

**Dissensus and Poetry: The Poet as Activist in Experimental
English-Canadian Poetry**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of Figures	iv
List of Tables	vi
Abstract	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Concrete Poetry: R u p t u r i n g the Modes of Doing Poetry	15
Steve McCaffery's <i>Carnival</i> : Panels, Over Saturation, and the Typewriter.....	20
Judith Copithorne's <i>Runes</i> : Poem-drawings, Authenticity, and the Hand	24
bpNichol's <i>The Captain Poetry Poems</i> : Borderblur, Comics Books, and the Body..	31
Reading: A Physical Act?	40
uoisnlbuoO	46
Chapter 2: Eeeeeoowww! Sound Poetry: An Inaudible Poetry	49
An Unsound History	53
O! <i>Canadada</i> and The Four Horsemen: Sound, Poetry, and Performance	62
SoundCloud and Penn Kemp: Birthing A New Type of Sound	69
Christian Bök and <i>The Cyborg Opera</i> : Machinic Poets for Machinic Audiences	77
Okuuuuuuurt!	85
Chapter 3: #instapoetry and the Blog: In Defence of rupi kaur	89
Beyond the Blog	94
kaur: A Proletarian Writer.....	102
A Digital Undercommons	121
#like4like #follow4follow #solidarity	123
Conclusion	125

Appendix A: Names of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit and Trans people who have gone missing or died as a result of violence according to It Starts With Us.....	131
Labour Cited	134
Other Labour Consulted	142

LIST OF FIGURES

0.0	Judith Copithorne, <i>Runes</i> (1970)	9
1.0	Steve McCaffery, page from Panel 2, <i>Carnival</i> (1975)	18
1.1	Steve McCaffery, Panel 2 booklet, <i>Carnival</i> (1975)	20
1.2	Steve McCaffery, page from Panel 1, <i>Carnival</i> (1975)	23
1.3	Judith Copithorne, <i>Runes</i> (1970)	25
1.4	Judith Copithorne, <i>Runes</i> (1970)	27
1.5	bpNichol, <i>The Captain Poetry Poems</i> (1971)	32
1.6	bpNichol, <i>The Captain Poetry Poems</i> (1971)	34
1.7	bpNichol, <i>The Captain Poetry Poems</i> (1971)	38
1.8	Steve McCaffery, Panel 1 assembled, <i>Carnival</i> (1970)	42
1.9	Rita Wong, “nervous organism,” <i>The Broadview Introduction to Literature</i> (2013).	43
1.10	Judith Copithorne, <i>Runes</i> (1970)	44
1.11	bpNichol, <i>The Captain Poetry Poems</i> (1971)	45
2.0	The Four Horsemen, “The Dream Remains,” <i>The Prose Tattoo</i> (1984)	67
3.0	@rupikaur_ , Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	95
3.1	@rupikaur_ , Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	95
3.2	@rupikaur_ , Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	95
3.3	@selenagomez, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	97
3.4	@rupikaur_ , “🍷 a throwback. Page 169 from #milkandhoney,” posted August 8 th 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	99
3.5	@rupikaur_ , “thank you@instagram for providing me with the...,” posted March 25 th 2015, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	103
3.6	@rupikaur_ , “🌻 my deepest apologies to those affected by my...,” posted September 6 th 2015, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	107
3.7	@rupikaur_ , “Page 107 🌻 #Thesunandherflowers,” posted March 29 th 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	108

3.8	@rupikaur_, “larger than life,” posted March 6 th 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	110
3.9	@rupikaur_, “i am haunted by the chilling and inhuman...,” posted June 19 ^h 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	111
3.10	@rupikaur_, “3 years ago today i self...,” posted November 14 th 2014, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	114
3.11	@rupikaur_, “the preface...,” posted July 11 th 2017, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	115
3.12	@mustagathepoet, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	117
3.13	@andrianhendyx, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	117
3.14	@najwazebian, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	117
3.15	@atticuspoetry, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	118
3.16	@nikita_gill, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	118
3.17	@rtylerknott, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	118
3.18	@ladybookmad, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	118
3.19	@langleav, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	118
3.20	@nayyirah.waheed, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15 th 2018.....	118

LIST OF TABLES

2.0	Christian Bök, Key to Notation, “When Cyborgs Versify,” <i>The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound</i> (2009).....	83
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ABSTRACT

Many of us believe that poetry, specifically activist and experimental poetry, is capable of intervening in our society, as though the right words will call people to action, give the voiceless a voice, and reorder the systems that perpetuate oppression, even if there are few examples of such instances. Nevertheless, my project looks at these very moments, when poetry alters the fabric of our real, to explore the ways these poetical interventions are, in effect, instances of what I have come to call “dissensual” poetry. Using Jacques Rancière’s concept of dissensus and the distribution of the sensible, my project investigates the ways in which dissensual poetry ruptures the distribution of the sensible—“our definite configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions and the field of our interventions”—to look at the ways poetry actually does politics (*Dissensus* 156). I look at three different types of dissensual poetry: concrete poetry, sound poetry, and instapoetry. I argue that these poetic practices prompt a reordering of our society, of what is countable and unaccountable, and of how bodies, capacities, and systems operate. They allow for those whom Rancière calls the anonymous, and whom we might call the oppressed or marginalized, to become known. I argue that bpNichol’s, Judith Copithorne’s, and Steve McCaffery’s concrete poems; the Four Horsemen’s, Penn Kemp’s, and Christian Bök’s sound poems; and rupi kaur’s instapoems are examples of dissensual poetry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to bring attention to “It Starts With Us,” an Indigenous organization that consists of No More Silence, Families of Sisters in Spirit, and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. Together, they are working toward compiling a database to “document [the] indigenous women, two-spirit and trans people who have gone missing or died as a result of violence” (“Why a Community-Led Database?”). The aim of this database is to “provide family members with a way to document their loved ones’ passing while asserting community control of ... record-keeping” (“Why a Community-Led Database?”). To date, they have compiled 108 names, although they acknowledge that the number in reality is much larger. They are independent of government and institutional funding. To learn more or to donate, visit www.itsstartswithus-mmiw.com.

Below are the names as they appear on the list. I have handwritten them as an act of personal meditation; I hope my reasons for handwriting them and for my misuse of the page will become clearer after Chapter 1. A list of the names in Times New Roman can be found in Appendix A.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the University of Ottawa English Department as well as Professor Robert Stacey, my thesis supervisor, whose guidance allowed me to work on a project that reflects both my academic and personal interests.

There are countless others I would like to name, such as Olivia Vanderwal, my roommate and good friend, who I think is more goddess than human for putting up with me these last few months; Liz White, the English Department's secretary, who not only had a constant supply of candy to keep me going but also a constant supply of encouragement; and Patricia Magazoni whose support in the last few weeks of this project was invaluable. Unfortunately, if I were to name everyone who has helped and supported me, this list would be far too long.

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Therefore, to those named and unnamed, counted and unaccounted, thank you.

¹ I created a blog for my thesis: www.thatsabsurd.ca. On this blog, I have posted the rough drafts of my chapters up to my completed thesis. Both the drafts and the completed thesis are in Google Docs and anyone can go and comment on my work. Because part of my project deals with poetry showing up where it should not and social media, I asked myself, what was the least likely social media platform an MA thesis would appear on. My answer: Tinder. I added a link to my blog in my Tinder profile. I was surprised at how many people on Tinder were willing to engage with my work. This act allowed me to discuss my project with an entirely new public.

INTRODUCTION

When pushed to the wall / art is too slow.

— Lisa Robertson,
“Thursday”

Poetry makes nothing happen.

— W.H Auden, “In Memory
of W. B. Yeats”

On October 24th 2014, poet, professor, and activist Stephen Collis posted to his blog *Beating the Bounds* a short, impassioned personal essay entitled “The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain.” In his entry, he wrote about how “young and old, men and women, professionals and the unemployed” were coming together on Burnaby Mountain against oil giant Kinder Morgan and creating a barricade out of the surrounding trash to block the pipeline expansion (“The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain”). He wrote that

We [himself and fellow protestors] are doing this to protect the local environment and people. And we are doing this because we know that people everywhere have to begin taking a stand against fossil fuel projects, and thus doing whatever we can to mitigate climate change. This is no time for new carbon projects. This is the time to build a new economy, based on new, renewable sources of energy, providing new, clean energy jobs. (“The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain”)

On October 31st of the same year, Kinder Morgan lawyer Bill Kaplan served Collis with a 1,000-page summons, accusing him of obstruction and suing him, along with fellow activists Adam Gold, Mia Nissen, and Lynne Quarmby, for 5.6 million dollars. During the hearings that took

place from November 4th to November 7th 2014, Kaplan brought forward the above mentioned blog post and presented it in court as a poem, even though the blog is clearly prose and even though Collis himself did not think of it as poetry. Collis later said, “I can only assume that the literary structure of the sentences led him to re-brand [it] as a poem!” (“The Poet Beats the Lawyer”). Less important than the fact that the lawyer misread the piece as poetry, though, is the fact that he was willing to use (what he thought was) poetry as legal *evidence* in a court of law. However, Kaplan’s strategy did not work; Kinder Morgan eventually had to drop the lawsuit and pay the defendants’ court fees as a sign that they would not pursue any further legal action against the protestors. This event is unique, not only because it marks an incident where activists fought against a large corporation and won, but because it complicates the role of poetry and its place in society; poetry is never meant to appear in a court of law as evidence. I argue that the political power of poetic texts resides in such moments of confusion and recontextualization. It is precisely when a “poetic” text, intentionally or not, crosses over into another domain of experience that we can say it has performed political work.

This argument is indebted to Jacques Rancière and his concept of “dissensus” and “the distribution of the sensible” (*Dissensus* 44; 46). According to Rancière, society “is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places” (*Politics of Aesthetics* 44). Dissensus happens when “modes of doing” or “modes of being” break with the expected “places in which these occupations are exercised” (44). Dissensus, therefore, “is not a designation of conflict as such, but is a specific type thereof, a conflict between sense and sense”; it is “a conflict between a sensory regimes and/or bodies” (*Dissensus* 147). On the other hand,

consensus “is an agreement between sense and sense ... [and] between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning” (152). By showing up as both legal evidence and as poetry in a court of law, Collis’ blog “manifest[ed]”² a moment of dissensus (149). This project investigates just such moments of dissensus in Canadian poetry — the moments where poetry appears outside of its ordered place in ways that are traditionally not considered poetry.

Dissensus is part of Rancière’s theory of the distribution of the sensible. The distribution of the sensible is “the system of self-evident facts or sense perceptions” that forms our reality (*Politics of Aesthetics* 12). It is

the dividing-up of the world (*de monde*) and of people (*du monde*) ... This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation... This later form of distribution, which, by its sensory self-evidence, anticipates the distributions of parts and shares (*parties*), itself presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what is not, of what can be heard and what cannot. (*Dissensus* 44)

In other words, the distribution of the sensible structures the systems that form our social and cultural frameworks as well as our individual and collective understanding of reality, of the world. It separates what is accounted for, what is seen, and what is heard from what is

² The term “manifest” is translated from the French word *manifestation*. When Rancière says that dissensus is “manifested,” the term simultaneously implies “enunciation and demonstration” (*Dissensus* 149). Dissensus is manifested because “what comes to pass is a rupture in the specific configuration that allows us to stay in ‘our’ assigned places in a given state of things. These sorts of ruptures can happen anywhere and at any time, but they can never be calculated” (151). Moreover, a manifestation of dissensus “invents new forms of collective enunciation; it re-frames the audible and the inaudible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distribution of space and time — in short, new bodily capacities” (147). Dissensus is less about a specific linear set of causes and effects and more about events or occurrences that force a redefinition of our reality.

unaccounted for, invisible, and unheard, and manages how people, objects, and systems operate. It decides who and what belong to which categories, and how, when, and where they are seen.

Collis' blog entry, "The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain," became dissensual art when Kaplan called it poetry *and* brought it into the courtroom, because the traditional partition between art and legal evidence and between activist blog and confessional poetry was dissolved. The act of bringing the blog into the courtroom as poetry and as evidence transformed the blog's specific modes of doing and modes of being and allowed it to leave its ordered place in the distribution of the sensible. As Rancière would say, it "rupture[d]" the distribution of the sensible because it manifested a moment of dissensus (*Dissensus* 151). "The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain" is dissensual because it navigated space in a way that complicated the role of poetry, where poetry belongs, and to whom and how it appears.

Eden Robinson has called Collis "the most dangerous poet in Canada" (Robinson). Although his work is read as counter-cultural, one wonders what tangible material effects his work has had on the natural and social commons. His work appears as it should and where it should, in the hands of academics, artists, and readers who already have a "particular *dispositif*" towards his works (147). According to Rancière, practices of art like Collis's "do not provide forms of awareness of rebellious impulses for politics, nor do they take leave of themselves to become forms of collective political action" (157). In order for something to do politics, Rancière argues that it must "break... the frame within which common objects are determined" because politics is that which "breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the 'natural order' [of the distribution of the sensible]" (147). In other words,

politics invents new forms of collective enunciation; it re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time — in short, new bodily capacities. (147)

Collis's collections of poetry such as *Anarchive* (2005), *The Commons* (2008), *On the Material* (2010), and *To the Barricades* (2012) inadvertently work to maintain consensus because they do not "intervene" or "re-frame" the distribution of the sensible. According to Rancière, poetry and poetical practices that are political intervene, re-frame, or rupture the distribution of the sensible, like Collis's blog post "The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain." Accordingly, when Rancière uses the word "political," when he says something is political, he does not use the term as we would or as the Oxford English Dictionary defines, as that which "engage[s] in political activity...in order to strike political bargains or to seek votes" (Oxford Dictionary). Instead, when he refers to politics, he means that which manifested dissensus, "breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the 'natural order,'" and "re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible" (147)

While politics, prompted by dissensus, works to reframe our "real," what we take to be the natural order, there is a system that Rancière calls the "police" that works against politics and functions to maintain consensus (147). In Rancière's theory, the police does not refer to authority figures in uniform sanctioned by the government to protect its citizens; instead, the police is that which intervenes in public spaces to prevent the manifestation of dissensus. Where Louis Althusser's police might shout, "Hey, you there!" to interpellate individuals, Rancière's police shout, "Move along! There's nothing to see here!" whenever dissensus occurs (44). In a literary

context, if a poem manifests dissensus, then the police would say, “Move along! There’s nothing to read here! In these poems, there’s nothing! These poem say nothing! This isn’t even poetry!”.

Dissensual poetry is inherently political because it ruptures the distribution of the sensible, allowing what was previously not counted — the marginalized and the oppressed, or as Rancière would say, the “anonymous” — to be counted, to count (150). Therefore, in my project, the terms activist and activism do not have to mean someone who or something that works against oppression consciously, but instead someone who or something that, intentionally or unintentionally, disrupts the distribution of the sensible. Consequently, my project looks at the moments when texts operate in dissensual ways. It is precisely these moments in Canadian poetry, where art breaks with its ordered place — where it ruptures with the specific modes of doing and modes of being — and finds new ways of navigating into or interacting with the public, that I seek to investigate in my project (44).

