



PROJECT MUSE®

The Remainder: Social Collage and the Four Discourses in
(some of) the Kootenay School of Writing: Part II

Clint Burnham

ESC: English Studies in Canada, Volume 36, Issue 4, December 2010, pp. 27-48
(Article)



Published by Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of
English

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2010.0042>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/464293>

The Remainder: Social Collage and the Four Discourses in (some of) the Kootenay School of Writing: Part II

Clint Burnham
Simon Fraser University

Note: This essay is from a larger work on the poetics and poetry of the Kootenay School of Writing, the body of work primarily being that published in the 1980s, the approach being a Lacanian one. I divide the poetry into three camps or tendencies: the Red Tory neopastoralism of Lisa Robertson, Christine Stewart, Peter Culley, and Catriona Strang, the concerns of procedural constraints and Blanchotesque absence in Susan Clark, Kathryn MacLeod, Dan Farrell, and Melissa Wolsak, and, here, the social collage/disjunctive form to be found in the work of Colin Smith/Dorothy Lusk (discussed in the first half of this essay) and Deanna Ferguson/Jeff Derksen/Gerald Creede (discussed in this, the second half). Thanks to Donato Mancini, whose research in 2008 greatly helped to kick-start this writing.

Ferguson and the Reminder of the Remainder

Sometimes the subordinate clause is while you still have friends. Causality abets restless energy; ensues credit. If stool the size of an infant's head is removed from one's cadaver, it's a sign. Adjust connective degenerations. What appears to the eye and touch after twenty or thirty years is the same after forty or sixty, singing, cords, casts, stuck to the bottom. (Deanna Ferguson, "Swoop Contract," *The Relative Minor*, 51)

CLINT BURNHAM
 teaches cultural theory
 and contemporary
 literature in the English
 Department at Simon
 Fraser University, where
 he is also director of
 the MA for Teachers of
 English (MATE) program.
 His books include,
 among others, *The
 Jamesonian Unconscious*,
Smoke Show, and *The
 Benjamin Sonnets*;
 forthcoming in the fall of
 2011 are *The Only Poetry
 that Matters: Reading
 the Kootenay School of
 Writing* (Arsenal Pulp)
 and *The Boundaries of
 Literature* (co-edited
 with Paul Budra, Indiana
 University Press).

Jacques Lacan's notion of the signifying chain holds that language functions as a structure to give meaning to signifiers and, further, that those signifiers constitute how memory works (or, in the case of repression, does not). In one formulation of the role of signifiers, things are remembered for the subject by the "signifying chain"—by words (Fink 20). And in an uncanny parallel to Lusk's text, Lacan notes the case of "the man who withdrew to an island to forget—to forget what? he forgot—so the Minister, by not making use of the letter, comes to forget it. This is expressed by the persistence of his conduct. But the letter, no more than the neurotic's unconscious, does not forget him" (*É* 34/24–25).

The signifying chain works in the following way. Take the ordinary sign: "Thank you for not smoking." We do not know what "thank you" means here until the end of the sentence, of the chain. "Thank you for not ..." what? We may know the dictionary meaning of "thank you"—of common gratitude—but not its meaning in this sign, until the chain is complete. "Smoking" gives meaning to "thank you."

Looking at Deanna Ferguson's excerpt, then, we can add a second meaning to the notion of the signifying chain: not only does a sentence only make sense once it is complete, but when sentences are removed from their context they do not make sense. Thus "stuck to the bottom" at the end of the Deanna Ferguson quotation would resonate with, or echo, for the reader of the entire poem, the line from the opening paragraph "Failing tomato juice, macaroni stuck to the bottom, she squawked" (WC 136). But that reference or resonance or echo does not mean that the phrase now *means* food or macaroni stuck to the bottom of a pot; what the reference *means* is the technical or formal device of collaging in a phrase from earlier in the poem; it *means* that the stuff of the poem is drawn from itself as well as from other texts, other meanings. The text is an intertext; the text is dialogic. Meaning in the sense of a fixed, definable essence is resisted, is never arrived at.

It's also important to realize that it is not just this kind of poetry which is subject to the signifying chain. All language is. We can return to the "Thank you for not smoking" sign, for instance, and note that there are still further indeterminacies at work here: for not smoking *what?* (Indeed, in the context of Vancouver, a city in which lately one is more likely to be censured for smoking tobacco than marijuana, the question is not merely mischievous.) Or for not smoking *where?* *When?* Ever? Or just right now, right here. These questions, this opening up of the signifying chain, which we ignore in our everyday use of language (or, Lacan would say, in the everyday use language makes of us), are what this writing is engaged with.

And the refusal of meaning going on here is also connected to how some critics have seen Lacan's own writing functioning. As Bruce Fink, a clinician and the translator of a recent edition of Lacan's *Ecrits* argues:

[I]t is precisely insofar as understanding involves nothing more than situating one configuration of signifiers within another that Lacan is so adamant about refusing to understand, about striving to defer understanding, because in the process of understanding, everything is brought back to the level of the status quo, to the level of what is already known. Lacan's writing itself overflows with extravagant, preposterous, and mixed metaphors, precisely to jolt one out of the easy reductionism inherent in the very process of understanding.... Thus the gist of Lacan's claim that meaning (meaning as what you imagine you have understood) is imaginary. By assimilating something, you have the sense of being someone, or you imagine yourself as someone (an ego or self), who has accomplished a certain difficult task; you picture yourself as a thinker. (71)

So *understanding* a Colin Smith poem or a Dorothy Trujillo Lusk poem—or an Al Purdy poem or a Rita Wong poem—would entail merely fitting the challenge the poem poses to one's sense of language, of self, of the world—would mean just fitting that challenge into one's system. Disjunctive poetics—the use of the profane—the vernacular—immigration politics (to crudely sum up these four examples)—aha! now I've got it. But the writing being described in the present study is doing something different, and its domestication or colonization by analysis and exegesis will do it a disservice if that truly radical nature of the disjunctive, of the social, is not given its proper due.

