



PILLLS

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**PACIFIC INSTITUTE FOR LANGUAGE  
AND LITERACY STUDIES:**

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2008

# SELECTED THESES / EMPTY SET

Poetry, Politics, and “the Problem of the Police”:  
Notes for Discussion at the ksw “Positions Colloquium”

Self-Valorizing Glossary of Housing-As-Commodity-Form

Roger Farr

# UNSQUATTED HOUSES

Aaron Vidaver

# ESCRACHES

Nothing to Lose But Funding:  
Recognition, Recuperation, and Decolonizing the Culture Apparatus

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## PILLS STATEMENT FOR POSITIONS COLLOQUIUM

*KSW*: “How is poetry a political field of action? What can poetry un/do? What do ‘limits’ mean for poetry? What are the crucial issues in taking a social (ideological) position with in a poetics today? What relationships arise between cultural production and broader social projects?”

*RF, for PILLS*: Historically, the political agency of the avant-garde has been understood largely through the politicization of artistic form, and through a critique of the relationship between “the work” and the process of its institutionalization within the academic field of “art history”. The avant-garde artist, in this account, rejects the commodification of praxis (lived experience) in favour of a renewed, direct engagement with “everyday life”, producing works which are intended to interfere with or empty out exchange value and to return to the work its political and social agency (cf. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*). Or, in another formulation, the avant-garde work is viewed as a “pre-figuration” of new social relations, a site in which “structural homologies” (Bourdieu) between the work and the world (read: political economy) may be read, struggled with, and rearticulated. In both of these readings, we see a foundational formalist axiom: namely, that “the work” is capable of producing certain affective experiences that are denied to the audience due to the instrumentalization of life under capitalism. For instance, the “noise and politics” magazine *Datacide* describes the political efficacy of avant-garde sound this way:

“Musical time is radically different from the time of capital in which our public life proceeds ... musical duration is measurable only in terms of sensibilities, tensions and emotions...”

Thus, the aesthetic or *poetic* practice of creating “radically different” temporal, spatial, emotional, cognitive experiences—what Jameson in *Marxism and Form* calls “the administration of linguistic shocks”—becomes “political” at that point where it overlaps with what could be called an *activist* project of “consciousness raising”: both are aimed at the production of “experiences” which open cognitive space for the emergence of “new subjectivities”. This affect, one hopes, will (somehow) open the possibility for more material or tangible transformations in a broader social field.

In the case of contemporary avant-garde music, the transformation of lived, material social relations by the experience or reception of the work has had some success. The “temporary autonomous zone” of the rave or the festival, as limited and recuperable as it was, at least allowed for the exploration of alternative forms of sociality, largely via the poetics of *duration*: in other words, there was a more or less concrete relationship between the temporal duration of the work (whether measured in BPMs or in the total duration of the gathering/performance), and the emergence of new subjectivities and social relations. Alternative sociality is, in this

case, consequential to the experience of temporality in the work: both meet in “real [historical] time”.

In the case of contemporary avant-garde poetry, however, we feel it must be said that a concrete relationship between the work and its reception in the social field is absent, and that the promise of new forms of social organization is deferred for too long. To be clear, we’re not calling for greater “efficacy” (Andrews) and we’re not lamenting the absence of a literary avant-garde “sub-culture” that might surround our work; rather, we mean that the affective potential of poetry is neutralized by the extent to which it fails to materialize as, or to directly influence, social organization. Because of its theorization as working mainly through the production of “cognitive effects”—a form of “cerebral compensation”—that are mediated through cultural and academic institutions, *the politics of the literary avant-garde are more or less exhausted in the work*. In short, there are few, if any, material site in which avant-garde poetics become more than pre-figurative. [Note: the ksw, as a writer-run collective that is often in an antagonist relationship to other actors in the cultural and political fabric of Vancouver and Canada, could, we think, be understood as an attempt to address this limitation].

“What do ‘limits’ mean for poetry?”, you ask. PILLS is interested in approaching this question by straying collectively into the badlands that lie between avant-garde poetry and radical social struggle. What can anti-capitalist, decolonization, and other autonomous social movements tell us about language? What can the avant-garde poetics of the last half-century tell us about the police? In preparing for tentative forays into this terrain, and in addition to the terms we have defined above, we have found the concepts of affinity, autonomy, and recomposition to be particularly helpful in charting a course of investigation and action – in establishing our “position,” so to speak.

#### EXCERPTS FROM RECENT WORK

(from *XCP: Cross-Cultural Poetics* 15/16, 2006)

**Enclosure:** The end of collective control over the means of subsistence brought about through the collaboration of property owners and the state. First theorized by Marx as “primitive accumulation,” the enclosures signaled “the historic movement which changes producers into waged workers.” Marx described the enclosures as a discrete stage at the dawn of capitalism, in which the English countryside (“the commons”) was literally enclosed by fences, thereby uprooting peasant communities and transforming subsistence agriculture into the industrial production of commodities intended for distribution on an open market. The term has been resuscitated recently by autonomist Marxists, who argue that enclosure is in fact a *continual* process – the very foundation of capitalist reproduction, witnessed today in SAPS (the manufacturing and management of a global “debt crisis”). The Midnight

Notes Collective argues that the terrain of these “New Enclosures” is both immaterial (the internet, information technology, communication) and profoundly material, transforming the very fabric of life itself (genetic engineering, seed patents, privatized water, etc.). Historically, popular response to the old enclosures included arson, theft, property destruction, and rioting. While certain wings of the contemporary anarchist movement have embraced this “diversity of tactics” [see LUMPENPROLETARIAT], most replies to the New Enclosures have been expressed as a desire to “Reclaim the Commons.” Such nostalgia for a lost “organic society” was critiqued by Williams in *The Country and the City*. As the British autonomist collective *Aufheben* notes, in advanced capitalist nations the pressing task is not to *reclaim* the commons, but rather *to transform capital into a commons*. [RF]

**Lumpenproletariat:** The surplus population said to exist outside of the productive apparatuses of capitalism. Riff-raff. Bums. Vagabonds. Beggars. Jailbirds. Hooligans. Lazzaroni. Blouson noir. Goldbrickers. Petty criminals. Ne'er-do-wells. Prostitutes. Hobos. Junkies. Rotters. Knaves. Defectives. Scavengers. Thugz. Layabouts. Despised by Marxists. “The ‘dangerous class’, the social scum, that passively rotting mass” (Marx-Engels 494). “The harshest measures of martial law are impotent against outbreaks of the lumpenproletarian sickness” (Luxemburg 74). Adored by anarchists. “They are ‘individual bawlers’ who offer no ‘guarantee’ and have ‘nothing to lose,’ and so nothing to risk” (Stirner 147). “That rabble ... which alone is powerful enough today to inaugurate the Social Revolution and bring it to triumph” (Bakunin 48). Central for mid-to-late twentieth century anti-colonial & national liberation struggles. “At the core of the lumpenproletariat ... the rebellion will find its urban spearhead” (Fanon 103). “We downed that [Marxist] view when it came to applying it to the black American ghetto-dweller because we were off the block too, Stagoles” (Seale 153). Recent theoretical debate revolves around whether the term “resists the totalizing and teleological pretensions of the dialectic” (Stallybrass 81) or leads to “bolstering of identity cut-off from social relations” (Thoburn 436). “You are not born dangerous-class. You become so the moment you cease to acknowledge the values and constraints of a world from which you have broken free: we are basically referring here to the necessity of wage labour. This *line* is one that very precisely separates the working classes from the dangerous classes” (Becker-Ho). [AV]

**Standard English:** The syntactic, grammatical, and lexical form of written English enforced as the norm. Non-Standard uses of English are stigmatized as “errors” and as signs of failed or incomplete enculturation or socialization. The ideology of Standard English maintains an idea of a pure, transcendent, acontextual correct English in denial of the varieties of English as a global language and the realities of everyday speaking and writing. In the English-speaking settler colonies the failure to reproduce Standard English is also taken as a sign of the failure of a migrant or indigenous person to integrate into the dominant white national culture. Educational institutions demand that teachers apprehend, detain, and “correct” students on

the basis of their ability to reproduce Standard English, putting teachers in the role of language cop and border guard. In return, English language, literature, and composition prerequisites for other programs justify the institutional space English departments occupy, and return to them the sense of moral purpose that feminist, queer, marxist, and postcolonial critics had threatened to relieve. It is often argued that “students [need] access to those standard forms of the language linked to social and economic prestige” (Pennycook) but writing that aspires to social and economic prestige would need to conform to the dialect of the socially and economically prestigious, a dialect that may be antagonistic to the representational requirements of most users of English. [R]

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**SELECTED THESES**  
from *Theses on Fine Weather*

“Revolution brings fine weather.”

