

**ALTER/NATIONS — LONG(ING) POEMS:
RECONFIGURATION OF THE NATION-DISOURSE
IN EXPERIMENTAL CANADIAN POETRY (1960s-1980s)**

by

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ABSTRACT

In Canadian literature, the discourse of the long poem has been both constitutive of, and excessive to, the formation of a national imaginary. The experimental poetics of this genre is evident in the poetry of Phyllis Webb, Roy Kiyooka, George Bowering and Daphne Marlatt from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. These poetics intervened critically at a powerful moment in the definition of a Canadian cultural identity, between the cultural and political nationalism marked by the institution of the Massey Commission in 1949 and anxieties around the demise of the nation-state marked by the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement in 1987.

Desires saturate the political language and socio-cultural representations of this significant period: national and cultural identity (the 1967 Centennial); national or provincial autonomy (the 1982 repatriation of the Constitution and Quebec separatism); regional identity; the management of ethnic diversity (official multiculturalism); contested sovereignties (First Nations); and globalism (free-trade ideology and NAFTA). The concept of “genre as social action” (Carolyn R. Miller) is valuable in demonstrating the ways in which experimental poetic practices enter signifying systems of cultural formation and, by making such desires inhabitable, subvert the fixity of meaning (and deployment of closure) of liberal nationalist ideologies.

To the ‘lack’ posited by cultural nationalists, the contemporary long poem opposes a poetics of ‘excess’ which escapes the logic of fixity and containment, utility

and consumption, and transforms notions of nationness and belonging. This strategy of poetic excess is also a textuality of desire, yet one that interrupts the powerful identifications produced by nationalist ideologies, no longer allowing for their safe habitation. As a creative discourse, it extends the textual possibilities of language and opens up spaces of critical intervention that help in rethinking the meaning of nationness and citizenship, as these become again highly contested notions in this time of late modernity and global capitalism.

Keywords: nation-state; Canadian long poem; experimental poetics; Canadian post-war avant-garde; desire; citizenship; Phyllis Webb; Roy Kiyooka; George Bowering; Daphne Marlatt

Ai miei genitori e Suor Maria Nazarena.

È quella infinita tempesta,

finita in un rivo canoro.

Dei fulmini fragili restano

cirri di porpora ed oro ...

A Laura.

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CHAPTER ONE

On Nation-ness and Belonging

The Nation as a Notion

... nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind.
—Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (4)

The works of critical historians Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawn, Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith have drawn attention to the nation as a notion which plays a major role in the formation of our identities, and for whose preservation or expansion wars are being fought even today. Albeit naturalized in the consciousness of its subjects, the nation is the product of the culture of Enlightenment and of eighteenth and nineteenth century European nationalisms.¹ But although the nation, in the language of semiotics, does not embody a stable referent, it certainly engenders a sense of commonality, shared values and interests that circulate and proliferate through language and other representations in our everyday lives. Thus the Nation is also a discourse, that is a set of practices, institutions and acts through which, daily and oftentimes unknowingly, we perform our idea of nation-ness, but also through which the Nation is performing us as its subjects.¹

That the Nation is “imagined” has become a widely accepted concept since the groundbreaking work of the historian Benedict Anderson. In *Imagined Communities*:

¹ From now on, I capitalize Nation to draw attention to the discourse of the Nation as overlapping with, but not necessarily synonymous with, the nation-state.

Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (1983), Anderson traces common patterns of nation-building both in Europe, where the discourse originated, and in the colonial enterprises of the Asian, African and American continents where it was transplanted and with which it was implicated. Anderson convincingly shows that this process of transplantation, which revolves around the constitution of educational institutions, the enforcement of dominant—first imperial and then *creole*—languages and the proliferation of print culture, was not simply the transferral of a uniquely European ideological apparatus onto a passive colonial subject territory. Rather, the complexity of indigenous cultures always negotiated and contaminated the metropolitan discourse of nation-building in order to re-articulate the tensions between metropolitan and peripheral understandings of territory, culture and community, and to initiate a new sense of national identity that could ignite the fight for independence from the colonial yoke. At the same time, this process was integral to the building and preservation of nation-states in the imperial centres: the ascending and capitalist European nation-states needed their colonial Others (both subjected European territories and transcontinental possessions) to legitimize not only the exploitation of natural resources and human bodies as cheap labour, but also as imaginary foil—that social, cultural and political entity construed as inferior, as holding up the mirror reflecting back to the imperial centre its greatness and, especially, the unity and cohesiveness of the Nation.

Anderson's work has reconfigured studies on the relationship among Nations, nation-states and nationalism that were primarily grounded in historicist accounts of linear modes of development, whether from nation to nation-state by way of nationalism or vice versa.² His emphasis on the complexity of the network of material and symbolic

practices that gave rise to the Nation through the engendering of a sense of nation-ness and belonging (the “imagined community”) has a twofold importance. First, it has helped to demystify the notion of the organic nature of nations which, in the ironic commentary of Homi Bhabha, “lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye” (“Introduction” 1). Secondly, it has paved the way for a thorough interrogation of nation-formations that has forced us to rethink the domain of literary studies. His call to historicize the concept of the Nation is aligned with the works of other “modernists,” especially Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Eric Hobsbawm’s *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1992), Ernest Gellner’s *Thought and Change* (1964) and *Nations and Nationalism* (1983).

This position (the Nation as imagined and tied to its modernity) has come under attack from Anthony Smith. In *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) and *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (1996) Smith criticizes the “modernization” of the concept of the Nation.³ Although nation-states came into being from the eighteenth century on, in Smith’s view they were formed out of earlier bonding patterns that cannot be ignored altogether. While disclaiming essentialist notions of nation-ness, Smith, one of the most renowned scholars of the field, invokes the sets of myth, symbols and cultural practices, which he calls “*ethnie*,” that predate the Nation and are instrumental to its formation. This stress on the importance of the cultural and ethnic substratum upon which modern nations are founded refutes as excessive the privileging of the roles of industry, capitalism and modern bureaucracy in the modernists’ accounts. Smith’s preoccupation seems to foreground the affective importance of “passions” in the establishment of national interests and identities. Nevertheless, his argument does not undermine

Anderson's work. In his "Introduction," Anderson points out that the interrogation of nation-ness and nationalism requires the acknowledgement of their constructed-ness: "To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, *in what ways their meanings have changed over time*, and why, today, they command such *profound emotional legitimacy*" (4, emphasis added). But he is also careful not to assimilate cultural figurations to *ex nihilo* fabrication, and he criticizes Gellner's claim that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist" (1964, 169). As he justly points out, this argument implies that "'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations." "In fact," he adds, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (6).

Anderson sees the Nation as inextricably tied to the rise of print capitalism. The innovative approach of his study lies in the simultaneous interrogation of material and symbolic practices that contribute to form a new political and social consciousness. By drawing attention to the *mode* in which communities are imagined, he supersedes the traditional view of the Nation as representative of a "true" identity.⁴ From the beginning of his enquiry, he points out that he is interested in showing "why these particular cultural artefacts have aroused such deep attachments" (4). This emphasis on the embeddedness of emotional factors in the fashioning of cultural and communal formations shows how uncannily Anderson's work resonates with Ernst Renan's meditation on nation-ness in the late nineteenth century, and with his famous dictum that "A nation's existence is ... a daily plebiscite" (19).⁵ Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm's provocative question "why do nations hold on to their hoariness instead of celebrating one's youth?" also bears the

imprint of Ernst Renan's pronouncement that Nations rest on forgetfulness: "Yet the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (11).⁶

Ernst Renan's lecture "What is a Nation?" (1882) raises important questions about the meaning of the Nation; its significance is being recognized still today. Renan was less preoccupied to save the phenomenon of nations and nationalism than to interrogate it. This lecture, delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, should be placed in its proper context. Renan was deeply concerned about the nationalistic wave across Europe that appropriated categories of race, language, religion and geographical characteristics—mostly derived from the nineteenth-century explosion of studies in anthropology, linguistics and geography—to justify the annexation of lands and populations in the name of national belonging. Particularly, he was sadly disappointed by France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the loss of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Humanistic ideals and principles of Enlightenment carried out by the French Revolution—such as a people's right for self-determination—understandably underpin his argument. His belief in the universality of human consciousness, human nature and human rights against the pettiness of insular nationalistic politics that was sweeping throughout Europe could hardly be accommodated by current historians and social scientists in their debates on nations and nationalisms. Yet his interrogation of the Nation, which did not bow to the humanistic rhetoric of nationalist liberals, remains a challenging and fruitful analysis to the point that it was included in Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990).

However, it is not Renan's shaping of a Germanic pattern of the idea of nation formation out of German mythologies that I am stressing here; as Martin Thom has

pointed out, his preoccupation with the resurgence of the Germanic spirit owes much to the ideological disputes between Germanist and Romanist interpretations of French history, which were to anchor the tension between the values of Romanticism and Enlightenment (23). Rather, it is Renan's conceptual interrogation of the Nation and his genealogical tracings that stand out as an attempt, in Bhabha's words, to alter "the conceptual object itself" ("Introduction" 1990, 3):

But what is a nation? Why is Holland a nation, when Hanover, or the Grand Duchy of Parma, are not? How is it that France continues to be a nation, when the principle which created it has disappeared? How is it that Switzerland, which has three languages, two religions, and three or four races, is a nation, when Tuscany, which is so homogeneous, is not one? Why is Austria a state and not a nation? In what ways does the principle of nationality differ from that of races? (12)⁷

Unsettling commonly espoused notions, Renan refutes the idea that Nations may be aligned with dynasty, race, language, religion and natural frontiers.⁸ Some of his formulations are tinged with uncanny prescience of the rise of fascist nationalisms.⁹ Specifically, the genealogical tracing of the Nation raises important questions about its conceptual formation (and not its naturalness), thus exposing its constructed-ness and narration: "In the tenth century, in the first *chansons de geste* ... all the inhabitants of France are French" (10).¹⁰ The Nation is not only 'reflected' in a literary act, but also created through it. Furthermore, the sentimentality that it requires to sustain itself cannot be borne solely by a community of interests ("a *Zollverein* is not a *patrie*," 18) but it has to be "imagined" (Anderson 5-6).¹¹ Despite the romantic slippage of his conclusion ("A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle" 19), Renan's analysis foregrounds the Nation as discourse, where the present-day consent is not the transparent reflection of the desire to

live together, but a technology engendered to foster common values and interests in which both national memories and forgetfulness of the past play an essential role.

Not surprisingly, Renan's essay is inflected in the masculine. The bond and community that he discusses as constitutive of the Nation is, unquestionably, one of men. Women, despite their central contributions to the French Revolution and their visibility in reclaiming a political identity (*Les Suffragettes*) are absent from his discussion. However, it is surprising that Anderson's delineation of patterns of nation-formation also does not account for women's presence or for the gendering and sexualization of the discourse of the Nation. Women remain definitely a blind spot in most theoretical works, including Bhabha's. Ann Laura Stoler and Anne McClintock are among the few to attempt to refigure the formation of a national imaginary by investigating the politics of gender and sexuality.

Stoler re-examines the process of nation formation within a discourse of European imperialism that is posited upon the relationship between 'mother country' (metropolitan centre) and colonies. She argues that the "gender politics of imperial cultures, colonial authority and racial distinctions were structured in gendered terms" (344). Stoler notes that the politics of gender and sexuality were instrumental not only to the way the colony was administered but also to the identity of the rulers, that is to the way colonial powers imagined themselves. The boundary between subject and citizen in the colonial economy was an unstable one and "categories of 'colonizer' and 'colonized' were secured through forms of sexual control" (345). Through a detailed account of the way women, white European as well as indigenous Others, were made instruments of the racial politics of colonial rule through the administration of sexuality, Stoler implicitly challenges former

theories of nation-formation and nationalism. The policing of sexuality (sexual activity, reproduction and marriage), which also entailed a careful management of gendered immigration, disrupts the andro- and Eurocentric bias of accounts of colonial and national histories.

More explicitly, Anne McClintock is the first to point out that debates about nationalism have either ignored or insufficiently considered gender and sexuality as constitutive to nation formations and to the rise of nineteenth-century nationalisms. She takes to task the most prominent theorists of the field, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, for disregarding any connection between the Woman Question and the birth of the nation-state, Homi Bhabha for relegating women to the status of “male appendage” in the discourse of the Nation and the rise of nationalisms, and Franz Fanon for containing women’s agency in nationalist struggles within the framework of “agency by designation” (98).

Nations and nationalisms, McClintock argues, are always predicated on gender and sexual difference, and she calls for “a theory of gender power necessary to understand how nationalism from the beginning has been constituted as a gendered discourse” (90). Borrowing from the iconography of familial and domestic space, nineteenth-century British nationalist rhetoric sanctioned social hierarchy and imperial domination by naturalizing the trope of the family.¹² The putative natural category of Woman as mother/nurturer and wife posited an organic unity that was made to slip instrumentally into the “family of the nation” and of the empire. The organic unity of the family represented a microcosm of interests that was reflected on a larger scale in the complementary interests and duties (labour divisions) of various social classes, or, within

the imperial project, of the various members (colonies) of the empire. This strategic rhetorical move enabled the dominant classes to depict “social hierarchy as natural and familial” (91). In an age, McClintock argues, when not only space but also time was measured, categorized and secularized through the institutionalization of History, the evolutionary theory of Darwin became a provident instrument for the production of the ‘family of Man’ and, therefore, hierarchies within a Eurocentric historical discourse.¹³ While Woman was figured as the repository of domestic and familial values, she was at the same time condemned by her reproductive function and easily frozen into an atavistic and immutable image of nature.¹⁴ On the other hand, man was thrust into history, thus becoming the “progressive agent of national modernity” (92). Women, like the colonized and the working class, were thus figured as archaic against the modern and historical nature of men, and gender difference became vital to the emergence and maintaining of a national discourse within the economy of the empire. Yet “there is no single narrative of the nation” and, as McClintock points out, “different groups (genders, classes, ethnicities, generations, and so on) do not experience the myriad national formations in the same way” (93).

Stoler’s and McClintock’s work is invaluable in bringing into visibility not only women’s place and agency within the discourse of nation-formation but, especially, the naturalizing process through which women have been deemed as symbolic bearers of national culture, and the ways in which they have been positioned in a metaphoric relationship to the Nation against the metonymic one accorded to men. The gendering and sexualization of the national imaginary as aligned with patriarchal norms and interests strings a powerful chord with feminist writers whose work is grounded in a

feminist investigation of the nexus woman/culture/nation and an experimental writing practice directed at the subversion of these norms. I will return to these specific concerns in my chapters on Phyllis Webb and Daphne Marlatt.

Stoler's and McClintock's work participates in the important shift of critical discourse in studies of nationalism and nation-formation. Drawing attention to the symbolic markers and cultural constructions of nation-ness in the contingent specificity of temporal geographies, their analyses contribute to re-definitions of the area of investigation from 'event' in history, with its assumed transparency of interpretation, to discourse formation and representation. Bhabha notes that this movement implies a re-conceptualization of the object of study itself: the Nation is in its narrative address, in the "textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems" which delineate the margins of the text, while drawing attention to the porosity of its borders ("Introduction" 2). By re-conceiving the nation-space not as a pre-existing entity but one being articulated through its elements, Bhabha draws attention to the performativity of the nation, its language and rhetoric, and to a processual enactment of cultural/national identity which unhinges the Nation from the notion of 'origin.' Similarly, British communication theorist Stuart Hall underlines the effects of understanding the much contested social category of identity as "production" rather than "rediscovery." The dream of origin is a fantasy which can only be unsettled by re-conceptualizing cultural identity not as an essence but a positioning "which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 395). Cultural identity, and thus the national imaginary in which it is grounded, is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (394). In this reformulation, identity and belonging

become unstable categories that can account for the diverse allegiances, relations and attachments that traverse the diasporic experience. As Bhabha points out, this shift brings the obscured narratives of alternative constituencies into visibility and draws attention to the “Janus-faced” ambivalence of the Nation, the porosity of its borders (the margins of the Nation always inviting transgression), as well as the tension between competing discourses ‘to fix’ its meaning. Bhabha’s statement can be brought to bear upon the specificity of Canadian historical conditions.

Imagining Canada

Colonial Enterprise and Nation-building

The growth of a national literature ... must ... be the genuine product of the national imagination and invention ... and we are now a nation ...

—Charles Mair, “The New Canada”, 1875

In Canada, the discursive formation of the national imagining (Canadian culture as a technology of nation-ness) has been a conscious yet unstable process, exemplifying what Bhabha has termed the tension between the “pedagogical” in the “narrative address” of the Nation and the “performative” (Bhabha 1994a). Although governmental policies and commissions were, since the beginning of the Canadian state, central to the definition of Canadian-ness, contestatory practices of feminist groups and racialized minorities (in what is generically referred to as identity politics in the late 1970s and 1980s) have drawn the attention of cultural critics to the complexity of the processes of identification (recognition) of national affiliation. With the increasing mobility of national subjects and transnational migrations, cultural identity and diversity have been important coalescing

sites of mobilization of radical political activism in First World countries, as well as being subject to challenge in public debates.

The relation of Canadianness to literature has marked the very beginning of Canadian criticism. In A.J.M. Smith's words "colonialism is a spirit that gratefully accepts a place of subordination, that looks elsewhere for its standards of excellence and is content to imitate with a modest and timid conservatism the products of a parent tradition" (74); as such, the literary production of pre-Confederation British North America was "colonial." Yet Canadian subjects never passively accepted the status of colony and with the achievement of independence the issue of culture and national identity came to the front. Nationalism in the Confederation age was blatant in its attempt to shape a Canadian Nation and ethos. But the myth of the development "from colony to nation" (as Irving Layton's homonymous poem will wryly declare) is itself a construction that risks at best complacency and self-delusion if it does not examine critically the process through which social and political forces have engineered instrumental notions of culture and literature.¹⁵

In 1857 D'Arcy McGee,¹⁶ the founder of *The New Era*,¹⁷ responded to Judge Haliburton who, in a lecture given in England, claimed that "there was no literature in the colonies because they had no past, no infancy, no youth" ("A Canadian Literature" 41). McGee published a series of articles fostering the cause of a national literature that would embody the values of the newly formed country and would differentiate itself both from the noble English tradition, with which it still retained privileged ties, and, most importantly, from the America south. In "The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion" (1867) he calls to the public "to consider with what intellectual forces and appliances,

with what quantity and kind of mental common stock, we are about to set up for ourselves a distinct national existence in north America” (75). And in “Protection for Canadian Literature” (1858) he re-affirms the idea that:

Every country, every nationality, every people, must create and foster a National Literature, if it is their wish to preserve a distinct individuality from other nations. If precautions are not taken to secure this end, the distinctive character and features of a people must disappear; they cannot survive the storm of time and the rude blasts of civil commotion. (43)

D’Arcy McGee was not the only one to express concern for the rise of a Canadian literature that would signify the “new national character” (“The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion” 75) and for the creation of a cultural apparatus that would help “to set up for ourselves a distinct national existence in North America” (75). Edward Hartley Dewart also maintained that “national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character” (“Introductory Essay to *Selections from Canadian Poets*” 50) and bemoaned the “tendency to sectionalism and disintegration” (51) among English colonists that did not nourish the rise of a literature of national union. John Gibson appealed to the reading public of *The Literary Garland* to give support to “the only representative of Canadian periodical literature” (“Introduction to the New Series of *The Literary Garland*” 37), thereby assisting Canadian literature. But many voices were also raised to lament the deplorable state of Canadian publishing and distribution; the necessity for the few talented writers to depend on the literary markets, at the time centred in London and New York; the proliferation of romance and sentimental fiction, especially by women, bound to corrupt the national spirit and taste and hinder the growth of a more dignified literature; the increasing facility of transport and communication, which worked against the forming of a distinctive literature; and the dangerous vicinity of

American culture as well as the lack of a critical press. From the beginning of Confederation, while John A. Macdonald was implementing the National Policy to provide the country with political unity and an economic basis, artists and writers were called upon to take up “the role of nation-builder” (Frank Watt 239) and to inscribe a national imaginary into the history of the newly formed country. How was Canada imagined? And what social action did the arts perform during this age?

While landscape and environment were certainly defining elements in the settlers’ experience, the Northern wilderness and the North as the expression of a superior race became a potent metaphor for Canadian identity. The idea of the North became co-extensive with the myth of the Anglo-Saxon race, and it also attracted the interest of American critics:

But Canada, with its adjuncts, is a land of equal form and colour with Mexico, its romance is of a healthier type, and our sympathy therewith would certainly be far stronger. [...] why does not some one of [our novelists], or more, turn their eye northward to this almost untrodden but inviting region of great forests, great waters, great heroes, great events, and great episode, and adventure a literary effort in that direction? [...] Who knows but the coming “American novel,” for which we are all expectant, is to be a Canadian novel, and that it is to appear out of the North?

(The Literary World, ctd. in George Stewart’s “Canada in Fiction” 1887, 123)

In “The True North Strong and Free,” Carl Berger traces the development of the myth of the north, which originated in the political Canada First Movement of the 1860s, as carrying values of strength and freedom but also racial determinism. Canada’s northernness was the rationale for the breeding of a strong and independent race that valued liberty and self-determination, unlike the south, a region which was equated to erratic behaviour, libertinism, effeminacy and disease. A popularized social Darwinism

helped explain and disseminate the northern race concept by imparting to it “scientific authority” (Berger 19). The idea also served to differentiate Canada more sharply from the United States, whose migratory flows from southern countries had “degenerated” the originary Anglo-Saxon colonial race. At the same time, it had to accommodate the inclusion of French Canadians on the base of common racial backgrounds by foregrounding the northernness of Brittany and Normandy as the originary points of French migratory waves to Canada.

In *The House of Difference*, a study on Canadian cultural politics, Eva MacKey further explores the ways in which visual art relied on the natural environment to construe Canada as a virile (and therefore male-gendered) nation. This construction, as Berger also remarks, echoed the racist rhetoric of the Canada First movement.¹⁸ Natural descriptions abound in the poetry of William Wilfred Campbell, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott and Charles G.D. Roberts, and fictional works teem with northern landscapes. Charles Mair, a member of the Confederation Poets group as well as of the Canada First movement, noted that “to be characteristic, [a national literature] must taste of the wood” (“The New Canada” 109), and the paintings of the Group of Seven also projected the image of Canada as a virgin land and a northern country—the north as a mirror of national character. Lawren Harris of the Group of Seven noted:

We came to know that it is only through the deep and vital experience of its total environment that a people identifies itself with its land and gradually a deep and satisfying awareness develops. We were convinced that no virile people could remain subservient to, and dependent upon the creations in art of other people ... To us there was also the strange brooding sense of another nature fostering a new race and a new age. (cited in Berger 1966, 21)

While the first sketches of the Canadian landscape drew primarily on northern Ontario and rural Quebec, the Group of Seven's subsequent interest in the Rocky Mountains and the Arctic prompted the paintings to be seen as "national." In MacKey's reading of the Group of Seven's paintings, the "wild and unpeopled northern landscapes" (40)—a wilderness that is erased of Aboriginal presence—became a potent symbol of Canadian identification that would persist until post World War II industrialization. Stripped of its racist basis, the wild northernness would resurface in the thematic criticism (the conceptualization of the monstrosity of nature and victimhood as traits of the national psyche) which was best exemplified by Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden* (1971) and Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972).

In literature, the endeavour of the Confederation poets was also the celebration of the untamed north, as well as the projection of the settler's mind onto a landscape that unified the Canadian experience and effectively erased gender, ethnic and class difference. Here Aboriginals are not the 'absent Other', but rather their image is appropriated and normalized. Their romantic containment within an aesthetic practice would also serve to perpetuate the image of a compassionate Canada in its treatment of the 'Indian problem' as differentiated from the ruthlessness of its southern neighbour. D.C. Scott is probably the most interesting figure in this sense. His idealistic portraits of Indian life and Indian innocence,¹⁹ which stretch to a mourning for their passing cultures,²⁰ is at odds with his position in the federal civil service in the Department of Indian Affairs, which was responsible for the institutionalization of residential schools.²¹

Did topics of aboriginal life and the subject of 'Canada' make a literature necessarily Canadian? Did they relieve Canadian culture from the burden of its colonial

past? The Canadianness of Canadian culture and literature has been a constant preoccupation in the formation of Canadian arts and has been often conveniently explained by the ‘newness’ of the country: given its youth, the Nation lacks the confidence and cultural substratum that countries of the Old World simply inherit. But as I pointed out in my first section, all nations are young and all are constructions. They do not evolve naturally from older entities and their significance is constantly re-negotiated. Despite the increasingly autonomous status of the country, the efforts of the Canadian cultural establishment to forge an identity of its own, and mark a new beginning in history, reveals a lingering anxiety about its colonial origins.

McGee frequently expressed his concern for the lack of a cultural apparatus, such as a local publisher, literary newspapers, periodicals and reviews, which would give a significant outlet to local writers and, especially, would help create and shape a national literature of significant value. What McGee laments, echoing many of his contemporaries, is the lack of a technology of textual production (canon) that would engender a discourse of nationness. In “Protection for Canadian Literature” (1858) he remarks, referring to himself in the third person:

Mr McGee has taken the first step in this matter by giving notice of an enquiry whether the ministry have opened or intend to open any negotiations with the Imperial Government with a view to relieve Canadian Book Publishers from the restrictions of the Copyright Act. This course of Administration in this respect will be watched with anxiety by every one who has a heart for the future nationality of Canada. (44)

McGee’s awareness about relationships with the government, and his attentiveness toward the material condition that would engender the emergence of a national literature, will develop into concerns and pressures for an increasing role of the

State in the formation and protection of the arts. This will result in more intense and refined state cultural policies in the first decades of the new century, which will lead eventually to the Canadian Authors Association in 1921.

Culture and the State

O Canada, O Canada, Oh, can
A day go by without new authors springing
To paint the native maple, and to plan
More ways to set the selfsame welkin ringing?
—F.R. Scott, “The Canadian Authors Meet”, 1927

State involvement in cultural production dates back to the beginning of Confederation, and even before the Union if we consider policies adopted by the British government to consolidate a sense of ‘Britishness’ among its colonists. In *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (1990), Maria Tippett criticizes the excessive importance that the Massey Commission is believed to have had in shaping Canadian culture. In her book she shows the richness of Canadian cultural activities and their relationship with federal institutions before the Massey Commission in order “to challenge the popular view that the government patronage of the arts began only with the founding of the Canada Council in 1957” (91).

Governmental interventions, Tippett argues, started with the direct actions of governors general who definitely gave direction to the country’s cultural life. It was with the arrival of the Marquis of Lorne and his artist-wife Princess Louise that the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts was established in 1880 “for the purpose of cultivating and improving the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, and industrial design” (Tippett 64). It was modeled after Britain’s Royal Academy (1768), inspired in turn by France’s Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (1648), and it enabled the creation of the

National Gallery of Canada (1880). The Historic Landmarks Association of Canada was created in 1907 to engender an historical consciousness among immigrants; organizations fostering a Canadian folk-culture through the founding of festivals (such as the Dominion Drama Festival in 1932) were also federally supported. British governors, as well as Prime Ministers, were especially concerned about the “rawness” of Canadian cultural life and the risk that ethnic heterogeneity and conflicting interests between east and west would endanger the unity and British affiliation of the country. To make Canada British they made sure to create a tradition normalizing English and French interests and assimilating diversity. Ethnic (that is non WASP) elements were at best ignored and “almost any organization which patterned itself after a British model could expect viceregal support” (Tippett 68).

Prime Ministers were also active in promoting cultural life, both in private life (e.g. in attending events) and in public talks. Sir Wilfrid Laurier spoke in favour of government support for the arts; R.B. Bennett, during the Depression, allocated federal funds to provide for the building of the Winnipeg Auditorium and resuscitated abolished titular honours (such as knighthoods and officers of the Order of the British Empire). Nevertheless, he denied support of W.A. Deacon’s proposal to subsidize a committee to administer pensions, cash prizes and literary awards for artists and writers. Mackenzie King, also vocal in his public encouragement of a federal Department of Fine Arts, rejected J.S. Woodsworth’s proposal to provide financial support for destitute authors.

Government involvement took the form of indirect assistance or direct commissions and the hiring of artists and writers for specific purposes (e.g. national holidays and pageants). It spanned many areas and activities. Sponsorship of pageants

and ceremonies was most directly related to national celebrations. It also built on the encouragement of cultural activities fostered by private companies, such as the Canadian Pacific Railway's sponsorship of festivals celebrating folk-songs, dances and handicrafts of French-Canadians or "ethno-cultural" groups such as Ukrainian, Italian, Icelandic, German and Scandinavian immigrants, but the intent of strengthening British and imperial ties was more evident. Exhibitions and trade fairs served the function of performance of Canadianness, beginning with the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations at the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park in 1851, followed by the British Empire Exposition at Wembley in 1924 and the famous Paris Exposition of 1937. The spectacularization of Canadian culture was necessary to project a national image of Canada in the context of international relations, but also to forge a political identity counteracting the economic strength and the hegemonic aspirations of both United States and Great Britain. The Department of Trade and Commerce's Canadian Exhibition and Publicity Bureau (later to become the Canadian Motion Picture Bureau) was established in 1916. This was the first federal film agency in the world, established prior to the founding of the National Film Board in 1939 with John Grierson as its commissioner; it advertised one-reel travelogues and industrial short films for public use. Radio, as a medium, also attracted the attention of the government through the expansion of the early private programs and the Canadian National Railway broadcasts (the historical drama series "The Romance of Canada" began in 1930s). The Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission was established in 1932 and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1936.

The first federal intervention in the production of a national literature was probably the founding of the Canadian Society of Authors in 1899 for the creation of a separate Canadian market. Canada did not adhere to the Bern copyright convention, and this made the protection of Canadian works from pirating in the United States and Great Britain very difficult.²² In 1912 a group of Toronto writers formed a syndicate to attend to the problem. Canadian Writers' Limited (or Writers Syndicate) could not settle the issue, and the lobbying for revisions to the Copyright Act became more forceful with the Canadian Authors Association (1921). This became probably the most effective organization in promoting (and constructing) Canadian literature through the organization of reading tours, the promotion of the Canadian Book Week (1921), featuring readings and presentations by booksellers and publishers, and the publication of *Canadian Bookman* as its official organ. The Association also published dramas by Canadian playwrights in such volumes as *One Act Plays by Canadian Authors* (1926), and established the *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (1936). The Governor General's Award for Literature was founded in 1936. It became the major literary award together with the Lorne Pierce Medal (1926), presented biennially by the Royal Society of Canada. Tippet remarks that these organizations were national only in name. The Canadian Authors Association, for example, established branches across the country but was run by members residing in Toronto and Montreal. So were the members of the Royal Canadian Academy and, as mentioned earlier, the members of the Group of Seven.

In the post World War II era cultural nationalism was burgeoning. Although moments of high nationalism, as I have briefly outlined in my previous sections, have marked both the Confederation age and the interwar period, it was in the second postwar

age that state patronage reached unprecedented levels and that the implementation of a State cultural policy expanded governmental presence in the arts. As Jody Berland remarks, “the connection between the arts and national defence—between autonomous art and an autonomous nation—was a fundamental component of postwar reconstruction and continued to lay the rhetorical foundation for cultural policy” (22).

The most important event, which would influence the future relationship between State and the Arts, was undoubtedly the Massey Commission. Appointed in 1949 with the title of Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, the Massey Commission has been justly regarded as one of the defining chapters in Canadian cultural history. Although the original mandate was “to investigate broadcasting, federal cultural institutions, government relations with voluntary cultural associations, and federal university scholarships” (Litt 3), it became a strategic site for the fostering of cultural nationalism. Enlarging its role to “a general survey of the arts, letters, and sciences in Canada” (*Report* 3), it soon became known as the “Culture Commission” and its status gained an almost reverential respect on the part of the general public.²³ Subsequently, its importance was seen in its ability to provide Canadian culture with a distinctiveness that would separate it, in a protectionist way, from its southern neighbour. It is well known, and abundantly documented in Paul Litt’s study *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (1992), that the commission reflected the interests and preferences of an anglophile elite who stood behind its foundation “to protect their interests in public broadcasting and federal cultural institutions” (4). In this sense it was “a formative exercise” in sustaining these interests. It represented the values of defenders of high-brow culture (which would reproduce the existing hierarchical

societal structure) against mass-culture (symbolizing unchecked democratization) and was fervently opposed to the Americanization of Canadian culture. It is remembered with praise by cultural nationalists, while it is disparaged as conservative by those who believed in the democratizing value of mass-culture. Paul Litt rightly notes that the label of conservative does not carry the same meaning across time and social spaces, and he prefers to suggest that the Commission was representative of liberal humanist values. Whatever the value attached to it, it is undeniable that the Commission fostered an unprecedented state intervention in culture, science and the arts. The strong federal presence in the arts is certainly one of the most distinctive traits of Canadian culture, separating it from both the British and American counterparts.

The Report was published in 1951. The most important recommendation was the creation of the Canada Council, which would handle grants and scholarships for artists and scholars, relations with national voluntary associations and information on Canadian cultural affairs. Furthermore, higher federal funding for universities, as well as increased scholarships and aid to research, would ensure the enhancement of high culture; the CBC was to retain its role of public broadcaster and would continue controlling private networks that, otherwise, would become part of the American system and not serve as outlets for the national coverage of CBC. Other commissions followed: the Fowler Commission (1955) on radio, television broadcasting and magazine publishing, the O'Leary Commission (1961) on magazine publishing, and the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission (1963) on bilingualism and biculturalism. But the Canada Council remained the major apparatus through which the federal government could manage, as well as support and control, the state of the arts.

Whose Imagined Canada? Dominant and Minority Nationalisms

In the postwar era, despite efforts to solidify the image of the unitary, cohesive Nation in the mind of its subjects, the Canadian polity wrestled with the centripetal forces that always threatened to expose the fissures of the national text. The rise of the United States as a world power and the critical role that it played in the Canadian economy increased anxieties about national identity and sovereignty that reified culture as the marker of political borders. Meanwhile, the dissemination of Americanness through mass-culture, contaminating the image of 'Britishness' that many Canadians still tried to project, reinforced the cultural imaginary associated with the "garrison mentality" which was thematized by Frye and Atwood. An extreme example was the 1976 attack of Keith Richardson on the poets associated with the American Black Mountain School, primarily *Tish*, for their "anarchic individualism" and indifference to "social tradition" (*Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish*).²⁴ A follower of Robin Mathews, Richardson articulated the anxieties of Mathews's conservative nationalism. Furthermore, a strong regionalism construing Ontario as 'the centre' suggested a centralism of the current politics of culture, whereby constituencies outside central Canada were simply made invisible; the furthering of a sense of regional identities was to defend the specificity of local values against the centralist policies of Ottawa.

What becomes apparent through these controversies is the inability of the polity to come to terms with the heterogeneity of the social fabric and the multiplicity of socio-cultural identities which could not be accommodated within the binary logic of self and other (insider and outsider) onto which the political and cultural elite held. The assimilationist strategies of the state were disintegrating and the centre would not hold;

this crisis would become apparent with the outbreak of the FLQ activities during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, the most visible challenge to Canadian unity came from the threat of Quebec secessionism; in 1963 the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was appointed to address a dangerous, rising Quebec nationalism. While the political machine was working toward the celebrations of the Centennial, Quebec's 'minority status' obtained official recognition, as well as substantial provincial autonomy, to legitimize the sign of Canada within the discourse of the "two founding nations."²⁵ Following the recommendations of the commission, a policy of official bilingualism was legally encoded with the passing of the Official Languages Act in 1969. The process was facilitated by the Quiet Revolution, which had made possible the transition of Quebec from a rural country firmly controlled by the Catholic Church to a modern, liberal and secular province. Ironically, this transformation deprived the Canadian imaginary of the solid anchorage in a past of 'tradition' which, although ambivalently construed as Other, blurred into myth the lore of colonial origins. But by proposing an official policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, the act (Appendix to the *Report* of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, volume IV, section entitled "Others" on cultural and ethnic pluralism) also re-contained the increasing visibility of 'ethnic' minorities, as well as First Nations activism, within the policy of "official languages."

When the possible autonomy of Quebec became close to reality and the revolts against a polity construed as representative of colonial powers materialized again through the FLQ activities (October Crisis), the power of the State was articulated both through military intervention and rhetorical closure. In the official speech broadcast on October

16, 1970 Prime Minister Trudeau announced the establishment of the War Measures Act and the suspension of the Canadian Bill of Rights. In fact, the speech performed an interpellation of the Canadian citizen. By re-inscribing the “tolerance” and “compassion” of the Canadian citizenry, Trudeau effectively solidified the image of a benevolent Canada which underlay the historical narrative of the colonial conquest and the relationship of the colonial establishment with aboriginal peoples. The narrative frame of the speech functioned as a representational device constructing the meaning of Canada as a democracy where the rule of law is guarantor and protector of civil liberties and whereby the values of democracy, individual liberty, tolerance and compassion became markers of ‘Canadianness.’ Ironically, in order to defend those liberties civil rights were suspended (the War Measures Act) under the ‘threat of insurrection’.

In *Fragile Freedoms: Human Rights and Dissent in Canada* (1981), Thomas R. Berger analyses the events that led to the enforcement of the War Measures Act and the military occupation of Montreal and Quebec City, and argues that “the October crisis of 1970 was ... the end of Canadian innocence” (190). Berger criticizes the acquiescence of the House of Commons and the majority of the Canadian public in what is now considered an over-reactive and all-too-hasty recourse to drastic measures of the Canadian government for a state of “apprehended insurrection” of which there was never evidence. Interestingly, Berger asks: “But should we be astonished? After all, in 1942, when anti-Japanese sentiment had overwhelmed the country, the only voice raised in Parliament in defence of the Japanese-Canadians was that of parliamentarian and socialist politician Angus MacInnis” (212).²⁶

The “defence” to which Berger refers was less adamant than the comment allows (Cohn 1985; Miki 2004).²⁷ Nevertheless, what I find interesting in the parallel to which Berger draws attention is the way in which ‘threat’ is conceptualized. Without any material reality of an imminent danger for the Canadian State (no Japanese Canadian plot was ever proved during WWII and there was never any evidence that the FLQ terrorist attacks were part of a larger and well-organized political structure working to overthrow the Canadian State), ‘threat’ is articulated rhetorically as that which questions, or challenges, the dominant image of a unitary Canada benevolent toward its minorities (who are thereby constituted as outsiders to the Nation). The dispossession of Japanese Canadians and the war measures adopted against FLQ terrorism were not the result of an escalation of events.²⁸ Rather, they depended on the construction of a Canadian imaginary which sanctioned the Anglo-colonial elite and lineage as the ‘true Canada’, against which all other groups (French-colonial as well as other ethnicities) were successively ‘accepted’ or assimilated.

The challenge of Quebecois nationalism was not entirely violent. A cultural nationalism was already loud in promoting the cause of Quebec secession and in exposing the colonial status of Quebec under the rule of English Canada.²⁹ Pierre Vallières’s *Nègres Blancs d’Amérique: Autobiographie Précoce d’un “Terroriste” Québécois* (1969) was probably the most influential manifesto of the anger and restlessness of Quebecois cultural nationalism, and the politics of language was taken to task by poet Michèle Lalonde in “Speak White” (1974). Since 1967-1970, following the recommendations of the *Reports* of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Quebec’s cultural restlessness has been the focus of a cultural politics

aimed at bridging the differences between English and French Canada. Funding became generous for Quebec literature and arts, and the excitement produced by the new cultural climate generated a fertile and exuberant field of cultural production. Indeed, bilingualism as a new distinctive feature of Canadianness would also become apparent through the enhancement of translation programmes going beyond the translation of official documents. In 1972 the Canada Council created the Translation Grants Programme and in 1975 the Literary Translators' Association of Canada was founded. Since then, the importance accorded to the translation of literary and cultural texts has steadily risen, a sign of the increasing importance and dissemination of texts in translation. Yet the disparity in the number of translations between the two languages (translations from English into French are predominantly of governmental documents, while translations from French into English are predominantly literary) also re-affirms the hierarchization of Canadian society underlying the foundation of translation programmes.

The Politics of Citizenship: Radical Counter-Discourses, 1960s-1980s

While competing nationalisms took on the central stage of Canadian cultural politics, radical voices began to critique the liberal assumption underlying the politics of citizenship of the Canadian State—a critique which is articulated by the cultural poetics that are the subject of this study. From the mid 1960s to the 1990s diverse constituencies, such as First Nations, ethnic minorities, women, gays and lesbians have taken to task the liberal subjectivity of the citizen as inherited from the English civic tradition. Citizenship is a central organizing principle for the management of 'the people,' as the exclusion of Chinese and South-Asian immigrants, as well as the second-class status to which First

Nations were relegated by the 1880 Indian Act, show. In the hundred years separating Confederation from the celebration of the Centennial, the politics of citizenship of the Canadian nation-state materialized through a technology of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, which became increasingly the object of contestation.³⁰ Landmark events were the passing of the Indian Act in 1880, which conferred a 'special status' to First Nations and instituted Indian reserves. The paternalistic and colonial impulse behind the Act was the assimilation of 'Indians' to the Canadian body, the eradication of indigenous cultural and spiritual practices, which entailed the suppression of Native languages and the conversion to Christianity, with residential schools being a potent tool of acculturation. Indeed, since its conception the Indian Act framed Native populations as second-class citizens unable to manage their destiny and presumably grateful for the 'benevolence' and 'tolerance' of the Canadian State, especially if compared to the spectre of the more visibly violent practices in the United States. The implementation of a head-tax for Chinese immigrants in 1885 also points to the centrality of ethnicity as a primary anxiety for the new State and the creation of an anglophile "imagined community." While other groups were targeted, the tools of implementation were also adjusted to state interests: Japanese were not subject to a head-tax, since Canada obtained a privileged entry to Japan's markets, and Blacks were openly discriminated against yet not legally disenfranchised, a powerful differentiation in the Canadian national imaginary from the southern neighbour. Restrictions to Chinese immigration were lifted in 1947, when the Canada Citizenship Act was passed and both Chinese and South-Asian immigrants obtained the right to vote. They were followed by Japanese Canadians in 1948, Inuit in 1950, and First Nations in 1960. The War Measures Act, which abrogated civil liberties,

had been implemented first during WWI, then in 1942 (with the suspension of civil rights of Japanese Canadians) and later in 1970, as described earlier. It was finally repealed in 1988, at the same time that the federal government agreed to sign for the official apology and partial compensation of the victims as demanded by the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement. In 1982 the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was passed to address the danger of infringement of freedoms. With the 1988 Multiculturalism Act multiculturalism became the official policy of Canada. Yet the Act has been critiqued by minoritized constituencies for re-inscribing the binary of a central, normative (WASP) Canadian citizen, against which other 'ethnic' groups are measured, and for covering the deep inequalities in the social fabric (Kamboureli 1993; Derksen 1994, 1995, 2002). Roy Kiyooka's poetic and artistic practices are the first radical critique of the racialization of ethnic Others and bring into visibility the constitutiveness of 'race' to the discourse of the Nation.

Furthermore, since the 1960s First Nations communities have been active in challenging constitutional notions of sovereignty. Activism of the Red Power Movement, which cut across Canada and the United States, gave visibility to the indigenous cause and made possible the first formulation of Aboriginal rights. Indigenous peoples advanced claims on the lands they inhabited before the arrival of European powers; in working toward treaty negotiations, they had asked for self-determination, self-government and social justice. Some land claims have been settled yet many remain objects of contestation, especially since the NAFTA has widened the danger of capitalist encroachment on Native lands by trans-national corporate powers—a reality that Roy Kiyooka and George Bowering address in *October's Piebald Skies and Other Lacunae*

and *Rocky Mountain Foot* respectively.³¹ In addition, the social inequalities that affect First Nations both in reserves and in urban centres are still part of hot debates in Canadian public life, as well as the court cases put forward against the injustices and violence suffered through the residential school system.

With Phyllis Webb's and Daphne Marlatt's poetics we encounter the first radical challenge to the encoding of gender and sexuality as powerful determinants of the liberal structure of the State. The radicalness of their poetics can be understood through a careful consideration of the entrenched hetero-normativity in cultural and political language. With the re-structuring of gender and sexual relations after the end of WWII, the increased visibility acquired by gays and lesbians, as well as by women who had left the domestic space and entered the labour forces, brought with it strategies of sexual regulations that would affect "class, gender, sexual and State relations" (Kinsman 157). To ensure the hetero-sexist structure of Canadian society one of the first acts was the criminalization of homosexuality in the Criminal Code and "national-security" campaigns, while women were re-directed toward the nuclear family unit by lowering the wages of female labour and making facilities for day-care unavailable. Gary Kinsman notes that "in 1948, a section on 'criminal sexual psychopaths' was added to the Canadian Criminal Code" (183) and "the new 1952 Canadian Immigration Act treated homosexuals as 'subversives'" (170). This process of criminalization of homosexuality echoed similar policies adopted both in Great Britain and the United States.

A report produced in England in 1950s—the *Wolfenden Report*—had a major influence in the process that led to the reforms of sexual regulation in Canada in 1960s.³² In Canada, the 1969 Criminal Code Reform followed the lines indicated by the

Wolfenden Report and its more liberal tolerance in what was the de-criminalization of homosexuals, who were reclassified together with prostitutes, juvenile sex offenders and women seeking abortion as “sick” or “inadequate” (Kinsman 267). The Reform was passed only after hot debates had dominated the media, the House of Commons and justice and legal affairs committees, the record of which “may be the most heterosexist document in Canadian governmental history” (George Smith, cited in Kinsman 267). Meanwhile grassroots activists from gay communities made their voices heard and kept the debate—and the need for increased visibility in public representation—going. Yet Trudeau’s famous assertion in 1967 that “there is no place for the State in the bedrooms of the nation,” uttered in the name of the “new morality” of the “Just Society” (Kinsman 266), could barely disguise the fact that the very strict definition of the private and the broad confines of the public in terms of homosexual behaviour still granted the State and police forces ample powers to police and regulate sexuality to defend, and enforce, a heterosexist norm.³³

The analysis of the legal debates around the regulation of sexuality that Kinsman performs shows the centrality of language and representation in the conceptualization of sexuality and gender relations, and deconstructs the naturalization of gender roles in the organization of the nation-state. The elaborate definition in legal terms of what constitutes a public or a private act goes beyond received assumptions of Victorian ideology and patriarchal values: it shows how the spatialization of gender and sexuality is a rhetorical act which depends on a complex structure of images, utterances, beliefs and anxieties on which the state apparatus relies to contain, and produce, its subjects. What becomes apparent through this brief outline is the tension between a Canadian national

imaginary and a politics of citizenship that is instrumental to the policing of the construed Canadian subject. The hot debates around civic rights and freedoms are only partially informed by the logic of the official (read mainstream) public sphere. Groups affiliated with diverse positions do not comply with easy categorizations of margin and centre, though this was also part of the critical language of the past three decades. Rather than being reified by an oppositional politics, activist groups engage in a politics of dissent which draws attention to the border zones of the national text and the blurred categories that resist the assimilation into the national subject-citizenry. The critical attention that writers and artists pay to language and representation gives to the cultural a privileged position in problematizing the images and the rhetoric of nationness circulating through diverse social domains. Not surprisingly, it was the energy and controversial nature of many academic (and non) conferences that drew together the cultural and the political, thus generating an energized field of action straddling the artistic, the literary and the critical, while often spurring the indignation and criticism in mainstream avenues.

Poetics was at the centre of conferences such as the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference, the 1978 Writers in Dialogue in Toronto and the 1979 Writing in Our Time in Vancouver. Language and the writing act were primary concerns of these conferences, which indirectly challenged the canon and mainstream aesthetic as they had been formulated by the literary establishment of central Canada, as well as the much contested Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel in 1978. Gender issues and feminist challenges to patriarchal discourse were first debated at the Dialogue Conference/Colloque Dialogue at York University organized by Barbara Godard in 1981. Women and Words/Les Femmes et les mots followed in Vancouver in 1983, drawing

together women writers, artists and cultural activists from across Canada. The 1985 Long-liners Conference on the Canadian Long Poem conference at York University focused on genre, language and subjectivity, but questions of ideology and discourse were often invoked and shifted the critical attention of the poetic act to more politicized stances. Ethnicity, racialization and sexual orientation were the focus of *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures*, organized in Vancouver B.C. in 1988 by a collective of which Daphne Marlatt, Betsy Warland and Sky Lee were part. It was followed by The Third International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal, where panels and workshops were organized to discuss issues and strategies of feminist thought and where challenges of “voice appropriation” were directed by some participants (First Nation writer Lee Maracle and critic Aruna Srivastava) to “white” writers (specifically Anne Cameron). The event had a major role in drawing attention to ethnicity and marginality which would be addressed at the 1992 retreat *The Appropriate Voice* and the 1994 *Writing Thru Race* conference.³⁴

The list is necessarily incomplete and, as Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy in *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003)* make clear, a survey on conferences, publications and little magazines re-draws the contours of Canadian literary history by making visible the blurred zones of critical intervention and poetic practice which fall outside categories of official histories.³⁵ What is worth noting is the overlapping of political and cultural activism with a poetic practice of the “cultural” as that which de-constructs and denaturalizes normative assumptions about society and culture, language and representation, and thus about the national imaginary of the “imagined community.”

The National Longing for Form: the Canadian Long Poem

I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, 'a long poem,' is simply a flat contradiction in terms.

—E.A. Poe, "The Poetic Principle"

National imaginings are inextricably tied to literary forms. In "The National Longing for Form," Timothy Brennan follows Benedict Anderson's path in claiming that nations are "imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role" (49). In the context of British culture Brennan identifies the novel as the genre which helped "standardize language, encourage literacy" and, especially, "allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation" (49). However, the long poem had a central role in imagining the English nation long before the novel came about: Milton's long poems, in their epic impulse, seemingly gave a voice to the Nation as being forged by the dream of Cromwell's revolution; later on, Wordsworth's *Prelude* would envision a national subject through the construction of a stable, unified "I" whose gaze could contain, and imagine, the people's landscape. If the alignment of the meanings of nation, voice and people is the product of discursive practices engendered by European nationalisms (and inflected by the theories of German Romanticism), in the context of settler colonies the emergence of nationalism is complicated by the fraught relationship with the mother country, at once perceived as origin, heritage and yoke. In nineteenth-century Canada, Great Britain and the Empire signify simultaneously the difficulty of developing an independent tradition as well as a fantasized belonging for the dominant class of English descent. Not surprisingly, therefore, the colonial beginnings of the Canadian imaginary are narrated through the long poem. Neither epic nor lyric, yet maintaining the totalizing impetus of the first and the meditative interruptions of the second, the long poem has a long tradition

in English and European letters, though its constant re-creation and shifting aesthetics have thwarted all attempts at generic formulations. Since its inception, the Canadian long poem has borrowed from several different modes to adapt an English poetic language to a new territory and social context. This articulation of an emerging 'national spirit' merges narrative and lyrical modes with the paradoxical celebration of both a national dawn and the justification of imperial ethos. The nineteenth-century long narrative form combines the narration of historical events and lyrical meditations on a lost (yet stable) past, frozen in time for the colonial subject to contemplate and, ideally, reach back to. In this tension between idealized past and imaginary, horizontal present, the long poem functions to territorialize a space construed as *terra nullius* (Miki "The Future's Tense") into narratives of community building (as in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* and Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*), heroic mythical imaginings (as in Thomas Cary's *Abram's Plains* and Charles Mair's *Tecumseh*), which legitimize the imperial enterprise and reassure the national subjects with the promise of 'belonging'. Thus since its inception the Canadian long poem is implicated in an economy of desires, whereby a pre-fabricated sense of belonging polices the borders of ethnicity, sexuality and class of the emerging nation-state, while simultaneously stabilizing the meaning of the Nation with its core values of Britishness and imperial legitimation. Although the creation of a national literature was a constant source of anxiety and efforts, the long poem proved to be a remarkably prolific genre since the colonial period, throughout Confederation and the Depression era of the 1930s. Yet the conceptualization of the genre started only in 1946 with Northrop Frye's essay "The Narrative Tradition in English-Canadian Poetry."³⁶

From Northrop Frye and Dorothy Livesay³⁷ to Michael Ondaatje³⁸ and Smaro Kamboureli,³⁹ the long poem has been identified as a ‘distinctively Canadian genre,’ although along very different critical perspectives. In 1946 Northrop Frye was the first to draw attention to what he called a puzzling “phenomenon”: “In looking over the best poems of our best poets, while of course the great majority are lyrical, we are surprised to find how often the narrative poem has been attempted, and attempted with uneven but frequently remarkable success” (“The Narrative Tradition in English-Canadian Poetry” 151). Frye’s essay has acquired a landmark status in Canadian criticism, both among those who defend a lineage of Canadian writing as evolving from English poetic conventions, while developing its own tradition, and those who challenge the liberal-humanist values of the critical establishment and turn to notions of locality and language-centred writing practices. The importance of Frye’s criticism lies in the recognition and articulation of the problem of language as central to the development of Canadian writing: “The Canadian poet cannot write in a distinctively Canadian language” (147), since by choosing to write either in English or French “he joins the line of poets in the tradition of that language, at the point nearest to his immediate predecessors” (147). And this tradition cannot be ignored, since it comes “with a thousand years of disciplined utterance behind it,” and can only be “adjusted” to an environment “foreign” to that language, and to which the poet himself is foreign.

Frye was writing at a crucial moment of Canadian history, when the nation-state was securing its newly acquired international role through the projection of the modernist values of progress, modernity and cohesion; its discursive borders were being secured by the nationalist machine of the Canadian polity. The quoted passage is emblematic of his

humanist belief in a hierarchy of values which befits, and constructs, the image of a modern and progressive Canada. The ethnocentrism of his conservative, Anglo-Saxon elitism is apparent in his belief in hierarchical differences which can separate between self and other, the origin of tradition (the “disciplined utterance”) and the foreign (read unscripted) territory. Nonetheless, the passage reveals its discursive contradictions in the way it problematizes cultural difference as a *translational*, as well as *transnational*, act (Bhabha 1984b, 172). By drawing attention to the problem of language Frye brings to the fore the fraught relationship of the colonial periphery and imperial centre, and a translational process which exposes the instability of the sign of the Nation as fixed identity. Decades later, and from the vantage point of a critical vocabulary informed by poststructuralist theory as well as M.M. Bakhtin’s work on language and literature, poet Robert Kroetsch articulates the specificity of the Canadian subject through the fissures of the Nation, where locality becomes material for writing, as I will discuss later.

Although Frye clearly privileges a thematic approach in his selection of the “best” Canadian narratives—and thus insists on poems by Charles Heavysege and Isabella Valancy Crawford that should rather be criticized for their colonial ethos and imperialist overtones—he also pays tribute to E.J. Pratt’s narratives in terms of structure and form: “Pratt has studied the technique and resources of the narrative form more carefully than his predecessors” (154). His formalistic reading of Pratt is not extensive and remains grounded in a thematic paradigm. The author of narrative epics built upon extensive research of the poetic material, E.J. Pratt is a contested figure in Canadian writing. His long poems lack the energy of the twentieth-century American epics yet they constitute a fascinating cultural artefact in their attempt to construe an archaeology of ‘Canadianness’

for the ethos of the modernist present. Kambourelis sees Pratt as a solitary figure with no influence in Canadian literature but she is perhaps too hasty in her dismissal of Pratt's "grand narratives" (Kambourelis 1991, 29-37). In "Pratt's Modernism, or Digging into the Strata," Sandra Djwa responds by arguing that Kambourelis's analysis of Pratt is grounded in a postmodern critical perspective that does not fully perform the expectations of a Foucaultian genealogy announced in the introduction to her study. I do agree with Kambourelis that Pratt's narratives reveal complicity with imperial motifs, yet the relationship of Pratt's poetic practices with the machinery of Canadian nationalism (1930s – 1950s) and the fantasy of the modern nation-state also demand further investigation: *Toward the Last Spike* was published in 1952, three years after the appointment of the Massey Commission (1949) and two years after the publication of Harold Innis's *Empire and Communications* (1950).

What is worth noting is Frye's praise of Pratt for his formalistic work on the narrative form; in Frye's terms, this form is particularly suited to "the poet's vision of Canada as a pioneer country" as well as "a vision of Canada as a settled and civilized country, part of an international order, in which men confront the social and spiritual problems of men" (156). Thus the narrative form seems to respond to an epic impulse, and it is not a coincidence that in the same essay Frye insists abundantly on the spiritual affinity of Canadian narrative poetry with the Anglo-Saxon long poems. He concludes with an interesting appeal: the abandonment of the lyric which, "if cultivated too exclusively, tends to become too entangled with the printed page" (157). The new age of communication and technological advancement calls for the opening up of poetry to new media, such as the radio, and "the narrative as a form peculiarly well adapted for public

reading, may play an important role in reawakening a public respect for and response to poetry” (157).