Let us test this disavowal of the scholarly, first with a bibliographic note on this poem and Lusk's "Oral Tragedy." As I already noted for Lusk, both poems exist in various states: Ferguson's was published in the *East of Main* anthology as well as her 1993 collection *The Relative Minor*; Lusk's, as mentioned above, was published in her chapbook *Oral Tragedy*, her 1990 collection *Redactive*, and the *Writing Class* anthology. In both cases, minor punctuation mistakes or variations exist. Lusk's poem reads "ie. bum" in the chapbook and anthology states but "i.e. bum" in *Redactive*. Ferguson's poem reads "infant's head" in the anthology, but "infants head" in *The Relative Minor*. Now, these variations or mistakes, like the shifting small caps in "Oral Tragedy," locate the poems at a certain juncture or nexus of poetic, technological, and modes of production narratives. In terms of poetics, the incorporation of misspellings in contemporary poetry (and, in

this case, mispunctuations) render the variations difficult to fix. Readers will not necessarily, in a book which includes lines like “Wee Plad in The iCS Fihing hol” (the opening of Ferguson’s “iCS Fihing hol” in *The Relative Minor* [81]), assume that “infants head” is a typo, missing out the possessive apostrophe. Indeed, the missing apostrophe (if that’s what it is, and not a revision by the author) could plausibly change the line to suggest that “head” is a predicate for the plural subject “infants.” As in, infants head for the exit. Then, in terms of technology, the typos also remind us that these poems were retyped, or re-entered on a keyboard, at a transitional space between the modernist typography of cold type and the contemporary (twenty-first century) processes of scanning and uploading files. Finally, the means and relations and modes of production are also referenced. In Marxist theory, the first, means of production, refers to the machinery and material conditions of production: desktop publishing computers, offset presses. Then, relations of production refers to who owns such means: the petty bourgeois (New Star, Pulp, the publishers of the two anthologies, and Talonbooks, publisher of *Redactive*) versus collectively owned Tsunami (publisher of *Oral Tragedy* and *The Relative Minor*). Finally, modes of production refers to the larger societal organization of goods and profit, which is to say that this takes place under (late) capitalism. A final comment: in both instances I reproduced what seemed a most plausible reading for my quotation.¹

So let’s return to Ferguson’s excerpt, which begins with a meta-linguistic statement that rapidly becomes absurd: “Sometimes the subordinate clause is while you still have friends.” The “subordinate clause” here is a noun phrase (as are my words “meta-linguistic statement”); ironically, this sentence does not have a subordinate clause. But the *frisson* of domination contained in the neutral linguistic marker “subordinate” is then continued with the foreboding “while you still have friends.” Speech is connected to the social. The declarative statement that follows suggests that these are descriptions of some pre-existing condition, be it linguistic, political, or physical: ideas of causality and energy suggest the latter, for instance. But the disjunction between and within the sentences makes us suspect that the text is to be read as non-referential: what “ensues credit,” for instance? Rather, we are reading a certain tone or affect that then continues with the cool description of “stool the size of an infant’s head” being removed from “a cadaver.”

1 Jameson delineates these distinctions nicely in his introductory essay on base and superstructure in *Valences of the Dialectic*.

The medical language certainly reminds us that here we are in the realm of the university discourse—thus “stool” instead of *shit*, “cadaver” instead of body or *corpse*. Too, the very euphemistic nature of these nouns does nothing to hide the *abject* status of “stool” and “cadaver”—the body as *objet a* that is addressed by the university discourse: $\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{S}$. That scientificity, that university discourse, connects with other such lexes in the poem, including “proctitis” (inflammation of the rectum, OED), “the common cold,” “professional muscle,” “dirty-minded dentist,” the obvious “we know medical companies are interested” (50) and “more and more medicine,” culminating in “Cell formations on file dead on DNA” (51). And the cool language then is immediately turned around with the flat statement that if all of this happens, “it’s a sign.” A sign in a medical sense, or a sign in a linguistic sense? Or, again, a meta-linguistic sign?

Once again we have play going on with the signifying chain: it’s a sign of what? The passage then shifts registers slightly, to a demand: “Adjust connective degenerations” (again, demands abound in the poem: “Find suitable vents” [50], “Code functional disorders,” “Test the theory” [51], “Lunch forward,” “Yell timbre,” “Carry the baby,” and “Forever calculate” [52]). These medical resonances, these demands, then return to the flat declarative and tautological sense of the beginning of the sentence, “What appears to the eye and touch after twenty or thirty years is the same after forty or sixty”—a form of entropy perhaps (the entropic is an important concept in contemporary art, deriving from the influential Robert Smithson). But this sentence rapidly spirals out of meaning or control: “or sixty, singing, cords, casts, stuck to the bottom.”