In his book, *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner focuses on the political value of poetry and the publics they create. According to Warner, a public “exists by virtue of being addressed” and “is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself” (413). On the other hand, a counterpublic is a public of opposition, something against the public, and “is not merely a different or alternative idiom, but one ... [that is] regarded with hostility, or with a sense of indecorousness” (424). In Warner’s theory, the public is what appears as the “public sphere” while a “counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status” to the public (414; 424). His work is useful because it tells us where conventional activist texts, such as Collis’ poetry collections, are positioned in the distribution of sensible. Whereas Warner would argue that they produce a counterpublic, which challenges the

public, Rancière would argue that although traditional activist texts might be thought of as political, they are still working within consensus because even oppositional art has an ordered place in the distribution of the sensible. Collis' blog entry "The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain," with its pro-environmentalist stand and anti-capitalist sentiment, creates a counterpublic, but Warner's theory does not explain why Collis' blog was able to blur the divide between the counterpublic and the public when it was presented in a court of law. Warner's theory does not take into account that when counterpublics operate in expected ways, they become regulatory systems and maintain the distribution of the sensible. Dissensual poetry does not necessarily have an identifiable public, but disrupts the system by which publics are created in the first place. I want to look at poetry that leaves its ordered place, that is dissensual in its practices or becomes newly visible due to dissensus, and that has no identifiable public to figure out how poetry can engage in politics without having to participate in regulatory systems.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each focusing on a different type of poetical dissensus: chapter 1 focuses on concrete poetry, chapter 2 focuses on sound poetry, and chapter 3 focuses on instapoetry. All of these poetical practices produce new relationships to bodies and texts that lead to new possible interventions in the distribution of the sensible, and prompt dissensus. In her book, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*, Marjorie Perloff, quoting Mary Ellen Solt, argues that

'concrete poetry presented itself as first of all a revolt against the transparency of the word,' a demand that we must see words rather than merely read (see through) them. Concrete poetry 'makes the sound and shape of words its explicit field of investigation'; it is 'about words.' Further, in its concentration on the

physical material of which the poem or text is made, its use of ‘graphic space as a structural agent’ ... is able to eliminate subjectivity — what we now call the author function. (114)

In chapter 1, I turn to Steve McCaffery’s *Carnival*, Judith Copithorne’s *Runes* (see figure 0.0), and bpNichol’s *The Captain Poetry Poems* because these texts, as concrete poems, make the “shape of words [their]explicit field of investigation” (114). In concrete poetry, words and space, the “physical material of which [a] poem or text is made,” become the focus instead of “subjectivity — what we now call the author function” (114). In chapter 1, I argue that by making poetry more about the visual elements of language and by using the space on the page in alternative ways, these texts manifest dissensus because they bring the body into our experience of “reading” and “writing” by way of foregrounding corporeality and materiality, something we often preclude from literature. As such, these Canadian concrete poems necessitate a different choreography of bodies, spaces, tools, and poetics. Essentially, these texts give us a new way to access poetry because they give us a new reading and writing tool — the body. The corporeal body’s involvement in poetry democratizes poetry, reading, and writing because it makes reading and writing less about understanding the system and rules of a particular language and because it makes poetry less about having literary knowledge. These concrete poems rupture the fabric of our real because they not only demand that readers reevaluate what we consider poetry but also ask us to rethink how we interact with language and the appropriate ways language can be accessed. As such they force us to redefine what counts as poetry, who can create poetry, and who has access to poetry.



Figure 0.0: Judith Copithorne, *Runes* (1970)

In my second chapter, I investigate the ways sound poetry, like visual poetry, is a dissensual practice of art. Whereas poetry is often thought of as the expression of emotions or thought in writing, with a strong focus on form and a respect for grammatical rules, and whereas the poet is often thought as the producer of meaning and the reader as the ready recipient of meaning, sound poetry looks to express the experience of the corporeal body and moves away from the idea of author as the producer of meaning. Rafael Barreto-Riviera, an original member of the Canadian sound poetry group The Four Horsemen, defines sound poetry as “poetry which has its basis in non-verbal, vocal, and sub-vocal elements of sound” (qtd. in Scobie 215).

Stephen Scobie, in his book *bpNichol: What History Teaches*, says “a wider definition would go

beyond abstract sound produced by the human voice to include verbal elements, though often such techniques as simultaneous or contrapuntal reading modify, or break down altogether, reliance on syntax and linear progression” (215). Penn Kemp, the Canadian sound poet and playwright, suggests, in her article “Sound Wave Sound Wavers,” that sound poetry “explores the primal areas of the human psyche that are beyond the reach of words and ideas at this juncture of the threshold, on the surface of skin, looking in and out” (62). I argue that sound poetry is a dissensual poetic practice because it not only disrupts the appropriate modes of doing poetry in a way that unsettles the notion that poetry is the ordered written expression of human emotions, but because it disrupts the appropriate modes of using the human voice. To make this argument, I turn to the The Four Horsemen’s sound poetry album *Nada Canada* and a number of their live performances, Christian Bök’s ongoing sound poetry project *The Cyborg Opera*, focusing on his poems “Synth Loops,” and “Mushroom Clouds,” as well as Penn Kemp’s sound poems, particularly her sound poem “Night Orchestra.”

How we use and how we hear the human voice speaks directly to our understanding of people as political beings; if we rupture our notions of speech, which I argue sound poetry does, then our notions of what counts as a political being are also affected. Rancière argues that our notion of person stems from the Aristotelian definition of a political person; he says, “whoever is in the presence of an animal that possesses the ability to articulate language and its power of demonstration, knows that he is dealing with a human — and therefore a political animal” (*Dissensus* 37). He argues that for speech to be heard, and recognized as speech under the distribution of the sensible, it needs to be in the form of “*logos*” — rational, linear, and articulate speech (45). Therefore, in this chapter, I also argue that the screaming, chanting, and

unintelligible human noises that make up sound poetry disrupt these definitions of what counts as a human because sound poetry works not to order the human experience through language but to communicate the experience of the human body through sound; as such, sound poetry makes visible a new modes of doing speech and manifests new possibilities for what counts as a political animal. In this chapter, I argue that sound poetry makes visible not only new ways of doing poetry, but new ways of doing speech, and new definitions of what counts as a “political being.”

Chapter 3 departs from the concerns of the first two chapters, which each investigate, in some way, the consequences of including the body in literature, to examine how Instagram has manifested a new type of poetry. I argue that although in academia and literary circles we champion blogs as making poetry accessible to new publics, it is more so the social media app Instagram which allows poetry to disrupt its accorded place within the distribution of the sensible. In my final chapter, I investigate the ways Instagram has allowed instapoetry to become counted as poetry and ultimately created a new poetical public. I suggest that instapoetry disrupts the appropriate modes of doing poetry because it changes how, when, and to whom poetry can appear in the world. Instapoetry makes it that poetry is no longer for the educated elite or artists, but breaks down the traditional distinction between lowbrow and highbrow poetry. To investigate this, I turn to rupi kaur’s Instagram account and her books *milk and honey* and *the sun and her flowers*. While kaur’s poetry is often defined as mundane, hackneyed, and altogether middlebrow, as is most of intaspoetry, it nevertheless demonstrates a radical redistribution of the sensible with respect to poetry. Instagram has allowed kaur’s poetry to appear outside of academia and literary circles, to the general public, and has redefined who can engage in poetry and poetics and how

they do so. Her mode of doing poetry, which includes a strong focus on the aesthetics of her posts and an absence of engagement with literary traditions, allows her work to reach new publics and to bring visibility to a new type of poetry. Despite the lack of poetic interest in her work, I argue in the final chapter of my project that Instagram allows poetry to navigate space in a way that is dissensual and forces the distribution of the sensible to repartition who, how, and when one has access to poetry.

My project investigates the ways dissensual poetry ruptures the distribution of the sensible — “our definite configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions and the field of our interventions” — to look at the ways poetry can actually do politics (*Dissensus* 156). Rancière argues that traditional “activist” art, such as Collis’ collections, “attempts to exceed consensus by supplementing it with presence and meaning. But it may well be that over saturation is the very law of consensus itself” (156). He argues that in order to intervene in the distribution of the sensible, art must “displace... art’s borders, just as doing politics means displacing the borders of what is acknowledged” (157). According to Rancière, “practices of art do not provide forms of awareness or rebellious impulses for politics,” but “they contribute to the constitution of a form of common-sense that is ‘polemical,’ to a new landscape of the visible, the sayable and doable” (157). In order to be political, art must intervene “in the sensory fabric of the common”(156). Poetry becomes political when it displaces the borders of what counts as literature through dissensus. In other words, poetry becomes political when it ruptures the distribution of the sensible, allowing for what was previously invisible, inaudible, and unaccounted to become visible, audible, and accounted. When the borders of what counts as literature are displaced, it affects what and how things are partitioned

distribution of the sensible. The poetry I suggest as dissensual (concrete poetry, sound poetry, and instapoetry) is genuinely activist because it repartitions the borders of what counts as poetry, thereby rupturing consensus.

Introducing the concept of “dissensual poetry” into the discourse of Canadian literature through experimental poetry allows me to both problematize and redefine what we currently consider counts as activist poetry and as experimental poetry. I propose that “dissensual poetry” offers us a more genuine and effective type of activist and experimental poetry. It is political, innovative, indeterminate, and works outside any type of regulatory systems. As such, the concept of dissensual poetry allows for a more sincere discussion about the value and function of poetry in society. It allows us to acknowledge that what we currently consider to be experimental and activist is always working with and as a type of regulatory system.

My project looks at Canadian texts only out of a need to centre the concept of dissensus in a tangible framework. Situating the concept of dissensus in Canadian literature allows me to investigate the ways dissensus has played a part in reframing what counts as literature in Canada. Moreover, it allows me to add something to the Canadian literature conversation because it allows me to move beyond Warner’s dichotomy of counterpublics and publics. In the introduction to their *Public Poetics*, Erin Wunker and Travis V. Manson argue that “while no single book can be held accountable for addressing all issues...the contributors to this collection enter the conversation at different cultural moments, yet almost every contributor (much like Warner) pays attention to dichotomous framing of publics and counterpublics” (4). My project moves away from this dichotomy because dissensual poetry works outside any type of regulatory system and because it looks at what is unrecognizable, and what, as such, cannot be ordered into

any specific public. My project discusses what has been left out of these publics and outside of our discussions — the invisible, inaudible, and unaccounted.

CHAPTER 1

Concrete Poetry: R u p t u r i n g the Modes of Doing Poetry

Its autonomy (that of art) surely remains irrevocable. It is impossible to conceive of the autonomy of art without covering up work.

— Theodore W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*³

Letters, words, and sentences are some of the foundational elements of language, but they are also regulatory systems. For instance, language is predicated on the appropriate usage of words. To be incapable of appropriately using or comprehending words is to be illiterate. Contrarily, those who have mastered words are those who are considered by society as capable of creating literature, which is often thought of as the ultimate use of words. The way we navigate language and understand words determines where we are on the spectrum of literacy. Consequently, our level of literacy effects how we are expected to operate in society. Those regarded as being proficient with words find themselves close to the “master of words.” Expectantly, they are seen as intellectuals and associated with highbrow culture. Likewise, those with a poor understanding of words find themselves closer to the “illiterate.” They are earmarked as labourers and are associated with lowbrow culture. Therefore, words have the capacity to function as what Rancière calls the “police,” in that they ensure that the “matching of functions, places and ways of being” is maintained in the distribution of the sensible (*Dissensus* 36). In his article, “Postmodern Decadence in Canadian Sound and Visual Poetry,” Gregory Betts argues that “[language] rules determine what we say, and, furthermore, what is

³ Quoted in Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* on page 35.

even thinkable. We operate (i.e. play) within the parameters of the rules, the grammar of the system without recognizing the social and discursive nature of such a ‘language-game’” (154). In other words, “language rules” — the rules that determine how letters, words, and sentences function — determine what is visible, audible, and countable. Therefore, to rupture how letters, words, and sentences operate in language is to rupture the partition of the sensible and force a redistribution of the “matching of functions, places and ways of being” (36). This is especially true if letters, words, and sentences are misused in literature — the supposed ultimate use of language.

For example, many of the visual and sound poets of the late 1960s and early 1970s challenged the functions of words and letters. Steve McCafferey’s *Carnival*, Judith Copithorne’s *Runes*, and bpNichol’s *The Captain Poetry Poems* all worked within a certain poetics, that of concrete poetry, which resisted the traditional use of letters, words, and sentences. Their concrete poems rupture how letters and words can be used in literature, thereby manifesting new definitions of poetry and new methods of reading and writing. Where we often think of the corporeal body and labour as separate from poetry because we think of poetry and art as actions of mental labour, something intellectually done by intellectuals, and as something far removed from physical work, these texts prove otherwise. Their works rupture the distribution of the sensible because the way they use words necessitates a different choreography of bodies, spaces, tools, and poetics. Theodore Adorno argues “it is impossible to conceive of the autonomy of art without covering up work” (qtd. in Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* 35). According to Adorno, art hides its labour in order to keep its special status in society. However, I suggest that these concrete poems misuse words to allow the corporeal

body to be present in reading and writing; they make reading and writing a physical act; they blur the lines between work and art and between the intellectual and the labourer. As such, these texts “displace... art’s borders” and demonstrate that poetry, reading, and writing is not only for the “masters of words” and manifest a new definition of literacy (*Dissensus* 157).

In her book, *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Mary Ellen Solt argues that “there is a fundamental requirement which the various kinds of concrete poetry meet” (Solt). First, there is “concentration upon the physical material from which the poem or text is made” and second, “emotions and ideas are not the physical materials of poetry” as we have come to expect but “generally speaking the material of the concrete poem is language: words reduced to their element of letters (to see) [and] syllabus (to hear)” (Solt). Similarly, Jamie Hilder, in his book *Designed Words for a Designed World*, argues that “practitioners of concrete poetry aimed for a supranational, supralinguistic poetry, one that would strive for a fusion of form and content by foregrounding the visual character of words and letters over their semantic or phonetic functions” (8). Accordingly, the concrete poetry of Copithorne, Nichol, and McCaffery focuses on visual properties of language, wherein they use the space on the page in alternative ways.

In her article, “A Brief History of Dirty Concrete by Way of Steve McCaffery’s *Carnival* and Digital D.I.Y.,” Lori Emerson refers to what is known as “dirty concrete” poetry. She argues that dirty poetry,

is commonly used to describe a deliberate attempt to move away from the clean lines and graphically neutral appearance of the concrete poetry from the 1950s and 60s by the Noigrandes in Brazil and Ian Hamilton Finlay in England (a

cleanliness that can also be construed to indicate a lack of political engagement with language and representation). (121)

The term, she says, was most likely originally used within the small community of experimental Canadian poets of the 1960s and first used either by bpNichol, bill bissett, or Stephen Scobie. I suggest that this term aptly describes *Runes*, *Carnival*, and *The Captain Poetry Poems*. These concrete poems can be defined as dirty because they misuse the page and refuse to use clean lines. They also directly engage with “language and representation” in political ways (121). For example, Copithorne, Nichol, and McCaffery wrote these concrete poems in ways that forced them to physically interact with language, and the end products are texts that force readers to engage with the texts in physical ways as well. On the page, they are messy, unreadable, and obscure (see figure 1.0), and this, combined with the fact that their



Figure 1.0: Steve McCaffery, page from Panel 2, *Carnival* (1970)

manner of doing poetry makes poetry physical, allows them to muck up the modes of writing poetry that argue that poetry is dependent on the appropriate usage of letters, words, and sentences.

