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Poetics and Public Culture in Canada

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Introduction
Surviving the Paraphrase: Poetics and Public Culture in Canada

Diana Brydon, Manina Jones,
Jessica Schagerl, and Kristen Warder

"Hey what are you doing?"
she said, and he said
"I'm just standing here
being a Canadian."
And she said, "Wow,
is that really feasible?"
And he said, "Yes,
but it requires plenty
of imagination."
— Lionel Kearns
"Public Poem for a Manitoulin Canada Day"

In 1974, Frank Davey's conference paper "Surviving the Paraphrase" took the small world of Canadian literary criticism by storm. The tenor of discussion changed as writers and critics became more self-conscious about their place in the world and how they engaged it in their work.[1] After the passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, arguably Canada's first major public encounter with globalizing processes, it seems to many that understandings of poetics and public culture in Canada are changing once more. This special issue uses the occasion of Davey's retirement from university employment in 2005 to address the history and challenges of the current conjuncture. How might we describe poetics and public culture in Canada at the dawn of a new century?

The epigraph to this introduction reproduces a quotation from Lionel Kearns's occasional work, "Public Poem for a Manitoulin Canada Day" that circulated publicly in the call for papers and on the poster for "Poetics and Public Culture in Canada: A Conference in Honour of Frank Davey," hosted by the Department of English at The University

of Western Ontario between 3-6 March 2005.[2] Kearns's poem suggests the degree to which "just standing here being a Canadian" is a complex imaginative event sited in time, space, and subjectivity. The act of "being a Canadian" includes the transactive public activities of dialogue, performance, and transnational economic relations, the latter introduced in the lines that follow our extract: "He seems so serious and determined / that she forgets to hand him / his MacDonald's hamburger." Drawing attention to what and how we eat now, this moment reinforces the text's reminder that citizenship is always embodied, in ways that register the changing dimensions of the public/private divide.

The papers in this volume negotiate the ways in which poetry and poetics can imagine the circumstances under which, as Kearns puts it in his poem, "Canada, / though not very plausible, is definitely / a possibility." That we were able to excerpt the poem and make the extract the evocative conference catchphrase, however, also effaces its own conflicted history of performance, a history that points to how very complicated those circumstances always are. Kearns recollects that "the public poem was written for a particular performance at the opening ceremonies of an Arts Festival on 24 May, 1974, on Manitoulin Island," where he and several other artists were flown in by the Canada Council, dropped off for their presentations to a small community of mostly Native people, and then flown out again. "I am not sure," Kearns reflects in remembering the event, "if it made sense to any one" ("RE: Public"). *How* it made sense, and *to whom*, he implicitly recognizes, reflects the situation of the viewer. Such official occasions seek to mask Canada's status as an invader-settler colony, performing an uneasy national identity that refuses recognition of a prior indigenous sovereignty, while seeking to claim indigeneity for its own nationalist project. Such insights, as generated by indigenous, critical race, and postcolonial theorists, further inflect the ways we now read the need for "plenty of imagination" in performing a settler national identity on indigenous land.

Kearns's poem reflexively imagines the poet "seen at his desk / composing a poem about Canada Day / through history"; readers may also want to make sense of the poem's public recitation and its own part in that history, evoked in large measure by the temporal "occasion" of its delivery, May 24th, traditionally known as Victoria Day or Empire Day or Commonwealth Day, but which had, in 1974, on Manitoulin Island, provisionally been renamed Canada Day. In the complementary text,

"Private Poem for a Manitoulin Canada Day," Kearns addresses the occasion again, attempting to work through the dynamics of his role as "official guest" in relation to the local publics with whom the poet interacts; the work is suggestive of the ways personal and public discourses are often agonizingly intertwined.[3]

The papers in this special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne* are grounded in a perception, concomitant with our reading of Kearns's poem, that any re-evaluation of "Canadian cultural power" (Davey) in the public sphere must be done in concert with an historical understanding of the shifting terms guiding their uneven development. As Ian Angus points out in *Emergent Publics*, engagement with the theories of Jürgen Habermas, in particular his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* has shaped most anglophone assessments of the public sphere in recent history (87), yet there has been little dialogue across these primarily political analyses and those taking place in discussions of Canadian poetry. Angus's interest, for example, lies in appreciating "how public debate is renewed and reformed by social movements" (9). In this issue, we are asking to what extent poets, individually and collectively, through their practices and theorizing, in interaction with the readerships they engage, also contribute to such debates. We would argue that renewed interest in the public sphere, as theorized by Habermas and complicated by a series of thinkers since, accompanies questioning of many of the established parameters that have defined Canadian literature and cultural expression more generally since their rise to public and academic attention in the 1960s, in the wake of the Massey Commission Report, the subsequent institutionalization of and support for Canadian literary studies and production,[4] and the increased profile of poetry as one method of engaging in activism and public protest.[5] The kinds of cultural movements in which poets participate may contribute to concepts of social citizenship in important ways that require further consideration. In a book designed to investigate "the complexities and contradictions of Canadian cultural pluralism" (20), Garry Sherbert defines "cultural poesis" as "the simultaneous experience of making and being made by culture" (xii). In this special issue, while affirming the double thrust of that general definition, we are unwilling to follow cultural studies' lead in conflating poetics with poesis as a generalized cultural activity embracing all forms of making and being made. The focus of this issue, we insisted, was the

specificity of poetry as a genre and its capacity for enacting resistance within the public sphere.