And meaning is also overdetermined: that is, first of all, the sentences in Ferguson’s poem keep sticking to the bottom, keep sticking or coming unstuck at their ends. The clause, is while you still have friends. Causality, ensues credit. Stool, is a sign. What connects, also degenerates. What appears the same, degenerates, or ensues, into something left over. One way to think about what is going on here with this string of connective degenerations, of things removed from the body of the sentence, of things stuck to bottoms or stools, is that these are all remainders, reminders: these are all leftovers (that great meal of the day after, of the Canadian midnight snack), the remaindered book. The remainder, in Lacanian theory, has two different resonances, the first to do with the *objet petit a*, that which is left over from the Real after the subject’s entry into the Symbolic. If the Symbolic means language, the rational system of the Law, a system of signs that we all must navigate, then the Real is the unbearable nexus of pain/pleasure that we are all seeking some trace of: the small “a” *autre* (the

In Ferguson's
work, however,
pleasure (in
Lacanian terms,
jouissance) must
be taken in *not*
getting it.

Autre, what Žižek calls the Big Other, is roughly analogous to the Symbolic, to the one we are trying to please, to figure out their desire—the parent, the teacher, the cop, the critic).

So what disjunction does in Ferguson's work and that of her colleagues is to open language, the Symbolic, the Big Other, up to what cannot be contained or symbolized or signified. This is the non-meaning that results from play with syntax, as in the paragraph's first sentence. The non-meaning that results from lack of referentiality, as in the "Causality" sentence. The break in the signifying chain that leads to the deflationary rhetoric of the cadaver sentence. The formal method that is commented upon with the impossible demand to "Adjust connective degenerations."

But these issues also connect to how poetry functions generally in our society, in the West perhaps. Poetry is forever constituted in terms of meaning, meaning being its *objet petit a*. Poetry is always lacking in meaning, lacking in understandability, which is why, on the one hand, high-school students are perpetually puzzled by it (perhaps also because of teaching methods which give the reader the sense that she or he has to get it) and, at the same time, the same adolescents write so much of it.²

In Ferguson's work, however, pleasure (in Lacanian terms, *jouissance*) must be taken in *not* getting it. For the other sense of the remainder, in terms of the university discourse, is what is produced or lost in the bottom right of the formula: in this case, the split subject. We may, for example, attempt to reconstitute sentences for more conventional meaning: perhaps the first one would then read "Sometimes it's best to be nice to people while you still have friends." The second one might end "it's a sign of intestinal distress." The third might read "Adjust connective tissues." But this is only to show us what is *not* in the text: our pleasure in reading such a text lies in its closeness to meaning. Proximity might be a better word, suggesting, too, the "prox cards" used in large corporate buildings to gain entry to locked-down areas. But the lack of meaning here is a trace of the Real in the sense that Ferguson's poetry shows how words that possess meaning ("connective," "bottom") can be deployed without meaning: signifiers without signifieds.

Derksen and the Statistic

The Rocket Richard riots would be an example of spontaneous agency.

² Hence the recent mock-genre of Teen Angst poetry. See www.teenangstpoetry.blogspot.com.

“Jeanine is a living example of Noranda’s attitude toward employees.”

China 6.3%

This train.

The residual anger resides here [points with right hand] and accumulates here [points with left hand], I’m still looking for the spigot.

More American soldiers were killed by accidents during the build-up than by either the Iraqi army or so-called friendly fire. (Derksen, “Interface,” *WC* 203)

Let us now turn to the fourth poet whose work exemplifies the social collage: Jeff Derksen. I want to begin a discussion of this excerpt from his text with the second sentence: “‘Jeanine is a living example of Noranda’s attitude to employees.’” The quotation marks in Derksen’s text—here indicated, in the North American protocol, by single quotation marks—signal to the reader that this line is quoted from elsewhere; their usage also suggests that, by contrast, lines in the poem that do not appear with quotation marks are Derksen’s own, even while this appears to be unlikely. A few lines below, for instance, we read “More American soldiers were killed by accidents during the build-up than by either the Iraqi army or so-called friendly fire”—an observation about the first Gulf War that likely enough was sourced from news media or political analysis. But why, then, the quotation marks for the Noranda line?

Luckily for this critic, Derksen comments on precisely this line, and quotes it to begin his key essay “Sites Taken as Signs: Place, the Open Text, and Enigma in New Vancouver Writing.” First published in the 1994 anthology *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*, the essay ranges impressively over forty years of Canadian (and American) poetry, quickly and succinctly critiquing Earl Birney, Pat Lowther, Brian Fawcett, Charles Olson, Gerry Gilbert, Fred Wah, and Phyllis Webb, by way of providing context for younger Vancouver poets such as Kathryn MacLeod, Lusk, Kevin Davies, and Gerald Creede. But before all of this critical praxis, Derksen begins the essay with the Noranda line, signaling that it came from a “Noranda TV ad” (144). He then cuts to the chase: “In the face of corporate constructions of our subjectivity that reduce a person to a ‘living example,’ how can we assert a space for the subject that goes beyond the limited official versions? Even in poetry, which has potential to be an ‘unofficial’ discourse, the position of the subject has been more or