This remark is interesting in two ways. First, the tension between the narrative and the lyric will re-emerge in postmodern theories of writing, where preoccupations with poetic closure and the author/reader relationship make both forms suspect. Secondly, the quotation reveals a profound anxiety as to the material site of the page and a materiality of language that is perceived as detrimental to the spirit of poetry. Frye’s attitude is remarkably evocative of the illusions of the Romantic age of poetry as the unmediated expression of the poet’s ‘soul’ and the nostalgia for a past devoid of the dangers of an encroaching and feminized technology as “Sign of the Times” (anxieties detectable in the Romantic poetry of William Wordsworth, as well as in Thomas Carlyle’s famous essay). What I would like to stress here is Frye’s fusion of poetry with the “reawakening of public respect,” and thus a Romantic slippage of poetry and ‘the people’ or, we might as well say, the Nation; yet his anxieties are at odds with the fundamental modernity of the concept of the Nation. Interestingly, the inevitable grappling with new media, which will be more thoroughly and critically taken up by communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, involves notions of ‘voice’ and ‘eye,’ which will become sites of contestation in Canadian culture in terms of voice appropriation and representation.⁴⁰

Dorothy Livesay elaborated on Frye’s notion but shifted the framework toward “the documentary” in the tradition of the filmmaker John Grierson, a genre of which she was herself a producer with *Call My People Home* and *Day and Night*: “I propose to show that in our literary context it is more than that: it is a new genre, neither epic nor

narrative, but documentary” (267). Although aspects of the documentary had been traceable since the beginning of Canadian poetry, as Frye had already pointed out, the form came to prominence especially in the first half of the twentieth century and it certainly reflected a time of deep social unrest. Livesay’s argument had a profound resonance. She identified the documentary form as the uniqueness of the Canadian long poem in its gathering of topical data, the mapping of the new social world where form, “descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements” (269), and theme are the primary structure for the writing act. Her proposition, as was made more evident in her subsequent revision in the paper delivered at the York conference in 1984, also offered a viable way to include modern texts, such as Anne Marriott’s *The Wind Our Enemy*, and more recent postmodern experiments, like Bowering’s *Rocky Mountain Foot*, as documentary poems. Livesay seems particularly anxious to differentiate Canadian poetry, and inherently the Canadian spirit, from its southern neighbour: the Canadian long poem is not the American epic and, since the 1930s, it is engaged in experimentations that draw from other media (film) as well as from technological progress. Her challenging thesis is more provocative than substantiated; she leaves “a very close analysis of literature in this genre” to individual reading and speculation, and she engages mainly in a discussion of Isabella Valancy Crawford’s *Malcolm’s Katie* (1884), whose documentary aspect is debatable. Pratt’s *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* (1930) and Earle Birney’s *Trial of a City* (1952) are treated only marginally, while Anne Marriott’s *The Wind Our Enemy* (1939) is mentioned just in passing.

Roy Miki takes Livesay to task for her much cited description of the long poem as “a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective

feelings of the poet,” where the narrative functions as “a frame on which to hang a theme” (269). Miki’s deconstructive reading of the poem *Call My People Home* exposes the use of the narrative frame as “representational device that enables the translation of the Japanese Canadian experience ... into a public discourse” and functions as a strategy of containment (“Asiancy” 102). By separating the position of the ‘subject’ from the ‘object’ of the ‘event,’ the poet is able to align herself to the tragedy suffered by the interned subjects; yet, in so doing, she elides her position of privilege construed as outsider to the wrongdoings, while her implication in the discourse of racialization of the Nation is obscured. Indeed, the specificity of the internment is assimilated by the liberal humanist feelings of ‘empathy’ and ‘compassion,’ hence neither an examination nor condemnation of existing structures of power is achieved. Livesay fails to recognize that the government decision to brand Japanese Canadians as enemy aliens and uproot them from the West Coast was neither an accident of history nor a frantic reaction to the possibility of a Japanese invasion; rather, it was made possible by a discourse of nationalism which increasingly cast non-Europeans, and specifically Asians, as Others to the Nation.

In “The Canadian Documentary: an Overview,” the paper presented at the Longliners Conference at York University in 1984, Dorothy Livesay shifts her conceptualization of the form, although her re-articulation of a theory of genre seems more influenced by a new cultural discourse than a critique of the humanist assumptions underlying her former formulation. Her marked emphasis on the radio media and the drama for voices seems to elaborate on Frye’s intuition, but it is also used as a category for aesthetic evaluation. According to Livesay, Pratt’s documentaries are not successful if

the poet's intention was *mythopoiesis* and he is "too deeply rooted in the nineteenth century models to be able to use the new media—radio—to full effect" (127). While Earle Birney and Anne Marriott seem to stand the test of time, new preferences are included: Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* (1970), Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), Don Gutteridge's *Riel: A Poem for Voices* (1968) and Peter Stevens's *And the Dying Sky Like Blood: A Bethune Collage for Several Voices* (1974). The CBC's present lack of interest in radio drama is explicated by the possible challenge that such works, obviously diverse but apparently sharing an anti-establishment edge, might represent.

Interestingly, no critic has ever tackled Livesay in her problematic take on 'voice.' In *Call My People Home (The Documentaries 1968)* the poet's subjective voice, seemingly an expression of the subject's interiority, is screened by the disembodiment of the radio medium, while its invisible presence uncannily reproduces the containment of the Japanese-Canadian experience that the documentary drama is purported to criticize.⁴¹ The vocal disembodiment of the absent Other enters the private ear: while the body's divestment of corporeal existence creates the aura of a metaphysical truth, the listener's sensory experience is not simply a passive one but, rather, domesticates and normalizes the object of representation. As Miki points out, the uprooting and internment of the Japanese-Canadians is encased by the seemingly sympathetic liberal ideology, which reiterates the containment of the voices and lives of those injured by one of the most painful chapters of Canadian history.⁴² Yet the medium of the poem, radio drama, also exposes the poet's conceptualization of 'voice' as construed and implicated with a technology of nationness full-fledged at the time of her writing—the use of radio and

radio-dramas for propagandistic purposes, the participation of the documentary in a modernist aesthetic of nation-building and John Grierson's involvement with the NFB.

The seemingly polarized reading of narrative and documentary, storytelling and factuality seemed to gain currency with different practitioners. Yet both narrative and documentary were accepted unproblematically, as given generic categories; although their ideological implications underpinned generic discussions, rarely were they examined critically. Livesay did not contextualize Grierson's own involvement with the propaganda machine of the war-time (although, to be fair to Livesay, a cultural-critical language did not exist at this time), nor was the film industry's appropriation of the documentary form from the grassroots political activity of radical left-wing movements ever acknowledged. "Documentary" was accepted as a descriptive term, as a substitution for factual, or truth portrayal.⁴³

By the mid seventies, poststructuralist philosophy and semiotics were slowly being introduced into English Canadian writing by way of Quebec.⁴⁴ The engagement with the ideas of French theoreticians such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva prompted an increased (theoretical) attention toward the workings of language and discourse, while French and American sociologists drew attention to the construction of literature as always ideological. The work of Pierre Bourdieu and John Guillory later drew attention to the "cultural capital" produced by institutions of higher education and aesthetics as a powerful tool for the re-production of existing social structures, rather than a matter of natural "taste." The new vocabulary helped articulate the tensions already apparent between the establishment and radical writers and critics. Literature could no longer be safely enclosed within the gilded cage of

formalism, mainly drawing from New Criticism; and the canonization of genres and authors, as well as normative reading practices, became increasingly challenged. It is in this emerging context that the attack on Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972) and on thematic criticism occurred. Shortly after, Frank Davey's publication of *From There to Here* (1973) followed suit and seemed to deepen the apparent rift between "anti-establishment" poets and mainstream academic criticism.

In "The Power to Bend Spoons" (1994) Frank Davey re-visits the critical context of the divide and notes how until the 1960s "literary power in Canada was usually mapped in terms of oversimplifying binary oppositions" (7), such as the establishment and the vanguard, the conservative and the radical, the centre and the margin, mass-art and "serious" art. He also acutely observes that the "youth-culture" of the 1960s was also a construction that enabled a multiplicity of positions to be perceived as one common front, ultimately concealing gender, ethnic, regionalist and class tensions. The opposition to dominant culture was, according to Davey, more declared than factual since, "seeking to maintain general prestige and power, the establishment of the 1960s and 1970s courted the 'youth' generation" (9). In *Reading Canadian Reading* (1988) he also explains how *From There to Here* was written at the invitation of Clara Thomas from York University in 1972. She had undertaken to write a guide for Canadian literature for Dave Godfrey at New Press and her volume would focus on pre-1960 writers. Davey's "supplement" would cover the contemporary scene, which gave him the possibility not only to write about fellow writers but also to counteract the humanist approach that was evident both in Thomas's title *Our Nature - Our Voices* and introduction. He also contextualized

Godfrey's politics of publication in "the struggle for legitimacy which Canadian literature as a field experienced in the 1940s and 50s" (37).⁴⁵

In "Notes on the Language of the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," a paper presented at the SFU conference/festival *The Coast is only a Line* (1981), Davey grounds his critique of the sequential narrative in a deconstructive practice that exposed the ideological impulse of the narrative toward linear causation. What characterized contemporary poets, Davey argues, and especially B.C. poets, was "a specific sense of the poet's relationship to his world and society," where the poet, "rather than seeing himself as solitary, independent, and in an adversarial relationship to others" works collaboratively and with a sense of "surprise" and "discovery." Although Davey was not completely free of modernist assumptions in his own formalistic reading of the long poem, he made visible the shift from thematic criticism to 'language' on the Canadian writing scene, and from the dichotomy of writers and critics to writers-as-critics.

Unlike Davey's essay, Robert Kroetsch's poetic prose writing, "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem" (1983), articulates the writer's mistrust of old cosmologies and ideologies by disrupting the format of the academic essay: the writing does what it says. Kroetsch's critique of 'content' and of the text as 'product' is performed through a textual criticism that can at best be called 'labyrinthian,' a writing practice which enacts the process of meaning formation as dissemination and deferral: "In love-making, in writing the long poem—delay is both—delay is both technique and content. Narrative has an elaborate grammar of delay" (91). Yet the male orgasmic connotation of Kroetsch's use of Derrida's articulation of *différance* undercuts Derrida's notion of writing-in-the-feminine and is at best problematic for a genre in

which women writers have been producing some of the most experimental and interesting works.

“For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem” was a seminal text in Canadian writing and perhaps the first conscious articulation of a postmodern Canadian poetics and the productive energy of the long poem. Neither ‘definition’ nor ‘understanding’ of the idiosyncratic Canadianness of the long poem is enabled through his ‘essay,’ yet this remains one of the most powerful and inspiring articulation of the long poem as a generative site of cultural-poetic articulation. Kroetsch performs a playful investigation into the new writing’s concerns for language and locality that defies linearity and tradition. The relationship among place, history and writing is unravelled in the poetic sequences and prose pieces exploring the meaning of archaeology as supplanting history, the placing of place, the articulation of silence and absence, hidden texts, fragments of language, lost details and blurred stories. Kroetsch argues that the long poem as re-writing is also, and always, ‘writing under erasure’: “the erotic and erratic erotic” (101). His writing does not allow for the closure of criticism but, rather, is in conversation with the many poems he weaves into his text: the “trace” (92) of Phyllis Webb’s *Naked Poems* (1965); “[p]oems in which archaeology supplants history” (93) in Margaret Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) and Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970); “the life-long poem” (94) of bp Nichol’s *The Martyrology*, Books I and II (1972); “the act of telling the story” (94) rather than the story; “[t]he placing of place, but not as in the American poem” (95) in Robin Blaser’s *Image-Nations 1-12* (1974) and Daphne Marlatt’s *Steveston* (1974); the “unnaming of silence” (96) in Don McKay’s *Long Sault* (1975) and Fred Wah’s *Pictograms from the*

Interior of B.C. (1975); the “fragments” (98) of George Bowering’s *Allophanes* (1976); Roy Kiyooka’s *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine: 18 Frames from a Book of Rhetoric* (1977), “the book become book” (104); and Daphne Marlatt’s *Zócalo* (1977), which “desires to become both love poem and long poem” (104). Many others are included and they all testify to the prolific energy of the 1970s.⁴⁶

The Long-Liners Conference held at York University in 1984 was a landmark event in reconsidering the shifting paradigms for reading/theorizing the Canadian long poem. It also reinforced, and perhaps epitomized, the clash between thematic criticism and theories about language and discourse. The conference was opened by Eli Mandel’s provocative declaration of “The Death of the Long Poem.” As Barbara Godard points out in “Epi(pro)logue,” although performing an ironic stance towards his own critical position Mandel gestures toward British Marxist critic Terry Eagleton when he declares that the long poem tradition, and the ideological values it carries with it, have reached their end. But Mandel is still uncomfortable in his use of the recent poststructuralist vocabulary and theoretical methodology. His attempt to devise a new structure for the contemporary form rather reveals a Bloomian anxiety of influence toward the power of literary tradition. Godard’s field notes about the conference highlight the tensions that took place between different critical positions but also draw attention to the ways in which the conference seemed to leave important questions unanswered, such as the question of ideology—often invoked but never really discussed—the hierarchy of the long poem genre, its institutionalization (via the academic poet), and women’s exclusion.

Smaro Kamboureli’s *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (1991) is the most recent attempt to formulate a theory of the postmodern Canadian

long poem that necessarily involves a re-reading and critique of former criticism. By echoing Derrida's "The Law of Genre" and *Of Grammatology*, Kamboureli argues for the long poem's "generic restlessness," claiming "it is precisely this difficulty, this resistance to generic definition, that characterizes the long poem as a 'new' genre" (xiv). She stresses the unwillingness of the long poem to reside within the fixity of generic categories. Such resistance to and critique of the ideologies underlying the structures and discourses of poetic genres is what characterizes the contemporary Canadian long poem and what makes it "reside on the edge of things" (xiv).

In the first chapter of her study, Kamboureli traces a Foucaultian genealogy of the Canadian long poem and its implication with imported forms from the nineteenth-century British (and imperial) tradition.⁴⁷ She also provides a review of critical readings and theoretical perspectives that have foregrounded the problem of genre in analyses of the long poem, and the specificity of the Canadian long poem in its tension between colonial origins and the construction of a national identity. Her enquiry proceeds to examine the way the long poem genre in its contemporary form has wrestled with conventional generic codes such as epic and lyric (interestingly she does not foreground the dramatic form in the same way) and how the increasing interest in the form is indicative of a growing "fascination," despite the lack of a coherent understanding of how the long poem should be.⁴⁸ Through a poststructuralist examination of issues of locality and self, which foregrounds the subject positioning constructed by the texts, rather than formalistic or thematic aspects, Kamboureli highlights the important shift in Canadian writing that has slowly emerged since the late seventies: from 'work' to 'text,' from 'author' to 'writing.' *On the Edge of Genre* is a challenging study providing illuminating insights for the

reading of contemporary texts and, through an interrogation of language, subjectivity and locality, radicalizing a theory of the genre as discourse.

While I find Kamboureli's study challenging and invaluable, I also think that some important questions about the specificity of the Canadian literary/critical scene in relation to the discourse of the Nation in the last forty years have remained unanswered. How have notions of openness, subversiveness, marginality and vanguardism been constructed? How has the "contemporary" attribute functioned? To which rhetorical exigencies have these writings responded? Which cultural and material contexts have they helped shape? What is the critical discourse produced by the contemporary Canadian long poem? What interventions do these poetic desires operate? These questions will inform my critical reading of the experimental practices in the long poem genre of the five poets that are parts of this study. While my methodology is mainly informed by feminist and postcolonial theory in the critical examination of texts that de-construct the discourse of the Nation, rhetorical studies on genre and, especially, speech act theory have been essential to articulating my formulations.

In her seminal "Genre as Social Action" (1984), Carolyn R. Miller critiques genre theory of the early seventies as inviting "reductionism, rules, formalism" and leading to "tiresome and useless taxonomies" (151). Against the study of genre centred "on the substance or the form of discourse" with the purpose to create a taxonomy, Miller proposes to focus on "social and historical aspects of rhetoric" (151) by centering on the action that genre accomplishes. Charles Bazerman and John M. Swales furthered the reflection on the nature of genre and the ways in which it produces communities by administering knowledge.⁴⁹ Thus, in the last fifteen years, the discussion has shifted from

formalistic concerns, and their critique, to a re-conceptualization of genre as discourse and social action. Until that time, the traditional underpinnings of studies of genre still relied on classical rhetoric. This notion, to which Northrop Frye was indebted, privileged literary texts over non-literary, and understood the study of genre as mainly descriptive. The assumption was that literary genres contained specific formal features and thematic elements that represented determined worldviews, and thus raised the literary text to the status of a self-contained textual universe. The formalistic approach came under attack from diverse disciplines—i.e. functional and applied linguistics, communication studies and rhetoric. The critique of representation by poststructuralist philosophy and the translation of M.M. Bakhtin's works in the seventies (*The Dialogic Imagination* 1981; "The Problem of Speech Genres " 1986) helped reshape genre as a social semiotic; it shifted the focus on the relationship between language and ideological formations (Halliday 1978), as well as the constitution of social identity in language (Giddens 1984).

In view of these radical re-conceptualizations of genre and discourse, a set of questions arises: what social action does the long poem perform? What are the strategies employed to reinforce or subvert dominant modes of thinking? What kind of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic) does it produce? What forms of power are woven into its discourse or what forms of power does it create? What kind of discourse does it engender? Why has the long poem genre emerged as a powerful discourse in Canadian literary and critical studies? To what social exigencies and desires was it responding? And which desires was it creating?

Desirous Subjects

... the subtle and not so subtle ways in which the desire-machine of the state socializes us.

—Kamboureli, *Scandalous Bodies* (3)

Any discussion of the nation invariably gestures toward notions of home and belonging, the affective relationship of the citizen-subject with the primary conceptual entity of modern political organization. The preceding sections of this chapter have highlighted competing discourses, both inside and outside of Canada, about and around the Nation and their attempts to make sense of the assumed ‘naturalness’ of the signifier Nation in the mind and everyday practices of its subjects. While most critics agree that the Nation is constructed through discursive practices (whether or not, as Antony Smith argues, there lies a primary substratum of cultural affinities), no theory has been able to effectively investigate the affect aroused by national identifications. Nevertheless, there seems to be no doubt that the imagining of the Nation needs a phantasmatic structure to be sustained, a set of beliefs, fantasies and desires both individual and collective. Desires are neither monolithic nor static: they result from the meeting of different axes and multi-directional flows in the tension between the single and the State, the community and the polis, the local and the global. Hence desires are not a ‘primary’ structure but the nodal points of negotiation between the incommensurability of identities and the Law.

Although psychoanalysis has delved extensively into the formation of desire in the subject, the risk of reinforcing the universalist claims of psychoanalytical discourse, as it was laid out both in Sigmund Freud and in Jacques Lacan’s theories, is always present. As feminist critics have pointed out, the discursive practice of the discipline still privileges the male, white bourgeois subject as the embodiment of the Law of the

symbolic. Nevertheless, Freudian and Lacanian theories have also enabled a critique of societal structures of power that has been instrumental in the understanding of racialized Others' and female subject formation, thus opening a space for the re-articulation of language and subjectivity in the tensions between individual agency and the Law.⁵⁰

In this study, though I do not actively engage with psycho-analysis, I still rely on its discourse, in its many contradictions, for the analysis of the radical poetics in the long poem form which were produced in the highly contested decades from the 1960s to the 1980s. An age of 'desires' (cultural nationalism, political independence, social justice and political recognition), these decades saw the simultaneous 'staging of desires' on the part of the state apparatus in order to stabilize an always elusive Canadian identity, and thus engender Canadian citizens and competing discourses across the spectrum of the population about the role of the nation-state and what it means to be Canadian. This engendering of desires is thus also part of a process of interpellation which has equal, though more insidious, force to the rhetorical address of the Nation; and as I explained in the preceding sections of the chapter, culture is an active agent in this process.

My argument therefore rests on the premise that the canonization of the long poem (from the nineteenth-century production in the epic mode to the documentary and postmodern form of the twentieth-century) as a 'distinctively Canadian genre' is part of a construction of culture which is implicated in "the desire-machine of the state" (Kamboureli 2000). The question then arises as to the politics of the text, as well as its construction: is the textuality of the Canadian long poem complicit in the engendering of desires? Is desire embedded in the form and, if so, does it lend itself to the appropriation of discursive structures of power? How different is the politics of the experimental

writings in the long poem form in the decades which are part of this study? For there is no question that these point to a form which is not only lengthy but also, I argue, ‘longing’ in the desire for social and political change.

What ‘belong’ and ‘home’ mean in the early Canadian long poems and the texts I analyse as radical poetics varies profoundly. I read the experimental poetics from the 1960s to the 1980s as attempts to re-think the political space of the Nation and re-imagine its radical possibility. Is the nation-state bound to the imperial? Is the state apparatus necessarily oppressive, as Louis Althusser claims? It is in this ‘longing’, which unsettles desires from the fixity engendered by patriarchal fantasies, that the ‘dream of the revolution’, perhaps, can take place as a radical possibility of social and political change. Thus, rather than envisioning change as the utopian moment of ideal fulfilment (the dream of wholeness and plenitude), it is the movement and the constant unsettling of desires that makes desire productive and unbounded.

As Slavoj Žižek points out, all desires are sustained by a phantasmatic structure, since the ‘lack’ to which desire refers is neither ‘need’ nor ‘want’ but, rather, the essential void about the human condition. It is only through fantasy that the subject can experience, as on a screen, desire (Žižek 2005). I do not explore further Žižek’s formulations of desire yet I am intrigued by his theoretical work as it straddles the preoccupations of psychoanalysis (individual subject formation) with the socio-political of Marxist thought. His attention to the lived experience of the everyday is hardly subjective and rather opens up theoretical possibilities of productive critique of the political—and, consequently, the poetical interventions into the cultural.

The notion of fantasy to which he often refers is particularly appropriate to an investigation of nationalist desires, as well as desires around the Nation, since it is through the engendering of fantasies that the desire-machine operates—as Roy Kiyooka’s deconstructive investigation in *The Fontainebleu Dream-Machine* shows by bringing its workings into visibility. This does not mean that those desires are not ‘real’, nor that the state necessarily follows a cold logic of citizen-production through bio-politics and propaganda (although this might be the case): people *do* feel attachments, positive or negative, to the Nation; they *do* want to leave the colonial status (metaphorically aligned with childhood) to embody a national self; they *do* care about the flag; language *is* an issue; and cultural affinities *do* matter in the delineation of what a Nation should stand for.

Nevertheless, those desires are not the product of a primary, natural self (Herder’s notion of blood and soil) but a ‘nexus of flows’ which, in turn, those desires shape. Thus I do not read the experimental poetics which I explore in this study as ‘oppositional’ or fully outside the national imagining they critique along different axes. They are also implicated in the fantasy of nationness which the state apparatus and the cultural elites actively pursue. But it is precisely in the ability of those experimental poetics to enter these imaginings and make visible the workings of the phantasmatic structure that I read their radicalness.

As the individual chapters will elaborate, it is through the exposure of the structures of beliefs and desires producing knowledge that the subversion of the patriarchal fantasies of the nation-state takes place. Rather than trying ‘to fix’ the image (“no, that is not what things are like”), radical poetics enter the image and, by de-

naturalizing its structure, subvert it from within. They always show that (cultural, political and social) purity is also a false assumption since the image has always already contaminated us.

Notes

¹ The debate around nationalism and the origins and character of the nation is essentially divided between two broad positions: “primordialist” (or essentialist) versus “modernist” (or instrumentalist). The first defends the idea of the unique and cohesive character of “the people” bound together by a common lineage, language, religion and culture—a position derived from nineteenth-century German Romantics, and especially Herder and Fichte. Today historians agree with E. J. Hobsbawm’s claim that “the basic characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected with it is its modernity” (1992, 14), and, thus, with the “objective modernity of nations” (1992, 5).

² In *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1992), Eric Hobsbawm points out that “little that was written in the classic period of nineteenth-century liberalism” was relevant, since most writings were imbued with a “nationalist and racist rhetoric” (2). Worth mentioning for interesting contributions to the field are passages from John Stuart Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) and Ernest Renan’s lecture “What is a Nation?” (1882), to which I will return later, as well as Marxist writings by Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Otto Bauer and Lenin for the profound later political influence on nationalist/internationalist movements. In the twentieth century, Hobsbawm cites Carleton B. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (1931), and Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origin and Background* (1944), for their valuable historical material.

³ This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of references. A renewed interest in the field, as Hobsbawm has pointed out (1992, 4), has produced a large array of significant works that address the need to historicize specific national formations as well as provide theoretical analytical frameworks. For the purpose of my study, I am indicating only the texts that have attracted most attention on the part of historians and theoreticians working in historical, sociological and literary areas.

⁴ Anderson uses the term “style” (6) that appropriately underlines the literariness of the imaginative acts.

⁵ Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?”: “L’existence d’une nation est ... un plebiscite de tous les jours” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, 1, 904).

⁶ Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?”: “Or l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien de choses” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, 1, 892).

⁷ “Mais qu’est-ce donc qu’une nation? Pourquoi la Hollande est-elle une nation, tandis que le Hanovre ou le grand-duché de Parme n’en sont pas une? Comment la France persiste-t-elle à être une nation, quand le principe qui l’a créée a disparu? Comment la Suisse, qui a trois langues, deux religions, trois ou quatre races, est-elle une nation, quand la Toscane, par exemple, qui est si homogène, n’en est pas une? Pourquoi l’Autriche est-elle un État et non pas une nation? En quoi le principe des nationalités diffère-t-il du principe des races?” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, 893)

⁸ Thom notes that the doctrine of “natural frontiers” was particularly popular among nationalist movements in nineteenth-century France, Germany and Italy (note 3, 21).

⁹ One may think of the nationalist rhetoric that took ground in Germany’s National-Sozialismus in the following century when he claims: “... and one does not have the right to go through the world fingering people’s skulls, and taking them by the throat saying: ‘You are of our blood, you belong to us!’” (15) “... et on n’a pas le droit d’aller par le monde tâter le crane des gens, puis les

prendre à la gorge en leur disant: «Tu es notre sang; tu nous appartiens!» (*Oeuvres Complètes* 898).

¹⁰ “Au Xe siècle, dans les premières chansons de geste, ... tous les habitants de la France sont des Français” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, 891).

¹¹ *Zollverein* is the German word for customs union. Renan maintains the original word since it highlights the economic and administrative aspect of the bond. *Patrie* has been left in the French original by the English translator since it had a stronger connotation than nation in nineteenth century Europe, one which emphasized the common origin of the fatherland and the attachment to the people's soil.

¹² Obviously Great Britain is not the only example of the instrumentality of gender in the constitution of an imperial discourse of the Nation. Since my study focuses on Canadian literary texts, I am directing my attention to British imperialism since it directly impacted the emergence of Canadian nationalism, as well as counter-discourses to mainstream nationalism. Furthermore, the gendering of nationalism has to be situated in the specific histories of European nation-states, which is beyond the immediate scope of my dissertation.

¹³ “In the image of the family tree, evolutionary progress was represented from a series of anatomically distinct family types, organized into a linear procession, from the ‘childhood’ of ‘primitive’ races to the enlightened ‘adulthood’ of European imperial nationalism” (McClintock 92). It is also worth noting Hegel's famous exclusion of Africa from History.

¹⁴ This image has not been completely dispelled until today and is readily recuperated by political rhetorics whenever nationalist appeals are used at times of crisis, as in the current Bush administration.

¹⁵ Irving Layton's poem title plays satirically on Arthur Lower's *From Colony to Nation* (1946).

¹⁶ McGee was a strong advocate of Canadian nationalism. Born in Ireland, he left for New York because of his involvement with the “Young Ireland movement.” Later he moved to Montreal and in 1858 was elected to the house of Assembly.

¹⁷ A tri-weekly newspaper founded in 1857, shortly after McGee's arrival in Montreal.

¹⁸ Intellectual nationalist group that included William Foster, Alexander Morris, Charles Mair, Robert Grant Haliburton and George Parkin. Haliburton was the first to state coherently the idea of the northern race. Interestingly, Parkin was Vincent Massey's father-in-law.

¹⁹ See the poems “The Half-Breed Girl,” “Pawassan's Drum,” “At Gull Lake: August, 1810” and “A Scene at Lake Manitou.”

²⁰ See the poems “Indian Place-names” and “On the Way to the Mission.”

²¹ In 1923 he became deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs. Nevertheless we should note that Indian Affairs did not make national policy.

²² Great Britain did not permit the adherence to the Bern copyright agreement.

²³ Canada, Royal commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (Ottawa 1951).

²⁴ It is worth noting that, despite its clamour, the attack was not representative of the critical establishment.

²⁵ The legal framework of “the two founding nations” has recognized Quebec's specificity yet entrenched the nation-state in a discourse of European colonialism, thus erasing the political

presence of First Nations and indigenous history. The rhetoric of colonization has been instrumental to Quebec to re-claim its cultural and linguistic difference. While Quebec's status of subjugation to English Canada is uncontested and cultural nationalism has opened the way to a thriving culture, Quebec's own position of domination of indigeneous peoples has been silenced until the Oka crisis in the 1990s. In this sense, the resurgence of indigenous activism and political protests—land claims, fishing rights and control over natural resources—have been haunting the future of the Canadian nation-state. It is also worth noting that Quebec nationalism does not overlap with French Canada, which has been further marginalized against both English Canada and Quebec.

²⁶ MacInnis helped form the Cooperative Commonwealth Cooperation (CCF) in 1932. In 1943 he published with his wife Grace *Oriental Canadians – Outcasts or Citizens?* The book called for a humane treatment of Japanese Canadians, but it also supported their uprooting from the West Coast for “wartime security.” The dispersal of Japanese Canadians was presented as being in ‘their own interest’.

²⁷ In *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*, Miki contextualizes McInnis's action in Parliament as being part of the struggle for citizenship rights, rather than being targeted against the disenfranchisement of Japanese Canadians: “At that time Angus McInnis, CCF member for Vancouver East, in a strategic move, proposed a resolution calling on the House of Commons either to support the disenfranchisement of Asian Canadians or to offer equal citizenship rights to all. The resolution did not endorse disenfranchisement but was meant to make visible the double standard for citizenship in Canada” (30). What the CCF specifically opposed was the confiscation and sale of property without the owner's consent. See also Werner Cohn, “The Persecution of Japanese Canadians and the Political Left in British Columbia, December 1941-March 1942,” *B.C. Studies* 68 (Winter 1985-86): 24-51.

²⁸ The killing of thirteen people and students' mass demonstrations pointed to the possibility of insurgency. Although I am aware of occupying a critical position informed by contemporary social and political theory, I differentiate ‘threat’, which implies the overthrowing of the structure of the State, from dissidence, to which the citizen is entitled in the liberal tradition. To my knowledge, while the critique to the Anglo-elite of the State was sustained by the majority of Quebecers, there is no evidence that the population embraced the methods of the FLQ.

²⁹ The FLQ manifesto aired on radio and television directly addressed the “workers of Quebec” and referred to Quebec as the “hunting preserve for ‘cheap labour’ and ‘unscrupulous exploitation’ of big capitals (quoted in Berger 1981, 193).

³⁰ See also Paul Hjartarson's essay “Allophone Cultures, Government Policy, and National Identity” for a discussion of government policies from 1918 to 1988 to regulate immigrant communities.

³¹ Among the successful land claims are the 1973 Nisga'a land claims treaty; the 1975 James Bay Agreement in Quebec; the 1993 Nunavut land claims agreement; the Nisga'a Agreement on self government in B.C. in 1999; and the 2000 Supreme Court recognition of Aboriginal fishing rights. The Nunavut territory was created in 1999. The Meech Lake Constitutional Accord failed clamorously in 1990, and in the summer of 1990 the Oka crisis took place.

³² The Wolfenden committee was established in Great Britain to address the panic of “sexual degeneration,” caused by the higher visibility of homosexuality and prostitution during the 1950s in England, with the objective to reassert traditional heterosexual family relations, and thus manage “sexual deviance.” National decline and the loss of the Empire were indirectly attributed to the moral degeneracy of sexual behaviour. The ensuing *Wolfenden Report*, the

recommendations of which were implemented in 1959, relied on a clear distinction between public and private life. Though still censoring homosexual practices, the Report shifted the conceptual framework of sexual regulations which allowed for margins of dissent and contestation on the part of gay activists.

³³ Interestingly, the public/private distinction applied differently to women prostitutes, thereby showing how the heterosexist and patriarchal values of the nation-state determined the structure of gender relations, which were at the base of nationalism and imperialism. Woman was assigned to the private/domestic sphere and her transgression called for the intervention of the law: streets had to be kept clear of “public prostitutes” but “sexual violence and harassment in the ‘private’ realm would elicit no intervention” (219). Several penalties would be enforced on male homosexual acts, both in private and in public: the ‘abnormal’ status of “male homosexuality justified more intense treatment in the criminal law” (Kinsman 218). Kinsman also notes that although the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as extra-parliamentary and legal struggles, “has led to a situation of considerable pressure for sexual-reorientation protection in human rights legislation at the federal and provincial level” (361), sexual policing and censorship are still in place in many forms.

³⁴ See “The Writing Thru Race Conference,” in *Challenging Racism in the Arts: Case Studies of Controversy and Conflict*. Ed. Carol Tator, Frances Henry, and Winston Mattis.

³⁵ Butling and Rudy’s study shows that conferences are contested sites for competing discourses about literature and artistic practices. A case in point is the recent conference TransCanada, which was held in Vancouver in June 2005. Although the organizing principle emphasized the critical challenge of re-examining the sign of Canada and Canadian literature in the context of globalization and citizenship—as well as the ethical responsibility of institutions in the current shift toward the ‘marketability’ of culture and pedagogy—the dialogue turned recurrently to the paradigms of ‘Canadian identity’ and ‘Canadian Studies mandates’, hence to the re-drawing of the borders of the Nation as strategy against the threat of the ‘trans’.

³⁶ In *The Bush Garden* (1971). The essay was first published as an article in French: “La tradition narrative dans la poésie canadienne-anglaise,” *Gants du Ciel* (Spring 1946).

³⁷ Dorothy Livesay’s “The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre” was presented at A.C.U.T.E., York University, on 12 June 1969.

³⁸ Michael Ondaatje’s “Introduction” to *The Long Poem Anthology* (1979): “... but it seems to me that the most interesting writing being done by poets today can be found within the structure of the long poem” (11).

³⁹ Smaro Kamboureli, *On The Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (1991).

⁴⁰ I am referring here to more current debates around print, textuality and literary production that are explored in areas of Print Culture.

⁴¹ In “Epi(pro)logue: In Pursuit of the Long Poem,” Barbara Godard briefly mentions Livesay for her theoretical approach to the documentary and her comments about gender during the panel discussions. Although she criticizes Livesay’s positioning of the documentary as “factual,” her take on voice seemingly goes unnoticed.

⁴² Livesay’s poem concludes with the ‘sympathetic’ voice of the white subject who, standing behind and laying the hand on the shoulder of the Japanese Canadian, voices the possibility of a new ‘togetherness’. The scene is indicative of a liberal humanist politics of ‘reconciliation’ which, despite the best intentions of the author, is bound to erase the markers of difference and the historicity of the suffering of Japanese Canadian internees.

⁴³ Manina Jones's *The Art of Difference: Documentary-Collage and English-Canadian Writing* (1993) recuperates the notion of the documentary within a postmodern perspective more attentive to the emergence of difference, but she fails to engage in a fruitful critique of the ideological ground of the documentary form.

⁴⁴ I refer specifically to the experimental circles around *La Barre du Jour*, founded by Nicole Brossard, and the important connections established by Quebecois academic culture with theorists from France, such as Jean-François Lyotard, Luce Irigaray and H el ene Cixous.

⁴⁵ Although Frank Davey fully supports the values that prompted him to write *From There to Here*, he has undertaken a more critical materialist analysis of the conditions informing the writing and publishing politics of the time.

⁴⁶ Christopher Dewdney, *A Palaeozoic Geology of London, Ontario* (1973); and *Fovea Centralis* (1975); Wayne Clifford, *Glass Passages* (1976); Douglas Barbour, *Visions of My Grandfather* (1977); D.G. Jones, *Under the Thunder the Flowers Light up the Earth* (1977); Robert Kroetsch, *Seed Catalogue* (1977); Eli Mandel, *Out of Place* (1977); John Marshall, *The West Coast Trail Poems* (1977); Barry Callaghan, *The Hogg Poems & Drawings* (1978); E.F. Dyck, *Odpoems Et* (1978); Andrew Suknaski, *East of Myloona* (1979); Patrick Lane, *The Measure* (1980).

⁴⁷ After the publication of Kamboureli's *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem*, new studies have addressed specifically the relationship between the nineteenth-century long poem and Canadian colonial origins: D.M.R. Bentley, *Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems on Canada* (1994) and C.D. Mazoff, *Anxious Allegiances: Legitimizing Identity in the Early Canadian Long Poem* (1998). However, none has shown the theoretical edge of Kamboureli's work.

⁴⁸ She mentions the publications of George Bowering, Lionel Kearns, Brian Fawcett, Daphne Marlatt and Fred Wah in *Imago*, the 1970 publication of *The Long Poem Anthology*, edited by Michael Ondaatje, Robert Kroetsch's "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem" (1980) and Frank Davey's "The Language of the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem" (1981).

⁴⁹ See Charles Bazerman, "Discourse Analysis and Social Construction" (1990) and *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article on Science* (1989); and John M. Swales, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Setting* (1990).

⁵⁰ Works by feminist psychoanalysts grounded in Freudian and Lacanian theory abound. Among the best known is Elizabeth Bronfen's. Franz Fanon's work is the most obvious example of the fruitfulness of psychoanalysis in the study of processes of racialization and the subject formation of the racialized subject.

CHAPTER TWO

Phyllis Webb: Sexing the Nation

Power, Politics and the Discourse of Poetry

I always saw through marriage. I'm sort of cursed with an ability to analyze power structures and social institutions.

—Phyllis Webb, Interview with Katherine Dedyne

Phyllis Webb's poetic production in its specific serial and long form re-envisions the relationship of the single to the discourse of the Nation in a transformative way—thus formulating the possibility of radical citizenship. As outlined in Chapter One, this discourse reached its most outspoken and overt manifestation in Canadian postwar culture and was integral to the construction of 'Canadianness'. I read Webb's poetics as an exploration and critique of the relationship of the 'single person' with structures of power—such as the Nation and the State—and of the construction of citizenship as an instrument for managing 'unruly' social identities, such as women and homosexuals. In particular, I look at Webb's poetry as intervening in the policing of out-of-the-norm gender and sexual identities through a politics of space.

Poetry is politics in Webb's writing, and her early engagement with the sphere of politics as simultaneous to her coming-to-writing makes this apparent. Webb's involvement in the production of *Ideas* for CBC Radio and her literary ties (she was close both to the literary scene of central Canada and the incipient West Coast Renaissance) show the role she played in the shaping of discourses about culture, politics and the

Nation in Canada. Yet, like all the writers that are part of this study, while being committed to the fostering of writing in Canada she was far from setting out a nationalist agenda. What I want to highlight is the ways in which Webb's poetry participated in the contested formation of CanLit by exposing the interconnectedness of the nexus Nation, State and the Arts, and the ways in which her experimental poetics takes to task the Canadian politics of hetero-normative and androcentric citizenship.

The Poetics of Activism: the CCF Years, Early Poetry and Ideas

Very little has been written about Phyllis Webb's early years. The most complete account of her education, activities and first literary involvement comes through her interviews with Janice Williamson (*Sounding Differences* 1993) and the interviews incorporated in Pauline Butling's critical study *Seeing in the Dark* (1996). Beyond their biographical aspect, what is most interesting about these interviews is the way in which Webb re-narrates her former self. Although she never falls into contradiction, there are clear inconsistencies in terms of the relationships, influences and activities that marked this early time of her intellectual growth and entry into the world of letters. Some of these inconsistencies are due to the reticence of the writer and a privileging of privacy. The nature of the interview as a form is also premised on the foregrounding of some aspects of her life instead of others. Webb has often repeated that her intellectual formation owed much to 'fatherly' figures; only later did she become interested in the women's movement and women's feminist writing. This could point to a 'feminist' Webb of the present trying to come to grips with a former self long ago abandoned. Nevertheless, the easy dismissal of the feminist awareness and the political nature of her early work is

hardly convincing and creates ruptures in a narrative that can tell us more of the relationship of women to Canadian letters.

As Webb points out in her interview with Janice Williamson, she was very political throughout her undergraduate studies at U.B.C. (1945-49). She describes the atmosphere at U.B.C. as politically engaging, since the veterans coming back from the war in 1945 had “brought a mature element—political intelligence—to the campus” (Williamson 323). Clubs were formed, and at that time she joined the CCF (now NDP). She notes how her involvement with the CCF had started in a purely accidental way before she graduated from high school. She had attended with her class a presentation by Harold Winch, then Leader of the Opposition (CCF), who was giving a reply to the budget speech—a reply that “had a very dramatic impact on [her]” (323). Her intellectual self-education in socialism began almost immediately and later it developed into a strong interest in anarchism. We don’t know much about her political activity at U.B.C. In 1949, after majoring in English and Philosophy, she ran for the CCF in the constituency of Victoria but was not elected. Yet she notes how the CCF decided to put up three women candidates, which was “quite innovative at that time” (324). It was during the CCF National Convention in Vancouver that she met F.R. Scott, who introduced her to the Montreal literary group.¹

I will return to her relationship with the Montreal group in the next section. What I think deserves attention in the next decade of intense activity and traveling (she lived in Montreal, London and Paris) is her work as a radio journalist and her active involvement with Canadian letters. Her own writing was not conspicuous and she was still developing her own poetic; yet from her first publications she showed a clear awareness of, and

definite concern for, the position of the woman poet in society and for the state of writing in Canada. None of her first publications was in the long form, but it is nevertheless interesting to consider briefly some of these early poems to show how the “feminist” Webb was there at the very beginning of her poetic career.

Trio was published with poets Eli Mandel and Gael Turnbull by Contact Press in 1954. Although this is her first work, it does not bear the mark of “apprenticeship.” The experimentation with sound patterns and line forms is not reductively formalistic but engages in a poetic exploration of the senses and female subject formation. The poems articulate notions of space (the street, the park, the city) and gendered spatial relationships where the in/visibility of woman is tied with ‘modes of seeing’ that are neither reliable nor certain. In “The Colour of the Light” the stress on the word “apparent” (l. 1) for what should be a specific location (the “corner of two streets,” l. 1) undermines the possibility of a totalizing eye; in her wanderings she becomes the *flâneuse* displacing the centrality and autonomy of the sovereign (male) subject and turning the male gaze back on itself. Her re-appropriation of a subject position traditionally understood as masculine aligns her with modernist women writers (the influence of Marianne Moore is the most detectable presence in the collection) and gives her a vantage point in exposing the “violent space” (l. 28) of public/private dichotomy and the constructed-ness of vision—a powerful technology of containment of woman. “Earth Descending,” with its “planispheric” (l. 23) theme, unsettles even further the power of vision in the play between the eye and celestial bodies. The echo of the early T. S. Eliot is both in the sound experiments and, more apparently, in the lines “that at this moment as I splutter / and now and then twirl and flutter” (l. 40-41), a reminder of the sex

of the “public woman” whom the male poet objectified in his *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*. The “tick-tock clocked bomb inside me” (l. 55) brings the corporeality of the female body, with her natural rhythms, to the fore and the “black brew” (l. 58) of the “witch below” (l. 57) is a stark reminder of religious hysteria (and discursive power) at the expense of womanness. Milton is also invoked, seemingly for his “lack of sight” (l. 34); yet we know that blindness has been inscribed on the woman’s body (“lowered the lid over the eye and me / covered with night,” l. 32-33), and not for poetic insightfulness.

Even Your Right Eye, published in 1956 by McClelland and Stewart, engages more directly with a male literary tradition which, though disabling for the woman poet, she does not abandon; yet she resists her female poetic self as being subsumed and made invisible. In the section “In Situ,” from the poem “Two Versions,” it is the spirit of Matthew Arnold—the Father of patriarchal poetry—and his disempowering poetic utterance that she calls upon, while she addresses the creative energy and radiance of the woman artist in “Marian Scott.” The body of woman in “Old Woman” is the ravished territory of patriarchal dominance and in “Double Entendre” she seems to hint at the double language in which women are forced to live to come into articulation. “Marvell’s Garden,” one of the most anthologized of Webb’s poems, invokes primarily Marvell’s “The Garden” but also other instances of the seventeenth-century poet’s pastoral production, especially “Bermudas” and “The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn.” The text intervenes in the rhetorical mode of Renaissance pastoral with its misogynistic, self-sufficient male speakers whose solitary wanderings in the “happy Garden-state” of the Mind (“The Garden” l. 57) hide the brutality of the historico-political conditions of the time, with the Civil War, the definition of the early modern

nation-state and the vexed question of land enclosure. Webb echoes Marvell's lines but displaces them from their totalizing impulse, as is most clear in the sixth stanza:

But then I saw his luminous plumèd Wings
prepared for flight,
and then I heard him singing glory
in a green tree,
and then I caught the vest he'd laid aside
all blest with fire.

(l. 36-41)

Yet her echo is never offered as a point of gratification for the male poet's narcissistic gaze. In a play of reverberation, his desire for the transcendental order of the mind is thwarted to expose the violence hiding behind the text—colonization, imperialism, women's erasure from language and representation. The "Garden-state" where the poet/Man wants to "wander solitary" ("The Garden" l. 62) is textualized as dialogical relationship. The female subject engages in a meditative dialogue that breaks open the confinement of the male poet's mind and disrupts the impenetrability of the mastering gaze of the viewer by having the poem inhabit her own language and space—a garden which is secondary, a 'copy' and defying authenticity. Marvell's retreat into the mind is structured through well 'designed' metaphors; Webb shows how the workings of metaphor elude the materiality of life and "the thing itself" (l. 18) and how his garden/state/text, "attitude / struck out of an earth too carefully attended, / wanting to be left alone" (l. 23-25), is wrought out of the colonizing impulse of his time. While the solitary figure of Marvell's poem can be matched only by a higher presence ("the skilful Gardner," l. 65) who designed the organization of the perfect world order, in Webb's poem the garden-text has become "the fixed sundial / that turn me round / unwillingly / in

a hot glade” (l. 3-6), thus aligning the woman-poet with the energy and vitality of the sun. Her position of outsidership is a choice, not the result of an exclusionary practice, and although she acknowledges the presence/influence of a literary tradition, the sensual physicality of the intellectual ethos of her poem is one of multiplicity and contradiction. Far from being dichotomized between wilderness and cultivation, this garden (this earth, this life) is a state of necessity where the boundary line reverses the insider/outsider status. Brothers, lovers, Christ—signifiers of male power—are now left outside. Yet “the walls” of the garden also make this image co-extensive with ‘home’ and a traditional female confinement, with the closing image undercutting the fantasy of Edenic garden and the equation of ‘withdrawal’ with ‘happiness’:

And I have gone walking slowly in
his garden of necessity
leaving brothers, lovers, Christ
outside my walls
where they have wept without
and I within.

(l. 42-47)

In *The Sea Is Also a Garden*, published in 1962 with Ryerson, modern female subjectivity, gender and sexuality are woven into the articulation of poetics and critical meditations about the aesthetics of writing. In “Poetics Against the Angel of Death,” Webb confronts Wordsworth’s *Prelude*—a signifier of British national culture that mirrors the narcissistic gaze of the male Romantic poet courting/conquering nature through his sovereign I/eye, “private Man speaking to public men” (l. 6). The autobiographical impulse of Wordsworth’s long poem is simultaneously a construction of the ‘natural’ development of Man’s mind to achieve vision and of the possibility of the

Nation's 'organic' growth. His vision is sustained by the choice of the iambic pentameter as the traditional literary verse form of 'Englishness'. While she remarks upon Wordsworth's "elevated tone" and "attitude" (l. 5), Webb exposes the ways in which the burgeoning British national culture relies on the discrete separation of spheres of life—the public and the private—and the consequent exclusion of women from representation. Webb's poem does not get caught in the pitfall of passive acceptance or nihilistic acceptability of the *status quo*. By reclaiming the sources of energy and vitality signified by "this June morning" (l. 8) she is able to identify the "Great Iambic Pentameter" (l. 9) as the "Hound of Heaven" (l. 10) and "Angel of Death," which she defeats through her desire (and choice) of writing Haiku. The utterance "I want to die / writing Haiku" (l. 11-12) is the poetic act that releases death from the closure of containment (of poetry as well as life) and turns it into a marker of excess exemplified by the final utterance, "yes!" (l. 14).

Thus we can identify a continuum in the poetic subjects Webb explores—the power of eye, female subjectivity, the *flâneuse*, the male gaze, the conflict with discursive patriarchal structures (Electra/Oedipus of "Earth Descending")—and in her critical thinking about the aesthetics of writing—an aesthetic that I would rather call 'poetics' given her definite critical edge. Poems like "Poetics Against the Angel of Death" and "Marvell's Garden" are statements of poetics that perform a critique on the construction of intellectual space, which is also a construction of gender binaries and national imaginings.

Webb's poetic activity has never been separated from her role of cultural critic. In 1955 she presented a paper on "The Poet and the Publisher" at the Canadian Writers'

Conference at Queen's University, a first version of which had been previously published in *Queen's Quarterly* (Winter 1954-55). This study on the state of publishing in Canada was based on a questionnaire "circulated to almost every poet of any merit in this country" (499), as well as correspondence with publishers and conversations with poets and academics. The study shows Webb's engagement as a cultural critic at an important time for Canada's self-definition and cultural policy. The questions set up in the circulated document are worth recording because they are indicative of Webb's accurate perception of the workings of book culture:

In what anthologies has your work appeared?

In what little magazines has your work appeared?

How did you submit your first manuscript to a Canadian publisher? (a) At the request of the publisher? (b) On your own initiative? (c) At someone's suggestion?

Was there any considerable lapse of time between submission of MS. and (a) acceptance and (b) publication?

Was there any prescribed limitation of subject matter or any effective censorship of the submitted material?

Was there a "first refusal" clause in your contract?

Was the arrangement and selection of material yours, or the editor's, or a compromise?

How many copies of your book (books) were sold?

How many editions were published?

Have you had anything printed privately? If so, what were your experiences in this undertaking?

(a) Have you had anything published by an American publisher? (b) Have you approached an American publisher? (c) Were there any special difficulties involved?

Are you contemplating a new book? Will it be published in Canada, England or the U.S. etc.? Approximate date of publication?

Lorna Knight has retraced Webb's preoccupations about the state of publishing and culture in Canada to her initial project of doing a graduate thesis on Canadian poetry (the suggestion about the questionnaire came from Earle Birney) at a time when she was also trying to get her work published and was becoming increasingly involved with the Montreal literary group. It is important to recognize that the beginning of her study dates back to the year of the release of the Report of the Massey Commission. Furthermore, the Canada Council had not yet been established when the article was published. A comparison between Webb's article and the sections of the Massey Report on "Literature" and "Book Publishing in Canada" shows the degree of professionalism and critical accuracy of Webb's study. The conclusion she draws from her findings that getting published was "a matter of reputation, of friends and acquaintances, of policy, and of luck if the poet happens to light on a receptive publisher" (80) throws more light on the 'business' of poetry than the Report does. While the state of Canadian culture had attracted the interest of writers/poets such as Louis Dudek and Earle Birney, theories of literature in academic and critical circles still relied on the liberal humanist assumption that literature represents the 'national character of the people' and the difficulty of Canadian literature in coming of age reflected its identity crisis—a vision supported by the Massey Report which, incidentally, pays no specific attention to poetry *per se*. Webb's materialist analysis shows that material factors contribute to the failed relationship between writers and audience, often determinable in contractual clauses between poet and publisher or agreements between publishers and bookstores, and the findings lead her to raise questions about the failed relationship between the author and

his/her public. In her conclusion, she expresses the hope of the establishment for “a cooperative press where all the little magazines could be printed, where collections of poetry could be published,” and where “much literary and even typographical and artistic experimentation could be carried on” (511). While acknowledging that the complexity of this process and the help that could derive from a government grant (if the still-to-be-formed Canada Arts Council can offer “some consideration” to the problem), she is also careful not to conflate the idea of subsidy with the creation of a “national culture” and, rather, emphasizes the “fertilizing action of controversy” (512). Though not explicitly stated, a critique of the workings of the Massey Commission that has offered no consideration for the particular state of poetry seems to be implied in her statement that “poetry is the least generally regarded of the arts in Canada” (511).

Lorna Knight notices that “Webb’s questionnaire served as a focus for concerns and a catalyst for solutions” (43) after the Conference, thus showing how Webb the poet also positioned herself as a cultural critic since the beginning of her activities with national radio. She joined the CBC in 1964, where she worked as a Program Organizer in the Public Affairs Department until 1967 and as Executive Producer from 1967 to 1969. *Ideas* started with William A. Young. While working at the CBC from 1965 to 1969 she was “vaguely conscious” of a gender imbalance in the programme (Williamson 322) but no direct action tried to address the problem. Webb’s articulation of the gender-problem during her work at the CBC is ambiguous. While she admits to having been ineffective in trying to solve the issue, she also points out that she clashed with CBC when she returned to the West Coast:

I applied for a job as a CBC summer relief announcer, and was told that they couldn't use women announcers. The man was foolish enough to put it on paper; I went to the Civil Liberties Association, started a case against the CBC, and won. ... After that, I'm glad to say, the CBC started hiring more women announcers ... The Civil Liberties fought a very good case, and I'm rather proud that my consciousness at that point was sufficiently raised to think, 'I have to pave the way for others'. (323)

The ambiguity that Webb shows in accounting for the ways in which gender imbalance is constitutive of power relations is consistent throughout her interviews.

'Dear Roy': Old and New Literary Communities

But my interest in Canadian poetry actually began in my first year in university, at U.B.C. where we actually studied, believe it or not—way back in 1945-46, something like that—some Canadian poets. And there were no courses then in Canadian poetry. But I remember reading in an anthology Dorothy Livesay and Earle Birney and E.J. Pratt and F.R. Scott and Smith and all those people. But the one who entranced me the most and made me feel I wanted to be a poet was P.K. Page. And I got a lot of courage from her poetry to think about being a poet, and when I met Frank Scott he was daring enough to say, "You are a poet," which was probably not the case at the time. But it led me to go to Montreal where I became a part of a group and began to write seriously.

("Addressing a Presence" 31)

The quotation is from an interview with Leila Sujir in 1985 during the Summer Arts Festival at Banff Centre, which was later published as "Addressing a Presence" in 1988. What it tells is three different stories. The first story is the slow emergence of CanLit in the early postwar years. The opening of departments of Canadian Studies and the regular offering of courses in Canadian Literature will flourish only in the early seventies (Sarah Corse 52-53), as part of the implementation of the recommendations of the Massey Report. Yet the teaching of Canadian literary texts pre-dates the more overtly nationalist impulse and was left to the 'vision' of individual academics. Roy Daniells and Earle Birney were prominent figures in enabling the emergence of Canadian writers—Daniells in the Arnoldian tradition of liberal humanism and Birney in taking the

establishment of Canadian criticism to task for its 'elitism', 'ideology' and 'outmodedness' (Sandra Djwa 2002).² The second story is the search for literary foremothers. It is the reading of P.K. Page, sole female member of the Montreal modernist avant-garde, which opens up the possibility of a space of articulation for the female artist and woman's subjectivity. The third story is an older one, with echoes both of Ezra Pound's mentoring support for H.D. and of the voices of generations of women writers whose movement from the secrecy of writing and the intimacy of the 'hidden rooms' to the visibility of literary production had to go through the legitimation of male authority to come into place, which was the object of Virginia Woolf's critique in *A Room of One's Own*.

Although these stories can unfold separate literary histories, they need a genealogical approach (Michel Foucault 1971) to unmap a territory of writing named and stabilized by the nation-state through diverse technologies and constantly re-charted to reproduce its structures.³ The unmapping, therefore, is a necessary strategy to unravel a discourse of nationness that, as the quotation clearly shows, is a nexus of institutionalization, gender and 'Canadian-ness.' It aims not only to recover silenced voices but also to account for the ways in which Canadian-ness has been constructed by entering the ruptures in the discursive maps, and to show that a politics of desire can re-articulate this narrative through the re-insertion of difference.