Within this context, we asked contributors to consider the extent to which Canadian cultural politics have historically interacted and continue to interface with transnational circuits of relation, as well as within and among more localized constituencies. Many of the papers here consider how such relations may ultimately destabilize some of the institutional foundations of the national public sphere. By publishing this collection in an academic journal with a national mandate, we are of necessity situating our discussions within a bounded national purview while showing the ways in which contemporary poetics practices strain at or ignore such boundaries. What does "in Canada" really mean when transnational communicative networks cross national boundaries? What does "poetics" mean when technological change enables creative production in the arts to cross conventional boundaries between print and oral performance, visual and verbal enactments? What does "public culture" mean when the Habermasian notion of a bourgeois public sphere is breaking down into alternative, emergent and counterpublic publics? What does "culture" mean when conventional distinctions between high and low culture are blurring, and what does "public culture" mean when there can be an easy slippage in many minds between "public" and "popular" as modifiers of the cultural?[6]

Most of the papers in this special issue were first presented at "Poetics and Public Culture in Canada: A Conference in Honour of Frank Davey." In planning the conference, a group of Frank's students and colleagues sought to celebrate his career as a public intellectual by gathering writers, critics, students, and the public beyond academia to discuss the varied roles of poetry and poetics in Canada and to consider their futures. The best way to honour Frank, we agreed, was to attend to the questions he had raised and, in the spirit of his work, to push them further. Occasionally these questions prompted informal discussions at the conference that we have not been able to reflect in this issue. We asked, for example, about the impact of changes in technology and the widening availability of what were only recently considered new media. We thought there might be papers that would consider how some of the many new on-line forums made possible by the web, such as blogs, online magazines, electronic poetry sites, sites that archive and/or transmit live poetry readings and performances,[7] and those that house discussion

groups, are currently affecting relationships among writers and their readers. Conventional notions of a literary community — as participating in a performance or merely attending a public reading or as a reading public — are changing as a result of technological innovation. What kinds of communities are created through these forums which transmit academic discussion and poetic performance both within and across national boundaries, often bringing public events into private spaces in ways that differ from earlier models of the privatized reader alone with a book? In addition to these new on-line forums, web-related technologies have led to the recent emergence of entirely new poetic forms, such as digital poetry, which is often collaborative, and various forms of animated poetry, in which the poem itself is visualized on the screen.[8] The creation of these new art forms located, to quote one of Agence TOPO's most recent calls for projects, at "the crossroads of visual arts, literature, and new medias," often rely both on the co-operation of artists from very different backgrounds and traditions and on different forms of collaboration among "readers" and "writers." Such multimedia works, then, also challenge conventional understandings of "reading" and "writing," poetic performance and exhibition. While many of the participants in the conference are actively involved in such activities, theorization of their significance is ongoing,[9] including by Frank Davey himself in the pages of *Open Letter* and on the journal's website.

Of the series of other questions posed in our call for papers, those to attract most attention were the ones that dealt specifically with issues of power, poetry, and publics: Why and how does poetry matter today? Has poetry a role to play in the formation and in the critique of public culture? Can one speak any longer — and was it ever accurate to speak — of a single "public culture"? What does national culture mean in a time of globalization? How do "counter-publics" intercede in the venues of public culture, and how do they work to shift the terms of discussion? What are the implications of these changes for art producers, such as poets, and for art's interpreters and gatekeepers? The dynamism of the conference is reflected in the several special issues to which it has given rise and in the inclusion in this issue of papers from colleagues unable to attend the original event but eager to enter the debates.[10]

We saw this gathering as in part a successor to the Long-liners Conference, held in 1986 at York University, which focused on the long poem as a theoretical intervention into how Canadian literature

was conceived of at that time. That conference considered, among other things, whether the poet's task was "not the textual one of 'how to reach the whole society' (Dudek) but the political one of how 'to create a different type of society' (Bernstein)" (Davey and Munton 6). Another model was the book, *The Recovery of the Public World: Essays on Poetics in Honour of Robin Blaser* (1999), edited by Charles Watts and Edward Byrne, which developed out of the Vancouver conference held in 1995 to engage many of the questions that continue to preoccupy us here. As Charles Bernstein explains in his essay in *Recovery*, "Blaser takes the title 'The Recovery of the Public World' from Hannah Arendt and specifically Arendt's distinction between society, an economic realm invested by individual property and wealth; and the public, the world we have in common," reinforcing Arendt's contention that the public sphere is a human creation (33). We asked to what extent that definition of the public sphere "as the world we have in common," still holds, and how it is contested and reinvented for different times. A third, complementary dimension of concern in devising our conference took its impetus from Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd's book, *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (1997). Lowe and Lloyd describe a "differently conceived 'politics of culture'" (26). Such a politics might be one that could see "poetry as a primary order of thought rather than a secondary expression of ideas or emotions," as Edward Byrne suggests in his Introduction to *Recovery* (20).