less taken for granted" (144). He provides here one reading of the line—a reading that, in the context of Derksen's essay, jibes nicely with its overall argument with respect to how KSW texts refuse a monolithic subjectivity. But the line works differently in Derksen's "Interface." First of all, consider its place between the comment on the Rocket Richard riots and the China statistic. The Rocket Richard riots took place in 1955 when the Montréal Canadiens hockey player was suspended by NHL president Clarence Campbell: the riots are sometimes seen as an early precursor to the Quiet Revolution in 1960s Québec. In both cases, Richard and Jeanine, we have the spectacle of an employee being used by the employer. That is to say, remember Žižek's injunction to read the university discourse, or $\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{s}$, so that we have knowledge addressing the subject *qua homo sacer*, as bare life, the biopolitical. Both Richard and Jeanine are bare life. A key difference might be that while with Richard this exploitation resulted in a spontaneous riot, with Jeanine the exploitation resulted in Derksen's two texts (his essay and the poem "Interface"). Or, to be more exact, both instances become "examples" in Derksen's poem. Does this mean that the poem should be read as a hysteric's discourse, as $\frac{s}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$? Perhaps, but consider, again, the context in Derksen's poem, how the Jeanine line is followed "China 6.3%," one of a string of statistics in the poem that indicate the percentage of military spending relative to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Others include "Soviet Union 24.9%" (WC 197), "United States 18.3%" (198), "Great Britain 17.1%" (200), "France 8.9%" (201), "West Germany 5.4%" (204), "Japan 3.5%," "Sweden 2.5%" (207), "Poland 2.3%" (209).³ Does this succession of statistics deployed in the poem not render the poem, again, as indicative of the university discourse, of the role of knowledge as agent?

To make this a stronger case, let us look more closely at Derksen's "Interface," and particularly at the following lines, all of which, I claim, are indicative of the shift in political poetry from the hysteric to the university. The first series taken from the poem indicate an attitude toward self:

I needlessly mapped an occasion, splitting my support, serving myself. (WC 197)

The structure I hate also hates me, but it makes me, and that's where the problem starts. (198)

3 China's military spending in 2008 was \$59 billion: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/04/AR2008030401345_pf.html (accessed 26 November 2009).

It was a way of thinking about myself that took in all perspectives and appeared not to damage the environment. (202)

“I’m a man—spell it *I apostrophe M.*”

I enter the artist’s body of work by walking across Second and Cambie, becoming a flâneur in modernism at the shutter’s click. (207)

In all of these lines, then, we have the fully rationalized subject of late capitalism and neoliberalism, the subject who has needlessly mapped itself but nonetheless possesses the knowledge of the structure (and the attendant irony), that accounts for “all perspectives” and is fully aware of the disjunction between the “I” and the “man,” finally the subject of an Ian Wallace photograph (Derksen is referring to Wallace’s *Heroes in the Street* series). This rationalized subject is then immersed in a world as the *objet a*, castrated and not knowing, apologized to but “still a little sore,” immersed in a Canadian discourse:

The return for refund where applicable part was never clear, but we continued, stopping at each gas station to ask. (WC 197)

Even though the ultra-sonic image of my testicle was on the split screen right in front of me, I felt detached, cube- or kiosk-like. (199)

The U.S. Navy did phone to apologize, making me feel even more like a nation, more unlike the United Nations, but still a little sore in the jaw. (205)

Lieutenant-Colonel Butt phoned me at work to assure me of his regrets on the “unfortunate incident” and the strictness of the naval code. (206)

“A reader must face the fact that Canadian Literature is undeniably somber and negative, and that this to a large extent is both a reflection and a chosen definition of the national sensibility.” (208)

This rationalized discourse then not only denotes civil society, or culture, but also the triumph of culture over nature:

The fish instinctively knew where the international boundaries are. (WC 197)

I was humped like a salmon. (198)

This rational-
ized subject is
then immersed
in a world as
the *objet a*,
castrated and
not knowing,
apologized to
but “still a little
sore,” immersed
in a Canadian
discourse.

“Males have strange and elaborate paired crab-clawlike jointed appendages attached to the snout, which had a sexual function; the females are unencumbered.” (199)

The bay curves past the family beach and pier, crosses the 49th Parallel, and terminates in an oil-tanker dock and naval base. (207).

The role of politics in this discourse, then, is to be simultaneously transparent and inconsequential, that is to say, pragmatic:

A strike that tries to “inconvenience the public as little as possible.” (199)

“It is only with plain talking, and a give and take on both sides, that will ensure there are forests in the future.” (200)

Propaganda points to propaganda within a transparent frame. (200)

In this discourse, in the university discourse, the role of language is to act as a code which reveals nothing, refers only to itself, is historical by way of being archival or intertextual:

“Urgent Fury” wasn’t the movie, but the code name: Grenada 1983. (200)

There was a picture of him “in the field,” notebook in hand, informant at knee. (201)⁴

The language of war at this juncture is an aim, a name. (204)

They wanted to argue generations but the past year is all archives. (205)

A highly developed national sense of irony was in place by 1942: Canadian raid on Dieppe was code named Operation Jubilee. (205)

“Operation Comfort” lacks irony in not recognizing an alternative system: comparative literature without the *comparative*. (207)

Operation Desert Shield, Operation Just Cause, Operation Rolling Thunder, Operation Success, Operation Martyrdom, Operation Should We Be Doing This? (209)

⁴ Refers to the cover of Clifford and Marcus’s *Writing Culture*.

Most dramatically, of course, this succession of code names for invasions and other war-like activities signals the elastic capacity of language itself to contain and represent the violent rupture of reality.

