relevant to the context of haptic poetry.[98] Works

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[98] In Chapter 1, I use Weaver's argument as a jumping off point to consider McCaffery's *Carnival*. While I recognize the importance of Weaver's argument there, I cheekishly suggest that just as McCaffery whisks away the body of the reader, so too should we whisk away McCaffery's authorial power over the text.

that require movement through specific sites, for example, assume mobility on the part of the audience and gives little consideration to persons who have specific mobility needs. Nichol's points regarding the "armouring of the body," which opened this chapter, suggests an awareness of varying needs and limitations of any person's body; however, that cannot be said for all poets and Nichol did not explicitly address these issues. A similar statement could be made about concrete poetry and sound poetry, which privilege sight and hearing, thus excluding persons who are blind and deaf, respectively. These works are produced knowing that they exclude, and the authors (who quite often theorized the definitions, histories, and developments of these practices) have presumably accepted this limitation as part of their work. I pause to take consideration of these issues here instead of my chapters on sound poetry and concrete poetry since I am responsible for generating a theory of a haptic poetic as I piece together its history, and situate it as an important and overlooked node of Canadian literature. I acknowledge my position as an able-bodied person. I have approached the notion of a haptic poetic with issues of ableism in mind. I have thus tried to maintain an expansive definition of the haptic poem that also considers a range of other bodily experiences that includes movement and proprioception as important ways of engaging these works with hope that this discourse can be as inclusive as possible.

Haptic Art and Literature: Historical and International Contexts

As I shall demonstrate, the Language Revolution encouraged significant developments in the growth of haptic poetry. However, prior to the Language Revolution, in a period stretching from the early to mid-twentieth century, haptic poetry manifested as a part of a diverse body of investigations into affective poetic materialism. As in the cases of concrete poetry and sound poetry, haptic poetry emerges in Canada in dialogue—at times inadvertently—with similarly

spirited, materially-concerned poetic and artistic nodes around the globe. In the found and ready-made sculptures of Marcel Duchamp, the sculptures and "avant-gardening" of Ian Hamilton Finlay, the Brazilian avant-garde movements like *poema processo*, the intermedia and participatory works of Fluxus artist Ben Vautier, and the participatory and instruction-based works of Conceptual Art by Yoko Ono, the tactile, kinetic, and proprioceptive aspects of language are an important element of artistic and poetic experiment.[99]

These nodes of poetic and artistic production—from Dada to Conceptual Art—provide convincing proof that haptics, as McLuhan points out, has remained to be a concern for writers and artists for well over 100 years (*UM* 105). These are works that are considered to be haptic because these artists and poets have made conscious efforts to explore the haptic literary realm as it relates to language and its materials. That being said, this attempt, like any attempt, to write a history of haptic poetry faces a vast array of complications. For one thing, examples of haptic poetry—as with all poetries that blur the borders between poetry and other practices—may rightly fit within more than one discursive category. Nichol's envelope *Journeying and the Returns*, for example, might be effectively considered both a work of concrete poetry and haptic poetry since both the look and hapticity of the works contained within the box prominently feature for readers. I should note, too, that there is not a movement of haptic poetry per se—not in the same way that concrete poetry is decidedly a global movement complete with manifestos, artist groups, anthologies, and gallery exhibitions. Rather, I present the history of haptic poetry by drawing a diverse range of artistic and poetic practices into proximity to produce a rich and

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[99] Though I do not have the space for it here, mail art—as practiced by Anna Banana or Robert Filliou, for example––could easily be located on the map I am drawing, notably for its interactivity and transformation of mail's utilitarian function in itself.

varied, rhizomatic genealogy against which we can understand the haptic poetry of the Language Revolution.

As with concrete poetry and sound poetry, the most recognizable moment of haptic poetry's emergence in Western artistic and poetic practices rests with the Dadaists and their practices of mixed media art including collage, photomontage, and assemblage. Like much of the work produced by the Dadaists, the practices of collage, photomontage and assemblage are effectively blurred since these works frequently incorporate print, photographic, and sculptural media. Of the three, I will focus on Dada assemblages, which are produced through the manipulation and combination of disparate three-dimensional materials (objects, garbage, fabrics, fragments, etc.) into new sculptures. As a result, these works are often the most textured and immersive pieces, which also frequently employ specific forms of participation.

There is a rich tradition of assemblage-based work produced by those artists associated Dadaists. Perhaps the most famous is French artist Marcel Duchamp whose work presents materially complex examples of assemblages, which he called "ready-mades." A work like his *With Hidden Noise* (1916), a collaboration with Walter Arensberg, is a sculptural construction that incorporates twine, brass plates, long screws, engraved text, and a mysterious unknown object that was locked inside the centre of the construction by Arensberg. Duchamp requested that he not be told what Arensberg placed inside his sculpture, and supposedly no one but Arensberg knows. The title of the work makes reference to this mysterious object: a noise made by a hidden item. The work, then, is only fully engaged when shook to produce the rattling sound of the sculpture. The brass plates are engraved, inviting the viewer to run their finger along the lettering. The inscription on the top plate reads as follows:

P.G. ECIDES   DEBARRASSEE.
LE.   D.SERT.   F.URNIS.ENT

                AS   HOW.V.R   COR.ESPONDS

The inscription on the lower plate reads:

    .IR.   CAR.E   LONGSEA
    F.NE,   HEA.,   .O.SQUE
    TE.U   S.ARP   BAR AIN .

Each plate consists of both French and English words; however, some of the letters of the words are absent. For example, in the first line of the top plate, the letter "D" is missing from the word "DECIDES." This omission of letters reflects the similarly hidden status of the object within the sculpture. In this unique orthographic form, the language of the plates are forms of linguistic noise, not communicating a signal, but rather noise from the mouth—much like a sound poem. Both the textual and the sculptural element of the work are participatory, prompting the viewer to complete each related piece: to guess the hidden object and to guess the missing letters, like a puzzle or game. Each aspect of this game is entirely dependent upon the viewer's interaction: the force and direction of the movement they use when shaking the object; likewise, the word puzzle is solved and wholly dependent on the letters the reader inserts into the absences. *With Hidden Noise*, then, is a complex work of textual and kinetic art through which users are not only prompted to re-envision the configuration of material properties of the world in assemblage, but also how their own psychological and physiological self unfolds from the interaction of the work.[100]

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[100] Temporally- and geographically-speaking, Dada assemblage is perhaps furthest removed from the context of the Language Revolution. Despite any aesthetical and political overlaps between Dada with the Language Revolution, Canadians had limited access to these works (see Chapter 1). This is the case, even more so, for haptic works, since haptic works are exceedingly more difficult to document and engage than the Dadaist typographical experiments that partially influenced concrete poetry. Dada, however, set the stage in Western arts and literary culture for an explosion of haptic-centric art and poetic works in the proceeding decades that more closely approximated the Language Revolution.

Sculpture was also an important medium for Scottish concrete poet and "avant-gardener" Ian Hamilton Finlay, whose work was embedded within the network of global concretism of the 1950s and 1960s which was prominently featured in Canada's little concrete magazines. Finlay explored a broad range of media in his concrete poetry as he sought to blur the borders between art and life. Finlay's haptic work is most fully realized in a large-scale, site-specific installation. The work is a sprawling and lively green garden situated in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh, Scotland. He first called this work *Stony Path*, but later changed its name to *Little Sparta* in 1983. Leaving behind the industrialized world, Finlay served as master, steward and poet to pastoral landscape of *Stony Path/Little Sparta*. In collaboration with his partner Sue Finlay, along with a number of builders, labourers, and crafts persons, Finlay created over two hundred and seventy-five works of art and poetry that were installed within the garden's five-acre perimeter. These were carvings of words, phrases, and aphorisms into the garden's infrastructure (gates, bridges, fences, paving stones, etc.) as well as sundials, pillars, columns, plaques, monuments, and memorials.[101]

Stony Path/*Little Sparta* was also Finlay's home, an escape from industrialization into the pastoral. *Stony Path/Little Sparta* is for an audience who "can enter into his poetic domain, even touch the text" (2), to be immersed within the poem and entangled within its environment—like being enveloped entirely by the pages of a book. The process for the engaging *Stony Path/Little Sparta*, begins well before anyone actually visits the textual site. Due to its exclusivity and remote location, one must first encounter an image or description of the garden—likely online or, in the pre-internet days, in an image or description of the garden in a book or literary periodical.

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[101] For more info on *Little Sparta*, see the website for the *The Little Sparta Trust* (http://www.littlesparta.org.uk/) or *Ian Hamilton Finlay: Selections* (2012), ed. Alec Finlay

Then one must schedule a period for a visit and then travel, during the specified season, to the garden itself. In this way, Finlay's garden resists the conventional portability of literary objects, which are easily movable in book or chapbook form. Each time a person enters the garden, the poems are made anew: the growth has been trimmed or has been left to overgrow, new birds are chirping nearby, the weather has shifted, the carved-faced of a rock has been smoothed by erosion. These works are, as Alec Finlay (Ian Hamilton Finlay's son) describes them, an "enactment of a poetics stilled in stone, subject to the flux of nature" (6). The poems in the garden require constant maintenance. Finlay continuously changed the space—adding, expanding, and removing sections from the garden. The poems, too, had lives of their own. Finlay writes to Guy Davenport: "If it is not one thing, it is another. Every day a poem is blown down, or shows signs of cracking, or needs oiled [sic], or withers, and what is needed is a full-time Poem-Engineer" (qtd in *Selections* 40). Thus, the poems of *Stony Path/Little Sparta* are subject to a complex design of human and nonhuman forces and processes. In each encounter, the poems offer a new experience, a new suspense from which the audience can unfold in relation to the environment as it shifts under the pressure of time, entropy, and human intervention.

While Finlay was busily carving and placing stones in *Stony Path* in the 1960s, another artistic movement extended from the concretism of Noigandres poets in Brazil. The movement is referred to as *poema processo,* which "is not a mere or simple continuation of concretism: [it] is a radical continuity, implying a semiological unfolding of its own, of one of the directions of concrete poetry" (Cirne 45). While Finlay's extension of the concrete poem into garden sculpture is escapist (leaving behind of the industrial world), *poema processo* is an affront to preceding literary genres and the military dictatorship that gripped Brazil from 1964 until 1985. For a short

period of time (1968-1972), poets like Wlademir Dias Pino, Moacy Cirne, Neide de Sá, and Álvaro de Sá advocated for a type of anti-literary poetic, characterized by nonverbal signs, symbols, geometric figures and perforated pages with an emphasis on audience participation and collaboration. In fact, their first act declared the arrival of the group on the front steps of the Municipal Theatre in Rio de Janiero, a liminal space between officially public and artistic spaces. There, "Books of poetry by Drummond, Cassiano Ricardo, and others were torn up, and protestors carried signs with such messages as 'Verse is Drummoncide,' 'Uncle Scrooge is imperialism itself' and 'There's more poetry in a logotype than in all the poetry itself of J.G. Araújo Jorge, Mário Chamie, Vinícisu de Moraes!" (Perrone 63).[102] As Charles Perrone suggests, the performance is similar to a "dadaist-demonstration stunt" (63) with its emphasis on shock and surprise; however, this type of commitment to a nonverbal anti-literature fused poetic experiment and radical political agenda as an attempt to make profound impacts on the social body.

Poema Processo's program for a nonverbal poetry is suitable considering the political climate the poets were living in: a military dictatorship that actively tried to suppress artistic and political dissent using violence and censorship. Thus, *poema processo* searches for alternative means of expression under a military rule that would not let its people speak. This motive echoes the ambition of the poets of the Language Revolution who, at the same time, sought alternative modes of expression during a period when expression is being narrowed and standardized by capitalism's increasing control over day-to-day life. For poets in Brazil, *poema processo* initiates

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[102] This quotation makes reference to two established Brazilian authors, Carlos Drummond de Andrad and Cassiano Ricardo, both of whom were representative of nationalistic, lyrical, modernist writing in Brazil, the old guard which the poets of poema processo were reacting against. In distinction to modernist lyricism the poets of poema processo created poems of "boxed graphics with implied words or messages, wordless cartoons, nonsense diacritical and alphabetical sequences, and satirical paste-ups" (Perrone 65).

active participation within the social body, using poetic means that circumvent governmental control. Fernanda Nogueira describes one of their key projects, the envelope magazine: The envelope-magazines edited, published and distributed by members of poema/processo and other artists connected to experimental poetry are an example of the will to publicize their poetic production and equally a sign of the demand for the active participation of the reader. The issues were carried out through personal contacts and correspondence among those interested in producing and publishing 'the new poetry'. The circulation of proposals was passed from hand to hand and through a mail network that would later, in 1971, be recognized as a mail art network. The poems were submitted via open calls announced by the editors and were mixed with parallel contributions, or even the reproduction of random materials received. Therefore, all pretensions as to the limits of poetry were already overruled. ("Poema/processo: Poetic Radicality and Dissent" 89)The envelope magazines serve as one example of how the poets made and distributed their poetry through public channels, encouraging participation from all within the network. This type of active participation was also a key element in the poetry itself. A work like "Poema da picotagem" ["Poem of the Pecking"] (1968) by Moacy Cirne, for example, also used an envelope. The work has been described online thusly:

> Three glossy leaves (half-craft) in different colors: red, yellow and black. Distributed inside an envelope, as parts of the same poem. In rectilinear but not parallel tracings, seven perforated cuts. The reader is "invited" to pry, creating ever new and differentiated formal possibilities to each part of the "played" poem outside. The reader could also shuffle the sheets, thus increasing the possibilities of the poem. (n.pag.)

Cirne's "Poema da picotagem" actively highlights participation as well as hapticity since the reader must reach into the envelope to extract the pieces to construct a geometrical figure. In this sense, the work is a type of game, driven by the reader's curiosity as they shuffle, feel and grab pieces inside the envelope.

From Latin American concrete poetry grew another poetic form based on language's relationship to the body, action, and environment. In *Corrosive Signs: Essays on Experimental Poetry (Visual, Concrete, Alternative)* (1990), Lisbon-based poet Fernando Aguiar refers to this new mode as a poetry of "interactive signs," and describes it as a "complete revolution in reading of the poem" ("Interaction" 93) for its considerations of "time, space, movement/action, three-dimensionality, color, sound, smell, light, and above all the presence of the poet as detonator" (93). Influenced by McLuhan's ideas on media as the extension of humankind (95), Aguiar and other poets proposed interactive sign poetry as another step in the evolution of poetic form. The crucial element of this poetic mode is the fusion of language, technology, and performance to create a live poetic event:

> The physical presence of the poetic operator is one of the most important factors of that which can be viewed as live poetry. Live, because it contains precisely the live form of its creator. Alive, because the (im)pulse/movement/breathing of the body take part in the room, as instigators of the unfolding of the body take part in the poem, as instigators of the unfolding and concretion of same." (94)

In this way, the poet of interactive sign poetry seeks the fusion of all bodily senses with an especial emphasis on haptic sensations through processes related to movement, immersion, and presence.

Accompanying his theorization of interactive sign poetry, Aguiar proposes two interactive sign poetry performances to illustrate what this type of poetics really entails. The first entitled "Ensadio Para Uma Escrita Continua" describes an immersive, kinetic poem which requires an overhead projector, a fish tank with water, a sheet, and plastic letters. The poet places the tank on top of the projector and fills it water then places the plastic letters inside of the tank. The letters continuously move as they float in the water and the image of their movement is projected onto a sheet in the room. The resulting poem is an immersive installation composed of

letters continually shifting in their relation to one another. The second of the two poems, entitled

"Imponder(h)Abiliddade (Projecto para simulador de anti-gravidade ou Performance a realizer

na Lua)," extends the ideas of the previous poem. Rather than a fish tank, however,

"Imponder(h)Abiliddade" requires an anti-gravity machine. In this piece, the poet enters an anti-

gravity machine with large letters that would, with the poet, float in the chamber. The poet floats

with the letters, grabbing hold of several letters at once to create words. Each word formed by

the poet is photographed and later exhibited. Aguiar, in neither case, considers the role of the

audience in his description of the work. In "Ensadio Para Uma Escrita Continua," it is not clear

where the audience would be situated in the room in relation to the projector or if the audience

can move through the projection and have the poem mapped upon their body. Likewise, in

"Imponder(h)Abiliddade," the audience is not in the anti-gravity chamber with the poet. In both

instances then, there is still a barrier between audience and poet; however, Aguiar has accounted

for this perceived separation. He argues that a poetry of interactive signs establishes the poet at

"the center of the action" which "confers on the poem a sensation of touchability, representing in

a certain way a link between it and the enjoyer" (94) and further, on an affective level, suggests

that "Between the poetic operator and the 'reader' there exists a direct empathetic relationship"

(94). These works, then, by specifically implicating movement, immersion, and affect for the

reader directly engage McLuhan's notion of haptic as a "life of things in the mind" (McLuhan

UM 105).

Around the same time, participatory and network-based art had been growing to

prominence, led by another group of artists who sought to foreground hapticity in their art and

poetry but did so by distributing that experience among a network which stretched across North

America, Europe, and Asia. This type of activity was part of a multifaceted movement known as

Fluxus, a term first coined by co-founder and designer George Maciunas in 1961. Inspired by Dadaism, especially the ready-made assemblages of Marcel Duchamp, Maciunas first tried to employ the term "Neo-Dada" to describe their work, but eventually settled on Fluxus. Fluxus (meaning "to flow" or "to be in process") describes both the group's attention to the present as well as the perpetually shifting nature of their work. Artists such as Joseph Beuys, George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Yoko Ono, and Nam June Paik were key members of the group, producing performances, noise-music, time-based works, concrete poems, multiples, visual art, design, and literature. Like the Brazillian *poema processo,* the haptic poetry of Fluxus sought to cross boundaries across media and forms of communication.

The practice of Fluxus artists could largely be summarized in a single word: *intermedia*. This is a neologism formulated by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins. The word is used to describe the blurring of borders between artistic activities and disciplines. Some concrete poetry and sound poetry, subjects of this dissertation's preceding chapters, could serve as prime examples of this type of work, but Fluxus artists continuously explored the possibilities of connecting different artistic disciplines. With a McLuhan-esque enthusiasm, Higgins hails the emergence of intermedia as a response to the conditions of his time: "due to the spread of mass literacy, to television and the transistor radio, our sensitivities have changed," he writes in 1965. Higgins further explains that "[f]or the last ten years or so, artists have changed their media to suit this situation, to the point where the media have broken down in their traditional forms, and have become merely puristic points of reference" ("Statement on Intermedia" np)—television, for example, is both a visual and auditory medium. The breakdown results in intermedia works— works that are no longer composed using one media (painting, poetry, etc.), but rather exist

between them.[103] According to Higgins, "[t]he concept itself is better understood by what it is not, rather than what it is," he writes ("Intermedia" 50). At times, too, these works hardly resemble what is typically considered art at all: works that require the destruction of other works of art to be engaged (like Ben Vautier's *Total Art Matchbox*, 1966). Fluxus works, like Dada, represent a kind of anti-art philosophy rejecting institutionalization and ensuring that the experience of the art is grounded in an imminent and intimate moment.