– Debord, *The Sick Planet*

3.

*Germany got Bader-Meinhof  
we got conceptual art.*

I rented a cheap basement  
On Payne St., not far from

The scene in Wall's "Eviction  
Struggle." 414 square feet. Bars

In the windows. I had a bad limp.  
I had an unemployment claim

And exterior latex on all my clothes  
Which made for difficulties. In short

My life was a laboratory of troubles  
That needed to be documented and

Labeled before they could be  
Conceptualized. I had hypotheses

But they would need to be tested  
Observed in a city known once for

Its porous boundaries, but which was  
Each day, beginning to resemble

The airport it would become.

17.

*Some people push other people  
who are pushing them back.*

Yes, I do have something  
To declare, but not much

In the way of credit: this utterance  
Will be semantic for many people

But only for a very short time, say  
Between the Hot Autumn of the

General Intellect, when talk was  
Cheap and the text was free

And the Hot Summer of Sales  
When everything came in BULK

[All Power to the Sales!]

Including the pinkish clouds  
Which I notice are lovely as

Are the little grasshoppers  
In the brown grass

The freesias, hydrangeas and gladioli  
All thriving like a series of events. In politics

As in verse, there are no victims  
Only the solidarity of targets. Likewise

In a time of war there is no thought

*Per se*, only strategy and grit

And what my neighbours to the South

And to the East might call

Being-On-God's-Good-Grid. Windmills

Are metonyms, not symbols

Of autonomy, wheelbarrows too

Beside the green tanks.

## 11.

*The values of the shop-keepers persist  
even in the composition of the avant-garde!*

Most literary communities tend  
To follow a specific pattern.

By reproducing this pattern  
You can perfect your writing

Skills, reach your audience, and  
Advance your career. In a well

Organized literary community  
Each writer has a specific purpose

Or role to play. But there is  
A limited number of roles

And unnecessary writers will need  
To be cut. To function properly

In a coherent writing community  
A writer should do *one* of the following:

1. serve as the main writer(s) by making a specific claim
2. provide examples and support for the claims of the main writer(s)
3. act as an emerging writer to establish a link to a new community.

Note you do not need an emerging writer  
However, if the current community

Is to be followed by another community  
Which will conclude the composition.

1.

*Poetry precedes language  
but the police precede poetry.*

At the demo against the first  
Gulf War, she yelled

“Oil is Earth Rape!” and was  
More or less correct – i.e.

She had deduced that particular  
Slogan from the totality of specific

Features of a definite political  
Situation. But when we froze

And allowed ourselves to be  
Kicked, cuffed, and arrested

Or was it the other way around  
The image lost its punctum

Our tactics their poetics. It was  
1990, and we had not yet learned

To parse the syntax of our actions.  
Years later (nuclear testing), we

Would simply activate an alarm  
In the elevator at the Embassy

And flee. Safe in a popular café  
Chain across the street, we

Watched the scene unfold

And felt we were unique.

## 21.

*Conditions don't really "cry out" –  
it's more like a sigh.*

If a large telecommunications  
Company fires several managers  
After a larger company takes control  
Then Canadians who are addicted  
To technology will feel they need  
New phones. If the managers of  
Private, unregulated pools of capital  
Support a certain candidate, then  
Despite the media's repetition of its  
Effective marketing strategy, a national  
Sports franchise will lose more games  
Than it wins. If a television show  
About men in a small town who become  
Full-time caregivers after their wives  
Leave for a week is renewed, then a  
Popular resort will try to shed its out-  
Dated high-rise image. If a number of  
Officers are killed near the border  
Then the state's attempt to make a large  
Military purchase will be thwarted by  
Concerns about espionage. If hunting  
Whales is a tradition that links generations  
Then migrant labourers will seek refuge  
In places where the law is harder to  
Enforce. If another foot washes ashore  
On the West Coast of North America  
Then gay couples in Montreal will object  
To the increasing privatization of public  
Space. If a national police force infiltrates  
The women's movement and collects

Intelligence about a popular entertainer,  
Then a new gene discovery will help detect  
Tumors earlier. If a union is allowed  
To appeal the closure of a retail store  
Then morale will improve when employees  
At an auto-dealer win the lottery. If a man  
Is arrested for an internet scam where  
People pay thousands of dollars for vintage  
Automobiles that never existed, then  
Someone will accidentally spend \$999.99  
On a digital phone application that does  
Nothing but display a glowing red ruby.  
If a politician criticizes China's human  
Rights record on the eve of the Olympic  
Ceremonies then a popular entertainer  
Will say she had no idea she was under  
Surveillance in the 1970s. If an international  
Sex-symbol has her first taste of a faux-  
Chicken sandwich after years of campaigning  
Against a fried-chicken chain, then the FBI  
Will link letters laced with anthrax to an  
Army bio-weapons scientist in Maryland.  
If research conducted in Sweden indicates  
That senior citizens are having a significant  
Amount of sex, then the email of a 29-year-old  
Computer designer will reveal his hatred  
For the West: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*

[...]

24.

*Patriarchy is the occupation force  
of democracy.*

“Son,” he said, “there comes a time  
In every man’s life when he must

Choose between two labs:  
In the one, they’re scrubbing up

To remove his heart; in the other  
They’re washing down to

Chop off his tongue. Either way  
A man’s got to vote if he wants

To complain, which is why dogs  
Lick their balls.”

## 2.

*In real life, words won't  
ruin the beautiful view.*

At the demo against the second  
Gulf War, I yelled

“Oil is Earth Rape!” and was  
Completely incoherent. In the video

Loop, surrounded by the new kids  
In a bloc, we look stupid and self-

Conscious with our pony-tails  
Toques and faded olive drabs.

Unable to adapt to the current situation  
We were simply repeating utterances

Which formerly had been correct  
But which had by then lost all meaning –

Lost as “suddenly” as the sharp turn  
In history was “sudden.”

38.

*Invisibility might very well be  
the last constraint.*

Green is the new red, black  
Remains black, while the greys –

Light, dark, slate and dim  
– Saturate the scene, tend

To be white, like me! – white  
Seeing red, tending towards

Black, and green, against the  
Greys, without blueprints.

## 7.

*It's not always possible these days to distinguish philosophy from statecraft, Stalin from Žižek.*

“language cannot be included either in the category of bases or in the category of superstructures”

“the Soviets are the most all-embracing mass organizations of the proletariat for they and they alone embrace all workers without exception”

“when the proletariat becomes aware of its revolutionary potential this very ‘insight’ transforms it into an actual revolutionary subject”

“the proletariat cannot retain power if it lacks an adequate number of trained cultural and administrative cadres”

“the Party must be armed with revolutionary theory”

“the true task, of course, is to assert the universality of a theory as the result of a hard theoretical work and struggle”

“Lenin, better than anyone else, understood the great importance of theory”

“Lenin was right”

“when ‘flourishing’ capitalism becomes ‘moribund’ capitalism”

“there is a radical difference between language and instruments”

99.

*Maybe poetry could reunite the  
non-instrumental with the vital.*

The calendar says November 30th  
Though the day does not concur

With the sun's aspect. From this window  
A view of an occupied place

To be measured, line by curved line  
And with deference to fences

In living circles, each expansion  
In accordance with the hand releasing

The stone (the *actual* stone), to barricade  
Map, and contain the Pacific flow –

North by northwest, or following the path  
Of most resistance, to the south

– Of capital: a system derived from “liquid  
Assets,” i.e., will fuck anything that *moves*:

Water, labour, time, and “the good earth”  
Or what's left of it to burn.

98.

*By the end of the century, the movement  
was definitely learning to perfect its gestures.*

The day after the riot – “force  
Ranging from shield pushes to

Baton jabs, overhand baton strikes  
And overhead baton strikes” –

She appeared on the front cover  
Of the local paper, her left hand

Raised, index finger pointing *down*  
On a faltering police line.

While the meaning of this gesture  
Is difficult to decode (Lyons points

Out that interpretation of deictic  
Expressions depends on mutual

Knowledge of the specific context  
In which the expression occurs –

“*this* is an unlawful assembly”

– And serves to establish physical  
Co-presence between interlocutors)

From this point forward, when we refer  
To “politics,” we’ll use this other term.

**POETRY, POLITICS AND “THE PROBLEM OF THE POLICE”:  
NOTES FOR DISCUSSION AT THE KSW “POSITIONS COLLOQUIUM”**

Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I propose to call it the police.

—Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*

but you say  
why not do away  
with police altogether?

ok!  
end-goal, yet

police are Alpha and Omega of system itself—last guardians  
(with armed forces)

t'would be the Eve  
of Revolution  
itself

— Rodrigo Toscano, “About The Amadou Diallo Police Shooting”

## 1.

I want to address as directly as I can the questions the ksw collective posed when they initiated this gathering:

How is poetry a political field of action? What can poetry un/do? What do “limits” mean for poetry? What are the crucial issues in taking a social (ideological) position with in a poetics today? What relationships arise between cultural production and broader social projects?

So, a challenge to think through the (im)possibilities of articulating a political “position”, via poetry, in relation to a number of contemporary social, ethical, affective, and ideological coordinates, commitments, imperatives, contradictions, and determinations. For me, and for many others here as well, these determinations first appear arrayed along a social horizon that has been drastically foreshortened by the rapid “advances” of global capitalism, and, more specifically, by the unprecedented expansion of the ideological “hardware” of neoliberalism: maquiladoras, protest pens, detention centres, security zones...in short, *the police*. Such spaces, which, incredibly, are still discussed by journalists as though they exist as *discrete sets*, now intersect at so many points and share so many internal elements that they have become metonymic. Does one ever actually leave the “International Holding Area” when one “exits” the airport in Frankfurt? Are cities themselves not becoming enormous airports – airport / city / detention centres – in which people are detained and electrocuted by police? These are some of the shifting “coordinates” with which poetry tries to “position” itself today.

## 2.

Neoliberalism has reset the register of the term “police” from an image of “the boys in blue” to the more fluid and insidious notion of “policing” – a *service* that is by no means tied to the bulkiness of a national or municipal “police force,” even though these highly-visible bodies, so essential in the overall maintenance of the spectacle, remain quite useful (i.e., cost efficient), in that the public is generally willing to pick up their tab. Of course, modern police forces, which find their roots in private militias hired by local authorities to carry our specific tasks, emerged side by side with the modern nation-state, and their primary role has been to “squelch,” to use Jules Boykoff’s excellent verb, “domestic” and “internal” threats to the state. However, with the retooling of the nation-state and the softening of its boundaries (boundaries which, as Agamben notes, secret-service and intelligence agencies have always ignored anyway), and the subsequent “emancipation” of capital from bottom-heavy national economies, *every threat to the expansion of the global economic system becomes an “internal” threat*, subject to the new technologies of policing. The spectacular dissolution of the nation-state not only emancipates

capital, it emancipates the police; in so doing, it collapses the distinction between “internal” and “external” threats, allowing for the emergence of a global sovereign police, while *expanding the sphere of criminality*. The lines separating the police from other state apparatuses (such as the military, schools, hospitals, art galleries, etc., but mostly the military...) become meaningless, as do the lines between crime, sedition, and everyday life.

### 3.

Where does one go these days if one wants *to evade the police*?

### 4.

Argot is commonly defined as “slang used by various groups, including but not limited to thieves and other criminals, to prevent outsiders from understanding their conversations.” Often described as a kind of linguistic degradation, a mutation, or even a disease within a more sophisticated national language (or, less sensationally, as merely “idiomatic”), argot was famously defined by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables* as “nothing more nor less ... than the ugly, restless, sly, treacherous, venomous, cruel, crooked, vile, deep, deadly language of misery ... we can hardly recognize it. It is really the French tongue? The great human tongue? We distinguish questions and answers, we perceive, without understanding, a hideous murmur, sounding almost like human tones, but nearer a howling than speech. This is argot.” Argot, then, poses a serious *threat* to the police, for whom it is intended to evade. As Alice Becker-Ho observes, argot “is the complete opposite of the language spoken by slaves: it is therefore alien to all forms of ideology. Authorities everywhere know this only too well, and dread the thought of it.”

But argot is not merely “a language”: it is “an independent and unified *practice*” that unites “a brotherhood of rogues.” Argot is, above all, *a form of contract*, a social bond that establishes “insiders” and “outsiders.” As Becker-Ho writes in “The Essence of Jargon”: “slang is what the dangerous classes truly possess. What differentiates it from ordinary language, however, is the fact that, in addition to fulfilling the function of communication, it has one of protection to fulfil as well. As *a language of conflict*, it must *perforce be strategical*. It must speak, as it were, two languages at once: “*chachipé con jujána*” (truth with falsehood). It therefore serves on the one hand to inform friends and accomplices by speaking the truth to them, and on the other, to elicit, by deceiving him, no undue attention from the enemy.”

With its ability to evade police, while at the same time building new social bonds among participants, argot is exemplary of the kind of language practices poetry might aspire to today.

## 5.

I want to propose two measures for the political efficacy of radical poetry and poetics today. The first is destructive: to what extent does the work *engage in conflict with police* (again, “police” here refers broadly to the new architectures of constraint, as well as to “the police”). The second is more “creative”: to what extent does the work help to create a new social terrain – a “literal place” – in which we can develop autonomous forms of communication and sociality – “an independent and unified practice” – *without police*?

Unfortunately, past literary explorations into these areas, especially the latter, usually limit themselves to the production of “cognitive affects” rather than “the construction of situations” – concrete, *lived* experience and practices. In this case, poetry is, at best, a kind of manual about how to “feel different”; at worst, the poem becomes merely cerebral compensation, *deferring* new social relations rather than becoming actively *constitutive* of them (for more on this, see the “PILLS Statement”). In its unwavering commitment to the tactics of “focusing attention,” “making strange,” and “changing perception,” the literary avant-garde seems to have been permanently embalmed in the thick wax of political “consciousness raising” (CR). While I can’t historicize the CR metaphor here – a metaphor that has informed both social movements and literary avant-gardes since the 60s, if not longer – I will say that the notion that one could use one’s writing to “lift” readers out of their ideological stupor not only sidelines the dubious epistemological status of “consciousness,” it overlooks some serious problems inherent in “the dominant ideology thesis,” not the least of which is the erasure of the agency of the reader, and the disavowal of the everyday acts of sedition and criminality in which all “oppressed” people necessarily partake. As Althusser argues, “if it is true that the ISAs represent the form in which the ideology of the ruling class must necessarily be realized, and the form in which the ideology of the ruled class must necessarily be measured and confronted, ideologies are ‘born’ not in the ISAs but from the social classes at the grips in the class struggle: from *their conditions of existence, their practices, their experience of the struggle*, and so on.” The poetics of CR, with its emphasis on cognition, perception, and the critique of ideology, effectively seals off and neutralizes the political agency of the avant-garde by separating it from the practices and experiences of those it seeks to “enlighten.”

## 6.

Where does one go these days if one wants *to evade poetry*?

## 7.

The creation of new social terrains will probably also involve disruption of the old social terrain. Jules Boykoff and Kaia Sand’s *Landscapes of Dissent: Guerilla Poetry and*

*Public Space* documents some recent attempts by poets to “[engage] in locational conflict through artistic means.”

The four projects they consider include “Poetry is Public Art (PIPA);” “Poet Activist Community Extension (PACE);” “The Agit-Truth Collective;” and “Sidewalk Blogger.” The tactics of these groups range from the development of “poetic” slogans, to posterings, public performance, and interventionist signage bordering on vandalism. In one project, members of the Agit-Truth Collective collaborated with farmers in Eastern Washington to line rural roads with serialized signs reading: “From Robin Hood / He’s quite the switch / Bush robs the poor / To help the rich.” The poetic “value” of this work lies not so much in the linguistic innovation or aesthetics of the sign per se, but in the new social relations made possible by collaborating with members of a community that are generally not considered by either literary or activist circles. In this sense, the politics of the poem are expressed as friendship and solidarity articulated along shared lines of opposition.

Boykoff and Sand’s attempt to move beyond a notion of poetry that accepts its incarceration in the form of the book is promising: they ask “What if a poem were lodged in public space”? In other words, what if one not only took *to* the street, but, to borrow from Heriberto Yépez, took *on* the street as a “unit of composition”? By putting poetry into direct confrontation with the maintenance of “public order,” gurellia poetry, they argue, can begin to “contest relations defined through private property...[and] attempt to reorient spatial relations, making use of public space as the jagged terrain of political struggle. While the state often uses the built environment to surveil and curtail activity, these culture workers (re)produce spaces of poetic dissent.”