As a way of substantiating my claim that Derksen's poetry posits the shift from the hysteric's discourse to the university discourse, consider the range of concerns in these lines: the self not as a victim; a universalizing discourse of bureaucracy (the military even apologizes); nature as part of scientific knowledge; a politics that is postideological; language as always already a code. Surely these conditions of Derksen's poem coincide in important ways with how Žižek has argued the relation of Lacan's four discourses is constituted with respect to the two faces of modernity: "total administration and capitalist-individualist dynamics" (*"Objet a,"* 110). But while the first part of that quotation speaks to the essentially thematic reading I've conducted here of Derksen's work, the second speaks to form. That is to say, it is important to note that like, for example, Bob Perelman's work, Derksen's poetry is almost always grammatically correct: no Bruce Andrews-like disjunction here. In this sense disjunction is not at the same level as we encounter in Lusk or Ferguson and is closer to Smith's or (as we will shortly see) Creede. Which is to say that disjunction here lies from line to line or verse to verse, as opposed to at the internal level of syntax. The collage is social because of the putative political content here *and* because the disjunction means the reader must construct meaning. The social is a collage because that formal structure is held to bear a relation ("realism") with the social world.

But this agency of the reader is also problematic, as Derksen argued almost twenty years ago in "Sites Taken as Signs," where he critiqued the McCafferyesque valorization of the productive reader and a surface "disjunctiveness" that is merely "a kind of cut-up method that leaves the central subject intact and does not challenge how meaning is made socially" (159). Crucially, that "central subject" then is the neoliberal subject, the neoliberal citizen or reader who reads by clicking, makes meaning by turning the page, and abdicates social or political agency in favour of crowdsourcing.

Creede and Excess

When we turn to Gerald Creede's work, again we see that the heterogeneous play of language resulting from a foregrounding of the polysemic is entirely coterminous with counterpoint of the hysteric discourse and the university discourse. This is relevant both to understanding the place of the *ksw* in the university discourse and to thinking about Lacan's system. That is, first

The last
sentence, of
course, suggests
a wit that is
simultaneously
of the hangover
and not.

of all, the *κ*sw itself was both the hysteric in relation to larger university formations in Vancouver in the 1980s and constituted itself, as a school (in both the collective sense of an aesthetic group *and* in the pedagogic sense of a teaching institution), in terms of the university discourse. But let us run through a poem of Creede's first of all as a way of elaborating on these remarks.

"Neglect is no bother" (*East of Main* 104–08) narrates in a loose way the morning after a drinking binge:

I woke up in a basement
not knowing where I was
or how I got there.
My head felt like
an L.P. some drunk
tried to centre
after breaking the spindle.
Sounded like it too. (104)

The last sentence, of course, suggests a wit that is simultaneously of the hangover and not. Nonetheless, much of the poem tries to find metaphors for the bodily condition, either outlandish:

My mouth
tasted like the coloured tinfoil
in a cheap kaleidoscope.
My spine felt the sound of glass being shoveled. (105)

or descending into lurid, pulp-noir melodrama:

A fist came
from the blind
side in my
consciousness.
I was weened over.
From the floor
on my back
the ceiling
seemed distant. (105)

I let out a curd
curdling scream &
mumbled a few words over the useless carton: (106)

But then returns to the quotidian, the mundane:

Drinking a mix of tea
& leftover tonic that tastes like iced piss, flat,
sweating summery summaries. The cranes move so
slowly I've never seen them move. It's so hot you
could fry x on the sidewalk. The traffic's distant
boom reminds me of bourbon. (107)

Four of the five senses in as many sentences. The poem ends both with resolution:

The last time I'll try
Freezer burned vodka (108)

... and its Beckettian dissolution:

All day long I make the ice cube.
Toting trays twixt sink & fridge.
same. so. then. same. then. so. (108)

Cube here is evidently a verb. Now, arguably in this poem it is the play between pulp description and bodily abjection that constitutes the counterpoint of hysteric/university discourse. The pulp/noir moments are the subject as hysteric, as divided, as victim, speaking to the master. Thus, in addition to the fist sequence above: "A boot swung in &/babied my teeth" (106) and

He smelt like a cheese whip
You could dip crackers in
But a few days beyond
His Best Before date (106)

These lines first of all indicate a subjectivity that is both inside and outside: the fist comes "from the blind / side in my / consciousness" and a boot "swung in." There is a blind side, a visual aporia, in the poet's consciousness, into which not just the fist but the boot swings in. Too, this entry of the pulp is very much the entry of another genre: earlier poems of Creede's are called "American Prose," or just "Prose," and half of his chapbook *Verbose* is little narratives.⁵

5 The full text of "American Prose" runs: "He needed a clear throat / 'Ahem.' he said / and put the barrel in his mouth." "Prose" (*Writing* 16) seems, again, to be a generic marker. The text is listed with that title on the cover of the magazine but then also given the title "The Face Falls" on the page. This text includes a line very similar to one in "neglect is no bother": "I woke up in the basement" (in "neglect": "a basement").