Of the many Fluxus performances and artworks that foreground hapticity, the aforementioned *Total Art Match-box* (1966) by Ben Vautier is rather striking, and occupies an intermedia space between poetry and performance art. The work is a box of matches upon which Vautier has printed a set of instructions for the user.[104] The instructions to Vautier's piece read: "USE THESE MATCHES TO DESTROY ALL ART - MUSEUMS ART LIBRARY'S - READY-MADES - POP-ART AND AS I BEN SIGNED EVERYTHING WORK OF ART - BURN - ANYTHING - KEEP LAST MATCH FOR THIS MATCH –" (n. pag.). The work is a playful testament to Fluxus's anti-art philosophy, demanding that the user burn all that we recognize as art including Vautier's work itself. The language, however, is undeniably poetic. The language is haiku-like in diction, using brevity as a tool for emphasis. The poems are reflective of the minimalist aesthetic that was being explored by other poets like Nichol in Canada but also Aram Saroyan in the United States. Similarly, it uses the uppercase letters—in a way that is reminiscent of Dada typographic experiments—to stress a sense of urgency in the work as well as the violence of the instructions. *Total Art Match-box*, then, can be read like poetry, but it can also be enacted to become haptic. If taken as more than a playful statement

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[103] This is different from "mixed-media" which uses multiple related materials in a single work.

[104] It is worth mentioning that the work comes one year after a similar work by Nichol—his "Cold Mountain" in *Journeying and the Returns*, which requires the user to fold and burn a booklet of poetry.

regarding anti-art, *Total Art Match-box* is a text-based, haptic work that distributes the art experience across time and space. One can imagine a user, if they had the sense to do so, attending art museums across the world, burning canonized paintings and sculptures one at a time in acts of creative-destruction.[105] The user, in body and mind, is implicated within the work: following the instructions, lighting the matches, feeling the heat of the flame, seeing the flicker of its light, and maybe even inhaling the smoke of the fire. In these ways, the work offers (or, at the very least, promises) a haptic experience. The affects from such a haptic experience could range wildly: pleasure in the act of destruction, pain if one were to be burnt or inhale too much smoke, or even sadness if one comes to regret the destruction of artwork, for example. These experiences would be distributed across time, offering a new haptic unfolding each time a match is lit.

Related both in its influences and concerns, Conceptual Art is a noteworthy node when considering the proliferation of haptic art across the West in the mid-twentieth century. Like Dada, Concrete Poetry, and Fluxus, Conceptual Art stretched across borders with work emerging both in the United States and Canada. At first, Conceptual Art may seem like an odd fit for this type of survey. The name of the movement itself emphasizes not materials—the interests for this dissertation—but concepts, which are commonly considered to be immaterial. Lucy R. Lippard refers to Conceptual Art as the "de-materialization of the art object," suggesting that much of the art of the 1960s and 1970s de-emphasized "material aspects" (Lippard 5). It is worth noting here, McLuhan's rhetorical question regarding touch: is it "not just skin in contact with things, but the life of things in the *mind*?" (McLuhan *UM* 105). In terms of haptics, it could be said that

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[105] I realize that this work could not totally burn the art world as there are only a limited number of matches in the box. However, I am taking the work up on its invitation to imagine this possibility and the multisensory experience it promises.

Conceptual Art has the capacity to touch the audience in the metaphorical sense of the word outlined above. However, Conceptual Art's relationship to materiality and hapticity is actually much more direct than that. Lippard's point is important, but I think it is equally useful to consider Conceptual Art as a mode that actually brings materiality to the forefront of the artistic experience. On the one hand, we are forever bound to material objects and processes, thus no art practice is really outside of the material realm. It might be said that a movement like Conceptual Art de-emphasizes materiality in art; however, Conceptual Art does not de-emphasize the material, rather it focuses on materiality by calling materiality itself into question. For example, conceptual artist Sol LeWitt's various instructions for drawing are installed in galleries not by LeWitt himself, but by gallery staff who follow the instructions he provides. The resultant drawing is unique in almost every instance. Among the various ways we can interpret this type of work, LeWitt's instructions demonstrates the inadequacy of language and instruction as a means of communication. In other words, these are works that meditate on the relationship between communication and materiality, even though LeWitt does not actually create a material artwork himself.

An early example of this kind of text-based work is Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* (1964), an artist book that is comprised of a series of instructions and drawings. The book is divided into eight sections: "Music," "Painting," "Event," "Poetry," "Object," "Dance," "Architecture Pieces," and "On Films." Each section consists of a different series of instructions that the reader must try to follow to create the work of art. These works correspond to Sol Lewitt's definition of Conceptual Art: "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes the machine that makes the art" (*Traffic* 60). Though it is unlikely that many readers will actually

try to execute the poems some will attempt to follow the plans.[106] *Grapefruit* is a book of plans

that can be executed, thus the works are haptic in exactly the way this chapter theorizes. This is

an unorthodox engagement with the codex—one is not simply supposed to read but one can act.

However, many of the pieces, like Vautier's *TOTAL ART MATCHBOX,* can be read like poems.

Like Vautier's language, Ono strives for a similar haiku-like brevity. If read like poetry, each

piece in *Grapefruit* works toward an aspect not uncommon to verse: the moment of epiphany.

Many pieces in the text strive to push the limits of the imagination, but also prompt readers to re-

envision what is possible. A piece like her "Throwing Piece," for example, instructs the reader

to: "Throw a stone into the sky high enough so it will not come back" (n. pag.), a feat that is

impossible but encourages readers to contemplate the limits of physics, gravity, and materiality.

While some of the works in *Grapefruit* can actually be carried out, "Throwing Piece" functions

primarily as a poem since it cannot truly be performed, but, like poetry, offers a space to suspend

physical reality and contemplates the limits of the material world.

 Grapefruit, like Vautier's matchbox, is equally a haptic work. For example, Ono's "Paper

Folding Piece," composed in Winter 1963, from the "Poetry" section of the book, demands that

the reader "Fold certain parts of a paper and read. Fold a crane and read" (np). The work of art

then is not just in reading the instructions but is also in the folding of the paper—a user running

her/his fingertips along the folded surfaces of the page, flattening them into a new shape,

preparing for them to be read aloud. In the same section, Ono pushes hapticity further into the

foreground with a series of touch-based poems. For example, "Touch Poem for Group of

People," composed in Winter 1963, encourages the reader to "Touch each other" (n. pag.). In

"Touch Poem V," composed in Autumn 1963, Ono recommends that the reader "Feel the wall.

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[106] I am among the people who have tried to execute some of pieces.

Examine its temperature and moisture. Take notes about many different walls" (n. pag.). This works much in the same way that Finlay's garden encourages the reader to see and listen to the environment. Ono's touch poems begin with language-based instructions but immediately turn the reader's attention to a tactile experience of the surrounding world: people and spaces.

In some way or another, each of these movements, described above, intersect with the discourse of the haptic. These poetic and artistic movements also varyingly connected with the context of the Language Revolution. However, the work championed by Black Mountain-affiliated poets such as Charles Olson and Robert Duncan, known as proprioceptive writing, directly affected the development of poetry on the Canadian west coast. Recounting the work of Duncan—whose writing proved to be influential for those infamous Vancouver editors of *Tish* magazine—Warren Tallman describes the proprioceptive writer as a writer who "see[s] the surrounding world in the midst of himself as subject" ("Wonder Merchants" 60-61). Tallman explains further that, "in the proprioceptive sentence SELF becomes the subject, the WRITING becomes all verb, and the OBJECT is life, to live" (61-62). Proprioceptive writing, then, according to Tallman, is an arguably egocentric, subject-centred adaptation of proprioception which circumvents the actual physiological dimension of the term. Proprioceptive writing, according to Tallman's description, approximates confessional modes of writing wherein the I-voice of the poem is a divulgence of personal, subjective account of that subject's experience in the world. Tallman's definition of proprioceptive writing misconstrues the actual proprioceptive elements—mainly, that proprioceptive writing is based upon the subject-relationship wherein the two are in a relationship of constant formation and reformation. The writing is, in a way, documentation of this processual relationship.

Proprioception is actually more bodily than Tallman seems to recognize it to be, though certainly no less egocentric, since the proprioceptive poem is often, though not always, subject-centred. These ideas are most clearly stated in Olson's writing, both his essay "Projective Verse" (1950) and his manifesto "Proprioception" (1965). Olson introduced the idea of proprioception into North American literary communities, which he described in 1961 and 1962 as "the sense whose end organs lie in the muscles, tendons, joints, and are stimulated by bodily tensions (–or relaxations of same)," and further that

> the data of depth sensibility/the 'body' of us as
> object which spontaneously or of its order
> produces experiences of, 'depth' Viz
> SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM
> BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES ("Proprioception" 181).

It is this thinking of the body with its stimulations and tensions that informed the development of his poetics essay "Projective Verse" a half-decade earlier, wherein he developed the idea of the "open poem."

The "open poem" consists of "the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense" and these elements "must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality; and that these elements are to be seen as creating the tensions of a poem just as totally as do those other objects create what we know as the world" ("Projective Verse" n. pag.). Olson's description of the poem here is bodily. It is a way of foregrounding the body—as a receptor and holder of these tensions—as the key element of a poem's composition—rather than rhyme or meter, common to lyric poetry––which was the dominant poetic mode of the time. What holds this together as a coherent work is the tension between the elements of the poem and the poem's relation to the poet's body: "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the

LINE" ("Projective Verse" n. pag.). Breathing is the means by which the poem is truly projected into voice and onto the page: "It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends" ("Projective Verse" np). Therefore, the poet is a receptor of sensations from the world who then engages and projects those sensations in language and breath back out into the world in a poem, organized by the proprioceptive processes of the body: "SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM / BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES" ("Proprioception" 181).

Duncan's and Olson's writing—especially their proprioceptive works—came to be influential for Vancouver's Tish poets, who published their early work in their newsletter *Tish*. It was Duncan who prompted the young undergraduates to adopt the name *Tish*, an anagram of SHIT, as the title of their newsletter. Duncan suggested the name because, without fossilized feces, archaeologists "had no idea what the people were eating except in those few fossilized remains" (*TISH* qtd in Davey 9). The fossil conjures images of excess (bodily waste) but also fertility and growth; it is a deposit from a previous existence. The poem, for Tish poets, is a product of genealogies and is produced as the result of consumption. The bodily connotations of the name also correspond to the Olson's notion of "Projective Verse." The newsletter served as a means of projecting the ideas, feelings, and experiences of these young UBC undergraduates out into the world, corresponding to bodily processes of consumption and excretion. George Bowering's poem "Poet as Projector," provides the best evidence of Olson's influence over the Tish-poets: "I do not interpret, / I switch on & I switch out, / I enlarge the film, / my latent image of all phenomena" (19-22). These lines are representative of Tish's adoption of Black Mountain poetics that emphasizes non-lyrical modes of writing, the page as an open-field. From 1961 until

1963, the first nineteen issues of the newsletter were produced under the editorial tutelage of

Davey, Wah, Reid, Bowering, and Dawson.

The activities of the Tish poets draw us back into close proximity with the Language

Revolution. For Nichol, Tish's activity served as a foundational foil for poetics, which he

developed more intensively in relation to *blewointment*. In 1974, he tells Nicette Jukelevics that

when he was living in Vancouver he was

> sitting in on a bunch of the workshops that some people from Tish were conducting,
> heavy discussions about the relationship of form and content. At that time this was very
> new to me, I used to sit there and shudder at the implications of what was discussed.
> Anyway, this opened up another dimension for me. And when bissett once again came
> out with the Blew Ointment issues, I got a sense of inspiration, the kind of inspiration that
> comes from a person who is also interested in the exact same thing, the inspiration of
> somebody communicating exactly what you are interested in and are doing. (Meanwhile
> 133-34)

Nichol's comments return us to the beginnings of the Language Revolution, to bissett,

blewointment, and the poetics that emerged, that developed a truly haptic poetic that was

influenced by both Canadian and non-Canadian texts, but was never derivative of those

preceding and concurrent influential forms.[107]

Haptic Art and Literature: The Canadian Context

Movements like global concrete poetry, intermedia, conceptual art, and performance art

impacted Canadian arts and culture in various ways. Robust studies and histories offered in

books such as *Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada, 1965-1980,* edited by Arnold Grant and Karen

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[107] I cannot, of course, offer more than a snapshot of haptically-based poetries within the space of this dissertation. Other notable projects that also correspond to the criteria I map in this chapter include *The Pronouns* (1979) by Jackson Mac Low, which consists of a series of dance instruction poems; John Cage's *Musicircus,* which was first performed in 1967 and consists of a group of people brought together in a large space to perform for a limited period of time without a score or specific concept to guide them; as well as *The Alphamiricon* (1987) by Brian Henderson and *sentences* (1978) by Robert Grenier, which were both published as unbounded box books, similar to Nichol's *Still Water* (1970) or *The Cosmic Chef: An Evening of Concrete* (1970). *Journeying & the Returns.*

Henry (2012); *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art*, edited by Tanya Mars and

Johanna Householder (2004); *Performance in Canada, 1970-1990,* edited by Alain-Martin

Richard and Clive Robertson (1991); and online archives like *Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art*

in the Sixties, curated by the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, document some of the ways these

international movements influenced parts of Canada's artistic and poetic communities. Haptic

poetry in Canada emerged both as a successor to and in concert with these poetic and artistic

investigations. However, haptic poetry lacks the critical, historical, and theoretical writings that

stimulated the proliferation of other movements in Canada. In some cases, Canada is among the

many locations where these movements flourished (Intermedia, Performance Art, Conceptual

Art) while in other cases, preceding movements hardly approximated Canadian arts and literary

culture (Dada).[108] Haptic poetry seemingly had no single catalyst for its emergence—no single

event, author, or manifesto. It did not result from the arrival of another arts or literary movement.

Rather, as this section will show, haptic poetry—much like concrete poetry—emerges

independently in Canada, growing rhizomatically at the local level before it was enmeshed

within a national and international nexus of arts and literary cultures.

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[108] As noted in the "Introduction" to *Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada, 1965-1980*, Canadian artists such as David AskevoldAskefold, Gerald Ferguson, General Idea, Garry Neil Kennedy, N. E. Thing Co., Michael Snow and Joyce Wieland, among others and institutions (especially the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design) made significant contributions to the "development and dissemination of conceptual art on an international level" (Arnold et al. 13). Conceptual Art was thriving at the regional level in Canada too, a point that *Traffic* seeks to highlight, with related activities cropping up in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, London, Guelph, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. Activities related to Conceptual Art inevitably overlapped with Canada's poetry culture. For example, notable overlap occurs in the practice of Roy Kiyooka, whose work has equal footing in both artistic, performative, and poetic communities. Though his works are not notably haptic from what I know, his work filtered the ideas and practice of Conceptual Art into poetry and text-based art. Kiyooka's multidisciplinary work, for example, merges a range of aesthetic and social influences—abstract painters such as Jock McDonald, the dance of Yvonne Rainer and Merce Cunningham, the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley. Kiyooka, too, worked in close proximity to poets affiliated with the Language Revolution, most notably Nichol. Kiyooka's poem *October's Piebald Skies and Other Lacunae* (1988), for example, was prompted by "the accidental conjunction of the Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement (September 22, 1988) and the death of poet bpNichol at the young age of 44 (September 25, 1988)" (*Pacific Windows* 304), writes Roy Miki.

It could be said that all of the previously mentioned movements, in some way or another, influenced the development of haptic poetry in Canada. These other poetic and artistic practices, however, tend to privilege one type of engagement over another: haptic works of art or performance tend to privilege the somatic over the poetic; likewise, the poetries that approximate haptic modes are more interested in linguistic expression rather than actual somatics (as in the case of Black Mountain). In each case, language and haptics are not wholly fused to create what I refer to as a haptic poetic wherein language, language materials, and the body are intricately bound in the work. The haptic poetry of the Language Revolution marks a departure from its historical predecessors in the way that the poets bring together these elements to create an affective poetic that breaks down the wall between poet and audience, language and body.

For the haptic poetry of the Language Revolution, dissolving the separation between bodies and language occurred due to a particular and unique relationship that these poets had with technology—just as in the cases of concrete poetry and sound poetry. McCaffery argues that sound poetry emerged in the 1950s in response to electroacoustic voice technologies and the tape machine (*Sound Poetry* 10). Likewise, some haptic poetry emerges in Canada as a result of greater access to print materials and technologies. Canadian poets seized upon the newly accessible "portable, inexpensive electric or electronic equipment" which not only permitted a "multiplicity of aesthetic systems, or even value systems" to co-exist (Davey *From There to Here* 14), but gave poets and artists opportunities to more deeply engage with the materials of their work. They made some or all decisions related to layout, design, typography, paper-type, binding and so on. All of these factors became a meaningful part of the process of poetic production since many of the poets of the Language Revolution self-published and distributed

their own books.[109] In doing so, the poet's body (labour) and mind (concept) are more deeply

embedded within the work. The body of the poet and audience become more closely

approximated to the language and the materiality of their work, thus closing the distance between

poet, poem, and audience. It is this access to and control over these new media technologies,

fused with a DIY sensibility, that prompted the proliferation of haptic poetry. To more deeply

understand the relationship between media and the emergence of haptic poetry—and to begin

accounting for the development of haptic poetics in a Canadian context—I turn again to

McLuhan, whose writings—as we know from earlier chapters—deeply influenced the generation

of poets who are central to this dissertation, and these writings include meditations on touch and

extension.

McLuhan's theories of media extension gesture toward haptic discourse, which—

inadvertently or not—underpins his critical considerations of the interface between humans,

affect, and technologies that are external to the human body. McLuhan's claim that "all media

are extensions of our own bodies and senses" (*UM* 113) advances a premise that is deceivingly

simple. On the one hand, McLuhan's assertion states that media is a means by which humans

extend their abilities. The telephone, for example, augments the human ability to communicate

with the increased capability of being able to do so across long distances. Likewise, the wheel

increases the velocity and distance at which humans can move (kinetics). These technological

mediations also permit humans to receive and dispatch affects, emotions, sensations, and

stimulations over greater distances. By using the telephone, humans can receive linguistic (and

non-linguistic) data that stimulates the mind and body in various ways, depending upon how the

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[109] I touch upon this point again near the end of this chapter with my discussion of the gift economy and hapticity.

individual's feelings unfold from the interaction. In this way, the utilitarian capacities of media literally extend the range of human input and output.