## 8.

In “Secure Channels,” the last sequence in my book *SURPLUS*, I used the Situationist practice of *détournement* to render useless a list of search terms purportedly used by the FBI to monitor email correspondence as part of their ongoing development of data-mining technologies and programs like TIA (Total Information Awareness) and MATRIX (Multi-State Anti-Terrorism Information Exchange), both of which exemplify the ways in which “police without borders” have expanded their own sovereign rights in tandem with an expansion in the sphere of criminality. Data-mining technologies, which essentially act as wiretaps on the internet, use a number of methods to collect data, one of which is to “cluster” certain words and phrases, or even virtual “movements” (transactions, browsing history, communications, etc.). However, unlike the surveillance of a phone, which is directly linked to an individual’s house, on the internet there are no unique lines or circuits belonging to individuals: all data is transmitted alongside data from other users. Thus, in order to monitor the individual “suspect”, the police also monitor thousands of “innocents” simultaneously. As a document by the International

Campaign Against Mass Surveillance reports: “Information on the false positive rates for [these] programs is not readily available. But an indication of the rate can be gleaned from the number of people Seisint Inc. told state authorities showed statistical likelihood of being terrorists in its bid for the contract to develop MATRIX: 120,000.”

By aligning the poetic method of parataxis with a commitment to anti-capitalist and anarchist politics, my aim with “Secure Channels” was more pragmatic than aesthetic: I wanted to offer an analysis of the ways in which language was being deployed by police to decompose and criminalize “the movement,” and to respond with an unreadable work of “poetic counter-intelligence” – a kind of linguistic “Cop Watch.”

## 9.

Rodrigo Toscano’s “About The Amadou Diallo Police Shooting” engages the conflict with police by offering both an analysis of “the problem of the police” as well as an insightful critique of the idea that this “problem” is of such a nature that it can be *solved* through “reforms,” “accountability,” “democratization,” or any other compensatory measures (including poetry); for, as the poem may suggest, “the problem of the police” *is* the democratization of police—or, as one Greek anarchist slogan puts it “The Police Is the Occupation Force of Democracy.”

The historical and social occasion of the poem is the shooting of Amadou Diallo, a 22-year-old Guinean man who was killed by four white officers of the New York City Police Department’s plainclothes Street Crime Unit on February 5, 1999. The police, who were searching the building for “a suspect,” said they believed Diallo was in possession of a weapon. They were wrong, but it took 41 shots, 19 of which struck Diallo, before they figured that out. In the days that followed, anti-police demonstrations and actions were unceasing, and after nearly two months, all four officers were indicted on charges that included reckless endangerment and one count of second-degree murder. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2000, all four were exonerated.

Toscano’s poem is dated January 28, 2000, just one month before the verdict. It deals not so much with “the facts of the case” (which by then had no doubt “fatigued” most New Yorkers) but rather with its reception, and more precisely with the politics of the movement that emerged in response:

...are you  
for something like:  
an Independent Community Review Board of the police?

ability to hire and fire, approve or reject “programs” carried out by  
precincts—

checking The Department's agency—self-validating authority  
100% hegemonic

a something beyond  
“(Just) Fuck Tha Pigs”  
prurience

and so, what demand

pursue to

concretize

and how would such a board be constituted?  
appointed by same villains?

or elected—accountable

Recognizing that “the problem of police” – especially sovereign police – cannot be solved via a set of demands placed on the legal system, Toscano hones in on the real “problem”:

they did: a crime: the cops—  
what “criminal” statutes, are cops held to?

and so can we talk about it—Power

In the end, any confrontation with the police that relies on the legal instruments or rights extended by the state is doomed to fail, for it will always end up strengthening and redeeming the very social structure that deploys its police in the first place.

As Alfredo Bonanno puts it in *The Anarchist Tension*:

There is no such thing as the solving of the problem of the police. Yet from a democratic point of view it would be possible to solve some aspects of it by democratizing certain structures, changing policemen's attitudes and so on. Now, to think that this might be a solution to the problem of control and repression would be as stupid as it is illogical. In actual fact, it is nothing other than a way of regulating repression in keeping with the interests of power.

**EMPTY SET**

“Can we hold on to the possibility of a self-consciousness that does not, simply because it must be critical of oppressive forces, repeatedly fold in upon itself, becoming self-referential—and self-incarcerating—in the form of that non-communicative language that Foucault (mis)recognizes as ‘literature as such?’”

— Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*

“What prevents communication is communicability itself.”

— Giorgio Agamben, “Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*”

Set a position to guarantee  
there is no set position.  
Set the time in the time  
settings. Say what others  
have set before. Set a game  
to settle a score. Set speaks  
in set. Set is at war.

*I think we should agree on set.*

*I think we should enjoy set.*

The general conditions are set  
to benefit the top 5% set.  
The table is set for consumption  
of the surplus set. Set the dials  
to return to set. Set is not a thing  
like “elite set.” Set is coming up.

*I say let set deal with China.*

*I say let China take set on.*

Set by proxy. Cross-set alliances.  
Set against set. Set regressing to set.  
Set at the point of convergence  
with set. The metrics of set pre-set.  
Set is in circulation. Set has been  
genetically modified. Set is a solvent.

*I say set because no one else did.*

*I wrote set and it makes no difference.*

Set mediates the relationship  
between this set and the other  
set. Set is weaponry. Set is equal  
to weaponry. So let set equal

weaponry. Set the leadership  
to protect the interests of set.  
Ethical, smart, green set. Iron  
set. Velvet set. Strong set  
imagery. Set has broken out.

*I resist set and the maintenance of set.*

*I find closed-circuitry set comforting.*

The problem is the representation  
of set. Set is not the problem.  
Set was set in the Seventies.  
Set was set in the Thirties.  
Right now set is poor compensation  
For the total breakdown of set.  
It's difficult to talk about set  
in the terms provided by set.  
Set only talks with set, etc.

*I reject the either / or logic of set.*

*I support demands for more and for less set.*

Set is not identical to the total  
number of set elements in set.  
Set is a sphere of pure set: a set  
containing only set. A set space  
facilitating the processing of set  
without the usual set of restrictions.  
In which case set is referred to as  
“twin set” or “in-set.” Set-as-such  
is consensual. Set surrounds us.

*I will argue that set coincides with its visage.*

*I will not support more funding for set.*

Set can be calculated and set can  
be felt. The value of set is set  
against the rise and fall of set  
on a scale of set to set. As in Zola  
this set will foreground social setting.  
Every set is a boundary, every boundary  
a large, metal set. Here, set is always  
shown in orange. Set is exceptional.

*I doubt set has any justification.*

*I'm certain set will strike.*

Set swarms where set is impeded  
even when the constituents of set  
are unknown to each set. Equalized  
set rotating around a set of demands.  
Set in common. Mass set. Visible set  
crystallizing into a system of applied  
set. Set moves but has no card.

*I believe set is set to become a classic.*

*I agree set is more innovative.*

Set is nourishing the next generation  
of set. Set is omnivorous and set is false.  
Set wiped set off the face of the earth.  
Only when set does a bit here and a bit  
there will set be able to live with set.  
For set to count as set it must fit the  
set that set has set out. Total set.

*I can only try to describe set.*

*I can't provide a diagnosis of set.*

Set is set off in brackets or set is a concrete object. The parts of set can be anything, including other sets. Set is the set of colors of the flag. If set is also a member of set, then set is said to be set. The power of set over set can be defined as the set of all sets.

*I want to abbreviate set.*

*I think we need to do something about set.*

Set is set on finding new ways to construct new sets from existing sets. Two sets can be set together. Associating every element of one set with every element of another set could produce more sets. And when set is set apart from set set may require special names. One of these is empty set.

[...]