I argue that concrete poetry, simply by insisting that it is poetry, attempts to alter what counts as poetry in the distribution of the sensible. In turn, by being viewed as poetry, concrete poetry makes visible the aspects of human expression that are not usually counted as literary — the corporeal and physical body. These concrete poems allow reading and writing to become a physical action. In essence, these concrete poems not only redefine what counts as poetry but what counts as reading, writing, and ultimately, literacy. I argue that McCaffery's, Copithorne's, and Nichol's works are dissensual and that they rupture the distribution of the sensible, our given "real," allowing for new modes of poetry and literacy to become visible, which gives the public new tools to participate in reading and writing. I suggest that Nichol's, McCaffery's, and Copithorne's concrete poems create "a new landscape" in terms of what is "visible, ... sayable and doable" in poetry, writing, reading, and literacy (*Dissensus* 57). They illustrate that our definition of what counts as poetry and how we use words aims to ensure that people, objects, and functions remain in their ordered place underneath the distribution of the sensible. These concrete poems democratize poetry because they demonstrate that reading and writing can be physical, making poetry and literacy available to a new public — a public who might have otherwise been excluded from poetry and literacy because they did not have the required tools to participate in reading and writing. McCaffery's, Copithorne's, and Nichol's modes of doing poetry allow them to make visible the work that goes into poetry which disrupts what we think counts as poetry, reading, and writing. Essentially, these concrete

poems allow for a new type of literacy to manifest itself, a literacy that is more physical than intellectual and not dependent on understanding how letters, words, and sentences function.

Steve McCaffery's *Carnival*: Panels, Over Saturation, and the Typewriter

Steve McCaffery created *Carnival Panel 1* (1970) using the typewriter and *Carnival Panel 2* (1975) using the typewriter, “xerography, electrotasis, rubber-stamp, tissue texts, hand lettering and [the] stencil” (qtd. in Emerson 123). Each panel came in an 8-by-13-inch booklet (see figure 1.1) with instructions on how to turn the booklet into a panel. Each panel, when constructed, measured 44 by 36 inches. Although the typewriter and the other various tools



Figure 1.1: Steve McCaffery, Panel 2 booklet, *Carnival* (1975)

McCaffery used are typical writing tools, the way McCaffery used them allowed him to show the labour involved in writing because it permitted him to interact physically with language. Perhaps even more importantly, his misuse of typical writing tools allowed him to work within

a mode of doing poetry that made the actual corporeal and physical body itself a writing tool. Moreover, McCaffery, by making the body itself a writing tool, made the physical labour that goes into creating poetry visible. As such, *Carnival* manifests a new form of literacy because it makes writing physical, thereby challenging the concept that reading and writing are intellectual actions dependent on understanding the particular rules and regulations of a specific language.

Emerson argues that “*Carnival* is a ‘dirty’ concrete poem in its anti-representationality and its embrace of illegibility” (122). Therefore, in *Carnival*, it “is not so much about what is written than it is about a record of the labour of writing” (122). While the traditional modes of writing poetry argue that “emotions and ideas” are the materials of poetry and that words and letters are to be used for their “semantic and phonetic functions,” *Carnival* as a concrete poem uses letters, words, and the page in such a manner that the focus is on the visual elements of language (Solt; Hilder 8). Because the focus is on the visual elements of language as well as the spatial dimension, the physical labour that went into creating *Carnival* becomes the focus. Of course, readers cannot avoid the written text, but McCaffery’s over saturation of the page is as much the focus as the text itself, if not more. We not only pay attention to the mental labour that went into writing this text but also the physical labour that went into it. In *Carnival*, no longer is labour separate from art. The act of writing *Carnival* was physically intensive for McCaffery. Not only did paper have to be put into the typewriter repeatedly and adjusted, but McCaffery also created the various shapes on the page and broke the linear pattern of the typewriter by imposing cut-out shapes onto the original page, typing over both the mask and the page and then removing the masks. Rather than simply typing on the typewriter,

McCaffery had to cut paper, paste the mask onto another paper, remove the mask that had been pasted, and move around to write the poem. Emerson argues that because “the written text itself is deliberately occluded, then what we are left with is writing media and the labour of writing itself” (124). *Carnival* seeks to use the space on the page in alternative ways and relies on the visual elements of language. It is the visual elements of language (letters) and the corporeal physical material involved in writing (the page, typewriter, scissors, stencils, tape, and most importantly, the body) that determine the poem’s ultimate form.

In his book, *bpNichol: What History Teaches*, Stephen Scobie highlights that “one of the central meanings of ‘concrete’ is that language itself is regarded, in its visual and aural manifestations, as a concrete material, to be worked with in the same way as, say, a sculptor works with stone” (33). Although McCaffery “sculpts” words and letters into various forms and shapes, it is not simply this action that makes him similar to a sculptor. It is because he does so by physically interacting with the typewriter, his other writing tools, letters, and paper (Scobie 33). That is, he builds the poem by physically interacting with the materials that make up *Carnival* (see figure 1.2), and akin to a sculptor, he chisels away material in order to create his final product. In other words, by occluding much of his writing (he fills up the pasted mask, then tears it away), he mimics a sculptor chiseling away. However, unlike a sculptor, he is the one that creates the stone, which suggests that there is also wasted physical labour that went into *Carnival*. In *Carnival*, the material elements that make up poetry (words and the page) are the stone and McCaffery is the sculptor, with his hands acting as the chisel; his corporeal body becomes as much a writing tool as the typewriter because he needed to move

around to produce the poem and because his body was physically interacting with the material that created the poem.



Figure 1.2: Steve McCaffery, page from Panel 1, *Carnival* (1970)

Although all writing can be gruelling, poetry, according to our current distribution of the sensible, should never be gruelling physically. However, in *Carnival*, writing becomes physically demanding because the body becomes an actual tool of writing since it needs to move around and interact with the paper and a typewriter. As a result, the physical labour that went into *Carnival* is foregrounded in the finished product, in the smudges and mishaps on the page, in the shapes of the text that omit the actual writing, and in the illegibility and unreadability of the text. McCaffery utilized a new writing tool, the body, and allowed a new type of writing to take place, one that involves the corporeal body which shows that writing

can be a physical laborious act. *Carnival* is a dissensual poem because it misses words and confounds our expectations that poetry ought not to be a physically demanding act. This concrete poetry manifests dissensus because it forces us to redefine not only what counts as poetry but also what type of labour is to be expected when producing poetry. It forces us to redefine what we think counts as writing. By making the body a tool for writing, McCaffery shows us how writing can involve the corporeal body and blurs the line between the intellectual and the labourer, the artist and the worker, the craftsman and the poet. This inherently blurs the line between highbrow culture, where we think the poet might reside, and lowbrow culture, where we think the physical labourer might reside. *Carnival* forces us to question what it means to have a “master of words” actively choose to misuse words and what it means to have writing be a physical act. As such, *Carnival* shows us that words police how we believe bodies, capacities, and publics should be ordered.

Judith Copithorne’s *Runes*: Poem-Drawings, Authenticity, and the Hand

While McCaffery relies on the typewriter and the body in order to create *Carnival*, rupturing the appropriate modes of creating poetry by “sculpting” the words on the page into various shapes, Copithorne, when creating *Runes*, relied solely on the hand to create her poems.

McCaffery misused the typewriter in ways that allowed the body to become a writing tool.

Congruently, Copithorne, by relying on the hand to create her poetry, brought attention to the body because published poems in 1970 were expected to be typeset and not handwritten. In his article, “Abstract / Concrete #1: Judith Copithorne,” Derek Beaulieu argues that Copithorne’s “pieces are *drawn* and not *written* and are hyphenated *poem-drawings*” (Beaulieu). However, I

suggest that Beaulieu misunderstands Copithorne's modes of writing. These poems, even if they are drawn, are written; they simply prompt a reconsideration of what we think counts as writing. Similar to McCaffery, Copithorne's poetics demonstrate the ways in which the production of poetry can be physical and show the labour involved in poetry. Where McCaffery relied on the basic visuals that make up language (letter shapes) and the over saturation of the page, Copithorne writes words in a way that they are fused with "scribbles" or "doodles" (see figure 1.3). She makes it nearly impossible to differentiate between the letters

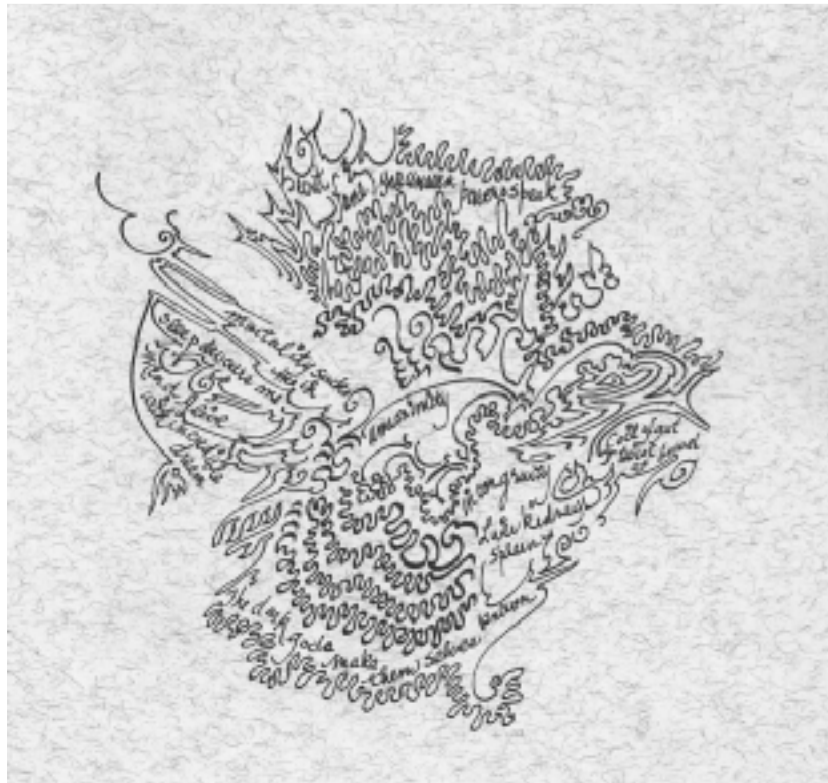


Figure 1.3: Judith Copithorne, *Runes* (1970)

and the scribbles. Using the hand allowed Copithorne to show how the corporeal body can / directly be involved in the creation of poetry and allowed her to invent a new mode of writing — one that allows for illustrative elements to be fused with letters. As such, Copithorne’s mode of doing writing in *Runes* allows her to go against the modes of doing poetry that expect language to be ordered in a linear way on the page. In turn, this allows her to challenge the notion that writing must be cohesive and that a text, especially one which works with the Lyric I, should endeavour towards directing readers to one particular meaning or sensation. Although beautiful, like McCaffery’s *Carnival*, these concrete poems are dirty concrete poems. Their composition shows the errors of human hands; they are illegible and unreadable at times, they refuse clean lines, and they are written in a way that obstructs linear reading, making them dissensual poems and political in essence. Moreover, Copithorne’s mode of writing allows her to assert her physical presence on the page and problematizes the concept of the Lyric I.

Betts argues that “Copithorne’s book *Arrangements* (1973) attempts to bring the body into the text by breaking the monotony and standardization of type. Anticipating Derrida’s work on the signature in the 1980s, Copithorne’s visual poetry asserts an authorial presence and authenticity through her cursive hand,” and the same can be said of *Runes* (167).

Copithorne’s use of the hand allows her to go against the modes of writing that argue that language is meant to be ordered, legible, univocal, and linear. In the above poem (see figure 1.3), words blend into scribbles, making the words and the scribbles the actual text of the poem, creating a new type of writing. The words “secret / fame/ the unseen power speak,” among others, hide from the reader. We do not know where the poem starts and where it ends. The reader must uncover the words. There is no direct and clear narrative. The following poem

also breaks with the modes of doing poetry in similar ways (see figure 1.4). The lines, “Grief eats me/ why can’t/ I get away,” hide among other lines and blend into the visual.



Figure 1.4: Judith Copithorne, *Runes* (1970)

Betts argues that using the hand allowed Copithorne to assert her “authorial presence” (167). However, by authorial presence, I argue that he means physical and corporeal “authorial presence” and not the Lyric I that we typically find in poetry (167). Of course, these poems do use the Lyric I, but they defy the notion of poetic closure that is usually associated with Lyric I poetry. For example, these poems can be understood in a multiple of ways, which

undercuts Copithorne's "authorial presence" in the traditional sense because there is no specific Lyric I that directs how we ought to read what is on the page. Where the traditional lyric poem directs readers to begin on the left side of the page and to read line by line, her mode of doing writing allows readers to enter her poems in a multiplicity of ways. For example, we can begin by reading the above poem (see figure 1.4) from the left ("Grief eats me/ why can't/ I get away"), from the middle ("Who you fooling girl?/ you have/ everything"), or from the right ("you need/ try growing/ some"). The authorial presence in *Runes* is not felt in the way we have come to expect from what traditionally counts as poetry because there is no author directing readers to any kind of poetic closure since readers can enter and exit this poem in a multiplicity of ways.

Furthermore, she does not direct our reading so that we come to a particular conclusion. Instead, her mode of doing writing seeks to leave readers feeling bewildered, perplexed, and unsure of whether or not they have understood the poems. Where Lyric I poets usually offer sense of how the poem is to be read and what the words are trying to convey, Copithorne's mode of doing writing refuses to direct the reader and refuses to allow the words to culminate to a particular meaning. Words still function as regulatory systems, as they are not disassociated from their signified, but sentences, or more appropriately, verses, are prevented from functioning as they should, from acting as regulatory systems, because they prevent poetic closure, and they do not direct readers. Because we do not know where to begin reading and what verse comes next, the poem itself cannot lead the reader to any type of poetic closure. And it is Copithorne's use of the hand, the corporeal physical body, that allows her to

rupture the modes of doing poetry that argue that Lyric I poetry should offer readers some type of poetic closure.

In *Runes*, like in McCaffery's *Carnival*, we are constantly reminded of the corporeal body and of the physical labour that has gone into creating these texts. We see Copithorne's hand when we look at the poems in *Runes*, and as such, we are reminded of how these poems were created by her body and physically demanding. Likewise, the over saturation of the page in *Carnival* reminds us of the physical labour that went into creating *Carnival* how McCaffery's body was also involved in the creation of this work. We cannot engage with *Runes* or with *Carnival* without acknowledging the physical labour that went into creating these poems. These texts rupture our definitions of what counts as poetry because not only do they use the raw material of language to make poetry, preventing words or verses from acting as regulatory systems, but they demonstrate how physical labour can be involved in poetry. Typically, engaging with poetry symbolizes a certain level of social capital. We want to think of poetry, or art more generally, as separate or removed from the realm of the physical labourer or from the worker. Our general idea of poetry is that it is separate from the ways we use our bodies to make and consume other things. Poetry is predicated on the false notion that art is not a product, a commodity, or a craft. However, when we view these works, we not only have to come to terms with the fact that words and the page are not being used as they should, but that poetry can be physically laborious too as tough it is a type of craft. Rancière argues that dissensus

implies a move from the one given world to another in which capacities and incapacities, forms of tolerance and intolerance, are differently defined. What

comes to pass is a process of dissociation: a rupture in the relationship between sense and sense, between what is seen and what is thought and what is felt.