Some of these ruptures are evident in Webb's own re-membering of the early years of her writing. In the same interview, Webb speaks about "the absence of a literary family" (31) at the beginning of her writing career. Admittedly, she borrows the image from the young writer Bronwen Wallace, but she shows a certain ambiguity in her

formulation of literary friendship: “I no longer feel the same kind of familiarity that I felt way back in the 50s when I knew virtually everybody—in the 60s too—I guess, in the Canadian writing scene” (31). Yet this ‘familiarity’ is not easily accommodated with belonging: “I wasn’t a peer but I was a friend” (31). She shows an early awareness of gender relations in her description of the state of writing at the time:

I guess I always felt that I had a—I wouldn’t have called it a family. It went back to Frank Scott and A. J. M. Smith and really, we have received a history, a story of how it happened and according to Scott and Smith, it happened when they came on the scene. And there are not many women in there, trying to tell the story or allowed in to tell the story. So I think there is a missing link in that story I would be curious to find out about. I wouldn’t have thought of grandparents and godmothers and things like that but just of a community more than anything else. (31)

While she claims she did not read many women writers, she admits at having been entranced by P.K. Page and having very much admired Marianne Moore.⁴ She maintains that she was always “treated very well” and it was the pervasiveness of the patriarchal culture that did not allow her to “climb out” of its structures and value more women’s writing (32). Yet, her gesture toward women’s writing is more telling than she avows and points to her wrestling with structures in place in order to create a space for her womanly self-articulation.

In the “Foreword” to *Wilson’s Bowl* she is more overt in her judgement. Looking back at her poetic career, she remarks that the structures and “domination of a male power culture in [her] educational and emotional formation” have cut her off from female figures as intellectual sources. In an interview with Janice Williamson (*Sounding Differences* 1993) she claims that only in the early seventies, with the rise of the second wave of feminism, did she become more aware of the relationship among gender, writing

and culture. Once again, Webb escapes direct answers and easy categorization. While the interviewer presses her toward admitting a “feminist consciousness,” her answers are slippery, neither acknowledging nor disavowing, and sometimes contradictory.

Interestingly, in this interview she does not mention P.K. Page and she claims she did not think of herself “as ‘woman writer’” in her early work:⁵

[...] and there weren't many things that reminded me that I was a woman trying to write. I was very young at the time and there were hardly any women writers in this group. ... But, as I remember it, which may be purely egocentric, I was the only young woman writer in the group ... But I never isolated that as a problem, and never tangled on the subject of why more women weren't there. They just weren't. (321)

Yet in her essay “The Muse Figure,” presented at the Women and Words/Les Femmes et les Mots conference in Vancouver in 1983, she comments how the Muse figure is a male construct and “for [her], the Muse figure has never figured as a potent imaginative presence” (3).⁶ Drawing from Robert Graves’s assertion in *The White Goddess* (1948) that the muse is “the anti-domestic,” “the other woman” (4), she takes a strongly feminist position that problematizes the exclusion of women from patriarchal language and articulates the split which woman, in effect, inhabits: “Right away you can see the problem she poses to the contemporary woman poet/writer, who herself may be anti-domestic, even the other woman, if not exactly the awful and naked truth” (4). She points out further that today the “other woman” is no longer the “mistress-lover” but the “radical feminist,” “she is other, a/part” (4). The essay dates back to the 1980s, a time when radical feminism was becoming increasingly vocal in Canadian culture. Yet it is doubtful that Webb’s meditations on the subject position of the woman poet had neither been prompted by her early relationships with a male-dominated literary scene nor were

they part of her early thinking about poetic forms and genres (as her CBC interview with American poets Charles Olson, Robert Duncan and Robert Creeley for *Ideas* in 1963 seem to suggest).

Her return to the West Coast after she left the CBC marks the beginning of a renewed engagement with her writing but also the reunion and involvement with a different writing scene. Her correspondence with poet Roy Kiyooka testifies to the mutual respect and a deeply felt friendship, but it also reveals a Webb very different from the reserved and at times dismissive poet that comes across from her interviews. Most importantly, it reveals the presence of what I would call an intimate community not posing as ‘public’ literary group but, rather, establishing a network of affiliations and, foremost, literary friendships that will produce a synergy of poetic creativity.⁷ In the third chapter I will return to the relationship with Kiyooka in my analysis of *transcanada letters* to show that both poets, although receiving little attention (almost none in the case of Kiyooka) on the part of the academic establishment, are the first to expose the limits of the nationalist ideologies that construed this “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) through the elision of the violent histories upon which the nation-state was founded. Their friendship is not just a context but the articulative site from which they engage in deconstructive critiques of ‘Canada’ through critical poetics, and which can offer us insights into the discursive practices of nation formation.

Woman, Space and Nation

In this second part of my chapter, I will discuss how Webb deconstructs ‘space’ as a technology of citizenship on the part of the nation-state and how, through a poetics of desire, she opens up new dimensions for women’s subjectivity and the re-articulation

of women's creative imagination. My interest in space in relation to Webb's poetics is generated by the materiality of her poetry, as well as by a context of literary criticism and cultural practices which are dominated by an interest in space, though with very different political agendas.

Terms such as long poem, sequence, serial poem, short lyrics and book—all widely used in critical assessments of Webb's poetry—immediately invoke spatial metaphors. Literally, they signify the poems' different unfolding on the page in terms of length and composition but they also structure the reader's relation to the poem in that they offer different 'entry' points and traversal avenues. They suggest a foregrounding of the materiality of the page, with the increased awareness of the embodiment of the human senses that visual and tactile qualities suggest. By drawing attention to the processual nature of meaning production, the scrolling of words on the page—and pages through the book—also questions received assumptions about poetic 'voice', especially the romantic notion of the poem's voice as unmediated expression of the poet's interiority and, thus, voice as conveyor of poetic intention. This is not only a shift in the conceptualization of the writing act: in the charged political climate of the 1950s and 1960s, with the 'loudness' of United States propaganda of the cold war machine, counter-mainstream and radical movements consciously attacked 'voice' as metonymic of political rhetoric.

Spatial metaphors also echo poetic theories of embodiment of the new American poetry, especially Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" and "Proprioception," as well as Duncan's "Ideas of the Meaning of Form." Olson's poetics was especially influential in his re-conceptualization of the meaning of history and geography outside of Eurocentric knowledge production, although he was definitely influenced by, and working alongside,

the modernist poetics of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, who were still unable to break away from European literary culture.⁸ To my knowledge, the relationship of Olson's poetics with the imperialist ethos of much of American poetic tradition, with the production of 'long forms' nominalizing a territory constructed as either *terra nullius* or the locus of originary (authentic) culture, has never been the subject of a critique, even in the domain of postcolonial studies. Interestingly, Webb was one of the first to articulate the politics of the line in her 1963 interview with Olson and, in 1981, in the essay "On the Line." Her comments foreground gender and sexuality as primary constituents of the politics of poetry and its implication in processes of nation formation:

Certainties: that the long line (in English) is aggressive, with much "voice."
Assertive, at least. It comes from assurance (or hysteria), high tide, full moon,
open mouth, big-mouthed Whitman, yawp, yawp, and Ginsberg—howling. Male.
[...]
---Emily---those gasps, those inarticulate dashes—those incitements—hiding
what unspeakable—foul breath? But not revolting; subversive. Female. Hiding
yourself—Emily—no, compressing yourself, even singing yourself—tinily—with
compacted passion—a violent storm—

(21-22)

Furthermore, the debates generated in the *Tish* group around narrative and the lyric, which I will discuss in Chapter Four, generated an increased awareness with respect to the relationship among genres, poetic modes and the politics of poetry. Especially, they drew attention to the ways in which conceptualizations of time and space, as embedded in poetic genres, are complicit in ideologies of nation-building (epic) and the classed and gendered hierarchization of societal structures (lyric).⁹

Nevertheless, it is Webb's engagement with a poetics that shows awareness of the ways in which space can become a technology of nationhood and citizenship that I find most compelling. In Webb's poetry, 'space' is addressed and re-created as a critique of

the production of social identities and a site of intervention for the re-articulation of women's subjectivity. From the early (though not long) poems in *Trio*, space and gender are a constant concern of the poet's exploratory mind, whereas *Naked Poems* enact a poetics of space both in their materiality and in the lesbian eroticism being played out in the text. Later works, such as *Wilson's Bowl*, take up a more articulate feminist stance which intervenes in preconceived notions about woman, tradition and place by confronting the powerful male tradition of her intellectual formation, as well as locating new possibilities of articulation in the embodied language.

This chapter builds on Pauline Butling's *Seeing in the Dark* (1996)—her feminist re-reading of Webb's poetry—yet shifts the focus to the notion of “space” in relation to women, desire and the discourse of the Nation. After addressing briefly the recurrent interest in space throughout twentieth-century social and cultural theory, I discuss how the conceptualization of ‘space’ on the part of postmodern Canadian poets and critics has opened up poetic possibilities to a new generation of young, counterculture writers but at the expense of women's subjectivity. As outlined in Chapter One, the shift of critical attention in the new poetics unsettled space as ‘theme’ and unhinged it from the referential bind of land, nature and people, thus allowing for the articulation from the local as subject position and the emergence of a non-centralized, counter-mainstream and non-unitary subject (see “The National Longing for Form: The Canadian Long Poem”). At the same time, it erased the reality of women's lives as having being excluded historically from the position of subjectivity; it also obliterated women's relation to, and production of, space as being different from men's—especially in the domestic ideology that had built up in the postwar decades. While the universality of the subject posited by

Enlightenment and European humanism is attacked and de-constructed, a new subject arises: counter-mainstream, local, but still definitely male, white and heterosexual.

The Space of Theory

The conceptualization of space as a mode of inquiry for the individuation of modern subjectivities is contemporaneous to the rise of the metropolis, with the increased massive urbanization marking the late nineteenth-century bourgeois culture and burgeoning imperial capitalism. In the first half of the twentieth-century, speculations on space range from lived embodiment, dwelling and corporeality to the rise of modern urban subjectivity; they unfold from Walter Benjamin's groundbreaking philosophical 'meditations' and Georg Simmel's urban sociology, to the new modernist poetics of the urban (Charles Baudelaire, Jules Laforgue, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce are only the most prominent examples).¹⁰ In the French intellectual milieu of 1960s, marked by the predominance first of structuralism and later post-structuralism, the theorization of space entered the domain of literary study and cultural criticism through the works of theorists as diverse as Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and François Lyotard.¹¹ Through the investigation of the discursive technologies and material practices that inscribe the body in a set of power relations—a body constructed in turn by these relations—postmodern theories of space have shown that space is not just occupied or inhabited but also, and always, produced. Different social identities produce differential relationships to space which, therefore, is also marked by the positioning of the subject within categories of gender, sex, race and class. Yet the relationship between space and social identity is not unidirectional: space is not a neutral stage, where the actor's drama is staged. An analysis of its material

construction shows how it is always already inscribed in discursive structures of domination. Thus, if space and subjectivity are mutually constitutive, space cannot be simply understood as “empty receptacle” (Grosz 1995, 92) but, rather, as construed through the social relations of the subject with its objects: “Space makes possible different kinds of relations but in turn is transformed according to the subject’s affective and instrumental relations with it” (Grosz 1995, 92).

Feminist theory has tackled the notion of space both in terms of accessibility and subject formation. An overview of the wide range of criticism produced in this area is beyond the scope of my study yet I think it is important to address the groundbreaking nature of critical works that have enacted deconstructive critiques of space. From Virginia Woolf’s *A Room on One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) to the feminist American criticism of the 1970s and 1980s—such as the work of Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Nancy Chodorow, Teresa de Lauretis, Toril Moi and Alice Jardine¹²—much attention has been paid to the ways in which women’s lives and subjectivities have been shaped and constrained by the exclusionary practices of the dominant culture. Moving beyond claims of equality advanced by the first women’s liberation movements, this critical work has problematized the conceptual divide between textuality, space and women’s subjectivities; it has shown that textuality (and different textual spaces) is both the site of production and the arena of contention between conflicting interests and discourses, and that representation is a powerful determinant of women’s lives.

Alongside the specifically social and literary focus in these formulations, the contribution of French thinkers—from the foundational work of Simone de Beauvoir to

the poststructuralist analysis of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva—has been invaluable in performing a deconstructive critique of language as the primary site of subject formation and representation. As Jacques Lacan showed, language is inherently phallic, and women, constantly under the male ‘gaze’, are produced as a male fantasy: hence, Monique Wittig’s ‘outrageous’ announcement that Woman is constituted in relation to Man, and the only possibility for women to exist outside this bind is through the figure of the Lesbian. Thus, we are prompted to ask, what different space does the Lesbian produce? We will have to come back to this question and consider whether Webb creates such a space in her *Naked Poems*.

More recently, with the turn to cultural studies, feminist theory has further paved the way for investigations in cultural geography and architecture (i.e., Doreen Massey, Linda McDowell and Saskia Sassen) of space as a powerful configuration in the production of social and national identity, thus inextricable from gender and sexuality. The separation of the public and the private sphere as coded by gendered and sexual norms has been one of the first issues raised by early feminist critics.¹³ The simultaneous rise of capitalism, colonial expansion and the consolidation of the nation-state in eighteenth-century Europe also relied on the increasing economic and social separation of men and women in the public and private sphere. While men were active participants in the political and economic apparatus that ensured the bourgeois structure of domination, women were increasingly relegated to the domestic, the private and reproduction. The notion of the body politic analyzed by political theorists Thomas Hobbes and Jean Bodin—that is of a State apparatus governing and regulating the welfare of the community—could emerge only by positing a dichotomy between the worlds of culture

and nature (Jean Jacques Rousseau) construed, since the foundations of Western discourse, along gendered and sexual lines.¹⁴ The alignment of Woman to nature, body and reproduction justified her consignment to the 'protection' of the domestic—the gendered and sexed metaphors of the natural world becoming, at the same time, the basis for the conquest of the virgin lands opened up by the new age of exploration. Anne McClintock and Ann Stoler have further demonstrated that gender and sex are inextricable from the racial politics of the colonial project.

Within patriarchal structures of domination, Woman is invisible since she cannot be represented outside the phallogocentrism of the (virgin) mother and the angel of the house. Her visibility in the iconography and rhetoric of nationalist discourses since the rise of modernity is possible only within this logic and at the expense of her sexuality (i.e., the sainthood and virginity of Anne d'Arc, the virginal iconicity of Elizabeth I and the phallic-Mother representation of Queen Victoria). Her function is to be the mother of the nation and reproducer of the bodies 'for' the nation which excludes her; she does not participate in the social economy as agent, but only as commodity. Her reproductive body is the product of exchange through the marriage-system which ensures the perpetuation of phallogocentrism (Irigaray 1977). When attempting to exceed the logic of this heteronormative project, she is consigned to monstrosity (Braidotti 1994). Both Luce Irigaray (1977) and Gayle Rubin (1975) have investigated the construction of Woman within a phallic imaginary where her status of commodity in a system of exchange serves to preserve its own logic. Although both Marx and Engels had raised the problem of Woman in relation to capitalist economies, they offered no effective critique capable of

destabilizing this system of relations. But, asks Irigaray, what happens if the goods do not go to the market?

The very possibility of this question has been made possible by French feminist theorists engaging in a deconstructive critique of language and the notion of 'difference'. Through the insights offered by post-structuralism (with the invaluable contributions of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault), French feminist theorists have engaged in a deconstructive practice of language and representation in philosophy, psychoanalysis and sociology that uncovers the hidden structures of discourse formation devaluing and excluding Woman from representation—a feminist deconstruction which has also enabled the analysis of the mutual constituted-ness of space and gender. Claudine Hermann's essay, "Women in Space and Time" (1980), exposes the spatial and temporal construction of knowledge and perceptions along gender lines and implicitly points at the ways in which gender is construed through the Western paradigms of Cartesian knowledge, vertical Time and horizontal Space. Especially valuable is Luce Irigaray's deconstructive critique of the master narratives of philosophy and psychoanalysis. She exposes Plato's *chora* in *Timaeus* as being the "foundational obsession" of patriarchal discourse, in its never-ending attempt to structure knowledge and space as "specular" in order to pierce through the mystery of Woman (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 1985). Irigaray's critique paved the way for Julia Kristeva's reformulation of the relationship of the subject with(in) language and for her reclaiming of the *chora* as "semiotic chora," the space of maternal language as primary constituent of subjectivity (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 1984).

Irigaray's analysis is particularly useful in exploring Webb's conceptualization of space in *Naked Poems* and the ways in which it deconstructs nationalist patriarchal fantasies. In my brief outline of Irigaray's deconstructive critique of Western configurations of space, language and representation, my intent is not to read *Naked Poems* 'through' the lens of feminist criticism, but, rather, to show how the text performs a trenchant and productive critique of gendered and sexed constructions of space in the context of dominant discourses of nation-ness. In my reading of the long poem, as anticipated in Chapter One, I stray from generic definitions and literary taxonomies and, rather, start from the premise of Carolyn R. Miller: what does the genre do?

In *SpeculumOf The Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray takes the master narratives of Western discourse—Plato and Freud—to task. In her (hysterical) re-reading and re-entering of Plato's *Timaeus*, she exposes the conceptualization of space as that which has no qualities but, rather, only 'exists.' In Plato's philosophy, space is that which nurtures and provides a dwelling in order for the Ideas to take form. Thus, space has only an intermediary function and is closely aligned with "matter" (mater/mother). Space as *chora* does not speak, only to exist outside the orders of history because timeless: space is subjected to time in Western thought. Irigaray's purposeful disruption of Plato's language through a speech act that defies rational thought is a strategy to draw attention to the metaphorical slippage through which space is aligned with womb, woman and the feminine and to expose the inherent flaw of the rationalistic basis of epistemology. But, foremost, it opens language to the suppressed utterance of the feminine by re-investing the womb with a possibility of language and subjectivity. It is Irigaray's exposure of the

sexed and gendered nature of Plato's stage of representation (cave) that I find interesting in exploring Webb's long(ing), serial poems.

A Poetics of (Sexed) Space: *Naked Poems*

I would also have liked to have included Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems* 1965 but was unable to; to me it is still one of the most beautiful and influential books of the last decade.

—Michael Ondaatje, *The Canadian Long Poem Anthology*

No work has generated a wider range of definitions than Webb's *Naked Poems*. This lesbian love poem, built as a sequence of short lyrics, was published in 1965—a time when the synergy generated by the 1963 U.B.C. Poetry Conference in Vancouver ran parallel to the emergence of a poetic West Coast avant-garde with close ties to the New American Poetry of the early 1960s.¹⁵ Despite the positive reception the poems received on the local scene, little critical work was produced. Criticism ranged from John Hulcoop's enthusiastic but humanist reading of love poetry and lyricism (thus following well recognizable reading practices) to dismissive, if not openly hostile, reviews.¹⁶ The sea change occurred in the 1980s, when feminist criticism re-read Webb's poetry as a radical feminist poetics.¹⁷ Sharon Thesen's introduction to Webb's *The Vision Tree: Selected Poems* (1982) reclaimed the feminist stance in Webb's poetry at a time when feminism was becoming increasingly coalesced and heard in Canada, both through the work of women's movements and in the theoretical engagements of women writers and artists.¹⁸ Pauline Butling's *Seeing in the Dark* (1996) is the first critical work entirely dedicated to Webb's poetry; it re-situates *Naked Poems* in a feminist perspective, despite Webb's own admission that she did not reach a feminist consciousness until the 1970s. Written between 1963 and 1965, this sequence of short poems which, as Smaro

Kamboureli points out, can be read only in a continuum, marks not only a major shift in Webb's literary production but also the possibility of feminist writing in Canada, at a time when women's writing was unable to challenge the structures of patriarchal domination in language and representation.¹⁹

The Vancouver Conference held at U.B.C. in 1963—a landmark event in the coalescing of new poetic counter-mainstream voices—saw the participation of American writers as diverse as Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Philip Whalen and the Canadian Margaret Avison.²⁰ Despite their individual differences, the American poets shared a concern for explorations in the realm of form and the explosion of the formalistic strictures of traditional poetry; they called for a pushing of the boundaries of poetic creation and the opening up of new creative possibilities. Olson's theory of "COMPOSITION BY FIELD," which was first introduced in his essay "Projective Verse" (1950)²¹ and further developed in "Proprioception" and "Logography,"²² was particularly influential in that it envisioned the writing process as being embodied in voice and breath and translated into the line breaks and gaps on the page:

Physiology: the surface (senses—the 'skin': of 'Human Universe') the body itself—proper—one's own 'corpus': PROPRIOCEPTION the cavity of the body, in which the organs are slung: the viscera, or interoceptive, the old 'psychology' of feeling, the heart; of desire, the liver; of sympathy, the 'bowels'; of courage—kidney etc—gall.
(Stasis—or as in Chaucer only, spoofed)
(“Proprioception” 17)

Shifting the attention to the body as a source of experience, Olson reaffirms the prominence of the social and the material. “Surface” replaces “depth” and “SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM / BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES”²³ the “consciousness as ego” through the outward movement of “projection,” which demands “participation: active social life, like, for no other reason than that— social life. In the present. Wash the ego out, in its own ‘bath’ (os)” (17). This was a challenge to a tradition of poetry still steeped in the idealism and subjectivism of the Romantics, with their reliance on a transcendental, neo-platonic poetic vision of the I/eye and a consciousness co-extensive with thought. It disrupts older categories of mind/body, depth/surface, conscious/unconscious, soul/physical that underlie the history of Western thought and were reinforced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the rise of Modern Man.

The scrupulous attention paid to the syllable and the line is meant to liberate the energy of the poem and release the instantaneous movement from one perception to a further one. Composition by field was hailed by a whole generation of new artists as the opening of a new era in poetics, where the creative act shifts from former aesthetic preoccupations with ‘product’ to more generative and fertile concerns with ‘process’ and ‘kinetics’. It paved the way for the emergence of writing practices in which embodiment grounds the artistic process in the ‘here’ and ‘now’ of the subject’s corporeal experience and enhances the sense of locality. This emphasis on the senses, the skin and the body is a clear reaction to the discourse on interiority that characterized the nineteenth-century poetic notion of the self as well as the discipline of psychology/psychoanalysis, which was still dominant in postwar America.

The emphasis on “organs,” “senses” and “breath” opened up a space for new poets—especially women poets—to articulate a new poetic of the body. Both Phyllis Webb and Daphne Marlatt have always acknowledged the importance of Olson’s theories, but it is also evident in writers like Fred Wah (*Breathin’ My Name with a Sigh* 1979). Yet Olson’s theories clearly reveal a masculinist approach to poetry and the over-emphasis of his influence on women poets would be misleading. A deconstructive critique of the abundance of terms in “Proprioception” coded in the feminine and, definitely, as hollow/lack is beyond the scope of this study. But it is interesting to note that Olson’s attack on abstraction and idealism re-inscribes the cavity/cave (metaphorically a womb) as that which contains (“the cavity of the body, in which the organs are slung”) and, as such, outside the orders of meaning-production: “The ‘cavity’/cave: probably the ‘Unconscious’? That is, the interior empty place filled with ‘organs’? for ‘functions’?” (17) While claiming that “The ‘soul’ then is equally ‘physical’” (18), he also invokes older categories of representation which, as Irigaray points out in her deconstructive critique of Plato, re-inscribes the cave/womb as the inert matter onto which forms and ideas are created:

surface (senses) projection

cavity (organs—here read ‘archtypes’)

unconscious the body itself—consciousness:

implicit accuracy, from its own energy as a state

of implicit motion.

(“Proprioception,” 19)

Despite its male-centred structure, Olson's poetics played an important role in new writing practices: it opened up a rhetorical space in which women writers could articulate their subjectivities as grounded in the specificity of their bodies and sexualities, whereas traditional poetics would have consigned their voices to the confessional and the lyrical mode. A critical vocabulary to deconstruct Woman in language and representation would become available only in the 1970s and 1980s, first with the challenges coming from feminist and women's liberation movements in North America and, more importantly, through the dissemination of French feminist poststructuralist theory, especially that of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Furthermore, the circulation of women's poetry, as well as those 'foremothers' who had been most active in challenging patriarchal societal structures (from Virginia Woolf to H.D.), was still limited and definitely marginalized by the literary canon.²⁴ These readings were often left to personal discovery or casual encounter.

As previously mentioned, Phyllis Webb was among those young writers/artists who attended the Poetry Seminars held in the summer of 1963 at U.B.C. She was in the process of composing *Naked Poems* (by the time she attended she had completed the first Suite) and the conference, judging from her interviews, certainly had a major impact on the development of her poetics.²⁵ Nevertheless, we should be careful in attributing to the poetry seminars a larger influence than they had. I am not disclaiming Webb's own emphasis on the major impact that the conference had on the whole cultural climate in the artistic (and non-artistic) communities and youth culture in Vancouver. Rather, I argue that the new exciting climate of transgression and innovation certainly enhanced an artistic development which was already in place and which should be re-contextualized in

the political atmosphere of the late 1950s and early 1960s. As shown in Chapter One, this was a time when governmental efforts to reinforce the ideological apparatus of the Canadian nation-state translated into larger public funding for the arts and a very active federal presence in constructing what Benedict Anderson calls “an imagined community”—one nevertheless structured in the hierarchized relationship of its citizens/subjects. Although Webb’s involvement in the political arena dates back to her youth—at seventeen she ran in a provincial election, “the youngest candidate ever fielded at that time, for the CCF” (“Phyllis Webb’s Canada” 13)—and although, as I have noticed, she claims she reached a full feminist consciousness only in the early 1970s,²⁶ the incipient climate of nationalism and the open questioning and debating of what constitutes a national identity must have entailed, for a female-gendered and now lesbian writer, the question of what is a nation and who is accorded the privileged status of citizenship. It is significant that the short and lyrical *Naked Poems*, standing out for their material clarity and pristine quality, were to be followed by a long-line poem dealing more overtly with political and social issues and infused with darker tones. In her application for a Canada Council Travel grant of \$ 2,000 Webb included both projects (Butling 1997, 146): “My plan is after I’ve finished the book of the *Naked Poems* to write a book with great long lines—great long poems—so I’m heading that way I hope; whether I arrive there is another question” (“Polishing Up the View” 47).

The second project has never materialized, thus acquiring the uncanny quality of the double Other. Part of it was incorporated in a later series of poems on the Russian anarchist Prince Kropotkin. The two projects are not necessarily intertwined but my suggestion is that similar preoccupations are at the origin of their inception, and these

concerns were voiced in the apparently simple, but troublingly so, *Naked Poems*.

Although this sequence was considered one of the best examples of Webb's production, its critical appreciation has entrenched itself either in a humanist reading privileging the poems as expression of the individual and creative self (i.e., John Hulcoop) or in their detraction for a lack of control comparable to a state of hysteria—the exception being Kroetsch's "For Play and Entrance."²⁷ In the late 1970s and 1980s, feminist critics have re-appropriated Webb's poetry, from Jean Mallinson's 1978 article to various sympathetic analyses of her "craft" (see note 16). These first feminist readings provide interesting avenues of engagement with the poems; yet I find it troublesome that the poetic enactments, such as the materiality of the words on the page, the presence of spatial frames, the language of embodiment, the lesbian relationship and domestic space, often tend to be re-constituted in a formalistic discourse and read as 'elements' or 'themes' within the text, rather than being analyzed for what they perform. These formalistic and generic concerns linger on in Thesen's valuable introduction to Webb's *The Vision Tree*. The exception is probably represented by Butling's study *Seeing in the Dark*. Nevertheless, feminist criticism of Webb's poetics from 1990s was definitely more creative; it has accounted for the dialogical relationship between text and reader—thus reading with and into the text, rather than unpacking predetermined formulas or solutions.

Yet, despite the apparently 'clarity' and 'purity' of their lyrical mode, *Naked Poems* enacts a trenchant critique of the heterosexism of social structures; by deconstructing the phallographic assumptions underlying liberal ideals of 'natural nationhood' (the people-as-one) and universal citizenship, the text enacts a feminist re-negotiation of national identity, thus opening up a space for women's subjectivities and

desires. Webb draws us into her private sphere of space, feelings and love-making but not to leave us comfortably there. The displacement performed by the different parts of the sequence creates an aporia through a constant production of excess that undoes all possible boundaries, the fraught division between private and public as well as the boundaries of the nation. The poem explodes the walls of the house of language; the empty interior re-emerges as the production of active/creative space (for women, for lesbian love, for poetry), and thus of space signed in the feminine whereby the *chora* is re-materialized.

“small like these poems” : The Naked Body of Architecture

What kind of ‘archi-texture’ is this that harbors women’s love? The poems strike one immediately by their privileging of body and space. Their attention to the materiality of the page—the brevity, the whiteness surrounding the ink, the short lines—reveals a typographical precision in common with the New American Poetics (features discussed abundantly by Olson, Duncan and Levertov). Yet *Naked Poems* is undoubtedly a unique text. It marks a radical break with the modernist-inflected poetry hitherto produced both by the ‘high tradition’ of American modernism and by the Montreal Group of the 1940s and 1950s in Canada. The reading of its spatial qualities only in terms of the influence of the new American poetry risks framing Webb’s poetics within a patrilineal logic that disavows Webb’s politics. As mentioned earlier, her previous work and personal engagement on the scene of Canadian culture hints at an early feminist consciousness, albeit one still lacking a critical vocabulary, but certainly showing critical awareness of the gender relations and social positions assigned to women. Although sharing much with

the new emerging poetics of the West Coast, *Naked Poems* also differs from anything produced at the time by the 1960s younger generation of poets.

The text is structured as a work of architecture. It is organized in five parts—Suite 1, Suite II, Non Linear, Suite of Lies, Some Final Questions—not simply following each other but arranged as spatial movements. The “Suite” is both the movement of instrumental composition and the room where love-making takes place. It draws attention to the musical quality of the text, sound being part of the poetic process. “Suite,” in fact, is also *sweet*—the sweetness of the lovers, the act, the room itself and the poems. In the same way, “lies” points to the position of the naked bodies, the lying of the poems on the page, and the lies that are not only part of love relationship but also of societal structures and discourse. “Lies” are also the fiction of patriarchal language (Butling 1997). Yet the play of sound in the poem denaturalizes the association signifier-signified-referent. If the signifier “suite” has diverse signifieds—room and sweet—as noun and adjective, spatial and relational, then the referentiality of language is exposed as both illusion and construction.

This is not a poetic device, a play with language for the achievement of surprise, let alone a pleasure-seeking melodious effect. Nor is it a shocking strategy in the mode of the historical avant-garde—the shock in *Naked Poems* being obtained, rather, in the overt reference to the lesbian relationship (“I have thrown my / blouse on the floor” 70). This simple move toward sound, which permeates the whole text, foregrounds the sensorial apprehension of language through the ear—the mechanics of hearing differentiated from the ‘naturalness’ of ‘voice’. Although not necessarily intentional on the part of the author, it also displaces the centrality of print and literacy in Western traditions of culture, as

well as of the visual in male avant-garde practices. Since much of the experimental writing practices of the Canadian West Coast and the New American Poetics also relied on the attention paid to the visual arrangement of the page and typographical setting, is this at odds with what is claimed so far? We will have to pause on this point before proceeding in the reading of *Naked Poems*.

Formal experimentation is a tenet of the practice of the historical avant-gardes. Experimentation is intended to achieve a radical *Verfremdung*, an estrangement of naturalized assumptions of the transparency and referentiality of language (Peter Bürger 1984). Although the disruption of language in writing is performed through the many instruments of poetry (imagery and sound patterns), prominence is accorded to the visual element that both foregrounds the materiality of language and also exposes its constructedness in a forceful way. Yet these practices, which borrowed heavily from cubist and surrealist techniques of painting and became the feature of both high modernism and the postwar avant-gardes, still posit the central presence of an ‘eye’. Although no longer bourgeois and at times even revolutionary, this ‘eye’ is unarguably male. The gendering of the eye lies not in the assumed autonomy of the humanist subject, which in the crisis of language and representation of the twentieth-century is already displaced and fragmented.²⁸ Rather, the gendering of the eye is tied to “the violence of representation” (De Lauretis 1987) and the disciplining surveillance of the gaze—which feminists have critiqued in the phallogocentrism of language and its “tragic consequences on women’s lives” (Brossard 1985, 9). Not surprisingly, women writers and artists, also engaging with radical forms of experimentation in language, steer away from the emphasis on the visual sovereignty of the eye as well as its fragmentation and, rather,

work more closely on the inner workings of language—i.e., patterns of sound, rhythms and ‘tactile’ arrangements. Is there a tradition of female avant-garde? And what is its relationship to what Julia Kristeva calls the semiotic *chora*? I will leave these questions open.²⁹ Suffice it to say that Webb’s text calls into question the male-centredness of contemporary poetics as well as of the ‘great humanist tradition’ in a work that weaves spatiality and orality in a poetic texture, a movement from voice to mouth, from speech to writing.³⁰

Arranged as rooms in this house of poetry, the sections of *Naked Poems* are non-linear and invite the reader to multiple entries and crossings of the text.³¹ The different positions that the speaking voice inhabits are always liminal in that they refer to a threshold of emotions which does not allow for consciousness to ‘settle in’. A dialogical space is thus created, whereby the poems unravel through the unfolding of emotions (corporeal as well as intellectual), a movement which evades the possibility of lyrical closure. This dialogic relationship (as space of encounter) is apparent in the speaker’s openness to the lover, whose silence is also ‘speaking’, and in the reverberation of the many voices of ‘discourse’ entering this enclosed (but not sealed) space. The spaces of ‘space’, thought and poetry are interwoven but the erotics of the poem does not freeze them in abstract, frozen structures of (self) enclosure. The poem never suggests the monolithic quality of a soliloquy or monologue:

TONIGHT
quietness. In me
and the room.

I am enclosed
by a thought

and some walls.

("Suite 1" 67)

Whose room is this? Obviously the room of the lovers' encounter as well as the stanza, the room of poetry. The room is marked by simple and everyday objects suggesting 'a room of one's own,' the writer's room:

YOUR BLOUSE

I people
this room
with things, a
chair, a lamp, a
fly, two books by
Marianne Moore.

I have thrown my
blouse on the floor.

Was it only
last night?

("Suite 1" 70)

The books by Marianne Moore, both a literary foremother and sign of 'monstrous sexuality' (that is characterized, in male-dominated high modernist criticism, by a non-reproductive, possibly frigid sexuality aligned with her highly intellectual poetry) is followed by another marker, the blouse on the floor. Love and writing inhabit, and define, this room of poetry.

The clarity brought by the writing act (love-writing) unfolds through the poem. There is no self-consciousness, nor autonomy; the darkness to which women's love has been confined has been 'gently' taken away and replaced by visibility:

YOU
took

with so much
gentleness

my dark

("Suite I" 71)

Thus lesbian writing, traditionally erased from language and excluded from representation, changes writing and loving itself in a movement that defies poetic idealism and the congealment it produces for women's lives. It reclaims embodiment:

*The sun comes through
plum curtains.*

*I said
the sun is gold
in your eyes.*

*It isn't the sun
you said.*

("Suite II" 74)

Not contained in the narcissistic gaze of love poetry, which is exemplified by Layton's narcissus and (we can infer) Wordsworth's daffodil, it is articulated as tidal waves, a flood of language that frees female subjectivity from the constraints of patriarchal language. The 'tidal' references ("ebb," "sea," "waves") in the next section, "Non Linear," are not metaphorical but, rather, the torrential and uncontainable force of

desirous writing that cannot conceptualize mind, body and nature as discrete (and opposed) categories: “I hear the waves / hounding the window: / lord, they are the root waves / of the poem’s meter / the waves of the / root poem’s sex” (“Non Linear” 90). The tide of lesbian writing leaves behind traces (of language? of formerly erased writing acts?) which merge into the new writing of woman’s imagination.

Naked Poems is both the representation and deconstruction of the gender-sex system that is produced and maintained by what Louis Althusser calls “the ideological state apparati” (Althusser 1971). The space is undoubtedly a domestic one, thus calling forward traditional images of family, the private, the maternal and, therefore, the hetero-normative construction of gender/sexual relations of dominant bourgeois ideology. At the same time, as a lesbian space it is excessive of the discursive field of heterosexuality as patriarchal contract. Movement, as it is invoked at the opening of Suite 1 (and implied in the musical quality of the “Suite”) is central to the sequence of poems. The movement in space (the house and the room) becomes movement of bodies (love-making and kissing of the body). But movement itself *moves* to inhabit different positions: bodies, mouth, visual standpoints (the flies on the wall observed from “down here” as well as the epigraph “*star fish / fish star*”).³²

The poems also resist the fixity of the lyric, while enacting a lyrical mode. While the much invoked pristine quality of the poems suggests a clarity and intensity as the domain of the lyric tradition, the poems thwart the limits of genre in different ways. The continuum of movement—musical, bodily, spatial—precipitates the possibility of seizing the essence of womanhood and the lovers. The silent dialogue between the lovers does not thematize love but, rather, plays a dance of the intellect where body and mind cannot

possibly be conceived as separate: there is no question that the lovers' eroticism is also intellectual. The rooms (of poetry? of the house?) also destabilize the classical notion of lyrical portrait through their non-linear arrangement, which, in turn, invites the reader to read them differently than the order of the sequence. At the same time they slide from spatial and musical qualities to a dialogical mode, which also subverts traditional notions of lyric and especially re-write women's and lesbians' love into visibility. The abstractness of lyrical erotic language is re-embodied through a loving act which is not represented but "enacted" in language, the writing itself being the gift and the love act between two women: the poems are, therefore, performative, in that they do what they say.

Thus the lesbian poems subvert the metaphorical slippage of traditional philosophy and Western discourse, the cave as stage of representation erasing its own sexualized quality: writing and loving in/of the room/page is also a writing act that kills the womb as site of re-productive hetero-normativity, which turns woman into a commodity for the phallogentric economy. Yet this act is not one of negativity or erasure: rather, lesbian desire re-appropriates the woman's body and sexuality as a site of pleasure and a sign of productive writerly excess:

THE BRUISE

Again you have left
your mark.
Or we
have.
Skin shuddered
secretly.

("Suite 1" 68)

The woman-centred language which arises is both new and antinomian, in that it connects a lineage of women whose words come to life again in the orgasmic tide of her *jouissance* writings:

Hieratic sounds emerge
from the Priestess of
Motion
a new alphabet
gasps for air.
 We disappear in the musk of her coming.

(“Non Linear” 89)

Thus, like petals, “the lies” of patriarchal fiction are “falling drop / delicately” (“Suite of Lies” 99) through lesbian writing. In this re-creation of reality, renewed perceptions and an alternative imagination are achieved through a language escaping the confines of the legitimate and sanctioned, displacing space from the flat construction of representation—an erotic writing a new space through ‘wastes’, what has been excluded and rejected, a text which crosses the threshold between reality and fiction, body and mind, and enacts a displacement in space, the material and imaginary. The poems throw light at the construction of reality and the fiction of the feminine: “love” and nature, “sun” and “plums” suggest the idealism of lyrical entrancement. As Butling correctly observes, “*What do you really want?*” (“Some Final Questions” 104) immediately evokes the patriarchal interrogation of woman’s essence, as exemplified by Freud’s famous dictum “what do women want” (1997 28). To the question “*But why don’t you do something?*” she can only answer: “I am trying to write a poem” (“Some Final Questions” 106).

What is “new” about Webb’s *Naked Poems*? I argue that it is the poetics of space, where space as formal experimentation is a discursive venturing into the territory of

gender and sexual representations and of the ‘un-representable’, which, as Teresa De Lauretis argues, in those patriarchal representations of nation-ness is invisible yet re-contained in discourse. For there is no doubt that the visual quality of the poem is an invitation to the reader to enter this poetic space but also to ponder the erasure that the white space, which frames the short lyrics, inscribed onto the page. If we draw on De Lauretis’s formulation of the “space off” in cinematic theory (*Technologies of Gender* 26), we can easily see how the white frame is the space in/by representation, in/by discourse that is not represented yet implied, and which avant-garde cinematic practices place alongside the represented space. This inclusion, De Lauretis argues, is neither re-containment nor dialectic. Rather, since women move in the experience of everyday life from one to the other, it points to a movement that is the “tension of contradiction” and the production of “heteronomous spaces” (26).

Silence, Wounds and the “strange gestation”: *Wilson’s Bowl*

And yet the long poem, by its very length, allows the exploration of the failure of systems and grid. The poem of that failure is the long poem.
—Robert Kroetsch, “For Play and Entrance”

Difficulty is a term that often recurs in commentaries of *Wilson’s Bowl*. Although the book was widely appraised in the writing community, criticism was scarce and privileged a thematic and formalist reading, foregrounding the individual poems as units of composition rather than the ‘book’ as assemblage and poetic process, and the poet as author rather than writer. This formalist approach ignores the construction of the “book-poem” as part of the compositional process and the poem’s deconstructive mode.³³ The only exception is Smaro Kamboureli’s review, “The Poetics of Failure in *Wilson’s Bowl*” (*Island* 10 1981).³⁴ Not surprisingly, the inclusion of *Wilson’s Bowl* in a discussion of the

experimental long(ing) poem may thus appear contradictory. A ‘book’ of poetry that assembles selections from incomplete older projects as well as new poems, *Wilson’s Bowl* could easily fall into the category of the collection—a term also used by Webb in her “Foreword.” Nevertheless, it is precisely the notion of assemblage and the critical space that this dialogic form privileges which gives the book a poetic form, as yet undefined in generic terms. Interestingly, in her personal correspondence Webb defined *Wilson’s Bowl* a “book-poem” (a term that Kamboureli also invokes), thus drawing attention to the materiality of the book and the poetic act involved in its writing-as-assembling act.³⁵ For there is no doubt that Webb’s careful and self-conscious poetic assemblage goes beyond the re-visitation and salvaging of older poems and becomes part of an incessant meditation on power, language and poetry. Weaving in and out of the subject of this “study” (“Foreword”) *Wilson’s Bowl* draws attention to its mutant form, the sequence/serial/long form unfolding into different shapes and unraveling its troublesome—and never to be resolved—relationship to the lyric.

Published in 1980 after ten years of “silence” (the last of Webb’s book publications had been *Selected Poems* in 1971), the book was received enthusiastically by the literary community, its appraisal coming from the mainstream positions of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood as well as Vancouver-based counterculture circles.³⁶ Yet the book was not short-listed for the Governor General’s Award, nor was it mentioned during the award ceremony.³⁷ The choices of the GGA commission were criticized and the media highlighted the controversy around the role of the public institution of the Canada Council as a technology of taste rather than the recognition and support of innovative works (Wachtel, “Prize and Prejudice” 9). In the same year, on the initiative of a group of

writers, including Michael Ondaatje, bpNichol, Margaret Atwood and P.K. Page, Webb received a private award in the form of a cheque for \$2,300. Although this counter-gesture to institutional indifference confirmed the recognition that Webb had achieved (slowly and painfully) in the literary community, the controversy also drew attention to the power politics of the literary establishment as well as the inability of structures of power (including academic criticism) to engage with “unrecognizable texts” (Derksen 2002) that escape the logic of identification, transparency and interpretation.

Wilson's Bowl was not conceived as a unit. The poems were written at different times: some were part of a project initiated in 1967 as a study of power, and others, more recent, arose out of Webb's personal circumstances. Yet this assemblage of poems old and new invites its reading as a long poem, the unfolding of personal-as-political moments as a space of critical thinking weaving the book into one text. Specifically, *Wilson's Bowl's* long(ing) form resides in the critical tension engendered by the poems' desires, as well as the desires the poems address, its movement beyond its thematic continuity (although themes are certainly present) or structural organization. As a book-poem, the text exceeds itself as it unravels the poems' utopian ruptures. It is in the performative nature of “failure” (failure being both the title of the sequence “Poems of Failure” and the failed achievement of the original project of the “study of power”) and failure as excess, that we read the book-poem as a disarticulation of linguistic and representational patriarchal structures of power and their figurations in the national imaginary (the nation and the citizen). Rather than a theme or a sign of lack, failure is thus re-articulated as a tactical deployment of feminist *poesis*.

Wilson's Bowl is the title of the book and of a single poem. Named after a bowl-shaped Indian carving discovered on the rocky shores of Salt Spring Island where Webb lives, the 'inscribed' bowl is both artifact and writing, trace of a hidden Native history. It draws attention to the act of writing as graphing, while its (womb-like) shape generates suggestions of the creative potential of 'mere' (feminine) matter. The petroglyph was discovered by Lilo Berliner, "a reference librarian at the University of Victoria" (*Nothing But Brush Strokes* 111) who was passionately interested in Northwest Coast Indian art and who corresponded with U.B.C. professor and anthropologist Wilson Duff. Hence the name "Wilson's Bowl."³⁸ While the name is both reminder and inscription of Wilson's work, it also acknowledges the fraught relationship between history and anthropology, the 'naming' of aboriginal people and the colonial violence of the anthropological gaze. At the same time, it is also interwoven with the writing act underlying the poetic and intimate correspondence between Duff and Berliner, which began with Berliner asking for permission to xerox one of Duff's essays. Their fascinating dialogue and sharing of ideas is already apparent in Duff's reply: "But what about the 'burning desire' to contact the author? The author's pseudonym? anonymous? amorphous? intangible? You would only be contacting yourself" (letter dated 20 August 1973).³⁹

In *Wilson's Bowl*, the absent presence of Wilson Duff is not only in the recurrence of his name as tied to the discovered carving and his work on Northwest Coast Indian art and mythology but also in the theme of suicide and death that runs through the poems. 'Suicide' is both a loaded and unavoidable term for these poems, since it aligns Duff's end (in 1976 he shot himself in his studio) with Lilo Berliner's own life-taking (she drowned herself) and with Webb's life-long meditations about suicide. But suicide,

failures (personal as well as societal) and writing are inescapably intertwined in the relationship of the lived historical beings and in the poet's engagement with the inherited letters of the now absent voices (although Duff and Berliner corresponded they never met). With Lilo Berliner leaving the papers at the threshold of Webb's house before walking into the water, writing becomes both gift of friendship and cultural trace woven into the poet's own writing act. In the inscription of Duff's and Berliner's lives/deaths in the poems, Webb's friends become co-signatory of the book; their names/words are graphs in the poet's text, carved in the manner of the Indian petroglyphs.⁴⁰ Thus the themes of suicide and death running through the poems are woven together into Webb's critical meditation yet they are not exhausted thematically. Instead, they become textualized through the tension enacted by writing *as* silence, gestation *as* failure.

In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel ("Intimations of Mortality" 8-9), Webb explained how the dark periods in her life were discovered to be the effect of a physiological condition. I am not so much interested in locating an origin for Webb's depressive modes and possibly death drives (a mode still entrenched in much of Webb's criticism and revealing a humanist anxiety about authorship and expression of the 'poetic self') but, rather, in examining the ways in which the text articulates a feminist poetics that weaves together an enquiry into female subjectivity, anarchist utopia and writing as a deconstructive critique of power to produce one of the most interesting poetic productions in North-American writing.

In her "Foreword" Webb gives important clues to the writing of the poems. By referring to "blood-line" she points to a genealogical approach that illuminates her relationship to writing, as well as the book's compositional process. The quotation from

Roland Barthes, “I am both too big and weak for writing. I am *alongside* it, for writing is always dense, violent, indifferent to the infantile ego which solicits it” (n.p.), underlies both the fragility of the poet’s ego and his/her being “alongside writing,” a position that privileges the writer over the author. She points out how “the poems are born out of great struggles of silence” and how “this book has been long in coming” (n.p.). As she further explains: “Wayward, natural and unnatural silences, my desire for privacy, my critical hesitations, my critical wounds, my dissatisfactions with myself and the work have all contributed to a strange gestation” (n.p.). This laboured language, which takes great pain in foregrounding the gestational process of this book’s coming-to-life, can hardly go unnoticed. In this context, blood evokes connotations beyond genealogy and the most obvious association with crimes and violence (including Wilson’s violent death): the bleeding of the female body as both organic and discursive in that woman can find no articulation in the prison of patriarchal language.

At the time of the publication of *Wilson’s Bowl*, Webb already had access to a feminist critical language and new critical discourse that allowed her to articulate her feminist poetics in a clearer way. In referring to “the dominance of male figures in *Portraits*,” she is very frank about the gender politics underlying the writing of the poems:

They signify the domination of a male power culture in my educational and emotional formation so overpowering that I have, up to now, been denied access to inspiration from the female figures of my intellectual life, my heart, my imagination. The ‘Letters to Margaret Atwood’ are an exception; I was asked to write on the subject of women that time. (n.p.)

Thus gender, power and political culture re-enter Webb’s poetry through a markedly feminist consciousness. Yet her avowal of the “domination of male power

culture” in her life and education cannot solely summarize her position; the reader is struck by her use, in the “Foreword,” of terms aligned with woman’s body and reproductive function. The imagery is strikingly womanly: it articulates a woman’s body and subjectivity together with the contested position of reproduction, evoking the consequences this entails for women’s lives. “[G]estation,” “blood-line” and “wounds” metaphorically describe her coming-to-writing after a long period of silence; the “Foreword” articulates her new relationship to writing, as well as her difficulty in struggling with the “Muse of History” and the “Muse of Poetry.”

This gesture is not an essentialist turn to Woman’s nature and function but the exposure of the condition of woman’s subjectivity in language—a (patriarchal) language of power which still excludes her articulation and condemns her to silence. Hence, the “natural and unnatural silences,” alongside her “desire for privacy,” “critical hesitation” and “critical wounds,” “have all contributed to a strange gestation.” The woman-poet’s coming-to-writing produces this book of “remnants” (traces?) that remains incomplete by definition, never being able to achieve the status of finished aesthetic product. The “study of power” that the sections of **Portraits, Crimes**ⁱⁱ and the “Poems of Failure” were meant to be, could not reach the closure demanded by the analytical tradition without reinscribing the power they were meant to expose and critique. Hence they ‘fail’. But the cause of such failure is not to be located in the poet’s inadequacy to tackle the largeness of the project and the structure it entails, as Webb seems to suggest in an interview with Smaro Kamboureli (“Seeking Shape. Seeking Meaning” 1991/92). Instead, failure is already inscribed in the condition of language. If post-structuralist theory has troubled the

ⁱⁱ I discuss *Wilson’s Bowl* as a book-poem. To clarify the discussion, individual poems are cited in quotation marks, while sections will retain the bold font of the original publication.

understanding of language within the paradigm of the Enlightenment project (the transparency of language as medium of representation and reflection of individual consciousness), it is the woman-poet who can best articulate the condition of the subject in language; it is precisely in the acknowledgement of the ‘failure’ of discourse to seal meaning that she exposes the ruptures in language of a phallogocentric economy—failure as a sign of incompleteness yet productively excessive.⁴¹

What is ‘failing’ in these poems? There is meaning arising from ‘failure’, if we conceive of failure as a “remainder” (Venuti 2000), a waste, an excess of the rational process in which our thinking is engaged. Failure, thus, as “supplement” (Derrida 1998), as the margin which, through *différance*, changes the centre. But failure also suggests abortive language, the failed project of reproduction, what is expelled from woman’s womb of signification in order to escape the constraints of patriarchal language and representation. What are, then, these wastes, exclusions from the containment of language? Though reticent to deliver answers, Webb seems to give us an insight in her conclusion to her “Foreword”: “The others—the unwritten poems—are the real ‘poems of failure’” (n.p.).

The book consists of five parts: **Preface, Portraits, Crimes, Artifacts**, and **Dreams and the Common Good**. The relationship of power with themes of anarchy and utopian dreams is already apparent in the section titles. As Webb notes in her **Foreword**, these poems have been “long in coming” and some were part of a project that started in 1967 (only two years after the publication of *Naked Poems*). Both “The Kropotkin Poems” and “Poems of Failure,” alongside poems contained in the sections **Portraits** and **Crimes**, are thus “remnants” of a “beginning in the study of power.” But whereas power

demands the closure of meaning and utopia holds on to its social dream, Webb's poetics of failure is enacted in its own performance—the miscarriage of language unable to bear the burden of representation—which marks the impossibility of completion for the poems.

Interestingly, the “Poems of Failure” are the only sequence contained in the **Preface** section. While their position marks the sequence-like structure of the book, they also draw attention to the performative nature of failure in the whole work. The sequence also foregrounds the motif of anarchism through the figure of the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin; as Webb explains in her notes, sections II and III of the poems “telescope some of the major events in his life” (87). A leading figure of anarchist thought—in fact the first to articulate a doctrine of anarcho-communism—Kropotkin enters the “Poems of Failure” as text: traits of his life and personality are not ‘narrated’ but, rather, dug out of the territory of History and political thought as traces of the failed utopia of socialist anarchism. Yet, through the intertextual presence of Kropotkin this failure also becomes site of production: the closure envisioned by utopian projects is dispersed and produces a web of possibilities of signification. The images drawn from Paul Goodman's *The Empire City* (“the little lady” and “the Flying Dutchman”), the quotations from *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, as well as Garcia Lorca's “Found Poem” in **Artifacts**, are inscribed in Webb's text as citations, opening up a dialogical space of polyvocality and authorial displacement. Although these texts undoubtedly gesture toward a literary lineage of anarchist writings, Webb displaces the stability of their authorial position, thus foreclosing the possibility of reading them in the Bloomian mode of “anxiety of influence.”⁴² While most of her poems posit an “I” and an addressee, here we cannot

locate a central voice since the author/poet's voice is refracted through the many voices/citations that she invokes. Her dialogues with Kropotkin, Socrates, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Rilke, Vasary and Pound articulate languaged spaces where the multiplicity of voices and genres relativizes the apparently solid position of the central "I." Hence the anarchists' voices cannot be crystallized in time but only acknowledged in their historical and cultural specificity as they re-enter the poet's present:

The *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* before me, things fall
together now. Pine needles, arbutus bark, the tide
comes in, path to the beach lights with sun-fall.
Highest joys? The simple profundity of a deadman works
at my style. I am impoverished. He the White Christ.
Not a case of identification. Easier to see myself
in the white cat asleep on the bed. Exile. I live
alone. I have a phone. I shall go to Russia. One
more day run round and the 'good masterpiece of work'
does not come. I scribble. I approach some distant dream.
I wait for moonlight reflecting on the night sea. I can
wait. We shall see.

(VII 21)

In these Bakhtinian spaces, the monologism of language on which power relies for the closure of meaning is subverted from the inside through the poetic act, rather than thematically. The dream has become "distant" yet it is not lost. Unable to produce "the good masterpiece of work" (the authorial aesthetic product), she can only "approach some distant dream," and thus evoke Barthes's claim "I am alongside writing" or, we might as well say, writing alongside writing. Although Webb explained that the project of the "Kropotkin Poems," of which the "Poems of Failure" were part, became in time too large and overwhelming, inscribed with the masculinist voice of the long line (and of anarchist tradition), her refusal to identify with Kropotkin shows awareness of the gendered politics of writing: "Not a case of identification. Easier to see myself / in the

white cat asleep on the bed.” While Kropotkin is definitely a large (male) figure in her poems, “He the White Christ,” his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* is part of her writerly and material landscape, not different from “pine needles,” “arbutus bark,” the tide and dusk. Political theory/philosophy is woven into the subjectivity of the memoir genre; the artificial, bourgeois separation of genres of high and low culture, abstraction and embodiment, as well as spheres of life is thus made indistinct. The blurring of space is also a blurring of the categorization of time which bourgeois History privileges. The *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* enters in the historical here and now of Webb’s writing: “The simple profundity of a deadman works / at my style” (VII 21). A gift from the dead, and a gift of friendship, Kropotkin’s text enters the dialogic space of Webb’s poetry alongside others:

you writing, speaking, hoeing your garden
greeting your friends, your mind sent out
to the people, a movement turning me to you
40 years after Sacco and Vanzetti
50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution
your gentle words wounding me on this island [...]
(II 16)

Red velvet on purple purple on red colours
of the mystic and revolutionary. *The Politics
of Experience, Love’s Body, Psycho-
pathology and Politics, Trotsky’s Journal, Pushkin,
The Possessed, Social Contract, Journey into Russia,
Memoirs of a Revolutionist, The Romantic Exiles,
Anarchism.* ‘Eleanor Rigby.’
(IV 18)

These inscriptions, both borrowings and layerings, expose the nature of the literary text as palimpsest, the traces of a discourse of difference. Its archaeological mode is neither a nostalgic movement toward a narrative of origins nor a reconciliation of

the guilt of historical violence, but a blurring of the boundary of language and the material, words from the past reemerging as “bones” in a continuous present:⁴³

To be reconciled with the past
is redemption but unreal as hell
if you can't recall the beginning
and of time, who can get back there?

redemptive anthropologists, archae-
ologists, bones, stones, rings of
trees ...