At the same time as we were planning our conference, the editors at *Studies in Canadian Literature* were producing their special issue, Canadian Poetry: Traditions/Counter-traditions; Poésie canadienne: traditions/contre-traditions, which appeared in 2005 to revisit earlier notions of the relations among Canadian identity, nationalism, and poetry and to assess the ways that they are playing out in current times. As they point out, there are now multiply constituted cultural epistemologies, each of which "defines a different way of imagining what it is to be Canadian." To them also, the time seemed right to focus on poetry in relation to the changing cultural complexities of the nation and to international movements inspired by modernism and the postmodern moment. That issue demands to be read in dialogue with this. This current issue both echoes and departs from the earlier Poetry issue. Our difference is signalled through the explicit turn from poetry and the nation to poetics and globalization, a turn we mediate through atten-

tion to the many roles (poetic but also critical, editorial, pedagogical, and polemical) through which poetics may influence public culture, as exemplified here by a single influential figure, Frank Davey.

In citing the titles of some of Davey's best known provocations as section headings for this number of *SCL / ÉLC*, the editors acknowledge Davey's work as poet, editor, teacher, mentor, and cultural critic and the ways in which it has occasioned and directed debates around poetics and public culture in Canada. In its double focus on Frank Davey and the multiple contexts that have made him and with which he has engaged (and continues to engage), this special issue affirms Davey's impact as a public intellectual and social critic. The Poetics and Public Culture in Canada conference marked Davey's retirement from the University. Davey, of course, while he may occasionally perform the role of diffident poet-professor, has never been retiring — thus the conference's commitment to pay tribute, not just to Davey's academic career, but to his ongoing role as public intellectual and cultural *agent provocateur*.

The title of this introduction, "Surviving the Paraphrase," borrows from the wit of Davey's imagination to make a playful comment on the usual programmatic form of an introduction, while signalling our belief that Davey's challenge still resonates today. The essays presented here are inheritors of what in her essay Smaro Kamboureli terms Davey's path-breaking focus on "the social, political, and economic impact different media of material production have on culture." In debating the shifting meanings attached to our key terms of poetics and public culture, conference papers and discussion addressed issues facing the humanities today: the changing material conditions for the production and reception of poetry; the nature of public space and its cultural determinants as they are being rethought in geographical, national, and theoretical terms; the recent "restructuring" of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada[11] and its implications for scholarship in dialogue with poetics and public culture in Canada. These issues resurfaced at Congress 2005 and at the "TransCanada: Literature, Institutions, Citizenship" conferences in June 2005 and October 2007, testifying to the urgency of sustained dialogue about the cultural work that Canadians do as writers, critics, educators, and citizens, locally, nationally, and globally, and to the changing contexts in which that work is produced.[12]

Academic papers are one way to show the very real contributions of Canada's poets to discussions of public culture, but they are certainly not the only avenue for the promotion of critical creativity within a university setting. Public readings offer an opportunity for diverse constituencies of readers to engage with the poetic imagination. Charles Bernstein, one of seven poets invited to read during the conference, argues, "Readings are the central social activity of poetry. … The reading is the site in which the audience of poetry constitutes and reconstitutes itself" ("Introduction" 22). Not surprisingly, considering his comment that "*the poetry reading is a public tuning*" (6) and his statements about how "poetic authority" is "a model for the individual political participation of each citizen" ("Comedy" 236), Bernstein performed as an exemplary transnational public intellectual, critiquing the anti-intellectual stance of George W. Bush's US-American government through a variety of rhetorical strategies, from what would be understood as the conventionally — and unconventionally — poetic through to the satiric and reasoned prose of the skilled orator. The face-to-face community renewed through the public reading remains an important site for performing poetry's social function, yet increasingly that public tuning takes place as well on internet sites devoted to sharing those moments with a wider audience, which no longer needs the immediacy of the initial moment to feel connected to an extended poetics community. While some speakers at the conference lamented what they saw as the decline of the authority of the literary critical journal in mediating reception, many others saw vitality in a wealth of new publications emerging in both print and virtual environments, including those sites that provide differently mediated access to the spoken word and its visually organized manifestations. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and M. NourbeSe Philip, who had both studied with Davey, appeared at London's Forest City Gallery, to challenge and move the audience with their storytelling and readings. At The University of Western Ontario, a panel featuring Glen Lowry, and a reading by Larissa Lai and Rita Wong from their collaborative long poem *Sybil Unrest,* led into an engaging series of poetry presentations by Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, and Roy Miki. One highlight of the conference was the Saturday evening of poetry that coincided with the conference banquet, hosted by that most public of all poets at the time, George Bowering, then serving as Canada's first Poet