Taken differently, McLuhan's writings on media as extension become a little more complex (and also a little more like science fiction). For McLuhan, the significance of media during the electric age exceeds its utilitarian function. Instead, media becomes a corporeal prosthetic that has direct impact on the haptic realms of human experience, including touch, kinetics, proprioception. The media technologies that humans employ in their day-to-day lives directly correspond not just to the outward extension of the human body nor the inward reception of affective stimulation: media directly influences and shapes the physical and psychic life of humans. This premise, which deeply informs this dissertation, influenced McLuhan's thinking throughout his career. The idea can be found in his 1951 *Mechanical Bride* wherein he, anticipating the technological singularity, anxiously claims that "technology is an abstract tyrant that carries its ravages into deeper recesses of the psyche" (33) and further that "as terrified men once got ritually and psychologically into animals, so we already have gone far to assume and to propagate the behaviour mechanisms of the machines that frighten us and overpower us" (34). In this case, McLuhan's consideration of technology describes the modulating capacities of media––the ways in which a medium attaches itself, parasite-like, to the body of the user and influences that user's experience of tactility, kinetics, and proprioception.

McLuhan maintains his position on media as a literal extension of the human body in later works like *The Medium is the Massage* (1967). In this text, McLuhan swerves from his idiosyncratic academic writing found in *The Mechanical Bride* and instead issues a series of provocative statements: "The wheel… is an extension of the foot" (31-2), "clothing, an extension of the skin" (39-40), and "electric circuitry, an extension of the central nervous system" (41).

The title, *The Medium is the Massage*, foregrounds the inherent hapticity of media by invoking massage—a process of engagement with the muscles and tissues of the body via flesh-to-flesh contact that, if successful, has tremendous (if only temporary) effects on the body's feeling and composure. Indeed, the use of media is a similarly intimate affair. For example, a telephone requires a short range of finger motions across a number pad (or along a roto-dial) in quick succession to achieve oral and aural contact with another person on the other end of the line. Thus, to use that media, the body must always satisfy a predetermined program of haptic engagements—primarily movements and tactile sensations—that are encoded within the medium. As the body repeats these movements they become embedded within the body in what is commonly referred to as muscle memory. Likewise, before the rise of mobile devices, a film requires the viewer to be folded into their seat in a way that positions the body toward a screen and in a position that is comfortable enough, typically, to remain in a resting position for longer than an hour. Each of these examples demands the body to touch, move, and perceive its own actions in particular ways and at particular velocities in order for the medium to be engaged. These engagements that occur on the level of haptics shape the individual and community's sense of their world.

With the advent of telecommunication technologies came what McLuhan famously refers to as the "global village," a shrinking sense of the distance between persons as well as an increased sense of alienation, since these communications mediate interpersonal experiences, establishing a veil or barrier between one person and the other. McLuhan takes note of this problem in *Understanding Media*: "Our mechanical technologies for extending and separating the functions of our physical beings have brought us near to a state of disintegration by putting us out of touch with ourselves" (*UM* 105) and, I would add, one another. For McLuhan, the

telephone and tape machine, for example, offer a means of communication, but in a disembodied form, thus the possibility of a haptic encounter with another as part of a face-to-face meeting diminishes. Instead, this communicative process becomes a haptic encounter with a nonhuman mechanism—a telephone, a radio, a book, a poem— thus denying possibilities of imminent human community. The problem being posed by McLuhan here is out of phase with other comments he makes regarding the emotional and psychic resonance of hapticity or, what he refers to as "the life of things in the *mind*" (*UM* 105). The dissonance in McLuhan's thinking here is not easily reconcilable and, going forward, I think it is crucial to keep both points in mind. McLuhan's point regarding the problems of disembodiment and technology highlights an anxiety or discomfort some people may have around the use of new communication technology and the way it changes the relationship between materials and bodies as well as bodies and other bodies. This is an issue that the poets of the Language Revolution addressed in their work in various ways. They sought a means to renegotiate the conditions of haptic encounters in the face of these conditions through the poem. By investing an interest in touch this problem is partially solved. An investment in touch, during the electric age, is a means of healing the disintegrating self and subject; it is a means of reinstating a conscious connection between the inner affective lives and the outer physical lives of persons, a point of interface that McLuhan argues has been significantly altered by the conditions of the electric age.

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan confirms that the artistic zeitgeist that informed the Language Revolutionaries was concerned with touch as a crucial part of day-to-day and artistic experience: "For more than a century now artists have tried to meet the challenge of the electric age by investing the tactile sense with the role of a nervous system for unifying all the others" (*UM* 105). For McLuhan, acknowledging touch is crucial during the electric age. It is a period

characterized by shrinking distances (thanks to the possibility of telecommunication technologies), but also characterized by increasing mediation between bodies (as a result of those same telecommunications technologies). In part, understanding media and technology's impact on the body in this way explains the impetus behind the visual concrete poetry and sound poetry of the Canadian Language Revolutionaries. They purposefully misuse or détourne their technologies—writing machines, books, tape machines, and language itself—to resist the standardization and industrialization of the electric age, to resist the physical and psychical conditions that the conditions of the time impose upon the body of the poet and the user. However, it also begins to explain the impetus for a whole range of related activities wherein the interface of work, with its materials and audience, are engaged on the haptic level. In Canada, these ideas were the impetus for new and daring artistic endeavours, new communal formations, new publishing ventures, and new ways of blurring the borders between art and life.

To trace this type of activity, I turn to Pauline Butling's useful adaptation of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the rhizome to trace activities within a literary network. Butling writes, "The rhizome posits a dynamic interconnectivity together with the possibility of intervention because nodes are critically active sites" ("One Potato, Two Potato" Butling 29). Using this model, literary activity is organized into nodal points that are simultaneously active, connected or disconnected, and compose Canada's literary culture. In this chapter, this model acknowledges that each of these nodes contributes to the gestalt of a haptic poetic mode in lieu of the manifestos, statements, and debates that have guided my other chapters. Furthermore, these nodal points can be distinguished as part of a "tripartite structure" which consists of related activities: "popularizing, synthesizing, and researching" (Butling 32). All of these activities can be recognized at live events such as readings, festivals, workshops, and conferences and in

publications such as periodicals, books, and editions. These concepts happen simultaneously and contribute to a vital literary culture. As my focus shall demonstrate, the rhizomatic model identifies various, select forums which assisted with the proliferation of a haptic poetic in Canada.

As with sound and concrete poetry, I return to the work of bill bissett, a key figure for the development of borderblur praxis in Canada and whose early work was deeply influenced by McLuhan (see Chapter One). bissett's *blewointment* magazine, for example, proved to be a significant forum for the development and popularization of haptic poetry in Canada, notably for its collagist aesthetic. Michael Turner gestures toward *blewointment*'s haptic quality as he recounts differences between *Tish* and *blewointment* in the early 1960s; he writes,

> While the TISH newsletter was a clean and neatly-typed affair, filled with poems of a 1950s modernist bent, blewointment's first issue emphasized the concrete nature of the written language, not just in its phonetically shortened form ("reveald") but through misspellings ("wgich", "abstracion"). Although the poems in blewointment also had a localized modernist sensibility, woven between them were drawings and collage elements made up of newspaper clippings and handbills, many of which ("wgich"?) were supplied by bissett. ("Expanded Literary Practices" Turner n. pag.)

bissett's collages are abstract, grounded not always in figures and critique but in haptics. For example, in some issues there are extraneous materials pasted into *blewointment* that are differently textured than the mimeographed pages—these are hand-painted scraps or pieces of paper that unfold. In some cases, a single issue of *blewointment* would be created using different types and sizes of paper thus drawing the reader's attention to way the periodical is touched and held by the reader.[110] Issues of *blewointment* sometimes varied in physical form quite

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[110] The "Fascist Court" special issue of *blewointment*, for example, contains several different types of papers—including smaller foldouts papers that fold out, a thin red strip with a quote from John Lennon, and a textured paper (perhaps cotton-based) with a picture of bissett. In another copy of the issue, some of these differently sized pages are a different colour or were cut differently. Other issues contain cut-outs from magazines and newspapers, and other sources, that are bound into the issue. For example, in Vol. 4, No. 1 a poem is printed onto paper towel and bound into the book along with a variety of other kinds of paper.

dramatically. For example, the "Fascist Court" special issue is bound down the longside of the page like a typical book; however, the "Occupation Issew" is top-bound like a field notepad, and printed on paper that is much larger than most other issues.

Due to the "makeshift conditions of production many of bissett's original[s] from these publications [*blewointment*] have been lost" ("bill bissett" Wallace 15).[111] However, bissett began experimenting with collagist techniques well before *blewointment*. Keith Wallace, who organized an exhibition of West Coast assemblages entitled *Rezoning*, suggests that "For bissett, collage and assemblage is a visceral activity, an endeavor to become 'one' with the materials of his world" ("bill bissett" 21). Like Duchamp, bissett employs a variety of materials that were at hand to construct his work: a wooden frame around a visual poem by bissett, a torn scrap of printed media hangs in the top left corner while an "a," "s," and "c" rest in the bottom right corner. The wooden frame is backed by additional triangular materials and overlaying the piece are the words "ice & cold storage" (n. pag.). *Vancouver Mainland Ice and Cold Storage* is also the name of bissett's 1974 book published by bob cobbing's Writer's Forum and an image of the assemblage was used for the cover.[112]

bissett was affiliated with a loose organization of artists and poets in Vancouver whose work explored, researched, and promoted the immersive, interactive, proprioceptive possibilities of art and literature (as well as communal working). They were named Intermedia Society, a name likely derived from Higgins's characterization of Fluxus. In 1967, Intermedia leased a

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[111] There seems to be little written on bissett's collages from a visual arts perspective. For more on the relationship between bissett's assemblages and his modernist predecessors (Duchamp, Rauschenberg, and the Surrealists), see Carl Peters's *Textual Vishyuns: Image and Text in the work of bill bissett* (2011) wherein he attempts to map out the contiguities of these works. That being said, also take note of Keith Wallace's point in *Rezoning: Collage and Assemblage* (1989): "Having no visual arts education, bissett's contact with Dada and Surrealism transpired indirectly through the literature he was reading and through friends he would later meet in Vancouver" (13).

[112] Poor photographic documentation has made it difficult to fully analyze the work since not all elements/materials are discernible in available black and white images.

four-storey building at 575 Beatty Street (a former spaghetti factory), which became a

multipurpose hub for like-minded Vancouver artists. It contained studios for film editing, sound

recording, installations, dance, performance and many other arts. bissett produced some

blewointment publications in a studio there and performed with the Mandan Massacre.

In addition to bissett, members of Intermedia Society included some other, by now,

familiar names including Copithorne, Gadd, Varney, Gary Lee Nova, Gregg Simpson, and Gerry

Gilbert. Intermedia first formed to "discuss Marshall McLuhan's theories on how electronic

media, particularly television, was transforming our world into a 'global village'" (*Intermedia* n.

pag.). Stimulated by these ideas and committed to social action and change, the group formed the

Intermedia Society in 1967 with the help of a $40,000 Canada Council grant. The society

> centered around the creation of environments and participatory installations. Objects
> were being made, but even then these were often shuttled around the city and used in
> interventions or as "props" for photographs. There was a great deal of interest in time-
> based projects - first film, and later on video. Much of the activity was conceptually-
> based and process-oriented. The artworks were those things that were happening minute
> by minute – interpersonal stuff, performance, poetry and dance. It was ephemeral. The
> process could be initiated purely for the camera, with no real product being created other
> than the pictures themselves. (Intermedia n. pag.).

While Intermedia initially formed around media and technology, haptics figured strongly in the

work of intermedia artists. Copithorne confirms this element: "I saw Intermedia as to do with

process and variety," she says; "I saw Intermedia to be the human media, not the mechanical

media" (*Intermedia* n. pag.). The body as a kinetic and feeling thing figured strongly as part of

Intermedia life and art: performances, dance, immersive installations, and recreational drug use.

A great deal of the work produced as part of Intermedia incorporated the body in a

variety of ways. In 1970, for their last show at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Intermedia organized

an installation entitled *The Dome Show*, which took place from 19-30 May. The show was

organized around the structure of geodesic domes, which Intermedia members were invited to

build individually or communally. A series of performances and events took place within the domes including poetry readings, listening sessions, and musical performances. *The Dome Show* hinged on process- and temporally-based experiences: "if you were present at a happening and were documenting, it meant you weren't in the moment, and that wasn't cool" (*Ouno Design* n. pag.). Within a dome, then, the body—with its interactions and reactions to the event and to the other bodies within that space—is an integral part of the performance and reading.[113]

Intermedia and *blewointment*, were representative of thoughts and ideas emerging as part of the counter-culture that swept across Canada in the 1960s and the 1970s—DIY sensibilities, artistic autonomy, leftist political goals, collectivity, and an emphasis on drug use. Another common type of event that emerged as part of the counter-culture is referred to as a "happening," which is largely associated with performance with improvisation as well as participation. "Happenings" rely upon the energy between artist and audience, and demand the audience to be fully present in the moment of the event. The *Dome Show,* presented by Intermedia, facilitated these types of events; however, they also occurred in less contrived settings. For example, poets Maxine Gadd, Ed Varney, Gerry Gilbert and, Henry Rappaport staged happenings to unsuspecting students at the University of British Columbia sometime in February 1970. Varney recalls what happened: "Gerry Gilbert, Henry Rappaport, Maxine Gadd and I did a free-wheeling poetry event which mostly consisted of us shouting our poems across the campus and making a lot of noise" (*Performance in Canada* 95). After reading this, I recall my own experiences of disruption on university campuses—protests, performances, conflicts, parties—and how those moments quickly redefine the space and the awareness of my body within it. I imagine a

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[113] Happenings were not unique to Vancouver or Canada. Happenings took place wherever the spirit of counterculture thrived including the United States, Belgium, Germany, England, Italy, among other places.

similarly possible experience if I were confronted by Gadd, Varney, and company running by, shouting their counter-cultural verse. As Varney tells it, the poetry reading was likely a spontaneous event, and hardly as contrived as some of the more elaborate poetic works examined in this chapter. However, a happening like the one staged by Gadd, Varney, Gilbert, and Rappaport emphasizes a desire to create events that fuse art and life, and to viscerally immerse people (whether they like it or not) into the flow of their performed poetry.

R. Murray Schafer explored the potential of immersive artistic environments in his series of musical theatre works known as *Patria*, which included ten parts as well as a Prologue and Epilogue. The Four Horsemen, for example, featured as actors in *The Princess of the Stars*, presented outside of Toronto at "the enormous spaciousness" of Hart Lake in 1981 (*My Life on Earth* 163) where the audience would view the performance. Nichol played the Presenter, Paul Dutton played the Wolf, Steve McCaffery was the Three Horned Enemy, and Rafael Barreto-Rivera was the Sun Disc. Schafer recounts the work:

> The work begins in darkness before dawn with the aria of the Princess floating across the lake. The singer is a kilometer away from us. Later she is joined by other singers in different places around the lake, echoing the phrases of her song. As the dawn light unfolds the lake, echoing the phrases of her song. As the dawn light unfolds we see an old man paddling down the lake towards us. This is the Presenter who will tell us the story of the *The Princess of the Stars*. (163)

Thus begins the work which carries on across the lake's surface, ending at 7 AM. Though not necessarily a poetic series, works like Schafer's *Patria* includes elements of poetry, but more importantly offers a glimpse one of the many ways poets and artists affiliated with the Language Revolution intersected with elements important to haptic poetry: immersive and interactive environments as well as time-based works, which are important to a number of poetic projects as well.

Of course, hapticity is also explicitly foregrounded by the materiality of printed poetry of the time. Periodicals like Ganglia and *grOnk* sought to publish works that fit into the category of haptic poetry. In addition to foregrounding the physicality of the publications themselves, by creating unique literary objects of varying size, colour, and construction, Ganglia and *grOnk* were interested in poetries that engaged physicality. As stated on the cover of Volume 1, Issue 1 of *grOnk* in 1967, the magazine is primarily interested in "concrete sound kinetic and related borderblur poetry," and it remained a forum for this type of work until it ceased publication. These forums were crucial not only for the proliferation of kinetic poetry, but for haptic poetry in Canada in general. As noted in Chapter One of this dissertation, *grOnk* and Ganglia were poet-driven endeavours; the poets were in near total control of their work. Haptically, issues of *grOnk* were similar to *blewointment*; the paper size and type vary from issue to issue, thus each issue of *grOnk* must be held differently and generate different textures of feeling. These issues, however, were less collagist than *blewointment*. Of the many notable works published under the Ganglia Press moniker, one example of Ganglia's preference for haptic poetry includes *pnomes jukollages & other stunzas* (1969) by Earle Birney. Similar to Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns*, Birney's text was published in a white, 8.5 x 11-inch envelope. The pieces are loose within the envelope and consist of various fold-outs, booklets, and sheets. Each work is unique, altering typical experiences of the literary object as demonstrated by the multiple versions of "Like an Eddy," each of which requires different types of physical interaction to activate the text (more on this later).

Coach House Press began, like *grOnk* and *Ganglia*, with a commitment to experimentation with design. Founded in 1965 by printer Stan Bevington and designer Dennis Reid, Coach House Press is said to be "arguably the most important publisher of experimental

poetics during the 1970s and '80s" (Butling and Rudy 5). Like *grOnk* and Ganglia, Coach House was driven by poets, including Wayne Clifford and Victor Coleman, and later, an editorial board including Nichol, Davey, David Young, David McFadden, Michael Ondaatje, Linda Davey, Christopher Dewdney, and Sarah Sheard. Committed to the small press literary culture, Coach House became a hub for innovative texts. In 1967, Coach House published Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns,* which is a "characteristic CHP combination of imaginative book design and innovative content" (Dennis Reid qtd in Rudy and Butling 5). Like Birney's *pnomes jukollages & other stunzas,* Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns* resisted the traditional codex form. Instead, *Journeying and the Returns* was published in a folder and consisted of a variety of materials including sheets, booklets, a perfect bound book, and pieces of cardstock each of which requires that the reader hold and move each unique material in a different way. These works can be read like conventional books, such as *Journeying & the Returns,* while others, like *Cold Mountain,* must be folded and then burned. These texts will be analyzed further in the next section. Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns* was not the only publication by Coach House to resist the codex form and require non-traditional types of movements from the reader to engage the literary work. David Rosenberg's *Excellent Articles of Japan* (1969) is a box of loose sheets of paper that can be endlessly shuffled into new orders. Upon each loose sheet is a photograph of objects from Japan, including light sets, lace, guitars, and hats—fairly uninteresting objects. Each photograph is accompanied by the name of item, and contact info (telephone number and manufacturing location). As a literary text, this is a rather confounding publication reminiscent of Fluxus works that seek to make wondrous fairly utilitarian objects.