## UNSQUATTED HOUSES

















































## SELF-VALORIZING GLOSSARY OF HOUSING-AS-COMMODITY-FORM [RF]

**Amortization:** to vacate the land they are occupying

**Appraisal:** “part of the process” for redevelopment

**Appreciation:** living in squalor in a lock up filled with used syringes and human excrement

**Approved Lender:** at the expense of the local people

**Assumption Agreement:** will be attained by 2010

**Balanced Market:** it’s kind of understood that this is a criticism of everyday life

**Blended Payment:** on public land, having no rights

**Breach of Contract:** a warrant to evict the latest group

**Buyer’s Market:** occupying the site and confronting anybody

**Closing Costs:** living on the pavement

**Conditional Offer:** demolished under police watch

**Counteroffer:** unoccupied and in foreclosure

**Deed:** living on forest land

**Delinquency:** attempting to force themselves into

**Deposit:** trying to use the property for parties

**Depreciation:** a building belonging to the Ministry

**Discharge:** appalling conditions in a leafy setting

**Down Payment:** to clear the area

**Easement:** reducing the cost and making it affordable

**Eminent domain:** not harming the building

**Equity:** homeless people the city calls “tenants”

**Eviction:** set to be kicked

**Foreclosure:** the areas along rail lines

**Freehold:** an unsavoury city apartment building

**Gross Debt Service Ratio:** the counterpart of the tenements

**High-Ratio Mortgage:** given another three months to relocate

**Holdback:** a piece of land in dispute

**Indenture:** the homeless don’t really work

**Interest Rate:** when the Government takes back

**Lien:** humbly moved to a new site

**Liquid asset:** closed for renovations

**Listing:** condemned to harsh conditions

**Loan-to-Value Ratio:** creating space for modern developments

**Lump Sum Prepayment:** living together in a group

**Mortgage Payment:** pelted with stones and doused with boiling water

**Mortgage:** the power to remove them

**Net Worth:** first claimed rights to graze the land

**Operating Costs:** illegal land allocations of the past

**Power of Sale:** to scratch out a living by fishing, hunting or farming on “free land”

**Principal:** a former social services building

**Renewal:** a protracted standoff

**Right of First Refusal:** a bit of a transient problem

**Seller's Market:** blocking a commercial property redevelopment

**Survey:** Land Settlement Agency

**Tenant:** rent-payer

**Tenure:** government assistance in legitimately acquiring homes

**Term:** three-story abandoned home

**Total Debt Service Ratio:** a lot of degradation

**Valuation:** illegal settlers trooping into the forest

**Vendor:** resonating in the investment sector

**Zoning Bylaws:** theft of land and money internet

**NOTHING TO LOSE BUT FUNDING:  
RECOGNITION, RECUPERATION AND DECOLONIZING THE CULTURE APPARATUS**

As an introduction to a panel discussion at the Positions colloquium (presented by the Kootenay School of Writing and the vivo Media Arts Centre in Vancouver, Canada, August 19-24 2008) entitled “Alpha Bets, Language Gambles on Land”, Rita Wong writes:

The session [...] invites both indigenous and non-indigenous writers to discuss the challenges of negotiating with English as an imposed colonial, expansionist language and the shifts that may come when writers work to respect the indigenous cultures and languages of the lands on which they live. Preceding and exceeding colonial frames, indigenous perspectives can and do challenge colonial norms that posit land as property to be bought, sold, and exploited. Situating language as an act on land, a possible decolonization and deterritorialization of it, could position writers/readers/speakers in ways that foreground ecological interrelations.

In light of structural obstacles to decolonization (neoliberal capitalist economy, neoimperial ideological state apparatuses, etc), how might writers build other/wise? How do the range of questioning practices that writers bring to bear upon colonial inheritances stir up language(s) and inform how they work/play as poets, teachers, cultural organizers, and/or perhaps tricksters?

In addressing these issues I would like to consider the link between language and poetics and the “structural obstacles to decolonization” that Wong mentions above. I want to talk about language and poetics as, first, problems of cultural organizing. That is, in fact, where the idea for this panel began, in a discussion about how, and if, this colloquium should represent a specific set of issues relating to struggles to preserve aboriginal languages. In our efforts to make solidarity with struggles like these, our problems have as much to do with how we get our money, our positions in the cultural apparatus, how we publish and distribute our writing, where we meet, and who we invite, as they do with language and writing itself. If our desire is to decolonize, we must recognize the futility of working through colonizing institutions. To the extent that poetics are embedded, develop and are distributed through a state cultural apparatus, a market apparatus, an elite philanthropic apparatus, an academic apparatus—in short, the reproductive (as opposed to transformative) function of culture within the nation-state—the question of organization is inextricable from poetics. What kinds of solidarity with aboriginal struggle do our institutions and our material geographies (where we work, read, publish, how we travel, where we spend the night) foster / permit / create? Which solidarities do we consider possible and desirable, and which do we consider impossible, inconvenient, or not our problem? Because, as Rita Wong reminds us, the land and its languages are important, and their preservation is urgent, we don’t want to waste our time trying to reform institutions that may be not only

recalcitrant, but which may also recuperate our efforts to make change to preserve and strengthen their own power. Can cultural institutions be decolonized? Can they “align” with indigenous cultures? Can the regulations and structures of galleries, universities, and the publishing industry “respect indigenous cultures, languages, and perspectives?” Or do we, through our efforts to include and represent, merely “educate the oppressor?”

In his book *Redress: Inside The Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*, Roy Miki reflects on the Canadian state’s recuperation of its own racist past through its recognition, in 1988, of injustices done to Japanese Canadians during the second world war and their subsequent inclusion into the state that had once refused to recognize them as citizens. For Miki, the recognition and inclusion of people of Japanese ancestry into Canada required the discursive shifts towards identity and human rights that developed through the 1960s and 70s. Miki argues that “once their wartime treatment was seen as a ‘black mark’ in Canadian history, the injustices they had endured began to call for more social and political recognition. Such recognition could even strengthen national coherence, particularly in demonstrating the capacity of the liberal nation to address its racist past”(313). The Japanese Canadian strategy in the redress movement, Kirsten Emiko Mcallister claims, was “to write themselves into the nation’s public sphere”(322). “In reading themselves into the nation as the agents of redress,” Miki argues,

the Japanese Canadians who were now named “Canadians of Japanese ancestry” [...] were also incorporated into the nation as subjects who had been redressed. While they enjoyed the euphoria of their achievement, the nation, represented by the Prime Minister and the House of Commons, was symbolically redeemed by its acceptance of redress. In this interchange, the ‘Japanese Canadian’ identity that was constituted by a history of injustices at the hands of the nation was *given up as a gift* to the nation and therefore ceased to exist in the conditions of its desire for a resolved future. (323, my emphasis)

Through recognition and apology from the state, the agent of injustice against them, Japanese Canadians and other apologized-to and redressed groups (Chinese Canadians who paid the head tax, aboriginal survivors of residential schools, for example) can “enter a post-redress condition of new transformations and limitations”(325). There is the possibility of closure, healing, and justice, a kind of “truth and reconciliation”. The benefit for the state is that it can clear its accounts with the past and move into an enlightened future in which, it promises, such things won’t happen again.

Tell that to Maher Arar or any of the people held on security certificates. In the context of redress (the late 1980s), the future, as Miki points out, was the future of neoliberal globalization. In this context, “redress [encouraged] a reevaluation of

Canadian citizenship at a critical juncture in the federal government's efforts to mediate a new global economy"(324). As it turns out, citizenship continues to be a battleground, taking the form of debates about the limits of multiculturalism itself in the discourses of "reasonable accommodation" and "the limits of tolerance". The violation of the civil and human rights of new groups of citizens and non-citizens is justified by new appeals to security and so-called "Canadian values". Neoliberal globalization, as we now know, strengthened the state's borders and repressive apparatus, and has prompted the worst sorts of nationalist backlash in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Austria, in the settler colonies of Australia and Canada, and in the imperial rampages of the United States.

In autonomist marxist analysis, the state's recuperation of its own crimes through the manipulation of recognition and inclusion is one of the ways in which it manages, on behalf of capital, our rebellions and desires for liberation. In this analysis, the struggle for redress, recognition, and apology are moments of "recomposition": Japanese Canadians, the families of head tax payers, the survivors of residential schools, and other groups, organize themselves against the marginalizing and poisonous identities thrust upon them by the state, and assert a preferred identity, the truth of their experience of history, and their demand for justice. This is a potential threat to the power of the state because its crimes are exposed, its version of history is shown to be distorted, its subjects find their autonomous agency—in short, the illusion of fairness and representation the state requires to govern is threatened. To restore the illusion the state accepts responsibility for its crimes, showing that it is capable of acknowledging mistakes, and, as Miki shows, thereby proves itself to be capable of justice and fairness, legitimating future exercises of power, buying time, faith, and trust for the crimes it will need to commit later on the bodies of new groups of people. In this way, the state "decomposes" the threat to its legitimacy certain groups posed to its legitimacy by the unredressed, unapologized-to condition of certain groups. I do not mean to question the importance of recognition and apology for the groups who have struggled so hard for it, nor do I want to suggest that they should remain victims. Indeed, the new identity formations Miki claims are made possible by redress and recognition can themselves be "recompositions" against the state. I mean that in apology and recognition the state has found a discourse that allows it to continue to victimize and exploit, to manage race, difference, and citizenship on behalf of capital.