Laureate, and Lola Lemire Tostevin, the Canada Council-supported Writer-in-Residence at Western for 2004-2005.[13]

The conference also featured an inaugural reading by Frank Davey himself, the University of Western Ontario's first Carl F. Klinck Professor of Canadian Literature. Davey used the conference to launch his twentieth book of poetry, *Back to the War* (Talonbooks). His musings prefatory to the reading, reproduced here, remind us of the extent to which Davey's work insists on the inseparability of the roles of the poet and cultural critic: Davey remarks, for example, that he considers his poems "both literary texts and theoretical probes" that seek to overcome the "suspect epistemology and ideology" of the lyric voice and engage "the discursive underpinnings of some of the major political issues of our time." It seems perversely appropriate that a conference marking Davey's legally mandatory retirement should be the occasion both for a poetry book launch and for Davey's generous distribution to registrants of copies of his most recent chapbook, *Risky Propositions* (above/ground press). The latter seemed to many of us to be a kind of reverse-retirement gift to conference participants attending a retirement event that refused to celebrate retirement in any sense, but focused rather on their own and Davey's resistance to the very concept of a post-professional or post-civic "private life" into which one might withdraw. His pre-reading comments suggest the degree to which Davey has come to define the work of poetry as emerging from conflict, and his critical writing (as van Herk explores in her essay) has often placed him on the firing line, deliberately and productively inciting dialogue and debate.

The essays that comprise the first section of this issue — "SwiftCurrent: Tangled Histories and Bodily Poetics" — initiate such charged inquiries. These papers and the texts they examine bear witness to the fact that citizenship is formed in historical configuration and engagement with popular cultures and technological change, as well as gendered and racialized subjectivity. "SwiftCurrent," the town in Saskatchewan evoked by the world's first on-line literary magazine, devised by Frank Davey and Fred Wah, functions here to affirm their notion that the circulation of texts affects and is affected by our sense of geographical and civic location and our feeling of connectedness.[14] Their image of a "SwiftCurrent" as a fusion of technological, poetic, and political power suggests the hydroelectric currents that literally

fuel Canadian activity in many spheres — and that are currently under threat from U.S. plans for electricity restructuring. Under this heading, the first two papers of this section treat public cultures of mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth-century Canada, documenting cultural flows and blockages through time to expand the range of Canadian cultural memory and the kinds of "documents" that register as having cultural currency.

Len Findlay's three-part essay "Towards Canada as Aesthetic State: François-Xavier Garneau's *Canadien* Poetics" puts each of our three key terms — poetics, public, and culture — "under productive stress." His essay situates poetics and public culture in historical and cross-cultural European contexts, noting their roots in classical antiquity and their problematic presence in modernity, before addressing the special challenges of a "linguistically constituted nation like Canada where publics continue to form around two 'official' languages as pre-eminent bearers of culture and markers of legitimacy." Findlay's example of Garneau's "A Lord Durham" raises the question of public debate and poetic moderation at a time of national crisis. Findlay concludes that Garneau's poetry can be read "as an expression of political acquiescence and resolve via an aestheticizing of the Canadian state as a place of honour and reconciliation for the Québécois nation in spite of the increasing racialization of the Canadian economy." In reminding readers that the rise of the nation-state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was accompanied by a recourse to art and aesthetics, Findlay sets the stage for the essays that follow. Findlay's argument, that "one way of reading the story of nation formation is to attend to the particularities of capital in that context," responds to the economic turn that characterizes globalization by reframing it as always already in dialogue with cultural formations.

That dialogue continues in the essays that follow. Brenda Carr Vellino's "Machine-Age Discourse, Mechanical Ballet, and Popular Song as Alternative Document in Dorothy Livesay's 'Day and Night'" attends to Livesay's "capacity for multiple citizen locations" as a literary public intellectual. Reading "Day and Night" in relation to both national and transnational leftist political movements of the 1930s and through its referencing of cultural materials from dance, jazz music, and popular film, Vellino notes Livesay's participation in and resistance to "machine-age discourse and aesthetics." Livesay, Vellino argues, uses poetry to offer a model of community social organization, to critique industrial

class and race relations of the 1930s, and to "disavow a bourgeois life of romance, leisure, and lyric individualism to the ends of collective organizing and revolutionary action."

Christine Kim's "Rita Wong's *Monkeypuzzle* and the Poetics of Social Justice" returns to the notion of the poet as public intellectual but within contemporary contexts. Wong, Kim argues, is the poet/public intellectual who can articulate the "small changes" needed to make a better society. This metaphor of "small change" — as material exchange, alterations to representation and form, conversions of cultural currency, and desired social changes — anchors Kim's analysis of how Wong's collection resists exploitative logics of capitalism, labour, and racial categories. Kim suggests that there is "an intimate connection" between the aesthetic innovations of Wong's poetry and possibilities for social change in an era of globalization, a point taken up in greater detail in the penultimate section of this issue, "Post-National Arguments."