(14)

While Salt Spring Island and Russia are aligned on the chronotope of utopian dreams, the boundary between the “everyday” and “History,” as well as past and present, is blurred. The condition of the writer/artist/political philosopher is marked by “exile” (in language as well as in life), and writing remains the only possible articulation for the opening up of the possibility of “dreams” of social change.

The language of abstraction that characterizes these poems may at first sight seem contradictory in its refusal to be self-contained. The philosophy of the mind is always articulated alongside the particular, the material, and the lived embodiment of historical specificity. Nevertheless, material specificity and embodiment cannot indulge in a realist mode. Both the ‘I’, which only apparently occupies the centre stage, and the material are textualized and show the structures of language producing them. Hence the poet’s message machine (reminiscent of Jack Spicer’s notion of poetic dictation) points to the technology of the self that discursive powers of containment operate: the letters as signifiers detached from the signified; the sounds which are produced under the injunction “not to speak” of the jailer of Kropotkin’s cell; the inarticulate sounds escaping the interpellation of the jailer/prison system that calls on the subject’s

imprisonment to restrict his voice. Here not only does the lyrical I subvert the private individual voice (Roger Farr 2005) but also engenders a poetics of silence disarticulating speech from intentionality and representation.

In the book-poem, “A Question of Questions,” “Spots of Blood” and “Free Translations,” all part of the **Crimes** section, occupy a central position. In the first sequence, the interrogation of the prisoner exposes “the question” as a form of interpellation of the subject-citizen on the part of the state (“who—how many years / to shape the mind to make / its turn toward this?” 47) and the seduction of power. The nightmarish quality of the poem, sliding in and out of both torturer’s and victim’s minds, is increased by the abundance of graphic details and the highlighting of bodily parts. Nevertheless, these do not perform a representational function but, rather, become bodily speech acts either in their participation or resistance to discursive interpellation. Organ parts blur the boundaries of reproduction, the erotic and the tool (labour) which befit the logic of bio-politics:

Succulent lobe of the ear
droplet of flesh
depending from the not
quite crescent you are
allowed to hear with (II, 48).
...
The hello of your mouth is what I want
the smile of your crooked pearlies. [...]
Hello / hello is as equal as we’ll come
my love
my question
my answer
smiles on one side,
ugly, or other of
power and seduction.
(III, 49)

In “Spots of Blood” the womanly language traverses the poem with stark imagery blending (bleeding?) alienness, bodily invasion (“Count Dracula”), disease (plague brought in by the “rats”), female migraine (suggesting a premenstrual syndrome) and menstrual blood (“spots of blood”). While the occasion of the poem was suggested by a radio interview with the actor performing the role of Dracula, the imagery and the hybrid language of everyday radio talk, individual thoughts and popular imagination (Hollywood) is woven into a personal-as-political meditation on the power of language and the reliance of power on the construction of Otherness. While the interviewer is entranced by the idea of the 14,000 rats beleaguering the Dutch town where the movie was shot, the “spots of blood / spots of womantime” materialize her sense of pain and allow her to empathize at an intimate level:

The blood pounds at my temples.
The women of the world parade before me
in red slippers and red vests, back and
forth, back and forth, fists clenched.
My heart emerges from my breast for
14,000 rats and the citizens of Delft,
for the women of the world in their menses.
(54)

The power of media representation takes the form of Count Dracula as he “leans / against my throat with his own teeth” (55).

The vampiric function of patriarchal language and discourse resurfaces in the **Artifacts** section, where images of blood and death abound, but it is worth noting that the last poem of the **Crimes** section, “Free Translations,” already highlights First Nations mythology (the raven), thus grounding her text in the locality of Northwest Indian territory, history and language. Although increasingly dark—imagery of blood, death and

water clearly referring to Duff's and Berliner's suicides but also the ravishing effects of the prison of language—the poems of **Artifacts** also offer a possible re-imagining of the meaning of the cultural and the political entity of the Nation. Rather than producing a synthesis by completing the first part of the book-poem, this section intersects the preceding ones and re-articulates the meaning of utopia and anarchist dreams away from its originary Western sources, thus weaving a web(b) of future possibilities for a nation grafted by petroglyphs and “Twin Masks” (70).

Notes

¹ Webb established a close intellectual relationship with F.R. Scott.

² It should be pointed out that Earle Birney's Marxist leanings translated both into studies of Marxist formations in B.C. (papers are held at the National Library) and in a sharp critique of the institutional engineering of the Canadian subject through his visual poetry. Nevertheless, his statements of poetics (*The Cow Jumped Over the Moon*) as well as large parts of his poetry still posit a humanist ethos.

³ The concept of genealogy was first introduced by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*. It became the focus of Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," which first appeared in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 145-72. Genealogy implies the patient documentation of source material to retrace the "numberless beginnings" (1984, 81) of historical events, but "it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" (1984, 77) that is taken up by historical tradition. The genealogical mode of investigation, therefore, unsettles the historian's illusion of the unfolding of tradition in a continuum and, rather, is interested in uncovering the underlying power relations that constitute discourses of knowledge.

⁴ "When I came to Montreal, a kind of 'fate feeling' occurred within me: I somehow realized that a lifelong commitment to being a poet was my fate, a fate unable to walk out [...] That was the only time in my life that I have felt part of a literary community. I was a good friend of Irving and Betty Layton, John Sutherland, and Louis Dudek, of course. I think there was a great sense of frustration in that era. Montreal had a lot going on—Layton always had a new book coming out—Contact Press came out—Louis (Dudek) made me take a look at the current poets and introduced me to poetic theory." Dudek also introduced her to the poetry of Marianne Moore.

⁵ By this time P.K. Page had left Montreal and was living abroad.

⁶ The essay was published in the conference proceedings *In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les Femmes et les Mots* (1985), editorial collective, and in the collection *Nothing But Brush Strokes* (1995), ed. Smaro Kamboureli.

⁷ I will discuss Webb's relationship with Kiyooka in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Webb maintained extensive epistolary relationships with many poets, and especially Louis Dudek.

⁸ While Ezra Pound openly acknowledged his indebtedness to the European tradition, W.C. Williams's position is more ambiguous. Williams's articulation of localism in his poetics is more a gesture of assertion against European tradition than a complete break-away. The writing of *In the American Grain* (1956) is illuminating to situate Williams in the coming-into-being of an American national literature still in tension with European culture.

⁹ Post-hermeneutic investigations of literary forms have addressed the 'imperialist' overtones of the epic mode (with the long line territorializing Space and constructing Time as a primary category of human experience), as well as the fixity of the lyrical structure, which privileges a vertical representation of societal relations and posits the 'voice' of consciousness (the lyrical I/eye) as a containing paradigm of experience. See also Antony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* (1990).

¹⁰ See Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Space* (1903), especially "The Metropolis and Mental Life"; "On the Spatial Projection of Social Forms," revised and expanded for *Soziologie* (1908), with the addition of "The Social Boundary," "The Sociology of the Senses" and "The Stranger."

Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk* (1982; tr. *The Arcades Project* 1999), composed between 1927 and still unfinished when Benjamin fled Germany in 1940.

¹¹ See Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (1957; tr. *The Poetics of Space*, 1964) and *Critique de la vie quotidienne I: Introduction* (1947; tr. *Critique of Everyday Life*, 1991); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (tr. *The Primacy of Perception*, 1963) and *Signes* (1960; tr. *Signs* 1964); Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (1966; tr. *The Order of Things*, 1970), *Surveiller et punir* (1975; tr. *Discipline and Punish* 1977), *Histoire de la sexualité. La Volonté de savoir* (1976; tr. *The History of Sexuality* 1978); Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace* (1974; tr. *The Production of Space*, 1991); Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Génèse et structure du champ littéraire* (1992; tr. *The Field of Cultural Production*, 1993); Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien I. Arts de faire* (1980; tr. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984); François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (1979; tr. *The Postmodern Condition*, 1984).

¹² Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brönte to Lessing* (1977); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979); Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978); Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1982); Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1985); Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (1985). Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978).

See also Linda A. Kinnahan, *Lyric Interventions: Feminism, Experimental Poetry, and Contemporary Discourse* (2004), for a discussion of the lyric voice and women's contemporary poetics. Kinnahan quotes Clair Wills as complicating the descriptions of American Language poetry and the "disappearance of the private, and with it the lyric voice, and the selfhood on which it depends" through the historicization of "women's access to selfhood in Western culture" and "perceptions of the woman lyricist in literary theory" (21).

¹³ Some critics have recently argued against this categorization and have shown that women's subjectivity has transgressed and challenged these boundaries. Easy categorizations can be necessarily homogenizing a reality that offers different avenues of interpretation, while strategies of subversion are continually being performed by subaltern subjects. But a scrutiny of the particularity of women's lives, and the contingency of the 'single,' cannot divert our attention from the ways in which women are 'positioned' in a dominant discourse of gender relations and the ways in which the patriarchal structure of the nation-state shapes these relations. The question of agency raised by cultural theorists often tends to elide the powerful determinants of hegemonic discursive structures. Women may 'choose' to challenge systems of oppression and exclusion and thus struggle to open a space for themselves. But what choices are effectively available?

¹⁴ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) and *De Corpore* (1655), parts of which have been republished in *Body, Man and Citizen* (1962), ed. Richard S. Peters; Jean Bodin, *Les Six livres de la République* (1576); Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions* (1782). See Hobbes's claim from *Leviathan* that "the universe is corporeal; all that is real is material, and what is not material is not real."

¹⁵ In a discussion held at his house in Vancouver on 6 August 2006, Bowering notes that "the 1963 summer was the climax of a movement in Vancouver that dated from about 1957."

¹⁶ Hulcoop was one of the first (and few) to recognize the lesbian subject of the poems—a recognition which may have been favoured by his sympathies for queer writing. With respect to hostile (and often misogynous) reviews, see the infamous 1973 article by John Bentley Mays, published by Frank Davey in *Open Letter* 6 (Fall 1973). Mays's harsh article claimed that the poems are "statement" or "nothing at all" and that "she writes for a dwindling minority who still

worry about [...] complex and arcane intellectual problems” to whom she poses questions “monstrous, meaningless, pointless.” Davey did not depart significantly from Mays’s comments in his *From There to Here* (1974), where he located Webb’s aesthetics in a rhetorical space of negation, lack and hysteria—a “phenomenal world” of “relentless torture,” and the further emphasis on “contradiction” and “desperation.” He stressed Webb’s use of a language “so private, cryptic, fragmentary, and ‘naked’ that it almost abandons communication”; she “collapses into a series of gnomic questions and answers” and her poetry is both “pessimistic” and “a-materialistic.” The attack had such a paralyzing effect on Webb’s creativity that she did not publish a book again until *Wilson’s Bowl* (1980). Among the feminist “defenders” of Webb was Jean Mallison’s article “Ideology and Poetry: an Examination of Some Recent Trends in Canadian Criticism,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 3 (1978): 93-97. Mallison deconstructs Mays’s argument as arising from “culturally enforced expectations about attitudes appropriate to females,” his past personal experience and “ideological” and “prescriptive” criticism. She also takes Davey to task for sharing Mays’s “ideological bias.” See also the interesting review of the critical debate and the connection between feminist writing and eco-criticism in Diana M.A. Relke, “Feminist Ecocritique as Forensic Archaeology: Digging in Critical Graveyards and Phyllis Webb’s Gardens.” *Canadian Poetry* 42 (Spring/Summer 1998): 66-99.

¹⁷ Here feminist radicalness suggests a poetics which exposes the phallogocentric structures of power, as articulated by Nicole Brossard in *The Aerial Letter* (1988) and bell hooks in *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000).

¹⁸ At this time the conference Women and Words/Les Femmes et les mots, organized by the West Coast Editorial Collective of B.C., of which poet Daphne Marlatt was part, took place in Vancouver and resulted in the 1984 publication of an anthology of writings and critical interventions. For the first time women writers, artists and critics from across the country were gathered to work and engage in debates on women as subjects, language, the arts and institutions. The event had a major impact, especially since it brought together different approaches to language and representation with the fundamental contribution of avant-garde Quebecois writers and theorists, such as Nicole Brossard. It also prompted a second conference in 1988 around “race” and ethnicity, which resulted in the anthology *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures* in 1990. The rejuvenating (and deeply contestatory) effect of the 1984 conference is shown by the outpour of publications from a feminist position which followed throughout the 1980s. See *A/Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*, ed. Kamboureli and Shirley Neuman (1986); *Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women’s Writing* (1987), ed. Barbara Godard; the editing of the feminist journal *Tessera* since 1984, and criticism by Barbara Godard and Kathy Mezei.

¹⁹ I refer to a feminist radical aesthetic as it will be formulated theoretically by Nicole Brossard. Obviously women’s writing was not necessarily complicit with, nor submissive to, structures of patriarchal domination. Nevertheless, their challenges were not directed to language. Early on, Dorothy Livesay had connected social critique to gender norms; P.K. Page’s poetry invited a reading in terms of domestic politics and eco-criticism, although in a subtle way; Gwendolyn MacEwen relentlessly voiced her discomfort and entrapment through her poetry; and Margaret Atwood defiantly challenged the societal construction and position of woman.

²⁰ Jack Spicer, a member of the San Francisco Renaissance, did not attend the conference but he came to Vancouver for lectures and readings in 1965. He also attended the Berkeley conference organized in 1965.

²¹ “Projective Verse” resulted in large part from the Olson-Creeley correspondence. It was first printed in *Poetry New York* in 1950.

²² Charles Olson, *Additional Prose: A Bibliography on America. Proprioception & Other Notes and Essays*. Ed. George F. Butterick. In the editor's notes, Butterick writes that "Proprioception" was written in the form of worksheets between 1959 and 1962 and "Logography" is dated 31 October 1959 in manuscript. They were published at first in little magazines and Olson "saw them together as a book, which [LeRoi] Jones had intended to publish in 1964, until printing difficulties made it impossible" (85).

²³ Butterick confronts this line with the definition of "proprioceptive" in *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 5th ed.: "Activated by, pert. to, or designating stimuli produced within the organism by movement in its own tissues, as in muscle sense. Cf. INTEROCEPTIVE ..." (85).

²⁴ Women's writings were visible in mainstream Canadian literature since the early twentieth century, especially in fiction, but women's writings which critiqued societal patriarchal structures were not easily recognized for their subversiveness either by mainstream critics or avant-garde circles.

²⁵ Cf. her interview with Dorothy Livesay in 1964. Its transcript was later published as "Polishing Up the View" in *Talking*.

²⁶ Barbara Godard provides an account of the different waves of Canadian feminism in her "Re(w)riting Our (Hi)story: Canadian Feminists Organizing for Change" (2000).

²⁷ Other than the quoted John Bentley Mays and Frank Davey, we should note the following criticism of *Naked Poems*: Fred Cogswell (1966), "honesty," "clarity," "economy" and "control" of the poems; John William Corrington (1966), "narcissistic" in form and content; Alan Pearson (1966), "a waste of money" and evading "the reader's comprehension"; Hugh MacCallum (1966), "anti-rhetorical," "haiku," and enclosed by silence and space; Ross Woodman (1967), the love affair between two people is at the same time "the love affair between poet and the printed page"; Roger Seaman (1967), explore the "possibilities of silence" but "too much on the side of silence," "too much denial of the referential side of words," "poems more un-fleshed than naked."

²⁸ The works of Georges Bataille and Buñuel are probably exemplary in this respect.

²⁹ The influence of a Canadian modernist avant-garde on Webb's poetry, especially Eli Mandel's and Margaret Avison's work on the I/eye and creative vision, also invites further exploration.

³⁰ For the relationship between speech and writing, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri C. Spivak (1976); the essay "Signature, Event, Context" (*Glyph 1*, 1977: 172-97); and *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (1978).

³¹ One could argue that the numbering of the sections implies a linear arrangement. But the reading of the poem is not tied to the sequence of the different sections and the spatial arrangement on the page foregrounds both the page as unit of composition and alternative entry points of the reading act.

³² Brenda Carr proposes that the epigraph "starfish/fishstar" inscribes "a conflation of Ishtar (pre-patriarchal Babylonian 'Queen of Heaven') as muse/goddess, lesbian lover, and woman writer" but also enacts a gesture of "cross-dressing" and, therefore, "gender subversion" ("Genre Theory and the Impasse of the Lyric?" 67).

³³ Webb discusses *Wilson's Bowl* and the choice of the title in a letter to her editor dated 22 January 1980.

³⁴ Pauline Butling's *Seeing in the Dark* (1997) and Sharon Thesen's "Introduction" to *The Vision Tree* are important critical appreciations of Webb's feminist poetics. Yet Thesen still privileges a

humanist mode of universal concerns of female voice in her discussion of the relationship of the lyric and female subjectivity.

³⁵ In her letter to Helen, dated January 22, 1980, Webb replies to her editor's queries to try to explain a few difficult references. Interestingly, her recalling of the writing of the poem "Wilson's Bowl" and her sense of the ways in which different parts work together also suggest the impulse of reading *Wilson's Bowl* as a book-poem.

³⁶ See Cecelia Frey's "Phyllis Webb, An Annotated Bibliography" for the reviews of *Wilson's Bowl*, also mentioned in Pauline Butling's *Seeing in the Dark*.

³⁷ The winner of the 1980 GG was Stephen Scobie's *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*. Webb's *The Vision Tree: Selected Poems* won in 1982.

³⁸ See Webb's retracing of the relationship between Berliner and Duff in "A Correspondence": "Lilo was passionately interested in Northwest Coast Indian art, particularly petroglyphs—Indian rock carvings. It was because of my own new discovery of petroglyphs in 1970 that I was introduced first to Lilo Berliner and then to Beth Hill, who was working on her book *Indian Petroglyphs of the Pacific Northwest*. Duff had sent Beth Hill his "Levels of Meaning" and she had shown it to Lilo. This strange network of connections was to affect all our lives in ways we could not foresee" (*Nothing But Brush Strokes* 111).

³⁹ Cited in Webb's essay "A Correspondence" (*Nothing But Brush Strokes* 111).

⁴⁰ The book cover was also a photograph of Webb and the bowl.

⁴¹ See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (1981), *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation* (1985), and Walter Benjamin's important formulation of his theory of translation in *Reflections* (1986).

⁴² For a perceptive discussion of Webb's anarchist poetics in the "Poems of Failure," see Roger Farr's "The 'insurrectionary wilderness of the I': Phyllis Webb's anarchist poetics," *West Coast Line* 38.3 (Winter 2005): 63.

⁴³ I draw from Robert Kroetsch's notion of archaeology as articulated in his essay "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," which I discussed in Chapter One: "Poems in which archaeology supplants history" (93). Robert Kroetsch's archaeological mode, central to his own poetics, draws both from the Derridean notion of "writing under erasure" as well as the Foucauldian notion of genealogy vs. history.

CHAPTER THREE

Alien-Nation: Roy Kiyooka's Cleft Tongues and the Spectre of Race

On Citizens and Aliens: Race as Subject-Interpellation

Everytime I find myself talking, talking about anything under or even above and beyond the sun, I feel the very pulse of my thots in a North American/West Coast dialect of the English language with all its tenacious Indo-European roots. Now, concomitant with this recognition is the feeling that when I am most bereft, it's the nameless Jap in me who sings an unsolicited haiku in voluntary confinement (117).

In a talk Roy Kiyooka delivered at a conference in Seattle in 1981, "We Asian North Americanos," he addressed the audience on his experience of "growing up yellow in a white world" and the indelible mark of racism on his body and life. The talk was foremost a meditation on language as a primary structure for the constitution of power-knowledge and subjectivity. Kiyooka shows his critical awareness in the reference to his "tenacious Indo-European roots," "nameless Jap" and "voluntary confinement." He situates his subjectivity in the specificity of Canada's colonial discourse, which demands the production and circulation of racial and cultural alien-ness to maintain the fantasy of national origin, and in the experience of the mass-uprooting and dislocation suffered by the Japanese-Canadian community following the attack on Pearl Harbor during WWII—what writer Joy Kogawa referred to as "the cutting off of tongues" (Kogawa 1981).

Kiyooka's articulation of feelings of bereavement and the namelessness of his Japanese identity provides an interesting entry point for my discussion. This chapter examines the ways in which his writing problematizes notions of nationness and racialized identity at a time when the machine of nationalist ideology was highly invested in the production of a Canadian identity for its citizens. Kiyooka's experimental practice spanned many genres and artistic media, but it is the hybrid conjunction of seriality, photography and design in the long poem form and the interweaving of visual construction with the auditory quality of his poetic language that I am particularly interested in exploring. This textual work, in the sense of the 'texture' of language and the craftsmanship of the page, reaches out to the daring experimentation of Euro-American modernist practices while deconstructing them from the inside. The Europe I invoke here is not only a critical/intellectual framework, but primarily a discourse that constitutes Kiyooka's autodidact artistic beginnings as well as the spectre of conquest and colonization. A Europe which, as Kiyooka also suggested, "remains the perennial country of my imagination: 'i' keep wondering when I'm finally going to make it over there ... ?" ("Dear Lucy Fumi"). In *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine* (1977), the text which pays homage to, yet deconstructs, the old masters of Europe, Kiyooka re-situates the "country of the imagination" as a critique of "rhetorick" and the desire-machine of the State for the construction of docile subjectivities: this is the text where the interlocking of concerns about the role of the public sphere and the artist's imagination is most overt. But it is Japan that marks the beginning of Kiyooka's writing and his coming into articulation. *Kyoto Airs* (1964), his inaugural work, was composed during his first visit to Japan and to his sister Mariko in 1963. The sequence of short-lined poems, unfolding syllable by

syllable, represents the artist's birthing into language, wavering between the haunting history of WWII (with his sister Mariko's accounts of wartime sufferings resonating with his personal memories) and the experience of misrecognition of his 'Japanese' body in the mirror of the Nippon-ness which, in Japan, surrounds him. A poem surrounded by 'silence', *Kyoto Airs* spells the specificity of the poetic 'i' coming to voice: "I am among / them a tongue- / twisted alien" (12). The tracing of the postures and the voices of "the Asian in himself" ("*We Asian North Americanos*" 117) inflects both 'inglish' and 'nihongo', while he wanders through Kyoto as if invisible. Words and silences recover a cultural memory which is marked by the echoes of atomic destruction: "the lost word / found in an urn" (8). The poems come in a spell, a tremor of language yet the exactness of the instantaneity of perception.

In 1969, Kiyooka was invited to represent Canada at Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan. The choice of the artist of Japanese descent may seem ironic in the light of the mass-uprooting and dislocation suffered by the Japanese-Canadian community at the hand of the Canadian government during WWII. But the opening up of new market possibilities in the Asian Pacific region re-contained Japan within a Western logic of capitalist expansion: new economic relationships translated into a geopolitical shift. In this context, Kiyooka's cultural heritage had become an asset. In the new temporality of Canada's expansion in the Pacific region, the boundaries of 'race' shifted to allow for the emergence of the 'Pacific Rim'. During his work for the exhibition, Kiyooka resided in Kyoto and travelled daily to the exhibition site. This was the occasion for the writing of one of his most experimental texts, *StoneDGloves* (1970), prompted by the sight of gloves left by construction workers. Traces of capitalist 'excess', the gloves become signs

of the material conditions of labour which remain hidden in the economy of commodity circulation. But the text also evokes the 'absent referent' of ethnicity, for the workers at the construction site are also immigrants (or the descendants of Korean forced labour as markers of Japan's imperial history). The absent presence evoked by the gloves also materializes the buried memories of atomic destruction: skins with no bodies, they evoke the spectre of the atrocious violence upon which a new capitalist Japan is built.

This prolonged stay in Japan also occasioned the composition of a second text *Wheels*, which was composed from the journal he started writing during a trip through the backcountry of Honshu, the largest and central island of Japan, at the time his father was visiting from Canada. The text would undergo many transformations (1974-84). The journey represented a powerful moment in Kiyooka's articulation of his subjectivity with cultural memory. In the poet's attempt to reconnect with his father and his own Japanese-ness, the silence of his reticent father becomes the sign of the liminality of Canada and the histories of social violence that cannot be re-contained by its boundaries. The poem is woven around the tension between silence and language as a critique of discursive structures—the silence of the repressed histories that haunt the discursive borders of Canada.

Kiyooka's interest in the form of the serial/long poem has received little critical attention.¹ The exploratory mode of his writing and the impulse to bring himself into articulation makes the long poem—with its possibilities for hybrid forms and speech genres—a natural choice, but it also calls for a critical reading of Kiyooka's choice as re-shaping a literary genre canonized as 'essentially Canadian', whether in the colonial/imperial ethos of nineteenth and twentieth century productions or in the

postmodern practices of postwar poetry. With Kiyooka, the long poem is taken to its most radical possibilities. Grounded in the modernist tradition of the European avant-garde, Kiyooka's artistic practices cleave the discursive structures of the Nation to expose, in their site-specificity and historical contingency, the false transparency and ideological nature of the "imagined community." This poetics dismembers the ontological impulse of place and history that the 'Canadian' long poem has traditionally inhabited, and shifts the poetics of the long poem to a site-specific and constructive act, thus re-defining the possibilities of the public role of the artist. Always infused with the individual (modernist) voice of the artist—their autobiographical impulse is both evident and undermined—Kiyooka's long poems are a never-to-be-completed-attempt to articulate his diasporic sensibility. The "cleft" tongue marks his liminal position in relation to Canadianness, as well as the liminality of Canada itself, but it is also a strategic intervention on language, a dislocation and disruption which opens up a rhetorical space for difference.

The Artist as Writer

Painting ... Poetry ... Art is where you're in it.
—Roy Kiyooka, *Seen Through the Eye of Bernie Bloom's Camera*

Kiyooka's artistic practices span many forms: painting, sculpture, photography, multi-media installations and poetry. His restless quest for the meaning of art and the role of the artist in the social is also a process of articulation of the self: "where 'polis' touches 'eros' and both touch 'art' is to say the least / where you find me" (*Pacific Rim Letters*). In the last section of *transcanada letters*, he summarizes the activities in which he was involved and his vast artistic production until 1974. The "resumé" was written in

preparation for the exhibition entitled *Roy Kiyooka: 25 Years*, held at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1975. The list is daunting and detailed, despite the artist's complaint about his "crummy memory," and it foregrounds Kiyooka's practice as being at the very centre of international post-war avant-garde artistic movements; but here the international is not synonymous with a field of cultural production which is always dependent on, and in tension with, dominant culture (Bourdieu 1993). Instead, Kiyooka's network of influences and intertextual relationships weaves together the "Nippon" of his family memories, the "Europe" of his imagination, encounters with artists from Canada, the United States and Mexico, as well as his omnivorous knowledge of books of art history. Foremost, the artist always carries art with himself:

I don't know if say Edmonton is further away than another place. I don't think it matters, now. I've lived in every province except the Maritimes and I've lived in most of the big cities in them and I've never felt that I couldn't be at home ... to be at the centre is to be where the ideas are, that is, in your own head, wherever you are. Right now, I'm in Vancouver and that feels like the centre. One of the useful things about art is that you literally take it with you wherever you go ... you don't have any choice—you can't choose to leave it all behind.
(“Interview,” *Seen Through the Eye of Bernie Bloom's Camera* 22)

His artistic formal innovations were not easily accepted by mainstream critics. Although this would be a common position for avant-garde artists choosing alternative creative paths, these exclusions remain puzzling choices given the later offer he received to represent Canada at the World Expo 70, which I will briefly discuss in the next section. After the formative years in the early 1950s in Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Nelson B.C. and Mexico, Kiyooka took up a teaching position at Regina College. In this important and transformative period (1956-60), he worked on paintings that marked his transition

from figurative painting (*Emma Lake* 1958) to abstract expressionism.² According to critic John O'Brian:

The "Hoarfrost" series was executed in Regina between the fall of 1959 and the close of 1960. It comprises about a dozen of works (the exact number is unknown), varying in size from three by four feet up to four by eight feet, and carrying generic titles such as *Hoarfrost, No. 1, White Complex* and *Untitled (hoarfrost)*. [...] Kiyooka began the series in the months following an encounter with the American artist, Barnett Newman, at the Emma Lake Artists' Workshop in Saskatchewan during the late summer of 1959. (20)

O'Brian notes the break with more traditional forms as a sea-change, whereby the "formal imperatives of paint and its properties overwhelm those of nature" (20), but he also points out the international practices to which Kiyooka referred for his practice: while Kiyooka claimed that he learned the use of duco as a ground medium from the Mexican muralists which he encountered at the Instituto Allende in San Miguel in the mid-1950s, O'Brian notes that this "was the medium favoured by Jackson Pollock to execute his drip paintings in the late 1940s" (21). Despite its formal innovation, the series was excluded from the exhibition organized by Richard B. Simmins for the National Gallery of Canada and called "Five Painters from Regina" (December 1961), an exclusion which caused profound disappointment to the artist.

The "Hoarfrost" series, which has never been exhibited as an ensemble, presents nevertheless interesting challenges to the viewer as 'poetics'.³ As a series, it articulates a notion of art as both quest and unravelling: although the individual paintings were created without a definite goal for the whole group (Kiyooka himself was not sure about their final number), they constitute a seriality which is not dissimilar from the new tendencies in post-war American poetry and which articulates a search for (visual and formal) language. The first feature which strikes the viewer is the 'exactitude' of their execution,

a term which George Bowering has often used to refer to Kiyooka's poetry and relationship to language.⁴ They depart dramatically from notions of territory and landscape which have dominated Canadian art and which found their accomplishment in the works of the Group of Seven; hence they are anti-tradition, if by tradition we accept the nationalist construction of landscape and nature as 'mirrors' of the soul of the people (although it should be noted that Kiyooka also admired the Group of Seven for different reasons and referred to their relationship with geography as "osmosis"). Their materiality enhances the work of painting, thus drawing attention to painting as artistic 'construction' rather than representation. While hoarfrost is strongly allusive of whiteness (and, incidentally, Kiyooka's colleague Ron Bloore was engaged in producing a series of abstract white-on-white paintings at the Emma Lake workshops), here whiteness is articulated *to* other colours—blues and reds and off-whites—and, thus, *as* colour rather than neutral term. Ten years later, the artist would return to the notion of 'whiteness' in an interesting way. In the "letter" to Peg (Margaret Atwood) and Jim (Polk) from Montreal dated 22nd December 1968, he muses on "snow" and the "tenous demarcations based on the ubiquitous rites-of-colour." The poem-letter is a critique of 'snow' as a metaphor of Canadian nationalism—the tyranny of the notion of Canadian purity and the artistic work around the 'North'. The critique is spurred by the accusations of racism that black students had raised to some faculty members of Sir George Williams University. Kiyooka weaves the occurrence into everyday accounts of his relationship with snow in Montreal life, as well as recollections of the racism he suffered growing up in the Prairies. The whiteness of snow is also contaminated by the blood of the carcasses amidst which he worked on the killing floor at Swift Canadian in Edmonton: here snow slips

into a discourse of death and war (Pearl Harbour and Buchenwald). Nonetheless, the letter remains a cultural critique as poetry, and the silences of whiteness are also invoked:

its snowing again my white
van is heapt with it, again let 'it' then tell you all
abt itself how the very night hides under its silences—
its awesome white silences
(*transcanada letters*)

Although this has been termed his phase of abstract expressionism, I am sensitive to Kiyooka's reluctance to be easily categorized (and 'boxed') in labels; while elements of the abstract expressionism of the American and European new avant-garde are certainly there, I want to focus on what O'Brian calls "the presentness" of his work: the painting as an instant of composition; the de-construction of the 'i' as beholder; place turned into site; geography as "osmosis" (a recurrent term in Kiyooka); art as creation and birthing into language. These concerns infuse his poetry and methods of composition. Kiyooka also dates to this period his "1st attempts to write poems" (*transcanada letters*). Later he will articulate his artistic position as "I'm a painter writing poems" (*transcanada letters*).⁵

The early 1960s marked an important shift in his work. Back in Vancouver (1960), he enjoyed the fertile environment of the Vancouver's poetry scene and the Vancouver School of Art, where he also organized many poetry readings. These were creative years for the artist, when he produced important works such as relief paintings, the enamel-on-paper collages, the first large scale acrylic hard-edge paintings and also began the "Ellipse" series, where the abstract-expressionist technique becomes more colourful and structured (squares and rounds).⁶ The acrylic paintings were "decisive in changing the color/form of [his] work" (*transcanada letters*) and the work on large

canvases and hard-edge paintings would bring him increasingly into visibility on the Canadian arts scene. The painting variations of the “Ellipse” exemplify the ‘exactness’ of form and attention to the material that Bowering considers also distinctive of Kiyooka’s poetry. Reflecting back on this period, Kiyooka notes: “my work had very little to do with what the locals were doing or what the geography proposed it’s only later 1970 onwards that the lower mainland takes place in my images, / particularly in my photographs” (*transcanada letters*). He held various exhibitions and Bau-Xi became his only gallery.

But this was also the time of his coming-into-writing and the weaving of close relationships with local poets. His friendship with poet Phyllis Webb dates back to this period; together they attended the 1963 poetry conference. George Bowering notes that, upon his arrival in Vancouver in the late 1950s, Kiyooka and Webb seemed to be a reference point for the younger generation. Their correspondence testifies to an intimate artistic relationship which, in *transcanada letters*, often acquires a tone of levity about their position vis-à-vis the cultural establishment: “*Dear Paper Doll*, the CanLit Establishment’s most intelligent moll: / How’s that for starters after all the silences? Love the callit texture of our anti-ghazals, / the oft-times wry wholly inimitable speaking-out voice. Love the small precise gestures” (*transcanada letters*, dated 19/2/ ’83). Their exchanges situate their works at the nodal point of an emerging avant-garde self-consciously articulating a critical position against dominant cultural nationalism. A letter written in 1972 is worth quoting at some length:

Dear Phyllis

Yes i have read Peg's SURVIVAL tho not re-read it yet. its got to be one of the deep probes into Canuck-Psyche via mainline W.A.S.P. eyes. I mean Peg does belong to the companions of Canadian Shield Seers who via literature probe the litter /compost of our i-denti-ties. But her is it thesis is too too pat for yours truly who does not if he has has thoughts abt it at all think of himself as an anima/ victim despite the hazards of the 49th Peril and Yankee mendacities. Its my belief that WE who abide in the Westcoast do propose another take which I wont go into here. (as complement to Peg's tough-minded and occasionally ironic despair try Ed Dahlberg's scathing indictment of Yankee Literature viz the anger at the fact of the utter lack of memorable women in its entire oeuvres. O the flea of Sodom! O Hiawatha! O Ernest Hemingway!

'not in ideas but in things' viz W.C.W. aint become a syntactic relic yet.

Xmas gift to myself
Journey to Ixtlan the 3rd book of the teachings of Don Juan and his side kick Don Genaro. Old D.J. must be one of the great teachers 'cause he rigorously proposes that HUGE LIFE is utterly a gift to be attuned to. Nothing but that that awesome fact and the responsible telling. And it must be that 'shamanistic spirit' we also live within that has something to do with our take on Can/Lit: Survival.

totem! fact! polis

By placing the publication of Atwood's *Survival* as an ethnocentric act, Kiyooka performs a cultural critique of the Nation. Despite his friendship with Margaret Atwood, also an addressee of many of his letters, Kiyooka shrewdly reads *Survival* as construing the position of central Canada as symbolic of the heart of Canada in the Canadian imaginary. Paralleling *Survival* to the canonization of the Group of Seven, to which the "Canadian Shield Seers" indirectly alludes, he exposes cultural nationalism as a

technology of identity management (“who via literature probe the litter / compost of our i-denti-ties”). “Compost” is an important and recurrent word in Kiyooka’s poetics: the process of composition and de-composition is both organic and social—the world is in constant transformation and identities are processual rather than fixed in the category of the ‘natural’ or ‘historical’. His criticism, then, is directed toward the “victim” position *Survival* conceptualizes as symptomatic of Canadian identity, whereby Canadian culture is besieged by American imperialism and the State will have to set barriers up not to be swallowed. Instead, Kiyooka situates literature as agent of cultural struggles and politics. As “complement” to Atwood, he proposes the American Ed Dahlberg—maverick critic and itinerant lecturer—who critiqued American literature for its “lack of / memorable women,” and William Carlos Williams, who transformed the conceptualization of poetry as being about “things” not “ideas.” Atwood’s appropriation of the pronoun “we” for a unitary national (WASP) identity is turned back on itself, and Kiyooka’s “WE” unsettles the pronoun from the fixity of nationalist ideology to locate it in a border zone of larger connections. As opposed to nationalist perspectives, the artist-poet offers the dream of building communal forms (“polis”) based on particularities (“fact”) and relating to the totemic (“cultural concerns”).⁷

That Kiyooka made of Webb a privileged correspondent is clear both from the reoccurrence of her name in *transcanada letters* and one specific entry:

dear Phyllis

if you arent gonna make copies of
our correspondence ... i guess i have to save all
of your letters. i mean to go right on making
carbons of mine—i aint got scruples abt literary
record of my own thots viz letters. besides letters
happen to be written out of the same concern i wld
bring to bear if i were writing something else.
(*transcanada letters*, 3/ 28th/ '72, halifax nova scotia)

Their closeness is also marked by the common experience of 'dis-location' against
mainstream society, either along the lines of 'race' or gender and sexuality:

Dear Phyllis

... yeah i is also dis-located sometimes.
like, who isn't? otherwise i seems to be where
i am doing my thing whatever that thing
happens to be. and YES i do know (intimately
that awful feeling of 'is it any fucken good?'
viz a poem/ painting/ or any thing. i is saying
all this knowing it aint much consolation to
another *mired* in the depths of her doubtings.
(*transcanada letters*, 10/ 26/ '69, Kyoto City Japan)

Webb did reply to Kiyooka's poem-letters.⁸ Her tone is also facetious and intimate, and
shows in her responses to his artistic concerns their relationship as being of 'elective
affinities'.

Their poetic practices also intersected. In 1964 Kiyooka published his first book
of poetry, *Kyoto Airs*, and Webb's *Naked Poems* followed in 1965. Both were published
as part of a four-book series by Periwinkle Press, with Takao Tanabe as designer and
printer (the other books were John Newlove's *Elephants, Mothers and Other* in 1963 and
Gerry Gilbert's *White Lunch* in 1964).⁹ The choice of the avenue of publication was not
random: poetry becomes artefact—the collaborative work of the poet and the artists from

the Vancouver School of Art. This was also the time when Kiyooka collaborated with his frames to George Bowering's *The Man in Yellow Boots / el hombre de las botas amarillas* (1965).

In the same year, he participated in the Eighth Sao Paulo Bienale, Brazil, and accepted a teaching position at the Sir George Williams (now Concordia) University: "The 4th Avenue Pomes in G.B.s / Imago [Kiyooka's emphasis] tell something of the despair in which I left" (*transcanada letters*). Yet Montreal also meant the entry into the mainstream artistic community. He participated into Expo 67 and exhibitions in Montreal and Edinburgh. His comments on Expo 67 are a critique of the politics of culture of Canadian nationalism as complicit with "big business" but also reveal the artist's self-conscious fascination with the spectacle of art and the Nation:

I am at a loss to say
what it in aggregate is all abt . I mean most of
the so called Art is inextricable frm the masses of
the mazes of peoples and buildings . 'like' its
a confabulation of kulturs a veritable melting pot
a ubiquitous tableau of the arts.
[...]

and theres
no occasion when you can see it without looking in
and thru a bunch of people the jostle the fatigue of
multitudes . thus, VISION or simply 'sight' is im-
paired.

(*transcanada letters*)

From this period are "Barometer," "Court," new variations on the "Ellipse" series with the last "all-blue" works, and fibreglass sculptures. His second book of poems, *Nevertheless These Eyes* (1969), is dedicated to the British painter Stanley Spencer and "the women of his life." The first work to combine visual art and poetry, it also a celebration of erotic vision which disrupts the normalization and rationalization of

capitalist societies: “What grabbed me was Spencer’s intensely naïve / erotic-vision A Vision woven into the very substance of his painting and writing”(transcanada letters, Montreal 1968). In 1970 Kiyooka left Montreal for Osaka, Japan where his four part steel and vinyl sculpture, “Abu Ben Adam’s Vinyl Dream,” represented Canada at Expo 70.

Osaka marked a turning point in the transition from painting to sculpture and photography, as well as his increasing preoccupation with writing. The hundreds of photos he took at the construction site of the pavilion would be the material for a large photo-show, “StoneDGloves”—which was later exhibited at the Centre Culturel Canadien in Paris, France and across Canada—and a book of poems with the same title and originally serving as catalogue. The camera brings about a different attentiveness and new particularities—the instantaneity of the ‘click’ and the uncanny of the dematerialized image, while the poems ‘complement’ what is hidden in the visual. When he moved back to Vancouver (1970-75), he produced cedar-laminates, silk-screens, photography (*B.C. Almanac(h) C.B.*, a photo-book edited by Jack Dale and Michael de Courcy of the exhibit held in Vancouver, Edmonton and New York), the “Book of Letters” (*transcanada letters*), and *StoneDGloves*:

(—that gives us 5 phases with
any number of divisions within them: each division
corresponding to the kinds of things I am
then into. (not incidentally) these divisions form
a series of related works which is the mode
I started to work with in the late-50s all white ptgs.
even my pomes tend to work serially. all
of whc is a clue to hanging, re chronology.)
 (“RESUME OF THE SHOW” *transcanada letters*)

From this moment, photography will occupy an increasingly central position in Kiyooka’s art. But this shift should be read in a continuum, rather than a change of

direction. Kiyooka's artistic practices overlap, traverse each other and give attention to the particularity and specificity of the material. Musing about aesthetics and "what qualifies a work of Art," he notes:

Under my hands under my very eyes—in the act of shaping words, clay, colour or any other substance there is no thought abt Beauty . There's only the act of taking up 'words' as they occur and in and thru their occurrences tell how wood has innate substance not to mention a shapeliness, pungency and heft. And yet the *urge* nonetheless to hew/ chisel/ hack/ saw/ or whittle a form into its very substance—whc may show forth another shapeliness, inherent, in wood and the mind's combined substances ... must have something to do with so-called Aesthetics.

(*transcanada letters*, Spring '69, Montreal)

Artistic vision is brought about through "awe" and "astonishments." Against the ideology of the "culture industry" (Adorno 2005), whereby the particular is subsumed under the universal, it is the attention to the properties of the thing "that gives each thing its sensuous, social and historical particularity" (Bernstein 5). The "culture industry," in Adorno's critique, "treats unequal things like equal and subsumes objects under (the unreflective drives of) subjects" (Bernstein 5). In Kiyooka's work, the particular and the contingent are at the centre of his concern:

FOCUS viz yr his camera/ eye must then be
and 'low' as even Olson's 'polis'
(*transcanada letters*, to Phyllis Webb, 10/ 26/ '69)

Hybrid Identities and Promissory Notes: the Spectacle of the Nation

... their token WASP is a Jap.

—Roy Kiyooka to George Bowering, cited in *All Amazed*

Memory hinges on space and location (Nora 1996). While Bergson conceptualized time as being at the centre of the workings of memory, the increasing “compression of time and space” of late modernity (Harvey 1989) has brought to the fore the constitutiveness of space to the workings, and construction, of memory. If Expo 67 in Montreal epitomized the ‘spectacle’ of the Canadian Nation in the conjunction of Canada’s celebration of the Centennial with the entry into the world economy, Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan, marked an interesting shift in Canada’s relationship to the ‘world’, specifically its relationship within the Pacific region and the celebration of postmodernity.

Scott McFarlane notes that Expo 70 was the first World Exposition in Asia, thus marking the new times of globalization and the “meeting of east and west” (*All Amazed* 118). Kenzo Tange, one of the Expo planners, explained that “the goal” was “to unite east and west within a ‘soft architecture’ modelled on computer informatics systems”

(McFarlane 131):

Instead of providing a physical monument, like the Eiffel Tower or the Crystal Palace, we intended to create a sensuously perceptible environment with which the visitors to the fair could mutually act to develop a consciousness of emotional involvement that they will [sic] never forget. In short, the Expo 70 monument is soft instead of hard. Consequently the idea was born of creating a *virtually* shapeless monument, one that would not display things but that would become a *reservoir of information and communications*. This, we feel, is a suitable attitude in the light of the nature of the contemporary world.

(McFarlane 131)

The de-materialization of space inherent to the digitalization of culture can be read as “Sign of the Times” evolving relentlessly toward the futurity of postmodernity and the

promises of globalization—the shapelessness and softness of Expo 70 gesturing toward the dissolution of the nation’s boundaries. Yet the utopian promise for a futurity of world communication and knowledge production masks the seamlessness which capitalism necessitates to ensure circulation and further integration. Adorno’s critique of postmodern culture is, in this respect, illuminating. Although he has been repeatedly stigmatized by cultural critics for a defense of modernist aesthetics which reproduces the elitism of high culture, we should re-situate Adorno in a critique of late capitalism as enforcing the erasure of difference and particularity toward the seamlessness of integration into dominant relations of production. Tange’s “reservoir of information and communication,” therefore, becomes complicit with a construction of knowledge which fetishizes the sign at the expense of the lived material: it is on the layered ruins of a devastated Osaka that Expo was built. The erasure of cultural memory is not a by-product of late capitalism, but integral part to it. Memory, unlike history and archival knowledge (the museum and the memorial), is “a perpetually actual phenomenon” (Nora 1996) and has meaning only in the presentness of society, yet it is this presentness which constitutes a barrier to the neo-liberal ultimate goal of a “flat world” (Friedman 2005).

In Osaka, Kiyooka presented his sculpture the “Abu Ben Adam’s Dream,” a tri-coloured pyramid structure. In *transcanada letters*, he draws attention to the artist’s awareness of his role as part of the spectacle of the Nation: “Dear Charlotte / ... my sculpture is a flag wavering in my mind’s eye. / its a Magritte flag fluttering at half-mast on a windless day” (9 / 10 / 69). McFarlane notes that the Canadian pavilion, designed by Erickson-Massey, was a pyramid of mirrors which gestured toward the “double-entente” of much of Japan’s aesthetics while creating, through a reflection of the sky, the illusion

of recognizable signs of Canada: arctic ice, mountains, prairies and waters (132). But Kiyooka's work draws attention to the construct of nationalist dreams: his sculpture is also contingent to the labours of amnesia of Expo 70. As a work installed in the Canadian pavilion, thus articulated to the discourse of the Canadian nation, it is also inserted into the global network signified by the World Expo. Nevertheless, it is neither complicit with the nation-state nor with global capitalism and, rather, exposes their overlapping. The sculpture is an urban palimpsest whereby the Sufi tradition of the dream of Abu Ben Adam for peace and love of mankind in the eyes of God reinscribes the victims of the war, and the sign of 'race', as the living presence of cultural memory—of Japan as well as Canada.

**National(ist) Dreams and Ideological State Apparati:
*The Fontainebleau Dream Machine***

... undoing the beliefs so as to attain the production of desiring-machines, and to reach the level of economic and social investments where the militant analysis comes into play. Nothing is accomplished as long as machines are not touched upon.
—Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (112)

The Fontainebleau Dream Machine (1977), subtitled “18 Frames from A Book of Rhetoric,” is the text that most directly engages the notion of desire in relation to subjectivity and ideology in the nation-discourse. This long poem, which combines poetry and collaged frames, intervenes in the structures of language and representation which provide the phantasmatic scaffolding to uphold the dream of modernity and the “imagined community.” In so doing, it makes visible the workings of these structures which the ideological State apparatus naturalizes for its subjects through the operation of the desire-machine.

As Deleuze and Guattari note in their psychoanalytical interrogation of capitalism and subjectivity, “in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression. [...] All of this happens not in ideology, but well beneath it” (2000 105). Desire, therefore, does not coincide with ideology but becomes the site of the operation of power. Although I do not intend to enter a psychoanalytical reading of the poem, Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis provides a useful entry point to my discussion in that it clearly articulates a notion of desire to a machine operated *through* and *within* a social field: “social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions” (29). In their conceptualization of desire they ask:

In what respect are desiring-machines really machines, in anything more than a metaphorical sense? A machine may be defined as a *system of interruptions* or breaks (*coupures*). These breaks should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering. (36)

If, as poststructuralist theorists claim, meaning is generated in the differential relations of the endless chain of signifiers, we can posit these “breaks” as moments of closure. The insights of poststructuralism as to the primacy of language in the constitution of subjectivity and meaning formation are not, therefore, opposed to a material analysis of structures and effects of power, as some (Marxist-oriented) critics seem to argue. Language and materialism can be brought together in a productive way to critique and effect change.

The frames draw attention to the constructedness of representation. As collages, they disrupt the closure of meaning through painterly techniques (Dada and Surrealists) and gesture toward the palimpsest-nature of knowledge production. In making visible their function (“show” and “hide”), they produce, through momentary closure,

signification. Hence the frames operate as machines—that is “systems of interruptions.” Yet, through this process, the artist disarticulates the notion of representation by showing the frames not as representational devices but as information systems. The disjunctures among the different superimpositions visible in these assemblages are not a tribute to the great masters of painting and engraving, although the artist’s fascination for the European tradition is also apparent. Instead, the disjunctures make the notion of representation opaque: by folding their references (the ‘originals’) onto themselves, they show the frame as a closed system where ‘meaning’ is contained within its borders. By closing off the image while superimposing different materials, the artist is, in fact, showing how ideology works: through containment and closure. Nevertheless, this is not a reification of the workings of ideology: this process is made opaque in that the reader/viewer does not enter easily into this system and can hardly inhabit a fixed subject position despite its obvious seduction—we have to learn to read/view differently. We are forced to shift different subject positions since this text does not ‘reflect’ us. The desires the frame produces through containment are therefore disrupted from within.

How does the subject-citizen resist the framing of one’s identity performed by the interpellation (Althusser 1970) of the nation-state?¹⁰ Can the dream of a world of justice be pursued without falling into the written “Book of Desires” pre-formed by ideologues and master-discourses? “*who is really dreaming the dream everyone / one by one dreamt?*”, asks the poet at the end of his sequence, after addressing the “*(Fellowship of the Dreamt Universe) for / their untiring Collaboration.*” The interface of allusive writing and collaged images initiates a critical dialogue with modern masters by exposing the rhetorical nature of all texts and language structures that inspire the poem’s

composition: the Renaissance Fontainebleau school under the patronage of François I (through the 1969 volume of engraving *L'École de Fontainebleau*); the masters of the Italian Renaissance, Michelangelo and Raffaello; Eugène Delacroix's historical *tableaux*; and Peter Haining's *The Dream Machines* (1971), a popular history of balloons. The artist's intervention in the field of representation is, therefore, not oppositional: Kiyooka does not try to 'set the record straight' and re-consign the image to an originary moment (the authenticity of the real). Instead, the artist is positioned both *within* and *without* the frame: the choices of his intertextual references relate to his work and preferences as artist; language also weaves in and out of the frames. This intervention, right at the core of the image, is a subversive one in that it shows the contradictions of representation as structured within its own system. The text, then, does not move toward closure but by making visible the overdeterminations of knowledge production (the moments when fixity is deployed) it releases desire from strategies of containment and breaks down the homogenization of dreams and expectancies at the hand of ideologies.

The "dedication" following the title—a quotation from Charles Henri Ford's poem "Flag of Ecstasy," homage to Marcel Duchamp from *Poets for Painters*—foregrounds the dream structure of the poem and situates it in a poetic tradition of the artist as public intellectual:¹¹

*'over the princes of delirium
over the paupers of peace'*

Building a space of delirium which escapes the rationalistic orders of the Law, the artist forges his dream of global social justice. The list of artists and writers that he cites is both a tribute to friends and fellow artists and the articulation of a community of writing. To

the fellow West Coast artists and writers, he adds Giorgio Vasari [sic], the artist who was responsible for the creation of the machine plates and marked a turning point in the history of painting.

The poem is self-consciously performing its 'constructedness'. The space of the page is carefully organized and consistent throughout the text. Every page begins with one line, followed by a short prose-poem (from six to nine lines); the first page is the only one adding one additional line before the next section. The 'caption' explains the visual frame which constructs the second half of the page. Echoing the organization of the painting gallery, this 'explanation' is not an arid statement, either descriptive or of 'intent', that characterizes both traditional art galleries and contemporary artistic forms. Each caption, which I will briefly introduce to illustrate the pattern, foregrounds the constructed-ness of the frame. We may ask: what does the image do?

the 1st Frame shows

Breath (shadowing) Dream (shadowing) Air (shadowing) itself

the 2nd Frame shows

all the dreams breath abides betrothed to the Queen of Hearts

the 3rd Frame (hides)

the Morning Star under the Cowl of Breath

the 4th Frame

A Clap of Thunder marking the Distances We Travel by Night

the 5th Frame hides

the actual length of the column inside your Inner Ear

the 6th Frame exposes

Our Host the Retinal Ghost Dancing in the Dark

the 7th Frame shows
the Hand of the unseen Poet turning into a Palimpsest

the 8th Frame hides

the real pigeon shit spattered on the back of a bronze Napoleon

the 9th Frame hiding

the unspent Heat of the solar Belfry, the climbing plant i am

the 10th Frame hides

the fluted (breath) Column in the unmined Quarry beneath your tie'd tongue

the 11th Frame hides

the Butterfly Wing tattoo'd on the Ceiling of your Mouth

the 12th Frame

for the un-dreamt Vowel

the 13th Frame shows how

obliquely Shadows fall across the face of so-called Sky-Scrapers

the 14th Frame shows

the Dream's Effluvia pouring into the Gutter of a Song

the 15th Frame pre-figures

the Pulp of an Unborn Dream buried inside the Book of Lawes

the 16th Frame shadowing

the inflamed Lyre burning in the 2nd Narrows

the 17th Frame belongs to Those

Who celebrate Night's Libations at the Mermaid & the Cecil

the 18th Frame

The recurrence of “hides,” “shows” and “exposes” exposes the technology of visuality and representation: pre-figuring theoretical works that take to task the construction of vision as a powerful mode of knowledge in Western thought, Kiyooka enacts a deconstructive critique which intersects his individual engagement with the world of art and personal history, whereby the discourse of trauma is translated into less and less

opaque references. In the 16th Frame [Fig. 1], he weaves the memory of his dislocation to Opal, Alberta—preeminently a Ukrainian town—with the recollections of the war devastation in Europe and Asia (“the Carboniferous Sky”). The desire to enter the cellar and eat all the food is not an image of (imagined) abundance and a descent into the unconscious where trauma suspends language (“aphasia”) against a surreal landscape of black and white. Jean Mignon’s frame of Cleopatra and the asp contrasts the abundance of the Renaissance decoration with the round blackness within the frame and Cleopatra’s arm enveloped by the snake at its centre. The language brings the poem back to the lyric impossibility (“inflamed Lyre”) of the presentness of Vancouver (2nd Narrows).

Thus the long poem does not hide its own narrative: the frames address public discourses of knowledge and progressively descend into the domain of the unconscious, dream and trauma that implicate the artist at a most personal level. Christian Bök insightfully reads the poem as “oneiromechanics” yet he translates too quickly the surrealism of Kiyooka’s poem into the contained narrative of the Surrealist Manifesto. Rather than performing “a surrealist exercise that explores the parataxis of the unconscious through an associative logic of jumpcuts and dissolves” (“Oneiromechanics: Notes on the Dream Machines of Roy Kiyooka” 24), Kiyooka shows the unconscious to be also textualized, one further determinant in the formation of the ‘i’ and not the privileged Freudian one: “breathing Thing/s ‘i’ lie under the belly of / the Dream” (18th Frame). In the 18th Frame [Fig. 2], the last of the series, “the dream dies in the cave / of your Mouth.” The process of dreaming is a fraught one, the artist/spectator (and readers as spectators) are both inside and outside of it. The frame consists of a palimpsest in which the decorative, ornamental Renaissance frame of Fantuzzi’s void cartouche reflects

the image as false illusion through the contrast between dark and light—a process which also plays on the work of photographic development. Its centre is ‘filled’ with an image of Pan, the fertility god: the focus on the god’s phallus alludes overtly to the Renaissance motifs of pagan themes but also to the artist as creator, his “whispering” to the poet’s Dream is also the moment where “the Seances of another day startle ...”. But the poem-frame also draws attention to the instantaneity of the creative act and the artistic vision the dream brings about is neither abstract nor universalistic, as the surrealist movement seemed to imply. In the “cave / of your Mouth” is the song of “the Starlings in the Pear Tree” and the language they “sing” is Cantonese:

O the Pear Tree in my backyard on
Keefer St. C h i n a t o w n m y C h i n a t o w n.