What comes to pass is a rupture in the specific configuration that allows us to stay in ‘our’ assigned places in a given state of things. (*Dissensus* 151)

Copithorne’s *Runes* and McCaffery’s *Carnival*, and, as we will see, Nichol’s *The Captain Poetry Poems*, “impl[y] a move from ... one given world,” where poetry is meant to be mentally and emotionally laborious and is separate from manual labour, into another given world, where poetry is physically laborious and not separate from manual labour.

Moreover, in *Runes*, the hand-drawn scribbles, like words, are what count as language. Copithorne manifests not only a new mode of creating poetry but a new mode of writing. Like McCaffery, these new modes are physical and make it possible for those incapable of engaging with poetry or writing in the traditional sense to have access to poetry and writing. Copithorne, like McCaffery, breaks the conventional rules of poetry by hand-drawing her poetry, demonstrating that the body can be a part of poetry as well. These poems reframe the distribution of the sensible to show that poetry is a laborious act and not something separate from the world of physical labour. These poems show the work that goes into art. They prove that although we think of the poet as someone who is different than the physical worker, it is possible for the poet to be involved both in physical and mental labour. These poems rupture the distribution of the sensible and manifest the possibility of a new form of writing — one that is physical and not solely dependent on understanding a particular language.

bpNichol's *The Captain Poetry Poems: Borderblur, Comics Books, and the Body*

Like Copithorne's *Runes*, the section "The Unmasking of Captain Poetry" from bpNichol's *The Captain Poetry Poems* is also hand-drawn concrete poetry. I suggest that, like Copithorne's *Runes*, these poems essentially allow Nichol to make writing a physical act. Nichol, similar to Copithorne and McCaffery, ruptures the traditional modes of creating poetry by making the physical labour that goes into poetry visible. Moreover, his use of the hand allows him not only to blur the boundaries between what we consider poetry and what we consider visual art but to also fuse together highbrow and lowbrow forms of literature together. For example, *The Captain Poetry Poems* consists of highbrow forms of literature such as the lyric and the sonnet as well as lowbrow forms of literature such as the comic book. In her article, "the exploits of Captain Poetry: escaping the book, a series of fortunate e-vents," Sheila Simonson argues that this blurring of genres allows Nichol to challenge master-narratives that favour the lyric poem and the book format (59). She argues that Nichol's "exploits enact an impulse – a desire to escape the 'Book' as a certifying object and to resist assumptions about 'book-ness' that threatened to 'bind' and diminish poetic experience" (59). As a result, Nichol's poetics is "more democratic... one amenable to experiment, expansion, and inclusion" (59). I suggest that bpNichol's "democratic poetics" leads to a mode of doing poetry that, like *Runes* and *Carnival*, makes visible the corporeal body and the labour that goes into writing (59).

The section of concrete poems, "The Unmasking of Captain Poetry Poems," lies between two sections – the introduction section, "The Origins of Captain Poetry," and the

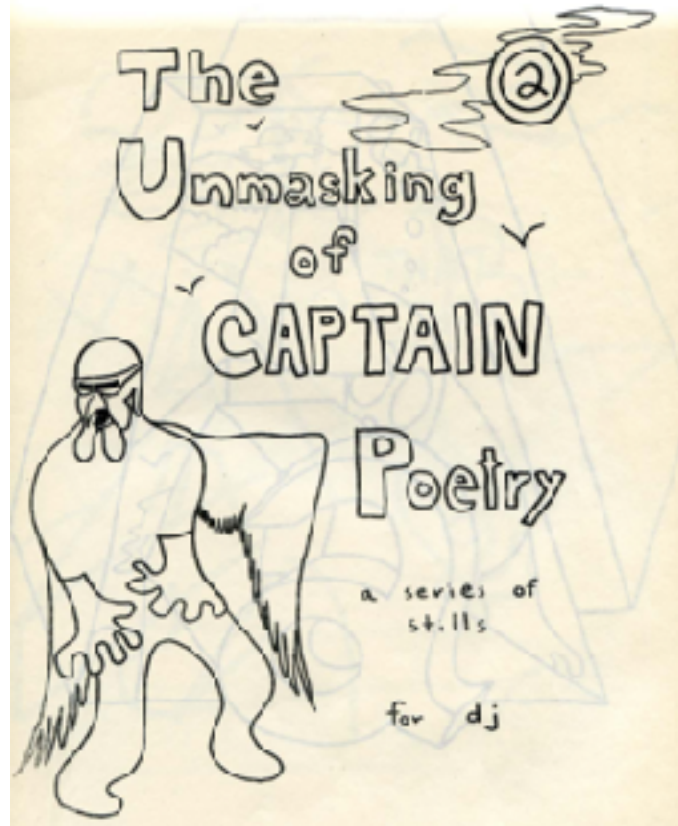


Figure 1.5: bpNichol, *The Captain Poetry Poems* (1971)

concluding section, “The New New Captain Poetry Blues: An Undecided Novel.” The introductory and the concluding sections are a combination of lyric poetry, free verse, and sonnets. They tell the story of Captain Poetry and rely on comic book clichés. Captain Poetry, the protagonist of the text, is a giant male chicken. He is, crudely put, a giant cock. His costume not only has wings but also includes gilets, which are drawn in a way that resembles testicles. He is an allegorical figure for Canadian poetry (see figure 1.5). Nichol said that *The Captain Poetry Poems*

[were] an attack on the macho male bullshit tradition in Canadian poetry where if you were male & wrote poems you had to make damn sure you could piss longer,

shout harder, & drink more than any less obviously effete (i.e. they weren't writing poems) on this national block. (*The Captain Poetry Poems*)

His disdain for a certain kind of male poet popular in Canada, the hyper-masculine and egotistical Lyric I poet, is apparent in the eventual downfall of Captain Poetry.

In *The Captain Poetry Poems*, Captain Poetry is initially depicted as a heroic figure; however, by the end of the narrative he is depicted as unrefined, outdated, and in keeping with Nichol's analogy, flaccid. In the battle of "verses / versus / poems," which takes place in the first section of the text, he is described as "all man / blond & tan" (2). At the "battle scene/ ... between rounds" he can be seen "talking with a lady" (2). However, as the "battle rages / ages pass" (2). Eventually Captain Poetry is described as "bound & gassed" and is said to be "late" to the battle (2). Captain Poetry's lover, madame x, even tells him that his poetry is "trite" and that he "cannot write a sonnet" (II). She tells him that because of his inability to write a proper sonnet, "we're true" (II). The narrative arc of Captain Poetry from a heroic figure to a denigrated, pitiful figure is an allegory for what Nichol thought of Canadian poetry. madame x's comment that Captain Poetry cannot write a sonnet suggests that even his lover knows that Captain Poetry's style of writing is inauthentic. If we keep with the allegory that Captain Poetry represents Canadian poetry, then Nichol seems to be suggesting that Canadian poetry needs to re-evaluate what counts as poetry. I suggest that Nichol's desire to rethink what counts as Canadian poetry could be applied to poetry in general. Nichol seems to be suggesting that continuing to write using the same modes of poetry results in poetry that is "trite," as in clichéd and hackneyed. Nichol seems to be suggesting that lovers of poetry are "true" with poets attempting to write in forced traditional norms (II). In her article, "Sport as Living Language bpNichol and the Bodily Poetics

of the Elite Triathlete,” Susanne Zelazo refers to Nichol’s poetics as “borderblur” and argues that Nichol’s poetry is “of the interstice” and “liminal” (32). She says his poems are “always on the



Figure 1.6: bpNichol, *The Captain Poetry Poems* (1971)

verge of becoming-other (prose becoming-poetry, becoming-cartoon, becoming-performance)” (32). In the section “The Unmasking of Captain Poetry,” we see exactly what Zelazo means when she refers to Nichol’s concrete poems as “borderblur” — they are at once paintings, comic books, and poetry. The untitled poem above (see figure 1.6) is an example of Nichol’s “borderblur.” It is also the section where Captain Poetry is officially unmasked. Captain Poetry is in front of six panels and standing on top of another one.

When Captain poetry is unmasked, he is revealed to be none other than Milt the Morph. Milt the Morph is another of Nichol's recurring figures who appears in his concrete poetry comic books. He is a goofy figure. The speech bubble says, "like leaving my roots behind me!!!" I suggest that this poem is Nichol arguing that if Canadian poetry wants to be genuine, it needs to actually break away from its traditional modes of doing poetry, its "roots." Only then can new modes of doing poetry manifest themselves. However, it is not only Nichol's use of the hand that allows his poetry to become physical or the way he uses the visual elements of his work (as seen by the letter "B" floating in the first panel of figure 1.6) that makes his work dissensual but also the fusing together of various types of literature. He is not only challenging what we think counts as poetry but also where certain types of poetry belong and how this poetry should be created. We might think that comic books belong in popular culture, that sonnets belong in highbrow culture, and that concrete poetry belongs in experimental literary circles; however, Nichol in *The Captain Poetry Poems* forces them to blend together. He is not only blurring the lines between visual art and poetry but also those between poetry and comic books — a popular form of entertainment. By making Captain Poetry's true identity Milt the Morph and by introducing the comic book form to poetry, Nichol demonstrates that poetry does not always belong to highbrow culture and its separation from popular culture is a false notion.

Moreover, because his mode of creating writing is physical in "The Unmasking of Captain Poetry," since his poems are hand-drawn concrete poems like Copithorne, he makes the labour that goes into writing visible. Like Copithorne, he makes the body an instrument of writing. More importantly, because he shows that poetry can be physically laborious and that poetry can be created by figures like Milt the Morph, he shows that poetry can be for the non-

academic and the non-artistic. Nichol directly challenges the modes of doing poetry that argue that poetry is for the elite. In other words, he challenges the mode of doing poetry that argues that it is only meant for those who have access to highbrow culture. He democratizes poetry by rupturing the divide between popular and highbrow culture.

Nichol seems to also suggest that instead of trying to force Canadian poetry to adhere to outdated modes of doing poetry, we need to allow for new modes of doing poetry and new modes of writing to manifest. If not, like madam x, the general public will be “true” (II).

Simonson argues that Nichol, by fusing different genres together “was able to disavow elevated and lauded phenomena — the Cannon, the book, the Lyric poem, the Word” (60). Nichol’s *The Captain Poetry Poems* not only argues that we need new modes of doing poetry and writing, but I suggest that Nichol, as such, also challenges the Cannon. He does not challenge the Cannon because the texts within the Cannon are inherently problematic; he challenges the Cannon because it is artistically limiting and creates the sense that only certain modes of doing poetry count. Although unfamiliar with Rancière’s work, Nichol seems to be suggesting that cannons police what counts as poetry and who has access to what types of poetry, like words. His poetics seem to want to prevent words and genres from functioning as Rancière’s police since they order who has access to poetry and what counts as poetry.

Moreover, like McCaffery and Copithorne’s work, Nichol’s concrete poems do not use language as consensus demands. As previously mentioned, Betts notes that for concrete poets, there was an awareness that “rules determine what we say, and, furthermore, what is even thinkable. We operate (i.e. play) within the parameters of the rules, the grammar of the system without recognizing the social and discursive nature of such a ‘language-game’” (154).

However, the use of the body as writing tool allowed these poets to go against the “parameters of the rules of language”; more importantly, it allowed them to make visible the system that controls “what we can say” and “what is even thinkable” — words and sentences (154). By making these systems visible, those that control “what we can say” and “what is even thinkable,” they, as Rancière would argue, show us how language works to ensure that “groups tied to specific modes of doing to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places” (Betts 157; *The Politics of Aesthetics* 44). Nichol, by using language not for its semantic or phonetic functions, ruptures this ordering of the distribution of the sensible. Nichol ruptures the modes of doing poetry that argue that poetry should hide its labour, therefore allowing poetry to become something that involves the corporeal body. As a result, he ruptures who has access to poetry and where it belongs, allowing it to no longer be only for those who have access to highbrow culture. In other words, Nichol’s poetics forces a redefinition of what counts as poetry in the distribution of the sensible, and therefore, ruptures what groups are to be associated with poetry and to whom poetry should appear.

Of particular interest is the poem below (see figure 1.7). The letter “A” shows up 4 times. Three of them are in 3-D and form a type of infrastructure in which the second 3-D “A” houses Milt the Morph who, as discussed, is actually Captain Poetry, and his thought bubble. This visual poem demonstrates how we are so invested in our systems of language that they have come to form the basis of our infrastructures and limit our thoughts. This is shown by Milt the Morph

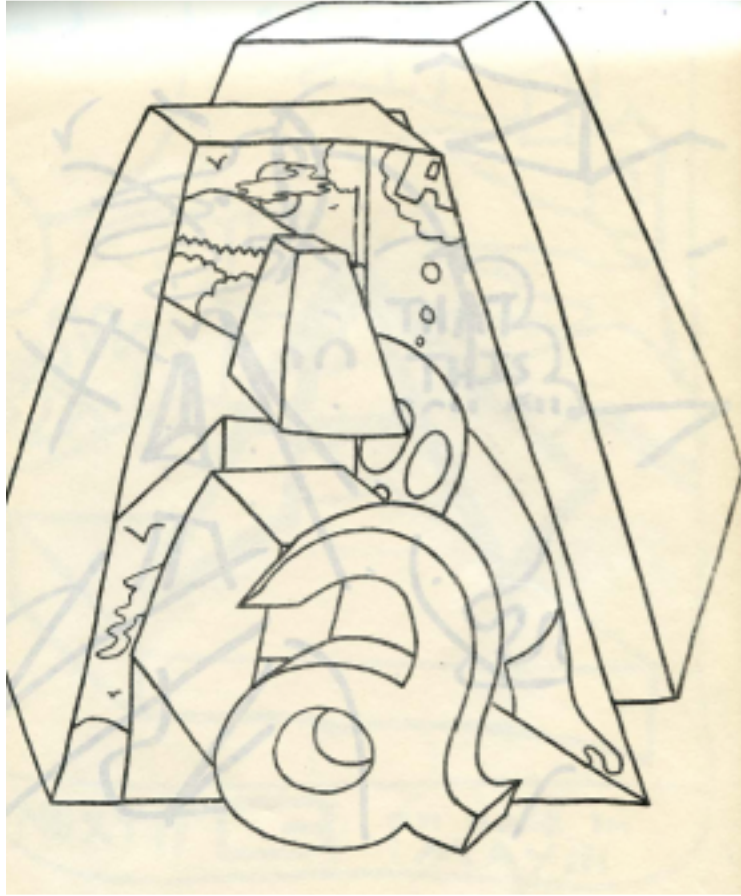


Figure 1.7: bpNichol, *The Captain Poetry Poems* (1971)

and his thought bubble being enclosed by the second 3-D “A.” The movement from the minuscule “a” to a capital “A” and then to a larger capital “A” also suggests a kind of progression in how we interact with language. At first, language was insignificant; therefore, the first “a” is minuscule. Then, as language gained importance and built our infrastructures, it came to embody who we are and what we think; consequently, Milt the Morph is enclosed in the second larger “A.” Carl Peters, in his book *bpNichol comics*, claims that “what is striking” in Nichol’s work “is the movement ... among the disparate particles and forms of Nichol’s work” (214). However, the movement in Nichol’s poetics is non-linear and liminal like in Copithorne’s. Nichol’s poetics, like Copithorne’s and McCaffery’s, refuse to adhere to a

poetics that works to maintain consensus. By working within the practice of concrete poetry, where “emotions and ideas are not the physical materials of poetry” but “the physical material from which the poem or text is made,” as in, “words reduced to their element of letters” and the space on the page, these poets misuse words and complicate what it means to be a “master of words” and what it means to be illiterate (Solt). In the above poem, Nichol demonstrates how words have come to shape our infrastructures, but his poetics shows us how to misuse words, and offers us a way to move beyond the limitations of language. Nichol’s poetics demonstrate how language can be used in a dissensual way, hence the largest “A” is empty, suggesting potential and possibility.