Wendy Gay Pearson's "'Whatever That Is': Hiromi Goto's Body Politic/s" offers a similarly hopeful reflection: that "a new body politics can … be imagined and that thought can be freed to think differently." In reading Goto's work in dialogue with contemporary queer and multicultural theory, Pearson illuminates a poetics that challenges heteronormative and exclusionary discourses of citizenship. Pearson's focus on the "body politic" provides another way of thinking about public culture, stressing that Goto's poetry offers "a poetical and a polemical intervention into the embodied effects of the discourses of racialization and sexualization, of their combination in orientalism, and of the hermeneutics of citizenship within the Canadian public sphere."

These essays remind us that tangled histories and bodily politics are always emplaced. Section Two investigates that relation through attending more explicitly to the politics of place and the role of regional communities within national contexts. This section's subheading "From There to Here: Place and Public Culture," derives from the title of Davey's 1974 collection of essays *From There to Here: A Guide to English-Canadian Literature Since 1960.* This title suggests a journey taken not only through place but also through time.

Michelle Hartley's "Finding Narratives: *George, Vancouver*, and the Process of Discovery," reads George Bowering's 1970 biotextual/historical long poem *George, Vancouver: a discovery poem* as an argument for an ongoing rediscovery of both place and self through poetry. Hartley's

paper argues that Bowering's poem offers public culture "a way of theorizing the interconnections between poetics, culture, and empire … through the idiosyncratic individual, exploding any myth of a monological identity." The paper complicates the notion of regional origins by considering the development of this definitively West Coast poem and Bowering's spatial poetics as "originating" in London, Ontario. To what extent are imagined landscapes always constructed by some version of the exile's gaze?

In similar fashion, Kristen Warder's "(Un)Settling the Prairies: Queering Regionalist Literature and the Prairie Social Landscape in Shane Rhodes's *The Wireless Room*" and Paul Chafe's "Newfoundland Poetry as 'Ethnographic Salvage': Time, Place, and Voice in the Poetry of Michael Crummey and Mary Dalton" query the many functions of Canadian regionalisms and their varied sources in public and private imaginings. The analysis of textual communities as social constituencies drives both essays, which explore texts by contemporary Canadian poets who contest nostalgic and homogeneous regional self-representations, and reflect a new wave of challenges to Canadian regionalisms currently breaking within Canadian cultural theory and literature. Situating Rhodes's poetry in relation to contemporary cultural theories of prairie regionalism, Warder argues that one of the main problems with maintaining outdated regional constructions is that entire segments of the population are denied public visibility and are thus effectively excluded from the regional identity. She proposes that in his first book of poetry *The Wireless Room* (2000), Rhodes responds to the prevailing homogeneous (and heterocentric) characterizations of the prairies by disrupting the literary traditions of prairie poetry and by resexualizing prairie (agri)culture non-normatively. In his depiction of a queer prairie persona grounded in both place and sexuality, Warder concludes, Rhodes "moves from reinscribing an implicitly heterosexual, homophobic regionalism to engendering an explicitly queer prairie regionality."

In much the same fashion, Chafe's essay, which explores the "Newfoundland poetry" of Michael Crummey and Mary Dalton, shows how these authors dispute Newfoundland's retrograde identity as marketed by the province's tourist industry. As the paper's title suggests, Chafe reads Crummey's and Dalton's "Newfoundland poetry" as attempting to preserve Newfoundland culture in a manner that expands on what Graham Huggan has described as postcolonial "ethnographic

salvage." Chafe contends that by maintaining an ironic sensibility and by focusing on idiosyncratic individuals, the poetry of Crummey and Dalton resists the sentimentality often manifest in Newfoundland literature. His paper advocates for the modification of many of the region's conventional touristic clichés and stereotypes and the depiction of a Newfoundland culture that is continuously negotiated rather than simply disappearing, yet it does so by invoking irony, a turn that Linda Hutcheon has claimed for Canadian sensibilities and W.H. New for Commonwealth stances more generally.

The essays in Section Two revisit canonical regional/national debates within postmodern contexts that privilege proliferating differences and individualist assertions of the idiosyncratic and the particular. Section Three continues to complicate contemporary alertness to the complexities of place by attending to the ways in which the local and the global are mutually constituted, sometimes to bypass the national and at other times to reinflect its significance. This section is titled "Post-National Arguments: Global Poetics" in recognition of Frank Davey's influential study of how globalization was beginning to impinge on fictional engagements within the Canadian canon of the late twentieth century. Yet these essays recognize that early predictions of a post-national phase of global development have not materialized as expected. To some, globalization has hollowed out the old nationalist social welfare state while to others it has simultaneously strengthened the repressive powers of the state to act in the service of global capital. With globalization, transnational networks have proliferated but so have multiple nationalist movements, breaking apart some nation-states as others are created from their fragments. Within such contexts, Canada appears as a relatively stable and long-lived nation-state formation. While most agree that the nation-state is changing, few now see its demise. Each of the articles in Section Three engages with the challenge of what Hardt and Negri have influentially termed "Empire," their term for the emergent capitalist formation that has succeeded earlier forms of imperialism. These essays theorize how globalizing processes are changing Canadian understanding of the national public sphere and the resultant altered relations among poetics, culture, and contending versions of empire.