We can see a similar dynamic in aboriginal land-claims struggles. Illegal until 1951, the struggle by indigenous people to reclaim the land that was stolen from them and win autonomy from the Canadian state can be seen as recompositional in the sense that its focus has been the achievement of self-government and the recognition of quasi-national status—to become a First Nation. The articulation of indigenous nationalism has fostered tremendous creativity and cultural renewal. However, Kwakwaka'wakw historian Zig-Zag, in the pamphlet *Northwest Coast*

*Indigenous Resistance to Colonization*, claims that “indigenous legal and political struggle [...] has become a specialized body of law requiring expensive, professional legal teams. Land claims and aboriginal rights cases are now a multi-million dollar industry”(34). “Although it does not mobilize large numbers of Indigenous people, and instead relies mostly on white lawyers, academics etc.,” Zig Zag writes, “the legal strategy is still promoted as the primary (if not only) form of indigenous struggle. Not surprisingly it has from the start been officially sanctioned and funded by the government”(35). By recognizing and acknowledging only a certain type of aboriginal claim, by negotiating through the mechanism of its own law, and by recognizing leaders created through the band council system—a system that is the product of its own *Indian Act*—land claims decompose aboriginal struggle by “[diverting] people away from resistance and [reaffirming] the state’s legitimacy as a ‘neutral arbiter’ in society (and, by extension, its courts). This is clearly false, as history shows us”(35).

Our work as artists / intellectuals / teachers / critics / activists to “recompose” ourselves against capital and its agent, the state, is also susceptible to recuperation and decomposition. Sometimes we are directly in the pay of the state and rely on it for our livelihood, and sometimes we make application to it in order to fund the production, distribution, and discussion of our work. In this alone it functions to decompose our struggles, because by “supporting” us it can claim to be open, free, and just. It also decomposes in the form of organization it imposes. Anybody who has served on the board or collective of an arts organization knows the organizational strings attached to a Canada Council grant. Anybody working in an academic institution understands the racket behind publishing, conferences, and the tenure system.

One of the discursive means we use to resist and intervene in these imposed forms of organization is through the now-commonplace acknowledgment in certain activist, literary, and academic spaces that a speaker is on “unceded aboriginal land”, and the thanking of indigenous people for allowing the speaker to be on this land. The power of the statement derives partly from its displacement of the sovereignty of the Canadian state, and partly from its shift of agency to indigenous people, by suggesting that the speaker’s presence on Indian land is in some way conditional, contingent, and potentially revocable. But this agency is tricky, a trickster. By thanking, the speaker suggests that hospitality has been extended, and can be withdrawn. By thanking we inscribe a welcome, assume a generosity, whether it has been offered or not. Have we been welcomed? Are we allowed to be on this land? Who welcomes us, who allows us, and who does not?

Images of welcoming aboriginality are ubiquitous on the northwest coast. Locally, the most offensive example is certainly the use of the inuit inukshuk as a symbol for the Vancouver franchise of the Olympic corporation. This is a bare-faced appropriation: a corporation privatizes a cultural artefact, turns it into a logo, a

trademark, a brand, without the permission of or compensation to the people whose culture it represents. More recuperative are the uses of the sculptures of Haida artist Bill Reid, which greet travellers at the Vancouver airport, and mark Canadian territory at the embassy in Washington, DC. Reid's figures are also featured on the Canadian twenty-dollar bill, a distinction he shares with French-Canadian author and former head of the Canada Council, Roch Carrier. Roch Carrier's nostalgic story, "The Hockey Sweater", a parable of anglophone / francophone relations, is featured on the Canadian five-dollar bill. Here aboriginal art, story, and perspective—at the borders, at the moments and locations of exchange—is made to fit inside the "three founding nations" myth of Canada.

But of course, when we acknowledge aboriginal territory, our intention is to *displace* the Canadian state, not affirm it. Our intention is to make solidarity by recognizing the claims of aboriginal people upon the land and to ground the subsequent discussion in this perspective. But instead the utterance inverts the actual power relationship and effaces hostility, conflict, and resistance. The proceedings that follow such an utterance are rarely grounded either discursively or materially in a decolonizing perspective.

The colloquium we are attending, for example, is funded by money attached to the 2010 Olympics, which are opposed by many aboriginal groups (many aboriginal groups also support the Olympics). What form should our solidarity take in this case? One response is to "take the money and refuse the vision" by using the colloquium to sponsor anti-Olympic art and organizing. Unfortunately, *that is* the vision: a celebration of the diversity of opinions, of cultures, of freedom of expression through art. If we use this opportunity to "raise the consciousness" of conference-goers about the plight of aboriginal languages, we can thank the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee for making the funds available to do it. Another example of the gap between our desire for and discursive efforts towards decolonization and the organizational forms we insert them in is provided by the organizing of the transcanadas conference in Vancouver in 2006. Catering and other services were provided to conference participants by Delta Hotels, which was under active aboriginal boycott for their role in resort development on aboriginal territory. Despite the conference's supposedly radical agenda and the participation of aboriginal writers and scholars, the organizing committee claimed they were helpless, bound by the contractual obligations their co-sponsor, Simon Fraser University, had with the Delta Hotels corporation. That is undoubtedly true, and exactly my point: the organizational structure of most literary and academic activity makes it very difficult to create solidarity, and very easy to cooperate with the requirements of state and corporation.

Which of these contradictions do we take seriously? Which do we ignore? How do we rank our imperatives? These are questions we ask when we assume, in Margaret Thatcher's infamous phrase, that "there is no alternative", which is another way of

saying that “there is no outside” to capital and state, so we must be “within-and-against.” These are dead ends I won’t rehearse here. Instead I’ll conclude with some speculative alternatives.

In his essay “Protest Genres and the Pragmatics of Dissent” Roger Farr argues that our forms of protest—marches and rallies, for example—are ineffective to the extent to which they are “readable”, or recognizable, by the police and the media. When we pitch our slogans to the cameras and stick to the route assigned to us by the City, we censor and police ourselves, internalizing the rules and boundaries of the state and the media. By ignoring such restrictions, by ceasing to construct slogans and actions that meet the expectations of our guardians and sponsors, we construct new forms of sociability. We become “for ourselves” in creative ways, and our actions are harder to recuperate. If our intellectual and artistic work is to be similarly irruptive and disruptive, if it is to break free from the reproductive uses to which it is put and become a means of recomposition, perhaps we should turn away from the “genres” of the colloquium, the conference, the seminar, the opening, the reading, the grant application, etc. which we endlessly reproduce, and which are so depressingly familiar. We might remember also that outsiders recognize these genres as alienating and elitist, granting them prestige but also regarding them as out of touch with reality. We’ve got nothing to lose but our funding.

Finally, I want to question the post-identity imperative that literary and academic gatherings must “represent” social diversity. Maybe some struggles and discourses should be incommensurable. Maybe a decolonizing perspective requires us not to include it, or represent it, but to give up the privileged, stolen locations from which we make the invitation. David Marriott’s critique of “language writing” is helpful here. As Marriott understands it, language writing “[breaks] down the semantic and syntactical codes of discourse and representation at the level of poetic form, [and by doing so] makes manifest the ideological workings of realist discourse and representations.” He cites Robert Grenier’s slogan “I HATE SPEECH” as emblematic. Marriott critiques this as an “oppositional political aesthetics” by arguing that

marginalized voices—black women and men writers for example—have traditionally had their claims to representation, their positions of performativity, silenced, ignored, and oppressed. Grenier’s dismissal of speech has a different ring entirely if one’s speech has not been a privileged source of positionality and individuation but has been a source of an agonized attempt to make oneself HEARD.

Mark Nowak, I think, has made a similar critique of language writing as “the wages of whiteness”.

This explains, for me, some of the discomfort between those who possess “marginalized voices” and those who seek to “[break] down the semantic and syntactical codes of discourse and representation at the level of poetic form”. Of course these categories overlap, but they also constitute a serious difference in ideas about poetry as a field of politics. For writers for whom speech *has* been a “privileged source of positionality and individuation”, semantic and syntactical breakdown, the deconstruction of that privilege, is exactly the task. These imperatives may be incommensurable, but they are in solidarity.