These poets all blur the lines between visual art and literature and ensure that the body is foregrounded in their poetics. They also demonstrate the ways in which writing can be a physical act. McCaffery, Copithorne, and Nichol demonstrate to us how our current systems of language seek to police the body in ways that remove it not only from poetry but also from language and reading. These dirty concrete poets do not “cover... up [the]work” that went into creating their poems, as Adorno suggests art should, because they demand an acknowledgement of the physical labour that went into writing these poems (qtd. in Bürger 35). Concrete poetry does not “provide forms of awareness or rebellious impulses for politics” but it does “displace... art’s borders,” allowing for popular culture and high-brow culture to blend together (for example), which inherently “displac[es] the borders of what is acknowledged” (*Dissensus*157). Concrete poetry, by making visible the corporeal body in literature by misusing words, manifests moments of dissensus that forces us to reconsider what counts as poetry, where poetry belongs, and who has access to it. In other words, concrete poetry “implies a move from the one given world to another

in which capacities and incapacities, forms of tolerance and intolerance, are differently defined” (151).

Reading: A Physical Act?

Jamie Hilder argues that we approach concrete poetry by asking “How are we supposed to read this poem?” (21). However, he says “perhaps it is not the poem that needs reading, but the act of reading itself” (21). All these concrete poems break the traditional modes of reading and demand that reading becomes about viewing and asks that the reader interact physically with the texts. In her book, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*, Marjorie Perloff argues that “concrete poetry presented itself as first of all a revolt against the transparency of the word,’ a demand that we must *see words* rather than merely read (see through) them” (my emphasis 21). Unlike traditional modes of doing poetry that tells us to make sure that poetry is ordered on the page in a way that we can read it from left to right, line to line, these concrete poems make reading less about symbolic decoding (as in, one sees the words and turns them into concepts). Instead, they require the readers to acknowledge everything that is on the page at once. In other words, in order for these concrete poems to be read, they demand a new mode of reading, one that is physical. Like the poets made writing a physical act, they make reading a physical act too. Not only do they demonstrate the labour that goes into poetry, but they demand that their readers interact physically with the text; they demand that their readers do labour too.

This is especially true of McCaffrey’s *Carnival*, for example. As discussed, Panel 1 and Panel 2 originally came in the form of booklets (see figure 1.1). Each page in the booklet

was 8 inches by 11 inches, and in order to view the poems as intended, the reader had to rip the booklet apart and construct each panel by attaching the loose pages to each other. The reader is required to interact with the text in a way that is laborious and physically demanding. There is a production process that must occur in order for the text to be viewed. *Carnival* came with the following instructions:

In order to destroy this book
please tear each page carefully
along the perforation. The
panel is assembled by laying out
pages in a square four.

The instructions note that to read this poem, the book must be destroyed. *Carnival* can only be viewed in its entirety if it is taken out of its book form and made into a panel. McCaffery is quite literally demanding that his readers interact physically with poetry. He breaks the modes of creating poetry that dictate that poetry, for the reader, is a product of mental labour. He makes poetry something that is physical and laborious. Where the appropriate mode of doing poetry dictates that poetry must to be read out of a complete and already assembled book, with *Carnival*, the book must first be “destroy[ed]” and then “assembled” (*Carnival*). When the poem is finally taken out of its book and “assembled” by its reader, it measures 44by 36 inches (*Carnival*). The reader must view the poem much like they would a visual art piece (see figure 1.8). With *Carnival*, the act of reading then is not only physical because we must “see” the text and navigate around the image but also because we have to “assemble” it. This challenges the modes of poetry that argue that poetry is not a corporeal and physical experience, since it



Figure 1.8: Steve McCaffery, Panel 1 assembled, *Carnival* (1970)

demands that those looking to experience the text interact with it in a physical and corporeal manner. It makes reading poetry a physical action.

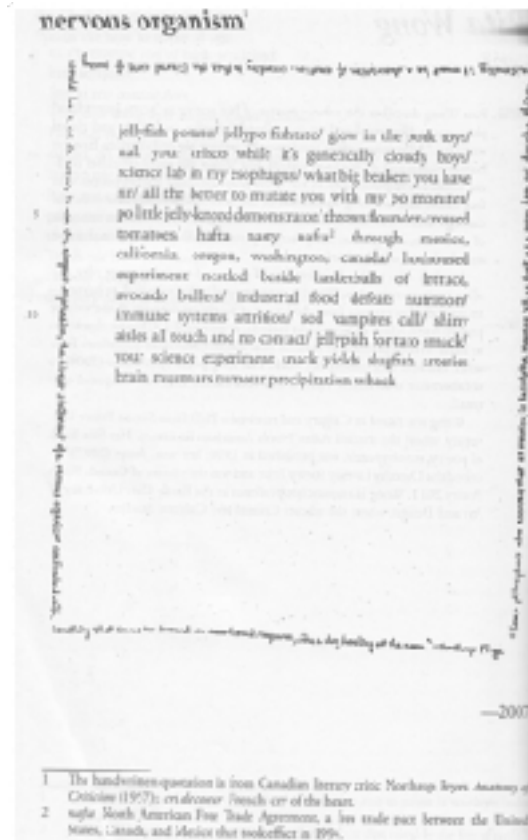


Figure 1.9: Rita Wong, “nervous organism,” *The Broadview Introduction to Literature* (2013)

Although *Runes* and “The Unmasking of Captain Poetry” do not require their readers to construct the text like *Carnival*, these texts require the readers to contort their heads or to move the poems around in order to read them. Pauline Butling, in her article “Re: Reading The Postmodern: ‘Mess is Lore’,” argues that the double text found in Rita Wong’s poem “nervous organism” (see figure 1.9) and her use of space creates “physical discomfort” (327). In order to read the text, Butling says, “I have to twist and turn my head, squinting to make out the miniature handwriting, turn the book again a couple of times to find the beginning... These physical contortions parallel my mental struggle to comprehend” (327). The exact same could

be said about *Carnival*, *Runes*, and the concrete poems in *The Captain Poetry Poems*. With *Carnival*, we have to move around the panels, moving from side to side or back and forth, while with *Runes* (see figure 1.10) and the concrete poems in *The Captain Poetry Poems*,

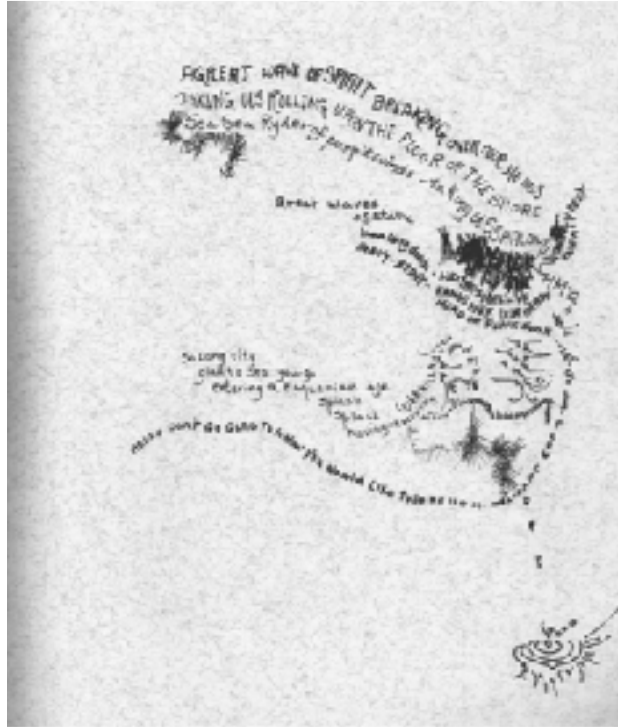


Figure 1.10: Judith Copithorne, *Runes* (1970)

(see figure 1.11) we either turn our head, navigate around the page ourselves, or physically turn the page around. In the above poem from *Runes*, if we begin from the bottom right with the verse “HELLO DON’T GO GLAD TO KNOW You would LIKE TO SO he....” then eventually we need to turn the page in order complete the sentence or contort our bodies. In a concrete poem from *The Captain Poetry Poems*, we again have to either navigate around the

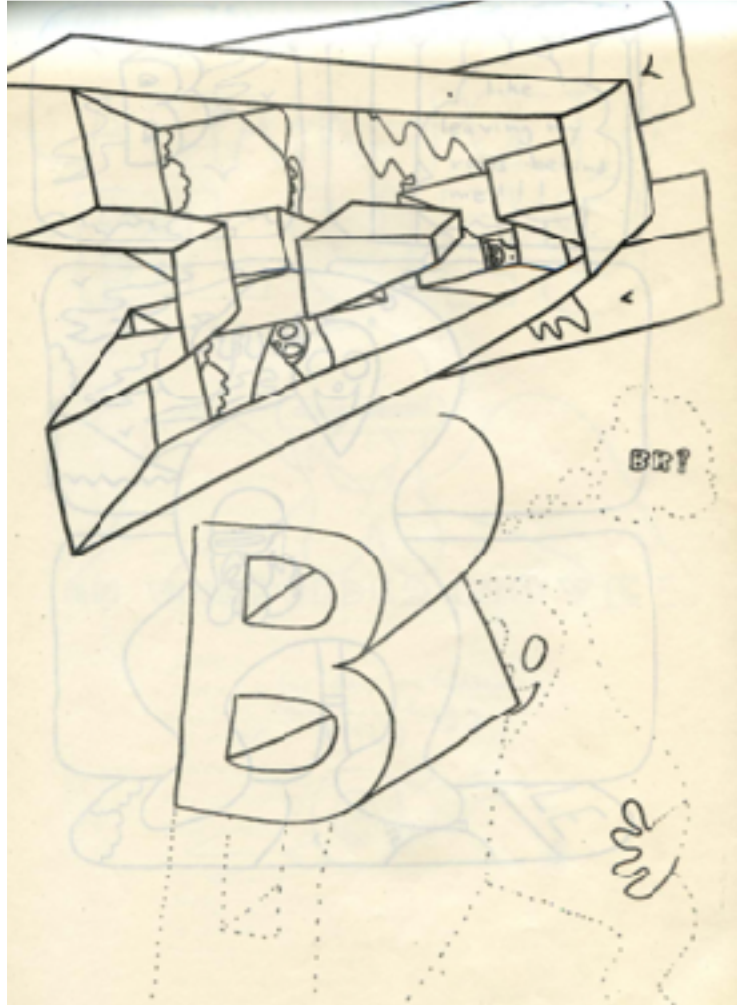


Figure 1.11: bpNichol, *The Captain Poetry Poems* (1971)

page, turn our heads, or physically move the page. Reading, then, becomes a physical act. We are reminded of our body while we read these poems because of the “physical discomfort” these texts give us while we view them (327). *Carnival* demands that we build the poem to experience it, while *Runes* and *The Captain Poetry Poems* demand that we move either the page or our heads. These concrete poems make reading a physical act. In essence, they open up the possibility of reading and make poetry accessible to a new public. Where a person might have been incapable of understanding language as it is traditionally used, these concrete poems make it possible to access poetry and reading through the body. They manifest a new

possibility of what counts as reading and what counts as poetry because reading is no longer about simply understanding the meaning of words. These poems demand that the body participates in the creation of poetry in the sense that both the writer and reader must physically interact with the text. These concrete poets show that poetry is also a laborious act. They rupture the modes of doing poetry because with concrete poetry, poetry is not simply about mental labour but becomes about physical labour. This has the effect of reordering the distribution of the sensible insofar as literature is usually bracketed off as non-labour from other ways of using our bodies and transforming matter. These concrete poems force a reconsideration of what counts as reading.

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Alan Kay, the computer scientist, argues that “the ability to ‘read’ mediums means you can access material and tools created by others. The ability to ‘write’ in a medium means you can generate materials and tools for others. You must have both to be literate” (qtd. in Emerson 125). The dirty concrete poems of Steve McCaffery, Judith Copithorne, and bpNichol by making writing and reading physical acts, manifest a new definition of what counts as poetry as well as new definitions of reading and writing. Furthermore, they not only manifest new definitions of what count as poetry but also of what count as literacy. In concrete poetry, the corporeal body can become a tool for writing and reading, giving a new public the capacity to engage with literature. Although these texts engage with the literary tradition they “displace... art’s borders” and as such, engage in politics and intervene in a “new landscape of the visible, the sayable and doable”(157).

Where traditional modes of poetry, reading, and writing are limited to a certain type of public — to the academic, to the artist, or to somebody who has the ability to access culture and the ability to read and write — these dirty concrete poems invite a new type of reader and writer. McCaffery, Copithorne, and Nichol's concrete poems make poetry, reading, and writing rupture the expectation that poetry, reading, and writing are for those who understand how letters, words, and sentences function. This is not to say that we can fully understand these texts without prior literary knowledge but that they, at the very least, allow those who would traditionally be illiterate to participate in reading, writing, and poetry. They put forth a new mode of doing poetry that allows one to understand literature in a physical and instinctual way. In this manner, poetry, reading and writing, and perhaps more importantly, literacy become democratized. These concrete poems make it possible to perform literacy through physical labour and not solely through mental labour. They also rupture the notion that art and labour are separate categories, forcing us to reconsider how bodies, functions, and capacities are ordered in the distribution of the sensible.

Contemporary readers might be familiar with the poetics of McCaffery, Copithorne and bpNichol, but that does not take away from the way readers interact with these texts or how these texts were created. In other words, it does not take away from the dissensual impact of these works. These dirty concrete poems contaminate the idea that literature is for the “masters of words.” They demonstrate that even those who misuse words can create literature. These dirty concrete poems contaminate the modes of doing poetry that work to discount anything that does not adhere to the appropriate modes of doing poetry, reading, or writing. They make visible a new mode of writing and reading, one that is physical and corporeal. They open up

poetry to a new public and allow people to engage in literature in physical ways. They show that poetry can be physically laborious, and therefore blur the lines between the poet and the physical labourer. In other words, they blur the lines between the “master of words” and the “illiterate” and the inherent value system associated with these categories.

CHAPTER 2

Eeeeeooowwww! Sound Poetry: An Inaudible Poetry

Wherever the reverence of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being.... And whatever men do or know or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about.

— Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

As a graduate student, I am often asked three questions by friends and family: (1) What are you studying? (2) What is it that you are hoping to do with your degree? (3) and What is the purpose of studying literature? These questions are well-intended and asked with the aim of finding unifying interests. To the first two questions, my answers are brief: “I study if experimental poetry necessarily is activist” and “I’m going to do a PhD.” “What is the point of studying literature?” demands, however, a more thoughtful answer. Academics who study experimental literature are often asked, and even ask themselves, another version of this question: “What, if anything, is the point of studying experimental literature?” The answer I most often hear given to the question “what is the point of studying literature?” is some version of “it creates a space for important discussion.” The answer I hear given to the question “what, if anything, is the point of experimental literature?” is almost always that “it creates an alternative space for alternative discussions.”

However, anyone posing these questions or having these conversations is already invested, whether it be family members supporting family members, like my family supporting

me, or artists and academics defending and discussing the significance of their work. In a room of hopeful young academics, or in a room of tenured professors fighting against budget cuts, these answers are likely met with agreement. To my working-class family, though, the claim that literature “creates space for discussion” seems ironic, particularly when these discussions focus on the labouring classes, marginalization, and social justice — “real” world issues. “But how exactly do these conversations produce change?” they might ask. These conversations we are having are important; however, these conversations stay within the “Ivory Tower,” in which I include both academic and artistic institutions, thereby excluding the very groups who are the subjects of our discussions.

Moreover, any time these conversations move outside their ordered place in society, outside academic and artistic institutions, it is usually still the academic or artist talking *to* other members of society rather than *with* them. The conversations we are having within the walls of academia are important, but rarely do they intervene in our society and create a space for more voices to be heard. We might think traditional poetry and its ensuing conversations create a public, while experimental poetry and its ensuing conversations create a counterpublic; however, these conversations are happening and being divided into sub-conversations because society has already been divided in such a way. Poetry does not create a public, and experimental poetry does not create a counterpublic, as Michael Warger suggests. Instead, poetry is partitioned into the public, and experimental poetry is partitioned into the counterpublic. As Rancière would argue, the ways that poetry, experimental poetry, and the conversations surrounding poetry and experimental poetry function in society respect an already established distribution of the sensible. As such, these conversations are not political but work to maintain consensus. These

conversations do not invite new voices in the conversation; instead, they work to police how, where, and when art is discussed and who is discussing art. What is not being said within the walls of the university and literary institutions? Whose voices are inaudible? Who is invisible? How then can these conversations manage to move outside their normal patterns and circuits in the distribution of the sensible? I argue it is through certain art practices such as sound poetry. Sound poetry can change the nature and place of the conversation about art and politics because it has the potential to manifest new possibilities of what counts as poetry and speech.

In an untitled manifesto found in their collective works, *The Prose Tattoo*, The Four Horsemen argue that in sound poetry, “words are recharged with the energy of physical movement, the ultimate base of emotion” (np). They argue that sound poetry “is [the] fusion of the essential elements of several arts into a new art, based on the exploration of the body’s potential for sound and silence and the capacity of the body to produce that sound and that silence” (*The Prose Tattoo*). According to Stephen Scobie, “the ‘contents’ of the sound poem[s] are, and always have been, more emotional than intellectual, more visceral than mental” (216). According to Steve McCaffery, “sound poetry is the poetry of direct emotional confrontation: there is no pausing for intellectualization” (qtd. in Scobie 216). Chanting, breathing, moaning, groaning, screaming, gargling, choking, gibberish, and phonetic use of words, syllables, and repetition are some of the materials that make up sound poetry. It is the sounds from the body, the noise from the body, that makes up sound poetry. As such, sound poetry takes poetry off the page and is about performance, improvisation, and contamination. As a poetry that is focused on the material body, sound poetry challenges what counts as poetry and creates a new mode of doing poetry. Moreover, because sound poetry is a vocal act, it also creates new ways of

speaking, which forces a reconsideration of what we label as speech. Speech and “the human” are interrelated insofar as our definition of what counts as human is dependent on what counts as speech. Therefore, by throwing into question what counts as speech, sound poetry throws into question our definition of what counts as human as well as what counts as poetry. In this chapter, I turn to The Four Horsemen, Penn Kemp, and Christian Bök because their sound poetry allows us to rethink the modes of doing poetry and the modes of doing speech in ways that impact our understanding of what counts as human. Our current definition of human works to exclude certain voices from counting as political beings and helps to maintain consensus. When these texts rupture what counts as speech and poetry, they allow for new voices to be counted as political beings, and this alteration in the fabric of the distribution of the sensible allows for a reordering of what voices can be heard and where these voices can be heard.

I discuss the The Four Horsemen not only because they were Canada’s first sound poetry group, but because they changed the effect we thought poetry performances should have on their audience and how we think poetry performances should be scripted. Penn Kemp allows us to rethink what type of bodies can produce poetry and how poetry is to be distributed. Her sound poems shows us that the divisions between academia and literary institutions and the general public is not an intrinsic ordering of publics. Christian Bök’s sound poetry allows us to ask questions about what bodies can produce poetry and what bodies can constitute its audience. His sound poems make visible a new type of speech, what I have come to call *machinic* speech, and therefore make visible a new political being and a new kind of poet, the cyborg. These sound poets force us to rethink what qualifies as poetry and as human because sound poetry

disorganizes the traditional relationship between poetry and speech that has supported liberal humanism.

Sound Poetry: An Unsound History

According to critics such as Stephen Scobie and Steve McCaffery, it is difficult to trace when and how sound poetry started. Although Scobie notes that it is commonly agreed upon that sound poetry was first performed as sound poetry proper when Hugo Ball performed it at his Zurich avant-garde club, Cabaret Voltaire, in the 1920s, there are examples of sound poetry prior to the nineteenth century. Steve McCaffery argues in his article “Sound Poetry: A Survey” that “in a period roughly stretching from 1875 to 1928, sound poetry’s second phase had manifested itself in several diverse and revolutionary investigations into language’s non-semantic, acoustic properties” (“Sound Poetry: A Survey”). These investigations were being done by Russian Futurists Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksey Kruchenykh, the Italian Futurist F. T. Marinetti, and Dada artists Raoul Hausmann and Hugo Ball, among others. Its first phase was “the many instances of chant structures and incantation of nonsense syllabic mouthings and deliberate lexical distortions” found among indigenous peoples (6). The difference between phase one and phase two was a conscious decision to use these sounds as counter-institutional, as a way to challenge what counts as poetry, communication, and speech. Humans have always made non-verbal sounds, whether to signify joy, sorrow, pain, pleasure, *etcetera*, but in phase two we re-labelled these sounds as poetry. Sound poetry’s contentious history speaks to its dissensual position in society. Sound poetry finds itself in a precarious position in society because it relies on the act of destroying what we think qualifies as speech and because academics, artists, and

poetry readers alike question its right to call itself poetry. Speech has been how we typically defined who is human and who is not, who counts as a political being and who does not. As Rancière notes, “if there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing [them] as the bearer of signs of politics, by not understanding what [they] say..., by not hearing what issues from [their] mouth[s] as discourse” (46). In other words, if we want to refuse someone’s political agency, then we refuse to hear them, refuse to see their ability to communicate, and refuse to recognize what they are saying as speech.

Rancière’s notion that speech marks the human animal as political being is influenced by Aristotle’s definition of what qualifies as a political animal. Rancière refers to Aristotle’s Book 10 of *Politics* in Chapter 1 of his book *Dissensus*, “Ten Theses on Politics.” He refers to Aristotle’s argument that

the sign of the political nature of humans is constituted by their possession of the *logos*, which is alone able to demonstrate a community in the *aisthesis* of the just and the unjust, in contrast to the *phôné*, appropriate only for expressing feelings of pleasure and displeasure. Whoever is in the presence of an animal that possesses the ability to articulate language and its power of demonstration knows that he is dealing with a human — and therefore political — animal.

(*Dissensus* 45)

Aristotle, like Rancière, argues that for a political animal, for a human, to be recognized as such, they must have a speech that is recognizable; they must possess “*logos*” (45). However, what is recognized as *logos* is that which is visible, audible, and already counted as speech in the distribution of the sensible. It is the appropriate way to speak. As such, it can never be

dissensual; it cannot be “political” in Rancière’s sense of the term. In other words, underneath the distribution of the sensible, what is recognized as a “political animal” can never in effect be political because it adheres to the appropriate modes of being and does not challenge how things, people, and functions operate. And as Rancière notes, “the essence of politics is dissensus”; without dissensus it is impossible to engage in politics (38). A “political animal” defined by traditional modes of doing speech always participates in maintaining the distribution of the sensible and does not cause dissensus. However, if a person utters “*phôné*,” that which is “appropriate only for expressing feelings of pleasure and displeasure,” and simultaneously insists that this can be a method of communication for a “political animal,” then they are actually engaging in politics because they unsettle the distribution of the sensible — more so, perhaps, if they do so from a position of authority, like the poet or performer (45).

Essentially, to challenge who counts as a “political animal” is to challenge who counts in the distribution of the sensible as human and what counts as an appropriate mode of communication. It forces us to acknowledge that our limited definition of what counts as speech has worked to exclude other forms of communication. It is to acknowledge that our definitions of what counts as “political animal” favour us, who have typically counted as the human, and work to maintain consensus and to ensure that bodies, functions, and systems stay in their ordered place. The point of sound poetry, therefore, is as much to draw our attention to a given distribution of the sensible as to change it irrevocably. Sound poetry forces us to acknowledge that there are other types of speech and communications that have been excluded from the distribution of the sensible, and as such, it forces us to acknowledge that there are bodies that should be recognized as political beings in the distribution of the sensible that our current notions

of proper speech have worked to exclude. If we are to acknowledge that there are other types of speech that have been policed into silence, then what other voices have we not recognized as speech? Who have we excluded from being counted as a political animal? Do animals count as a political animals? Do machines count as a political animals? Do the noises heard from the environment allow for nature to count as a political animal? What about people who cannot speak in *logos* but can communicate in alternative ways? To acknowledge that there are other forms of speech that are discounted underneath the distribution of the sensible is to acknowledge that there is an anonymous public that has not been accounted for in the distribution of the sensible that our current definition of political being has worked to exclude. It allows us to acknowledge that our definition of what counts as speech and as communication has worked to silence others. For example, if we acknowledge the noises of the body, whether screaming, gibberish, or moaning, as poetry and as communication, then it opens up how we can discuss politics. If we recognize the noises of the body as poetry and as communication, then we can now recognize expressions of rage, pleasure, sadness, *etcetera* as worthy of being included in political discussions, as opposed to only recognizing *logos* as the only worthy form of communication in politics. Sound poetry ruptures our modes of what counts as political speech and forces us to reevaluate what we think counts as poetry and communication and who we think counts as a political being. It forces us to acknowledge that our modes of doing speech work to exclude anything we do not want to have count as “human.”

Sound poetry defines itself as speech from the body but still labels itself as poetry, thereby confounding the appropriate modes of doing speech and of doing poetry. It challenges our notions of speech and poetry because the performer of sound poetry is neither articulate nor

coherent and seeks to foreground the voice of the body (*phôné*) and not the articulate, organized mind (*logos*). It challenges our notions of poetry because it does not seek to hide the primal corporeal body — no, instead, it seeks to foreground it! Moreover, it challenges our notion of the human because it refuses to speak as the human should, with *logos*. However, it still defines itself as poetry. It demands participation from the listener, and it demands to be *witnessed*. Whereas traditional notions of poetry dictate that poetry needs to be recorded, whether in the conventional book format or in blogs, sound poetry needs to be heard and experienced. The current traditional modes of doing poetry do not depend on a listener to function appropriately. Our modes of doing poetry dictate that poetry should function on its own and be autotelic. Sound poetry, on the other hand, needs to be witnessed and is dependent on an audience, an outside source. It is about the sounds and noises of the performing body, but it is also about these sounds and noises being received by another body and about being contaminated by this other body. Sound poetry calls into question the role of the receiver of the poem and calls into question the relation between the performer and audience.

In her book *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler introduces the notion of injurious speech, by which she means that speech, “on the basis of a grammatical analysis alone, appears to be no threat. But the threat emerges precisely through the act that the body performs in speaking the act” (11). She argues that

the notion that speech wounds appears to rely on this inseparable and incongruous relation between body and speech, but also, consequently, between speech and its effects. If the speaker addresses his or her body to the one

addressed, then it is not merely the body of the speaker that comes into play: it is the body of the addressee as well. (13)

What I find interesting about Butler's argument is that it shows that words matter and that they have a physical effect. It also shows that in speech, there is a certain type of interplay between the "body of the speaker" and the "body of the addressee"; the one affects the other (13).

Although Butler is talking about speech that hurts individuals, we might want to think of sound poetry as a benign form of "injurious speech" insofar as sound poetry is dissensual speech and only a real threat to the distribution of the sensible because it disrupts our definition of what counts as a "political animal." It is a threat to the distribution of the sensible — the system — because it ruptures the false sense of there being a distinct "real." Although injurious speech implies violence, sound poetry is a benign form of violence to individual addressees, unless we believe that the opportunity to bring visibility to the anonymous and what is unaccounted is harmful.

Butler further argues that

to be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is *unanticipated* about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control. The capacity to circumscribe the situation of the speech act is jeopardized at the moment of injurious address. To be addressed injuriously is not only to be open to an unknown future, but not to know the time and place of injury, and to suffer the disorientation of one's situation as the effect of such speech. Exposed at the

moment of such a shattering is precisely the volatility of one's "place" within the community of speakers. (4)

We might as individuals "feel a loss of context" when we witness sound poetry, but only because it "open[s us up to] ... an unknown future" by rupturing the distribution of the sensible (4). If sound poetry does do direct injury to its addressees, it is only because it "shatter[s the] ... volatility of one's 'place' within the community" by blurring the lines between *logos* and *phôné* and forces them to acknowledge that their "real" is arbitrary, which can be "disorient[ing]" (4). It does harm in the sense that it manifests dissensus, and dissensus in itself is disorienting. Sound poetry is "injurious speech" because it does damage to the distribution of the sensible, but as such, it has the potential to reconfigure what counts as speech. It makes it possible to hear new voices as voices and redefines what and who counts as a political being. Sound poetry allows the authority figure, the performer or the poet, to still be heard and still be visible as an authority figure, all the while speaking from the body in something other than *logos*.

Like Rancière, Butler argues that "one 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*" (5). However, sound poetry blurs the lines between what is recognizable and what is not because it allows for an authority figure, a poet or performer, to be visible all the while rupturing the modes of doing poetry and the modes of doing speech. The poet stands there, recognizable, yet refusing to speak coherently, as one should speak in order to be visible, in order to count as a political animal. Moreover, by witnessing the performance, the viewer is forced into a type of interplay with the poet; the "body of the speaker" and the "body of the addressee" affect each other, recognize each other. The addressee in this recognition is forced to identify with the figure that is breaking the modes of being

human. Furthermore, the viewer is not only forced to recognize themselves in the poet but also made to participate in the creation of the poem, and because the sound poem is an act of dissensus in itself, they become complicit in a dissensual act.