If the three Graces of the 2nd Frame are symbolic of the classic division of the arts, the poem playfully merges artistic practices and disrupts a division which, as Adorno noted, is parallel to the capitalist division of labour (Adorno 1991). High and low culture undercut each other—the visual image cannot close upon a definite discursive edifice: cinema, literature, painting, religion, engineering, photography are brought together in the “Dream’s Cornucopia” (7th Frame), where the erotics of desire breaks down hegemonic systems often by ridiculing them. In the 8th Frame [Fig. 3], Fantuzzi’s elephant, adorned with flowers, is a sign of cultural memory. The elephant is placed aside a balloon with the inscription of Hermann Goring’s name (the balloon as a sign of utopia but also surveillance), Napoleon’s bronze, a fragment of the gathering of the British fleet, and L.D.’s representation of the artist; in its silences, it articulates the “absolute truth” of the “Behemoth of Speech” to the logics of containment of imperialism and fascism.

The Book is also homage to the artists of the period, and the celebration of the 17th Frame [Fig. 4] combines the nocturnal “Libations” at “the Mermaid & the Cecil” (pubs in downtown Vancouver crowded with artists in 1970s) with the psychedelic encounter of colours and senses—desires released in the erotics of material language: Earth, Beloved, Barge, Mirage, Urge, Port of Call.

Figure 1 **16th Frame**
l'aura of the Ukraine Opal Alberta

the Carboniferous Sky over Europa and Asia: Black
as my horse Sleepy Jim who fell thru the winter sod roof of
our Root Cellar and ate — ate til the snow the snow
falling thru the hole the huge Sky-hole Jim had fallen thru
fell down on top of him. Black as his bloated belly.
his Nest of mashed-up roots. we tore out the whole front of
the cellar to bruise Jim an exit — and chained behind
the tractor we dragged Jim out into the unforgiving cold

aphasia a cross frozen stubble
aphasia the drifting snow-mantled pasture
aphasia down the huge black hole
aphasia his un deserved famine
aphasia

the 16th Frame shadowing
the inflamed Lyre burning in the 2nd Narrows

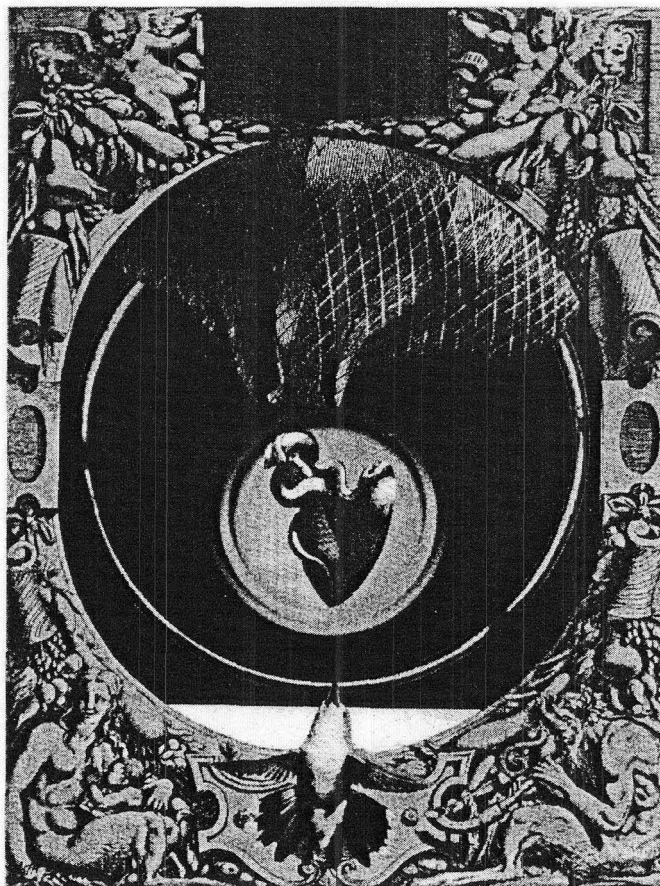


Figure 2

18th Frame

the dream dies every morning in the cave

of your Mouth with all the Starlings in the Pear Tree singing
Cantonese . O the Pear Tree in my backyard on
Keefer St . C h i n a t o w n my C h i n a t o w n .
breathing Thing/s "i" lie under the belly of
the Dream — a goat-footed Savant in the Aura of its Commotion/s .
"be me" the Dream whisper'd "be my Daylight ." let
the Seances of another day **startle . . .**

the 18th Frame

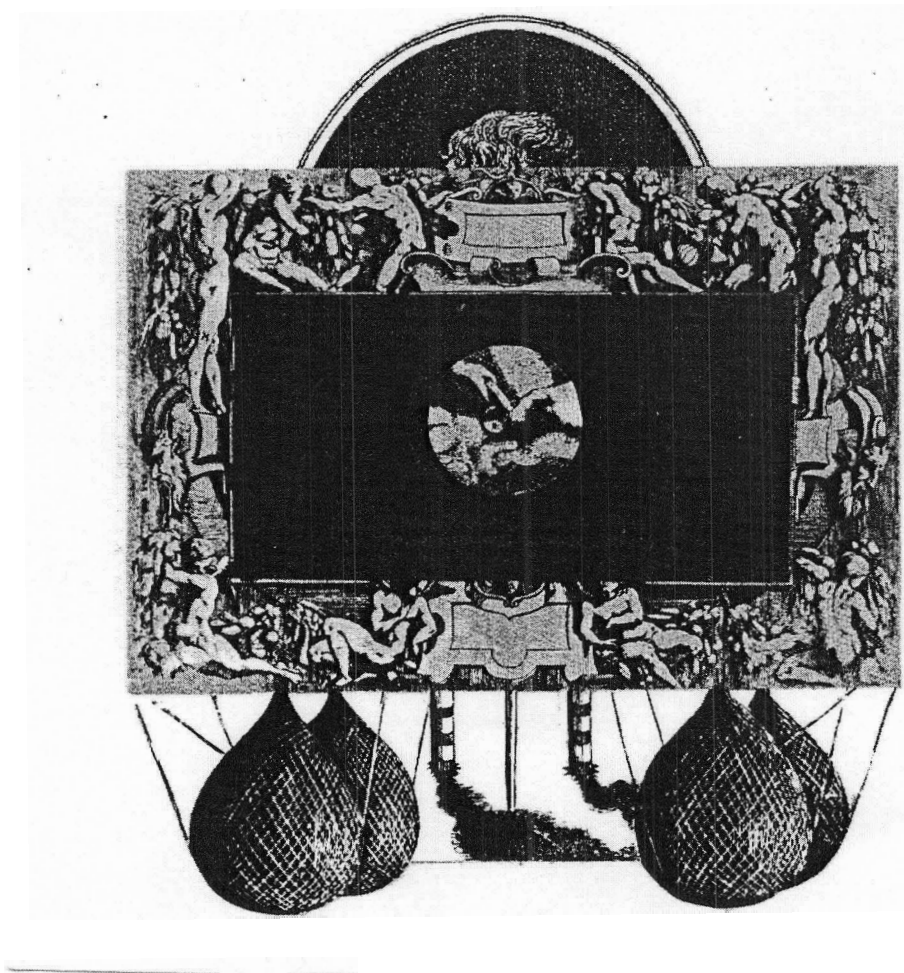


Figure 3 **8th Frame**
sifting the Rune/s for

the Behemoth of Speech: the absolute truth of
those huge white tusks curving in the moon-light marsh
a million years ago, today. searching the Sahara
for the Algebra-of-Awe Rimbaud wept when he stumbled
on them in front of the pygmy king's palace. the impossible
death of Chairman Mao on late night television. nuclear
frisson. Hermann Goring & Separatism. on the
tusk of a dream i beheld the Elephant on the promenade:
his inflamed ear thrums the mammalian silences

the 8th Frame hides

the real pigeon shit spattered on the back of a bronze Napoleon

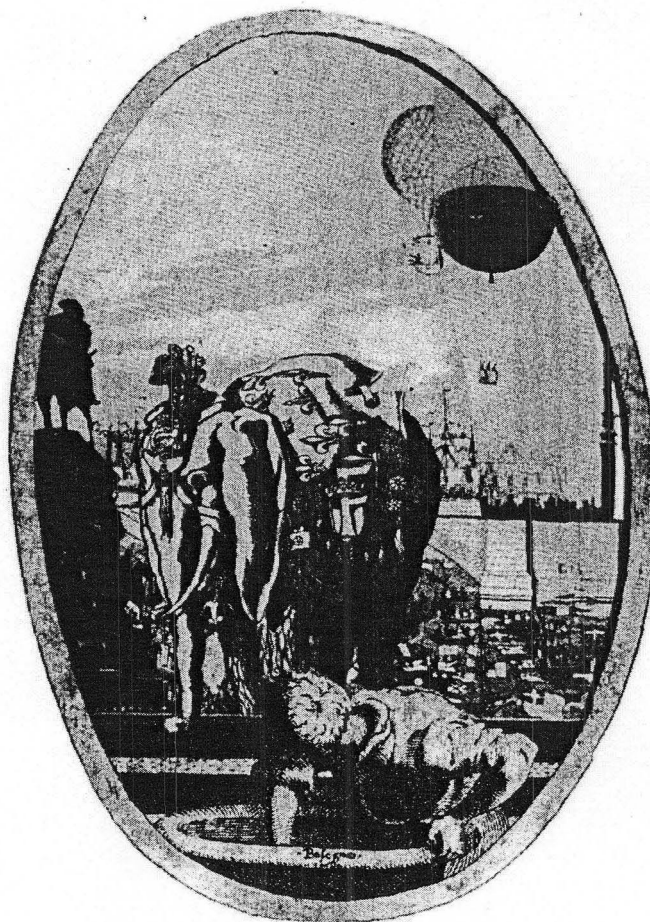
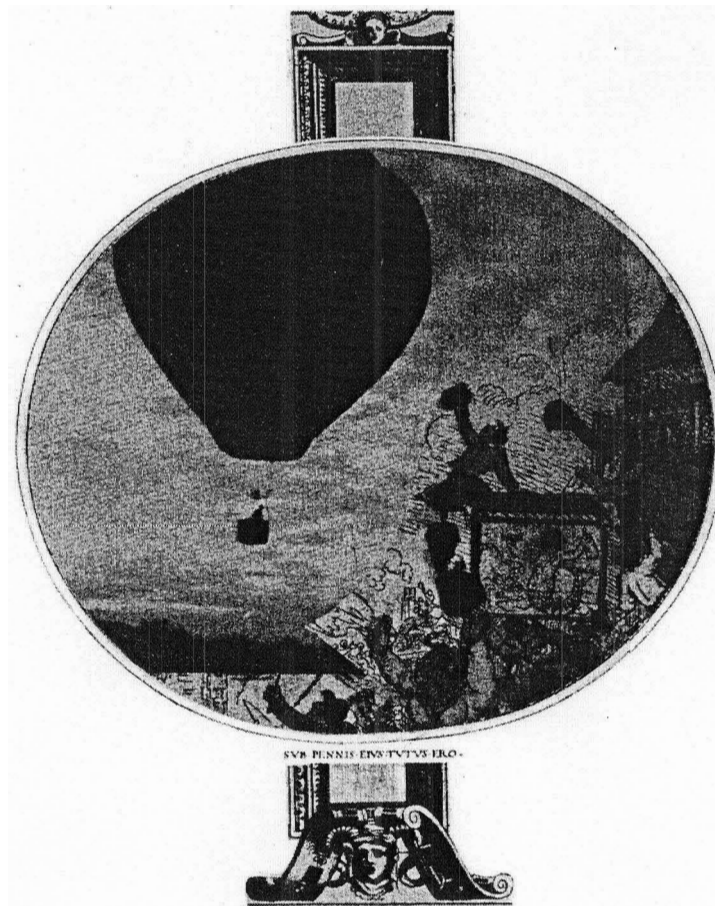


Figure 4 17th Frame
the end of dreaming is the Beginning of

Day Glow Colours spinning a Shiner on
your astonished eyes : Daughters my Daughters
How how is it "i" suddenly see Green : hear Blue :
smell Brown : touch the breath of Rotund .
what the Epithalamion of Bird Songs throng my return to
Earth Beloved Barge Mirage Urge

Port of Call

the 17th Frame belongs to Those
Who celebrate Night's Libations at the Mermaid & the Cecil



Silence, Mourning and Unspoken land(s): *Wheels*

what we come to in our solitude is the recovery of our
singleness defined, by s i l e n c e.

—*transcanada letters*, 4/ 66 montreal, quebec

Kiyooka's acute awareness of the construction of national subjectivities and the inscription of the 'people-as-one' in the national imaginary is most clearly articulated in his long text *transcanada letters*, an assemblage of writings structured as letters as well as lettering. But it is in *Wheels*, sections of which were included in *transcanada letters* in 1975, that this discourse is opened up for scrutiny and confronted through its effects on racialized subjectivities. Read alongside each other, the two texts illustrate the poet's ongoing preoccupation with a critique of the Nation and the ideological state apparatus as powerful determinants of Canadian culture.

Wheels is born out of the diary and travel journal that Kiyooka wrote during a journey through the backcountry of Honshu with his father in 1970, after he worked at the sculpture for Expo 70. The inception of the poem is therefore traversed by the intimacy of familial relationships (with his father as well as the memoried traces of Japan) and the nation-discourse inscribed through the Canadian Pavilion at the World Expo. The poet came back to the text repeatedly. Although rewriting was part of his poetic practice, the processual quality of *Wheels* seems to hint at Kiyooka's inability to give closure to a text deeply implicated with an evolving discourse of 'Canada'. In the tension between the father's silences and the poet's attempts at 'language', the poem challenges the notion of the unitary Nation by showing the fracturing as always *within* language. The process of identification required by nationalist narratives is thwarted not by oppositional values but through the articulation of cultural memory, which introduces

“that sudden shock of the successive, non-synchronic time of signification” (Bhabha 1994b, 162) into dominant culture. This intervention is a performative act that resituates the nation-discourse through the locus of the Other, implicates it with other symbolic systems, and thus destabilizes the pedagogical effects of the nation-discourse. Cultural memory, therefore, is always an act of cultural translation.

The writing of *Wheels* has a complex editorial history. Sections of the diary/travel journal that Kiyooka wrote during the trip with his father in 1969 were first published in *Imago 20* (1974) and incorporated in *transcanada letters* (1975). Later they appeared in *Paper Doors: An Anthology of Japanese-Canadian Poetry* (1981) and in *Descant 44-45* (1984), until the final challenge that Roy Miki, editor of the collaborative project of *Pacific Windows*, had to face in integrating the last revisions the poet left on his computer screen before he died. Yet the last act of Kiyooka’s writing as revision, or re-visitation, points to the constitutive incompleteness of the poem that cannot exhaust itself in a final version. The text demands of the poet its own re-working as the writing subject’s positionality in language and discourse also changes. The imprint of the last words on the screen—with the writing hand disappeared forever—is the final challenge to the printed word and the closure in discourse that Kiyooka’s writing and art have always dynamically resisted. The text writing itself through the hand of the artist is also the text escaping consumption and enacting the de-sacralization of language as poetic act.

The text ‘about’ the journey, echoing the Japanese poetic tradition of Basho and Issa (utaniki), is also, therefore, a ‘textual journey’ re-worked for many years until its publication in 1997. Kiyooka’s unwillingness to fix the text also points to his inability to reach closure by stabilizing the ‘i’ within a notion of identity that could be absorbed by

the nationalist fantasy of Sameness. In a letter written to Gerry Shikatani in March 1977, which Roy Miki quotes in his editorial notes, Kiyooka noted his concern of “‘getting a canadian-japanese voice in there’ and composing a ‘homage to my father. & what he spawned. what, therefore, i also, am’” (“Pacific Rim Letters” 57, cited in *Pacific Windows* 309). But the tension between the hyphenated identity of the son and the Japanese identity of the father is always wavering, never reaching the finality of official borders. The textual ‘i’ is neither the construct of Canadian nationalism nor the return to an essential identity of lost origins; instead, it foregrounds the processual aspect of identity formation and exposes his different positionalities in the changing meaning of Canada and Canadian-ness. Hence the ‘errancy’ *of* and *within* the text. The textual performance becomes a performative act of text-in-process, re-constituting, while always mobilizing, the relationship of nation-ness and subjectivity.

The text straddles genres by combining travelogue, intimate diary, lyric poems, letter-writing and photo-montage. The voices of the three travelers—the poet, his father and Syuzo, the “intrepid guide”—are all audible, but the poem is held together primarily by the poet’s meditations on his vain attempt to get his father—drinking whiskey for most of the time—to talk. In the textual landscape of the journey, the poet’s ‘i’ shifts his position in discourse and foregrounds the situated-ness of the speaking voice. Although the camera frames the countryside through the traveller’s gaze, the photo-collage format makes visible the power of the eye, while undercutting any possible romanticizing and exoticizing of the landscape. Furthermore, the constructed-ness of the image is exposed both through the photo-montage of the final part of the poem and through the visualization of the mechanical act of picture-taking (“click”).

The hybrid conjunction of genres displays different modes of attention to language and perceptual edges, allowing the poet (and the reader) to meditate on the condition of “athwarted-ness,” which marks Kiyooka’s relationship to the English language and to Canada’s colonial sensibility. What George Bowering called Kiyooka’s “attention & accuracy of rendering” reflects his acute modes of perception, attentive to the contingencies of social reality and culture, a critical edge developed through his experience of residing at the margin of dominant discourses. Kiyooka’s artistic and writing practice always shows his acute awareness of language and subjectivity as mutually constitutive and language as a site of power struggles. In an interview with poet and cultural critic Roy Miki, Kiyooka claims that “I did have a sense, when I was quite young, that to survive in this culture was essentially a quest for language as the modality of power about which you could be present in the world (“Interface” 67). Further on in the interview, he articulates this awareness through what he terms the condition of “athwarted-ness,” the rift and split of the (racialized) subject in the dominant language being a recurrent motif in his poetry: “... growing up in this country and being beholden to the white culture, its institutions, I have nonetheless grown up athwarted ... You are of it, and you are not, and you know that very clearly” (71). The term suggests a certain obliqueness and dislocation of ethnic subjectivity, a duplicity that is both complicity and betrayal. A condition, therefore, that suggests a translational movement across borders and time-zones, and which is apparent through the silences *in* and *of* language of *Wheels*. The tension between language and silence is particularly evident in the narrator’s desperate attempt to get his unwilling father to speak and unravel a condition that is

bound to remain incomplete, since no stable meaning can be assigned to the diasporic subject:

... how come we have so little to say
given all the years we've traveled separate ways.
... how is it we seem to have spoken of all
manner of things cast-up in familial nets.
... o the assuaged tongue/s of a father & son
riding Pine/Wind train thru Honshu's Backcountry

... pictures-of-the-floating world
pictures-of-our-passage-thru-it ...
i thot, winding the film up

resting his head on his suit-
case father nods off his empty cup
jiggles on the window ledge
(138)

Nation-ness thus becomes a haunting term, where Japan functions as the liminal space that can never be contained nor spelled out, for it is inscribed in the precarious instability of what Homi Bhabha calls the “double time of the Nation” (“DissemiNation” 1994b). For Kiyooka this is the unsettled boundary between Canada's colonial moment (the father's experience) and his post-colonial present condition (the son's hyphenated identity):

without rime or reason
this rain-dappled Landscape becomes “us”:
'lineage' must have something
to do with these precipitous rock ledges—
this serpent river follows

towards the China Sea

it's raining! it's pouring!
cats and dogs and cascading fields
“inside or outside we're 80%
water anyhow,” father chuckled,
pouring another VO

mere name on a map where
the Japan Sea sat upon brown tile roofs
aloof as only the sea can be

by the time father turned to take a look
it had vanished behind a tangle of
pine branches on a red rock promontory

's d u n e s:
grit on a 35mm lens
a cup of scotch
neat unbespoke s a n d

Backcountry Time is 'local'
:locate each Whistle-stop – place
Its earthen goods its weather
on the horizon line... doze off

(140-1)

Language is intimately tied to different tongues: English, in which the poem is written, Syuzo's inflected "inglish," the poet's "comparable 'nihongo'" and the fluency of the father in both languages—another sign of "our passage." In this dialogic space, the mother is an important absent presence. The addressee of the many letters, 'M' is both literal mother and the mother tongue, nearly erased by the politics of assimilation and signifying the wound inflicted by the State branding him as "enemy alien." In "We Asian North Americanos," Kiyooka refers to this primal tie of his Japanese identity:

And everytime I have tried to express, it must be, affections, it comes out sounding halt. Which that proposes, that every unspecified emotion I've felt was enfolded in an unspoken Japanese dialect, one which my childhood ears alone, remember. ... I am reminded of these grave matters when I go home to visit my mother. She and she alone reminds me of my Japanese self by talking to me in the very language she taught me before I even had the thot of *learning* anything ... So that I find myself going home to keep in touch with my mother tongue and, it must be, the ghost of my father's silences. (n.p.)

In *Wheels* it is the father's silences that are primarily confronted and the motherly language is, apparently, absent. The triangular relationship between father, son, and young guide is paralleled by the dream about the father, a dream about his forthcoming death and the son's desperate attempt to hold on to him. This final identification with the Sameness of the Father invests the sign of the mother with overdetermined significance. Indeed, it is through the mother(tongue), ex-centric in relation to the symbolic, that the poet is able to unravel the conditions of his diasporic subjectivity and subvert the closure that the State deploys on the Japanese-Canadian subject. The letters the poet sends to the mother, marked only as "Dear M," point to his gesture toward the only source of intimacy and depth within language—and the only ear ready to listen to him:

Dear M:

Let this postcard tell you 'where' we be. Let it fill in for our Backcountry silences. If the rest of the trip has more of this in store – I'm looking forward to further Astonishment/s. p.s. it almost feels like I've come this way before but that's another pilgrim's odyssey.

(148)

The sensuous language of Kiyooka's poetry also relates to the sounds and sensations of the semiotic chora. The poem invites a feminist reading of the increasing corporealization of language which, toward the final part of the poem, is stripped away of the abstraction of the Symbolic. The visit to the sites "remembering" the atrocities of Hiroshima visualize the horrors and the sufferings through a language of the body:

there's a charred-hand reaching out of my abdomen to
inscribe my 'name' in the Museum's Guest Book:
there's an acrid taint to all the consonants & avowals
of a hundred-thousand (faceless) Signatories

(169)

return, it is the citizen that the nation-state is supposed to protect, harbour, and nourish through its stable, and well-defined, geographical and institutional boundaries. The (liberal) citizen of the 'modern time of the nation' testifies 'presence' through the coherent cultural identity produced by the linear development of national History—and all narratives of cohesion require the inscription of firm boundaries. Hence the discourse of citizenship, traversing and overlapping the discourse of the Nation, is constituted upon the notion of the 'border'. As discussed in Chapter One, critics from Ernst Renan to Homi Bhabha have problematized the imagined coherence of the nation, for "few states contain coherent historically stable communities of shared descent" (Shapiro 80). The emergence of nation-states in the modern era is far from being a natural process of organic development from conflictual relationships on the ground of ethnicity, religion, language, customs and social practices. Nation-states are constructed through their self-inscription as historical narratives solidified by the conquered geographical space and the polity of the nation. The script functions not only to legitimate the Nation in the 'heart of its subjects' but also to erase those narratives of violence and conquest which marked its inception, and the re-emergence of which could threaten the 'presence' of the Nation. The sameness which is inscribed as constitutive of the Nation becomes the pre-text to negate the articulations of inclusion/exclusion upon which the birth of the nation-state necessarily rests. In this context, citizenship becomes a border, marking the position of who is inside and who is outside. The marking is geo-political: it invests locality as well as social relations. But it is not easily identifiable with a 'geographical' position, for the foreigner, the stranger and the alien are not just outside the border but residing *on* the

border. Through the linguistic inscription of Otherness they are, in fact, borders: the alien's Otherness is therefore constitutive to the citizen-subject.

Who acquires a right to citizenship and who is denied it? The heated political climate in the wake of 9/11 echoes and replicates a not-too-old rhetoric: Pearl Harbor and the Yellow Peril that legitimated the mass uprooting of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians: stripped of their rights to citizenship, deprived of their homes and possessions, they were branded as "enemy aliens." Now as then, the reification of the original sin (the attack on Western civilization) is performed linguistically through the presumably objective abstracted-ness of the numerical mark (9/11) and geographical identification (Pearl Harbor). Voided of any apparent emotional attachment and conveniently laid bare of a grid of significations which could expose complicated, and undesired, contexts of relations, they become signifiers of a discourse of security which produces the cohesion of the body of the 'people'. Now as then, it is the body of the Nation which is materialized, defined and exposed in all its presumed vulnerability to foreign harming and penetration. Flags are raised, anthems sung, prayers said, candles lit and an emotional chord touched in the soul and the hearts of the nation's self-proclaimed 'innocent', though engineered, subjects. But the process of racialization of the alien Other is never without consequences, in that it entails the impossible fixation of the nation-people who are, in turn, produced along the line of an untenable sameness always tied to difference to exist. Not only does the racialization of the subjects of the nation-state, as well as their gendering and sexing which inevitably accompany it, reveal the fictitious nature of the Nation, but it also exposes citizenship as a technology rather than the given natural order—the product of Enlightenment culture in Western democracies where

governments are supposed to be representative of and accountable to the 'people'. Borders, therefore, are lines of demarcation defining both concrete boundaries (the protected entity of the nation-state) and symbolic (the language of borders signifying the nation-people). The performativity of borders (Butler 1993) is dependent on the citationality of the language of binary opposites (East and West, good and evil), the abyss between them becoming *terra nullius* to be heroically conquered. But as it becomes apparent from the current political rhetoric, borders shift; they engender social and political realities; and, in their discursive performances and material enactments, they become sites of contestation. Borders, therefore, *live*. As signifying practices, they demand a reconceptualization away from the static and passive understanding of borders as demarcation toward a generative conceptualization of the ways in which borders, instead, circulate (Rogoff 117) and enable the emergence of a radical citizenship. It is in this spirit that we should follow Kiyooka's poetic 'i' in his Vancouver Downtown East Side languaged peregrinations.

The writing of *October's Piebald Skies & Other Lacunae*, one of the last and most overtly political of Kiyooka's texts, was prompted by the uncanny conjunction of the news of bpNichol's untimely death and the ratification of Japanese Canadian Redress. Composed between September and October 1988, this is a poem of mourning and longing—with bp functioning both as the artist-friend and as the body of a particular history. The poet who "lifted our common speech into the thrall of incantation" (*A February Postscript* 291) re-defined the possibilities of Canadian writing—his life and writing coinciding with a powerful moment in Canadian nationalist discourses. The coincidence of his death with the ratification of Japanese Canadian Redress and the entry

of Canada into the Free Trade Agreement acquires a symbolic significance. Kiyooka's poem is a critical mediation engaging the contested terrains of literature and politics. The poem explodes the paradigms of dominant national culture that normalize the 'Asian-Canadian' artist as the readable, and containable, minoritized subject, thus exposing the false transparency of a cultural nationalism which, through the pedagogy of nationness, hides the sacrificial acts which enabled the process of nation-building. Located at the intersection of race politics, the nation-discourse and multiculturalism, while highlighting their incommensurability, the poem performs a critique of the structures of an emergent cultural nationalism hiding its dark side in the name of progress: the subjection and colonization of First Nations, as well as the racialization and economic exploitation of the immigrant Other, as both constitutive of and haunting its unfolding present. Through a poetics of critical attentiveness to the experience of the lived quotidian, Kiyooka articulates the position of the single (individual or cultural group) to its relationship with institutionalized culture, where both educational and academic structures function as technologies of citizenship. The text re-negotiates the social boundaries of cultural production—those cultural relations and material productions which, according to Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space* 1991), mark the formation of the social space.

In *October's Piebald Skies & Other Lacunae*, 'CanLit' becomes not only the unstable, and thus impossible, centre but also a discourse of containment which generates its own excess. The wastes thus produced challenge the notion of policing and subject interpellation on the part of the state apparatus. The protean body of the nation, far from achieving any plenitude or wholeness, defies official national discourses. Its leakages cannot be encased in the centralizing and homogenizing project which, historically, has

underwritten Canada's attempts to construct a white and anglicized Nation. The bodies wandering aimlessly through Vancouver's Downtown East Side mark their excessiveness to the reified borders of the Nation:

I miss
the burly old guy with his red toque and crackt smile who stood just
around the corner of the New World Grocery with his baleful shopping bag
of oddments. The last time i saw him he was looking up at all the starlings
in the topmost branches of the tall maples fronting powell st. with an ice
cream cone in his hand.

(280)

The writer articulates the social and linguistic body of this 'detritus' to the "promissory" note of the liberal state, whereby the promise has turned into nightmare: the "far-flung 'dene-nations'" robbed of their rights to aboriginal entitlements, a scarred Japantown, the petrochemicals of a ravaging industrial capitalism encroaching on B.C.'s interior, and the genetic engineering geared toward the construction of the perfect (un-racialized) human body. Unhomely ghosts of a fraught history, the bodies and wastes disseminated throughout the territory of the nation are also active agents in the production of a social space, where the wandering artist creates a site for resistance and alternative meaning through his textual territory.

At the conjunction of the troublesome emergence of a new racialized, yet to-be-assimilated, citizen (through the reluctant ratification of the Redress on the part of the Federal Government and the passing of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act) and the death of the 'language poet' who signified the open-endedness of discourse, Kiyooka's resistance to "genres" and "ideologies" carries the cynical tones of his scarring experience and warns against any all-too-easy rejoicing framed by state legislation. But he also reminds us that the signature/s of political contracts always exceed their fixed

terms, thus allowing “permutations” which escape the logic of sameness and commodification of identities.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roy Kiyooka was living in Calgary. Although he did not experience the internment and mass uprooting of Japanese Canadians living on the West Coast, he nonetheless suffered the humiliations of a racist governmental policy. His family was forced to move to Opal, Alberta since his father was deprived of his job and the children were forcibly removed from school. Here they became farmers. But the stigma attached to his ethnicity brutally construed as Other made him suddenly and painfully conscious of his racialized body. Years later, in his peregrinations in the Downtown East Side of Vancouver, he looks down on Powell Street where the abject bodies—exceeding the gentrified urbanity of the postmodern world city—are both expelled and contained. The sight materializes in his memory the trauma of what Judith Butler, in *Excitable Speech* (1997), calls “linguistic vulnerability”:

looking down on a perambulatory powell street

... i wish i could spell out how it truly felt to be 16 in '42.
i wish that spunky kid would talk a blue streak without
the intervention of 46 intrepid winters. i mean i wish that
spunky “yellow kid” welled-up in me utterly unsolicited.
But if the truth be known that kid died twice before he came to manhood.

And further on:

[...] Don't ask me how it felt to be “finger-printed” &
registered as an “enemy-alien.” Ask if you can locate him, that
dumbfound “yellow kid.”

Ask his imperturbable mother.
(281)

Butler notes that the interpellation of state powers is a performative act which does not have a descriptive function but, rather, inaugurates a reality: “And then imagine that the name continues to force itself upon you, to delineate the space you occupy, to construct a social positionality. Indifferent to your protests, the force of interpellation continues to work” (33). Can the subject-citizen resist interpellation? Branded as “enemy alien,” the poet sees his social contours in time and space being produced: in the loss of the “i” his position shifts to the “dumbfound yellow kid” of his memoried injuries, the shift from the first to the third person pronoun marking the split of subjectivity. The force of interpellation by state powers produces the subject as the non-citizen who is cast outside the borders of the Nation. By re-enacting the scene of trauma, the poet reiterates both his subjection and his state of injury; but he also acknowledges that his being called into linguistic visibility gives him the agency to re-name the terms of his own condition. While finger-printed and branded as enemy alien, the spunky yellow kid is still dwelling inside the geographical and political boundaries of the nation-state, and thus forces his own entry into an imagined national community that he compels to be reconfigured.

The bodily inscription of racialized violence is re-constructed in the alignment of two defining events. At the age of ten, his back caught fire while he was playing with his brother in front of an open gas flame oven. This incident kept him confined at home for a year (and forced him to miss school) in a condition of physical pain and slow recovery from the shock, but it also allowed him to reach a closer intimacy with his mother, who was tenderly attending and surrounding him with the protectiveness of her maternal Japanese language. Kiyooka will always remain sensitive to this particular period of his life as the only connection to the intimacy of the mother tongue—functioning as the pre-

symbolic order of the semiotic *chora*. But the burning of the skin is also the prescient mark of the tragedy to occur shortly, Hiroshima and the scarred, burning bodies. The pressure on the family's part for the children to assimilate in the anglicized society and be assimilated by the dominant structures also led to the almost definite loss of the Japanese language.

"Twice killed," as the poet declares, this "kid" is bound to the naming of the State, the act of re-membering being tied to his linguistic vulnerability and the naming that pre-forms his social identity (can the subject resist interpellation?). But despite his longing for homeness and belonging, the poet does not allow for closure and assimilation into the powerful discourse of legislative powers. Reflecting back on his past, he articulates his condition of "athwartness," a term he uses to express both the split between his two selves and his own 'twisted' relationship to "inglish." What he therefore calls his "cleft" tongue disturbs the homogeneity and normalization of authorial narratives. In the uncanny conjunction of his first symbolic death with the Hiroshima massacre, he recognizes both the premonition of historic events to follow and the linguistic vulnerability enhanced by the loss of the mother tongue.

The clear recollection of the history teacher's "unabashed voice," on the day in which the bomb is dropped, marks the sealed boundaries of citizenship and nationhood from which he is purportedly excluded: "My grade 10 teacher fought with / the British at Vimy Ridge and taught us History as if "he" had / in deed, co-authored it." Yet the pain of that exclusion and the harshness of those years never become part of a narrative of victimization but constantly intrude and disarrange the apparent cohesiveness of state ideology. Refusing to bear the social inscription assigned to him by State historiography,

Kiyooka turns the fracture of the subject into a site of resistance, as is apparent from the anaphora of the imperative mode (a mode turned both against the reader and the State) in the lines previously quoted (281).

The re-construction of memory is played against a physical and live present. The poet does not allow for a remembered past to reconstitute itself 'as things were'. Although he longs for reaching back to a stolen childhood and making sense of the events which left him "dumbfound," his writing escapes the nostalgic aura of re-evocation and, instead, interlaces with the poetic instances of a lived present. Space and time are released from the totalizing control of master narratives; they become fragmented and woven into the contested fissures of the here and the now. The Book of History which the grade 10 teacher taught as if he had "co-authored" is taken to task both by the ironic juxtaposition of Kiyooka's own "peevisish biography" and by the enumeration of the many items that this History has produced and is presently trying to disclaim: the First Nations's genocide, environmental pillaging, the scarred and dismantled Japantown and Chinatown, along with the disenfranchised men and women of Vancouver Downtown Eastside—all these not only dismantle the monolithic script of official histories but also, by haunting the spatial present, bring the "dark side of the nation" (Himani Bannerji 2000) into visibility. Textual disturbances occur, allowing for the emergence of a linguistic site where the fractured subject can find instances of articulation.

Witnessing the pervasive rhetoric of the neo-liberalism of the eighties and the increasing pressures of global forces on local communities, Kiyooka exposes the hidden contradictions inside liberalism, where the assault of the New Pedagogy in schools and universities geared toward an increasing professionalization of students toward

“productive” (translated as remunerative) positions, necessary to the preservation of capitalist economies, are dressed in the outfit of the enlightenment ideals: the universalism of individual rights, the discourse of “mankind” (Foucault’s birth of Man) and “citizenship,” which are presumably foundational to the institution of Democracy. Yet, as Wendy Brown points out:

[...] the latent conflict in liberalism between universal representation and individualism remains latent, remains unpoliticized, as long as differential powers in civil society remain naturalized, as long as the “I” remains politically unarticulated, as long as it is willing to have its freedom represented abstractly—in effect, subordinating its “I-ness” to the abstract “we” represented by the universal community of the state.

(States of Injury 56)

The narcissistic gaze of liberal discourse meets its own distorted image in the mirror artfully held up by Kiyooka’s poetic text—and the spaces of conflict hiding in its folds can emerge:

Pedagogy in the ‘80s has been largely persuaded to mid-wife a secular / specular ideology — that will shaft itself on its own empowerment /s. All the technocrats shaping their paradigms under the skyscraper’s meagre shade. All the furbelows of the Free Trade Dialecticians add little to diminish our plethora. Democracy’s uplift denigrates the Third World lying awake in all of us. Out of the ‘agora’ of Native Cultures — the only meaningful dissent.

(282)

Space and time have dramatically shifted. The new temporality of the nation necessitates the production of citizens as players in the logic of the new world economy: ‘education’ to enter the job market of the global village. The simultaneous compression and expansion of the temporal and spatial coordinates of the nations-state produce different effects in the downtrodden areas of Vancouver Downtown East Side:

autumn briefing/s:

in the pisst-up against entrance
to my powell st. studio — a swirl of crispen
leaves half obscuring a heap of shit.
“is this a sign of our acrimonious economy?”
i ask myself — stooping to scoop it
up in a handful of leaves and depositing it in
the gutter between two trucks. Then
i head upstairs to fetch a bucketful of water
to flush out my

october exegesis

do the soi-distant stars really care ‘who’
shits in anybody’s doorway?

(281)

The master narrative of ‘economics’ is exposed as “acrimonious economy” through an “exegesis” which brings together language, body and social identity.

At this point of my discussion, a digression may be useful to contextualize the poem in the social politics of the 1980s in Canada and B.C. This does not imply that texts are the products of contexts or that the contexts ‘explain’ the poem; yet it can help to situate the text’s critical intervention in the political rhetoric of the time and in discourses of crisis which were symptomatic of important shifts in the conceptualization of the nation-state in Canada. While in 1982 the process of repatriation of the Constitution, initiated by Premier Trudeau years earlier, was completed, the government adopted a politics of official multiculturalism: an act of consolidation was therefore followed by a shift in ethnic relations, which would nonetheless maintain the centrality of the two founding nations of the liberal State (see Chapter One). The signing of the Japanese Canadian Redress in 1988 marked both an end (the ‘closure’ of the injustices perpetrated against the community) and a beginning (Japanese Canadians as citizens of equal status and full integration). But the entry into the N.A.F.T.A. agreement in that same year, after

years of preparation and public debates, seemed to shatter the certainties around the nation-state in which Canadian nationalism has laboriously invested since the end of WWII: free trade and globalization were not only implicated in national politics but had become official rhetoric. The language politicians used was “the new reality” and in B.C. the price paid was high:

Ordinary people are paying the price of readjustment. Many are thrown out of work as they and their skills become redundant. For some—the lucky few—lucrative opportunities have emerged. But for others, the “new reality” is unskilled, part-time, low-paying jobs. Expo 86 is perhaps symbolic. Geared to the high-tech future, it created thousands of temporary, minimum-wage jobs. Some of these may become permanent if the “hospitality industry” expands as expected. So, many of our young people can look forward to careers as waitresses or car jockeys. They may indeed be the lucky ones, if the alternative is permanent unemployment. [...] All the talk about the Pacific Rim and high-tech industry conceals a deep anxiety. The global economy is changing, British Columbia is being left behind, and the government has no idea what to do about it.

(Magnusson et al. 1986, 384-385)

Here the reference is to the “restraint budget” that British Columbia Premier, Bill Bennett, had ushered in 1983 in response to the widespread recession. Poet and artist Stan Douglas, in his introduction to the *Vancouver Anthology* (1991), also discusses the profound impact that the “trimming” had on the arts and educational programmes, as well as on Medicare and the privatization of five Crown corporations. Douglas draws attention to the budget address’s claim that, “in too many cases expenditure programmes, which may be desirable for some groups, do not support the broader goals of all British Columbians. Expenditure for such programs should be trimmed, and the trimming should be welcomed” (11). While a large demonstration and a general strike were held against the policy of restraint, the act was clearly the symptom of a new direction of the nation-state: diminished responsibility of the government towards its citizens and the market as

'self-regulator' of competing economic and political forces. Kiyooka's long poem enters the rhetoric of the time to expose the contradictions of the discourse of the Nation as inherent to the logic of the liberal State.

Despite the "dream of justice achieved" through the Japanese Canadian redress settlement, Kiyooka is cynically aware that any judicial contract entails a loss:

henceforth: We Japanese Canadians will go on being opened out by the vast multicultural, linguistic, gene-pool... til there's nothing left for "racism" to plunder because we will all have become the original colour of that "face" predicated on the myriad-coloured faces preceding each of us.
(283)

Through the "we" comprising the community of Japanese Canadians, Kiyooka releases a subtle criticism of the discourse of identity politics of the 1980s. Though politicized, "we" can play right into the hands of universalistic assumptions of collective identities and nationalist discourses that always sacrifice some other "them." The language of Redress can also be contained ("Our Grievances Tallied"). But the text disrupts containment by paying attention to the particular and to the kinship with the larger community: a "new geography of struggle" (Harlow 2000) is written across the boundaries of social identities. Walking in a ravaged Japtown, the 'i' reads the significance of the Redress settlement against the disempowerment of the homeless people:

Those who unlike us have
very little to be dispossessed of: those to whom our "Redress" isn't even a
bread and butter issue.
(282)

While marking Redress as an important event, he also turns a critical eye toward the future, whereby the logics of multiculturalism reduces difference to the flavour of the exotic:

Is it any wonder when I think of the eko/logical
ravages wrought by our vociferous use of petro/chemicals I tend to think of
our Redress as a token, political stratagem: let's get this "minority" off
our backs so we can get on with the establishment's business. Is it to mend
our own disaffected loyalties that we Nikkei have had to undergo such
abasements... i ask myself as i walk down the steep flight of stairs to alight
on rainy Powell Street. Through the open door of the Japanese Deli sushi
and sashimi fill a variety of bellies.

(283)

But the poetic 'i' does not give in to despair and resignation: "i'll be damned if i'll let the word 'shikataganai' fall from my lips again" (283). "Shikataganai" (it can't be helped) marks the resilience of those who could do nothing but fight to live, yet it is also the resignation upon which power structures rely.

Kiyooka has often referred to his "athwartedness" and "cleft tongue" to draw attention to the primacy of language in the formation of subjectivity. Difference, then, inscribed in language is also what can resist the interpellation of power. The poem meditates on bpNichol as a friend and poet whose work has obsessively insisted on language as material. In his poetic homage to bpNichol, Kiyooka's 'cleft tongue' releases language from the containment of discursive power strictures—his 'inglish' inflected by difference:

"i" am despite these permutations and all the
genetic-engineering going on in the laboratories, nothing if not my Kochi
mother's beloved son. We always speak "kochi-ben" when we're together.
Otherwise, we speak inglish in the white man's world. When it comes right
down to the heart's own politics—we all speak in our mother tongue.

(283)

Yet this is not an essentialist gesture but, rather, a poetic disturbance in the seamlessness of hegemonic language. In the course of his neighbourhood peregrinations, he disrupts “the propensity of language” toward “fiction” and “slithering down the trough of translation,” he remarks how:

“i” suspect i’m a sheer product of all such linguistic-
transaction/s: an intransitive noun at best I translate myself.
(280)

By interrupting continuity through “parenthetical silence/s” (280), he produces moments that are lyrical yet not marked by closure. The poetic voice is not expressive of the self but placed under erasure: “‘i’ under my breath said” (278). The silences of language are at odds with “rhetorick” and official discourses (“i’m sick of ‘ideologies’ and ‘genres’” 282) and poetry is in the instantaneity of the moment: “Somewhere near to my hand an old man draws the blind back from his / street-level-window” (280).

Notes

¹ Eva-Marie Kroeller published on *the Fontainebleau Dream Machine* in 1987 but the first substantial critical work on Kiyooka is Roy Miki's "Afterword" to *Pacific Windows*, which he edited in 1997. This work stems from an original collaborative project between Kiyooka and Miki, long-time friends and fellow poets, to bring together Kiyooka's vast poetic/artistic production. Kiyooka was at work on the revising/re-visiting of his poetry when, suddenly, he died. While the death of the artist affected him profoundly, Miki decided to carry out the editorial process in line with Kiyooka's thinking of poetry as 'gift'. *All Amazed* (2002) developed from the Roy Kiyooka Conference held on October 1-2, 1999 in Vancouver. See also Glen Lowry's dissertation *After the End/s: CanLit and the Unravelling of Nation, 'Race', and Space in the Writing of Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt and Roy Kiyooka* (2002).

² Kiyooka refers to the period comprised between 1956/'60 as "the Regina College/Emma Lake years / the transitional years." He is keen on putting on record that "tho I helped to organize and / attended several of the Emma Lake Artist's Workshops I / didn't do any ptgs. of consequence at them. All the works / painted there (the W/Cs etc.) were done during the summer." Furthermore, he identifies the "Norman MacKenzie's large ducco on masonite" work and the "Non Still-life Monica" as the culmination "(in so far as my work cld be sd to do so)" of the "previous decade's work beginning in '46." Although this chronology was prepared for the retrospective exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, its inclusion in *transcanada letters* re-shapes it as a meditation—and re-visitation—of his artistic practices, as well as a 'portrait of the artist as a poet'.

³ In *transcanada letters*, Kiyooka notes that the 'Hoarfrost' Series "are really my first sustaind (abstract) field ptgs. (Bloore and I were into titanium white concurrently.)"

⁴ John O'Brian notes that in *Hoarfrost, No. 1* (1959), "[a]t first glance, the accumulation of elongated strokes gives the impression of interlocking criss-cross diagonals, but on closer inspection a complex arrangement of irregular hexagons can be distinguished" (21).

⁵ The entry is dated 1970.

⁶ This was also the last time when he painted the last watercolors using "bands or stripes of pure colour with merging edges" (*transcanada letters*).

⁷ This letter was the object of much scrutiny and discussion of the graduate class of English 804 in Fall 2003. I am indebted to Prof. Roy Miki and my fellow students for the exciting and productive dialogue that it generated.

⁸ Webb's letters to Kiyooka are housed in Roy Kiyooka's papers in Special Collections at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby B.C. and the Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa.

⁹ In a private discussion held at his house in Vancouver on July 14, 2006, Bowering notes that the series emphasized poetry as art.

¹⁰ See also Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997).

¹¹ Photographer, artist and surrealist writer Charles Henri Ford was the editor of the avant-garde magazines *Blues* and *View*, which published works by Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy, Andre Breton and Marcel Duchamp, thus bridging the worlds of art and writing, as well as Europe and North America. He was closely associated with modernist writers and poets like Djuna Barnes, Jean Cocteau, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens. In 1933 he published the novel *The Young and the Evil*, written in collaboration with Parker Tyler. The book was banished both in the United States and in Great Britain for fifty years.

CHAPTER FOUR

Post Cards / Correspondences: George Bowering's Long Poems, The Poet and The City

Poetry and the Production of Locality

Two of the most powerful determinants in the construction of the long poem as an 'essentially Canadian genre' have been the categories of history and geography. In the teleological movement of nation-building, history becomes the measure of the time of modernity and progress as they are projected onto a static space—a space curiously absent of women, First Nations and ethnic subjects.¹ In this classical (Romantic) notion, time and space are the coordinates of the contexts that have shaped the Canadian long poem—the 'reflection' theory of literature, that is literature as representation of a social group. Yet literary criticism is also the product (and producer) of nationalist ideologies and new socio-political exigencies demand new questions to be asked. What is the relationship between the cultural and the political? Which determinants have intervened in the re-articulation of the Nation? What do we ask of poetry?

Within a nationalist North-American discourse of place and history, the radical poetics emerging from the Vancouver scene of writing in the sixties re-figure space through a theory of locality that undoes the imperial ethos underlying the construction of place (Butling 2005, 89). In his 1978 interview with Caroline Bayard and Jack David, George Bowering identifies the concerns of the *Tish* poets as "the business about the

local, the business about studying linguistics, the business about getting the poem out of the body and onto the page” (79). The new poetics articulate locality through a phenomenology of language grounded in the vernacular, the languaged layers of the “here” and “now,” set apart from the oppositionality apparent in Birney’s “heavier rhetoric” (79):

The word that we used all the time was “locus,” which we liked partly because it came out of Olson, partly because it didn’t say setting, it didn’t say place, it didn’t say landscape, it didn’t say all those things that are literary devices. Every time you use one of those terms you posit a person who is saying, OK, now how can I organize all this into a literary work. But if you say locus, it implies trying to find out where you are. It implies, I’m trying to locate myself. We didn’t know much about our own skills and we didn’t know hardly anything about the place that we lived in so those two things were built simultaneously. (79-80)

The shift from landscape and place to locus distanced the group of new poets both from Frye’s nationalist thematic criticism (his famous dictum “Where is here?” and the thematization of Canadian identity as “garrison mentality”) and from the regionalisms that contested Ontario’s cultural and political centralism but maintained its belief in ‘place’ as referent. While mainstream academic critics and poets were concerned with rooting a ‘Canadian identity’ in the specificity of territory and the psychological projection of the individual’s (read white settler’s) mapping of the Canadian experience, a new generation of poets was struck by a sense of foreignness within mainstream culture and language; hence the need to articulate locality through the phenomenology of language and the writing of a linguistic terrain. What is radically new in these poetics is the sense of the processual nature of subjectivity; rather than the poet as beholder or privileged centre of experience, the ‘i’ is the textualized subjectivity of a layered language. These texts critique and deconstruct the liberal humanist ideal of Cartesian

subjectivity (the scopic gaze of the sovereign I/eye) by displacing the privileged position of the writing subject.

Nevertheless, in reading through the many avant-garde long poems of the ‘turbulent’ sixties and seventies many questions arise. Do all long poems strive toward a language-centred practice of authorial displacement? Does the processual nature of the open-ended form escape formal (and ideological) closure? What is the relationship of the form with the production of locality? Many of these questions, specifically in relation to the authorial I/eye and the question of closure, underlie Smaro Kamboureli’s analysis of the long poem genre. In a chapter dedicated to locality, she engages in a reading of texts by Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt and Eli Mandel to investigate the relationship between place and language, the textuality of place, and locality as ideological position as well as displacement. Citing Bowering, she highlights the poets’ indebtedness to the notion of the local as articulated by William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson, “local pride” as reversing the dream of origin of earlier immigrants, a locality outside the logocentric tradition. Kamboureli’s insightful poststructuralist analysis privileges language as a conceptual and analytical framework, which a reading of the “contemporary” long poem seems to invite. As a supplement to her discussion, I propose to engage subjectivity and locality by recouping questions about the social nature of language and knowledge production in order to articulate the ‘local’ to the discursive geographies of the nation-state and trans-nationality.

What is the local and what is its relationship to larger social and cultural formations, such as the nation-state and the global? Current debates about globalization—and anxieties about the demise of the nation-state—have revived attention to the

production of locality and the possibilities of social articulation and resistance. Yet what is referred to as the 'local' remains a highly ambiguous concept, vaguely understood as the social space set in opposition to political and discursive structures of containment (of subjects as well as resources), the micro against the macro. Subsequently, the oppositionality and grassroots quality often associated with locality can easily slip into the "metaphysics" of the imagined community, since it is precisely through the production of locality that the nation-state, as well as trans-national capitalism, operates (Appadurai 1996).

This chapter focuses on George Bowering's long poems in the context of a discourse of locality and subjectivity that informed much of the writing theories of West Coast poets. Its title gestures toward the re-articulation of the time-space nexus through an urban poetics which is also poetic networking—writing within and for a community (as the title of this chapter, "Post-Cards/Correspondences," suggests)—as well as making its way and intervening into the "forest of signs" (Baudelaire, "Correspondances" 1857): the poet, then, as flâneur. Although the local has been taken up recurrently in different ways by many experimental writers, Bowering's poetics shows a profound awareness of the tangled relationship of the local with the national and the trans-national, at a time when 'community' and 'oppositionality' were powerful terms of identification for a network of emerging writers. In the next section, I address the function of the newsletter *Tish* and the little magazine *Imago* in weaving a trans-national community and establishing a network of sometimes very diverse writers. Subsequently, I focus on four long/serial poems by Bowering: *Rocky Mountain Foot*, *At War With the U.S.*, *Allophanes* and *Kerrisdale Elegies*. The radicalness of these texts lies precisely in their de-

naturalizing the ideology of the nation-state and its corollary of regionalism, as well as their grounding the 'local' in the material specificity of its always shifting context. This strategy unhinges locality from the production of place as the projection of history and the dream of origin—the 'evocation of place' called for by mainstream Canadian poetries—as well as from the linguistic abstractiveness of many experimental poems, such as bpNichol's *The Martyrology* which risks disarticulating the local from the specificity of its social relations.² Instead, Bowering's poetics in the long poem engages locality as historically contingent and spatially dynamic, thus providing a productive understanding of space outside the containing framework of liberal humanist ideologies.

Tish and Imago

What is this community of poets
I bother to claim citizenship within?
—*Rocky Mountain Foot*, "community"

The publication of *Tish: a poetry newsletter — Vancouver*, which appeared from 1961 to 1969, has received much critical attention. Bowering, a founding member of the editorial collective with Frank Davey, Fred Wah, David Dawson and Jamie Reid, had already been involved with Davey and Wah in the new writing community emerging from the M.A. programme in the English department at U.B.C., associated with Earle Birney.³ Fred Wah and Pauline Butling were students in Warren Tallman's poetry class and Tallman became an energizing presence for the group of young writers. Readings at Tallman's house focused on the San Francisco poetry scene and Olson's poetics.⁴ But Bowering had already become increasingly interested in American poetics in his personal 'search for poetry': he encountered William Carlos Williams's *The Desert Music and*

Other Poems when he was going through the entire collection of modern poetry in the U.B.C. library, a ‘found poetry’ that will become crucial to the definition of his poetics. Yet he was aware of a sense of “deracination” as it related to the possibility of Canadian writing. His 1976 recollection is worth quoting at some length:

Well, when the whole *Tish* thing was happening, we were people who had been deracinated—we didn’t get any Canadian writing at school in B.C. Most of the people in *Tish*—Fred Wah and Frank Davey—didn’t know anything about Canadian poetry. The only people that knew of Canadian poetry were Lionel Kearns and I, who got together before the *Tish* stuff happened anyway. Lionel had been an exchange student in Quebec and he brought back the Contact Press books and I read them in one of those cabins in the dorms. Souster, Layton, Dudek, D.G. Jones, Milton Acorn and all those guys. I hadn’t even thought about Canadian poetry. I didn’t even think about thinking about Canadian poetry. (81)

With other students, among these Fred Wah, Pauline Butling, Lionel Kearns and Jamie Reid, Bowering attended Warren Tallman’s reading sessions at his house, where he would encounter and discuss a poetics at the time still excluded from Canadian curricula: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson, as well as the American poets included in Donald Allen’s anthology *The New American Poetry* (1960).⁵ It is from these encounters that the idea of *Tish* started to germinate.

Recollections of Tallman’s influence on *Tish* and what was later dubbed the West Coast Renaissance are discrepant. In “The Roots of Present Writing,” a discussion in which George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, Fred Wah, Robert Creeley, Peter Culley, Victor Coleman and Steve McCaffery took part on 20 October 1980, Wah recalls how *Tish* responded to a sense of vacuum that the young poets (Bowering, Wah and Lionel Kearns being the first nucleus) felt about writing located in the West Coast. But it was specifically an open letter from a Montreal poet, stating that Eastern poets were more interested with what was going on in the United States than in Western Canada, which

prompted them to discuss with Warren Tallman the possibility of regular meetings to read and discuss poetry:

So Warren started to have Sunday afternoon meetings where we'd get together and we could read our own poems. That was exciting and it was all new poetry. And that's how *Tish* started. For me, a response to that Eastern Canadian writer. We're more interested in New York. (218)⁶

In the "Introduction" to *Tish No. 1 ~ 19*, his retrospective collection, Frank Davey also retraces some of the events that led to *Tish* but he does not give enough agency to the poets. Robert Duncan came to Vancouver to give readings at Tallman's house in December 1959 and, in February 1961, as part of the 1961 U.B.C. Festival of the Contemporary Arts (Tallman and Jane Rule were part of the U.B.C. committee). Subsequently, Tallman obtained support from the students (Bowering, Davey, Fred Wah, Jamie Reid, David Dawson and Gladys Hindmarch) to finance Duncan for three nights of lectures which took place at his house in July 23-25, 1961; and he was later instrumental in bringing other "avant-garde" artists to Vancouver: Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Jack Spicer, Charles Olson, Robin Blaser and Margaret Avison (Davey 8). In "Poet in Progress: Notes on Frank Davey," Tallman assigned a central role to American avant-garde poetics in the emergence of a new Canadian poetry. While acknowledging the importance of Tallman's commitment, Davey counters this view by noting that "[a]ll five of the founding editors had been writing for some years before this summer. Bowering, Dawson, Reid, and myself had taken courses within Earle Birney's creative writing program" and "Bowering was beginning to receive intermittent publication in eastern Canadian magazines" (8).