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ESCRACHES <sup>i</sup>

“The global standpoint is one in which we look at the world as spectators, the mass-mediated outlook that turns us into concerned individuals, concerned about issues that come to us only as representations. The constricted sphere of the situation, however, is one whose configuration we are responsible for. We produce and are produced by the situations we inhabit. Either our practices are those of the individual-spectator and thus keep in place certain values, bonds, and affects that reproduce the centrality of state power and the pervasiveness of market relations, or we are the persons in situations who are open to producing and maintaining a different, noncapitalist sociability.”<sup>ii</sup>

“THIS IS A CALL. That is to say it aims at those who hear it. The question is not to demonstrate, to argue, to convince. We will go straight to the evident.”<sup>iii</sup>

“I’d like to dedicate this one to all the soldiers fighting in Chicago, Milwaukee, and New York...Oh yes, and all the soldiers fighting in Vietnam.”<sup>iv</sup>

“Don’t start me talkin’  
I’ll tell everything I know  
I’m gonna break up this signifyin’  
Somebody got to go.”<sup>v</sup>

“Opening the field”, we discover where the bodies are buried

*buried in holes in the desert*

*from Sarajevo to Baghdad*

*dedicated to all the soldiers fighting in Seattle, Quebec City, Genoa*

This new shit's a good score

my wife is happy, I ask the doctor for more

I walk the streets but it's not like before

when all I could see was the class war

Because what's good for me  
Is good for society.<sup>vi</sup>

Courage, my ass.

I want to get this wise guy out of my poetry

but I don't become dangerous-class until

I cease to acknowledge the values and constraints of a world from  
which I want to break free: I mean  
the necessity of wage labour <sup>vii</sup>

Maxine says "you couldn't survive without him."

**blood kondo**

**no Olympics on stolen land** <sup>viii</sup>

RCMP Constable Khomphet Khamphoune, 33, tried to buy oral sex, touched, and offered marijuana to a 16 year old girl after arresting her for shoplifting. His supervisor, RCMP Superintendent John Reid, said that the constable's actions were "professional [and] if anything, his unbridled enthusiasm made him vulnerable to this kind of situation." <sup>ix</sup>

*fighting in Clichy*

“the rigid command of scarcity  
in the midst of fecundity”

“successive and characteristic sites of struggle: the commons, the plantation, the  
ship, and the factory”<sup>x</sup>

take the slaves from Africa

bring them to the plantations in America

bring the product of their labour          cotton

to  
Manchester

for the British factories                          and set off again for Africa

this is the circuit of capitalist production

that even today reproduces itself

by proposing once again

the expropriation of land                          brutal labour conditions

and slavery<sup>xi</sup>

*a desert blown by violent neoliberal winds which blasted existing bonds and intensified the process  
of dispersion*





there's been an outbreak of pissing on war memorials <sup>xii</sup>

emptying Molson's and Timmy's

on monuments to the nation's war dead

jobs from Upper Canada, lawyers' sons

future Parliamentarians

salute the kids their grandfathers sent to die

us, their oil economy cannon fodder;

And the interview with the widow of the Canadian soldier who, in the sensitive framing of the CBC radio host, "took an axe to the head",

whipping up support for the war by sending schoolchildren to the battlefields of France,

the Stanley Cup to Afghanistan,

yellow "Support The Troops" ribbons for police cars.

## blood diamonds

“The music conjured up images of white tourists being hacked to death on the fringes of tropical golf courses”<sup>xiii</sup>

“Famous fortunes were made in Mexico. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil bought in on the ground floor of development. The refined, art-loving Guggenheims befouled the air of El Paso-Juarez with their refinery for a century. J.P. Morgan established banks and annexed great swatches of the Mexican countryside with greenbacks [...] The Hearsts claimed immense tracts of Mexican forest lands in the Chimilapas on the Oaxacan Isthmus and the Tarahumara Sierra of Chihuahua.”<sup>xiv</sup>

“Almost twice as many traveling Canadians were assaulted in Mexico than in any other foreign country so far this decade”<sup>xv</sup>

Now that’s *ya basta!*

## blood tuna

To Serve and Molest

SINK—Single Income No Kids,  
no kondo

Born to Choose

[*everything I want*]

Live Work Die

[*he gives it to me*]

Under straw hats of summer

[*everything I want*]

A robust response

[*he gives it but not for free*] <sup>xvi</sup>

...so many,

I had not thought debt had undone so many <sup>xvii</sup>

“Let Malibu burn.” <sup>xviii</sup>

*Our god delights*

*in festive good times,*

*but he loves also*

*Peace, who makes us rich*

*and saves our lives.*

## **no Olympics on stolen land**

RCMP Corporal Russ Hannibal and Constable Tracey Sokolowski went on patrol to the Foggy Dew pub in Coquitlam. As she walked through the bar, a man patted Sokolowski on the rear end. Sokolowski dealt with the incident, but recounted it to Hannibal. Hannibal approached the man, who tried to leave. The two men ended up on the ground outside the door. Hannibal was having trouble getting control of the man. The officers got the man handcuffed. Hannibal went to the car to get the Taser. He threatened the man, then shocked him twice. Sokolowski continued her patrol. Hannibal took the man to the detachment.

Hannibal was also one of five RCMP officers who arrested Robert Thompson. Thompson was under the influence of drugs and alcohol and threatening suicide at the time of his arrest. Hannibal used a Taser twice on the already-stressed individual, even though three other officers had Thompson on the ground and under control.<sup>xix</sup>

“RCMP complaints commissioner Paul Kennedy said the critical bond between the public and police is being damaged. ‘That bond must exist,’ he declared. ‘It is a fundamental aspect of our society’.”<sup>xx</sup>

*fighting in Rostock*

This is humiliating.

“Organized sport is the paradigmatic model of a just society”—Gil Grissom, *CSI*

So much depends upon

Illegal migrant labour.

“The Games help to keep the speculative housing bubble inflated and provide patriotic legitimization for state violence”

in Iraq’s bloody sectarian tit-for-tat

dunk

link

solving problems by “the piece”

triage of the attention span

“Nowhere is safe. Insurgents struck in the heart of the Green Zone yesterday, one of the most heavily defended places in Vancouver. The symbolism - and the message - was clear with this attack on the home of the VANOC<sup>xxi</sup>-imposed democracy.”

Green Zones of Gastown and Chinatown, security by Blackwater

insurgents infiltrate Business Improvement Associations,

steal the flag from the fort for Harriet Nahanee,<sup>xxii</sup>

retaliatory evictions.

If we supported the Dalai Lama's call to boycott the Beijing Olympics for crimes against Tibet, will he support our fight against the Vancouver games for crimes against Turtle Island?

Give your head a shake.

## **blood gold**

*The fish instinctively know where the international boundaries are* <sup>xxiv</sup>

The bees and the salmon vanished

up and quit the bee and the salmon business

asked each other, “what’s in it for us?”

Give your head a shake.

## blood chocolate

*But the last essay never comes.*

“and up came the fish<sup>xxv</sup>, the students”<sup>xxvi</sup>

then they vanished too

the students, the bees, the salmon, the welfare state

overfishing

in the knowledge economy

while condos and arts grants

go up in the Runcible Mountain clearcut<sup>xxvii</sup>

“With this booming economy, we see a growing need for food banks every year”<sup>xxviii</sup>

## no Olympics on stolen land

RCMP Constable James Adam Carson was in possession of 24 pornographic videos involving children. Carson took the keys of female co-workers from their personal property at the RCMP detachment and made copies at three different key-cutting shops in Revelstoke. He then entered the different officer's homes, where he stole bras and panties or masturbated in them, leaving them soiled and balled up for the officers to find later. Carson often took the underwear with him, with intent to transfer it from one member's home to another. It was stored in a Rubbermaid container in his bedroom closet until he made the switch. The women often found unfamiliar underwear in their drawers and eventually realized their missing underwear was turning up at other officer's homes. Carson, in his late 20s, had worked at the RCMP for four years before he was arrested.

He resigned from the force and moved to Leduc, Alberta, with his wife and young child.<sup>xxix</sup>

*Who's with us  
out here in the streets?  
Who's there  
in the dark house?*

I do not want to appear too political; I am afraid of seeming controversial; I want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; my hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday I hope to get a big grant: Who am I?

“The university has become an organized conspiracy against the world of ordinary human experience. But it would be an insult to anyone who does the real work of the world to say ‘I hate my job’”<sup>xxx</sup>

and I will stay to have another drink with you

because tonight

I'm teaching *Antigone* in the executive leadership seminar.

“You'd do it too if they paid you \$200.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

*fighting on the US / Mexico border*

## **blood credit**

from Attica to Abu Ghraib

Salvador Allende to Saddam

*a lot of holes in the desert / a lot of problems are buried in those holes*

This is ridiculous.