As previously argued, sound poems are meant to be witnessed; they are performances. A sound poem is not complete on its own, but only reaches a certain level of completion when it makes contact with an addressee. Heriberto Yépez, in his introduction to Jerome Rothenberg's collective works, *Eye of Witness*, argues that

performance is not 'form' — a closed or at least recognizable form — but an unsettled form-process, a form-in-becoming or even form-that-will-not accomplish-itself, a kind of ephemeral or liminal transition between one form and another in which culture goes through a crisis to transform and make sense and non-sense during the struggle, an interplay of resistance and emergence. (20)

Sound poetry depends on this indeterminacy, on this “unsettled form-process” (20). It is what allows it to break with the binary relationship of poet and audience. The performance aspect of sound poetry is what allows sound poetry to eschew the fixity of the book and what puts the body of the poet, what the traditional modes of doing poetry seek to organize, at the forefront of poetry. As Yépez also notes, “performance is how we go from one form to another, without the need or help of rational means and with body as a catalyst — it is not the individual poet who performs but who himself becomes the subject of performance” (20). Sound poetry allows poets to connect with their audience on a visceral level, without the need to adhere to the standard modes of speaking. It allows the poet to be political without having to restrict themselves to the appropriate mode of being a political animal. The sound poet is a new type of political figure, in

effect, and relies on a new mode of doing speech, therefore manifesting dissensus rather than helping to maintain consensus. The sound poet is not the correct type of “political animal” but for this reason is the type of “political animal” that can manifest dissensus and engage in politics.

Sound poetry is a poetry that focuses on the liberation of the “most primitive pulses of the human self,” and I suggest that this liberation is precisely why sound poetry forces us to reconsider what we think counts as poetry and what we think counts as a political animal (Scobie 216). It also forces us to rethink the hierarchy that is associated between poet and reader and between performer and audience members. It forces us to address that our definition of poetry, like our definition of what counts as speech and political animal, is determined by arbitrary notions that have been agreed upon and maintained by consensus. It forces us to acknowledge that the language we use to determine what counts as a political animal works to ensure that dissensus does not manifest. It works against Rancière’s definition of the police because it ruptures the “matching of function, places and ways of being” and brings new visibility to the anonymous, demonstrating that there is a void that is unaccounted (*Dissensus* 36). It forces us to redefine our place in society, the poet’s place in society, and the audience members’ place in society, or even who can be counted as a poet in society and who can count as an audience member. It makes us rethink who has access to speech, what counts as speech, and what should count as a political figure. It forces us to reevaluate the system that has named us the ultimate political animal

O! *Canadada* and The Four Horsemen: Sound, Poetry, and Performance

Canada's first and probably most notable sound poetry group is The Four Horsemen. The group consisted of bpNichol, Rafael Barreto-Rivera, Paul Dutton, and Steve McCaffery. They were active from 1972 until Nichol's untimely death in 1988. During their time together, they released two vinyl records, *Nada Canadada* (1972) and *Live in the West* (1977), as well as three print collections, *Horse d'Oeuvres* (1977), *A Little Nastiness* (1980), and *The Prose Tattoo* (1983). Their body of work was prolific and varied. At times they experimented with technology and musical instruments, while at others they relied solely on the human voice. Sometimes they scripted their texts in grid form (see figure 2.1), while at others they relied on Raoul Husmann's optophonetic notation method⁴. Sometimes their works were improvised, while others their performances were meticulously planned. Finally, sometimes the content relied on some referential language, while at other times their poems were nonsensical, rupturing completely the habitual connection between the signified and the signifier. The most interesting of their sound poems in regards to my project are those that are non-instrumental, non-formally scripted, non-referential, collaborative, improvisational, and performative.

One such non-referential work is an untitled poem performed at The Rivoli in Toronto in 1983.⁵ It combines two individual poems: a poem by Nichol called "8 States of Denial for the 1980s," performed by Nichol, and an unnamed poem from the French Québec sound poet Claude Gauvreau, performed by McCaffery. While these two poems were being performed simultaneously, Dutton and Barreto-Rivera added various improvised sounds including gargling,

⁴ Optophoneticism is "a sound reading / interpretation of spatially organized text" (*The Prose Tattoo*).

⁵ To hear the poem go to the following link: https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/groups/4-Horsemen/Rivoli-1984/Four-Horsemen_Live-at-the-Rivoli-Toronto_10-11-1984_02.mp3.

howling, and random gibberish⁶. Dutton and Barreto-Rivera used sounds from the body, which do not refer to any specific word. This poem challenges the modes of doing poetry because it refutes fixity. It takes poetry away from the page and the book. Although it was recorded and put on PennSound, it was never recorded in a studio and never scripted. It depended on in-the-moment improvisation and on the combination of other sound poems. Their work is interesting because it redistributes how poetry shows up in the distribution of the sensible and therefore who has access to it and how we can access poetry. It takes poetry out of the book and away from words to make it about performance and orality. The poems of The Four Horsemen, like the concrete poems of Judith Copithorne, Steve McCaffery, and bpNichol, make poetry physical. Where page-based poetry normally seeks to repress the body in the writing and reading process, as I have argued in chapter 1, their sound poems make the body visible in poetry.

In his 1978 article, “DISCUSSION ... GENESIS CONTINUITY: Some Reflections on the Current World of The Four Horsemen,” McCaffery notes that “The Horsemen don’t think of their pieces as, in any way, final products” (32). Instead, the poems are altered at each performance depending on the “micro alterations in the energy states” of the audience and The Four Horsemen (32). This is why McCaffery says that “The Horsemen have a decided preference for the purely acoustic, eschewal of microphones, of electricoustic treatment of any kind. It was felt that there is a significant difference between human energy *per se* and extended human energy through electronic processing” (35). According to The Horsemen, to rely on microphones, recordings, or instruments limits the possibility of connecting with the audience and of foregrounding the body. For The Horsemen, sound poetry should allow both the performer and

⁶ This information comes from an email exchange between Robert Stacey and Ottawa sound poet jw curry.

the audience to influence the creation of the poem. According to The Four Horsemen, a sound poem is not its own independent, complete product. Instead, a sound poem relies on the connection of different bodies and the ongoing in-the-moment act of creation. It relies on being contaminated by outside sources. Sound poetry does not have an organizing function in relation to the body but is meant to assimilate various energy levels and is meant to express the visceral energy of the body.

For the Horsemen, the audience witnesses the poem, but they also affect the poem.

Heriberto Yopez notes that

performance occurs when the body enters into a strong field of non-standard language. The eye of performance is the eye of the hurricane. The central ego disappears and is replaced by the void produced by the intense movements of energetic language around. Performance is ... [what] make texts come into living material conditions. (20)

The Four Horsemen refuse to “articulate language,” *logos*, and work within *phôné*, “a strong field non-standard language” (20). Because performance occurs, along with a form of witnessing, they still have “power of demonstration” (*Dissensus* 45). The performance of the unnamed poem performed at The Rivoli ruptures the distribution of the sensible because the audience is forced to make sense of the idea that a political animal can speak incoherently but still be audible and visible. The audience, as Butler would say, “suffer[s] a loss of context” (4). This “loss of context” is not only because the audience is forced to physically witness the performance, but because, by witnessing the performance, the audience is now part of the performance (4). By witnessing this unnamed poem, the audience becomes, even if unwillingly,

part of an act of dissensus. By physically being present for the poem, the audience is implicated in an act of dissensus. Therefore, the audience that was at The Rivoli in Toronto in 1983 when The Four Horsemen performed can be considered activists, even if they are unknowingly so. Being present for the performance forces the audience to acknowledge that authority figures, such as poets, can be heard even if they speak in *phôné*, and that our definition of what counts as poetry and speech is dependent on a false sense that there is such a thing as a given “real” — “the system of self-evident facts or sense perceptions” that forms our reality and ensure how bodies, objects, capacities, and systems operate (*Politics of Aesthetics* 12). Audience members need to question what it means that a political animal can be seen as such even if they speak in *phôné*. If the same audience was transported to a reading by Stephen Collis, who speaks in *logos* and functions as an activist poet should in the distribution of the sensible according to consensus, then they are not implicated in an act of dissensus because there is no manifestation of dissensus. They do not become activists. In order for poetry to be activist, there needs to be an alteration of what counts as poetry, its place in the literary system, or that system’s role in the distribution of the sensible. Collis and the audience maintain consensus. The “body of the speaker” and the “body of the addressee” still affect each other, but because the distribution of the sensible is not ruptured, no type of decontextualization takes place (Butler 13). Instead, the “body of the speaker” and the “body of the addressee” simply enforce consensus because they function as expected; the audience member defers to the poet, Collis, as an authority figure, recognizes the poet as someone who speaks *logos*, and feels that all is as it should be. On the other hand, sound poetry as dissensual poetry and as dissensual speech refutes fixity and makes the audience members “open to an unknown future” (4). Audience members are forced to witness an authority

figure speaking *phôné*. There is a “threat,” an injury, in that the performance of The Four Horsemen ruptures the distribution of the sensible, what we take as our “real,” because it forces us to acknowledge that the appropriate modes of doing speech and of being a political animal are arbitrary — a policing act of consensus.

McCaffery argues that if we understand writing as “the inscription of units of meaning within a framed space of retrievability and repeatability, then tape [or any form of recording] is none other than writing” (“DISCUSSION” 35). He continues to argue that “to transcend writing, and the critical vocabulary built up around the logocentricity of writing, and to achieve a totally phonocentric art, must involve a renunciation of those two central canons of the written: repeatability and retrievability” (36). However, although the recordings of The Four Horsemen allow for “repeatability and retrievability,” the performances themselves cannot be said to do so. Even the recordings themselves still rupture the modes of doing poetry: like the performances, they also allow for contamination and problematize the role of the poet and the division between poet and audience and how poetry is accessed. The Four Horsemen, by recording their sound poems on vinyl, allow the poems to reach a public that was not present for the performance. Moreover, releasing their poems on vinyl altered how consumers of poetry accessed poetry, allowing them to access poetry through a vinyl and not a book. Of course, there is no body-to-body connection between the poet and the addressee; however, the poems still affects the listener on a physical level, and the poem is still contaminated by outside sources. Listeners might hear the traffic that is driving by, they might be disturbed by their own coughing or sneezing, the vinyl might be scratched and skip, or their experience could be affected by the bodily utterance of a fellow listener, for example. A vinyl release of poetry alters the act of consuming poetry and ties

to a whole different set of technologies, bodily experiences, and social possibilities. Moreover, the listener of the vinyl is still confronted with an authority figure who speaks in *phoné*, and the outside surrounding sounds affect how the listener comes in contact with the sound from the vinyl. By releasing their sound poetry on vinyl, The Four Horsemen allow those who were not present during their live performance to also be implicated in an act of dissensus. Like the audience that was present in 1983 at The Rivoli, listeners unknowingly become activists.

Moreover, although The Four Horsemen published collections of their sound poems in print with the release of *Horse d'Oeuvres* (1977), *A Little Nastiness* (1980), and *The Prose Tattoo* (1983), which would suggest a certain level of “retrievability and repeatability,” the way they scripted their poems, for example the grid and the use of optophoneticis, still disrupts the modes of doing poetry because they are cues instead of detailed, completed scripts (“DISCUSSION” 35). “The Dream Remains”⁷ (see figure 2.0) was published in *The Prose Tattoo*. It still breaks

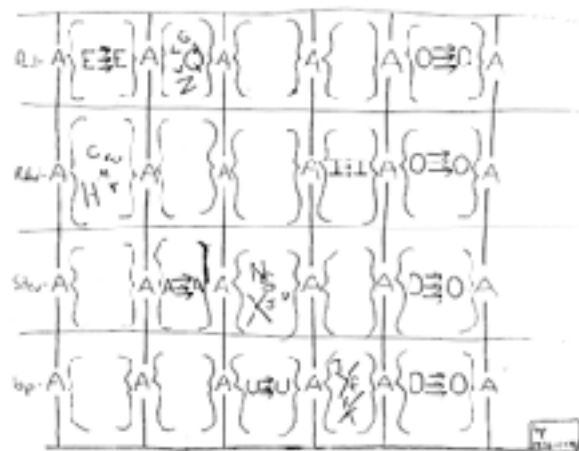


Figure 2.0: The Four Horsemen, “The Dream Remains,” *The Prose Tattoo* (1984)

⁷ To hear the poem, go to the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahUdQd_YtwM%20. The YouTube clip is part of Ron Mann’s documentary *Poetry in Motion*.

with the modes of doing poetry because it is more of a visual poem and needs to be interpreted. Different poets will interpret the poem differently depending on their body. The script for “The Dream Remains” is what The Four Horsemen referred to as a grid, and instead of presenting exact verses to be read off the page, the grid presents clues for interpretation. As McCaffery notes, the grid show “arrival points ... that we will all reach at some point during the piece, but [the] actual duration is indeterminate” (32). The poem is created by recognizing the “energy states for each [Horsemen and the audience],” and so a different body will read this grid differently (32). Not having a traditional script but instead a grid allows for The Four Horsemen to rely on the energy created by the poets and the audience. It allows poetry to be about performance. A grid refuses fixity because it is a tool that prompts improvisation and extemporization.

The Four Horsemen’s sound poems rupture the modes of doing traditional poetry by taking poetry off the page and by making it about performance and the utterance of the body. In this way, their sound poems also rupture the modes of doing speech and our definition of what counts as a political being because they show that someone refusing to speak in *logos* cannot only be visible but visible as an authority figure (as a poet). This forces us to question the idea of speech as the maker of what counts as political being. Moreover, their poems, by refusing fixity in the way they are performed, recorded, and scripted, also implicate the addressee and consumer of their poems in a dissensual act. By focusing on performance and by recording their poems on vinyl, The Four Horsemen allow for their poetry to be consumed in such a way that outside sources and the addressees of their poetry can influence the final outcome of their poems. Moreover, the way their poems are scripted, for example the grid, also allows the consumer of

their poems to impact the outcome of their poems because their poems are scripted in a way that needs to be interpreted by the corporeal body and read out loud, leaving room for improvisation and interpretation from the consumer. The sound poems of The Four Horsemen, by allowing the consumers or addressees of their poems to impact or aid in the creation of their poems, and because their poetry is itself dissensual, implicate the consumers or addressees of their poetry in the act of dissensus. In addition, by disrupting what counts as poetry and as speech, and by disrupting the dynamics between the poet and consumer of poetry, the sound poetry of The Four Horsemen forces us to reevaluate our political structure as well as our definition of what can count as political speech and communication. In other words, because The Four Horsemen “displace... art’s borders,” they “displace... the borders of what is acknowledged” in the distribution of the sensible (*Dissensus* 157). Therefore, by disrupting what counts as poetry, they made it possible to see the utterance of bodies and the noise-not-words aspect of speech as political speech.

SoundCloud and Penn Kemp: Birthing A New Type of Sound

Penn Kemp is one of the few women sound poets in Canada. Like the visual poet Judith Copithorne, not much is written about Kemp. I hope this section helps address this critical neglect. Kemp's sound poems demonstrate what sound poetry from the female body sounds like, and the recordings of her poems, like those of The Four Horsemen, bring poetry outside its ordered place in society — academia and artistic circuits — into popular culture (even if we might think of sound poetry as anti-popular culture or as a literary counter-culture). The female body and the idea of birthing is central in Kemp’s sound poetry and poetics. She argues that her

notion of sounding started with the labour of childbirth: an amazement at the inhuman howls emitted from a mouth that insisted on its own expression.