The attempts to forge a description of the body as it endures a hangover constitute a university discourse because of how they relentlessly seek out knowledge, the knowledge of the metaphor especially: his head isn't just like a misplaced LP but sounds like it; mouth tastes like not just "coloured tinfoil" but that "in a cheap kaleidoscope"; spine doesn't feel like "the sound of glass being shoveled" but "felt the sound" (the synesthesia of these two examples further extends the range); the assailant smelled not just like cheese whip, not just like a cheese whip, but one "a few days beyond / His Best Before date"; and so on. This expansion of the field, of each metaphor, not only serially (that is, they are all attempts to convey the phenomenology of the hangover) but also particularly (each metaphor can conceivably expand infinitely) constitutes the university discourse in the following way. Here knowledge is the speaking subject, the agent: knowledge as master but supported silently by power. Too, as Žižek remarks above, what is arguably addressed here is the abject body, the abject body of the alcoholic or hungover subject. This characterization might seem paradoxical or contradictory. Haven't I just argued that the pulp and noirish description come from the abject? But two points are necessary to clarify things: first of all, the poem as a whole is being read as a counterpoint between the hysterical and university discourses, that is, the noir moments are from the *point of view* of the divided, or abject, subject. Then, as Žižek argues in an essay on Lacan's *Seminar XVII*, the upper level of the university discourse (S2 directed at a) stand in for "the university knowledge endeavoring to integrate, domesticate, and appropriate the excess that resists and rejects it" ("*Objet a* in Social Links" 108). That is, the poem attempts to take the excremental excess of the hangover, of the "iced piss," of the expired cheese whip and "Freezer burned vodka," which is to say of the decayed commodity. Finally, that is, it is not the abused body that is the subject matter here, nor even of language as a vehicle for such description, but the commodity-form, which is in the end the form of exploitation, of class exploitation.

One final remark on this text—and on an interesting subtheme of Creede's production—Creede appears in a 1984 light-box photograph by Jeff Wall, *Milk*. In the picture, Creede is squatted in front of a brown brick wall, staring fixedly at the right as an arc of milk streams up from a carton in his right hand. This may be referenced by the lines "I let out a curd / curdling scream & / murmured a few words over the useless carton" and certainly by these from "Prose (The Face Falls)": "Details such as the lack of shoelaces and socks, the lank, uncombed hair, the ugly polyester shirt rolled up on one arm but not the other, reveal the character as a low life,

a derelict, unwilling or unable to care for his physical appearance and at the mercy of his impulses” (33). In a conversation five or ten years ago, Creede allowed as to this description of the photograph coming from an unpublished essay by Peter Culley. On the Tate Modern website image of the photograph, Wall is quoted as saying: “Suffering and dispossession remain at the centre of social experience” (we will return to dispossession in the neoliberal moment at the conclusion of this study).⁶ Culley also comments, in a published essay, on another photograph of Creede, this by Vancouver photographer Roy Arden: “[T]he subject, shirtless, awkwardly recumbent on a worn carpet, pivots nervously away from the ... merciless light ... the photographic portrait’s conventional dialectic of subject (flesh), light and emulsion are out of balance, some unspoken contract between sitter and subject seems subtly violated” (2002).

It is no coincidence, I would argue, that these photographic representations constitute a hysterical subjectivity. A final note on Creede’s poem *qua* discourse, or the four discourses: what mustn’t be lost here is how the poem constitutes a barrier, a battery of signifiers *qua* knowledge, against *jouissance*, against the terrifying, transgressive pain-pleasure that is alcoholic oblivion.

Conclusion

Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, first developed in his 1969–70 Seminar, has increasingly been read in terms of the possibilities for social critique. In his 2004 book *Iraq, or, The Borrowed Kettle*, Slavoj Žižek argues that the university discourse was a succinct model for how capitalism and the reign of experts functioned and, in particular, the two forms of capitalist domination: the hysterical subject and the totalitarian bureaucrat.⁷ And in his essay “*Objet a* in Social Links,” Žižek, discussing the analyst’s discourse $\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$, remarks on this shift in Lacan’s thinking, from the analyst as *Autre* or big Other (to frustrate imaginary misidentification & misrecognition and to get the patient to recognize his or her place in the Symbolic) to analyst as *objet a* (indicating the inconsistency of the big Other). Too, in her essay “Fascism, Stalinism, and the Organization of Enjoyment,” Jodi Dean argues that in the university discourse, “knowledge speaks” and thus we have “the rule of experts” (36); in this discourse, Dean continues, experts provide facts but not the values with which to assess

6 See www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/jeffwall/infocus/section1/img5.shtml (accessed 10 November 2009).

7 See Žižek, *Iraq*, 131–57, especially 156.

Evidently there
are two
questions here
at this late point
in the essay.

them, which is why the divided subject \$ is extra, production, surplus, that is, knowledge addresses the *objet a*, or *the subject as object*: “We see this in the way that capitalism undermines symbolic identities, how it undermines forms of attachment through the revolutionary force of ever expanding and intensifying markets. Instead of a symbolic identity of the kind provided by a Master, capitalism offers its subjects enjoyment (*objet petit a*).”⁸ Evidently there are two questions here at this late point in the essay: first, to make a final convincing statement on the relation of the four discourses to the ksw poets discussed here; second, to address what seems to be an implication of that connection, that is, am I not arguing that social collage poetics constitutes a continuation of late capitalism by other means?

To identify Derksen’s or Ferguson’s poetry with the university discourse means the following: that the formal methods of such poetry constitute a dialectics of that discourse, a way in which such a discourse gives rise both to its own critique and to the pillaging of those methods. That is, Derksen’s use of statistics (not only in “Interface”)⁹ takes the paradigmatic “knowledge speaking,” furthers the decontextualization that statistics ontologically function as (knowledge has no subjective values) by presenting statistics anonymously, and makes such matter into the raw material of poetry. Or, when Ferguson’s sentence “What appears to the eye and touch after twenty or thirty years is the same after forty or sixty, singing, cords, casts, stuck to the bottom” (51) reminds us of the opening verse-paragraph for “Swoop Contract”: “Failing tomato juice, macaroni stuck to the bottom of the pot, she squawked” (50), this reminder/remainder constitutes the *objet a* not merely as a form of auto-inter-textuality (or textual cannibalism) but also in the sense that in the university discourse the \$ or barred or split or hysterical subject is what is produced/lost/surplus: here figured as the “she” who “squawked,” a “she” who then is *lost* in the second iteration of Ferguson’s poem.