## **blood furs**

### **no Olympics on stolen land**

An officer engaged “the services of a known sex-trade worker.” An officer used “foul and racist language” while issuing a speeding ticket. An officer held onto an exhibit, a firearm, for “personal use.” An officer tried to pressure another officer to do a favour for his brother-in-law, arrested for impaired driving. An officer used “excessive force” against a suspect. RCMP Const. Justin Harris had sex with underage prostitutes in Prince George, B.C. but the charges against him were dropped because the Mounties took too long to bring them. Adam Jonathan Clarke, a former officer in Langley, used a community police office computer to convince a 12- and 15-year-old girl to produce child pornography for him. B.C. Mountie James Douglas Macleod raped a woman at a Super Bowl party in 2005. <sup>xxxiii</sup>

*The life of the police agent is painful; his position in society is as humiliating and despised as crime itself ... Shame and infamy encircle him from all sides, society has expelled him, isolated him as a pariah, society spits its disdain for the police agent with his payment, without remorse, without regrets, without pity... The police badge that he carries in his pocket documents his shame. <sup>xxxiii</sup>*

*a Motel Six*

*in Phoenix*

*near the airport.*

*“it’s a scary place, the desert. there could’ve been a hole anywhere.*

I can hear whale-breach.

sparrow

marks

every crumb

that falls

I'd like to dedicate this one to all the soldiers **deserting** the fighting in Chicago, Milwaukee, New York... Oh yes, and all the soldiers **deserting** the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Roll call:

Dan Felushko, Brandon Hughey, Jeremy Hinzman, Joshua Key, James Burmeister, Agustin Aguayo, Bernard Hibbits, Robin Long, Darrell Anderson, Dean Walcott, Ehren Watada, Kyle Snyder, Ryan Johnson, Chris Magauay, Camilo Mejia, Ivan Brobek, Kevin Benderman, Clifford Cornell, Patrick Hart, Christian Kjar, Cory Glass, Phil Mcdowell, Steve Yoczik, Linjam Mull, Matt Lowell, Tim Richard,

and 39,972 others <sup>xxxiv</sup>

slaves to fate but no lackeys to the law <sup>xxxv</sup>

<sup>i</sup> According to Sebastian Touza and Nate Holdren, “the word ‘escrache’ is Argentinian slang that means ‘exposing something outrageous’. *Escraches* are street demonstrations in front of the houses where people involved in human rights violations during the dictatorship live.” *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization*. Stephen Shukaitis, David Graeber, Erika Biddle, eds. AK Press: Oakland, 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> Sebastian Touza and Nate Holdren, in *Constituent Imagination*.

<sup>iii</sup> La Rage, 2007-05-23 17:47.

<sup>iv</sup> Jimi Hendrix introducing “Machine Gun”, New Years Eve 1969. *Band of Gypsies*, 1970.

<sup>v</sup> Sonny Boy Williamson, “Don’t Start Me Talkin’.”

<sup>vi</sup> “As for the reigning order, everybody knows what it consists in: That a dying social system has no other justification to its arbitrary nature but its absurd determination—its senile determination—to simply linger on; That the police, global or national, have got a free hand to get rid of those who do not toe the line; That civilization, wounded in its heart, no longer encounters anything but its own limits in the endless war it has begun; That this headlong flight, already almost a century old, produces nothing but a series of increasingly frequent disasters; That the mass of humans deal with this order of things by means of lies, cynicism, brutalization, or medication.” *La rage*.

<sup>vii</sup> Paraphrasing Alice Becker-Ho, “The Essence of Jargon”. Trans. John Mchale. In *Parser #1*, Roger Farr, ed. Vancouver, May 2007.

<sup>viii</sup> “There’s an old rule of thumb which I always apply to armies in the field. If you find out about one abuse, you can bet there were a hundred others that will never be revealed”—Robert Fisk

<sup>ix</sup> *Vancouver Sun* Saturday, June 09, 2007

<sup>x</sup> From Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Beacon Press: Boston, 2000.

<sup>xi</sup> From “The Diffused Intellectual: Women’s Autonomy and the Labour of Reproduction: An Interview with Mariarosa Dalla Costa” in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization*, Mark Coté, Richard J.F. Day, and Grieg de Peuter, eds. U of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2007.

<sup>xii</sup> “Furious veterans are renewing their demands that the National War Memorial be guarded to protect it against “disgusting” assaults after young men were caught urinating on it during Canada Day festivities. A retired major snapped digital pictures of several people relieving themselves on the monument around 11 p.m. on Saturday, as thousands poured into the streets following the fireworks. Most cheered and laughed when they were photographed using the memorial as a toilet on the nation’s birthday.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, July 03, 2006.

<sup>xiii</sup> Timothy White, *Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley*. New York: Henry Holt, 2006.

<sup>xiv</sup> Quoted in Akers, Justin Chacon, and Mike Davis *No One Is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the US-Mexico Border*. Haymarket Books: Chicago, 2006.

<sup>xv</sup> *National Post* March 15, 2007.

<sup>xvi</sup> The Clash, "Hateful". *London Calling*, 1979.

<sup>xvii</sup> Cf. T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land".

<sup>xviii</sup> Mike Davis. <http://www.radicalurbantheory.com/mdavis/letmalibuburn.html>.

<sup>xix</sup> *Coquitlam Now*, date unknown.

<sup>xx</sup> *Globe and Mail*, November 26 2007.

<sup>xxi</sup> Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

<sup>xxii</sup> Communique from Native Warrior Society, March 7 2007: "In the early morning hours of Tuesday, March 6, 2007, we removed the Olympic Flag from its flag-pole at Vancouver City Hall. We pried open the access panel on the pole with a crowbar and, using a bolt-cutter, cut the metal cable/halyard inside, causing the flag to fall to the ground. We claim this action in honour of Harriet Nahanee, our elder-warrior, who was given a death sentence by the BC courts for her courageous stand in defending Mother Earth. We stand in solidarity with all those fighting against the destruction caused by the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. No Olympics on Stolen Native Land!"

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Enduring Occupation: Palestinians Under Siege in the West Bank*. Amnesty International, 2007.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Jeff Derksen, "Interface".

<sup>xxv</sup> In prison argot, a new arrival: "*Fish* [...] refers exclusively to new prisoners" (<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~cpercyc/courses/6362-ellis>).

<sup>xxvi</sup> George Stanley, "Terrace, '79".

<sup>xxvii</sup> "Start with a baseball diamond high

In the Runcible Mountain wilderness. Blocked everywhere by  
stubborn lumber.

[...]

We shall a build our city backwards from each baseline  
extending like a square ray from each distance

[...]

We shall clear the trees back, the lumber of our pasts and  
futures back,

[...]

And our city shall stand as the lumber rots and Runcible  
mountain crumbles,

comes to meet us."--Jack Spicer, "Seven Poems for the Vancouver Festival".

Friends of Runcible Mountain (FORM) was active through the 1990s in opposition to these poetics.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Mark Forsythe, CBC *Afternoon Show* Foodbank drive, Dec. 7 2007.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Vancouver Sun* Saturday, June 9, 2007.

<sup>xxx</sup> “Some academic work (especially that which sees direct results in industrial development—biotech, informatics, etc.) appears as more obviously related to the advancement of the productive apparatuses. Teaching might be less obvious, though its role is still apparent. A process of training students is one of creating the boundaries for thought to function in the social machine. The emphasis is on developing students’ abilities to ingest past knowledge and relate it in a group form—all under the disciplinary function of the grade. Even if study appears to have no direct relationship to later wage-labour, it still works to create mass intellectuality; it produces the linguistic-cognitive abilities of the student in a way that is *generally* copascetic with the functions of capital. The process of study is one element in the creation of the subjectivities necessary for this post-Fordist metropolis to function.” Dave Eden, “Black Sails in the Corridor: Treasonous Minds and the Desire for Mutiny”.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Mark Cochrane, before his performance at Vancouver’s Word on the Street festival, September 2001.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, December 6 2006.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Quoted in “The Insurrection to Come” by Comite Invisible, 2008.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> “The Pentagon says that a total of 40,000 troops have deserted their posts since the year 2000.” *The Sunday Times* August 27 2006.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Mark of Cain*. Dir. Alix Lambert. Pink Ghetto / Go East Productions, 2000.

The Pacific Institute for Language and Literacy Studies (PILLS) was founded in 2003 to formalize an ongoing intellectual collaboration between Roger Farr, Reg Johanson and Aaron Vidaver that commenced during discussion groups at Runcible Mountain College and the Kootenay School of Writing (1998-2002).

As a small affinity group of individuals who are active as writers, teachers, archivists, editors, scholars, parents, caregivers and/or cultural organizers, PILLS' mandate is to carry out collaborative research and co-authorship in the intersecting areas of language, literacy and social reproduction.

Current activities include co-research into protest genres, utopian pedagogy, and lumpenproletarian resistance, and publication of *Parser: New Poetry and Poetics* (Parsermag.org), *The Rain Review of Books* (Rainreview.net) and *Working Papers in Critical Practice* (Recomposition.net).