In "Poetics and the Politics of Globalization," Imre Szeman provides a compelling materialist analysis of globalization discourse to argue that globalization is far more than a mere replacement term for postmod-

ernism, in part because it is more centrally a public concept but also because it offers more scope for social change. While he remains wary of too deep an investment in ideas of the imagination as a free-floating concept, Szeman finds hope in extending engagement with the range of cultural production beyond narrow views of culture and its provenance. In arguing that "literary criticism and poetics (and literature and poetry) have an essential political role to play in the era of globalization, even if they do so in transformed circumstances," Szeman's article begins to theorize a poetics of globalization. Szeman argues for a specific kind of global poetics that can provide "the imaginative vocabulary, the narrative resources through which it might not only be possible to challenge the dominant narrative of globalization, but to articulate alternative modes of understanding those processes that have come to shape the present — and the future."

Szeman's overview is followed by two essays investigating the different ways in which globalization theory is entering poetic practices and theorizations of poetics. Kit Dobson's "Transnational Subjectivities: Roy Miki's *Surrender* and Global Displacements" shares Szeman's belief in the importance of culture in nuancing globalization debates and, like him, concludes that questions of liberation may be staged at the level of language itself. Dobson argues that Roy Miki's *Surrender* may be read as interrogating the function of subjectivity when the self is displaced under transnational capitalism. He reads Miki's poetic staging of "cultural dissidence against global capitalism" through the lens of some current theories about the decline of the nation-state and the rise of the global. Focusing on the instability of the lyric subject and the politics of transgression, he considers the ways in which cultural practices, such as the transnational mobility of certain subjects, may participate in the destabilization of the nation state.

Heike Härting takes a tack more critical of the utopian potential lauded by Hardt and Negri and affirmed in Dobson's reading of Miki. In "The Poetics of Vulnerability: Diaspora, Race, and Global Citizenship in A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* and Dionne Brand's *Thirsty*," Härting analyzes "the affective conditions of global citizenship" through elaborating "a diasporic poetics of vulnerability." Härting develops Davey's insight in *Post-National Arguments* that, as she puts it, "Canada's economic insertion into the global market changed the rapport between literature and citizenship." After explaining the limitations

of Hardt and Negri's conceptualization of the multitude and in particular their understanding of colonial and racial violence, she offers instead "an account of the racialized production — past and present — of differential vulnerability" as it is inscribed in these two texts. In documenting the micropolitical ways in which race enters into a transformative practice of global citizenship, Härting interprets works by Klein and Brand as modes of anchoring "the notion of global citizenship in narrative and a diasporic poetics of vulnerability." The debates addressed in this section are not resolved but provide a snapshot of the ways in which globalizing processes are challenging and reframing the ways in which Canadian cultural producers, poets and critics alike, understand poetics and public culture today. The once assumed link between nationalism, art, and aesthetics has been severed and is being rethought in many different ways, starting with re-examinations of the nature of subjectivity and embodiment in a variety of times and places.

The concluding section of this issue continues the themes of transformation and dissent, but turns more directly to the figure of Frank Davey himself, and the mode he has memorably termed "cultural mischief." Fittingly, this cluster of papers, named for Davey's 1996 collection of prose poems, *Cultural Mischief: A Practical Guide to Multiculturalism*, begins with Davey's own iconoclastic questioning of what constitutes a poem, how meaning is made, and how cultural authority is negotiated, in part through tracing the shifting boundaries between public and private. His lifelong advocacy of "risky propositions" is explained in this lucid brief piece, and then further elaborated in the analyses that follow by Smaro Kamboureli and Aritha van Herk.

Each focuses on Davey as cultural force and cultural analyst. Each stresses the consistency of his internal contradictions. Each attends to Davey as "Davey," the self-conscious protagonist in a multifaceted and ever-developing critical engagement with his time and his place. Kamboureli focuses on Davey the editorial activist, critic, and radical poet whose work takes place within "a field of continuous action." For Kamboureli, Davey's attention to questions of methodology may constitute his most singular contribution to Canadian literary discourse. While she devotes extended attention to "Surviving the Paraphrase" as a turning point within the Canadian preoccupation with cultural identity, she finds that it is in *Reading Canadian Reading* that "his anti-thematicism is granted greater cohesiveness, and as a result greater efficacy."

Kamboureli stresses Davey's interdisciplinarity and his career-long interest in the media of cultural production. These characterize his "radical poetics," which consistently highlight "our often-discomfited relationships with the tradition, the academy, and the cultural and national institutions at large."