Davey explains that “[t]he immediate models [for *Tish*] were two American underground magazines, Cid Corman’s **ORIGIN**ⁱⁱⁱ and LeRoi Jones’s and Diane Di Prima’s **THE FLOATING BEAR**,” while Louis Dudek’s **DELTA** was a “more distant model” with “a professional veneer which concealed whatever human contexts the writing had occurred in.” Instead, he adds, “had [they] encountered copies of **CONTACT** and **COMBUSTION** instead of **DELTA**, they would have undoubtedly been more useful” (7). In an interview (*Line* 7.8 Spring/Fall 1986), Barry McKinnon remarked that the narrative of *Tish* is “probably overblown in terms of what it actually was—its influence” (109). But McKinnon also remembers *Tish*’s role in creating a space for a poetics of the page. Olson’s “composition by field” and the typewriter as a method of composition immediately created a distance from what was being produced in the East, “the artist as tortured, mythmaker, loner” (103). Unlike other innovative magazines, it had an irreverent tone—*Tish* being the phonetic inversion of “shit”—breaking poetry as artefact apart; it offered an immediate, ‘beat’ criticism, thus becoming the obvious entry point into the new post-modern times. Unlike Wah, Davey does not emphasize the impulse to create *Tish* as prompted by the invisibility of the West Coast perceived by local writers against Eastern centralism.

The attack on the *Tish* poets is well-known. As explained in Chapter One, nationalist critic Robin Matthews accused *Tish* of betraying Canadian national identity and opening the way to imperialist American influences. One of his students, Keith Richardson, articulated his objections in *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish* (1976). Although the criticism was unsubstantiated—West Coast poets had always voiced

ⁱⁱⁱ In bold in the original text.

strongly their critique to American imperialism—it wedged a further divide between the Eastern critical establishment and West Coast writing; the divide had already been made apparent by the critical reception of Margaret Atwood’s *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) and nationalist thematic criticism by the West Coast avant-garde. In the end, this attack contributed more to the inscription of *Tish* in Canadian literary history than to its demise.⁷

The synergy of *Tish* contributed to Bowering’s coming-to-writing. In the interview with Caroline Bayard and Jack David, he emphasizes the importance of “community” and “collaboration” in the *Tish* group:

What *Tish* mainly offered, to me, was two things: one, being taken seriously by people who I would take seriously, people in the group, and them saying, That’s no good there. Frank really got upset with this after a while, like everybody looking over your shoulder. Doesn’t upset me at all, I think it’s wonderful. The other thing was the business of being in a community, being in that community, is a kind of introduction to the commitment to the larger community of the language and of poetry; that is to say there’s a lot of people that I objected to then, but didn’t know why, and object to now, who have the view of the poet’s career, poetry as his product, the poet as in competition with other poets. [...] We published lots of poems without our names on them, with other funny names on them. (84)

From 1964 to 1974 George Bowering edited the magazine *Imago*, dedicated to the long poem form, an endeavour which, he notes, “was naturally contemporaneous with my wanting to writing long poems myself” (*Out-posts* 92). In the cited interview Bowering explains the rationale of starting the magazine, a position which he had maintained throughout his correspondence:

[...] at that time, [...] it was very rare that a magazine would have space to publish long poems. Not just anybody’s long poems, but the long poems in our context. So I started off for that, and I said I’ll have twenty issues. By the time I got less than half way through, up to six or seven issues, the long poem had

become a fad. Everybody's writing long poems. So the job of *Imago* was done. But it started at about the time that the original *Tish* guys broke up and everybody had a magazine—Fred Wah had *Sum*, Frank had *Open Letter*, and I had *Imago*. In a sense, we were all doing open letters. It was an extension of what was going on in *Tish*, with a little bit more savvy. (*Out-posts* 85)

The statement is an important one, since it sheds light on the increasing awareness in the literary community of young non-mainstream writers of the location of the long poem in Canadian letters, as well as its possibilities for experimental practices.⁸ At the forefront came the statement that “*Imago* is intended, more than can be seen in this n. 1, for the long poem, the series of set, the sequence, swathes from giant work in progress, long life pains eased into print: Blake's ‘Marriage of Heaven & Hell’ welcome” (*Imago* 1). An invitation, and poetic statement, which returns in the following issues: “*Imago* is a magazine that specialized in the long poem or the poem series” (*Imago* 2). In the last issue of the magazine, Bowering reminds his readers that, since its inception, *Imago* was planned for twenty issues only and its function has come to an end:

Here it is, at last, the long-promised final issue of *Imago*. When I started the magazine a decade ago, it was with the purpose of providing a space for longer poems, something the magazines weren't doing much of in those days. Since then they have done so, & god knows too many long poems are being thrun [Bowering's term] about. Everybody's doing it, like say patches on patches on worn-out bluejeans, what everyone “else” is doing. (“Preface”)

Little attention has been paid to *Imago* as a magazine that not only acknowledged the long poem as a productive poetic form for the local scene of poetry, but was also of crucial importance in consolidating a network of writers who shared theories of writing with respect to the new Canadian poetry. Bowering himself seems ambiguous about the role the magazine played: “It didn't make very much of an impact in the Canadian literary scene, or whatever. But I'm really proud of what's in there; that is to say, if you

went back and looked at the poems that are in there, there's only one or two poems I wish hadn't been in there, that sort of were foggin' them eyes. It's a kind of a memory bank now" (*Out-posts* 85).

Although among its contributors were the former *Tish* poets, submissions came from other parts of Canada as well as the United States—their involvement providing a scenario of the network of poetic communities across regional and national boundaries.⁹ Among these were Victor Coleman (editor of Toronto-based poetry magazine *Island*); David McFadden (editor of *Mountain* magazine); Robert Hogg (editor of *Motion*, a prose magazine formerly associated with *TISH*); Margaret Atwood; Al Purdy; Daphne (Buckle) Marlatt; Roy Kiyooka; Barry MacKinnon; Stan Persky; George Stanley; Gerry Gilbert; Gladys Hindmarch; Brian Fawcett; John Newlove; Dwight Gardiner; Ian Hamilton Finlay; David Bromige; Fielding Dawson (editor of the poetry magazine *Matter*); Michael McClure; Daisy Aldan (editor of *A New Folder*); Carlos Reyes (editor of *Potpourri*); Ronad Caplan (editor of *Mother*); Margaret Randall (editor of *El Corno Emplumado*); David Rosenberg (editor of *The Ant's Forefoot*); David Ball (editor of the poetry magazine *Blue Pig*); Carol Berge (editor of the magazine of new prose *Center*); the well-known American poets Jerome Rothenberg, Paul Blackburn, LeRoi Jones, Diane di Prima, Charles Olson and Robert Duncan; the British Tom Raworth; Ian Hamilton, from Scotland; Matti Rossi, from Finland; Malay Roy Choudhury, from India; and lesser known poets: Roy Bremser, Larry Eigner, Anselm Hollo, John Keys, Clayton Eshleman, Keith Wilson, Michael Shayer, Theodore Enslin, Gerard Malanga, Lee Harwood, Diane Jarreau, Theodore Enslin, and George Montgomery, publisher of "strange mimeo mags from the Lower East Side."

Every issue published a number of poems but there were also book-length poems which, making up the whole issue, were introduced by Bowering as “a book”: Lionel Kearns’ *Listen George* (no. 3); Frank Davey’s *The Scarred Hull* (no. 6); David McFadden’s *The Saladmaker*, a “humility cycle” (no. 9); Bowering’s own *Sitting in Mexico* (no. 12); Victor Coleman’s *Back East* (no. 15); and Brian Fawcett’s *Five Books of a Northman* (no. 18). Some issues contained sections of works in progress, such as Roy Kiyooka’s “The 4th Avenue Poems” (no. 11) and “Backcountry Trip” (no. 20), the latter becoming part of *Wheels*; Daphne Marlatt’s “Imperial Cannery” (no. 19) and “Steveston as you find it:” (no. 20), both of which became part of *Steveston*.

All issues gave brief, and sometimes humorously irreverent, information about the writers and their recent publications, which helped disseminate knowledge about individual works and their former avenues of publication. They also contained a dedication across the literary and political world, popular culture, and locally known literary figures: Charles Olson, Jack Kerouac, Fidel Castro, el Che, Otis Spann, Federico Fellini, Mahatma Kane Jeeves, Sergio Mondragon, Margaret Randall and Samuel Perry.¹⁰ One issue published a list of magazines recommended by *Imago: Work, El Corno Emplumado, Tzarad, Wild Dog, TISH, Potpourri* and *Tlaloc*, and references to other magazines where the contributors published their work included *Ganglia, Tampa Poetry Review, Sympton, Lugano Review, Move, The Open Letter, The Wormwood Review* and *Intercourse*.¹¹

This detailed information, though clothed in an often humorous and unpretentious tone, drew attention to a vast production of poetry in the long poem form which was not spontaneous but engendered through a locally grounded, yet intra- and trans-nationally

connected, 'community work.' While *Tish*, a catalyst of the West Coast Renaissance, had been made possible both through the active involvement of Warren Tallman and the young student writers part of the U.B.C. creative writing programme, *Imago* articulated a poetics through a community which was not geographically defined (urban/rural, intra-national, trans-national) yet was grounded in the specificity of interlocked localities. Against the trope of a (post)colonial and nationalist Canada in need of a 'culture' to defend Canadian values and identity (Frye's "garrison mentality" and Atwood's "victim position"), the magazine re-articulated Canadian writing as part of a larger network of influences and connections—the site of language against the containment of place.

When the Local meets the Global: *Rocky Mountain Foot*

Bowering's early engagement with the poetry and theories of language of W.C. Williams, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer—the latter in relation to dictated verse and seriality of form—helped him formulate a poetics grounded since the beginning in the specificity of the local. Yet the local is never 'parochial' or strictly bounded by either origin or affiliation; indeed, it is articulated in tension with, and as part of, the national and the trans-national. As the writing responds to the "moment-by-moment consciousness of what's happening in the language" (*Out-posts* 90), the writing subject is always in a tenuous position, responding to the immediacy of experience yet remaining in conversation with his many attachments and the contingency of the social context. In this sense, Bowering's writing about locality as historically specific differentiates from Olson's 'stable' voice in the *Maximus Poems*, where the deconstruction of History and the reclaiming of 'place' (articulated as relational in the American context) is re-contained by the centrality and stability of the speaking voice:

The nest, I say, to you, I Maximus, say
under the hand, as I see it, over the waters
from this place where I am, where I hear,
can still hear

("I, Maximus of Gloucester, To You" 34)

The poet's attentiveness to the workings of language reveals language as a primary locus for the formation of subjectivity and the workings of discursive structures—a poetic thinking which echoes in interesting ways poststructuralist theories of language and discourse.¹² There is no *a priori* consciousness which the 'self' can articulate in language nor is there a 'referent' available for representation. Voice, then, is not the expression of an autonomous self but a writing gesture which acknowledges individual subjectivity and the social as mutually constitutive. The eye/I of the traditional lyric genre is thus replaced by a textualized 'i' unable (and unwilling) to occupy the position of the sovereign subject: the 'i' enters the poem as text, thus subverting from within the lyric the positionality of the scopic gaze.

Interestingly, the lyrical mode pervades Bowering's poetry, whether in the early poems in the lyric genre (*Sticks and Stones* 1963; *Points on the Grid* 1964) or in the long poem/book form which constitutes the bulk of his production. While the reader is made suspicious by the poet's early lyrical exploration of the meaning of lineage and personal history ("Grandfather" 1962; "The Descent" 1963; "Grandmother" 1964), the lyric surprisingly offers the 'entry point' to the long poem format: by "building on the lyric into a larger mode and using an Olson sense of how you get into a long poem" (*Out-posts* 92) the poet contaminates and disengages the lyric from its traditional generic expectations—'voice,' transparency and sovereign subjectivity—to make it part of the socio-political.

Although Bowering's comment refers to the composition of *Rocky Mountain Foot* (1968), in *The Man in Yellow Boots / el hombre de las botas amarillas* (1965) this process is already visible. The book is a collection of closely interwoven lyric poems written both during the poet's sojourn in Calgary, where he taught at the University of Calgary from 1963 to 1966, and during the journey with his wife to Mexico in 1964. Some of the poems are a playful and linguistic exploration of the meaning of love and sexuality, but they do not invite an easy identification of poetic voice and self: Angela and George Bowering are also texts:

Is this me?
Strange faded figure
in striped shirt
& stringy tie?

[...]

Now listen, George Bowering,
dont write poems in an office,
yell poems of destruction
to all offices!

("old time photo of the present" 56)

While William Carlos Williams is present both as poetic gift ("for wcw") and textual voice, the instantaneity of the writing act as method of composition (a technique derived from Williams) is thematized and enacted both in the individual poem—

Words
 coming together
 moving at one another
traction for the tongue

("for wcw" 40)

—and in the most overtly political poems: “the day before the chinese a-bomb” (36), “her act was a bomb” (38), and “the good prospects” which was “(writ on the occasion of the Moscow test ban treaty meeting—GB)” (52). Attention to the instant of writing situates some of the poems within the text of Canada (“canadian café” 48; “calgary downtown sunday” 50; “indian summer” 62); synchronically, it foregrounds both the positionality of Canada within a net of global relationships (U.S. imperialism, Cold War order, international treaties) and the tenuous boundedness of nation. Thus the nation, the local and the global are not dichotomous structures: they traverse each other and overlap. The book is written through a ‘new’ community of writing, with “American / language shouting / across the Potomac” (“for wcv” 40) and “Paterson” being written into the locality of Calgary and Mexico. Writing is also traversed by visual arts, with Roy Kiyooka’s elliptical frames engaging the political (the atomic bomb, political assemblies, the killing of Malcolm X, drugs) and deconstructing the technology of representation. A short poem by Kiyooka plays with the significance of the frames is also included, and Kiyooka’s presence as artist and poet testifies to the intimate relationship of poetry and art in the Vancouver writing community. The letters at the end of the book are also interwoven in the book-text: the self-conscious literariness of the form and thematic address (Alberta’s conservatism, academic censorship, religious fundamentalism, economic powers, the commercialization of the space of America, Picasso’s political radicalness) further unsettles the lyric mode of the first poems. But they also situate the book more pointedly within “new geographies of struggle” (Harlow 1996), thereby taking to task the time-line of the Nation (and its implication in internal colonialism, uneven

developments and distribution of rights and resources) as “writ still in decisive ways across the political cartography” (Harlow 151).

The book, then, raises the question of borders: regional, national, the North American continent, religious, ethnic, sexual and linguistic—the text is in English and Spanish translation. Indeed, the publication with *El Corno Emplumado* was made possible through Bowering’s participation in the network of American avant-garde artistic practices which escapes the narrow and stifling confines of ‘national literature’.¹³ By contesting “the false simplicity of borders” (Balibar 2000), the book shifts accepted understandings of space as static; the reader finds it impossible to ‘define’ a territory, since territories shift and produce competing and overdetermined meanings.¹⁴ Although borders are part of national strategies to appropriate a territory in the name of a national identity, territories—the book suggests—defy codification.

Four poems, “the frost”, “the grass”, “calgary downtown Sunday” and “indian summer,” were included in the 1968 publication *Rocky Mountain Foot: a lyric, a memoir*, which won the 1969 Governor General’s award together with a second book, *The Gangs of Kosmos* that the poet also published in the same year. In an interview with Roy Miki on 9 May 1988, Bowering claimed that he did not think of the book as either a long poem or a “collection of poems” but “as a ‘suite’ of poems—‘a long thing made of little things, with connective tissue” (*A Record of Writing* 18). The “connective tissue” provides the impulse to read the book as text, the individual poems being part of a dialogic structure that does not allow for the consumption of the individual lyric stances but demands the reader’s active engagement with the poetry. The poems are situated in a cultural con-text, where context is understood not as ‘background’ to the reading but as the very matrix

constituting the socio-political of which the text is part. The poet's wandering through different times and spaces of composition—the compositional process reflecting the poet's traversal of diverse geographies and histories—articulates a notion of locality not in opposition to but interlocked with the national and trans-national. While the Albertans of *Rocky Mountain Foot* are the target of his facetious criticism, the poet de-naturalizes the 'transparency' of the structures of capitalism by making visible its 'fictions'. Here the 'Indians' and the wounded environment are the visible scars of the colonial enterprise and the reminders that the Nation's entrance into modernity through the construction of the State might not include them. While for the Indians, often reduced to shadows or echoes of the past by contemporary society, the colonial moment has not reached the privilege of the white 'post', they also unsettle the privilege of modernity from its narrative of progress: the words and buried memories of Chiefs and elders in the text point to a different relationship of humans to the land and the mythology of infinite progression as untenable.

Rocky Mountain Foot is a collage of fragmented texts from newspapers, brochures, pamphlets, reviews, Indian sayings, found poems, which both frame and are set in dialogue with the poet's individual lyrics. At the end of the book, Bowering acknowledges the quotations from the various sources: *The Imperial Oil Review*, *Our Alberta* (printed by Calgary Power Ltd.), *The Badlands of the Red Deer River* (printed by the Dominion of Canada), *The Frank Slide Story* by Frank Anderson, *The Calgary Albertan*, *The Calgary Herald*, Program Notes of the Calgary Film Society, "& the poems of some Canadian poets" (127). The epigraphs are quotations from Gerard Manley Hopkins and Edward Dorn and, at the very beginning of the book, he notes how:

*no dedication is necessary,
but I would like to say hello to:*

Chief Walking Eagle
Bob Edwards
Sitting Bull
Jabez Harry Bowering

(They were all there)

The book, therefore, already inserts itself as cultural artefact in the discourse of Canadian-ness. By addressing the Nation through its textual ‘sources’ and rhetorical gestures, it disintegrates the strategies of containment of ‘Canadian identity’. Against the official nationalism of political rhetoric, or the poetic discourse of the passage from “colony to nation” (the building of a national literary tradition), Bowering exposes the Nation in its “textual affiliation” and rhetorical address, the ambivalence of the double time of the Nation being caught between the “pedagogical” and the “performative” (Bhabha 1994a, 147); it is *pedagogical*, in that the citizens are constituted as subjects through history (“the tradition of the people” 147); it is *performative*, in that the Nation performs, and is performed by, its subjects through its everyday practices (“the self-generating time of national production” 148). For Bhabha,

Deprived of that unmediated visibility of historicism—‘looking to the legitimacy of past generations as supplying cultural autonomy’—the nation turns from being the symbol of modernity into becoming the symptom of an ethnography of the ‘contemporary’ within modern culture. Such a shift in perspective emerges from an acknowledgement of the nation’s interrupted address articulated in the tension between signifying the people as an a priori historical presence, a pedagogical object; and the people constructed in the performance of narrative, its enunciatory ‘present’ marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign. (147)

We see this interrupting movement (this “shift in perspective”) at work in *Rocky Mountain Foot*. Published one year after the Centennial celebrations, the text invokes and

deconstructs the conventions of landscape writing that the emphasis on 'heritage' and 'tradition' had foregrounded as 'distinctively Canadian', conventions both relying on the 'Canadian people' as *a priori* and producing 'Canadianness'. Ironically, the marketing of the book also followed these conventions, only to be disrupted by the textual agency. The liner promoted the text as landscape poetry: "Seasons and regions ... sun and snow ... pioneers and entrepreneurs ... premiers and Indians ... tourists and cities ... Rocky Mountains and Lake Louise ... all these make up Alberta ... and all these make up *Rocky Mountain Foot*." This strategy, which capitalizes on the potential of the textual 'content' to promote the Nation's discourse of history and geography, what Eve-Marie Kroeller calls the "travel poster" and "history textbook" of "regionalist verse" (1992, 41), is subverted by the poet's tactical deployment of textual fragments which expose the contradictions and the fictions of national history and territory. As the carving in the rock on top of Tunnel Mountain marks the achievement of "William Jackson / June 7 1894," the fragment turns the heroic act into a parody of White exploration narratives:

The Reverend John McDougall said (1890): "See that big hill in the north? I ran up and down it, across the valley and up another hill faster than any man alive; not because I was a good runner, but because a big buffalo was after me."

(*"tunnel mountain"* 17)^{iv}

In the poem "mount norquay," while the natural landscape ("the wild ski slope over Banff") is 'language', the speaking voice positions itself within a tourist economy with which he is also complicit yet, in a parodic gesture, refuses to 'consume':

^{iv} All fragments are in bold in the original text.

I am standing under the chairlift
empty seats dangle over me
never stopping—rising up hill

I look up
clouds rise
from behind a mountain
meeting the chairs
flying over them

If I look at the sky
I'll fall backward down the hill
(18)

The shifting points of vision that the speaker inhabits (climbing, following the trail, leaving it, descending) enable different 'encounters': the left-overs from the winter season, human traces of nature's 'consumption' now resurfacing from the melting snow; a crumpled sheet of paper containing a letter (perhaps a found poem); the "eyes of old / Rocky Mountain sheep" who "wiggles his ear"; sheep lying down. Every instance is also re-imagined to make visible what has been lost, hidden, erased—the labourers, bush-workers, tourist expansionism and aboriginal peoples:

I sit on stump & look down slash
to a ski café
imaging

bush workers
building the chairlift
axes cables steel
stanchions on steep
slope — another
job in the bush —
Banff below

Someone in white hat
cutting celebration ribbon
his first visit to
Mount Norquay

Berry bushes here
for centuries
unhappy people
at the foot of mountain

Each chair
has its own groan
(19)

The “imaging” is also an imagining, the active intervention of the imagination in uncovering erased histories and new possibilities—the longing for social change and justice which the polyvocality of the long poem invokes. For, as it becomes increasingly clear, *Rocky Mountain Foot* does not lock the critique of the nation-state into the time-space of negativity. Its poetics, therefore, is not ‘utopian’. Indeed, by making visible the blind spots that have constituted the script of the Nation, it enters the disjunctures and fissures of the national text to disarticulate the ideological linkages through which power is both produced and deployed.

The space which the book articulates does not fall into either history or geography. It is a geopolitical shift not subsumed by the narrative of time; rather, it is being reshaped as a field of multiple forces of social relations:

the religious lake

Lake Louise looks
just like her pictures

but the glacier
roars in the warm sun.

& people, my wife
& friends in the snow

are without wings;
they people the

green & white place
the Indians gave up

to speculating Whites.
The glacier & the

Indians, old or dead,
ageless or alive, moving

back to the mountains
we can only guess at.

Walking Buffalo said: “Indian savages, White savages, both made mistakes, both have much to offer.”

(15)

Mountains, lakes, plains, rainbows and trails are not the ‘source’ of inspiration for the poet’s eye/I, but social agents in the experience of the lived (people live and work in the mountains and in “cow country”); sacred and spiritual sites (Indian traditional culture and everyday existence); the archaeology of geological history (fossils of dinosaurs); site of capitalist exploitation (tourist and mining industries); expansionism (the CPR and its ‘ethnic’ workers); and pollution (oil fields). The traditional tension between “country and the city” (Williams 1973), the natural and the cultural, is also re-articulated as the imbrication of forces positioned as dichotomous but, in fact, depending on each other.

The production of urban space construed as separate and opposed to the space of ‘nature’ is challenged in the suite of poems that enter the engine of the capitalist economy to expose their de-territorializing and re-territorializing processes. Thus, rather than articulating space as a stable, fixed referent and originary point of cultural identity, space is re-conceptualized as a site of competing and overdetermined discourses, including as a space of resistance. In the poem “the oil,” the prairie is both the site of energy sources available for exploitation, the straight lines of highways, wheat elevators, oil derricks and train tracks pointing to a mechanization process and expanding industrialization. Yet the prairie is not empty land: buffalo fields and Indian fields are reminders of a different, pre-existing and now displaced economy:

Alberta

floats on a pool of natural gas
the Peigans knew nothing of
in their fright
in their flight
to the mountains.

We owe them that.

(29)

The near extermination of the buffalo, co-terminous with indigenous economy, has paved the way for an encroaching industrialization relying on the exploitation of oil resources—and marking Alberta as the ‘fuel engine’ of Canada. Ironically, amidst the bountiful presence of oil, home fires still burn buffalo turds (‘natural’ economy as well as space of resistance). Capitalist exploitation works hand in hand with the institutionalization of religion; “Catholic adoption agencies,” further uprooting Indian boys and enforcing their acculturation, become agents of “Alberta’s unnatural heritage.” Meanwhile:

the Peigans crossed the Rockies
to British Columbia
where oil is more scarce
& people.
In the high trees they rise now,
with campfire smoke,
the smell of needles burning.

(30)

But the space of the Peigans is dynamically re-created as cultural and economic space in British Columbia, while the “buffalo shit smoke / burning in Alberta / by the road, highway 2 North” has now turned into the space of consumption:

Now a
Cadillac, I see a
nother Cadillac, & there
is the black straight road, &
a Cadillac,
two Cadillacs

on the road, racing, North,
the mountains to the left
blurred by a passing
Cadillac.

(30)

In “the plain” the land is re-imagined before economic exploitation not to posit ‘cultural purity’ but to unhide what has become unimaginable. Its two-line structure points to the binary logic of the language of the Law, which strategically leaves no room for different choices and possibilities (political rhetoric presents ideological choices as ‘the only available choice,’ from capitalism as the only viable economic system to war as ‘inevitable’). But the poem constantly undermines this logic and points to poetry as a possibility for social change:

What are you doing,
a poet in cow country?

It is just that I think
the country can use a poem or two.

(32)

Thus the earth, re-territorialized by the ‘inevitability’ of industrial progress, is imagined as revolting and throwing off the markers of human activity, just as the city will liberate itself from the wires imprisoning it:

Another land will rise
from the broken ground of this

poor scratcht, harried, oil-sucked
hay-dusted spread of brown humps

that men squat on
in sight of those blue mountains.

(32)

The grid of industrialization is paralleled to the grid of language of “the hate-belching preacher / the greedy hands of chiropractors” (33), the imbrication of religion and politics being further explored in the “Bible Bill” of “*geopolitic*” (25). Through direct negation (“no fences, no great oil-sucking machines, / no highways, no dusty airports / no pastel-painted churches, no tanneries, / no slaughterhouses at the end of the trail, / no burnt black tin can piles”), the poem breaks open the closure of the binary structure, and a new land is re-imagined. Yet this is not the poetic vision of the Romantic imagination, still anchored in the metaphysics of the mind. The poem is writing, and the poet is inscribed into the text as responding to the instantaneity of the moment: “(Look out of the window: what else?)” (33).

The homogenization of land and people is most visible in “above calgary,” where the aerial photo of the city shows apartment blocks and houses like boxes “arranged / in squares by contractors” (42). Nevertheless, this ‘view’ is not objectifying for it brings together different positions in a dialogic structure which shows the imbrication of capitalism, politics, petty interests and religious discourse (“crops and the flag / built on the new testament” 26). Here the fragments draw attention to the lies and fiction of ideology. In “the grass,” “the blue,” “the frost” and “the snow” the lyrical mode undercuts the naturalization of discursive power structures through the utter contrast between the spontaneous poetic relationships with ‘nature’ (the speaker being in a social relationship with the environment) and the magnifying glass of religious rhetoric meant to infantilize citizens and police dissent:

**“... books and magazines are stench
with the smell of filth.”**

(“the grass”)

“... pollute the minds of youth ...”

(“the blue”)

**“When I see some of this stuff,” Mr. Hooke
said, “I wonder whether it’s the product
of an intellectual or a sex pervert.”**

(“the frost”)

“... these degrading, filthy, non-entertaining programs ...”

(“the snow”)

Interestingly, the fragment included in “*geopolitic*” containing the comment by Premier William Aberhart that “[a]dult Albertans have the mentality of thirteen year olds” (25), strongly echoes (and undercuts) the phrase accredited to United States general Douglas MacArthur that “the Japanese have the mentality of twelve years old” during the postwar occupation of Japan.

In the contrastive presence of the prosaic fragments and poetic language, the book also re-shapes the lyric genre through the polyvocality of the long form, at a time when the lyric was the focus of much critical scrutiny in North American criticism for its embeddedness in traditional poetic structures and the position of mastery that it constructs.¹⁵ Yet in a different critical context, the Marxist Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno recasts the lyric as “essentially social in nature” (“Lyric Poetry and Society” 57), rather than “purely individual.” Lyric poetry, Adorno claims, exposes in its nakedness the rationalizing forces that structure society, the “reification of the world” at the hand of the rule of modernity, and “proclaims the dream of a world in which things could be different” (58).¹⁶ Thus the lyric, by searching for autonomy from the social, exposes the

ideological structures defining the social. This gesture which, Adorno argues, is one of social critique, is enacted in *Rocky Mountain Foot*.

Poetic language also weaves a community of poet-citizens. Against the individualization of the citizen-subject and the parcelling of social space set up by corporate language, “the crumbling wall” calls for the breaking down of borders and lines of separation to engender a new ‘community’. Here community is neither exclusive nor identitarian, for the idiosyncrasies and specificities of cultural and ethnic groups are brought together for a common struggle: the urban and the cowboy Indians of “*indians in calgary*” (28); the “dying” Indians of “*indian summer*” (75) pressed like leaves between the pages of whiteness; the “slave labour” of Chinamen in “*east to west*” (64); the hybrid space of “low class Jewish east 8th avenue Calgary” of “*harpo, a living stone*” (103). An/other history is unhidden, where the text of the lived is written by human and nature alike (the environment as social agent and partnership) into the cultural (“*albertasaurus*” 54). This poetic gesture intervenes in the objectification of nature for ‘scientific,’ ‘economic’ or ‘entertainment’ reasons: fossils as source of knowledge and categorization (as well as fuel) in the fragment accompanying “*the mark*” (53); the frozen carcasses of antelopes hit by the train (“*30 below*” 55).

Although the suite of poems is written alongside the poet’s teaching activity at the university, which enters the text through the discourse of social/cultural conservatism as well as academic censorship, the writing does not follow a linear trajectory. Indeed, it acknowledges the different determinants that intersect the making of time and space. Thus the temporal and spatial axes traverse the representational narratives of nationalist discourses (history and territory as functions of nationness) both synchronically and

diachronically. The fragments can parody the official rhetoric and nationalist addresses or uncover buried words from the territory of “country cow”, while the competing meanings of history and geography undergo many re-articulations. Not even the speaker’s voice can settle for one position: all he can do is “[s]pin[ning] in the Volkswagen” (“spinning” 98), uncertain about his relationship with the Rockies. The re-shaping of the meaning of nation and belonging is more openly, that is semantically, articulated in “history is us” (76-78) and in the closing poem. In “history is us” the speaker traces a new genealogy of history. He recalls the shaping of Alberta on the map in 1905 (though it had older origins), as well as the founding of Medicine Hat and Wetaskiwin, Alberta. For each instance, he notes: “I find history / is towns —”; “(So history again / is death)”; “(or rather, history is pact).” Every moment of history is woven into its languaged place,

High River, Alberta,
 Okotoks, Ponoka, Kananaskis, Kahwin,
 Etzikom, Netook, buffalo tracks —

until the grass and tracks become maps of paper, proper, property, “which is / another name for / history.” Yet the poem does not enact closure: by making visible the different articulations of naming and history, the speaker can make different choices:

Other than that,
 I can name
 my wife
 & unborn children
 some other place.
 (78)

In the last untitled poem, territory and belonging are disarticulated from the narrow structures of the nation-state:

*nobody
belongs anywhere,*

*even the
Rocky Mountains*

*are still
moving*

(125)

Read within the framework of the book, the poem articulates a position that disengages subjectivity from narratives of origin, yet in a very different way from Atwood's "we are all immigrants to this country," a statement which effaces uneven class and ethnic positions ('yes, but we all arrive with uneven social baggages') and naturalizes the centrality of WASP identity to the text of the Nation.

The text did not receive extensive academic attention. The first serious engagement came with Eve-Marie Kroeller's "Newspaper Collage: *Rocky Mountain Foot*" (in *George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour* 1992), followed by Pauline Butling's "Poetry and Place: More Than Meets the Eye—Daphne Marlatt's *Vancouver Poems* and George Bowering's *Rocky Mountain Foot*" (in Schaub 2000).¹⁷ As Pauline Butling points out, the text deconstructs the mastery position of the sovereign eye/I which is privileged by the lyric, the position of the scopic gaze conquering 'place'. Nevertheless, while Butling's reading of the book carefully contextualizes the form in the context of Canadian nationalism of the time, it does not engage sufficiently with the discourse and apparatus of the nation-state. The risk, then, is a reading gaze that obscures what the text brings to the fore, for the book poem is also a poem of voices. The inclusion of texts as diverse as individual or collective sayings, meditations, documents, popular

culture and aboriginal culture, opens a space for diverse, yet interconnected, positions: it is the polyvocality of the text that makes *Rocky Mountain Foot* a long(ing) poem.

Indeed, against the ‘postmodern’ as articulated in Kroetsch’s understanding of the form (his famous statement that “Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into postmodern”), the poem’s radicalness lies in its laying bare the structures of capitalism of late modernity; it is the linkages of the Nation to the State (the project of modernity in which the building of the Canadian State is linked to the forging of a national identity) and the discursive structures sustaining it that it exposes.¹⁸ In this sense, *Rocky Mountain Foot* is not only the first text in Canadian literature to engage in (post)modernist practices that blur the boundary between writing and art (the collage form being part of the modernist Euro-American avant-garde rather than a Canadian ‘tradition’); but also, alongside Roy Kiyooka’s *The Fontainebleau Dream Machine* (1977), it is the text that disarticulates the naturalization of the Nation at the hand of nationalist rhetoric and gestures toward new possibilities of ‘political’ community. Hence, the text refuses to be identified with the ‘merely cultural’ (Butler 1997) that both academic criticism and the language of politics cite to re-contain the political action of the cultural.¹⁹

Technologies of the Ear: *At War With the U.S.* and *Allophanes*

By ear, he sd.

—Charles Olson, “I, Maximus of Gloucester, To You”

In the Preface to the collection *West Window* (1982), Sheila Watson notes that “*Curious*, the runic utterances of *Allophanes*, *Uncle Louis*, and the shorter poems in this carefully chosen selection are essentially political poems—poems which explore in a particular context all the meanings generated by the Greek root *polis*” (n.p.). The

publication is a tribute to Bowering's fecund literary production throughout the 1970s but also, in its choice of the long form, a reminder of the situatedness of Bowering's poetics as politics of the form. While the suite of poems in *Rocky Mountain Foot* had woven the instantaneity of the poetic act into the texture of the 'book', here the texts are constructed through a seriality whereby the compositional act works under 'restraint'. As Bowering himself often explains about his compositional method, the poetic act originates in the response of the writing to 'a baffle' which marks the temporal (the instant of composition) and the spatial (the page) as form, a method he shares with writer and artist Roy Kiyooka and which was indebted to his early readings of the French avant-garde (especially the Oulipo texts and Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style*).²⁰ Jack Spicer's notion of seriality, then, is re-located in a compositional field in which multiple forces generate meaning through creative tension. These forces are heterogeneous and differently situated, actively participating in the compositional act alongside the body and the page (Olson's poetics).

Curious (1973) is a series of 'portraits' of Canadian, American and British poets—its facetious tone taking to task the genre of 'individual literary portrait'. Although the text can be read as a gallery of favourite poets, it engages in a humorous and parodic way the 'making of a literature' which, from the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, was at the centre of debates, as well as government policies, about the relationship of literature to the Nation. The 'gallery' is openly slanted. While the title is explained in the dedication to his parents as curiosity being central to the poetic attentiveness to language, it also casts doubts on the legitimacy of the gallery as 'representative' of Canadian Literature. Yet the text also articulates a literary space; the

poets included are those making up a literary community, whether in its present material reality or in the correspondences established through time and affinity: the poets of the Black Mountain school; the social modernists of the 1930s in Great Britain; the Montreal avant-garde; and contemporary West Coast writers.

If *Curious* intervenes in the discourse of literature and the Nation, *At War With the U.S.* (1974) and *Allophanes* (1976) are more overtly political in their engagement with domestic and international politics. The poems engage with ‘voice’ and language at a time when political rhetoric in the United States, in the mire of the Vietnam War, was both ‘loud’ and ‘fake’ and, on the internal front, rhetoric paved the way for the government actions toward ‘insurgence’ in Quebec (Hunter, “War Poetry,” 152; see also Chapter One). In this section, I discuss *At War With the U.S.* and *Allophanes* in relation to voice and their displacement of language from the domain of ‘rhetoric’ and its relation to ‘truth’. The poems are different in their impulse: the first is an openly political poem and, at a first reading, works primarily at the semantic level. Written between 11 January and 15 August 1973, it is situated within the climate of anti-Americanism that prevailed at the time of the Vietnam War (Vancouver also being a major ‘outlet’ for American draft-dodgers), between President Nixon’s announcement of the unilateral withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam (15 January 1973) and the halting of U.S. military activity in Cambodia (15 August 1973). The second, infused with literary references and allusions of many sorts, undermines the possibility of referentiality and works primarily at the level of the sign. In the political climate of the time, both poems employ tactics to unseat language from the appropriation of official politics.

In *At War With the U.S.* the poetic as political impulse is established from the beginning:

1

There comes a time
when we must
take measures

Poetry is slow, the action of language not being immediately followed by political action. The “measures” of poetic language echoes Olson’s poetics of the body and the page, William Carlos Williams’s “The measure intervenes, to measure is all we / know” (*Paterson* Book V), and Creeley’s work on the line and breath. This notion seems inadequate to engage the reality of life. But the measures to be taken—political action—are made possible by poetic work. Poetry demands attention. Against the ‘rush’ of modernity and technological consumption, it demands slowness:

2

I pulled the carbon paper from between the pages

The white page said page five
The yellow page said page six

I have never written anything that fast

Especially this
slow slow
page one

The poetic ‘I’ does not indulge in his individual feelings or retreat in a state of absorption or contemplation. Rather, writing happens in the lived instant, through and within the ‘outside’ world:

3

This instant I saw
the young bearded man
swing by with crutches & one leg

I thought: he's been in Viet Nam

So that's what passes
thru minds in the USA
every day

Yes American life
is transparent

Hi Mom, hi Dad, hi Son

take it easy sitting down in California

Hence, the 'I' of the poem is not the external observer, describing the world as it happens to him: the 'i' is socially constituted, participating in a social field which is falsely presented as 'transparent'. If language mediates the constitution of the social being, then referentiality is put into question. Is the poetic 'i' seeing what he sees from his window?²¹ But the question about the relationship of seeing and "what passes / thru minds in the USA / every day" also becomes a question of the operation of media and official rhetoric in the experience of the single as national subject. The "the young bearded man" "swing[ing] by with crutches & one leg" is not only a lived reality but also a signifier of war: images of veterans returning from Vietnam were pervasive and while making more acute the absurdity of the war, they also evoked popular nationalism or the indictment of the veteran as 'complicit' with war powers. Nevertheless, the poem does not frame the image as 'truth'. Instead, it evokes the images and affective responses of Americans while locating the speaking voice within the field of observation: the poet is not

impermeable to the representational practices of the current war, but he does not allow for the transparency of the image. The immediacy of vernacular language inscribes the differential relations of social life on what the media present as ‘event’ (the war, containment of communist expansion, the veterans), rather than working toward the ‘apprehension’ of the image. Furthermore, the identity between sign and referent (on which the construction of transparent meaning relies) is interrupted by the estranging effect of the colloquial address to the family carrying on as ever in California.

The imbrication of media and war is articulated through the apparently naïve comment of the ‘i’ child: “1945 / I said when the war is over / there wont be any more newspapers” (64). The state of crisis on which media and capitalist structures rely, but also produce, to legitimize the actions of official politics is engendered through the inscription of power in language. In the context of American foreign politics, this was (and still is) the base for American exceptionalism (Denning 2004). But it should be noted how, on a domestic level, the resonance of the events of the October crisis in 1970 were still vivid (Trudeau’s passing of the War Measures Act and the rally of 3,000 students in support of the FLQ in Montreal). Thus war poetry is not simply located in a dichotomy Canada vs. United States, as the front cover design by Greg Curnoe seems to suggest. Instead, it enters the discursive networks engendered by imperialist politics to make visible the ways in which power is deployed to construct a ‘docile’ citizen-subject:

6

& who are we

The sheer
intensity
& numbers of their bombs—

they are trying to obliterate
measure, the inevitable measure

& making count of themselves

We help them count
one two three

They see their fear
walking out of the bush
four five six

Identity, then, is a primary locus of competing discourses for the formation of subjectivity. The subject is not the expression of consciousness constructed through cognition but a field of inscription, as well as agency. Citizens are part of a body politic (Foucault 1977) and pawns of international politics: “I just want to get the counting over with / the exchange of prisoners” (9). The insistence of the poem on the subject as body within a discursive field of ‘body count’ reflects not only a major preoccupation of national policies in the West in the wake of industrial contraction and the energy crisis, but also shifts the focus from the dichotomy of nation-state and market forces to seeing the nation as participant in the interests of corporate capitalism, as exemplified by the “Letter to Nixon” in relation to the “auto-parts plant in Michigan” and war as an engine of the economy. But war is also deployed at the level of everyday life—the daughter being “off to her war called school” (10)—and in the social relations implicated with consumerist ideology:

33

Now the Greek kid across the street
is carrying a stick, a rifle, over his right shoulder
American-style

& marching, his voice
like my drill corporal, 1954

Now it is a mortar
he sets in the forest
of his front yard

Where did that come from
his expertise

We were in NATO, no
nationalism, Greece is in NATO

no place for children

NATO, nationalism and Greece become in this context signs of the implicatedness of discourses of internationalism, the nation-state and multiculturalism which, though still not legally encoded, was already part of the official politics. The Greek child playing with the American-style rifle is also a critique of the 'multicultural' as the consumption of culture which later critics will articulate (Kamboureli 1993; Derksen 1995, 2002), rather than the transformation of society for the equal distribution of rights and resources.

Can poetry produce change? Are poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (Shelley "A Defence of Poetry" [1821])? The question underlies the whole poem, for the writing is not accompanying the critical act as it is part of it:

7

I write as they
walk by my window—

how quickly, a half-
sentence & they are gone

girding themselves at the general store
for the war of words

It seems, at times, that poetry announces its own defeat (“poetry / doesn’t hurt all that much” 15) and can only voice, impotent, the role reversal that the loss of reason can entail. In the hysteria that is contemporary politics, it is nature that occupies the victim position:

5

I saw it
from the train window
from the television helicopter

the dark, dark, stony forest
where Pleistocene eyes watch
the sky turn fishy, turn black

& no foot falls
shod

But we trim nickel, we tame electrons
we buzz the land. Our buttons
break on the soil of Yankee-torn Cambodia

300 years & a few miles from stone age
to splintered atoms, how have we
hurt our fresh-cut home so fast²²

Yet the text proposes agency at a political level: “At war with the U.S. / I surrender / I embrace you” (17). To whom is the poetic ‘i’ surrendering? The U.S.? Politics? The force of dominant discourse? But in the slippage among war, surrender, and embrace, the poem also engages the political through the mobilization of affect; by countering the strategy of power, which ‘presents’ the real as ‘transparent’ and ‘inevitable’, the writing act deploys a cultural tactic of affectivity, whereby the unglamorous reality of everyday gestures also becomes powerful sites of resistance. Addressing his daughter who, “22 months of age” is one of the “trouble-makers,” the ‘i’ opens a space of intimacy for the political and a

commitment/promise for the contemporaneity of the future: “Let me fail you no more / than I can support / than the blue hemispheres / hope for & deserve” (34).

As a poem of voices, *Allophanes* invites a reading alongside *At War With the U.S.*, which it followed two years later. The genesis of the poem is contextual to its poetics. Composed of 26 sections, the writing was generated by the undergraduate lectures of Robin Blaser at Simon Fraser University which Bowering (already an instructor) attended in the fall 1974. The course focused on W.B. Yeats and in a marginal way on James Joyce but Bowering notes how Blaser’s lecture style trespassed the confines of the assigned ‘topic’. The structure, language and allusions of the poem are all infused with Blaser’s lectures and all the ‘voices’ that he invoked. But it is specifically Jack Spicer’s voice reciting “The snowball appears in Hell / every morning at seven” that Bowering remembers hearing and immediately transcribing; the line will become the entry point to the poem. Hence, note-taking was included in the poetic process. The poem is both dictated verse, in the tradition that he also acquired from Spicer—Spicer’s *After Lorca* as “a serial poem [...] made up of letters that the dead poet Lorca had been writing to Spicer” (Miki 1989, 43)—and a processual poetic engaging the instantaneity of the poetic act (listening and writing). But a preoccupation with the discourse of ‘voice’, a powerful literary trope implicated in the construction of a liberal humanist self and projected onto the body of the “imagined community,” is also apparent from the cover. A blue-coloured fold with a triangular opening on the front cover, it exposes a hieroglyph from the back cover. The fold thus engages the hidden and uncovered histories participating in the writing of writing. But the triangular shape of the gap/lack onto the hieroglyph also inscribes voice as a technology—redrawing the borders of the

geometrical figuration of the human throat (McCaffery *Line* 7-8, 1986), yet one which gestures toward the constitutive incompleteness of speech and its “withdrawal [...] into the labyrinthine *tactics* of writing” (McCaffery 187).

As expected, the poem is full of literary (and non) allusions that foreground the textuality of the poem, what the poet has also referred to as its ‘obscurity’. I am not so much interested in mapping the inter-textual sources to the text which, as Susan McFarlane argues, produce a dialogic space. The poem that could easily be read as a retreat into language yet its difficulty demands the active engagement on the part of the reader. Through the interrogation of linguistic and discursive structures, this scene of writing engages the political and raises the question whether its poetic strategy is also an effective one.

Through its title, *Allophanes* already points to the instability of the sign. Literally decoded as “all appearances,” the term refers to the variable forms and colors into which stalactites change and it introduces the reader to a poetic investigation into the philosophy of language. The primary concern of the ‘i’ seems to be to deconstruct the reader’s expectations of authorial intentionality, vision and the site of origin/truth. A poetic journey into the space of language (“Have a seat on my language” IV), it crosses the borders of fields of knowledge, languages and the imagination to traverse a space of multiple discourses. Directions are being lost, but, in the end, this is a journey underneath the grid of the “logical sentence.” The poetic ‘i’ cannot claim any position of mastery, only the simultaneity of his subjectivity to the writing act since, in the end, the fields he traverses also construct his subjectivity:

III

Fold the page before the ink dries
& read before you pass on.

Literature must be thought now.

There is no perspective
when the eye is transparent.
When the author dies
I disappear.

Companionship is true growing up,
I reach for the companionship of art.

The sentence is always already contaminated by Other texts and Other voices. Yet this is not a defeat of agency and it is in writing that the poetic ‘i’ reaches “for the companionship of art.”

Although *Allophanes* invites a post-structuralist reading informed by Bakhtin’s conceptualization of heteroglossia and the dialogic form, its generational process and political intervention also demand attention. In the context of my discussion, *Allophanes* provides an interesting critique of traditional poetics as construing an “ontological role” for the long poem—the imaging of the place of the Nation as originating in its nation-building history (Derksen 2004), hence the ‘voice’ of the people. Derksen’s argument that contemporary writing and artistic practices address the “place of writing” as “both determined and determining” and eschew the discursive and historical imaging of place re-locates *Allophanes* in a constructive field of art, where the poetic act penetrates the organization of socio-political structures and demands the reader’s collaboration to generate meaning and effect change.

Allophanes is a site-specific text. It is generated within the boundaries of the classroom: spatially, within the room; geographically, as a Canadian West Coast academic discourse “contaminated” (Hall 1990) by American intellectuals; textually, in its engagement with the voices and texts of multiple literary and non traditions; historically, at the juncture of liberal nationalist forces, the production of locality and the global economic forces unsettling, and reshaping, the meaning of the *polis*. All these act as discursive vectors and become active participants in the creation of meaning. The poem, then, does not retreat in the space of writing nor does it address ‘place’ as pre-constituted and originary site of national or regional identity. Instead, the space of writing is made site-specific, a tactic which liberates space from its imaging either as ‘reflection of history’ or abstract site of language.

The Poet as Flâneur: *Kerrisdale Elegies*

In this section, I engage with the writing of *Kerrisdale Elegies* as urban poetics rearticulating the meaning of the city-space and the function of the neighbourhood as part of the local-national-global nexus. While my reading is informed by theories of locality as elaborated by critics Arif Dirlik and Arun Appadurai, as well as Canadian geography theorist Katharyne Mitchell, I address the discourse of the city as political space as it was re-articulated during the 1980s on the West Coast during a time of economic recession. Specifically, I am interested in situating the text within the increasing politicization of the Vancouver art scene as the funding for the arts was increasingly curbed by neo-liberal politics, as well as the anxieties around the loss of local control following the infamous “Restraint Budget” that the neo-liberal provincial government enacted in B.C. (see

Chapter Three). The 1984 general strike took place at the time of the publication of *Kerrisdale Elegies*, thus after its composition. But the event was the symptom of a profound discontent about the increasing corporativism in local politics which was openly voiced by artist-run centres, cultural activists and the writing community, as I showed in my discussion of Roy Kiyooka's *October's Piebald Skies and Other Lacunae*. Therefore, while *Kerrisdale Elegies* has been read primarily in terms of its inter-textual relationship with Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and authorial signature, I am interested in furthering this reading by looking at the poem's production of a space where community is re-signified outside the confines of the increasing gentrification and citizen-production of the provincial government working in the interests of trans-national corporate forces. The poem grounds 'Kerrisdale' materially in its social and political context. The 'neighbourhood' is not understood as a discrete entity, separated or resisting the city, the nation and the international, but as dynamically participant in the contested meanings of political and economic space.

For whom are these elegies written? The genre of the elegy, in classical terms, suggests a lyric for the dead. Death is a motif of the poem in the textual invocation to the "dead poets" and is also pervasive in Bowering's poetic production since the late 1960s (*In the Flesh* 1973). This was a time marked by the literal death of Jack Spicer in 1965 and poets of the Beat generation—Neal Cassady in 1968 and Jack Kerouac in 1969. Indeed, the elegy was also a form used by many poets of the San Francisco Renaissance: Spicer's *Imaginary Elegies*, Allen Ginsberg's "Neal's Ashes," "Memory Gardens," "In a Car" and the hybrid confessional-elegiac mode of *Howl*. Hence, the choice of the form is undoubtedly related to a poetic community which Bowering has always acknowledged as

intimate. But elegy, which was composed between 15 June and 1 September 1982, is also immediately connected to Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (1922) both through the title and the structure of the poem. Written as a palimpsest to Rilke's text, this is a poem about poetry and the public role of the poet intellectual at a time of profound changes in the social and economic structures of the city and the nation. Bowering recalls the different stages of the writing, while travelling among Texas, California and New Mexico, as 'failures': first in long lines, trying to get from the German language, which he does not speak, what he could; then the break into shorter lines, where the reader can contribute allusions and ambiguity to the text; deletions and re-arrangement of parts. Finally, while sitting in a café in Santa Fé and working at the text, he realized that a student sitting nearby was reading Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*: "I thought, oh, Santa Fé is a place where Rilke happens, and I thought maybe Vancouver is a place where Rilke happens too, so a few months after I came home, I started writing" (Miki 1989, 76). The text, then, is place bound and, although not dictated verse, is in a dialogic relationship with Rilke's poem, which at the time was being re-discovered in North American poetic milieus.

The poem is also written *against* Rilke's work (Bowering, interview with Peter Quartermain & Laurie Ricou 1988), bouncing back from it and bringing the reader closer to the space of the page. While the structure of the text closely follows Rilke in its motifs, preoccupations and allusions, it breaks down the metaphysical codes that the German-language 'counterpart' embodies, and naturally suggests a reading in terms of original and copy, authorship and forgery. Yet the open form of the text invites multiple readings. A poem of "meditation" (Miki 1989, 75), it also teases out the tension between orality

(the spoken word) and the page (the space of writing), self and other(s), history and geography. Undoubtedly, its elegiac tone constructs an audible poetic voice, yet voice is never assumed as natural or unproblematic. Like the time and space constituting it, the poetic voice always foregrounds its constructedness.

When entering the space of the poem, for, like the grid of avenues and houses making up the text the poem also calls for a flâneur reader, it is the otherness of death that the reader encounters. Going back to the beginning of this discussion, we may then ask: who are the dead poets? Since the poem has already evoked the spirit of *Duino* in its title, it is a natural step to read the dead poets against Rilke's angels. But unlike the angels of *Duino's Elegies*, angels from the Islamic tradition that observe with indifference the fate of humans and the absurdities of earthly actions (Rella 1994), the dead poets do not exist beyond history and do participate in poetic grief. Made visible by the poem's language, they become anthropomorphic figures, closely following and seemingly caring for earthly life. Although they signify absence, for, in the end, they are the dead, they are not synonymous with lack. Indeed, their presence-absence is intimately tied to the poetic act:

Being dead is no bed of roses,
you have so much work piled up in front of you
before the long weekend.

(Elegy 1, 19)

And the dead poets' absence is a necessity for creativity:

We need the mystery, we need
the grief that makes us long for our dead friends,
we need that void for our poems.
We'd be dead without them.

(Elegy 1, 19)

In the encounter with death, self and other confound their boundaries, the dead poets' inserting a difference in subjectivity and reminding, through their closeness, that alterity is already within us (Kristeva 1991).

But the presence of the dead poets is also a commentary on visibility, for the dead are not visible to everyone, only poets and children (and poets also retain something of the child, for aren't they playing with their "toys" when writing?). The mastery position of visibility that the angels evoke (the sovereignty and surveillance of the power system) is broken down by the dead poets' presence among us and the poet's strolling along the avenues of the city. Thus the everyday of the lived quotidian replaces the discourse of metaphysics of the 'original' text, low culture getting in the way of high literary and philosophical traditions. The poem visualizes what we cannot see and does not yield to the seductive illusion of transparency which is inscribed in Kerrisdale by the new economy.

What kind of space does the poem construct? Here Kerrisdale is the primary referent, though referentiality is at odds with a poem infused with literary allusions, references, quotations of French verse, dialogue with a German text, pop culture, media and scenes from everyday life. Rather, we get a feeling that the poem is re-constructing Kerrisdale, the meditation of the poetic 'i' weaving a city-text that removes its space from the static position of the gentrified neighbourhood into which it was reshaped by the interests of national and global capitalism. The material Kerrisdale is increasingly subject, together with Shaughnessy and West Vancouver, to the "aesthetic of economic change" (Mitchell 232) demanded by the logic of 'inevitability' of global forces which is implemented by the city bureaucracy. The rationalization of urban space as re-zoning (the

They

would put leaves on their naked pear trees.

They build a stadium of the heart downtown,
and will never find their way to the game.

(Elegy 9, 99)

Unlike Rilke's frightful chaos of the metropolis and Eliot's etherized city in *The Waste Land*, here the "spectre" articulates the estrangement of the 'monster houses' that make up the new economic and social space—and which seemingly swallow up the form that the previous house had created, as if preying on it from within. No committed social relations can be woven in this space, their markers functioning like empty signs without meaningful direction. Thus it is through different eyes that Kerrisdale has to be seen: robins, dogs, and the "poor sad *insensatti*" who have been evicted by bureaucracy from the texture of social life:

each time our heavy earth turns its outside to the dark sky,
it carries idiots who have given up the past
and lost the future.

Poor men,
even tomorrow is beyond sight.

(Elegy 7, 101)

The poem does not reinforce the understanding of space as 'inert environment' or 'empty form'. To the free flow of capital through the city it opposes an urban text dwelling on the particular and the estranged. Ghosts are "spooks" (Elegy 5, 75) and reminders that this is not empty land—the past still inhabits the present. In exceeding the commonsensical of everydayness, the voices of the dead poets are not re-containable within a rationalistic logic. However, they are not the only "materials" of which "the poet

space are not fused as a representation of ‘the people’ (as M.M. Bakhtin suggests in *The Dialogic Imagination*). Instead, the poem makes visible the uneven developments of the city and, especially, it re-articulates the local outside the taken-for-granted understanding of localized community—the localized production of a national imaging. As Appadurai notes in “The Production of Locality”:

The nation-state conducts throughout its territories the bizarrely contradictory project of creating a flat, contiguous, and homogenous space of nationness and simultaneously a set of places and spaces (prisons, barracks, airports, radio stations, secretariats, parks, marching grounds, processional routes) calculated to create the internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline, and mobilization. These latter are also the spaces and places that create and perpetuate the distinctions between rulers and ruled, criminals and officials, crowds and leaders, actors and observers.
(*Modernity at Large* 189)

The local is overdetermined by competing discourses and realities. The gentrification of 41st Avenue marks a glittering space (“power everywhere”) beckoning for consumers. Rather than imagining the poetic ‘i’ outside of language—the romantic function of the Poet—the poem situates the ‘i’ and the reader in the midst of it, leaving him to negotiate the voyeurism of his flâneur-position:

You swell your lungs
and invent summer,
 up at earlier light, up
before the heavy trees,
 spilling heat down those mountains
to ripple over the pavement of 41st Avenue,
 bring
shop women to the sidewalk for air.
 Others are
zipping by on bikes,
 powerful thighs brown in the sun,
power everywhere,
 boys crashing into third base
at Elm Park,

old geezers with gentleman shoulders
rolling heavy orbs over pressed turf,
meeting of hips, late afternoon
bedsheets thrown into a corner.