But this still leaves the nagging question or suspicion that my reading of the social collage tendency in the ksw is reducing this formally and politically radical poetics to merely chorus for neoliberalism, cheerlead-

8 Dean, “Fascism, Stalinism, and the Organization of Enjoyment,” 36; note that Dean here also draws on Žižek, *Iraq*, 145.

9 Various statistics (or at least such percentages as “Male 98%, married 92%”) appear in “If History is the Memory of Time What Would our Monument Be” (*Dwell*, 60–74); the exchange rate for the Canadian and American dollars in “But Could I make a Living from It” (*Transnational*, 24–39); and exports of oil to the U.S. from various countries in billions of barrels in “Compression” (*Transnational* 103–10).

ers for late capitalism, apologists for flexible labour and digital ennui. In answer to this, let us revisit the brief quotation from Jodi Dean just above, where she speaks of how capital “undermines forms of attachment through the revolutionary force of ever expanding and intensifying markets.” This passage recalls another, more canonical moment in political theory:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.

The writers of that passage had no doubt that capitalism was revolutionary—the admiration cannot even, in the rhetoric, be called begrudging—and their answer was for a revolution arising out of those very conditions. In the same regard, I would argue, the turn to a poetry of the university discourse in the formal machinations of the KSW constitutes a using of the very tendencies in neoliberalism against their progenitors.¹⁰

Works Cited

- Andrews, Bruce. *Paradise & Method: Poetics & Praxis*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1996.
- , and Charles Bernstein, eds. *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984.
- Ayers, David. *Modernism: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- Bernstein, Charles. *Content's Dream: Essays 1975–1984*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1986.
- Burnham, Clint. “Sitting in a bar on Commercial drive recently Dorothy Trujillo Lusk asked me why we had been asked to read at a launch of Dorothy Livesay’s marginal poetry or, My ex-boss’s anthology.” Unpublished essay, 1998.
- . “Feminist Trilogy.” *Buddyland*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 2000. 39–50.

¹⁰ The passage is, of course, from Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* (207).

- . “Choke the Chicken Hawk Leftist.” *Rental Van*. Vancouver: Anvil, 2007. 83–86.
- . “Bitter/Weber: Photography and Empty Architecture.” *Sabine Bitter/Helmut Weber: Right, to the City*. Exhibition catalogue. Linz: Landesgalerie Linz am Oberösterreichischen Landesmuseum, 2009. 40–45.
- Clark, Tom. *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life*. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2000.
- Clemens, Justin, and Russell Grigg, eds. *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Seminar XVII*. SIC 6. Durham: Duke UP, 2006.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Collis, Steve. *Through the Words of Others: Susan Howe and Anarcho-Scholasticism*. Victoria: ELS, 2006.
- Crain, Caleb. “Against Camel Case.” *New York Times Magazine*. 29 November 2009: 18.
- Creede, Gerald. “American Prose.” *British Columbia Monthly* 30 (June/July 1983): n.p.
- . *Verbose*. Vancouver: Tsunami, 1986.
- . “faluables.” *Raddle Moon* 5 (1987): 95–99.
- . “neglect is no bother.” Wharton and Wayman, 104–08.
- . “Prose.” *Writing* 16 (October 1986): 33–34.
- . “resumé.” *West Coast Line* 24/1 (1990): 61–69.
- , and Nancy Shaw. “Close to Naked.” *Writing* 23/24 (Fall/Winter 1989): 18–22.
- Culley, Peter. “Roy Arden’s Fragments: A Poem Containing History.” Oakville Catalogue. The Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art: The Canadian Art Database, Canadian Writers Files. www.ccca.ca/c/writing/c/culley/culoo05t.html. 2002. Accessed 14 September 2011.
- . “‘Because I am always talking’: Reading Vancouver into the Western Front.” *Whispered Art History: Twenty Years at the Western Front*. Ed. Keith Wallace. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993, 189–97.
- Davidson, Michael. “Discourse in Poetry: Bakhtin and Extensions of the Dialogical.” Palmer, ed., 143–50.
- Davies, Kevin. “From *Meanstreak*.” *Raddle Moon* 14 (1992): 57–63.
- . *Thunk*. New York: Situations #2, 1995.