Productive discomfort is the aspect of Davey's legacy explored by van Herk. Her complementary study addresses Davey as experimentalist, reading the considerable body of his work that has not yet attracted significant critical attention, especially his "trilogy," *Reading "Kim" Right*, *Karla's Web*, and *Mr. and Mrs. G.G*. With these texts, van Herk sees Davey taking on the Canadian national disease of "cultural politesse" to help us "relearn cultural mischief": dissidence inflected — and inflicted — by humour. Van Herk's essay is groundbreaking in its attention to some of Davey's most neglected and troubling texts, which themselves seek to understand the changing status of women who enter the public sphere. If masculinity has been seen as a way of "occupying public space" and femininity is felt to involve "a language of private feeling" (Warner 24), then Davey seeks to understand the changing social imaginaries in which three very different Canadian women have assumed, however briefly, a prominent public role within the Canadian national imaginary. Davey is both fascinated by and highly critical of Canada's first female prime minister, Kim Campbell; Canada's currently most famous sex-offender and murderess, Karla Homolka; and Canada's first female Governor General of Chinese descent, Adrienne Clarkson. Davey's own ambivalences, as expressed in these texts, and the silence of a Canadian critical establishment unsure of how to engage the questions they raise, are broached by van Herk in an essay that opens new ways of thinking about how publicity may operate to privatize as much as publicize certain discussions. In choosing to close with van Herk's essay, we leave our readers with the unresolved challenges of the current conjuncture, the destablizing potential of poetics in public contexts, and the pleasures and discomforts created by what Davey terms "cultural mischief."

The mischievous frontispiece image we have chosen for this issue is true to the spirit of Davey's provocations. The frontispiece reproduces in greyscale a detail from Bernie Miller's "Homage to L.H. 1930-2005" (2005), a photowork that updates the stark northern landscapes popularized by Lawren Harris, a member of the Group of Seven, in such paintings as *Greenland Mountains* (1930). Miller's ironic "homage" shows the

North as less a pristine natural landscape and more a garbage dump for the detritus of countless Arctic expeditions. This image is taken from a show, devised as a fundraising effort at the Winnipeg gallery, Plug-In, in October 2005. Called "Fabulous Fakes with a Twist," the show queries the iconic "public" image of Canada as empty frozen North, especially as that representation continues to be promoted through the work of the Group of Seven painters who, as Anne Whitelaw observes, still play a central role in the "affective relationship between individual and nation" (133). Claiming that "The Group of Seven is the epitome of established art, the oil-on-canvas equivalent of 'O Canada,'" publicity for the show asserts that the artists "mess with the Group's nature/culture divide, subvert the rugged manly virtues with feminist comment and give multicultural dimensions to its predominantly beef-eating British-Canadian outlook" (Gillmor). With the North American Free Trade Agreement and increasing globalizing pressures on the national welfare state, critics and artists have come to realize that more attention needs to be paid to Canada's role within the world. With global activism focussed on the Kyoto agreement and follow-up discussions in Bali in early December 2007, concerns around global warming, climate change and the need for international co-operation and transnational action seem more urgent than ever. The anticipated opening of the Northwest Passage has sparked renewed claims to Arctic sovereignty among a variety of nations, Canada included. In these contexts, Miller's image and the exhibition for which it was first produced provide a wake-up call to Canadians to rethink (through a visual pun?) how we are answering the iconic "Frygean" question of "where is here?," and how Canadians might address urgent planetary questions of how concepts of "here" may need to be revised within contexts of global belonging.

In depicting an iceberg landscape littered with discarded fridges, Miller's work illustrates the material realities of a threatened permafrost environment, and at a deeper level, the consequences of envisioning the land as barren and inanimate landscape. Here is a reminder of the ways in which humans have always left their traces on even the most apparently desolate landscapes. In this case, the witty juxtaposition of iceberg and refrigerator links two generators of cold, one from nature, one from commodity culture, so that at first glance, Miller seems to provide yet another unpeopled landscape in the canonical tradition of the Group of Seven. Looking closer we realize that people *are* present through the

imprint, the ecological footprint, that they leave. For us, Miller's photowork sets up an implicit dialogue with Julie Cruikshank's indigenous storytellers in *Do Glaciers Listen?* The lives of these storytellers involve "ritualized respect relations" that have been described as directed by a "'dwelling perspective' so profoundly relational that everyone understands how humans and nature co-produce the world they share" (243). When indigenous perspectives on belonging within a particular landscape are lost, Cruikshank warns, "Sentient and social spaces" may be "transformed to measurable commodities called 'lands and resources,'" excluding indigenous peoples again (259), just as notions of wilderness once did and continue to do so in environmentalist attempts to purge wilderness parks of traditional inhabitants.