(Elegy 7, 95)

Conversely, the downtown East side area is 'waste' of production, yet paradoxically excluded from consumption. Here the drudgery of life is also a product of the scopic regime that allocates resources differently in order to reproduce social identities. The disempowerment of East Hastings is not outside but constitutive to both Kerrisdale's gentrified community and Vancouver as world-city. Although still negotiating his voyeuristic position, the poetic 'i' deflects the logic of subject and object division by breaking down the binary structure of inside and outside that allocates social identities:

Where you are now.
It is lovely to be here.
Even you know that,
you women lost in your familiar
dirty coats in front of a broken door,
a pissy hotel
on East Hastings,
rain on passing cop cars, somewhere
you know it.
For each of you there was an hour,
there was a long minute,
a time I can measure
with half a line,
when your eyes were wide enough
for your soul to leap out,
stand and say
yes,
here I am,
I am.
Entire.
You felt it beating
against your nerve-ends.

But you and I do forget
what the people across the lawn can never see,
what they may never desire of us.

No, we have to
turn it outside,
we want everyone to see it, we
forget the lovely world we have been dying to see
is still inside;
we have to transform it
in the open,
inside.

(Elegy 7, 98)

Thus, against the flatness of the imagined national space, *Kerrisdale Elegies* re-situates locality as a poetic act, and poesis as life: writing as the measure of temporal and spatial difference. Capital circulation is not semantically excluded yet the form does not allow for the erasure of the contingencies of the lived at the hand of economic transaction. Excess is not the effect of money exchange (the illusion produced by capitalist ideology) but the insertion of difference in the presentness of the here:

This is not
poetry,
neither is it play;
it is life
whether you like it or not,
money
changes hands,
the sun goes purple and gold
behind the trees,
the lights come on bright,
the ball is white,
and someone
has to pay for it.

(Elegy 5, 74)

If “socio-political contradictions are realized spatially” (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996, 4), the poem articulates the ‘here’ as overdetermined by synchronic and diachronic

Notes

¹ As I discussed in Chapter One, space has been articulated through the trope of ‘place’ in literary criticism (Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood and D.G. Jones), lyric and narrative poetry, realist fiction and the paintings of the Group of Seven.

² In *Outposts*, Bowering refers to bp nichol’s “Journeying & the returns” and bill bissett’s “whale poem” and “train poem” as texts articulating the “evocation of place” (89). Bowering notes how in his own early poems he is concerned with “a linguistic landscape.” He brings as an example “‘The Walking Poem,’ where the actual walking on the avenue where I live is somehow to be found in the foot of the language” (89). Nevertheless, I argue that both bill bissett’s “evocation of place” and bp Nichol’s articulation of place and language as “coterminous” fail to deconstruct ‘place’ as a sign of Canadianness. Conversely, in this chapter I argue that Bowering’s poetry increasingly penetrates the discourse of the Nation (place, language, rhetoric) to subvert it from within.

³ Bowering studied in the English Department at U.B.C. from 1957 to 1960, when he received a BA in history and creative writing. He enrolled in the M.A. programme in 1961 and in April 1963 he submitted his thesis, *Points on the Grid*, “a sequence of poems with an introductory essay on poetics” (*Miki A Record of Writing*, xvi).

⁴ In a discussion held at his house in Vancouver B.C. on July 15th, 2006, Bowering pointed out the influential role of Tallman’s wife, Helen, in creating a cultural bridge between Vancouver and the San Francisco poetry scene.

⁵ Although these poets were not included in Canadian university courses, they circulated to some extent in academic circles. In a discussion held in Vancouver on August 15th, 2006, Sandra Djwa notes that Ezra Pound and W.C. Williams were both read by students and academic critics.

⁶ The magazine, according to Fred Wah, was *Evidence*, to which they were submitting poetry but with no success, and the Eastern poet Seymour Mayne. Nevertheless, Wah is not sure of the citation and a note of the editor of the transcribed discussion states that “*Evidence* was edited by Kenneth Craig; ten issues appeared between Spring 1961 to July 1967. The letter referred to was not found” (217). Wah also remarks that the conservative attitude of the U.B.C. student literary magazine *The Raven*, which was interested mainly in poetry within a British tradition, also played a role.

⁷ In the cited discussion, Djwa notes that Robin Matthews’s attack had no influence on mainstream academic critics.

⁸ In the cited interview, Bowering notes that “[i]n a sense, we were all doing open letters. It was an extension of what was going on in *Tish*, with a little bit more savvy” (85).

⁹ Although never explicitly mentioned, it is important to note how the new writers of the Vancouver scene were all from the interior and had a working class background. In a conversation taking place at Bowering’s house on July 14th, 2006, Bowering stated that they never reclaimed nor articulated a specific “working class consciousness.” While the relationship between the interior and the city enters in various ways their poetry and criticism, the locus was identified primarily with the artistic/writing community—the “downtown poets” as well as the “U.B.C. (*Tish*) poets.” Nevertheless, the poets’ articulation of a new poetics was also class based in its political and cultural affiliation, thus furthering the opposition to a ‘tradition’ of literature (Eastern and centralist) steeped in social and cultural elitism.

¹⁰ The dedication to Samuel Perry includes the note “who was killed in Vancouver Nov. 14/66.”

¹¹ It is worth noting that the recommendation of magazines was not unanimously well received. In a letter to George Bowering dated 21 June 1966, the co-editor of the magazine *From A Window*, Robert James Byrd expressed his concerns that this “was perhaps the most dangerous remark I have read yet concerning the small magazine in the English language. Such statements only help in further stultifying contemporary poetry. ‘Avant-garde’ if it exists at all is not a club of mutual friends, nor is it attitudes of accepted politics, as proved by Ezra Pound. The magazines you mention seem to suggest that poetry is *defined* and *regulated* by a period that existed in history between 1945 and 1960. Your statements concerning the small magazine present only a stasis to something that has always existed because of its very fluid motion. I do not consider poetry or the small magazine to be dead.”

¹² French poststructuralist theory was not part of North-American academic discourse yet.

¹³ George Bowering’s papers at the National Library show his intense relationship with writers and magazine editors of the new American avant-garde throughout the United States, as well as with more established writers.

¹⁴ See Étienne Balibar, “What is a Border?” in *Politics and the Other Scene* (2002).

¹⁵ See Marjorie Perloff, “Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman’s Albany, Susan Howe’s Buffalo,” *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Spring 1999): 405-34.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Prof. Jerry Zaslove for alerting me to this essay.

¹⁷ See Danielle Schaub (ed.), *Mapping Canadian Cultural Space: Essays on Canadian Literature* (2000). The essay was re-published in a new version as “Poetry and Landscape, More Than Meets the Eye: Roy Kiyooka, Frank Davey, Daphne Marlatt and George Bowering” in *Writing in Our Time: Canada’s Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003)* (2005).

¹⁸ See Robert Kroetsch, (ed. and intro.), “A Canadian Issue” *Boundary 2*, 3.1 (Fall 1974): 1-246.

¹⁹ In “Merely Cultural,” Judith Butler interrogates the resurgence of a critique of the “cultural focus” of leftist politics, aligned with the notion that “poststructuralism has thwarted Marxism,” as an attempt to wedge a rift between cultural studies and orthodox Marxism which posits an “apparently stable distinction between material and cultural life,” a sign of “theoretical anachronism” (*Social Text* 52-53, Autumn-Winter 1997).

²⁰ During the aforementioned conversation (July 14, 2006), Bowering clarified that his notion of the avant-garde was early on indebted to his readings of the French avant-garde, the Oulipo Laboratory and the *nouveau roman*, and specifically the reading of Raymond Queneau’s *Exercices de style* (1947) in 1961.

²¹ “This is the first daybook kind of poem I’d ever written, and it might have to do with the fact that I was writing it sitting in a second floor room looking out the window from which I could see Broadway, Balaclava, and 10th Avenue. I could see a lot going on from that window, and so a lot of the time the stuff I can see gets in” (Miki, “Interview” 11 May 1988, *A Record of Writing*).

²² The lay-out of the poem follows the original spacing.

CHAPTER FIVE

Currents of Desire: Crossings of Language in Daphne Marlatt's (G)host Writings

Between the (Coast) Lines: Of Civic Spaces and Migratory Territories

How can we counter the temporal narrative of the Nation, the teleological movement that sets up 'origin' and 'progress' to legitimize the finality of the national project? The Nation is not a *Bildungsroman*, yet the logic of narrative development, climax and resolution is deeply embedded in the ways in which the Nation is articulated through nationalist narratives (Bhabha 1994a). The script of the Nation, unfolded as development through time and in space, demands of its subjects the recognition of its own inevitability ('modernity is bound to happen') and the naturalization of its hierarchical model (time *over* space), a language simultaneously embedded in neo-liberal politics and orthodox Marxist theory. Framed as 'historical' and 'developmental,' this model is instrumental to the legitimization of actor-less modes of production, where social agents are either bound to be compliant ('teleology is impossible to resist') or invisible, and the Nation is articulated in its 'presentness' rather than the contingency of its historical specificities. Thus the temporality of capitalism, as based on spatial expansion, and the temporal narrative of the Nation become co-terminous yet need to obscure their ideological links. What is then the role of the avant-garde (woman) artist?

At the intersection of the feminist and the postcolonial, Daphne Marlatt's writing enters the social imaginary of the Nation to disarticulate its naturalization at the hand of nationalist and capitalist ideologies.¹ Here the feminist and the postcolonial are understood not as disciplinary entities (the categories of theoretical discourse) but as enunciatory positions from which minority constituencies—women, migrants, refugees, people of color, workers and queers—produce a dissonance and trouble the finality, and certainty, of the language of the Nation. In Homi Bhabha's reading of "Women's Time," Julia Kristeva's articulation of the relationship of women with the Nation, it is "the 'singularity' of woman—her representation as fragmentation and drive" which "produces a dissidence, and a distanciation, within the symbolic bond itself that demystifies 'the *community* of language as a universal and unifying tool, one which totalizes and equalizes'" (1994a, 155). Woman's dissonant time forces us to rethink the question of the Nation as a question of its time-space.

Bhabha's insightful reading is a productive entry point to engage the complexity of Daphne Marlatt's eco-feminist poetics in Canada. My title does not intend to encompass or re-contain her poetics but, rather, to gesture toward the many pathways that her politics of writing opens up. Some of these have been mentioned by the poet herself during interviews and private conversations: border-crossing and the immigrant imagination; travel musings and ghost-writing; desire and *jouissance*; body and writing; history and the m(O)ther tongue. While her poetry opens up to multiple avenues of reading/interpretation, it is her interventionist poetics in the discourse of the Nation that I am interested in addressing in this chapter.

Since the 1960s feminist theories of writing and language, both in Europe and North America, have focused their attention on the relationship of women with the Polis (the symbolic and material order of the Law). In Canada, an inter-generational network of feminist artistic practices has engaged with this fraught relationship in the attempt to displace the symbolic order of the Law without reinforcing its boundaries. In recent years, the proliferation of urban theory in cultural studies has further encouraged critical attention to the nexus space-subjectivity-discursive structures, which has prompted the emergence and dissemination of innovative feminist poetics; among the younger generation of poets, emerging in the 1990s, Lisa Robertson and Erin Mouré occupy a prominent position. Yet surprisingly, literary critics in English Canada (unlike Quebec) have paid little attention to the ways in which a previous postmodern generation of feminist writers has opened up these spaces for critical scrutiny. Women writers coming of age in the seventies and eighties have been framed typically, and rightly so, within feminist practices that are informed by the gynocriticism from the United States and, especially, French poststructuralist theories of language and meaning formation, which articulate the specificity of women's language and subjectivity (women's difference) in the languaged body. Nevertheless, if the engagement with French poststructuralist theory through the mediation of Quebec writing has played a prominent role in shaping a renewed feminist consciousness and in opening up a space of *différance* for the articulation of female subjectivity in English Canada, Daphne Marlatt's poetics bear the traces of these preoccupations from her early writings. Thus she anticipates concerns which later will be framed in feminist theories of writing, as well as contemporary urban poetics.²

Marlatt's preference for the long form is particularly interesting in the context of Canadian writing and the discourse of the Nation. A poetics of hybridity, where hybridity retains something of Bhabha's articulation of the third space and the linguistic border zones of M.M. Bakhtin's heteroglossia, Marlatt's writing embodies a *translational practice*. While I am suspicious of the common metaphorical understanding of translation as either the conveyor of meaning or representation of reality—be it nature or subjective experience—I am intrigued by the 'crossings-over' that translation implicitly suggests. As Walter Benjamin proposes in his essay "The Task of the Translator" ("*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*" 1980), translation is a form; it always gestures toward its own impossibility, since language refers only to language, yet ensures the survival/afterlife of language itself. Hence translation is inter-semiotic as well as generative. Nevertheless, I am also aware of the pitfalls that "translation poetics" entail and I depart from Pamela Banting's all too enthusiastic celebration of the term in her reading of Marlatt's writings (*Body, Inc.: A Theory of Translation Poetics* 1995). Within a language-focused poststructuralist framework, Banting's reading disarticulates Marlatt's poetics from the materiality of the socio-cultural, implicitly locating her poetic acts as outside the situatedness of ideological formations.

Conversely, a translation poetics as *translational practice* introduces an element of foreignness, an estrangement which denaturalizes what ideological formations make appear natural.³ My articulation of the translational is also marked by crossings-over, acts of passage as embedded in the etymology and cultural history of translation. It invokes Bhabha's *transnational* as *translational* cultural performances that diasporic/migrant subjects always inhabit: the scattering of the peoples, colonial subjects, migrants and

refugees, as well as international travelers and workers, and their gathering in other spaces and other languages; the crossings of genre in that the long poem, which Kamboureli defines as “resisting generic definitions” (Kamboureli 1991) becomes a lawless genre mixing prose and poetry, journal and travel writing, theory and fiction, all transgressing language, content and form; the crossings of gender and sexuality, since the woman poet can come into articulation only by “translating herself” in the language of the Law that marks female subjects as “vessels” for patriarchal reproduction—a translation operating a fractured displacement of language which does not allow for the reinforcement of those structures of domination; the crossings of fields of critical analysis and reading practices, since her eco-feminist poetics intervene in the language of the symbolic to re-write the meaning of civic space; the crossings of the space of language, where the unearthing of the erased histories of the Nation’s abjected bodies (migrants, women, First Nations and ethnic Others) interweaves writing and orality and unhinges locality from the historical colonial construction of place in Canada—in her writings, territories also migrate.

This chapter harbours no ambition to either address Daphne Marlatt’s generative poetics in all its aspects or offer a ‘corrective’ critical perspective on the existent body of her criticism. Rather, it tries to re-articulate the discourse of Nation, perpetually caught between the pedagogical and the performative—the desires of the State and the subject’s desires of (non)belonging—through the writings of one of the foremost experimental writers of English Canada. In Marlatt’s writings, where desires of belonging linger between woman’s “immigrant imagination” and “the phantom limb” of colonial Malaysia, the national is *always already* crossed by the trans-national. I read Marlatt’s

experimental poetics as the desirous interventions into dominant imaginings of nationness which unsettle the crystallization of official discourses—nationalism, multiculturalism, as well as identity politics—by exposing the technologies of their processes of meaning formation.

In the landscape of contemporary Canadian poetry and poetics, West Coast writer Daphne Marlatt occupies a position of ‘liminal’ centrality. ‘Liminal’ invokes both her sense of place—the localism of the West Coast, the particularity of ‘place’ against the centrality of Nation—and her position vis-à-vis dominant, or more widely recognized and institutionalized forms of writing. It also points to the ex-centricity of the woman writer, constantly caught between competing discourses that silence her in different ways, either speaking in her name or suppressing her voice. Yet, paradoxically, this liminality does not correspond to a position of marginalization, since Marlatt’s engagement with experimental practices and feminist poetics has resulted in some of the most innovative works in Canada and some of the most radical contributions to feminist writing.

Marlatt was born in Australia into a British colonial family. Her mother was born in India, as was her grandmother, but both still referred to England as “home.” Her father was a military officer from England stationed in Malaysia. The family had settled in Australia during WWII when fleeing the Japanese occupation of Malaysia, where they returned at the end of the war. The multicultural and multilingual background of her upbringing, with five languages being spoken in her household in Penang, inscribed her bodily relationship to language and writing. In her essay “Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination,” she discusses her fascination for the immigrant sensitivity and how her writing preoccupations were rooted in her own immigrant experience and sudden

awareness of the formation of subjectivity in language. When the family moved to Canada in 1951, Marlatt's immigrant experience—at the time she was a teenager—was marked by estrangement in language, inseparable from body and place. This “foreignness” embodied in consciousness, the split between signifier and signified, is the uprooting and displacement of the migrant subject, what Walter Benjamin calls the “foreignness of language” (Benjamin 1980). Writing hereby becomes the avenue for self-articulation and inscription into the newness of the world, a world that speaks her language but not quite so: “Looking back, i think that most of my writing has been a vehicle for entry into what was for me the new place, the new world” (18). Yet this gap in language produced a different effect on her mother, who fell into silence and slipped into an increasing neurosis which the poet could neither understand nor address.

As a young teenager living in North Vancouver, she was eager to enter ‘Canadianness’ yet the powerful memories of her childhood and her embodied awareness of the colonial never left her. At the same time, with her increased estrangement from her mother her maternal language was also slipping away—the semiotic *chora* slipping beyond the reach of consciousness. The intricacy of the (fraught) relationship of mother and daughter, language and writing, womb and home, unfolds through her *Ghost Works*. In the cited essay, she also adds that “[o]nly later, years later, did I begin to feel that, like a phantom limb, part of me, that Penang past, not quite cut off, still twitched alive and wanted acknowledging” (20).

From the beginning, as a young poet located in Vancouver, she was involved in the writing scene that grew out of the energy of the group of young poets who gathered around the newsletter *Tish* in the sixties, with their sensibility tuned towards the New

American Poetry and their grounding in a deeply felt sense of place and locality.⁴ While studying at U.B.C., she became associated with the *Tish* poets (Frank Davey, George Bowering, Fred Wah, David Dawson, Jamie Reid and Lionel Kearns), and from 1963 to 1965 was directly involved in the editorial activities of the second wave of poets (David Dawson, Bob Hogg, Dave Cull, Gladys Hindmarch, Peter Auxier, Dan McLeod), who continued the newsletter after the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference.⁵ Her beginnings were therefore marked by the synergy of this new poetic scene, the networking with the Vancouver writing community that took the shape of a collective, and the formalistic concerns about the line and the page rooted in the body (“proprioception” and “composition by field” as innovative concepts introduced by the Black Mountain Poetics of Charles Olson, Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov). Yet her position is indicative of the relationship of the woman poet to writing (either dominant or peripheral) and the doubleness that marks woman’s relationship to patriarchal language. Although her fellow poets were encouraging her writing, little attention was being paid to the specificity of woman’s subjectivity. In an interview with Brenda Carr (1989), Marlatt mentions how illuminating her encounter with the poetry of H.D. was at this time—she reclaimed the long line form for her female poetic self—and how the fraught relationship between H.D. and Pound “echoe[d] [her] own situation vis-à-vis the men in the *Tish* scene” (101). Here Marlatt seems to demystify the almost legendary history of *Tish* and unhide a different narrative, a narrative of difference: “Being a woman writer seemed to mean being always on the periphery trying to emulate men, trying to emulate their objectivity. So the question was, how did my being a woman make a difference in my writing? A difference not peripheral but central” (99).

Following the rise of identity politics in the 1980s and 1990s and the challenge to Canadian-ness along the axis of race, gender and sexuality, centre and periphery will become loaded terms in Canadian cultural criticism. But in the 1960s and 1970s, when Daphne Marlatt emerges as a young experimental writer, centre and periphery were articulated primarily through the counterculture language of oppositionality. At a time when Canadian cultural nationalism was construing centralist (male, white and hetero-normative) notions of nationness and citizenship, and when the ideological apparatus of the Canadian nation-state was powerfully at work to define and institutionalize categories of CanLit and CanCrit, no attention was being paid to the differential relations produced in the (patriarchal) language of the Nation by technologies of gender, sexuality and race. These concerns are already present in Marlatt's early writing, though not informed by the critical language which will enter the Canadian cultural scene only later.

Literary Labyrinths and Feminist Communities

Marlatt has always acknowledged the influence of Black Mountain Poetics as well as the importance of a sense of collectivity and networking in her own writing practices. Robert Duncan's frequent readings in Vancouver were a strong catalyst for the Vancouver experimental scene of writing—and an influence which she also tried to escape: "... I was terrified of Duncan ... I was trying to write these short line poems for *leaf leaf/s*, really trying to escape his influence, though at the same time I was influenced by H.D.'s work and Cid Corman's and Zukofsky's" (Butling 1992-93, 119). In Indiana, where she worked on a translation of *Le Parti pris des choses* by the French poet Francis Ponge for her Master's Degree (1965-66), she immersed herself in readings of phenomenology and poetics (Louis Zukofsky and Gertrude Stein). While working on

Frames and *leaf leaf/s*, which would be published in 1968 and 1969 respectively, she established connections with poets D. Alexander, Cid Corman, Clayton Eshleman and Robert Kelly. Thus from the start of her career she was deeply involved in the new writing practices in North America.

Her poetic experimentation, after the apprenticeship of her two first publications (the first a work of prose and the second in short lines), was pursued not independently of her strong ties to place and community. Both *Rings* (1971) and *Vancouver Poems* (1972) were written while she was residing in Wisconsin, at the time of a disintegrating marriage and the birth of her son; although away from the West Coast, her intense correspondence testifies to the exchanges she entertained with the poetry community. Writing represented her entry into and mapping of a territory that she longed for—both territory of embodied consciousness and social relations. The phenomenological poetics of *Rings*, a long prose-poem in six sections, reveals the methodological influence of Olson's proprioception but also the sharp and fruitful criticism of D. Alexander, while *Vancouver Poems* (1972), an interrogation of the sense of place and belonging, is based on archival material researched during a brief stay in Vancouver in the summer of 1970 and represent Marlatt's first clear articulation of her relationship to place as cultural citizenship.⁶

Upon her return to Vancouver in 1971, her engagement with the cultural work of literary magazines became inseparable from her writing. Together with Pierre Coupey, Bill Shermbrucker, and Ann Rosenberg, she was editor of *The Capilano Review* from 1973 to 1976, with the objective "to open the whole scene up," build "a very strong regional group of writers" while "forming connections across Canada," ranging from Michael Ondaatje to the Quebec scene (Butling 1992-93, 115). After *TCR* she started

with Paul de Barros *Periodics: A Magazine Devoted to Prose*. The journal was started to bridge the gap between experimental writing, which until then revolved mainly around poetry, and prose, yet it also appealed to Marlatt's own increasing interest toward the experimental prose poem form. Although the journal invited submissions of a broad range of prose writing—fiction, journal and essays—fiction was the form that received most submissions. Editorial attention was especially tuned toward the innovative writing that was coming from the United States, among these many women writers, such as Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Jean Day and Barbara Einzig. When *Periodics* was folded in 1981, Marlatt was approached by John Marshall and joined *Island: Vancouver Island's Quarterly Review of Poetry and Fiction*. The journal published increasingly British writers, thus enlarging further her connections across the contemporary poetic scene while feeding her interest for the lyricism of their experimental work—a lyricism, she notes, often absent in the language-centred writing from the United States.

In her interview with Pauline Butling (1992-3), Marlatt notes how her editorial experience was always inseparable from her writing. The large network of poetic exchanges that she was able to form cut across national and genre boundaries, ranging from English Canada and Quebec to the United States and Great Britain; it included experimental poetry and fiction, prose genres as well as mixed genres, where different discourses and approaches crossed. Being exposed to new writing practices was always “exciting” and “challenging” in the new questions that it raised: “... I had the same feeling that you have whenever you're confronted with really new material. I don't understand it; what's going on here?” (119). Asked by Butling how she could manage “to put all this energy into magazines and keep [her] own writing going—and support

[herself],” she highlights their interconnectedness: “They fed each other, though. ... It’s really kept my writing young in the sense that I keep pushing my own edges. I think that you have to do that to survive as a writer” (123). Butling rightly reshapes the question as “what have little magazines done for you” and Marlatt’s answer is unequivocal: “Definitely kept me in touch with what’s going on. Given me a community. Challenged some of my own pre-conceived notions of writing just by putting me in touch with writing that comes from very different bases than my own” (123). This constant effort to “open up the aesthetic range” is palpable in her poetic production.

An important shift in her theoretical concerns and experimental practices occurs through her networking with feminist groups and cultural activists since the late seventies and through her collaboration with Quebec-based ficto-theorists and writers—Nicole Brossard, Gail Scott and Louise Dupré: “It was a time of transition for me as i tried to integrate my feminist reading with a largely male-mentored postmodernist poetic, at the same time coming out as a lesbian in my life as well as in my writing” (“Readings from the Labyrinth” 1). The radical deconstructive practice of language theory opened up new possibilities for the articulation of desire for a female imaginary. While she was first exposed to Quebec writing through *TCR*, it was the chance reading of an issue of *Ellipse* dedicated to the writing of *Tish* and the *NBJ* (*La Nouvelle barre du jour*) that struck a chord: the reading of Nicole Brossard’s essay “l’é muét” resonated with her feminist consciousness. Like the reading of Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* and Adrienne Rich’s *Dream of a Common Language*, feminist theory from Quebec provided a language to articulate what “you’re dimly aware of, but you haven’t been able to articulate for yourself” (Butling 1992-93, 120).

During the 1981 Dialogue Conference at York, organized by Barbara Godard, Marlatt came in touch with Kathy Mezei, Gail Scott, Louise Cotnoir, Nicole Brossard and Louky Bersianik. She remembers the enthusiasm of the encounter:

It was terrifically exciting to be exposed to all this writing going on in Quebec and they seemed so far ahead of us theoretically, such sophisticated, elegant analysis. We felt we needed to have more contact with these women. There's got to be something ongoing. Kathy and I were talking with Ann Mandel, in our car ride back downtown to Toronto from York, about how it might be possible to do a magazine. ... Our first actual editorial meeting was in 1983 when Barbara and Gail came out for *Women & Words*. That was exciting. (121)

The Women and Words/Les Femmes et les mots conference, held in Vancouver in 1984, brought together women writers, artists, cultural activists and operators from across Canada. It was a landmark event, with Marlatt and poet Betsy Warland on the organizing collective, and confirmed the necessity to have a journal where new ideas and theories could meet and provide the fertile ground for feminist writings. The idea of starting a magazine about feminist theory responded specifically to the need to shift the current state of women's writing in English Canada still entrenched in realist modes of representation. Marlatt was part of the *Tessera* collective from 1984 to 1991. The journal was a turning point for her writing, as well as for the Canadian literary scene: "I think that's the one magazine I've learned the most from" (123). She highlights the commitment of the collective and how different the experience was "because it involved [her] personally so much more as a woman" (123). The engaged reading of the material and the editorial discussions were a highly formative experience. The "back and forth in letters" provided the ground to keep the dialogue going in a most productive way and marked one of the most exciting times of Canadian writing: "Without *Tessera* I wouldn't be writing those pieces ... I've always thought it really important for a writer to have a

sense of writing in an ongoing dialogue. You know, what's already been done, what's already been said; and you get a sense of what you might contribute that might add to it" (124).

This brief outline was meant not as a biographical excursus into the 'life of the author' nor to provide a contextual reading of her work. Although the structuring of this book privileges individual writers' poetics, it directs attention to the importance of community-based work. Language would not exist outside its communal basis and networking has always been fundamental to the existence of poetic communities. The emergence of a discourse of radical poetics from the mid sixties to the eighties in Canada is not just the background of the writers' work but its very substance. A primary concern of most writers is that poetry can be easily re-contained in elitist stances, where a counter-mainstream position assumes the reactive language of an avant-garde which, as Pierre Bourdieu explains in *The Field of Cultural Production*, becomes locked in its oppositionality. Thus Marlatt stresses how poetic work serves "a communal function": "If you look at the group of people that have clustered around small press publishing and little magazines, it's really quite an extensive network in Canada. It *is* a community" (124). Even a cursory glance at her archival material held at the National Library in Ottawa—working material, drafts, archival research and correspondence—reveals her writing aesthetics as firmly grounded in her community. Yet community is never confined by the boundaries of 'place' or 'nation' or even 'language.' It is never sealed off, never running the risk of becoming parochial. Marlatt's networks are a web of writerly correspondences generative of language and poetry as communal.

In Chapter One I outlined the discourses of culture and literature of the Nation in this period. In this chapter, I discuss the specificity of Daphne Marlatt's eco-feminist poetics in *Steveston* and *Ghost Works*, as both a critique and the re-imagining of new possibilities for the Nation outside the discourse of liberalism. Although the structure of the chapter can be seen as foregrounding the individual poems, I read these texts alongside each other in order to show the generative possibilities of Marlatt's long poems in the specificity of the changing relations she addresses.

Place as Mouth: Oral History and *Steveston*

I didn't set out to write a long poem so much as explore the place Steveston through a lengthening line. Hearing it push time—that came first.

I suppose, looking back on it, the lengthening line & the long poem were wound together.

—Daphne Marlatt: Long as in Time? Steveston

The end of the poem is both what is desired and what you don't want to have happen.

—Daphne Marlatt, "Syntax Equals the Body Structure" 28

Published in 1974, *Steveston* was a landmark text in Canadian writing.⁷ Place and locality were prominent preoccupations at this time, with many poets—from George Bowering and Frank Davey to Fred Wah and Robert Kroetsch—writing in the long poem genre to problematize official histories of nationness and reclaim locality. Its warm reception in the literary community of Vancouver was certainly encouraged by its appealing to these concerns that are neither 'resolved' nor brought to an end in the text. Homeness and locality, haunting and desire appear to linger on in Marlatt's writing in the long poem form, both in the 'Steveston project' and in later works. Project does not intend to recontain the text within the teleology of place in/as history but, rather, gesture

toward the ongoing re-writing of Steveston in the ebb and flow of Marlatt's eco-feminist poetics. The poems that came out of the collaboration with Robert Minden became, for the most part, *Steveston*. Three were nevertheless excluded and others took a life of their own: "And the first *Steveston* series, which appeared in the women's issue of *I's*, was another sequence all of its own, not really about *Steveston*. I started it about *Steveston*, but it turned out to be about Vancouver's skid road" (Miki "Syntax Equals the Body Structure" 32). Individual poems circulated in little magazines and broadsheets (*Centre*, *Document*, *Elima*, *Imago*, *Io*, *Iron*, *The Story So Far*, *Truck*, and *Western Voice*), as well as public readings in Vancouver. Hence, the dissemination of the text created a fertile ground of critical responses and, especially, a creative ground for criticism. Frank Davey gave the text critical attention in *From There to Here* (1973) before it was published; readings took place both before and after the publication, thus generating a 'discourse of Steveston' and grafting the text (and the eco-feminist politics of locality that it articulated) onto the map of the geopolitical history of the Vancouver region. In *Steveston*, and through *Steveston*, the past re-enters the present through writing, thus also becoming a history of its own writing (as well as reading as writing since the reader is made participant in the creative act). At the same time, the poems also actively intervened in the local politics of the text raising new questions (what is the local?) and shifting a poetics of the local toward a markedly eco-feminist consciousness. The discourse of/around 'Steveston' (both literal and imagined) became the project of its ongoing writing: *Steveston* was republished first in 1984 and, in 2001, with the addition of a last section (**generations, generations at the mouth**);^v it was aired as a CBC radio drama in

^v In the discussion of *Steveston* I have maintained for the title sections the bold font of the 2001 publication to differentiate them from the quotation of the individual lines and also convey their

1976, for which Marlatt wrote the script.⁸ More recently, the poet collaborated with Pangaea Arts director Heidi Specht and Noh master Richart Emmert for the Canadian Noh play *The Gull*, which strongly echoes the poem. The play premiered in Richmond, BC in May 2006.⁹

The first inception of the text is not bound to the literary community but rather stems from Marlatt's work as an oral historian. In 1972 Daphne Marlatt was asked to take part in a project of aural history for the Reynoldston Research and Studies (RRAS then Aural History, Provincial Archives of B.C.). The project consisted of a "study of cultural groups in B.C." and, specifically, the documentation of the history of the Japanese Canadians of Stevenson. A work of recovery and preservation, the full documentation entailed photographs by Rex Weyler and Robert Minden, as well as the Japanese interviewer and transcriber, Maya Koizumi. In "A Note on the Transcripts" Marlatt notes that Maya had been interviewing in Steveston before the idea of a book had been conceived, hence "the original interviews ... were truly exploratory."

In 1983, Marlatt's interest in oral history led to her participation in an oral history project for C.O.H.A in Vancouver East together with visual artist Carole Itter. As indicated in a paper she presented at the 1983 C.O.H.A. annual conference, her concern for the salvaging of those histories excluded from official narratives is interwoven with a profound sense of the working of voice (coming into articulation) and spoken language. Against the totalizing eye of master narratives, she privileges the instability of ear and the openness of mouth. Her un-grounding of the history of place in the recording of the

visual impact to the reader.

voices of displaced Japanese Canadians acknowledges the fraught relationship between orality and print culture.

These concerns underlie the writing of the poem. Nevertheless, critics have drawn attention either to her poetic treatment of place and time (as well as place in time, Davey 1976), or emphasized the relationship of the poet's voice with the town/river. Few readings (Carr 1989; Weir 1989; Kamboureli 1991; Relke 1996) insist on the polyvocality of the poem and the visibility given to a material history hardly included in Canadian narratives to this point. Yet the poem escapes the literalness of formal reading and deserves more attention than it is usually granted. Marlatt undoubtedly problematizes issues of origin and displacement, but her poetics is more radical than it looks at first sight. The 2001 edition added a markedly feminist section (**generations, generations at the mouth**) and recuperated photographs from the archives.¹⁰ The photographs were also rearranged and placed at the end of the text. But its original version already shows signs of her feminist consciousness of language and her critique of patriarchal ideologies: it exposes the implicated-ness of the nation-state with corporate powers, and race and sexuality as the axes along which the borders are constructed. By re-casting the discourse of the Nation in the larger discourse of corporate trans-nationalism and migrations, the text shifts place from the accepted imaging of nation and locality to foreground a different, and larger, geopolitical formation in Canada's expansionism into the Pacific Region. At the same time, space is not crystallized in a monolithic notion and, rather, is aligned with the cyclical flow of the Fraser river. Poetic language, grafted with markers of the female body, articulates her eco-feminist consciousness. Although running the risk of creating a false apprehension of the traditional alignment of woman and nature, this

gesture is never metonymic but foregrounds the teleology of progress of industry and labor exploitation: wastes and wreckage, both of nature and language. But “nature” is also problematized as a category of analysis: the salmon’s drive up-river toward reproduction highlights a web of significations undoing the separation of nature and culture and, especially, cutting across ‘species.’ The divisions between human and fish, organic and inorganic, are constantly undermined formally, linguistically and thematically.

The different editions show some changes in the book organization. In the 1974 Talonbooks edition Robert Minden’s photos preceded the writing, while in the 1984 Longspoon Press edition they were interspersed with the poems, thus creating a collage effect of juxtaposition and framing.¹¹ In the 2001 Ronsdale edition they occupy a section at the end of the book. These re-workings enhance not so much the division between image and text as a sense of the different works within the same collaborative project. As Marlatt pointed out in a conversation with bp nichol and George Bowering, the poems were not written in the same order they were published (“Syntax Equals the Body Structure 1985). The “compositional rhythm” of the writing was “in terms of the trips” (28) and she did not set out to write a long poem: “I just thought I was writing a sequence of poems about this place *Steveston*, and I was rather shocked when Michael Ondaatje suggested that *Steveston* is a long poem” (28). It is the cycle (of nature, of history, of people’s lives) that she repeatedly emphasizes (the ‘cycle-poem’). Here is her recollection of the compositional process:

It seemed to me that the form I was interested in wasn’t linear but cyclical. [...] And that thing in the middle, which is the unspoken, which is what each of the pieces is working towards, still exists in the centre as that unspoken. So what I

tried to do was arrange the poems in a way that would respect that. Now, it had an obvious beginning piece because that entrance piece is very initiatory, and then it had an obvious conclusion. But the conclusion—and I wrote it as a conclusive piece—was really an attempt to recreate the cycle all over again. (31)

Hence, the long poem becomes, once again, a term of tensions and ambiguities and yet a term that foregrounds its imbrication with desire.

Steveston flows through sections of different lengths and structure—the long line being the only consistent formal element.¹² Each section dramatizes specific instances, shifting between present and past: the gestational abundance of the river, with its “overspilling” matter and the urgency of the fish’s upstream swimming; the cannery at the junction of the national and trans-national economy—the “imperial” marker as reminder of Canada’s colonial origins as well as the participation of the nation-state in a global-capitalist system of production and exchange; the fragility of the fishermen’s shacks and of their displaced lives—broken promises, shattered dreams—against the bounty of the river; the labour of women working inside the cannery and of men, out in their fishing boats; the double invisibility of women as disempowered both racially (as immigrants) and in gender/sexual terms within a male, patriarchal social system; Steveston as a ghost-town, where memory and oblivion are suspended against the ‘lived’ experience of the contemporary; and the poet’s uncertain movement across the debris of history and the sensory reality of the quotidian present.

Narratives of the nation-state (Homi Bhabha’s “nation as narration”) require the tactical deployment of narrative closure ensuring the suturing of the gap between signifier and signified, and the establishment of Nature as a transcendental category “guid[ing] the pen from the depths of the soul through clear eyes” (Friedrich Kittler 64). Hence the

Romantic notion of Nation as grounded in blood and soil: the Nation as the transparent expression of the soul of the people is a powerful trope of national narratives that relies on the transcendental status of Nature. *Steveston*'s torrential quality (**Pour pour**) demystifies Nature as the transcendental locus of the original writing and, in the aural displacement of meaning (the sound play of assonances highlighting different meanings), directs attention to the generative power of language, as well as its evocative aspect of knowledge production. The streaming quality of the long line is obviously evocative of the impetuosity and the energy of the river. Yet it would be limiting to read Marlatt's poetic line as either metaphorical displacement or metonymic contiguity of a material referent ("the river"). The sense of urgency that informs the language is certainly aware of its river-like quality but does not function through formal devices such as literary tropes. Rather, it foregrounds the primacy of language in subject formation (the poet/pedestrian but also the participatory reader) as well as the individual and collective imagination(s). The language of nature is also nature as language, and the flow of language invests the poem and the writerly reader/poet alike.

Words recur, with a difference, offering new meanings since their positions and functions vary, but also acting as pauses, moments in language where the creative act is suspended yet interwoven in the 'before' and 'after'. The *recognition* of words on the page slows down the reading process (when did I encounter this word?). It implicates the reading act in the texture and the matrix (weaving) of language, against the empiricism and assumed transparency of the logical sentence: language escapes the exchange dynamics of capitalist economy. It disentangles memory from the consequential reading of history as linear temporality (words positioned as both temporal and spatial functions)

and thwarts the evocative impulse of nostalgia. It articulates a space for memories to re-enter the present and act within it. At the same time, the recurrence of words gives a pulsating rhythm to the flow of the long line form.

The stream of language defies boundaries: of the river banks, industrial production, national fantasies (the imperial dream) and the page. As in Webb's *Naked Poems*, the white space framing and interrupting the written text is hardly silent and, rather, speaks to the uncontainable subjectivities and excluded Others of the (patriarchal) language of the Nation (women, migrants, labourers). What remains off-frame in the official histories of national representation is often what defines, by exclusion, the elusive margins of the Nation. Located at the mouth of the river, *Steveston* (both text and material place) has a different story (a story of difference) to tell/untell about the building of the nation from, say, narratives of place and nation-building of the canonized tradition of the Canadian long poem (from Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* to Isabella Valency Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie*). Here "mouth" becomes a node intersecting the geography of place with a history of orality erased by official history (the power of print) and the woman-poet weaving the threads of frayed memories into the present. At the same time, "mouth" as technology of spoken language undercuts Romantic assumptions of the naturalness of voice (voice as the expression of inwardness) and writing as graphic translation of consciousness (Derrida's critique of Rousseau's "dangerous supplement" in *Of Grammatology*).¹³ The highlighting of language as a site of production (rather than transparent medium of representation) aligns language, the river and the town as generative sites of knowledge production and performance of nation-ness—against the commonly held view of the nation as a-priori entity which subjects, more or less

passively, inhabit. In this sense, the poem re-imagines alternative possibilities of the nation-state through a productive critique of its official histories which silence/erase the voices of migrants, ethnic Others and Women. By re-activating ‘time’ and ‘space’ (powerful axes in the nationalist representation/construction of the nation-state), the poem re-writes space outside the trajectory of History and linear Time—thus relieving it from the subjection of realist (representational) and epic time. The contingency of lived experience is the production, rather than inhabiting, of space which denaturalizes national imaginings from the idea of community (‘the people’) rooted in the land and in the lore of the past. Thus Steveston is re-membered (“he said”) into the present. The workings of memory, neither indulging in nostalgic remembrances nor in escapism from the lived contingency of life, point to the fragility of immigrants’ lives throughout the poem: their shacks, “a hole a shack. / they were all, crowded together on top of each other” (11), and their lives negotiating everyday perils (“fire,” “charred stilts” and “over the edge” stand out on the page) and uncertain futures (“chance lurks”).

The first section, **Imagine: a town**, places Steveston on the borderline between language, imagination and the geo-historical location of the town. Boundaries are blurred, in the town as well as on the page. The spatial arrangement of the poem does not allow for a linear unfolding or privilege one element over the other: the materiality of the town, its people, the river and its economics are not hierarchized. The particularities of Steveston are layered across the page but cannot be framed through a still point of observation; the poet is part of the writing and the reader has to enter the text and follow her pedestrian movement—the poetic (and reader’s) gaze is constantly undermined since the flow of the words, as well as the river’s, is uncontainable. Hence, the languaged-town

does not participate in the notion of landscape representation as reflection of human consciousness and construction of national identity—this relationship constituting a powerful trope in Canadian tradition (literary and painterly alike) as it stems from the liberal humanist ideals expressed in Romantic poetry and realist fiction alike. Here the poem undermines the possibility of self-location in a Canadian (or British) ‘tradition’.

The poet’s attentiveness to language is apparent from the beginning. The irregular lines break with adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and verbs mostly in the continuous form, which mark openings and points of entry (Into the town? Into language?): “running,” “smoothly,” “burning,” “standing,” “words in the,” “of each other,” “off,” “edge of the,” “unending,” “lurks,” “driving through,” “swills,” “where thru.” The only nouns that are given visibility at the turn of the lines become significant for they either enhance indefiniteness and opening—“fire,” “beams” and “dark mouth”—or wastes and detritus—“charred stilts,” “a shack,” “hall,” “residue and production.” Steveston as a site of material production blurs the borders of nature, human and labour, by making visible their interrelatedness. Coming at the end of the page, “residue” and “production” foreground the material economics of Steveston, the locus as part of a larger geo-political space—the West Coast, the Pacific, the nation as the legacy of the Empire and the global market economy—as well as anticipate the relations of production between fishing, the cannery and domestic labour in the following pages.

The foregrounding of space as interwoven with immigrants’ histories, sexual relations (‘re-production’) and moments of meditation/recollection reconfigures space as an active, rather than fixed, category. While “capitalist development” has traditionally been understood “as a purely temporal process moving inexorably towards some given

destination” (Harvey 57), what Fukuyama has too eagerly celebrated as “the end of history” (Fukuyama 1992), read bourgeois victory, space has been imagined as either a ‘natural’ category, or a ‘circumscribed’ one, often tied to national struggles for coming into being. Nevertheless, as cultural geographer David Harvey points out, “natural or cultural distinctions” cannot be “so easily presumed” (56) and capitalism, for its development, necessitates a re-organization of space while having to ensure the “fixity” of space (long term investments): “We are therefore faced with a historic opportunity to seize the nettle of capitalism’s geography, to see the production of space as a constitutive moment within (as opposed to something derivatively constructed by) the dynamics of capital accumulation and class struggle” (*Spaces of Hope* 57).

Harvey grounds his neo-Marxist critique in the contemporary discourse of globalization, and thus within an area of study of capitalist development as tied to the birth of the nation-state. His insights are particularly useful to highlight the ways in which Marlatt’s *Steveston* makes visible and problematizes the contradictory nature of capitalist economies and their links to the project of the nation-state; her eco-feminist poetics disarticulates space and the natural from the fixity to which it has been assigned in the national imaginary while being forcefully re-organized to ensure capitalist expansion. While it is illuminating to reread *Steveston* from the privileged standpoint of the contemporary (globalization studies), this gesture also highlights the relevance of poetry as a critical tactic of active intervention into the politics of language and representation: poetry anticipates, rather than follows, the discourse of theory.

In this sense, sections which might lend themselves to the reading of moments of closure, rather bring to the fore the contradictory nature of capitalist exploitation of

space. Women seem at first to be assigned to their roles of exploited workers and reproducers, what could be read as essentialist determinism:

Now she is old enough to be her
mother inside, working, with the smallest one standing by her skirt
in grubby dress, & the blood streams down the wooden cutting board
as the “iron chink” (that’s what they call it) beheads each fish ...

Now she is old enough for the wheel’s turn, she is feeling her
body in its light dress wind blows thru, as past the faces of
her friends, likewise silent, impassive. Wind blows thru

(Imperial Cannery, 1913 14)

Yet the presence of women also makes visible the ways in which gender and sexuality are not sub-categories of capitalist exploitation and nationalist ideologies but, as feminist theorists point out, “all nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous,” and all rely on gender differences for their existence (Anne McClintock 1997, 90). The division of labour in the patriarchal economy of capitalist exchange relegates women to fixed spaces, such as the shadows of underpaid labour in the cannery. While it engenders desires of consumption which are necessary to the stabilization of growth and capitalist development, it also excludes them, thus revealing its inherent contradictions:

But she is in her
element, dreaming of sails, her father’s or a friend’s son at the
Imperial which owns their boat, their net, their debt. But the
Fraser gives of itself, incessantly, rich (so the dream goes),
& wooden houses jammed on pilings close together, leaning, with
stutters out of silt the dykes retain, from a flowing
ever eroding & running river ...

dreaming, of fabric she saw at Walker’s Emporium, & the ribbon. A
woman of means she dreams, barefoot on the dock in the wind, leaning
into her threshold of work, machines, the wheel that keeps turning

turning, out of its wooden sleeve, the blade with teeth marked:
for marriage, for birth, for death.

(Imperial Cannery, 1913 14)

“This corporate growth that monopolizes / the sun. moon & tide, fish run” (**Moon 18**) is also complicit in a ‘traffic of women’ and sexual exploitation transgressing national boundaries. On Lulu Island, so named after the showgirl who settled out here, “these women in white, tired or wearily hopeful” are caught in the net of this place yet still hoping for change:

White as the moon, who was she? Apart from the different dreams they had, in smoke & whiskey, & then the Indians, Chinese, Japanese unknown in numbered houses. But mostly those her like up from San Francisco, turning in the aura of a silk-pleated shade those white arms suddenly lifted, naked, Lulu. Lulu Sweet’s namesake this Island

spawning in the dive of fisherman kids under the walk for change that spills from tight & multiple pockets of the packers, Scotch-English, Phoenix, Colonial, Paramount, this moon-crazed industry (you hear that splash at night of nets?), this town ...

(Moon 17-18)

Departing from the original project of *Steveston Recollected*, where only two female voices are represented, the poem is organized around space, matter and women’s bodies:

Steveston as you find it:

multiplicity simply there: the physical matter of the place (what matters) meaning, don’t get theoretical now, the cannery.

It’s been raining, or it’s wet. Shines everywhere a slick on the surface of things wet gumboots walk over, fish heads & other remnants of sub / or marine life, brought up from under. Reduced to the status of things hands lop the fins off, behead, tail, tossed, this matter that doesn’t matter, into a vat or more correctly box the forklifts will move, where they swim,

flat of eye — deathless that meaningless stare, “fisheye” (is it only
dead we recognize them?) in a crimson sauce of their blood.
(19)

What is “matter,” inert and dispensable, becomes remnant of a system of production and exchange that discards what it relies on: “sub” highlights the Othering of species (and by implication subjects who do not meet the category of the human) so that recognition takes place only through death. The “crimson sauce” of “blood” weaves women’s bodies and labour together into this system of exploitation but it is also a reminder that the bodies materially responsible for this process are those also aligned with the conquerable darkness of Nature.

The fragmentation of fish into parts points to the fragmentation of organic modes of life at the hand of capitalist structures. While the act is enacted in all its brutality (and thus the brutality that the labourers experience on an everyday basis), it also points to dismemberment as the separation of the human body from thought and affective processes: hands have become tools in the assembly line, as women have become tools in the larger production system of the town. This section is particularly explicit in its exploration of the artificial discourse of species categorization at the hands of science (a scientific cataloguing of life forms was simultaneous to the rise of capitalism), bodily boundaries and sexuality. It abounds with imagery of female bodies and sexual parts (“Housing wet dreams” and “the fishy / odour of cunt” 21) as they have been construed by patriarchal discourses—philosophy, science as well as psychoanalysis—and it dissolves the boundaries between knower/seer and object of observation, human and non-human, life and death:

We orient
always toward the head, & eyes (yes) as knowing, & knowing us, or what we do.
But these, this, is “harvest.” These are the subhuman facets of life we the
town (& all that is urban, urbane, our glittering table service, our white
wine, the sauces we pickle it with, or ourselves), live off. These torsos.
& we throw the heads away. Or a truck passes by, loaded with offal for what
we also raise to kill, mink up the valley.

That’s not it. It’s wet,
& there’s a fish smell. There’s a subhuman, sub/marine aura to things. The
cavernous “fresh fish” shed filled with water, with wet bodies of dead fish,
in thousands, wet aprons & gloves of warm bodies whose hands expertly trim,
cut, fillet, pack these bodies reduced to non-bodies, nonsensate food *these*
bodies ache from [...]

“DISINFECT YOUR GLOVES BEFORE RESUMING WORK.”

That no other corpus work within it. Kept at the freshest, at the very point of
mutable life, diverting, into death. To be steamed in cans, or baked, frozen in
fillets, packaged sterile for the bacteria of living bodies to assimilate. break
down. Pacific Ocean flesh.

(19-20)

The reader is challenged in pre-constituted categories of thought by a labyrinthine
language that foregrounds the echoes and webs of signification escaping the logic of the
linear sentence. In the quoted extract, “We orient” retains its grammatical signification of
“we head toward” yet the position of the verb at the break of the line foregrounds the
women’s ethnicity as the discourse of the Other (‘we *are* the Orient’ but also the fish
orientation toward their source, as well as the labourers keeping the fish head as their
reference point, “what we do”) and the nominalization of their bodies as territory of
exploitation. At the same time, the visibility given to the Othering of the women does not
become an identity trap; it is further critiqued both thematically, through the inclusion of
the complicity of urban life which follows, and formally in the line breaks: “we the,” “our
white,” “these torsos” and “for what” (19). Nevertheless, women’s bodies are neither
static nor passively accepting of their destiny. Disrupting the stereotype of the submissive

Asian woman, women are nevertheless present and marking the territory. While in *Steveston Recollected* women are for the most part invisible (only two women are interviewed), the poem acknowledges their 'silent' presence and silence becomes voice.

Women also become the markers of cultural hybridity. The "white arms" and "naked" body of Lulu Sweet are lifted by "Indians, Chinese, Japanese unknown / in numbered houses" (**Moon** 17); Christine is a Chinese woman running a café (**In time**); the "150 acres of good 'assembled / & sold by Al Austin'" is the "abandoned field" visible "from Lum Poy's back door" (**Not to be taken** 37); in the sections **Finn Road, A by-channel; a small backwater:** and **Response** it is a Finnish woman who fishes from her boat ("Been out / fishing for 20 years now" 40); and in **Or there is love** the female voice resists the boundaries of cultural identity (with the risk of ethnic essentialism): "I'm not really in / the Japanese community, I don't belong to Buddhist Church, I don't / send my kids to sunday school." Place is the nodal point where her affects (her love for the house), discursive boundaries (women to be kept in place yet subverting place) and agency meet:

[...] "At the end of the road," she says
Steveston is. At the mouth, where the river runs under, in, to the
immanence of things.

To live in a place. Immanent. In
place. Yet to feel at sea. To come from elsewhere & then to discover
love, has a house & a name [...]

[...] To the place of firstcomers where a woman felt
"like I was living in a wild field," where the grass, where the lines of
wind, where the lines of power moved clear in a field of power.

Where now her house stands
webbed with weaving, leaf tracery & light (of pots, plants), a house she
inhabits, immanent, at the edge of town a field they're raising houses on.

[...] “well I *live* here,”
lettuce, children, friends, you find a self, under the trees that sway like
underwater weeds, connecting things.

(53-55)

The “immanence of things” resonates with Simone De Beauvoir’s critique of the transcendence/immanence gendered divide upon which patriarchal systems of thought rely.¹⁴ But here immanence is textually transformed through the re-writing of place for herself, a writing act which infuses her individual desires with the construction of ‘homeness.’ ‘Home’ is also what interlaces the three sections **Finn Road, A by-channel; a small backwater:** and **Response**. For the only fisherwoman the writer meets, home is both her boat and the river she works *with*:

At bottom of this slippery time, it’s her boat,
her feet on, managing the freshet, swollen, flooding (highest tides
of the year last week) [...]

Somehow they survive, these people, these fish,
survive the refuse bottom, filthy water, their choked lives,
in a singular dance of survival, each from each. At the
narrows, in the pressure of waves so checked & held by
“deep-sea frontage” it’s the river’s push against her, play of
elements her life comes rolling on. Hair flying, in gumboots,
on deck with rubber apron (“it’s no dance dress”), she’ll take
all that river gives, willing only to stand her ground (rolling,
with it, right under her feet, her life, rolling, out from under,
right on out to sea ...

(43)

Place and home have different meanings for different voices yet are pervasive in the poem. For the crippled fisherman, observing the backwater of Hong Wo’s store on Dyke Road, the flow of the river is a marker of place and economic activity. Despite the wastes and filth the river is carrying, it is the extraordinary force of the stream toward the sea that stands out, irrational and erotic at the same time: “This river is / *alive*”. And it is

the river itself that the language seems to voice, its potency both resource of and threat to the markers of economic power:

Pour, pour

form its bank) this river is rivering urgency, roar
(goku, goku) thru any hole, like boats race tide a millrace, as,
the possible entry of this channel for, invisible under their hulls
& flying heels, the fish re-enter time, racing north of Roberts Bank
past Albion Dyke, then Woodward Reach opposite Woodward Landing
(where the ferry ran) by Woodward Slough, then Gravesend Reach &
City Reach the river proper lies, past any tidal reach (renew) fish
seek their source, which is, their proper place to die ...

(15)

But behind the window frames of his store, Hong Wo observes while trying not to be seen: a remnant of the past and dispossession he seems to haunt the place and keep alive the memory of the costs of 'the progress of History.' Words elide the possibility of the 'sovereign' viewer and a clear-cut division of past and present: we are no longer sure what this picture represents/contains, since Hong Wo's memories entangle his/our perceptions into a dissolving 'now.' All we know is that he desired this place ("only the falsefront silhouette / 'west' occupies his mind"), yet his position of "accountability" has not been met by the accountability of the nation-state toward its subjects.