Underwhich Editions built upon the spirit of Coach House and its commitment to uniquely designed publications. For this reason, Underwhich uses the term "edition" rather than

"press" because Underwhich's editors were not solely publishing print-based works like books, chapbooks, and pamphlets, but also published objects, audiotapes, and microfiche. Founded in 1978 by Michael Dean, Brian Dedora, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery, bpNichol, John Riddell, and Richard Truhlar, Underwhich Editions is perhaps the foremost publisher of haptic poetic works. Each editor was "given editorial independence in a spirit of mutual trust & understanding of the underlying mandate" (Curry n. pag.) and this resulted in an explosion of "action with an initial series of smaller works from almost all editors, each given the physical attention they deserved to become fully-realized works of book art, in addition to their values as literary artefacts" (Curry n. pag.).

A number of significant, and effectively haptic works, emerged from the press including a number of literary-based games by John Riddell such as *A Game of Cards* (1985) and *D'art Board* (1986). Each of these texts not only resists the standard codex-format for literature, but encourages the readers to engage the poem through unconventional means and media. To engage Riddell's game-based works, one must play the game by following his instructions. Likewise, to read Truhlar's *Five on Fiche* (1980), one must travel to the library to use the microfiche machine, which requires a whole different series of movements when compared to the standard movements of flipping the pages of a book.[114]

Each of these nodes emphasizes, in some way, a haptic dimension of literature and the arts, by way of "popularizing, synthesizing, and researching" (Butling 32) related activities. In their own ways, these nodes assist in the proliferation of art and poetry with an aim to close the gap between poetry, poet, and audience. These poets, artists, thinkers, and organizers developed

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[114] As Stephen Cain notes in Chapter 6 of his dissertation, Coach House also briefly sought to explore the possibilities of microfiche as an artistic and poetic media circa 1974. Like Truhlar, their commitment to the medium was evidently fleeting; however, they did plan to make the first ever artist book on microfiche and developed an imprint for sustained production of this type of work under the moniker Great Lakes Fiche Co.

publications, events, performances, and happenings to emphasize process, participation, response, movement, materiality, awareness, and the body to answer, inadvertently or not, Nichol's question "how can the poet reach out and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress?" ("Statement" 18). For them, these works were part of an expanded program of artistic and poetic approaches, in search of a means of reinventing the state of art and poetry to shift it from a static image on the page or invisible sound toward physical action, wherein the body is what literally engages the work. This is a radical gesture in itself, since these literary works reconfigure the typical interaction between reader and poetic object (active consumption of written information through the eyes) with a less common emphasis on the physicality and haptic elements using hands, fingers, muscle movements, etc. Furthermore, these works demand the audience to consider their role in the poetry making process and to determine how the suspense of the work unfolds and from their interaction with it and how that poem will further unfold into their bodily and material lives. Placing this role upon the audience is a crucial task since many of the conditions of the electric age, especially the emergence of new mediating technologies, insert a distance between subjects and the surrounding world, thus disconnecting them from the material conditions of their lives.

The Haptic Poetry of the Language Revolution

Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns* (1967) contains the most formidable examples of haptic poems in the Canadian context. The publication consists of a perfect-bound book of poems also entitled *Journeying and the Returns*, a 7-inch vinyl disc entitled *Borders*, and a variety of poem objects on sheets, pamphlets, chapbooks, and flipbooks. All of this material is encased within a pale mauve folder with a blue cover image on one side and Nichol's "Statement" on the other.

The "Statement," written by Nichol in November 1966, situates *Journeying and the Returns* as a haptic work: "how can the poet reach and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress?" he asks, to which he answers, "only if he drops the barriers" (n. pag.). To do so, Nichol explicitly created a work wherein the barriers between reader and poem are made very apparent. Each of the works in *Journeying and the Returns* requests a specific engagement from the reader, breaking down the barrier between poem-object and reader wherein the actual material container of the poem is part of the work. *Journeying and the Returns* is a collection that anticipates Ahmed's notion of a "borders that feel" (45). Nichol has conceived of poetry that "allows us to consider boundary formation" (Ahmed 45). These works engage the epidermal boundary with varying textures, movements, and smells.

The folder that contains the works immediately foregrounds the importance of understanding and dissolving barriers between the poet, poem, and the reader. The mauve paper that is used to create the folder feels like a cotton- or linen-based paper, subtly dimpled and resembling a felt-like texture. The collection within this folder is composed from a number of paper-based materials, containing a variety of textures—smooth, glossy cardstock; laid linen paper with horizontal lines; pages with smooth cut edges; pages with deckled edges; and reflective cardstock. Each of the pieces vary in colour too—olive, orange, white, cream, metallic. In each case, the poem-object offers a different texture that stimulates the reader's hands, and this contrast is what highlights the unique feeling of each piece.

All of the poem-objects are contained within an envelope with the words "Letters Home" printed across it in a hand-written script, signifying an attempt to reach out and communicate with a distant, but familiar place. While longing and desire are emotions that inform the work as a whole—especially in Nichol's desire to engage the reader on a bodily level—this is explicitly

foregrounded in Nichol's miniature chapbook "Cold Mountain," wherein the poem depicts the speaker's journey away from and return to their lover. Described as "a kinetic poem/sculpt for eventual distruction [sic]" (n.pag.), the booklet consists of differently sized pages, each at a different height that forms a staircase-like structure. As these pages are flipped, a new sequence of words forms, describing the journey of the speaker. Upon opening the book, the first sequence of words is "GO / TO / COLD / MOUNTAIN" (n. pag.) and after the first page is flipped, the sequence is changed "GO / TO / COLD / & high" (n. pag.), which then changes to "GO / TO / reach you / i must" (n. pag.) and then finally, "GO / from / her side" (n. pag.). At this last sequence, the reader reaches the top of the Cold Mountain and then eventually returns "home / in pain" (n. pag.), "COLD / to her arms" (n. pag.) which signifies the end of the speaker's "RETURN / FROM / COLD / MOUNTAIN" (n. pag.). With its unique design, the booklet's materials assist to represent the ascent and descent of the speaker on their journey, as they long for a loved missed one.[115]

By the end of "Cold Mountain," the speaker has returned cold, resting in his/her lover's arms. This can only be resolved one way: to be warmed by fire. The back of the booklet contains "assembly instructions" to prepare the reader for warmth:

1) Curl the covers in behind the text
2) Curl the text in individually
3) Uncurl the covers
4) Drop a lit match down the centre cone (optional step)

Recalling Fluxus pieces like Ben Vautier's *TOTAL ART MATCHBOX*, Nichol's "optional step" is to burn the booklet in an act of creative destruction. The heat from the burning booklet shall

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[115] Nichol's poem-flipbook "Wild Thing"—dedicated to British rock band The Troggs—also utilizes movement as the key to the work. Here, the poem consists of the word "LOVE" coming into formation, moving from the background to the foreground back to the background. The letters morph into each other "L" – "O" – "V" – "E."

warm the reader. That being said, jwcurry notes on his Flickr page that few people have probably burned their copies of "Cold Mountain." curry is among the few who have. While testing exactly how the piece would burn, curry remarks that it "turns out to be a very controlled burn, the central tube channelling [sic] the flame into a volcanic gout, the others following along as it spread from the bottom out until it was all consumed" (curry "Cold Mountain").[116] Nichol, then, according to curry's comments, consciously created "Cold Mountain" to present a distinctive aesthetic experience that hinges on the materials of the work: flame and paper. The flame moves and appears to follow a specific trajectory through the paper and ink as it produces warmth that affects the skin, a remedy to the cold mountain journey depicted in the booklet. The burning would also produce smoke and scent, likely engaging the reader's olfactory senses; this is another step in breaking down the barrier between poet, poem, and reader. In this way, "Cold Mountain" is a poem that touches both the inside and outside of the reader, using haptic sensations to articulate longing and regained comfort.

Another significant piece from Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns,* entitled "bp," engages similar ideas to "Cold Mountain" as a poem-object that seeks to break down the barrier between reader, poet, and poem. "bp" is a minimalist poem-object consisting of Nichol's two initials "b" and "p" joined together to form one simple cut-out. The cut-out is made using a paper with reflective finish with a matte black backing—as though it were a mirror. On the one hand, the piece looks like a celebration of the author—a bold and literally flashy signature that accompanies the other texts that announces the author's presence in the work. In this way,

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[116] Later editions of the booklet, like damian lopes's reissue, published by Fingerprinting Inkoperated in 1992, burned quite differently because he slightly altered the design: "doesn't quite reproduce it correctly" remarks curry; "Lopes having made the center sheet a french-fold that won't tuck in properly. i tried to get it to poof out a bit to form a tube but this is as far as i could get it to stay open &, when i dropped a match down it – having held it a bit to get it going good – it promptly went out & i had to carefully use a lighter to get it going from the bottom of that central loop" (Curry "Cold Mountain").

perhaps the piece is a reminder to the reader that there is a body and person intimately related to the texts that they hold. More significantly, however, this deceivingly simple piece effectively blurs the borders between poet, poem, and reader. When looking directly at the piece of paper, the reader's face is hazily reflected back at them. When looking at the work, I can see my nose, mouth, eyes, and glasses. In effect, I am seeing what I recognize as myself in "bp" but I am also seeing myself as I am shaped by the cut-out of the letters "bp." Within the piece, both Nichol (signified by "bp") and myself are intricately bound. In so doing, the work becomes reflective of an interlinked relationship between the poem, poet, and reader; and further, how a reader's consciousness, in that moment, is formed within the intersection of these three elements. In this moment, there is a gesture toward community between reader, poet, world and, poem—all are simultaneously present within one another.

In addition to a shared focus on the material, both of these poems are also representative of Nichol's interest in the Japanese haiku form, most prominently featured in his translations of Basho's "Frog Poem" (c. 1680). Like haiku, Nichol's "bp" and "Cold Mountain" embrace minimalist diction and careful meditation on the language used, with an emphasis on generating feeling from imagery, rather than explicit statements of feeling. Instead, Nichol primarily focuses on the material aspects of the text to do this. Nichol's *Journeying* radically brings the material world and its conditions back into the reader's grasp. Both "bp" and "Cold Mountain" draw attention to the poem as techné, highlighting the relationship between material and reader, seeking to close that distance. "Cold Mountain," a booklet about distance, reminds its readers that they must knowingly traverse the material realm to reduce feelings of alienation in order to find comfort again. Likewise, the smooth surface of "bp" offers an analogy between the ways, too, that materials are inserted into human life without friction and normalized, at times, with

detriment (as in the case with some communications technologies). "bp" is a poem that reminds us of our own place within material systems, reminding us of our power despite the seeming inextricability of new technologies.

Techné and the generation of affect are also key elements to interactive works by Earle Birney in a work that he composed like Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns*. Birney called his work *Pnomes Jukollages & Other Stunzas* (1969), and it was issued by Ganglia Press as grOnk Series 4, No. 2. The grOnk series is "dedicated to the language revolution" (n. pag.), states Nichol on the backside of a pamphlet that also includes his introduction to the collection. While Birney may have been part of an older generation of poets, one who was not at first interested in the experimental tactics of the Language Revolution, *Pnomes Jukollages & Other Stunzas* is another exemplary text that represents the spirit of the movement visually, sonically, and haptically. This comes, in part, due to Nichol's influence. The work is designed by Nichol and, like Nichol's *Journeying*, Birney's *Pnomes* is encased in an envelope that contains a variety of materials. The envelope is about 8.5 x 11 inches in size with the title and Birney's name boldly printed on the envelope's face. The printed side, however, is upside down. If you flip the envelope over from right to left (like the page of a book) you have to rotate the envelope 180 degrees to access the flap and remove the envelope's contents. By printing it this way, *Pnomes* resists a reader's intuition to flip print media from right to left as readers normally do with books. Thus, Birney's collection invites the reader to become immediately conscious of the object they are engaging: to be aware of the way the envelope must be moved, foregrounding the materiality and kinetic aspects of the work.

The hapticity of the Birney's *Pnomes* begins with the materials: there are various paper types and sizes that vary in texture and colour: creamy cardstock for one version of "Like an

Eddy" with thinner white paper for the second version; long, bright yellow sheets for a horizontally printed and staple-bound "Alaska Passage;" a purple folder containing sound and visual poems; and continuous feed computer paper with perforated edges for "Space Conquest: Computer Poem." Each piece requires a different type of engagement: the centre-folded computer poem, for example, must be opened to reveal a short three stanza poem on the large sheet of lined paper; "Alaska Passage" is staple-bound to be read like a typical chapbook, flipping pages left to right; and "Architecture" is folded and stapled but must be unfolded to read the poems tucked inside of it. Each of these unique pieces signal a move away from the conventions of the codex, using paper and binding to become not just a by-product of the poem, but part of the poem itself. Each poem, with its emphasis on varying materials and engagements, brings the reader closer to the poem and its ideas as they haptically engage each work. Like many previous examples of haptic art and literature, the reader unfolds from the suspense of interaction that stimulates curiosity, desire, annoyance and, perhaps, even pleasure as the reader explores each material and interaction.

Of the many pieces included in *Pnomes*, most striking are the two versions of the kinetic poem "Like an Eddy." Each version requires a specific type of movement in order for the work to be engaged: one version of the work must be rotated, while the other must be cut out and assembled to move itself. The first is printed on a flat sheet of paper with hand-written text in a spiral. Birney writes: "Like an eddy my words turn about your bright rock" (n. pag.), invoking the relationship between reader and author. The piece must be rotated to be read so that the reader's hands enact the "eddying" motion of the poem. The "bright rock" referred to in the poem, belonging to the reader (implied by the "you"), is in fact the body. To be read, the hands of the speaker must move in counter clockwise half-rotations, as the edges of the paper are

passed between each hand. A similar idea is manifested in the second version (a collaboration with Andrew Suknaski) which is printed on a flat sheet, and though it does not have instructions to cut the mobile out, it gestures toward that action. Once excised, the work would be hung like a mobile. In this version, however, the language is altered slightly. Instead of "turn about," Birney writes that it will "move about," suggesting that the mobile may not rotate but it will move. The mobile hangs in suspension, moving like an eddy as air passes through it or someone pushes it with their hand. The "bright rock," in this version, would describe any person standing below it, looking into it. As a pair, each version of the work is a meditation on human agency and kinetics. Version one points to the reader as the point of contact who initiates the poem as a work, while the second is more esoteric, indicating that the poem has a life of its own, its own form of agency and activity in the world.

Like Nichol and Birney, Ottawa-based collective First Draft sought to produce poetic works that exceeded conventional definitions of the poem, while also responding to the conditions of the electric age. At times, they would use "word-music" and other times they would use "sound poetry" to describe their work. They also used the term "intermedia," making reference not to the Vancouver-based society but to the international movement that was defined by Higgins. Indeed, their large-scale shows occupy the between-space of poetry reading, theatre, and musical performance. While these were shows that engaged a multiplicity of sensorial receptors at once (sound and vision), these were not necessarily haptic works. Their performances did not require audience participation. However, outside of their performances, they did produce text-based work that incorporates process, proprioception, and movement as key elements of the work. Their self-published book entitled *The Scream* (1984), which commemorates their Third Annual Group Show, is an elaborately designed, collagist book,

composed of photographs, sketches, scores, and abstract imagery, containing a number of text-based works including notes, essays, and a biographical snippet of the group. At this stage in First Draft's history, *The Scream* identifies Susan McMaster, Colin Morton, Andrew McClure, Claude Dupuis, Nan Cormier, David Parsons, and Carol English to be members of the group, all of whom contribute to the book.

Their piece entitled "SCREAM (how to)" is most exemplary of an intermedia haptic work, which they refer to as "a new collaborativeperformance [sic] art work" (n. pag.). Sherrill Grace suggests that "The Book deconstructs the usual notion of text to create a new type of multimedia textuality" (153), and in so doing, presents a "step-by-step guide to refining your own capacity to scream" (*The Scream* n. pag.). This piece intersects with Fluxus-based instructive art works like Ono's *Grapefruit* or Vautier's *Total Art Match-box*. Written by all contributors to the book, "Scream (how to)" touches upon a number of haptic realms: it demands the reader to consider the location and position of his/her body (in preparation for the scream) and instructs the reader to endure a series of physical activities to actually affect his/her psychological and emotional state, building toward affective release through screaming. They begin with a suggested series of possible locations for screaming (a phone booth, a street, the national gallery, a wedding etc.) which is followed by a series of what they refer to as "tense meditations." These meditations are intended to help one reach "optimal tension" so that one's scream can "express the absolute horror of your existence" (72). These methods of meditation include "not breathing," which may cause one to feel panic or exasperation; "the hang up," which requires one to hang by their hands from a bar which may cause exhaustion; and "the loggerhead," which requires one to fist fight, thus, likely, building up stress and anger. Once sufficiently tense, the poets provide readers a flowchart which directs readers through each

remaining step. While the flowchart begins with "WAKE UP" (84), it is significant that the step immediately preceding the instruction to scream is actually "LOOK AROUND" (84). It is from looking around that the reader is prompted to begin screaming and, as indicated in the flowchart, if one is not ready to scream, one should continue to look around some more. First Draft, then, locates the need to express "the absolute" horror of existence not because of existence itself, but because of the conditions of existence. They clarify this point on the back of the book "in the midst of your scream you no longer feel like a powerless cog; for an instant you may even experience the illusion that you can control your own destiny" (n. pag.). "SCREAM (how to)," then, provides momentary catharsis from the conditions of the present, specifically the lack of agency one feels in the face of a quickly evolving changing social and political landscape that reduces persons to mere "cogs" in a system. As such, it seems that even in 1984, when *The Scream* was published, the sense of alienation many began to feel in the 1960s continued to be deeply ingrained within Western society.

The production of sound through interaction and instruction is also central to R. Murray Schafer's "The Listening Book," published in a special issue of *Open Letter*, edited by Nichol and McCaffery. While First Draft is interested in the production of sound using the human voice in particular positions and locations, Schafer is interested in producing sound by giving a voice to the book. This emerges from a series of interactions between reader and codex. In his dedication of the booklet to Nichol and McCaffery, Schafer frames the text as a score: "In performing it you will / be required to make sounds […] Listen to the / sounds you can make together" (n. pag.). In this piece, "music" comes not from reading musical notation, but rather by following a set of instructions that guide the reader through different ways of creating sounds

with the codex.[117] These sounds are primarily made through a tactile relationship with the materials of the book. Many of the sounds are produced by tapping, rubbing, flipping, scratching, and tearing pieces of the book. Some examples include: "Move fingernail along the line, making the sound <u>descend</u>" (n. pag.), "Tear page off here, listening…" (n. pag.), and "Sign your name here with a real or imaginary pen. Listen to your real name being signed" (n. pag.). Though each action is technically repeatable, each sound can never be truly replicated. Schafer's tactile sound poems re-examine the relationship between codex and reader, and reconfigure the ways readers would normally extract meaning from them. In "The Listening Book," the artistic composition is not transmitted through the eyes but through the ears and fingers. It highlights the limitations of the codex as a container for the transmission of thought and feeling since, in order for this work to transmit the desired sensations, it must be torn, turned, flipped, thumped and rubbed. Schafer's "The Listening Book," then, like Nichol's *Journeying and the Returns*, turns the reader's attention back to the materiality of the work, prompting us to consider our own role in the way that sounds, sensations, and meanings are produced within a world conditioned by prescriptive media.