The tongue-in-cheek homage of Miller's work raises haunting questions of respect, belonging, and identity that charge contemporary discussions of the public/private divide in Canada today while pointing to the role that art plays in negotiating these. Sharing a central concern with the cultural poetics of power and space, each essay in this special issue of *SCL / ÉLC* argues for the need to revision Canadian public culture in ways that can do justice to the histories and challenges of our current, and ever changing, moment.

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London, ON

Notes

[1]See Smaro Kamboureli's article in this issue for further details of Davey's argument, its impact and its legacy.

[2]For their generous support of the conference, we acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, Talonbooks, the Forest City Gallery, and the following units at The University of Western Ontario: the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, the Departments of Anthropology, English, French, Modern Languages, Philosophy, Visual Arts, and the Department of English Committee on Graduate Studies as well as the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Law, and the Office of Equity and Gender in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and the Office of the Vice-President Research.

[3]A revised prose poem version of this work appears as "Manitoulin Canada Day 1975" in Kearns's recent collection *A Few Words Will Do* (70-72). The text we are using here is a corrected version, based on the blewointment press edition, courtesy of Kearns.

[4]In, for example, the work of the Canada Council for the Arts, founded in 1957 to fulfill the recommendations of the Massey Commission, and in the development of courses in Canadian literature at Canadian universities, which achieved widespread success in the 1960s and beyond (see King).

[5]See Habermas. For a small range of the large volume of subsquent and related discussions, see Angus; Bernstein, ed.; Gallagher and Wallhout, eds.; Robbins, ed.; and Warner.

[6]See the references to this conference in the Editorial to *Rampike*, 15.1 (2006-2007), where the conference is misremembered as addressing "Poetics and Popular Culture" (3). Diana Brydon has noticed as well that the name of her research centre, the Centre for Globalization and Cultural Studies, is often described by colleagues as the Centre for Globalization and Popular Culture. Such slippages are interesting indicators of the fluid terrain in which any discussions of contemporary culture necessarily operate.

[7]The Slought Foundation, for example, both transmits live poetry performances and events and houses an archive of Canadian literary events dating back to the 1960s on their website, www.slought.org.

[8]Canadian poets such as Lionel Kearns and bpNichol have been pioneers in the field of digital poetry. Jim Andrews is now one of the leading digital poets of our age. For a sample of his work, visit his website, www.vispo.com. For brilliant examples of animated poems, see the animated works or "lyric clips" of American poet Billy Collins's poems on Youtube: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgnec1r9YuU>, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0xiWuwGq8M>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrEPJh14mcU>.

[9]The foregrounding of Jim Andrews's poetry and a call for other forms of poems that use web-related technologies on the website of *Open Letter*, one of the more prominent journals of Canadian literary criticism and creative writing, suggests that different forms of poetry are becoming increasingly mainstream. Similarly, the increasing prominence of multimedia works is evident in the relatively recent emergence of artist-run multimedia centres in Canada, such as Agence TOPO, Laboratoire NT2, and La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse, which have mandates to bring together and financially support writers, visual artists, and web designers in their collaborations. These centres also collaboratively hold the reading series Sortir de l'écran / Spoken Screen (www.sortirdelecran.ca), which supports the travel of artists who wish to share and to promote their works. These particular centres based in Quebec have also managed to get institutional funding. They are financially supported by universities, such as the Université du Québec à Montréal, and governmental agencies including The Canada Council for the Arts, the Conseil des arts et des letters du Québec, the Conseil des arts de Montréal, and Emploi-Québec.

[10]In addition to the present issue, the conference is also the occasion for a special number of the journal *Rampike* (15.1, 2006-2007), and three special editions of *Open Letter*, two edited by Lily Cho and Melina Baum Singer (Summer 2006/ forthcoming Fall 2008), and the third, a collection of "Interviews, Dialogues, Responses, Interventions" edited by Jessica Schagerl (Spring 2006).

[11]See *Knowledge Council: SSHRC, 2006-2011*. Ottawa: SSHRC, Aug. 2005.

[12]The first TransCanada selected proceedings have now been published. See Kamboureli and Miki. Readers attentive to footnotes will notice that this special issue of *SCL / ÉLC* is sometimes referenced as appearing with *Essays in Canadian Writing* in this volume. Due to delays occasioned by the transference of *ECW* from Montreal to Saskatoon, we were forced to change our publication plans mid-stream. We are grateful to Kevin Flynn, Jennifer Andrews, and John Ball for enabling the smooth and amicable transition from one journal to another.

[13]"The Poetry Reading is a Public Tuning": An Evening of Talked, Read, and/or Performed Poems included short readings by Daphne Marlatt, Christian Bök, Louis Cabri, Nicole Markotic, Aritha van Herk, Susan Holbrook, Jeff Derksen, Adeena Karasick, Margaret Christakos, Aurian Haller, Tanis MacDonald, Cornelia Hoogland, and Robert Hogg.

[14]See Karl Jirgens, "For the Record," and Davey, "SwiftCurrent" for more details on the founding of *SwiftCurrent*.

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