- . “from *Overkill/a protocol*.” *Raddle Moon* 17 (1999): 80–89.
- Dean, Jodi. “Fascism, Stalinism, and the Organization of Enjoyment.” Fabio Vighi and Heiko Feldner, eds. *Did Somebody Say Ideology: Slavoj Žižek and Consequences*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007. 21–40.
- . *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009.
- De Baere, Bart, and Dieter Roelstraete, eds. *Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists*. Exhibition catalogue. Antwerp and Vancouver: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2006.
- Derksen, Jeff. “Blind Trust.” *Raddle Moon* 5 (1987): 66–74.
- . “Solace.” *West Coast Line* 24/1 (1990): 85–98.
- . “Exploded View.” *West Coast Line* 24/1 (1990): 144–45.
- . *Down Time*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1990.
- . *Selfish*. Vancouver: pomflit 5, 1993.
- . *Dwell*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993.
- . “from *International Muscle Cars*.” *Raddle Moon* 17 (1999): 92–99.
- . *Transnational Muscle Cars*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003.
- , and Roy Arden. “Through.” *Raddle Moon* 8 (November 1989): 33–57.
- Dorward, Nate, ed. *Antiphonies; Essays on Women’s Experimental Poetries in Canada*. Toronto: The Gig, 2008.
- Douglas, Stan, ed. *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*. Vancouver: Or/Talonbooks, 1991.
- Eichhorn, Kate, and Heather Milne, eds. *Prismatic Publics: Innovative Canadian Women’s Poetry and Poetics*. Toronto: Coach House, 2009.
- Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Fawcett, Brian. “East Van Uber Alles?” *Unusual Circumstances and Interesting Times, And Other Impolite Interventions*. Vancouver: New Star, 1991. 91–102.
- Feltham, Oliver. “Enjoy Your Stay: Structural Change in *Seminar xvii*.” Clemens and Grigg, 179–94.
- Ferguson, Deanna. “Skip Town.” *Raddle Moon* 5 (1987): 90–94.
- . “Cross Words.” *West Coast Line* 24/1 (1990): 17–25.
- . *The Relative Minor*. Vancouver: Tsunami, 1993.
- . *Edith & Enid*. Vancouver: Privately Printed, 1996.
- . *ddilemma*. Vancouver: hole, 1997.
- . “t & tenth & alma.” *Raddle Moon* 17 (1999): 66.

- Fink, Bruce. *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- . *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript, and Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author, with Contemporaneous Correspondence, Account of First Public Reading, Legal Skirmishes, Precursor Texts, and Bibliography*. Ed. Barry Miles. New York: HarperPerennial, 2006.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Howe, Susan. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. New York: New Directions, 1993.
- Hoy, Dan. "The Virtual Dependency of the Post-Avant and the Problematics of Flarf: What Happens when Poets Spend Too Much Time Fucking Around on the Internet." *Jacket Magazine* 29 (April 2006). Web. <http://jacketmagazine.com/29/hoy-flarf.html>. 16 January 2011.
- Hurst, Andrea. *Derrida Vis-à-vis Lacan: Interweaving Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Fordham UP, 2008.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan." *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986*. Vol. 1. Situations of Theory. *Theory and History of Literature* 48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 75–115.
- . "Lacan and the Dialectic: A Fragment." *Lacan: The Silent Partners*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso, 2006. 365–97.
- . *Valences of the Dialectic*. New York: Verso, 2009.
- Johnston, Adrian. *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2009.
- Klar, Malte, and Tim Kasser. "Some Benefits of Being an Activist: Measuring Activism and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being." *Political Psychology* 30.5: 755–78.
- Klobucar, Andrew, and Michael Barnholden, eds. *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*. Vancouver: New Star, 1999.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2002.
- . *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book xvii: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Russell Grigg. New York: Norton, 2007.
- Lusk, Dorothy Trujillo. *Oral Tragedy*. Vancouver: Tsunami, 1988.
- . "Sentimental Intervention." *Writing* 25 (1990): 24–30.

- . “This Story.” *West Coast Line* 24/1 (1990): 122–26.
- . *Redactive*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1990.
- . “Decorum (Typical).” *Four Poems*. Kamloops: Monoecious House Folios 4 (November 2000), n.p.
- . *Sleek Vinyl Drill*. Vancouver: Thuja, 2000.
- . *Ogress Oblige*. San Francisco: Krupskaya, 2001.
- MacCannell, Judith Flower. “More Thoughts for the Time of War and Death: The Discourse of Capitalism in *Seminar xvii*.” Clemens and Grigg, 195–215.
- McCaffery, Steve, Ron Silliman, and Charles Bernstein. “Correspondence: May 1976 – December 1977.” *Line* 5 (Spring 1985): 59–89.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Ed. Eugene Kamenka. *The Portable Karl Marx*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, 203–41.
- Mitchell, Juliet, and Jacqueline Rose, eds. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. New York: Norton, 1985.
- O’Brian, Melanie, ed. *Vancouver Art and Economies*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp/Artspeak, 2007.
- Olson, Charles. *The Maximus Poems*. New York: Jargon/Corinth, 1972.
- . *Call Me Ishmael: A Study of Melville*. San Francisco: City Lights, [1958].
- Palmer, Michael, ed. *Code of Signals: Recent Writings in Poetics*. Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1983.
- Perelman, Bob. *The Trouble with Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos*. New York: New Directions, 1986.
- Roudinesco, Elisabeth. *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985*. Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- . *Jacques Lacan*. Trans. Barbara Bray. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.
- Scalapino, Leslie. *way*. San Francisco: North Point, 1988.
- Schroeder, Jeanne Lorraine. *The Four Lacanian Discourses: or Turning Law Inside Out*. Abingdon: Birkbeck Law College, 2008.
- Silliman, Ron. *The New Sentence*. New York: Roof, 1985.
- Smith, Colin. *Multiple Poses*. Tsunami: Vancouver, 1997.
- . “Untitled.” *Raddle Moon* 17 (1999): 24–28.

Wayman, Tom. "Against the Smiling Bastards." *The New Quarterly* 101 (Winter 2007): 76–89.

Wharton, Calvin, and Tom Wayman. *East of Main: An Anthology of Poems from East Vancouver*. Vancouver: Pulp, 1989.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*. New York: Verso, 2004.

———. "Objet *a* in Social Links." Clemens and Griggs, 108–28.

———. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso, 2008.