Instruction-based poems encourage the reader to explore the possibilities of literature off the page, employing a playfulness that assists readers to focus upon the material elements of the work in their hand. This playfulness is pushed even further by some poets of the Language Revolution who developed a series of literary-based games. John Riddell was the foremost producer of literary games at the time, using the flexibility of Underwhich's production mandate as an opportunity to publish numerous unique interactive and game-based works, including

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[117] "The Listening Book" could be categorized as a sound poem, but since touch and movement are integral to the production of sound, I am here categorizing it as a haptic sound poem.

Game of Cards (1985), *War* (1981), and *d'Art Board* (1987). Since "Riddell insists that his readers reject passive reception of writing in favour of a more active role" (*Writing Surfaces* 4), each of his texts require a unique, and largely unconventional, type of engagement. For example, *War* requires the reader to cut up an original text and reassemble the pieces following Riddell's instructions. Riddell encourages the reader to directly contact him to discuss the work: "let me know how you feel about this process!" (n. pag.). Notably, Riddell is interested to know not what the reader thinks but what they *feel* during the process of the work.

Riddell first conceived of *WAR* as a four-volume work. Only the first two volumes were published, but in an accompanying pamphlet, he maps out his expectations for the set. Volume 1, which I will describe below, is "an attempt to explore the possibility of developing a 'peaceful discourse,' as distinct from one currently in vogue" (n. pag.); Volume 2 deals with "body armouring & militarism" (n. pag.);[118] Volume 3 explores a tentative content, & affect, of a 'peaceful discourse' (n. pag.); and, Volume 4 "will be a collection of your response/s to volumes 1-3" (n. pag.). Of the two that were published, Volume 1 emphasizes hapticity as a key aspect of the work. The book was xerographically produced, and created following a collagist aesthetic. The verso contains fragments of a prose text that the reader is encouraged to cut out. On the recto are a variety of materials, including quotes, comments, and questions, to which the reader may respond. Riddell is careful with his instructions. He encourages readers to follow his prompts, but he confirms that it is also the reader's decision to engage the text however they want: "you need not cut out designed areas … to do so, however, forfeits not only puzzle construct, but your active involvement in the con/de/struction of this & (as a further reading will reveal) possibly

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[118] Volume 2 of *WAR*, indeed, was published as two large-scale posters of text (with some imagery). That being said, I will not be examining these here because, while they expand notions of literary materiality, they are not haptic.

your <u>own</u> text!" (n. pag.). "Your choice," he writes. That being said, in lieu of cutting and assembling the puzzle, one can still be actively involved with the text, though it does reduce the haptic and bodily engagement that Riddell promises in Volume 1.[119] One could answer Riddell's questions about layout and design or follow his alternative set of instructions: to "write poems, using extracts &/or '*WAR*' proper on each page (or collectively) as your <u>total supply text</u>" (n. pag.) thus suggesting that this is not only a text that you cut up but also a text that you write in dialogue with. Regardless of one's pathway through the text, Riddell has established *WAR* as a designated pathway of clear communication and dialogue between author and reader. He includes his address on the fifth page of the text, and in the pamphlet, hopes that readers will "accordingly respond" (n. pag.).

By these instructions, it is clear that Riddell seeks to destabilize conventional notions of authorship, and instead invites the reader to become an author of the text as well. Though calling *WAR* a poem may seem like a stretch, it indulges in a variety of poetic devices including extensive punning on "peace" and "author."[120] As a puzzle, "peace" puns on "piece," two terms that propel the text as a textual puzzle and its thematic concern of peace. Not only does Riddell seek to undo conventional notions of authorship by actively involving the reader in the production of textual meaning, but he extends the meaning of the word "author" to larger notions of power and authority. For Riddell, it seems that undoing authorship correlates to larger structures of authority. In a pamphlet that accompanies *WAR* Volume 1, Riddell describes the

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[119] The cut-up method proposed by Riddell is very different from the cut-up method proposed by Brion Gysin and William Burroughs. Gysin and Burroughs sought to recreate new texts by cutting up existing texts and rejoining them with new ones; Riddell has cut up his own text and hopes the reader will put it back together for him to deepen the relationship between himself and the reader.

[120] Later in the text, Riddell includes an acrostic poem consisting of the words "Poetry," "Peace," "On," "Earth," and "Try."

post-WWII arms race, highlighting its spirit of competition as an industry in the United States, but also as a competition between the US and Soviet Union. Riddell's writing highlights the promise of catastrophe that the arms race poses, recognizing it to be the dominant form of "peaceful discourse" or, in other words, the promise of peace as a result of mutually assured destruction. Riddell, then, is identifying an authoritative emotion of the time: fear, and how fear is responsible for the production of a dangerous political climate. By establishing the text as a clear passage between author and reader, the text becomes a point of contact, a point of discussion wherein both author and reader are equal parts to hopefully undo textual hierarchies and situate the poem as a collaborative effort.

For the sake of research, I indulged Riddell's request to construct the puzzle. Primarily, I wanted to answer Riddell's key question: how does the process makes me feel? Careful not to destroy my own original copy, I photocopied *WAR* and carefully cut out each fragment from each page as best as I could. This took several hours, a period during which I felt tremendous boredom. At various points, I also felt annoyed, disappointed, and determined. I could see that some of my cutting was less than precise, which meant to me that I might not actually be able to successfully solve the puzzle. As I cut, I had to precisely control my body and its movements—I couldn't shake, I had to move slowly, and I had to cut as close to the edges of the lettering and lines as I could. As I cut out more pieces, however, I also became more engaged by the text. I was developing a familiarity with the fragments; I was reading across awkwardly broken lines, pieces of word and glyph, and soon began to find corresponding fragments. I taped them together as I found them, which I also found encouraging. It generated a desire in me to complete the text. In total, it took me six hours to cut up the text and assemble most of it. The process was exhausting, and as I nearly finished taping the final pieces together I realized I was actually

missing the final piece, which, of course, left me extremely frustrated. I went to bed, and woke up the next morning to find the missing piece. I am not sure if I threw it out with the scraps or if I had just never printed it. Nonetheless, it illustrated the risk one takes when adhering to Riddell's instructions: carelessness and a lack of attention will be an obstacle to completing the work. I reprinted the final piece and put it in place. I had completed the puzzle, feeling satisfied. More importantly, though, what I realized by enduring this process was that the haptic and interactive elements drew me into the text. As I worked through the puzzle, I developed my own intimate relationship with the book and my own textual narrative that is likely unique to me and my textual encounter.

Once assembled, the fragments form a large poster consisting of narrative. The narrative on the poster is conventionally written. It is a short story in six parts, told from the point of view of a first-person speaker. We enter the narrative *in media res* with the speaker at "The Staircase Hotel." The tone of the narration recalls the grittiness and matter-of-factness of a film noir—the hotel itself is shadowy and full of mystery, a mystery that unfolds over the course of the text. Moving around the hotel, the speaker, in section three, happens upon "The Party," where several gentlemen are speaking about corporate business, public relations, and how corporate P.R. obfuscates public knowledge. Specifically, these men discuss how corporate discourse (and political discourse) sidestep discussions of key issues like "Air. Earth. Water. Health" which have been "dismissed" (n. pag.). The speaker moves from this conversation and finds himself alone in a library with a young woman who begins to quiz the speaker on his thoughts about language. The speaker replies: "it's a means of communication, I would say— likely, the best means we have— a way of communicating thoughts, facts, feelings" (n. pag.). The woman sighs disappointedly and reflects upon the ways language is misused: "They step all over it. & so much

of it goes into print— Books have a way of domesticizing things– ideas– don't you think. If only there was some way to <u>free</u> language again, <u>repoliticize</u> it, return it to speech, to its proper realm… To the speech of the <u>body</u> where the body of speech truly dwells" (n. pag.). Shortly after, in parts five and six, the narrator finds himself working as a counterspy for two opposing groups; the woman from the library is on one side. He agrees to work for both groups, feeling a sense of belonging. In part six, the story shifts again, where the speaker, alone, reflects on his position as a spy: "An incident (arising on either side) could occur any day now, could conceivably lead to a full-scale confrontation. No one knows what to do about it. We seem to move around in the dark. Words don't seem to have any meaning, any power to initiate action anymore" (n. pag.). The speaker continues to reflect upon language in this final scene, mainly its inadequacies until, after spilling orange juice on his shirt, he begins to stutter "But now where– I– What– what is— just as I am about ready to–" (n. pag.), and there the story ends.

Driven by a tale of shadowy interactions, Riddell's narrative on the poster of Volume 1 is a reflection upon the inadequacies of language—with special attention to how corporatization and bureaucratic uses of language obfuscate essential ideas. Similarly, as in the case of the spy/counterspy scenario, the speaker joins both sides, with no real attachment to either, for a sense of belonging. Both cases reflect upon the powerlessness of language in these depoliticized and detached scenarios. Without making a clear case for how this might be done, the narrative calls for the return of language to the body, for this is how language will be freed and politicized once more. While the story does not offer an answer of how to reconnect language and the body, Volume 1, as an interactive and haptic work, does offer an answer. As a text that must be disassembled and reassembled by the reader, Riddell has invited the reader to become invested in the text in a bodily way. The text, in some ways, is a test that challenges a reader's investment in

fully accessing the language of the work and thus the meaning behind it. In this way, Riddell offers a means of returning language to the body by encouraging the reader to invest their body, time, and energy into the text.

Another work, *d'Art Board*, published by Underwhich, consists of a single semi-glossy sheet of paper that measures approximately two-by-two feet. Upon the semi-glossy side is the main body of text, which is designed to look like a dart board. This same text was republished (with rules) in Riddell's *How to Grow Your Own Light Bulbs* (1997) with an alternate title "Object D'art." In this version, the dartboard is reproduced in pieces that readers cut out of the book to assemble themselves. Riddell provides instructions for how to set up and play the game. The dartboard must be hung so that the "bull's eye is 68" from the floor" (n. pag.) and the throwing line is 9' from the wall. The outside edge of the board is surrounded by letters A through Z; each of these letters correspond to a number: "A = 20, B = 1, C/D = 18 … Z = 5" (n. pag.). The typical colours of the board have been replaced by dense collages of text: 1) an even spaced series of prosaic textual fragments which are barely legible and, 2) collages of bolder, denser, non-semantically arranged letters. The game oscillates between sense and nonsense, while blurring the borders between fiction, visual poem, and game.

Riddell's *d'Art Board* employs the same movements as a typical game of darts. Darts is a game of proprioception—one must position their body in accordance with the rules (behind the 9' line) and should throw a dart, aiming 68" above the floor, at the bullseye. It demands an awareness of the body as the dart is set in motion—a flick of the wrist with an appropriate amount of force to ensure the dart accurately follows the desired trajectory. By successfully doing so, the text unfolds for the player in pursuit of a win or loss. Strangely, Riddell's version of darts does not use text to replace the role of numbers in calculating the score, leaving

participants no clear understanding of the role the text actually plays in the scoring of the game. That being said, the title of the second edition of the game ("Object D'Art") suggests that the work is meant to be purely ornamental. An "objet d'art" (or "art object) is an ornately created object that has no other function aside from producing pleasure in the user. Riddell's "Object D'Art," then, offers participants an opportunity of orienting the body directly into a physical, proprioceptive relationship with language, to reconceive of this relationship as purely a joyous encounter.

Riddell is not the only Language Revolutionary to develop a literary-based game to create new and unique encounters with language. Like Riddell's *D'Art Board*, the Four Horsemen jointly developed an unpublished game that blurs the line between narrative, poem, and game: it is entitled *Andoas*. The instructions for the game are published in a 1979 issue of Toronto arts newspaper *Only Paper Today*, which gives *most* of the instructions needed to play. The players are required to create their own board, pieces, and statistics sheets. The game is designed to resemble other popular games of the 1970s, especially role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons* and board-based games like *Monopoly*. Like *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Andoas* is narrative driven, complete with multiple universes that players can move in and out of as they play in competition or collaboration. Movement around the board follows precisely detailed rules, and the players interact with one another through ENCOUNTERS and SITUATIONS. The narrative––or "Scenario" as the Four Horsemen calls it—that drives the game is devised entirely by the players, and can include such examples as the following:

> Player A has amnesia & has escaped from hospital. Because his memory is faulty he wanders from place to place not recognizing anyone. Player B has been hired to find him. Since A does not know who he is & does not remember anyone else the key element in the SCENARIO was B's ability to win A's confidence so that he would trust him enough to return with him to the hospital. Thus it was not enough for B to simply find A. The only possible way to show this in the game is to incorporate an element of repeated

ENCOUNTERS. 'Winning' in this amnesiac SCENARIO depended on B's being the winner in 5 different ENCOUNTERS (n. pag.)

The winners of these ENCOUNTERS are determined by odds laid out in a statistics chart and the rolling of dice against those odds; winners of these encounters receive experience points which contribute to their chance of winning while also shaping the narrative arc of the game.

Without an official and complete game, *Andoas* is difficult to fully realize; however, my attempts to play have offered me enough insight to critically situate the game.[121] *Andoas* is based in tactility and movement—the players touch the pieces in a virtual space, moving them on and around the board. The game establishes scenarios that are not immersive in a physical way; rather, they are virtually immersive, intersecting with McLuhan's expanded conceptualization of tactility as "the life of things in the *mind*" (*UM* 105). The scenarios are played out only through the movement of the pieces and through the player's imagining of the scenario; however, the game is grounded in affect. Part of what propels the game—in addition to strategic thinking—is the excitement provided by how the players encounter one another in competition or cooperation. In games that are competitive, the players must, at times, pursue one another around the board thus simulating possible affects like fear, dread, and determination if the players are fully committed to the game. These affective sensations drive the game, determining how the players will operate in relation to one another (and quite possibly how they may feel about one another outside of the game).

Though framed as a game, *Andoas* challenges participants to carefully consider affects, not just as players in a game, but persons in the real world. In their introductory blurb to the

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[121] Thanks is due to Dr. Christopher Doody, a Canadian Literature scholar and connoisseur of board games, for his assistance in deciphering and playing *Andoas* with me. Our game was driven by a "cat-and-mouse" scenario; Dr. Doody won the game.

game, the Four Horsemen suggest that the game encourages players to "determine what a 'win' or a 'loss' means to them" (n. pag.). In that same blurb, they suggest that this is a didactic game: "It is an educative experience the whole family can benefit from" (n. pag.). This didacticism is important to understanding the significance of the game, especially in its treatment of concepts of winning and losing. Notions like these—synonymous with success and failure; sink or swim––are largely results that drive subjects living under the conditions of third stage capitalism. A subject's place within a capitalist society is largely determined by one's ability to play by society's rules, with the promise of pleasure if one can succeed in doing so. On the one hand, *Andoas* offers escapism from that challenge, offering a universe wherein players can escape and develop an alternative narrative of their own choosing, which speaks to one of the powerful affects of games and play—relief. However, it makes a soft radical gesture in the sense that it encourages players to reconsider notions of competition, while not challenging the foundational impetus of competition, and to perhaps more actively determine what outcomes satisfy definitions of win and loss, both materially and affectively.

Each of the works mentioned so far require a certain level of performativity—instructions to move or engage an object in a certain way. There are, however, works that foreground performance explicitly as part of the poem to create interactive and immersive language-based experiences. Gerry Shikatani composed works that are interactive and immersive, offering the audience a chance to become part of the literary work or not. An installation like his "Sans Titre" (24 October 1981), performed at Toronto's Studio Gallery Nine as part of the Kontakte-Writers-In-Performance series, places the audience directly within the work: "Installation of desk, typewriter and visual text in elevator used by audience to reach performance space. Used to activate aural and visual space of language/action of reading" (*Performance in Canada* 210).

This is likely one of Shikatani's first conceptually-influenced, poetic installations that was grounded in his "interest in and relationship to *process* and thus, the moment ephemeral" (Shikatani, email correspondence). In his recollection of the performance, Shikatani writes:

> I do not think there were any instruction for the audience—it was a prop of silence, of potential – and it could be that some did type on it. The reading/performance was no different from a usual one I think – as the main issue was to condition, contextualize the reading as something that pushed the event outside the clear and usual spatial/temporal borders of a literary reading. (Shikatani, email correspondence)

Using the small space of the elevator as the site of the installation, "Sans Titre" places the audience within close proximity to the environment of the work of art, augmenting their sense of the scenario. Elevators are typically small spaces, wherein riders try to maintain a personal space between themselves and other riders. In these situations, one becomes more aware of their body and their body's position in relation to others. "Sans Titre" seizes upon the intimacy of the space and the ways by which it affects the body's structure—reminding us, again, of Nichol's argument for the way environments shape the body.

In the same year of Shikatani's "Sans Titre," Michael Dean, a core member of sound poetry group Owen Sound, developed a similarly immersive project entitled "The Imagination of Aldo Breun" which was also installed at Studio-Gallery Nine in Toronto as part of "The Symposium on Linguistic Onto-Genetics." The symposium, also organized by Dean, investigates problems of communication and language's relationship to affect and expression. In a special issue of *Open Letter* focusing on pataphysics, Dean articulates his concerns in the development of a theory of linguistic onto-genetics: "Language is suffering from a deep disturbance. It is not working the way it should. It isn't serving the human function it was meant to serve; that is, it no longer contains the poignancy and energy of Human Communication" (*Open Letter* 83). The work of the Institute for Linguistic Onto-Genetics, then, is grounded in the radical ideas that

intersect those of the Language Revolution—mainly their shared concern for issues of expression during a period of changing communicative capacities. As suggested by Dean's printed Introduction to the "Papers Delivered at the Symposium for the Institute of Linguistic Onto-Genetics"—found in the 1985 collected proceedings for the symposium—the Institute is part of an effort to repair the "schism between Man and his language" which will "continue as long as we refuse to attend to speech directly" (6). Thus "Man must rebel" (6) against this separation and try to re-fuse language with ontology.