Haunting and displacements infuse the poem with the longings and desires for what was left behind, either shattered dreams or threads of life, while the brutality of evacuation and internment, as well as the displacement of the immigrant experience, weaves a net of 'words' and 'holes'. Lines follow through with urge, like the river's urgency, unable to reach an end (closure, containment) and striving toward a sea where "boundaries give way" and the yearning of biological life (the biological body of river, fish, the town and its inhabitants) is also a desire for coming-into-writing. As the writer is

also situated within the poem (with the tensions around gender/sexuality, race and class that this involves), the incommensurability of “the subjectivity of the poet and the otherness of the town (she is, after all, a stranger)” (Miki 1985, 77) reveals the failure of the sovereign position to account for (dominate, control, represent, speak in the name of) the Other.

The poems have an absence at their centre, the unspoken and repressed side of the Canadian nation, the past which returns to haunt the present (history as inseparable from the lived present) as well as the future. For the fisherman who has “just painted, *Elma K*, all your ties to shore, / your daughters, wife”:

There are no territories. And the ghosts of landlocked camps are
all behind you. Only the blip of depth sounder & fish finder,
harmonic of bells warning a taut line, & the endless hand over
hand flip of the fish into silver pen — successive, infinite —

What to the charts say? Return, return. Return of what doesn't
die. Violence in mute form. Walking a fine line.

Only, always to dream of erotic ghosts of the flowering earth;
to return to a decomposed ground chocked by refuse, profit, & the
concrete of private property; to find yourself disinherited from
your claim to the earth.

(52)

Although the last section “Steveston, B.C.” may function as a ‘conclusion’ it also gestures toward openness, while the addendum of the 2001 edition reconnects the poem to current preoccupations around genetic manipulation, environmental depletion and the last stage of capitalist development. The poem, therefore, goes on.

Immigrant Imaginings: On Phantom Limbs and (G)host-Writing

Only later, years later, did I begin to feel that, like a phantom limb, part of me, that Penang past, not quite cut off, still twitched alive and wanted acknowledging.

—“Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination” 20

Ghost Works (1993) is an assemblage of three texts, **Zócalo** (1977), **Month of Hungry Ghosts** (1979) and **How Hug a Stone** (1983), which were originally published separately and are now framed as a book of serial/long poems and a journey into language.¹⁵ The choice is significant, since “book” and “long (or serial) poems” are hardly neutral terms. The book format calls into question a literary tradition of authorship and proprietorship that not only excluded women writers but also relied on the ‘traffic of women,’ which marks the economy of patriarchal language and discourse; the long poem is also a genre powerfully inscribed in the masculine and inseparable from histories of sexual and colonial domination. Rather than performing reclaiming gestures of exclusionary practices and territories, the book precipitates its own format: the architecture of literary forms is being exposed, thus un hiding the scaffolding of language; fluidity and difference replace structure.

The texts have been read both as (poetic) prose and poetry, a dichotomy often blurred in postmodern writings. Robert Kroetsch perhaps provides the most insightful reading of **Zócalo**’s aesthetics which, I argue, applies to all of *Ghost Works*:

Marlatt’s travel book, **Zócalo**, with its diagramming of the ineffable (protomandala?) desires to become both love poem and long poem. But Marlatt’s grammar of delay is so absolute that the poem, by a strategy of speech rather than silence, delays even its becoming a poem. The lover is a photographer, a lover who delays love by taking pictures (documentation); he is the book’s silence. The writer in the book, the poet (‘she’), talking endlessly, endlessly endlessly talking, caught in the eroticism of her own speech act, delays infinitely the entrance into the poem. The speech, the style, the journey delayed by speech and style, impose

on the reader the absolute and exquisite (sexual) pain of delay. This book is pure metonymy, a long poem instead of a long poem. (*For Play and Entrance* 18)

Although I am not comfortable with Kroetsch's notion of "delay," I find his fluid articulation of the long poem with respect to *Zócalo* intriguing and an insightful point of entry into Marlatt's writings with respect to poetic structures. Her 'genre blurring' is not simple playfulness with language and genre; rather, it highlights the poetic forms *within* and *against* which she writes as part of the cultural constructs of systems of domination. The complicity of the long poem with Canadian nationalism and the 'desire-machine' of the state is not disavowed, in that the text is also part of that language, but rather it is subverted from within—the desire to re-articulate the nation rather than dispose of it altogether. The work on the sentence and the paragraph in a poetic mode simultaneously questions the narrative mode of a large corpus of Canadian long poems and the assumed transparency and rational organization of prose writing. Writing in the (long) prose poem form is horizontal rather than vertical. Language flows metonymically, not logically, and words call up evocations and associations to make visible the supplementary nature of language (Derrida 1998). Against power's reliance on the alignment of signifier and signified to achieve full meaning, Marlatt's poetics shows the jarred moments of language clashing against barriers and disclosing the disjuncture in the narrative time and territorialized space of the Nation: if in *Steveston* it is the overlapping of time and space which was mostly made visible, in *Ghost Works* she tactically unfolds the competing temporalities of the nation-state, its memoried layers in language. By working on the discrete and the specifics of the logical sentence, she shows how narrative closure functions, and by so doing she makes closure impossible to achieve.

As Marlatt mentions in the “Preface” of *Ghost Works*, “Musings they are, travel musings, written out of three trips to three different countries. [...] Each work struggles with the notion of here, what being here means, what it includes or excludes” (vii). The writing weaves through notions of home, place, (non)belonging and diaspora which echo the writer’s position at the edge of the colonial and the post-colonial, in the constant tension between woman’s (his)story and feminist consciousness. Indeed, the three journeys take the writer-reader back to the woman signified as mother/Other—womb and metaphor of nationness and culture: how to deconstruct these powerful structures of signification that to date confine women’s lives and subjectivities and, especially, hinder the generative possibilities of different visions? But also, these notions resonate strongly with contemporary preoccupations about migrancy and global displacements. The poet’s journey through memory is foremost a labyrinthine journey through language that tears open the closure of cultural scripts and, by interrogating what constitutes the ‘here’ and ‘belonging,’ engenders possible re-conceptualizations of homeness, alienness and foreignness.

In *Ghost Works*, Marlatt’s writing-in-the feminine unravels the ghostly figurations (and alignments) of Mother and Home, Woman and Nation, always uncovering the fiction of the false ideologies that control the production of meaning and condition women’s lives. This ‘wild zone’ of writing is not oppositional, since it does not remain entrenched in binary forms of thought, but through its erotic/erratic movement is both what Nicole Brossard calls a “combat” and a contact, a border zone where contamination makes possible the explosion of the script in favour of a gift economy. Migrancy, with its processual quality of movement, displacement and nomadism, becomes a generative

avenue of poetic possibilities. The 'holes' opened up in the porous writing of process poetics enable these crossings-over, and what enters from the outside is bound to alter the script.¹⁶

All three texts are journey narratives of 'border crossing,' where Mexico, Malaysia and England are both real countries (with their people, their landscapes, voices and perfumes) and texts. The writing moves across generic boundaries—travelogue, intimate journals, letters, poetry, poetic prose and musings—the autobiographical tension always escaping narrative closure and undercutting the possibility of a fictive (symbolic) self. Through the journeyed threads of memory, the text weaves the complex negotiations and re-articulations of the self of the female subject in process, caught between competing discourses and hegemonies, but determined to open up and inscribe herself into the cultural, social and linguistic scripts that strive to name her identity and confine her to pre-established roles. Pointing out the autobiographical impulse of the writing, yet never falling in the category of autobiography, Marlatt highlights the preoccupation of "the place you recognize yourself in—you/i—a place occupied not by one but many selves, a place full of ghosts ... After all, place was once a broad street, thronged with who knows who" ("Preface" viii). Hence, 'place' is disarticulated from geography, territory, map, land—the powerful signifiers of Nation claiming an unquestioned link to a pre-existing referent. As she further notes:

Perhaps this is an immigrant's preoccupation. Or a border-crosser's. Or a genre/gender crosser's (if autobiography can be seen as divorced from poetry—that muse again, or lesbianism divorced from heterosexuality—that haunting family). Heterogeneous, this place here, so overlaid with other places: this self here sieved through with other selves when there was here and you were, you are, me. ("Preface" viii)

Zócalo is both travel diary and intimate journal of her journey to Mexico with her lover, poet and artist Roy Kiyooka. Her musings weave together meditations on the legacy and complexity of the ancient Mayan culture with the recordings of the daily events of their journey—voices enveloping her thoughts, faces and sensations penetrating her sensibility—and the unraveling of the complexity of her love relationship. The cultural displacement is a voluntary one: though a “journal” *Zócalo* is written in the third person and “she” acquires a quality of estrangement—the fictive separated from the female experience, the doubleness of woman in the symbolic orders of discursive representation. What is then the function of Kiyooka’s camera eye to which the writing returns almost obsessively? While we read about “she” through the writer’s drift of language, “she” is also framed by Kiyooka’s camera together with this exotic and uncanny landscape of ruins and ancient mysteries. The effect is of a *mise-en-abîme*, a textual vertigo into self-reference, where “she” becomes estranged and recognizable at the same time. “She” is the screen against which the mastery of his photographic representation—and the script of Mayan culture—can be enacted. Yet her climbing of the Mayan pyramids also allows her a different vantage point, one at the edge of vision that cuts through the mastery of visual representation. This border zone is one of double movement. While inhabiting different angles of vision, she feels drawn toward the bottomless depths of the pyramids, “earth calling her back to itself” (42). The descent into the entrails of mythologies, the womb of the sacred, is a labyrinthine journey that uncovers the sacrificial act in the abyss of signification; the hollowness where the serpent performs its priestly functions is a reminder of the attempt to erase woman-ness as the ground of signification—a powerful echo of Irigaray’s journey into Plato’s cave.

("What's he looking at?"); looking, seeing, glancing as markers of (in)visibility; cars bearing "signs" (of interpretation? A native language?); an open country and getting lost ("Back / in the car, she must turn around, but where?"); "here" becoming distance; a "native truck" and, on the edge, a native family (a labourer and three women—daughter, mother and grand-daughter) staring at her "white face"; knowledge, of herself, of the Other ("she feels they feel she must know"), pretended ignorance and the archeology of culture of which the stare of the natives seem to remind her ("the man she asked / directions of, she sees he has known, he has always known ...").

Processual writing forecloses the possibility of centrality and never hides the power structures that condition the relation of "she" to another (an Other) culture. The insistence of the text on the "here," as foregrounded in "JOURNEY," inevitably invokes the "there" of the industrial north and Canada as points of departure, though not cultural origin. But also, it evokes the lingering anxieties of Canadian culture framed in Frye's question "Where is here?" At the same time, the question is problematized through the displacement of the centredness (in cultural tradition as well as consciousness) that it originally implied. The 'centrality' foregrounded both in the poem title (zócalo is the central square of a town) and in the first section is undercut by the loss of direction (and personal grounding) in the new "here":

New Year's Day, it turns out, is the day they go to Progreso,
they go to the sea, to the light, to where they think sea light
lies, eastward across that land stretching east & west (or so she thinks),
under the sun's westward journey it lies like a great thumb sticking into
the Caribbean, lies in fact north & south, & dry as a stone its new year
begins at summer solstice when the rains come down. So to get to the
sea they take a bus north, north, which is strange to them, who come
from a north that lies east & west, where to get to the sea they go west,

or east, but here they go north when the sun is furthest south, as if that might restore its northward journey, as once it might. (8)

Cultural displacement is articulated as a loss of geographical and visual references: in “their land” (5) the cartographical marks of north, south, east and west lose sense, since there is no privileged centre (no point of origin) allowing their stabilization, and the only way to proceed is either her natural (nature’s?) instinct, which drives them toward the fluid boundaries of the sea, or local knowledge (“the man she asked directions of” 7); both acts defy any teleological impulse and, rather, are being produced in relational terms. But her attempts to ‘see’ the place through her camera eye also fail:

& as she fingers the camera with its telephoto lens she
wants to move into the street, through an eye that is an extension &
even impertinent accessory to the act of her seeing, she wants, not to
see but to be—him? impossible. The young man on the seawall knows
she is aiming at him ...

(10)

While the object of her gaze meets her with “his dark / glance which is both *for* her & *at* her,” she becomes increasingly conscious that “she is sacrificing them to her own curiosity” yet “[d]efiantly she continues to peer through the / camera, focusing, shifting as the people’s movements shift, but / now they are only elements of a visual image ...” (11). Her relation to vision is doubly fraught by her position as woman, as object of the gaze, and her tourist eye. But it is precisely her gendered relationship to ‘their’ land that makes observation and visual framing increasingly impossible: “She wants to take a picture of them but they’re out / of range ... she clicks the / shutter knowing none of it will turn out” (11). And “herself caught suddenly in her own viewfinder, establishing / a view on what is so present to them they are *in* it—which is where she / was & wants to be, she thinks, moving now, released, out of that / marginal shade to the spot he has

located” (11). From now on, it is only Yoshio who, almost obsessively, will handle the camera.¹⁷

But displacement is also skin-deep. While Yoshio attracts the attention of the local population—his body signifying ‘Asian’ (“the usual questions, ¿japonés?¿japonés?” 12)—“she” is also marked by her skin: ‘white’ is not a neutral referent but, instead, ‘colour.’ Like the ‘i’ of *Steveston*, they both are, in the end, alien to this land. And shrouded by the night in Merida, the unuttered question becomes inevitable: “does it feel like home? ... could you *make* it home?” (20).

A text about searching (of language? in language?), *Zócalo* re-engages with the meaning of home, belonging and displacement, which had already informed *Steveston*, yet on the terrain of the Other. But the poem does not enact ‘experience’ (language does not pretend to ‘reflect’ consciousness) nor does it construe a position for the all-knowing subject. Although positioned as a privileged traveler, getting away from the constraints of her own (Canadian) culture, “she” points to a textualized subjectivity which both enters and is entered by other languages and other discourses—music, language, voices, all interrupt her thoughts, her musings, her attempts to take hold of the local. In this polyphonic space, the long (prose) line of the poem unravels the multiplicity of the lived and the particular, while pointing to the infinite network of alliances and connections: vendors, native women, the shoeshine man, bus travelers, the tourist guide.

This polyphony of voices constantly interrupts her (writing) together with acts, gestures, sensations so that it is never possible to complete a thought, to consume an emotion, to reach representation. While Yoshio’s camera captures her, as well as the ‘local,’ her living *within* the land and *among* the people resists the specular effect of his

camera eye. Nevertheless, the text never enacts an unproblematic ‘openness’ of writing—the blind faith in a postmodern textuality inherently political. ‘Home’ and ‘belonging’ are crossed by differential axes of power relations that weave together the script of patriarchal language (Mayan ancient sacrifices), the dream of the (lost) body of the mother and the dream of a better future. Foremost, it is the encounter with Manuel Jesus that repositions Canada as the privileged north and English as the language of capital to ‘ensure’ the impoverished ‘south’ what promises to be ‘a better life.’ In Manuel Jesus’s gentle but firm insistence to learn English (“I learning Inglés” 70) and obtain the directions to Canada is the reminder of the traffic of cheap labour on which the industrial north relies (and also engenders) for its own benefit. Hence, ‘home’ is not synonymous with respite—though at times it offers shelter—and, rather, it gestures toward its unsettled and political nature.

Month of Hungry Ghosts, the second text in the sequence, was composed at the time of the writer’s journey back to Malaysia with her father and sister in 1976, and is probably the work that most openly invokes that “Penang past” which functions as “phantom limb” (“Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination” 20).¹⁸ A poetic exploration of the meaning of ‘homeness’ and ‘belonging’ through the present of memory, it is infused with longing for the mother-text (“you, / misspelled, gave yourself to the dark of some other light, leaving me / here with the words” 128). In the month of the hungry ghosts of Chinese tradition, when the deity of the underworld unlocks the ghosts of the dead inadequately remembered, it is the ghost of the dead mother which imbues the writing with the longing and desires for what is lost. The anniversary of the mother’s death one year before is the occasion for revisiting Malaysia with the poet’s sister and

father—a journey which, the poet explains in the “Preface” to *Ghost Works*, her parents had planned as their last to Penang. Nevertheless, we should be cautious in reading the text as a reflection of the poet’s personal grieving for her loss. As it will become even clearer in **How Hug a Stone**, the mother is both literal and text, the language of the *chora* and women’s culture irremediably lost to the language of the Law.

The most hybrid of the three texts in the book, *Month of Hungry Ghosts* spirals along different modes and directions, ruptures of language visible everywhere. This is a languaged journey of re-entry into the past, a past layered with the voices of those surrounding her childhood and her colonial family, and resonating in this familiar/unfamiliar landscape of the present:

as a cup fills itself in the stream

undoing it, the clasp on the trunk ... always there were voices calling to each other in another language rising through the house, full of incomprehensible import, intent on each other, saying something even in the chatter ...

(111)

The foreignness of languages, both familiar and unfamiliar, brings about the memories of the household in which she once lived, and which constituted her colonial mother’s everyday existence. It is a household where linguistic and social barriers are reinforced by the mother’s language and acts. The language of colonial division and domination is re-cited through the mother to ensure its own reproduction. Hence the mother performs her assigned role of “reproducer of the boundaries of the national group” (McClintock 1997, 90), a role which is constitutive (and not outside) of a gendered discourse of the Nation. But the citationality of discourse makes language never identical to itself; it always comes with a difference. Here the difference is inflected by the language of the

Other mothers—the women who gave up their own families to help bring up the mem sahib’s children. Both languages become part of the poet’s bodily consciousness: the mother tongue is being shaped by “two mothers” and the five languages being spoken in the house (English, Malay, Hokkien, Tamil, Thai), both familiar and alien, contaminate the Englishness of the white household.¹⁹

... two mothers, two, but one mother &
the other someone we had a claim to, we thought of almost as part of
ourselves, her hands our hands to bathe us, dress us, & the gentle
combing of our hair, & young—did we see her? & a third who cared for
the house, Amah, had seven children “& they all died, my dears,” who
cared for us too, sloppy & merry & what did it matter? Except what the
Mem says. What the Mem says goes (sometimes). what the Mem says
exists as a separate entity in the house, to be listened to & walked
around, with suitable contrition if asked (giggling in the back rooms),
but separate, separate from the way life moves, on. what the Mem says
was meant to last. Like mercurochrome on a cut. like the contents of a
steel trunk ...

(111)

The text dissolves the boundary between language and body. Memory is not understood in the conventional sense of re-remembering but, rather, body-memory (“o the smell came back so vivid, that deep sandloam fern palm dank smell” 99), as well as food-memory (“the durian fruit” 98), sensations from the past finding articulation in the presentness of the moment. Writing to her lover back home, the ‘i’ embraces “this morning such a beautiful awakening” in “the room we used to sleep in, the ‘nursery’— Pam recalls running around the verandah, it’s familiar to me too” (84). It is the language of touch and sound that enfolds her:

I didn’t want
to wake up but to rock there between sleep & waking in the cool, in
that liquid & musical world, so deeply familiar I was hardly present
anywhere, just to be, in that long childbeing, sentient, but only just,

skin (not even 'mine') merging with an air that is full of melody &
rain-breath, breath, sound enwrap—

(84)

The many women that enveloped her childhood with their voices, faces and touches, are brought back to memory by her bodily re-entry into the past in the encounter with Eng Kim and Amah:

&
Eng Kim herself, oh Roy that is the strangest. I recognized her as soon as she came down the steps to greet us (old baronial family style), she's hardly changed in 25 years, still climbs the stairs with all that girlish quickness & like any good servant, utterly silent. But more her smile—it's as if i'd never gone away I know that smile so completely & love it, yes it's the love that astonishes me. That face told me as much as my mother's, by its changing weather, how the world was with me, or against, what i, as any rebellious child, was up against. I must have spent hours of accumulated moments watching it. (97)

Yet the past cannot be domesticated: this is both a powerful moment of realization of her own 'non-belonging' ("I want to get out" 82) and a reconceptualization of the meaning of home and belonging through the political consciousness she has achieved. Although the *failure* to reach plenitude (the seduction of the wholeness of origin) is pregnant of poetic and political possibilities in that it defies closure, it also suggests the resistance of the female adult self to surrender to the call of maternal language(s):

My (hardwon) independence as a Western woman is being eroded every day & of course i'm seduced by my senses into just giving in—to the heat as much as to everything else. Finally let myself have an afternoon nap today, but the swimming—every afternoon the sea takes me in, old mother sea, sand dusk (no clarity like the Caribbean), & warm. (99)

The inextricable relationship of languages and homeness is articulated as a web of relations in the poetic sequence **bahasa malaysia** (95), where the polyphonic structure of

the poem interweaves Malay, English, the poet's voice ("sometimes i panic / i want to rush home / as if i might get / trapped here"), nature ("river, hill, cape"), place, mapping ("the coarsest of maps"), naming, the voice of traditional culture, the language of tourist advertisement, cultural sites and the "trail" left by "international finance." Each term of reference is distinct and unique, made visible in its singularity, yet not extrapolated from the network which binds social, cultural and political relations.

Formally, the poem is also connected to the other sequences that intersperse the text. Intensely poetic, they are meditative, moments of rest, but depart from the Wordsworthian notion of "emotion recollected in tranquillity" (*Lyrical Ballads* 1798). Fragmented poems, constituted of different voices, languages, texts, gaps and holes, they thwart the possibility to achieve closure.²⁰ These are lyrical interventions into the field of language and representation, a discourse of literary criticism around the selfhood and privacy which has enabled the separation of the 'cultural' from the 'political,' a separation which is part of the ideological strategy underlying notions of 'culturalism'.²¹ Marlatt turns the 'lyric' genre on itself and by displacing the lyrical I/eye (traditionally constituted as private and interior) she re-positions the field of the lyric as a public gesture. The titles of the lyrics, also functioning as first line, openly address the discourse of the public: **disparities, res publica, "abandoned", crossing by, mem sahib, planters, bahasa Malaysia, street opera and coming in, who**. At the same time, they do not set up a distinction between public and private; rather, the public and private are interwoven in the materiality of the 'linguistic-as-lived' condition. It is language that we encounter in the reading of these lyrics, but a language making visible the asymmetries of power and social relations: the lives of the local domestic workers and plantation

labourers; the colonial structure, remaining as the trace of a crumbling order yet surviving in its practices; the inability of ‘Europeans’ (signifying whiteness and First World dominance, since a New Zealander is also implicated) to ground themselves in the local culture and, in the constant fear of ‘going native,’ becoming ghosts to themselves; the lives of colonial women are caught in the trap of colonial patriarchal structures yet complicit with it; the mother-daughter relationship is a reproduction of existing structures of power; the theatre of life in the everyday markets and streets—the hybridity of its space.

Hence, the textual aesthetic invites the entrance of different forms, in the consciousness that ‘home’ and ‘here’ are not discrete experiential entities but a language architecture interweaving past and present: diary entries; letters addressed to her lover, poet Roy Kiyooka, back ‘home’ (Canada); shorter and longer lyrics. While the lyrics are obviously ‘poetic,’ diary entries and letters can easily be read as ‘prose,’ especially since they are immediately recognizable within established generic categories—but repetition comes with a difference. Foremost, the text should be read in its entirety. *Month of Hungry Ghosts* is not prose interspersed with lyrics but, rather, a *poetics*.²²

Month of Hungry Ghosts also opens with a dream sequence, though here the dream is more visibly marked by a critique of the patriarchal structures of language and representation which runs through the entire text: “Snakes. Woke up dreaming of the striking head of the cobra—pok— / into me, my hand over breast. Snakes at the Temple of the Reclining / Buddha where we stopt, latter part of the floating market tour” (76). As in *Zócalo*, sight-seeing brings to the fore the workings of the script of culture and its interrelationship with homeness, nation and politics. During the visit to the Temple of

the Emerald Buddha, the “sacred power” (78) of the legend of the Buddha is recounted: the snake’s act of wrapping itself around the body of Buddha and protecting him from the rain weaves together the theme of Otherness (the snake) and the gift of protection (homeness). At the same time, the voices of the two guides—the “sermon” addressing both politics and religion—opens up a space of contradiction between the monologism of official rhetoric (the protests of “pro-Communist” students opposed by “the people” and “the division amongst the Thai people” as to the presence of the Americans) and the multiplicity of “the sense of many lives invested here” (78). But the text soon changes direction, exploring the divide between the outer space of roads and markets and the interior space of ‘home.’ The diary entry inscribes the writing act on the page, while ‘otherness’ is looking at her:

A cheecha running along the ceiling above makes a funny chirping noise—light brown almost pink legs, one beady eye upon me writing at this glasstopped desk. Waves of cricket & treefrog sounds continuously breaking outside around the house. Barking dogs in the distance. Hot. Dark.” (78)

The familiar/unfamiliar space of homeness resurfaces as she walks outside the house “on the road by myself” (78). This is a simultaneous walking in space (the road, Penang) and time (childhood “vague memories” and the darkness of the night), the walking interweaving with the writing. The boundedness of home is emphasized through the “locking up” of the gates at her return, with Mr. Y and her father looking for her—the homophony of ‘look’ and ‘lock’ stressing the closure of family relations on female subjectivity and marking the female body as boundary of national identity. Yet it is through the familiar presence of Eng Kim, once her mother-servant and now serving her, that recognition of the female world with which her childhood memories are infused

comes along. It is not a painless process: class disparities are obvious and a confining narrative. But with it comes the recognition that 'home' (of family, language and nation) is hardly a neutral term. What is construed as 'home' leads her to the exploration of 'what here means': "This is what I came out of. & how else can I be here?" (79).

Against the progressive narrative of linear time, territorializing home as domestic (and national) genealogy, she avows the contingency and multiplicity of time-space relations: the boundary between the real and the unreal, wake and dream, are increasingly blurred, and the terms 'home,' 'here' and 'there' overlap and traverse each other. The 'letters' to her lover are particularly interesting since the tension between 'here' and 'there' and what constitutes 'home' is made most evident. Musing on their visit coinciding with the month of hungry ghosts, the 'i' makes clear that this is a "[q]uestioning of the real, no quest" (104):

What is strange, even precarious, is how this is
also real, this that i wake up to every morning, & as the day progresses
becomes so voraciously real it eats up all the other real where you &
Kit & Jan are, so that even its strangeness has disappeared. (104)

[...]

I dream of you & Kit, believing you exist as you usually do in a world i
know but can't escape to. Here a world is dreaming me as much as i am
dreaming it, a dream that's been going on too long, i want to wake
up. & at the same time learn, as usual, i want too much. (105)

'Here' is never stable. It lingers between different temporalities and re-shaping of space. The textual unfolding of layers of meanings constructs space as complex and changing, rather than dominated by time. Whereas modernity and progress project time onto space, the text re-articulates the time-space relationship as interweaving a web of significations, thus unsettling the hegemonic narrative of colonial domination. The

contamination of Other cultures taking up and inhabiting the space of British commercialism, “the interests of the Chinese middle class here as commercial as the British, & the same sense of formality, & pragmatism” (93), reformulates the master narratives of imperial centre and periphery. But it also voices the reality of a complex web of ethnic relations—including aboriginal peoples (*orang asli*)—as entangled in the specificity of local histories and modern nationalism:

Today I’ve heard both an Indian (the cloth salesman in the market whose son is training to be a doctor in England) & a Chinese (Catholic convert, committed to both Christianity & the English language, living in a nation devoted to advancing Islam & teaching Malay) protest against the unfairness of the Malayanization policy of the govt (e.g. how 65% of all university entrants must be Malays, the other races compete for what’s left). & yet this is Malaysia & the largely rural & labouring Malays have a lot to catch up on, fast. I can’t believe the stereotype passed on to us that they’re “lazy,” don’t want to work, don’t have a head for business, etc. & yet how long, how many generations these Chinese & Indian families have lived here, feel they belong, & then are separated off on the basis of race. All the separations. (94)

Separations are the walls of the house where the textual ‘i’ immerses herself. Although the social barriers (class, gender, ethnicity) regulating everyday life and “the routine,” which she is expected not “to upset” (98), are made visible, the text acknowledges the differential relations underlying them and foregrounds their complexity. Against the master narrative of History, the text opens a space for the tactile and voiced contingencies of the lived. Conversely, colonial subjects are unable to let go of the fears of ‘going native’ and ground themselves in the locality of culture: they remain spectral presences throughout the text.

Although the assemblage of *Ghost Works* was occasioned at the suggestion of the editor, *Month of Hungry Ghosts* is closely interwoven with *How Hug a Stone*. The

exploration of the interrelationship of 'ghost,' 'host,' 'guest' and 'house' unravels through the text. The mother-daughter relationship is at the heart of **“as a cup fills itself in the stream”**; and the following section, **“the line,”** explores and unsettles the dream of origins in a flow of language which breaks down syntactical logic yet is capable of producing meaning: “Begin at the beginning, she thinks, there was no beginning [...]” (118).

Coming to terms with the mother tongue accompanies the unfolding of the third text, *How Hug a Stone*, written on occasion of her trip to England in the summer of 1981 with her son, Kit, to visit the family house and the relatives of what her mother always called 'home.' This is also a journey into the layered structures of language that bring her female self into being, but one where the uncovering of the linguistic palimpsest of culture is bound to expose the differential relations of the ghost/host/guest/house, and show that 'home' was never really there. This border crossing is both a poetics of migrancy and a translational act re-articulating 'home' through the estrangement of foreignness.

Lianne Moyes's stimulating reading of the text in “Writing, the Uncanniest of Guests: Daphne Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone*” (1991) challenges critiques of essentialism put forward by critics Frank Davey and Lola Lemire Tostevin. For Davey, Marlatt's writing is in the search for “origins, beginnings, sources—always for realities that are prior to language” (*Line 13*, 72), an analysis shared by Tostevin, who suggests that the text is “vulvalogocentric.”²³ Moyes constructs a powerful counter-argument grounded in post-structuralist theory and claims that “in *How Hug a Stone* origins are marked by the difference of writing, inscribed in the order of the 'always already written.' The text has a

stake in exploring the largely unrepresented and perhaps unrepresentable material contingencies of beginning” (203). Moyes examines the play of difference in the words ‘guest,’ ‘ghostly,’ ‘host’ and ‘ghos-ti-’ in Marlatt’s text, which, following Luce Irigaray, she reads intertextually with Freud’s construction of gender in “The Uncanny.” Freud’s exploration of the *Unheimlich/Heimlich* (*Heim* meaning home) leads him to conceptualize the *Unheimlich* not simply as the unfamiliar. Instead, the *Unheimlich*, or uncanny is “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud, cited in Moyes 212). The alignment of the *Unheimlich*, “what was once *heimisch*, familiar,” with the experience of “neurotic men” who “feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs” casts the female subject as frightening and unfamiliar as her body signifies the woman-mother.²⁴

How Hug a Stone invites this feminist post-structuralist reading and I find Moyes’s argument compelling. Nevertheless, this reading also elides the material instances that ground the text in the social conditions of its production. Moyes’s critical analysis is based almost exclusively on theories of language and representation; while this analysis is useful to make visible the linguistic and discursive structures produced or co-opted by ideology, it also runs the risk of de-materializing the text. Indeed, the ‘i’ of Marlatt’s text returns to a construction of ‘home’ (England) which cannot be easily separated from its role in a colonial system of which Marlatt’s parents were part, and the socio-political consequences of which are still visible today; and returning ‘home’ (Canada), where Kit feels “it’s nice & boring” (187), always comes at the expense of Others’ dispossession. Marlatt is not unaware of these contradictions which, in fact, underlie the whole text. Yet, to my knowledge, *How Hug a Stone* has been read primarily

as a feminist text, also in consideration of Marlatt's commitment to a feminist politics at the time of its publication. While accusations of essentialism have called for significant counter-arguments on the part of feminist critics, none of these readings has addressed more specifically the textual exploration of 'home' and 'belonging' in terms of the tensions within a discourse of colonialism and nationness. Since the text was published at a time when postcolonial studies were slowly making their way into academic criticism, this 'absence' is remarkable and indicative, perhaps, of an unwillingness to investigate questions around nation formation and the uncomfortable status of Canada as a 'post-colony.' Incidentally, it is worth noting how Linda Hutcheon's "'Circling the Downspout of Empire,'" which borrows its title from *How Hug a Stone*, takes the position of the text ("seeing Canada as still caught up in the machinations of Empire and colony" 167) only as the starting point for her discussion of postcolonial studies in Canadian writing, and fails to engage with the text altogether.

Thus, I would like to re-insert Moyes's analysis in a discussion of the relationship of home, nation and gender and see how the play of difference that Moyes highlights in the text deconstructs the "domestic genealogy" of the "family of Man" (Anne McClintock 90). While the text is constructed as an exploration of domestic genealogy, the "foreign members" of the family also bring with themselves the margins of the discourse of the nation. As McClintock explains, "[N]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. The term 'nation' derives from *natio*: to be born" (90). Her elaboration on the relationship of gendered citizenship, time and space, is worth quoting at some length:

The family trope is important for nationalism in at least two ways. First, it offers a 'natural' figure for sanctioning national *hierarchy* within a putative organic *unity* of interests. Second, it offers a 'natural' trope for figuring national time. [...] Because the subordination of woman to man and child to adult was deemed a natural fact, hierarchies within the nation could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature. The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial—the 'national family,' the global 'family of nations,' the colony as a 'family of black children ruled over by a white father'—depended in this way on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere. (91)

A sequence of pieces of various lengths, which Phyllis Webb suggested can be read as prose or poetry (liner comments), *How Hug a Stone* is composed of journal entries, meditations and explorations of this 'foreignizing' experience. Whose house is this that the 'i' re-visits in a journey taking her from 'home' in Canada to what was always referred to (yet not lived as) 'home' in England? The visit is both literal, 'i' visits her relatives as well as cultural sites, and text, a journey within writing. From the beginning, the interface of factual note-taking and the meditation about narratives sets the tone for the unfolding of the writing: fact and fiction, individual and cultural memory, and the ("enraged") mother that is at the heart of the text. Although this journey reels back in time, in the unfolding of the writing time is always present. While 'i' muses about the flight, "unraveling the plot of life," she is also "fed a line":

[...].we feed ourselves stories to dull our sense of the absurd. fed a line so as not to imagine the end—linear version of our lives unraveling in a look, back. (131)

As the train from Reading proceeds, "speeding down the line" (132), the English landscape is both familiar and estranged: "brick houses, / rows of washing, embankment flowers" (132), all images which she saw as a child but only for a few months before

sailing for Canada. Whose memories, then, are these? As the poem unfolds, interweaves the past into the present:

by train to Reading

it is the rickety clacking of the wheels that is familiar, or this sideways motion, this compartment speeding down the line, of brick houses, rows of washing, embankment flowers, it's my son discovering the window open, staring head out into the wind, ecstatic, until the cinder bit in eye:

didn't i tell you?

that was it, my vision smeared with soot like some kind of powered ink my mother's handkerchief a scalding rubdown, tearful eyes to the horizon line of the cut, those fences other kids were climbing free as they went in their unscripted world ...

(132)

A *familial* narrative unravels in which the mother is signified as the absent referent. Always invoked and remembered in the family conversations, the older photos given 'back' to the 'i'-daughter, the mother is, nevertheless, absent. Language functions 'in her name' yet erases her 'lived' singularity. Like a shell emptied of its content, she existed only as a role. But the textual unfolding does not allow for her erasure, and the obsessive search (since, at this point, the writing becomes anxious and frantic) leads the 'i' to uncover the palimpsest of language and expose the constitutive absence of 'mother' to language and culture. This uncovering is neither return to the origin (there is no nostalgia at its core), nor, as Davey and Tostevin argued, the search for a pre-linguistic mother tongue. Instead, it gestures toward a dream of origin that also dreams her ("**six years earlier in Vancouver / the English medium began**" 154).

The mother cannot be narrated in a 'proper' sentence—she is, in the end, non-representable (in Irigaray's terms, the womb is neither inside nor outside representation)—

but she also confounds the boundaries of mother-daughter, even more so since the 'i' is also mother. The propertied boundaries of the self can only be threatened by this linguistic and embodied blurred zone, while 'i' only longs to "be unnamed, / walk unwritten, de-scripted, un-described. or else compose, make it say / itself, make it up" (149). Writing becomes, then, a tactic to disturb and unsettle the settled nature of home. These house walls have been erected by "The Common Good" which Jean (her mother's old friend) invokes, and which the 'i' sees otherwise:

& if The Common Good, pointing its nineteenth century hand, has tyrannized all sense of me, small voice essential to life? So that we falls apart, gone mad at the mask of Reason which still is quoting Good in the face of annihilation: tactical advantage, counterforce capability, stockpiling. *the first few weapons arriving do almost all the damage conceivable to the fabric of the country.* have done so, without ever arriving, the nest we live in full holes these days. (178-79)

Although the impulse to reach to the 'hole' at the centre of the script acquires personal significance—now she is a mother too—it returns the text consistently to the "hereditary home" (139). Body memory resurfaces sensations and images which belonged to her childhood but these are reinserted into the present rather than enclosed in a re-imagination of the past. "Familiar" is a recurrent word in the text, as well as "familial," *familia* and "family," their constructed-ness and metaphorical nature questioned:

what is parent material? how long do we need it? Feet on the red dirt of Devon bedrock we go back to the familiar: my mother's trace, these family pathways to negotiate, these still-standing walls of home. (141)

But in this family of language, to which her relatives play host, they (guests) are the "foreign members" (138). Their foreignness is emphasized throughout the text—their

spoken language, habits and manners, not properly (propertyed) English. In this insistence on home and family, interrupted by the etymological uncovering of the palimpsestic layers on language which haunt words, host and guest meet. Yet the host, who invites and receives, is also the one harbouring the sickness bound to destroy it (Kit's allergy and the fear of death pervade the text): in Derrida's terms the foreigner is the one who, invited, questions the authority of the logos and threatens the authority of the master of the house, which, the text reminds us, is "hostly" as well as "hostile" (161).²⁵ Foreignness is, therefore, a parasitic condition yet one which is always already there, since the boundedness of home could not exist without its walls, the outside being not excluded but, instead, constitutive of the inside (Derrida 1988; Kristeva 1991). In the house of Englishness, firmly located at the centre of the Empire, where the rise of the imperial nation was paralleled by the rise of biological taxonomy and positivist scientific discourse, "ground still rushes away from me though my step-brother has named / every flower in all four directions contained by a brick wall. my host" (133):

under the moon a grown man now lures *moththe, math-*, worm. with a white sheet spread on the lawn, with a bedroom lamp he lures their bodies, heavy, beating against the walls. he wants to fix them in their families, he wants them wing-pulled-open, pinned on a piece of cotton, mortified. as then, i protest this play as death—despite his barrage of scientific names, his calling to my son, you game? as if he held the script everyone wants to be in, except the moths.

[...] she sees us,
ghos-ti-, not ghostly nor free—reciprocally obliged. host & guest fixed
 in the one script, the prescribed line of relationship. (133)

It is precisely the binaries of male/female, colonizer/colonized, centre/periphery that Marlatt's text forces us to rethink. While the moth evokes the mother, both through its etymology and in the imagery of the fixing to the script, the "*ghos-ti-*" effects a double

inscription on the “host & guest” relationship.” The ‘guest’ harboured in the g/host of language evokes the maternal body that nourishes the fetus to birth and infuses it with the sounds and pulsations of the semiotic chora. But ‘host’ is also the organism/body carrying a parasite—and the residue of alienness, the foreignness of translational practice (also a transnational one) emerges with its infectious possibilities. The guest was never completely outside the home but already inscribed within: this gesture recasts the question of culture and nationness as one of transculturation rather than cultural origins.

In a flippant tone, the step-brother comments that grandmother “*speaks like all colonials deprived of an / English education. it’s what we call Anglo Indian—singsong he means*” (143). Accented language, idiomatic and colloquial language pervade the text alongside the familial narrative. From the ‘margins of the Empire,’ colloquial Canadian, which the ‘i’ in North Vancouver brings home, also contaminates the values of the hereditary house of language. The daughter does not fulfill the injunctions of the script, “refusing the dream its continuity in what i / thought was no man’s land (not Rupert’s, not the King’s), just the / trees” (143). This gesture also changes the articulation of the periphery, traditionally hinging on the metropolitan centre, since it brings to light the territorialization of space at the hand of colonial powers as constitutive of the formation of the Canadian nation. By interrupting the citationality of gendered citizenship as subordinate to the script of the nation, the ‘i’ unhinges the sign woman from her “symbolic signifier of national difference” and can question her own position in relation to the dispossessed native populations ‘at home.’ In the last sequence, with Kit playing with pigeons among the signs of monumental national history (National Gallery, the Tate, the statue of Nelson, Trafalgar), language is dis-located from homeness, only to

become re-connected to the contingency of the lived through a porousness inviting the language of Others.

Marlatt's own diasporic condition enables her to inhabit a border zone—marked by the clash of cultures, traditions, allegiances and sexual regimes—that unsettles essentialist notions of cultural identity. This marginal position is rewritten as a privileged one through a labyrinthine feminist poetics that weaves together her transcultural experience and postcolonial subjectivity as well as her lesbianism. Home, with its uneasy metaphorical relationship to “womb,” is both yearned for and dreaded. The poet sets out on a journey of exploration that deconstructs home-ness and re-inscribes it into heterogeneity and estrangement, while the ghost of the (m)other (the domestic, land, nature, womb) haunting her travels functions as a reminder that, in the words of Marie-Louise Pratt, “as mothers of the nation women are also others to the nation.” In the haunted ‘house’ the mother is always already absent.

Notes

¹ I understand disarticulation as the attempt of experimental poetics to expose the ideological nature of power and simultaneously disengage language and representation from their (constructed) alignment with referential meaning. In “Ideology and the State” (*Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*), Louis Althusser explains that ideology never says ‘I am ideology’ but, rather, presents itself as natural and transparent. Discursive power structures achieve the naturalization of their workings and effects by hinging specific constructions onto language and representation (i.e. “land” and “tradition” as signifiers of “nation”). But when we see ideology functioning we can act against it: this is a tactic of disarticulation. I am indebted to Prof. Jeff Derksen for the elaboration of this point.

² Marlatt first came into contact with the theoretically informed writing practices of Nicole Brossard through “the issue of *Ellipse* [23-24 (1979)] which was devoted to *La Nouvelle barre du jour*” (Williamson *Line* 13, 47).

³ For a discussion of the foreign element in cultural translation, see Homi Bhabha’s elaboration on Walter Benjamins’s articulation of the foreignness of languages in “Dissemination” in *The Location of Culture* (1994a) and, on a cultural-linguistic level, Antoine Berman’s “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (2000).

⁴ In an interview with Pauline Butling in 1989, she traces her first contact with the New American Poetics to a course she took with Robert Creeley and the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference (“Magazining: Interview with Daphne Marlatt” *Open Letter* 8.5-6 1992-93).

⁵ The first wave included *Tish* 1-19; the second wave *Tish* 20-24 (August 1963 – May 1964).

⁶ The relationship of *Vancouver Poems* to cultural citizenship is briefly addressed in Glen Lowry’s “Cultural Citizenship and Writing Post-Colonial Vancouver: Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* and Wayde Compton’s *Bluesprint*” in *Mosaic*, Sept 38.3 (2005): 21-39.

⁷ In her 1996 article “‘time is, the delta’: *Steveston* in Historical and Ecological Context,” Diane M.A. Relke defines the publication of *Steveston* as “a milestone in the history of West Coast writing” (29).

⁸ Some of the original poems of the ‘Steveston series’ were never published in the long poem book but were re-worked at several instances and shifted the focus on Vancouver skid road. Others, such as “Litter.wreckage.salvage,” which appeared in *Line* 11 (Spring 1988) underwent considerable transformation and became part of the feminist re-reading of language and place in *Salvage* (1991).

⁹ *The Gull* was first performed as a work in progress in 2005. The play features Japanese Noh master Akira Matsui, who traveled back and forth from Japan during the collaboration. Richard Emmert is creative director of Theatre Nohgaku in Tokyo and colleague of Akira Matsui. The text, interweaving dialogue and poetry, both in Japanese and in English, is accompanied by Noh music played by professional musicians. Based on a Steveston fisherman’s ghost-story, the play portrays the mother’s ghost, a once-immigrant from Japan who was interned at the hand of the Canadian government, unable to find rest until she has found ‘home’ again. The two sons, played by Canadian actors of Japanese descent, are fishermen of Steveston and engage in conversation with the ghost of the mother, who appears in the form of a gull and haunts the banks of the river and the docks. Once her identity is revealed, they tell her that now ‘this’ is ‘home’ to them: time passes and all things change, and her spirit should finally find rest.

Interestingly, the image of the “mother gull” also belongs to *How Hug a Stone* (1983).

¹⁰ In a private conversation (13th June, 2006), Marlatt clarified that the addition of the last section of the 2001 edition responded to the publisher's need to market the book in a new form, rather than as a re-print, in order to obtain funding. Although constraints of the market interfere with the creative process, it is important to note how at this time Marlatt was already deeply involved in a feminist literary community and her writing embodied an open feminist politics since the mid eighties—as it becomes apparent from the publication of the 'discarded' *Steveston* poems in *Salvage* (1991). While this section has the quality of 'appendage,' the writing does not function as closure but replaces *Steveston*'s concerns in the eco-feminist preoccupations of the 'now.'

¹¹ In the course of the same conversation (13th June, 2006), Marlatt also mentioned that the 1984 edition was generated during her stay at the U of Alberta as a writer-in-residence. The re-arrangement of the photos was due less to the author's and editor's intentions than to problems arising during the printing process. Nonetheless, it is important to remark how *Steveston* was, at this point, already part of a discourse addressing locality, writing and history; the circulation of the text in this form, which escapes authorial control, points to the generative and open-ended possibilities of the long form in book format.

Marlatt also discusses the project in the relationship between photos and text in "Distance and Identity: A Postscript to *Steveston*" (*Line 3*, Spring 1984: 42-44).

¹² One of the defining moments in Canadian postmodern poetics has been the articulation of the page as a unit of composition. Nevertheless, while in *Steveston* the page stands out as a unit (both in terms of size and in the spatial arrangement of ink and white frame), the text runs over the edge of the page into the next, thus privileging the breathlessness of the line over the page as unit.

¹³ For an intriguing discussion of the Mother at the origin of the pedagogical discourse of the nation-state in the context of German culture, see Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*: "the difference [between the sexes] allowed the Woman as the Mother's Mouth every right to be a Voice, but no right to have one ... the Mother does not speak nor write" (65-66). "Dangerous supplement" is elaborated by Rousseau in his *Confessions*.

¹⁴ Diane M.A. Relke develops this point in the cited article.

¹⁵ *Zócalo* was originally published by The Coach House Press, Toronto, in 1977; "Month of Hungry Ghosts" first appeared in *The Capilano Review* (16/17.2-3) in 1979 as "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts"; *How Hug a Stone* was originally published by Turnstone Press, Manitoba, in 1983.

Marlatt points out that the suggestion to re-publish the three texts as a book came from the publisher. Nonetheless, the three texts are effectively interlaced in their common concerns about homeness, belonging, desire and ghost-writing. While *Steveston* also partakes of these preoccupations, what ties the texts together is the increasing attention to the structures of language and representation in relation to female subjectivity and the 'mother-text' as repressed by dominant ideologies, which marks the poet's increasing involvement in psycho-analytical feminist theory and a poetics in the feminine.

¹⁶ For an insightful discussion of process poetics in Daphne Marlatt and bp Nichol, see Miriam Nichols's "Subjects of Experience: Post-cognitive Subjectivity in the Work of bp Nichol and Daphne Marlatt." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Etudes en Littérature Canadienne* 25.2 (2000): 108-30. Note, in particular, Nichols's claim:

These are the points at which the I-voice has to face the impossible, the hole in its world, as it were. Such moments hold open the writerly point of view so it can never quite close into specular circularity, and the "hole" then becomes a point of entry for the gaze of

others: it makes the world of the poem porous, the mirror permeable. And what then comes through begins to alter the script (125).

¹⁷ Yoshio is used as a pet name for Roy Kiyooka in the text.

¹⁸ In its original publication in *The Capilano Review* (16/17.2-3 1979) the poem is interspersed with pictures; two are in colour but the rest are in black and white. The photographs were provided by Marlatt and some are attributed to her parents, Arthur Buckle and Edrys Buckle. In the "Introduction" to the issue, which was solely dedicated to Marlatt's "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" and Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, Sharon Thesen notes how "[t]he work in this issue is what has been brought forward from two separate journeys back, is what 'continues'." While the rationale of the coupling lies in the writers' "mutual concern, friendship, and their admiration for one another's work," they are presented as "two very different writers." Thesen also notes how "[T]hese works are not memoirs, nor are they autobiography. They are rather accounts of the recovering of language and self in a context saturated by memory" (2-3).

¹⁹ Marlatt discusses her moving from "a colonial multicultural situation in Penang" (19) to the monoculturalism of Vancouver in 1951 in "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination."

²⁰ Marlatt acknowledges as quotations in the short-line poems Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, a political text, Shelley for "getting here" and Phyllis Webb for the line "take away my wisdom & my categories ..." in "the line," thus all political writers.

²¹ See Zizek's critique of culturalism and particularism in "Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" (*New Left Review* 225, 1997: 25-51). Canadian cultural critics have also elaborated on the relationship between the politics of official multiculturalism in Canada and culturalism: the inclusion of 'different' groups (minorities) into the larger body of the nation in the respect of their 'original cultures' is in fact an attempt to contain difference and fix national identity around the 'core' identity of the French and English founding nations (Kamboureli 1993; Derksen 1994, 1995, 2002). See also Chapter One, "The Politics of Citizenship: Radical Counter-Discourses, 1960-1980."

²² See Martin Heidegger's notion of poetics in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971).

²³ See Frank Davey, "Words and Stones in How Hug a Stone," *Line* 13 (1989):40-6; and Lola Lemire Tostevin, "Daphne Marlatt: Writing in the Space That Is Her Mother's Face," *Line* 13 (1989): 32-39.

²⁴ The passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to a place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that "Love is home-sickness"; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself ... : "this place is familiar to me, I've been there before," we may interpret that place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case, too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix "un" ["un-"] is the token of repression. ("The Uncanny" 368, cited in Moyes 212)

²⁵ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (2000) and *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001).

CHAPTER SIX

Afterwords

This study started from the premise that the Nation is a discourse construing an “imagined community” to show how critical poetics in the long poem genre intervene in this discourse to subvert it from within. To do so, I felt I had to address the relationship of the cultural and the national, as well as the cultural and the citizen, in Canada, hence my lengthy discussion in Chapter One. The danger in so doing is to re-narrate the Nation, that is to re-draw the boundaries of the Nation through a shift of positions, the strategic re-location of the experimental poetics of the long poem at the centre of a different Nation. Although I was aware of this danger, in writing this thesis I was also prompted by the impulse (should I say desire?) to pull the many threads of critical discourse that constitute, contest, re-design and re-envision the meaning of the Nation. The pitfall is the writing of a different narrative—and narratives are always incomplete and suspicious; yet my intervention also intended to insert a difference that would shatter the mirror of repetition.

But in the course of my writing new challenges have arisen: my personal critical trajectory has undergone many translations and has re-positioned my entrance into the body-politic of the Nation; on a general level, the notion of the Nation is undergoing a radical transformation, and if not the notion of change, it is the speed of it which is unprecedented. If the intra-national relations were at the forefront of the re-negotiations

of the nation-state in the 1990s (First Nation political activism), and accompanied by the anxieties about the demise of the nation-state following the entrance into the NAFTA agreement in 1988, we can with a degree of certainty say, echoing Virginia Woolf, that on September 11, 2001 human nature has changed. The ripple effects of that 'event' have not so much shifted the hierarchies of power-relations on a global scale as they have made visible the contradictions and over-determinations of the liberal tradition of the nation-state. In the wake of current wars, for and against 'terrorism'—understood both as material act and discursive construction—borders have acquired new-old meanings and state sovereignty dominates political language anew. But the swiftness of political events has also revealed more cogently how the old antinomies of local, nation and global are more intertwined, and mutually constitutive, than critics of the Nation allowed them to be. And the 'post' that has invested the national (after the modern and the colonial) has turned out to be a re-shaping of the liberal state rather than its demise. For it is apparent, both in the urgency of the historical time we live in and in the more recent analysis of cultural theorists, that the nation-state has not been surmounted by the free-trade ideology but, rather, globalization necessitates the liberal nation-state to operate in the interests of corporate capital. Therefore, the conceptualization of the nation-state in studies of nationness and nationalisms (Hobsbawm 1990; Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Chatterjee 1986, 1993; Bhabha 1990) has been re-articulated by current theorists (working across disciplines) within the discourse, and reality, of globalization (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Featherstone 1990; King 1991; Robertson 1992; Rosenau 1990; Dirlik 1996; Appadurai 1996). But the contraction of time-space relations has also made clear that our 'post-national' times are less 'post' than they have been announced (by the market

forces) or decried (by leftist intellectuals). The globality of social movements of ‘universal justice’, ranging from the activism of indigenous people, anti-globalization movements and social forums, are also re-shaping the nation as a tool of resistance to the new imperialism of the market ideology and a notion to reclaim (Rogoff 2000; Jusdanis 2001; Fraser 2005).

Some of these concerns have become more visible to my critical enquiry (also a critical gaze) during my writing, and have underwritten my thinking process. Although this critical movement has created moments of tension in what I had originally thought out as a thesis of experimental poetics’ deconstruction of the Nation, it has also proved fruitful. For it was increasingly clear to me that the critical intervention of the poets that are the focus of this study is not framed by negativity (the dismantling of the Nation) or absolute oppositionality (the reversal/subversion of margin/centre positions) but, rather, is an active re-articulation of the possibilities of the Nation. All poets, I came to note, had come of age at a time when the nation-discourse of the liberal Canadian state was being defined—the age of modernity. Thus I take issue with Robert Kroetsch’s brilliant yet slanted analysis of Canadian writing as having moved from the Victorian to the postmodern. Kroetsch’s provocative statement forced the literary establishment to rethink the position of ‘peripheral writing’—a periphery that should perhaps be re-shaped as the real centre in view of its productive possibilities. But in so doing, Kroetsch disavowed the constitutiveness of the project of modernity to the formation of the Canadian nation, a deflection of the present that confines the history of the nation to the ‘past’. Yet, it is precisely by re-contextualizing Canada’s modernity and internationalism (that is

Canada's position within the global relations of late capitalism) that we can re-read these poetics as radical acts.

The specific poets I have decided to discuss are not a random choice. Although they are undeniably my 'favourite' Canadian writers (thus my bias is invested in the reading), I did not make a choice to fit the thesis framework. While postmodern poetics in Canada have differently and productively engaged with the issues at stake, as Rudy and Butling's study *Writing in Our Time* (2005) shows, not all postmodern poetics are deemed experimental. Few are avant-garde. Fewer intervene in the phantasmatic structure of desire production that enables the Nation to effectively interpellate its subjects ('Hej, you! Me?').

In my discussion, I have avoided defining the "avant-garde"—a term often received with suspicion by Canadian critics for its European tradition as well as its militaristic connotation—while believing that these poetries constituted indeed the avant-garde of their times. In my use of "experimental" I have avoided consigning a definition to the fixity of the page, although I have been accompanied by Bowering's processual understanding of experimental as that which fails. As I discuss in Chapter Two on Phyllis Webb, it is this poetics of failure that generates meaning. But I also want to remark how the failure of the experiment is excess and it is the excessiveness of these poetics to the Nation that I find productive. Excess cannot be re-contained, *jouissance* spilling over (and through) its borders.

Finally, my own desire was also invested in the writing. I was forced to leave out of my discussion a much admired poet, Dionne Brand, whose long poem *No Language is Neutral* casts Canada at the centre of current corporate relations on a global scale.

Although her poetic production is firmly grounded in the race politics of the 1980s, the poem was published in 1990 and already gesturing toward an age self-consciously post-national. Conversely, the temporal narrative of my investigation, between the release of the Massey Report in 1952 and the entry into the NAFTA agreement in 1988, is a conscious choice to shed light on the discourse of the Nation and the experimental long poem in Canada. But all narratives are constructed, all are incomplete. Dionne Brand's politics of non-belonging ("I don't need no fuckin' country") has never abandoned my thinking process and has alerted me to the overdetermined meaning of borders and nations, who is excluded and included; foremost, how the nation-state is inseparable from its older and new colonies, internal and external, its conquered territories (*terra nullius*) and the outsourcing of capital. The nation, therefore, always carries with itself a 'heart of darkness.'

This last chapter was not intended as an explanation, although it also gives the narrative of my writing, not a formal conclusion, but rather as a gesture forward. I wanted to investigate the experimental poetics from 1960s to 1980s grounded in the presentness of my critical and lived position, but the ground continued to shift and despite the outcries for the end of history or the end of the nation, the nation moved fast into its futurity. Yet, unlike Walter Benjamin's angel of history, I did not want to recount the debris of progress but to look at the presentness of the future to see what possibilities the Nation entails for the achievement of social justice and radical democracy.

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