The papers delivered at the symposium variously intersect with Dean's radical premise in his "Introduction." McCaffery imagines what he refers to as "paleosexuality and fossil speech" (69), a concept that, in his paper, was discovered by the imaginary pseudoscientist Samuel Gatty. Janine Mather, on the other hand, theorized the application of "psychometry to language" to examine the "emotional bondage in which speech is now trapped" (81). The symposium itself was a space for creative engagements with materiality, corporeality and poetic language beyond the book. The participants imagined themselves as part of an alternative universe composed of imaginary scientific investigations that rely upon (for the most part) material realities with the intent of not only highlighting the perceived schism between language and human communication, but also the relationship between body, feeling, and language. Pataphysical experiments like these effectively blur the boundaries between life and art—to fuse scientific discourse (which is perceived to be integral to material social processes) and the poetic. Some participants further explored the possibilities of blurring these boundaries. It gave some participants an opportunity to experiment with notions of corporeality and identity, distributing imagined personas of themselves into material performance and print spaces. Brian Dedora, for example, created his "gay alter-ego" Adrian Fortesque while Riddell composed a correspondence

series with his own alter ego: Lleddir Nhan Nhoj.[122] Though seemingly playful, these

personalities foreground language's intrinsic relationship to identity and the production of

subjectivity.

The most strikingly poetic aspect of the symposium was Michael Dean's centerpiece

"The Imagination of Aldo Breun," which was also the setting for panel discussions. As part of

the symposium, Dean delivered a lecture on the installation which describes the key pataphysical

elements of the installation, especially the affective aspect of the work. As participants walk

through the gallery, they are walking through (according to Dean) the imagination landscape of

the fictional pseudoscientist Aldo Breun. Breun is said to have witnessed the schism between

language and humankind, indicated by the development of a "mutant letter," the letter "y" (18).

The letter is significant here for the ambiguity it holds in the alphabet. Is it a vowel or a

consonant? At the moment of its invention, a moment that Dean says occurred on 14 July 1832,

"mute syntax" is born, which describes "the inability of language to find one expression for a

fact of state-of-affairs that is dual in nature" (14) or, in other words, it is "the struggle to find the

word" (17). According to Dean this suggests that "a rupture has grown between our genetic

imagination development and our being" (16). Language is no longer material, rather it is a trace

of its materiality; it no longer functions literally or forcefully in the world. Instead it is up for

interpretation and analysis. For Dean, "language is a shadow left by light after it has met an

object" (19). Human communication with language has become less precise and convoluted. The

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[122] In a comment thread of a Facebook post, Dedora muses that Adrian Fortesque may be "the only gay Pataphysician in the country" and that "Adrian was very active infusing gay into his many performances throughout the 80s." Citation: Dedora, Brian. "gay alter ego." 6 October 2017. Facebook Post.

exhibition portion of the symposium, the inhabitable companion to Dean's talk, visually and spatially registers this conception of language.

"The Imagination of Aldo Breun" has been referred to as "probably the largest & thoroughly contemplative piece to have been built in Toronto" (curry 7). Breun, a mysterious character, "developed an interest in 'those conditions which the mind could grasp, but which language could not express'" (7). This problem parallels the interests of my dissertation: poets who try to work through the limits of language to express the complexities of affect. The problem sets the stage for "The Imagination of Aldo Breun," a large-scale and immersive poetic environment. curry describes the installation:

> One walked *into* the poem, huge distorted letter-shapes reaching out across the floor & up the walls from a central point in the room. It was also perhaps the most nonsyntactical piece made public: not only were there no words (save those in the title of the piece), the letters themselves defied fixation as specific letters. What appears to be an H at first glance could just as easily be a mutant A. Context is derived entirely from the title, content entirely from the viewers' own interpretations. (7)

In this same article, curry describes "The Imagination of Aldo Breun" as a "logical extension of earlier concepts of concrete & visual poetry" (7), and acknowledges that here "space [is] functioning as field & image" (7). These latter terms gesture toward the same elements that comprise haptic poetics with an emphasis on space and immersion and the body situated within a field.

The poem is composed of lights and shadows, opacities and transparencies, objects and perspectives. Vision is important to the installation—seeing the shadows—but so is the body, especially the body as it orients the degree and angles from which the piece may be viewed. As curry notes, "What appears to be an H at first glance could just as easily be a mutant A" (7) thus what each piece might be perceived to be is also determined by how the body is positioned: distance, angle, movement, height and, even the number of people in the room, would affect how

the pieces are interpreted. "The Imagination of Aldo Breun" foregrounds how language, even when reduced to its most basic elements, integrally relies on the body's movement and position. "The Imagination of Aldo Breun" expands upon Nichol's statement that opens this chapter: "syntax equals the body structure" (*Outposts* 27). Except, Dean's installation offers a twist on this phrase; perhaps it is also: body equals the letter structure. "The Imagination of Aldo Breun" suggests that the processual relationship that Nichol highlights operates in both ways. Nichol argues that "If I can keep moving the structure of the poem around, hopefully I can encompass different realities and different ways of looking at things" (*Meanwhile* 276); likewise, in Dean's case if you keep moving the body around the space by changing locations, positions, directions, etc. then one can also encompass different realities and different ways of looking at things. The poem, then, is only enacted by a viewer's active movement within the space. Even the letter shapes themselves, left by shadow, left for interpretation by the reader, which is entirely dependent upon the body of the participant.

Poets like Nichol, McCaffery, Shikatani, Riddell, McMaster, and the others mentioned above, created poems that directly engaged the interface of poem, material, and audience through works that require an encounter on the haptic level. In so doing, the poem becomes the space wherein the audience (and at times the poet) can reconsider and renegotiate the conditions of the electric age, and its impact on the kinetic, tactile, and proprioceptive dimensions of human life. In many of the poems published as part of Language Revolution, the literary work expands beyond the linguistic content of the poem (with its semantic meaning or pure affect) to include the materials of the work as a necessary aspect of the text's meaning. This is not a modernist consideration of form as a mere extension of content. It is through the careful consideration of these materials that the poet, as Nichol would say, reaches out to touch their audience. The poem

and its materiality, then, becomes a mode of experience—personal and communal—that is primarily experienced through the affects produced via hapticity, that productively reintroduces the audience to the material conditions of their own world.

The Gift Economy

It is difficult to determine precisely the impact that the haptic poetries of the Language Revolution had on their audience. Unlike concrete poetry and sound poetry, there is little critical trace to tell us who these works touched, how they were touched, and most importantly what affects were generated by each encounter. As outlined earlier in this chapter, hapticity is understandably not a common concern for literary critics and reviewers for the ways it exceeds codified language. Nonetheless, this was a focal point of exploration for many poets and artists in the twentieth century. Much of the impetus for haptic poetry comes from the desire to close the distance between poet and audience; thus poets devised unconventional works that require the reader to do more than simply move their eyes along the page. Instead, these works were interactive games and booklets, puzzles, instruction-based works, and immersive environments that generate affects entangled within the encounter of audience and poem. The analyses above speculate upon the possible affects—intended or not—but, like some of these works, the actual affects generated by each moment remain within the temporal and geographical window of the encounter, inaccessible to us now.

That being said, the principles that inform the haptic poetry of the Language Revolution extend beyond the encounter with the poem, informing not only the movements and communities (as seen in the surveys above) but how the poem circulates within and between literary communities. The poetry of the Language Revolution circulated among pathways and networks

that were alternative to mainstream literary culture. Instead, these works circulated through what is now commonly referred to as the gift economy. In "Writing as a General Economy," McCaffery describes the gift economy by using an analogy of practices of potlatch that Marcel Mauss observed in north-west indigenous cultures such as the Haida. McCaffery describes the practice thusly, "In the potlatch, commodities have an alimentary status and wealth is literally expelled … Potlatch does not demand a presupposition of reciprocity. A receiver is not obliged to return" (219) and further, "Potlatch establishes status and position (i.e. social value and hence a 'meaning') not from commodity possession, but from the rate and momentum of its disposal" (220). That being said, aside from the "alimentary status" of small press literary commodities, describing the gift economy as a form of potlatch is hardly an adequate comparison, and misappropriates Indigenous ceremony for the sake of a poor analogy.[123]

The most important aspect of McCaffery's analogy describes the generosity of small press communities (like the Language Revolution): the giving away of material possessions without the expectation of material reciprocity. The principle of generosity, seemingly more than anything else, informs much of the activity of small press communities. Pauline Butling confirms the generosity that McCaffery finds in small press communities, noting "Nichol's habit of handing out armloads of *grOnk* publications to anyone and everyone, bissett's similarly ubiquitous gifts of books, paintings, magazines, and the like, to Coach House Press's warehouse freebies" (62). Butling describes the gift economy of Canada's small press literary culture as an

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[123] Furthermore, in his *Given Time* (1992), Jacques Derrida questions Mauss's reading of potlatch as gift giving. He critiques Mauss, and suggests that "he never asks the question as to whether gifts can remain gifts once they are exchanged" (37), recognizing that a gift cannot really be part of the process of exchange. The process of exchange contradicts and nullifies the gift's status as a gift, something that exists outside of the dichotomy of give and take. It seems then, for Derrida, the possibility of a gift economy is impossible. Derrida's point is taken and, in one way undermines the notion of a gift economy entirely. It raises important questions regarding the status of the literary item as "gift" and accrued cultural capital through the dispersal of these items, especially when it comes to self-promotion and cultural status. That being said, these points do not negate the intent of the gift economy as a process that seeks to undermine and provide an alternative to dominant forms of capitalist exchange.

alternative to the mainstream; she writes, "[i]n material terms, a gift economy is one that produces surplus or excess goods rather than (or in addition to) tidily packaged, marketable commodities." (62). Butling's description of the gift economy, in the Canadian context, suggests that it is an alternative mode of exchange that opposes the principles of the capitalist market place (tidy and marketable), thus framing the gift economy itself as a site of resistance against standardization, homogeny, and capitulation.

While Butling and McCaffery effectively account for the material and economic significance of the gift economy, there remains to be an analysis of the significant affective and haptic dimensions of this economic model. As indicated by Butling's description of Nichol and bissett, the poet is located at the centre of the exchange: it is most often the authors of the work who charge themselves with the task of disseminating it (just as they often take responsibility for its production). It would be inaccurate to say that small press authors were not trying to sell their books; however, they also sought to ensure their books were given away to many individuals, sometimes without scrutiny (as indicated by Butling's quotation above). In this way, the principles of the gift economy parallel the principles of haptic poetics. While the haptic poem becomes a site wherein the poet and audience are brought into intimate proximities, the gift economy is another material and economic site wherein the gap between poet and audience is closed—the exchange is not mediated by a store nor is material or economic reciprocity expected. The gift economy is a haptic and affective economic model: it is founded solely upon the movement of the literary object into another person's hands; to give that object away with no expectation beyond the grasping of that object. The hope in such an exchange is that the person who comes to touch the gift will find some joy in the work, but also in the act of gift giving itself. This parallels Hardt and Negri's description of "affective labour," wherein affect can be

embedded in the moments of human interaction. In the moment of the encounter within the gift economy, there is both a somatic interaction—the face-to-face meeting of the poet and audience––as well as affect—a feeling of excitement, gratitude, but especially a sense of connectedness and community.

As foundational to both the poetics and economics, hapticity is central to understanding the radical ambition of the poets of the Language Revolution. The electric age is characterized by rampant technological development, which significantly impacted the psychological and physiological conditions of human life. While new communication technology mediated interaction, a haptic poetic is a means by which some may overcome the alienation felt as the world became less human and more technological—especially since human communication and expression increasingly relied upon capitalist media and infrastructure. In effect, human subjectivity—and expressions of that subjectivity—become reliant upon these structures threatening to standardize human life, reducing any person to the role of consumer and producer within a capitalist marketplace. In light of this threat, poetry that turns toward the haptic—with its emphasis on touch, tactility, kinetics, and proprioception—is a necessary response, offering a means by which the audience and participant can re-access an awareness of their body within contrived systems (artistic, economic, social etc.) and consciously attend to how to their body—with its range of affects—enters, exceeds, and engages those structures.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: The Failure of the Language Revolution

"th revolushuns nevr ovr"

− bill bissett, letter to bpNichol (1972)

As I outlined in the Introduction to this study, the Language Revolution can easily be affiliated with the critical discourse of the avant-garde. In his accounting for the term "avant-garde," Richard Kostelanetz identifies three key attributes in his essay "Avant-Garde" (1980): first, the term refers to work that "transcends current conventions in crucial respects;" second, it "will take considerable time to reach its maximum audience;" and third, "it will probably inspire future, comparably advanced endeavors" (16). Situated in this way, avant-garde art and literature is created in pursuit of a "new terrain" (16)—a utopic endpoint or, at least, a space wherein the existing social contract of an artist's culture has been altered. The fourth attribute—unstated by Kostelanetz but perhaps the most obvious feature of the avant-garde, especially the literary avant-garde, is that all avant-gardes fail. The disruptive and chaotic performances of Dada sound poets, for example, did not significantly alter the social and political fabric of the early twentieth century. Likewise, the anti-art and anti-institutional strategies that enlivened Fluxus later that century eventually dissipated, leading to the incorporation of many Fluxus artists into institutional settings.[124] By these criteria, the Language Revolution is indeed avant-garde. The Language Revolution actively resisted dominant literary conventions of the period, mainly lyric modes; it took some time to find its maximum audience; it has inspired comparably advanced endeavours (see the work of Lillian Allen, Gary Barwin, derek beaulieu, Christian Bök, Stephen Cain, Margaret Christakos, Peter Jaeger, Karl Jirgens, Adeena Karasick, Wayne Keon, Darren

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[124] This latter point is a key issue for avant-garde theorist Peter Bürger who declares avant-garde arts as routinely failed efforts for their inability to fully integrate art into life. Instead, Bürger sees (as in the case of Fluxus) the removal of art's direct relationship to life as it is placed in the museum.

Wershler, writers who been touched by the ideas of the Language Revolution in some form); and yes, the Language Revolution failed.

As with other previous literary and artistic avant-garde movements, there was no moment of declared victory for the poets of the Language Revolution. Despite their efforts, a canon of Canadian Literature was formed, thus creating what some critics recognize as Canada's national literary identity (indicated most recently by Nick Mount's *Arrival: The Story of Can Lit*); highly-theorized and developed modes such as concrete poetry, sound poetry, and haptic poetry have remained largely on the fringe of literary culture; many of the presses and magazines that began as part of this movement have since floundered; and those poets who have gained some margin of success have either passed into the institutions they once critiqued, like Steve McCaffery, or sadly passed on from this life, like bpNichol. That being said, it is difficult to determine with any precision when the Language Revolution failed. As discussed below, Gregory Betts suggests that disillusionment in the Language Revolution precipitated near the end of the 1970s while, in 2011, McCaffery admits a loss in faith in the revolutionary literary projects he developed with Nichol "long ago" (Cox "Trans-Avantgarde" n. pag.). Furthermore, the turn toward pataphysics in the 1980s, with its emphasis on imagination and imaginary processes, as evidenced by Michael Dean's *Symposium for Linguistic Onto-Genetics* (discussed in the previous chapter), suggests an abandonment of the real and material conditions that many of these poets deeply engaged in the 1960s and 1970s. That being said, I am reluctant to concur with these notions of wholesale failure and to wholly denigrate the efforts of 25 years of radically spirited work as comprehensive failure.

If held to the traditional standards of the avant-garde—as a pursuit of a material, utopic endpoint—it does seem likely that the poets of the Language Revolution were simply

unequipped for actual intervention into the rapidly mutating social, political, and cultural

conditions between the years 1963 and 1988.[125] In Canada, this was a period characterized by a

tumultuous social, political, and technological landscape: there were the centennial celebrations

in 1967 that also heralded (for some) the arrival of a nationally-distinguished Canadian

Literature; the rise and fall of counter-culture movements; aggressively situated anti-American

sentiments; the Trudeau years; and, the subsequent rise of neoliberal hegemony in the years of

Brian Mulroney's government. In addition to these historical cornerstones are the tremendous

global shifts that were underway, especially the transformation of capitalism into its third or late

stage. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, echoing Marshall McLuhan, describe this as an

"informatization" stage, characterized by the rise of affective labour, which tremendously altered

the role of affect in social, cultural, and political institutions. The poets of the Language

Revolution seemingly did their best to grapple with these issues using a sensory-based

borderblur poetic with a special focus on keeping open the possibilities of emotional expression

while third stage capitalism began to circumscribe and dictate the role of feeling in day-to-day

life. I am left, then, with an important question about this avant-garde poetry in Canada: What

did it *really* do? From the following assessment of these political ambitions, a significant point, I

hope, emerges: the political program of the Language Revolution was misled from the beginning

by a naivety fueled by unrealistic utopian expectations, but it was precisely their aspiration for

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[125] Though I am encouraged by the spirited endeavours of some avant-garde movements to intervene into the social and political conditions of their time, most literary and artistic avant-garde movements are more often than not unequipped for actual intervention. In large part, the effects of the avant-garde happen at the microlevel, among small communities. It should be noted, too, that utopic ambitions that emerge as part of these movements are often compromised by conflicting issues such as gender inequality, toxic personalities, and various forms of violence. For example, Futurism's misogyny—exemplified by Filippo Marinetti, and addressed in an earlier section of this dissertation—undermines the progressive ambitions of the movement.

utopia (literally meaning "no place") that should prompt us to reconsider notions of failure for the Language Revolution—and perhaps the literary avant-garde in general.

The teleological conception of the avant-garde—as a goal-oriented drive toward utopia – –leads McCaffery to renounce the revolutionary sense of optimism that invigorated the Language Revolution: "Both bp and me felt that in 1968 we could change language and also that language is not—to put it in Marxist terms—pure superstructure, it's base and it's as determinant of cultural change and historical movement as economy and economic relations [sic]" but "that utopian belief in a language revolution is long gone" (Cox "Trans-Avantgarde" n. pag.). Since they were, according to McCaffery (who also speaks on behalf of the late Nichol), unable to alter the fabric of social and material life, McCaffery, at least, lost faith in his own avant-gardism.[126] Similarly, in his essay "Postmodern Decadence in Canadian Sound and Visual Poetry," Betts examines the trajectory of the Language Revolution which "began with a vague belief in utopian potential" but which "fell quickly to postmodern disillusionment" (173). Betts selects a line from bissett's 1978 poem "bend ovr so we can see yr asshole" to partially illustrate the movement's disillusionment: "th revolushun will have to start tomorrow / everythings to fuckd up today" (qtd. Betts 151), which supposedly captures bissett's loss of faith and overwrites bissett's own claim in a 1972 letter to Nichol that "the revolushuns nevr over" (n. pag.). Similarly, one may identify bissett's disillusionment with the utopian project of the Language Revolution when he— after a series of financial troubles and the accumulation of a large debt—sold his small press blewointment in 1983, through which he had released at least 23 of his own publications, thereby relinquishing total control over the production of his poetry. This sale is significant when

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[126] It should be stressed here that McCaffery is speaking on Nichol's behalf. We do not know how Nichol would have felt about this activity today.

considering how intensely bissett's poetry has focused on free poetic expression and expression by his own means. While many of the other poets, like Martina Clinton and David Aylward, stopped publishing altogether, poets like David UU, Richard Truhlar, John Riddell, Gerry Shikatani, and Judith Copithorne continued to write and publish poetry after 1988 in other small press forums. And yet, the affects—anger, dissatisfaction, and desire—that drove the poets' revolutionary fervor and inspired them to create this work has seemingly dissipated from their public personae. Since the spirited work of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, it seems that many of the writers (with some exception) who were part of this initial sweep of activity no longer connect literature and art to modes of larger social transformation.

The failure of the poets of the Language Revolution to intervene into the conditions of cultural, social, and material life, and their recognition of this issue, strongly resonates with criticism of left-oriented political projects that similarly resist neoliberal logic. "Where did the future go?" ask Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams at the outset of their 2015 book *Inventing the Future*, wherein they lament the recurrent failures of left-aligned political projects. The twentieth century saw, they say, such "a vast assortment of emancipatory visions" (1) yet today "The glimmers of a better future are trampled and forgotten" (2). Though located in the context of political theory, this narrative poignantly resonates with the surge of optimism that surfaced as part of the Language Revolution and its subsequent disillusion. Though not a concern for Srnicek and Williams, the Language Revolution was among these movements that arose in the 20th century with an emancipatory vision that has since been largely left unrealized.

Srnicek and Williams argue that previously established leftist practices have been largely ineffective. In particular, they situate a rigorous criticism of what they call left-oriented "folk" political projects. Among the leftist movements they critique, the one that resonates most

strongly in the context of my discussion today is *localism*, which attempts to "bring politics down to the 'human scale' by emphasizing temporal, spatial, and conceptual immediacy" (10). It is a movement that is empowering on an individual level, but Srnicek and Williams warn that this sense of empowerment can be misleading since that individual power typically does little on the larger political-economic scale. For Srnicek and Williams, the problem with localism is that, "in attempting to reduce large-scale systemic problems to the more manageable sphere of local community, it effectively denies the systemically interconnected nature of today's world" (40). Politics at a purely local level is, according to Srnicek and Williams, ill-equipped for systemic change since the conditions of capitalism are massive, abstract, complex, and non-localized.

As a political-aesthetic project, the Language Revolution could be said to have suffered the same fate as other left-oriented "folk" political movements. For one, localized efforts were made by bissett, Nichol, and their peers who participated in the small press economy, which privileged the face-to-face, hand-to-hand interaction when producing and distributing their literature. As part of a localized, small press economy, the poets of the Language Revolution produced hundreds of periodicals, books, pamphlets, leaflets, objects, and editions. As outlined in the previous chapter, the small press economy is grounded in the desire to generate affects without following the same faceless model that dictates the capitalist marketplace. Furthermore, the act of reading is largely an intimate and localized experience. And while publishing is an act that potentially distributes literary experience among a wider audience, the works produced as part of the small press network only reach a *small* audience. In "Publishing the International Concrete Canada: 'the Communication Link' of Ganglia Press," Graham Sharpe confirms the limited reach of small press periodicals: "Apart from a small number of university and public

libraries, by 1969 *grOnk* was being distributed to no fewer than 237 individuals" (119).[127] With

such similarities in content and audience, I can only assume the subscription-base for

blewointment was comparable, if not less. This localization of experience is more minutely

engaged in instances, as in my last chapter, when the aesthetic experience occurs at the haptic

level of surface-to-surface contact. While well-attended performances may also offer a forum for

wider dissemination of literary experience, these occurred in mostly closed spaces to audiences

who, most likely, opted to attend. Therefore, assuming that poetry with a fairly small audience—

no matter how radically spirited—could implement large-scale changes is rather naïve. The

localized folk politic of poets, indeed, stands in opposition to the logic of standardization and the

dominance of a mainstream marketplace, thereby providing space for poets and readers to escape

these mechanisms. However, none of these aspects seem particularly equipped for imminently

catalysing systemic change, nor would they influence the direction of cultural, social and

political affairs.

On the specific level of the Language Revolution's poetics, perhaps failure was promised

from the beginning since the goals of the movement—their commitment to borderlessness, anti-

canonicity, genre-bending, rethinking affect, new media, and free and open expression through

the poem—were vague. The cover of the first issue of *grOnk*, which declared the arrival of the

Language Revolution, is only a loose commitment to alternative modes of poetic sensibility:

"concrete sound kinetic and related borderblur" (n. pag.). And though Nichol's romanticized

search for "as many exits as possible . . . in order to form as many possible entrances for the

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[127] Though Sharpe provides us with an estimate of the *minimum* number of subscribers, it is unlikely that the periodical was distributed to many more people than this. The production of small press periodicals was a small endeavour (hence the name), that was driven by individual or small groups of people and often funded out-of-pocket. Even today, with increasingly efficient printing machines and print-on-demand options, small press publications are still published to a small number of people. A typical print-run for a small press poetry book today is no more than 500 copies.

other" ("Statement" n. pag.) articulates a project for literary accessibility, borderlessness, and

communal openness, this emphasis on entrances and exits develops no particular place or space

for literature. Rather, it is a continued effort to open literature and poetry—its capacity for

fostering community, modes of production and dissemination, and recognized genres—as it

already exists. Stephen Cain confirms in an interview regarding his edition of Nichol's early

poems, *bp: beginnings* (2014), that "Nichol, perhaps more than most poets of his time, was also

extremely interested in ambiguity and undecidability (as evidenced by his love of the pun or the

paragram)" (n. pag.). This lack of endpoint or goal negated the possibility of a revolutionary

literary program when assessed by the criteria established by Kostelanetz at the outset of this

conclusion.

In light of the Language Revolution, the avant-garde's pursuit of a spatial, utopic

endpoint must be reconsidered. Like David Harvey, I contend that utopia is not necessarily a

spatial endpoint, but rather it is a series of processes, invoking the cyclical-nature of revolution

(to move in rotation) in revolutionary activities. Harvey proposes that we transform notions of

utopia from an end-result (a materialized utopia) to what he refers to in his book *Spaces of Hope*

(2000) as a "utopianism of social processes," defined as something that is "expressed in temporal

terms' (rather than spatial terms) and are literally bound to no place whatsoever and are typically

specified outside of the constraints of spatiality altogether" (174). From this perspective, the

undefined goal of the Language Revolution might actually be the most literal realization of

utopia, which means "no place." Thinking of revolutionary poetics in terms of a utopia of

process (rather than spatial location) much more effectively highlights the radical nature of the

Language Revolution. Rather than hold the expectation that a radical poetic like borderblur will

alter cultural, social, and/or material conditions, I believe that radically aspiring poetics engages

what Brian Massumi refers to as a "micropolitics" which seeks to modulate "a situation in a way that amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility as an alter accomplishment" (58). It is here within the linkage of utopian processes and micropolitics that the poetry of the Language Revolution truly resides; their work, as seen in the poetry of the preceding chapters, is an opening of literature to accommodate multiple literary identities, to bend generic conventions, and to stimulate emotion and feeling when these aspects were being circumscribed by a shifting capitalist economy.

Massumi's concept of "micropolitics" returns us to the rich potential offered by thinking of literary avant-gardism through concepts of affect. In my effort to rethink the limits of failure and success of the Language Revolution, I return to theorist Charles Russell, whose notion of avant-gardism is somewhat optimistic. Instead of leaning solely on shock as a key affect of artistic avant-gardism, Russell argues that generating disorientation and disruption is the target of avant-garde works; he contends, "literary disruption is seen as a necessary expression of an affirmative modernity, and disorientation is felt to free the audience to perceive things of previously unimagined beauty, or experience states of abruptly expanded consciousness" (35). For Russell, the affect of the avant-garde is already inscribed within localized phenomenon, not necessarily intended to immediately impact systemic conditions (despite grand claims of some artists and authors). Rather, for Russell the affectiveness (and effectiveness) of the avant-garde begins on the individual level. The turn to affect as a theoretical cornerstone is a means of shifting away from this sense of failure, to show that affects, though not always functioning on the level of superstructures, are crucial to the proceedings of material life. For Sara Ahmed, however, affect is not personal and not individual. Ahmed's crucial thinking demonstrates how, through the study of affect, we can see the larger impacts of radical poetics beyond propositions

made by Russell. As I note in my Introduction, Ahmed confirms that "the individual subject comes into being through its very alignment with the collective. *It is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies"* (128). This is precisely how and why the Language Revolution, though mostly overlooked, emerges from Canadian literary history as a significant node of the avant-garde. These were poets who saw collective bodies form in contention with the social and political conditions of postmodernity.

The Language Revolution made many contributions to the formation of collective literary bodies in Canada, during and beyond the prime of their literary activities. Little publications like *blewointment, Ganglia*, and *grOnk* served as communal hubs, connecting both lyrical and non-lyrical writers with local, national, and international clusters of readers and writers. For example, to return to the earlier Graham Sharpe quote, he points out that *Ganglia* (a word that implies connection) had 237 individual subscribers: by 1969

> small number in comparison to mainstream periodicals with large-scale circulation. The majority of these subscriptions were based in Canada, though there were also an impressive number of international subscribers including forty-five in the U.S., fourteen in South America, three in Japan, and fifty-five in Europe (of which twenty were posted to the U.K.). For Nichol, *grOnk* undoubtedly connected with a world-wide movement. (119).

Following the success of these connections, Nichol, by 1969, intended to publish a series of nationally-based issues: "Nichol had plans for a much larger series of anthologies (including flag-waving all-canadian and all-american issues), each of which would provide glimpses into the concrete activity taking place in different parts of the world" (120).[128] So, while Canada in the 1960s and early 1970s was grappling with the idea of forming a national body of literature, as

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[128] As Sharpe notes, only a Czech anthology was realized, delivered by Jíri Valoch, and this was published in 1973 by Coach House: *The Pipe: Recent Czech Concrete Poetry*.

illustrated by Nick Mount's *Arrival*: *The Story of Can Lit*, Nichol and his coterie had already

conceived of a collectivity around non-lyrical poetry (visual, sound, and haptic), both within and

beyond Canada's borders.

The impact of such activities resonated with many individual poets, making definitive

impressions upon local and individual levels. In her "poem for bp" from *Psychic Unrest* (2000),

Lillian Allen laments Nichol's passing but recognizes his lasting presence on Canadian writing:

"u never really left" (5). Allen continues:

> and u became a womb
> birth a child of Canadian culture
> promise destruction of borders
> in the turbulence of language (9-12)

While Allen has made significant contributions to the shape and communal formations of

Canadian writing herself—especially her involvement with dub poetry collectives—it is

significant to note that Allen cites Nichol as a significant figure in the development of Canadian

literary culture. Similar praise has been given to bissett by indigenous poet Wayne Keon, whose

"an opun letr tu bill bissett" (1972) admits drawing influence from bissett. He writes in an

orthography reminiscent of bissett's:

> deer bill
> i don't think
> i evr met yu
> but sum peopul i no did
> the rezun i am riting
> this letr is tu tel yu
> that i used sum of
> yr lines (1-8)

Keon goes onto to thank him at the end of the poem. While Keon's praise gives bissett the same

degree of recognition as Allen to Nichol, it is clear by Keon's imitation of bissett's style that

bissett's influence affected writers that he had not even had direct contact with.

Despite the admiration of Allen and Keon, and the involvement of writers like Gerry Shikatani and Roy Kiyooka, the Language Revolution as a whole did not reflect racial concerns nor did it actively seek to open space for non-white writers. This is among the failings of the Language Revolution, and reveals to me one of the significant blind spots of the movement. While Nichol did support the work of Allen—for example, he interviewed Allen alongside nine other sound poets for *Musicworks* magazine in 1987—most other poets of the Language Revolution did not include considerations of race as part of their work. One crucial issue here is the seeming universalist principles that guide the poetics and politics of many poets of the Language Revolution, leaving them blind to the nuances of understanding white privilege and cultural appropriation. Some poets' inclination toward what they considered to be "openness," enabled them to cherry-pick certain aspects of non-white culture with little consideration for the significance of those actions. I find this most obviously in bissett's sound poetry (addressed in Chapter 3) wherein he integrates tropes of Indigenous chant into his work. Maxine Gadd has described bissett's use of both Indigenous and cowboy imagery as a form of escapism, an "attempt to get the hell out of being a weak, miserable, near-sighted, undernourished, physically rundown, feeble city intellectual" (179). Gadd's comment here explains away the severity of bissett's actions as mere "fantasy" (179); however, bissett's appropriation of chant forms inadvertently contributes to Canada's longstanding history of colonial violence through the appropriation and misrepresentation of Indigenous traditions.[129] Likewise, as pointed out in previous chapters, McCaffery's poetry—especially *Carnival, panels 1 & 2*—makes privileged assumptions about the body and disembodiment. Andy Weaver argues, and I concur, that

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[129] This is an important point to consider when examining the politics of poetry more broadly, which included anti-colonial and anti-empire stance, suggesting, perhaps, a premature embrace of McLuhan's ideas about connectedness and the global village.

McCaffery's assumptions about the body, in this way, indicates that he occupies a position of white male privilege which is at the core of much of his work (130-47). Many writers who are marginalized by culture are forced to acknowledge the subject position from which they write, while white male writers—like McCaffery—assume that the body is a neutral, nonsignifying thing. With that being said, the poets of the Language Revolution did not actively seek to mobilize a hateful poetics, and they did in fact welcome writers of colour who reflected similar interests in non-lyrical modes into their community; however, an important distinction must be drawn between hospitality and programmatic support. The poets of the Language Revolution were seemingly hospitable to writers of colour, but they did not include racial concerns in the program of their poetics. A generous reading of these failings might try to recognize that these writers meant well and were working in a different socio-climate than we are today. And while I think the writers did mean well, and recognize that they were responding to real social and political issues, material threats to artistic life, and real forms of poverty and inequality, their failure to actively integrate programmatic support for non-white writers is disappointing. Many of these writers wrote in concert with the civil rights movement in the United States and the Red Power movement in Canada while watching global war and the American occupation in Vietnam and did so without integrating programmatic support for non-white writers. This is an important aspect to consider for a radical poetic program that is predicated on notions of openness as a response to ongoing social and cultural tensions.

Like Allen and Keon, many writers in Canada found significance in the activities and ideas of the Language Revolution. In 1986, Paul Dutton and Steven (Ross) Smith edited a substantial festschrift dedicated to bpNichol and his work for *Open Letter*. This included contributions from an international—though mostly Canadian—roster of contributors including

George Bowering, Bob Cobbing, Robert Kroetsch, Barbara Caruso, Dick Higgins, Margaret Avison, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Stephen Scobie, Daphne Marlatt, Fred Wah, Gerry Shikatani, Earle Birney, Jíri Valoch, and many others. As evidenced by this list, Nichol—along with his writing and ideas—possessed a unique ability to formulate relationships across generations, styles of writing, and geographical contexts. Evidence of Nichol's persisting influence appears again in later issues of *Open Letter* dedicated to Nichol's work and showcasing intellectual and creative engagements with Nichol's poetry and ideas. 1998 saw the publication of bpNichol + 10, edited by Frank Davey, which included contributions by some of Nichol's friends and a new generation of writers and scholars including Lori Emerson, Darren Wershler, Peter Jaeger, Stephen Cain, and Christian Bök. 10 years later, Lori Emerson published two more issues of *Open Letter* dedicated to Nichol's work (published in 2008 and 2009) with an expanding roster of poets and writers including Clint Burnham, Stephen Voyce, Steve Zultanski, Marie Buck, and Jim Andrews, a list which speaks to Nichol's continued influence for writers across borders.

Issues of praise and dedication were not limited to Nichol. bissett received similar praise in an issue of *The Capilano Review* (2.3, Fall 1997), which contained a number of anecdotal, creative, and scholarly engagements with bissett and his work. Contributors to this issue include Susan Musgrave, Jamie Reid, Adeena Karasick, Judith Copithorne, Maxine Gadd, Darren Wershler, and Renee Rodin. McCaffery, too, received such praise in *Open Letter* with two issues dedicated to his work, published in 1987 (edited by bpNichol) and 2011 (edited by Stephen Cain). These issues, like those dedicated to Nichol and bissett, speak to the lasting impact McCaffery has made on poetry and poetics, but also academia. In his essay, "Becoming Clinamen: McCaffery and the (new) York School of Writing," Betts accounts for what he describes as a "less articulated group made up of those who capitalized on the opportunity

afforded by McCaffery's employment as a professor in the English Department at York University from 1998 until 2003" (44). These writers include "Christian Bök, Darren Wershler, Angela Rawlings, Bill Kennedy, Stephen Cain, Suzanne Zelazo, Jason Christie, Jay MillAr, and Geoffrey Hlibchuk" (44), poets that

> emerged in the late nineties and 'Oughts' during McCaffery's tenure at the Toronto university, and that remains active today albeit in a variety of loci, might have encountered McCaffery through the auspices of a formal education (if they weren't already actively engaged with his work) but used his influence to provoke multifarious and radical literary practices both inside and outside the institution. (44)

While McCaffery, Nichol, and bissett have received these most apparent forms of praise and recognition from an international collective of poets, critics, and fans, other writers of the Language Revolution undoubtedly had their share of influence, undocumented or less documented.[130]

Though they have received less critical recognition than Nichol, bissett, or McCaffery, other poets of the Language Revolution—like David UU, John Riddell, Richard Truhlar, Ann Rosenberg, Judith Copithorne, and Paul Dutton—continued to publish beyond 1988, albeit with less of the consistency and revolutionary fervor that first marked their work. This slowing of poetic production, however, does not seem to be the rule when looking to poets Penn Kemp and Susan McMaster, who continue to publish to this day, building upon the foundations they established in their earlier borderblur work. Penn Kemp, who received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal for service to the arts in 2012, continues to embody some principles of the Language Revolution. Kemp continues to produce in the spirit of the small press economy by publishing through her own Pendas Productions, which has released audio CDs, computer

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[130] For example, following his death *ditch*, released a short digital-only festschrift dedicated to David UU and his work with contributions by Darren Wershler and jwcurry (2010).

poems, books, pamphlets, and more. Furthermore, Kemp has continued to find ways of blurring the boundaries between artistic and poetic disciplines. For example, she created, with Dennis Siren, a collaborative video poem "Between Between" (2012), which writes through processes of mourning. Kemp has also focused on theatre, composing at least 18 works since the late 1970s and well into the new millennium. These plays include *What the Ear Hears Last*, first published in 1978 and produced by Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto in 1994, as well as more recent works like *The Dream Life of Teresa Harris* (2013) and *Homeward Bound* (2015). Unlike McCaffery, Kemp has not lost faith in the relationship between poetry and socio-political change. She has been affiliated with socially-inflected groups such as 100 Thousand Poets for Change—an organization dedicated to developing ideas for social change through art, music, and literature (n. pag.). She continues, too, to focus on the intersection of gender and writing, and has published anthologies of work by women, including *Performing Women* and *Women and Multimedia*, which were both released in 2016.

Like Kemp, McMaster has also assumed a more powerful position in Canada's literary community—notably, as President of the League of Canadian Poets from 2011-2012. All the while, McMaster has maintained a commitment to borderblur poetics. After First Draft, McMaster formed two more groups that compose and perform at the intersection of poetry and music: SugarBeat and Geode. SugarBeat is a prior iteration of Geode, which continues to perform and release (as far as I can tell) work today. Geode formed in 1999 and consists of a rotating roster of members, including Susan McMaster, Alrick Huebener, Jennifer Giles, and others. Together they have released a self-titled album in 2000 and, more recently, *Until the Light Bends* in 2004 (released by Kemp's Pendas Productions), which was nominated for the Archibald Lampman Poetry Award and the Ottawa Book Award in 2005. McMaster has also

maintained a commitment to the feminist principles that she first cultivated as part of her work with First Draft. McMaster, for example, has founded three magazines—notably, the long-running feminist art magazine *Branching Out*, which featured "original fiction, poetry, photography, and artwork, along with articles on topical issues on women's emerging presence in such areas as politics and sports, and evolving laws on abortion, rape, and women in the workforce" ("Branching out" n. pag.). Though their work seems to be overlooked by literary critics interested in the non-lyrical poetries of mid-to-late twentieth century Canada, Kemp and McMaster seem to be the poets of the Language Revolution who are still the most active and who have also maintained the most obvious commitment to using their poetry as a platform for social-politics.

With all of that being said, it would be absurd to suggest that the writers of the Language Revolution were the sole influences for proceeding generations of writers—surely, all writers and scholars come to their work with an assemblage of experiences and influences. By noting these various forms of praise in print above, I am merely trying to suggest that the writers of the Language Revolution were significant figures within the assemblages of new writers. In other words, I am not so much trying to dogmatically trace genealogies; rather I seek to identify how the writers of the Language Revolution opened processes that continue to support writers today. Graham Sharpe argues that "While Ganglia Press initially provided an exposure to international concrete in Canada, it helped, in typically Canadian fashion, to validate the work that was begun and ongoing here" (121), but I think this point can be expanded more broadly to apply to the work of the Language Revolution as a whole. Speaking as broadly as possible to the processes initiated by the Language Revolution, it might be fair to suggest that their writing, commitment to small press, the gift economy, and affect in poetics, legitimated and validated this kind of

work for many more writers to come. Evidence of this exists today with literary awards dedicated specifically to small press publications. The "bpNichol Chapbook Award," for example, is Canada's most prestigious award for chapbook publications, which includes a $4000 award for the author and a $500 award for the publisher. The award is administered annually by Toronto-based collective Meet the Presses at their Independent Literary Market each year, where poets like Beth Learn, Paul Dutton, and other poets often make appearances as publishers. In 2017, Sonnet L'Abbé received the award for her chapbook *Anima Canadensis* (2016). Upon assembling this record of documentation that demonstrates a concentration of interest in the poets of Language Revolution and their lingering presence in Canadian literary culture, it is striking that there is still no full-length, academic study of their activities. This lack of focused critical attention motivated me to compose this dissertation. I hope that my dissertation captures, at least, the crucial ways these poets developed affect as a key component of their radical, non-lyrical poetic program.

Under the auspices of a borderblur poetic, the poets of the Language Revolution formulated a loose collective of poets that supported one another—with varying degrees of success—in their resistance to circumscribed notions of literary identity and, most importantly, against the capitulation of psychic and social life in the face of a mutating capitalist economy. So then, rather than considering the Language Revolution as part of a historical lineage of failed literary avant-gardes, the Language Revolution—on the microscale that it operated—is hardly a failure in this sense. Canadian concrete poetry, sound poetry, and haptic poetry formulates a significant alternative literary canon that remains relevant to today's literary discourse: as Nichol predicted, this activity continues to offer readers significant "entrances and exits" into and out of the poem.

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Appendix A: Konkreet Vizual from *space travl* by bill bissett
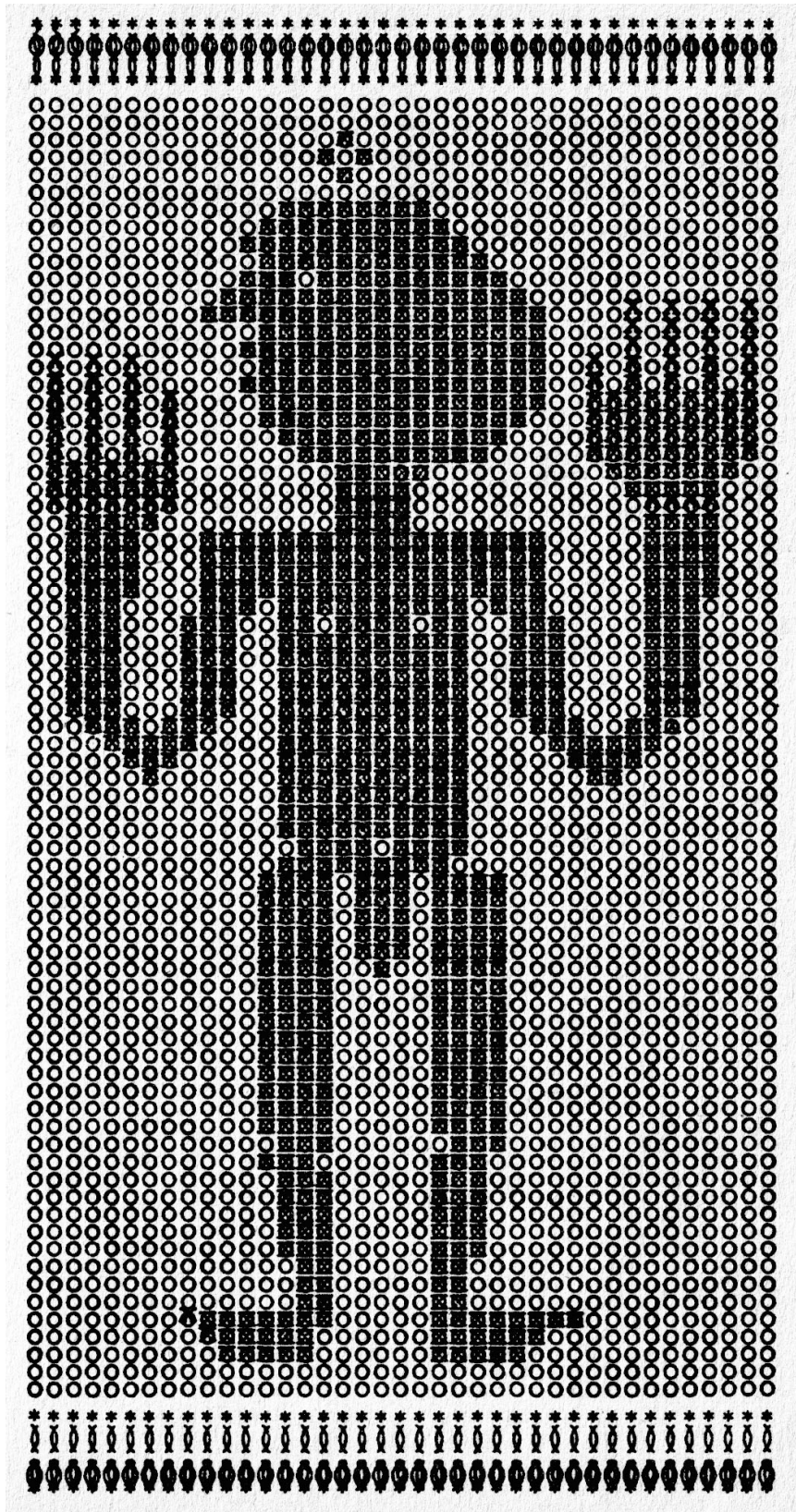
Appendix B: "Untitled" by Steve McCaffery

Appendix C: "Untitled" by Judith Copithorne
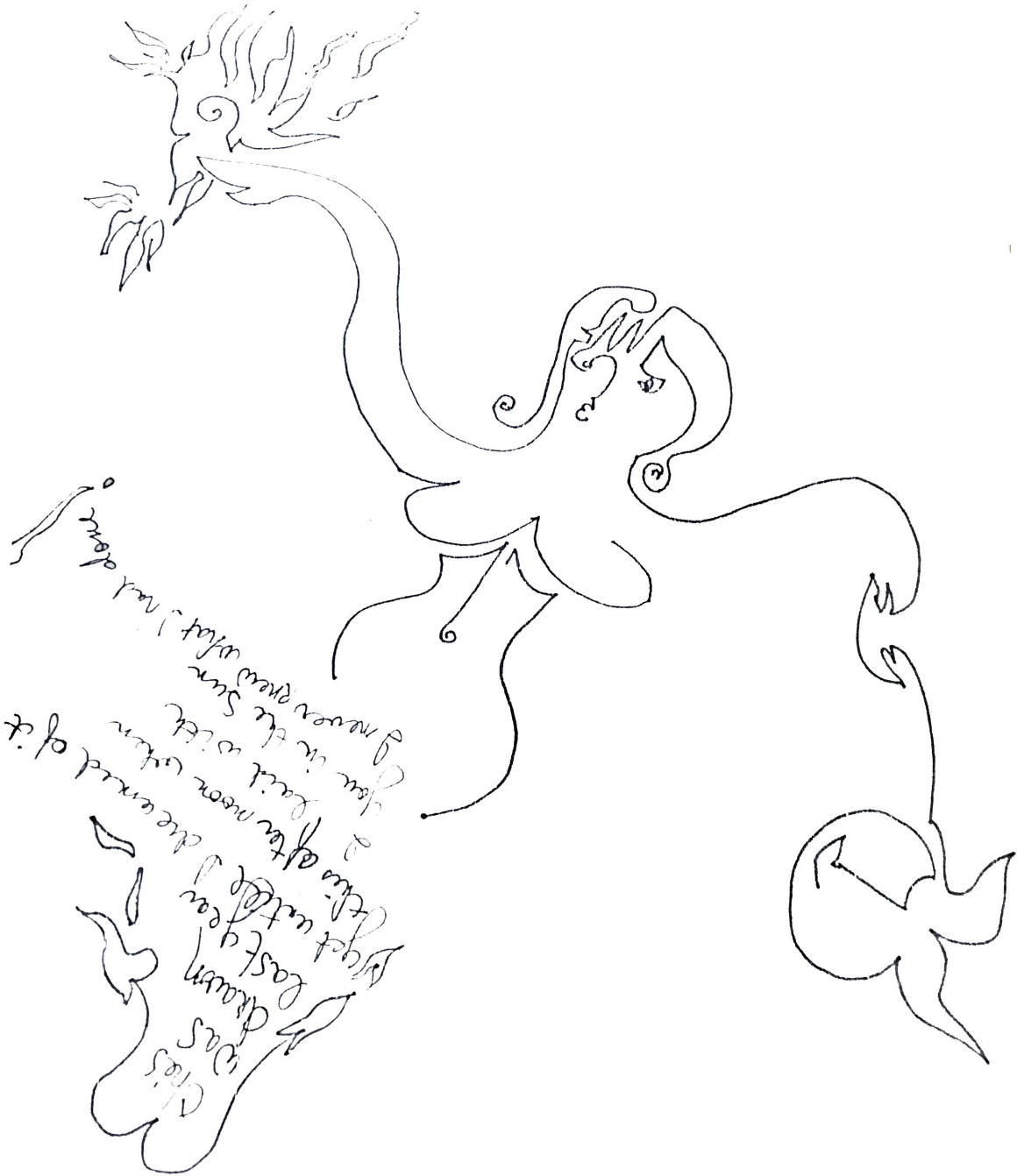
COPITHORNE

Appendix D: "Blues" by bpNichol

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 love o
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Appendix E: from *Release* by Judith Copithorne

Little girl you've become
a fussbudget
a worry wart
a harried
house wife
Let it all go. Let it
all go. Let go.
fly free

Appendix F: from *Rain* by Judith Copithorne

Appendix G: from *Rain* by Judith Copithorne

Appendix H: from *Rain* by Judith Copithorne

A shore
At last
reached
a home beyond
the dark
night sea
of rain
— Salty —

Appendix I: from *Touch* by David UU

Appendix J: from *Touch* by David UU

Appendix K: "LIEBESTOD" by David UU

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                        LIEBESTOD


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Appendix L: from *IBM* (c. 1972) by bill bissett

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Appendix M: from *Yonder Glow* by Martina Clinton (crap cross)

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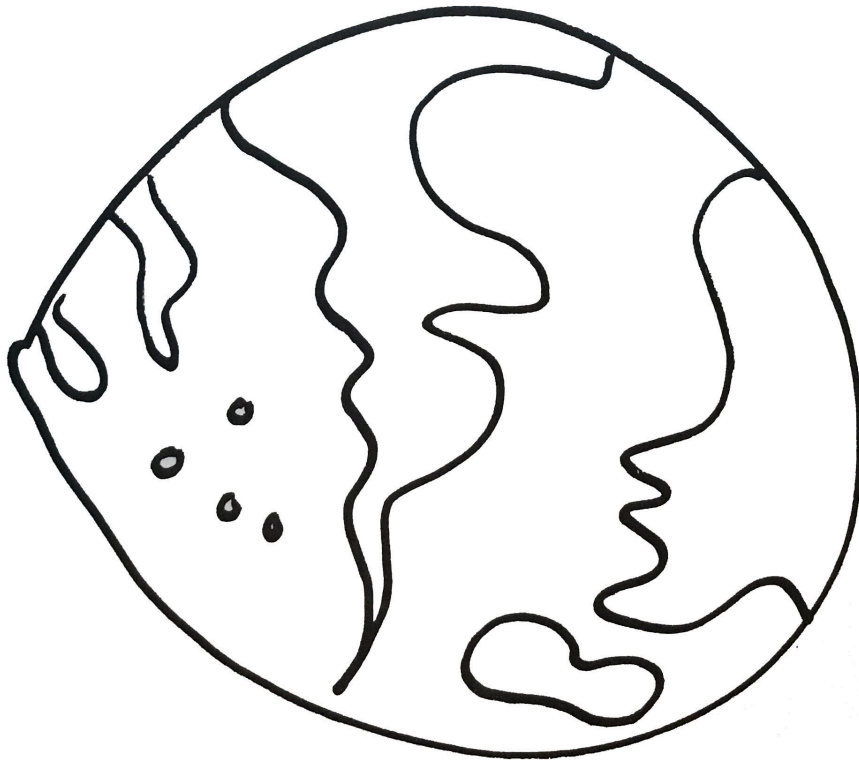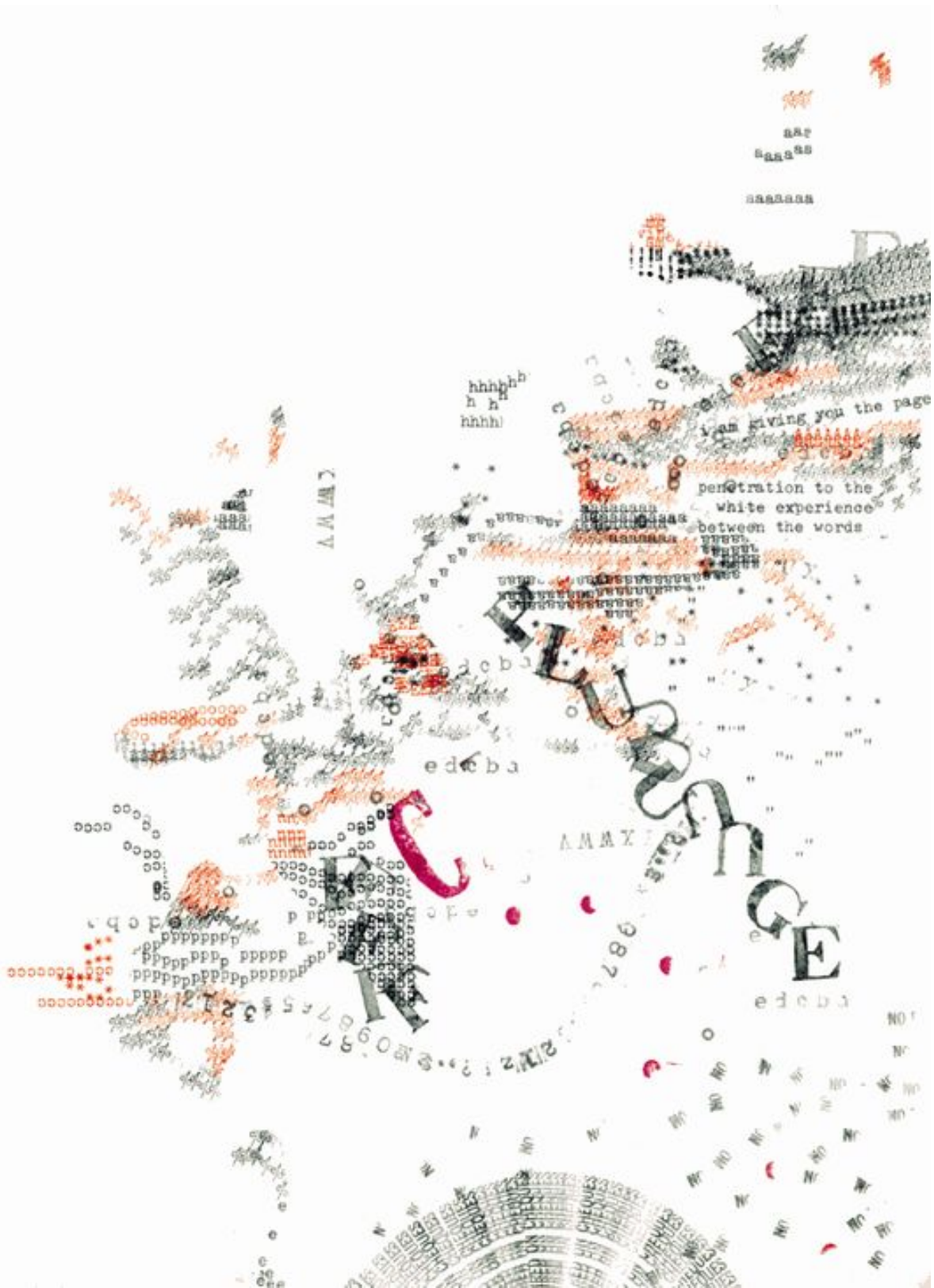
Appendix N: from *Yonder Glow* by Martina Clinton

everything crap isnt every thing crap isnt every thing crap isnt every thing crap isnt every thing crap isnt every thing crap isnt every thing crap isnt

Appendix O: from *Carnival, The Second Panel* by Steve McCaffery

Appendix P: from *The Plastic Typewriter* by Paul Dutton