Grounded in that direct experience of the female body, my experiencing with sounding continued in hearing and echoing babies' exploration from babble into language. ("Sound Waves Sound Wavers" o62)

Kemp was inspired to produce sound poetry by the birthing process and from her experiences of watching children move from expressing themselves through *phôné* to *logos*. She performs live like The Four Horsemen; however, most of her sound poetry repertoire is formally recorded, and her sound poems rely heavily on technology. Her sound poem "Night Orchestra," from her 2016 album *Barbaric Culture Practice*⁸, depends on the over tracking of her own voice and other various recording techniques. Her sound poems could be described as what Sean Braune in his article "Arche-Speech and Sound Poetry" calls "audiopoetry" (114). According to Braune, "audiopoetry is the technologization of an embodied and organic process of vocal projection" (114). Braune notes that "audiopoetry lacks the performative immediacy of sound poetry" (144). Scobie too argues that "a recording produces only a disembodied voice, which for the sound poet is almost a contradiction in terms" (114). However, I argue that Kemp's sound poems are still dissensual because, although her poetry is recorded, her recordings and the distribution of her poetry mimic the way popular music is recorded and distributed today,

⁸ The title of the album is a response to and satire of the Conservative party's proposal to establish a "Barbaric Cultural Practices Hotline" in 2015. The controversial hotline would have allowed Canadians "to inform authorities about disturbing rituals they may believe their neighbours to be indulging in" such as forced marriage, polygamy, or female mutilation. However, the proposed hotline came about "amid intense debate about the wearing of the niqab during citizenship ceremonies, and the right of the federal government to strip convicted terrorists of their citizenship" (Maloney). Many critics felt the purpose of the hotline as well as the title of the hotline, with the words "barbaric" and "culture," was a direct attack on the cultures who are stereotypically associated with these practices (Maloney).

digitally, and allows her poetry to still refute fixity. Releasing her work digitally not only allows her work to reach new publics but also allows outside sources to contaminate her poems just as the The Four Horsemen vinyls allowed the consumption of their poems to be affected by outside sources. Like The Four Horsemen, Kemp manifests a new mode of doing poetry and speech. The recording of her body of work allows her poetry to reach a new audience and new listeners who will unwittingly become activists by simply witnessing the poem, like the audience that was present at The Rivoli when The Four Horsemen performed.

True, “Night Orchestra,”⁹ like most of her other sound poems, depends on a script that, on the page, looks exactly like a lyric poem. However, when Kemp performs her poetry, she uses “sounding” to rupture the rules of grammar and syntax, thereby rupturing the authority of the script. She argues that “sounding encourages the auditory representational system that transgresses the dominant pattern of authority, the grammar of hierarchy, laterally perturbing the syntax” (“Sound Waves Sound Wavers” 63). The first stanza of “Night Orchestra” is as follows:

Deep in summer
stillness, an electric
hum of air conditioner
in B flat flat monotone
entrains my body
monotonous.

The poem is recorded in such a way that different parts of the poem are repeated, in different tones of voices, for different lengths of time. Although it is a multi-track recording, the voices we

⁹ To hear the poem, go to the following link: <https://soundcloud.com/penn-kemp/night-orchestra>

hear are only Kemp's. The poem begins with one version of Kemp repeating "deep," then another track begins to repeat the syllable "sum" which eventually turns into "summer." After some time, a new version of her voice begins to read the poem. When the one version of Kemp's voice finishes repeating the words "deep" and "summer" and the syllable "sum," we begin to hear humming and some heavy breathing. This creates the sensation that there are multiple versions of Kemp speaking, and it is one way of breaking down the unity and uniqueness of the typical lyric voice. The poem "Night Orchestra" is about the sounds of summer. Kemp hears the sound of her neighbour's air conditioner, which is only broken by the chant of her Tibetan music. One of the many voices of the poem remarks that "I resist the single sound" in reference to summer. However, "Night Orchestra" also resists the singular, lyrical "I" that is foregrounded when speaking through *logos*. "Nigh Orchestra" exchanges the singular "I" for a plurality of female voices.

In her book, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Luce Irigaray argues that "female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (23). Irigaray argues that "woman's desire [should] not be expected to speak the same language as man's; woman's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks" (25). The language of man is that of *logos*, and more than just being "a *phallic* one, [it] shares the values promulgated by patriarchal society and culture, values inscribed in the philosophical corpus: property, production, order, form, visibility . . . and erection" (87). She argues that women "need to proceed in such a way that linear reading is no longer possible: that is, the retroactive impact of the end of each word, utterance, or sentence upon its beginning must be taken into consideration in order to undo the power of its teleological effect, including its

deferred action” (79). She says the “issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal” (78). She calls for a new language termed *écriture féminine*.

We might be tempted to view Kemp’s sound poem “Night Orchestra” as a type of *écriture féminine*, as the layering of her voice and the echoing effect do not allow for a “linear reading” of the poem (79). However, Kemp’s poetry does not simply “jam ... the theoretical machinery” that is *logos* (78). It goes further; it *ruptures* “the theoretical machinery” that argues only a certain type of speech counts. She jams “the theoretical machinery” that is *logos* when she speaks in a way that foregrounds the feminine voice and body, but she *ruptures* the system when she demonstrates that there are other forms of communication, other voices, in the distribution of the sensible that are not being heard as communication, as voices. By demonstrating an alternative way of speaking, she demonstrate how *logos* works to police how bodies, functions, and systems operate in order to maintain consensus. Kemp’s poem “Night Orchestra” demonstrates that there are other ways of speaking than in *logos*; it manifests a moment of dissensus that forces a redistribution of how things are partitioned in the sensible. Although it does so by foregrounding the woman’s voice and body, it ruptures the distribution of the sensible in a way that can allow for other forms of speech to be seen as speech and other voices to be seen as voices which might have been previously excluded.

Kemp demonstrates how her body and her voice sounds and therefore shows how the voice and body of a woman sounds, but it does not suggest that it is the way all women bodies and voices should speak. She ruptures the system that suggests that certain bodies and voices

should sound in a certain way if they want to be heard. The feminist theorist Donna Haraway supports my understanding of how Kemp's sound poetry is more than simply *écriture féminine*, and she also supports my critique of *écriture féminine*. Haraway argues that "the feminist [*écriture féminine*] dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, it is a totalizing and imperialist one" (51). Kemp's sound poetry is dissensual because it completely ruptures *logos* and allows her to speak in *phoné* while still remaining in a position of "political animal." It does not seek a "perfectly true language" (51). Kemp, by layering her own voice, by foregrounding the female body, and by rooting her approach in the birthing process, ruptures the appropriate modes of doing speech and poetry. By "sounding," she "transgresses the dominant pattern of authority and [grammar]" and ruptures the modes of doing poetry and speech. However, her poetics in no way suggest that this is how all women's bodies should speak ("Sound Waves Sound Wavers" 63).

As previously mentioned, she uses a digital platform to distribute her sound poetry. Most sound poetry recordings are accessible via UbuWeb and PennSound; however, Kemp uses SoundCloud. Unlike those who use UbuWeb and PennSound to distribute their poetry, using SoundCloud allows Kemp to disrupt the appropriate modes of distributing poetry. In his article "Poetics in a Networked Digital Milieu," Michael Nardone notes that UbuWeb was "founded in 1996 by Kenneth Goldsmith, [and] is a Web-based repository of text, sound, image, and video works related to historical and contemporary avant-garde aesthetic movements," while, PennSound "is an online repository of MP3 audio recordings dedicated to poetry and poetics ... initiated by Charles Bernstein and Alan Filreis at the University of Pennsylvania in 2003" (Nardone). PennSound, like UbuWeb, focuses on experimental and avant-garde art and

literature. On the other hand, SoundCloud is a digital music sharing platform which allows users to stream and curate music. Known in popular culture for having started the careers of musicians such as rappers Post Malone, Don Monique, Kehlani, Bryston Tyler, and Kygo, SoundCloud is not the place we would expect poetry to appear, especially sound poetry. However, Kemp, has uploaded the majority of her oeuvre on SoundCloud, and by doing so, she disrupts where poetry shows up and to whom it shows up. Much of the sound poetry I have analyzed for this chapter was posted on UbuWeb and PennSound, but not Kemp's. UbuWeb and PennSound are avant-garde-centric and are where I found The Four Horsemen's and Christian Bök's sound poems. Although we might think of UbuWeb and PennSound as making experimental and avant-garde art accessible, it is the place of the counterpublic, where experimental and avant-garde art has been regulated to according to the distribution of the sensible. It is for the academics and artists, for high-brow culture. SoundCloud is the public of popular culture. If we find ourselves on UbuWeb or PennSound, we have typically already been introduced to experimental and avant-garde art, unlike SoundCloud, which is a mixture of different kinds of music files, podcasts, *etcetera*. Those who purchased *Nada Canadada* from The Four Horsemen would have already most likely been in the public of highbrow culture of experimental or avant-garde, like those who go to UbuWeb and PennSound. However, by using SoundCloud, a digital platform part of popular culture, Kemp allows her sound poetry to reach new publics. Kemp, by using SoundCloud, allows a different public to access her poetry, rupturing where we think poetry should show up, to whom it should show up, and how it should show up. And this allows poetry to have a greater effect because it blurs the false boundary between popular culture and high brow culture. It reorders how bodies, functions, and systems operate.

Moreover, Kemp, by using SoundCloud, makes it that her sound poems are open to contamination. Where a digital recording might not be able to be impacted by the direct energy of the audience, it is instead contaminated by other digital sources and outside sounds. For instance, although SoundCloud is free, there are ads that periodically impede our listening (unless we register and pay a monthly fee). Obviously these ads are a sign of capitalism; however, these ads also contaminate the listening process. They cut into the enjoyment of the poetry, affecting how one might experience the poem. Listeners can also make their own playlist with any of the files on SoundCloud, and depending on the playlist, Kemp could find herself between a song by Post Malone and Kygo, which would contaminate how her sound poems are received. Moreover, like The Four Horsemen and their vinyl recordings, the outside noises that are around listeners (a roommate's footsteps, our own coughing or sneezing, children overheard from outside playing, *etcetera*) as they listen to her poetry also impact the poem. Therefore, Kemp's sound poetry forces listeners to participate in this act of dissensus and to become activists too, just like the audience at The Rivoli and the listeners of the vinyls of The Four Horsemen.

The digital files of her sound poems on SoundCloud allow them to refuse fixity because instead of being impacted by an audience, they are contaminated by other digital sources and outside noises. Likewise, listeners might not impact the recording of the poem with their physical presence, but they influence how the poem is received by creating their own playlist. Kemp's sound poetry breaks with the modes of doing poetry because she ruptures, like The Horsemen, the notion that *logos* is the only form of speech in the distribution of the sensible. Her use of the digital allows her sound poems to proliferate, influence and be influenced by new publics that

would normally not come in contact with poetry. Her sound poems are useful in allowing us to think about how sound poetry does not necessitate new ways of doing speech, in “totalizing and imperialist” ways, but how it allows for new modes of doing speech to become visible in the distribution of the sensible (Harraway 51).

Christian Bök and *The Cyborg Opera*: Machinic Poets for Machinic Audiences

Whereas The Four Horsemen and Penn Kemp promote *phôné* over *logos* in a way that finally draws attention to the body, Bök’s work makes visible a distinct new type of speech and new type of political figure. Whereas everyone has always assumed that poetry was a human activity by and for humans, and whereas The Four Horsemen and Penn Kemp try to expand poetry to take into account the corporeal body that is usually ignored or suppressed by language, Bök imagines non-human poetic subjectivities — the cyborg. Bök draws on Donna Haraway’s definition of the cyborg, in which “a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (5). In his article “When Cyborgs Versify,” he argues that “cyborgs have almost become the updated subject in our humanist theories of History” and that there is a “whole class of beasts, robots, and clones, all of which await their own unique brands of ‘liberation’” (129). He states “we are perhaps the first generation of poets who can reasonably expect in our lifetime to write poems for a machinic audience — but despite the foretold approach of this artificial readership, poets continue to address only each other in the lyric voice of our human drama” (“When Cyborgs Versify” 129). His ongoing sound poetry project, *The Cyborg Opera*, not only addresses a machinic audience but brings visibility to the machinic voice and body. As such, Bök’s sound poems, I argue,

rupture the modes of doing speech and make audible a new type of speech, something different from both *logos* and *phôné*. His poems make visible *machinic* speech, and in so doing, they rupture the appropriate modes of being a political animal because they make the cyborg recognizable as a political animal. Bök's *The Cyborg Opera* forces us to consider not only who is poetry's audience but what voices are being excluded from the distribution of sensible and whether it is possible for something non-human to be a political being.

Like Kemp's, his sound poetry uses words that are attached to specific signifiers; however, he purposely misuses the words in ways that install a tension between the sound and meaning of the words, with sound temporarily displacing meaning. Bök says that "while the title of the [project] might suggest that the work is a kind of libretto, the word opera in this case does not refer to a genre of musical drama so much as the term abbreviated a technical 'operation' — a procedure by which to imagine a hitherto undreamt poetics of electronica" ("When Cyborgs Versify" 129). Bök defines the poem "Mushroom Clouds"¹⁰ as a "faux aria" — "a sequence of nonsense, inspired by the acoustic ambience of the video game Super Mario Bros. by Nintendo" ("When Cyborgs Versify" 135). When performed, the sounds of the words recreate the happy and playful Super Mario Bros. theme song by Nintendo. Nintendo is a company based in Japan. This, combined with the reference to nuclear bombs in the title of the poem, "Mushroom Clouds," makes it clear that Bök is referring to Hiroshima. The happy and upbeat rhythm of the sound poem is juxtaposed against his dark historical event. The poem starts,

Hong Kong

King Kong hop-along ping-pong

¹⁰ To hear the poem, go to the following link: https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Bok/Studio-111/Bok-Christian_05_Mushroom-Clouds_UPenn_4-20-05.mp3

dingbat ding-a-ling

wingding sing-along

defining

ding-ding diphthong of a gong

guys sung

something from a some folk song (137)

The words were clearly not chosen solely for what they mean; instead, Bök has chosen these particular syllables, words, and sentences for their phonetic value and because of the feeling they create. The rhythm of the poem combined with the phonetic sounds of words is meant to mimic the Super Mario Bros. Nintendo theme song. “Dingbat,” “defining,” “dihphthong,” *etcetera*, are all words with specific meanings, but within “Mushroom Clouds” they take on new meanings because we have to consider them in relation to the rhythm they create when they are articulated in sequence of each other. We are also meant to consider how these silly words can manage to represent such a horrible historical event, or if it is even possible for words to represent such an inhuman historical event. Bök argues that the poem is meant “to suggest that, under atomic threat, life itself has taken on the cartoonish atmosphere of our pinball arcades” (135).

Moreover, Bök notes that

the ‘aria’ serves as a kind of video game that I play through the activity of speaking aloud — and if my performance induces laughter in the audience, I

suspect that such listeners might be responding in part to an experience of the ‘uncanny’ while watching a funny human behave like an artsy robot. Moreover, the silliness of the poem does indeed contrast with its overtones of atomic horror, and the audience may find itself laughing at the mordant ironies of a poet saying ‘oops’ in response to the potential accidents of nuclear détente. (135)

Bök realizes that sound poetry is about the performance and that speaking about Hiroshima in a “cartoonish” way creates tension (135). He knows that according to the audience, a person breaking down the structures of language, of *logos*, is comical, but it is also discomfoting. “Mushroom Clouds” is effective because it is about the audience viewing a human being, a political animal, who refuses to speak in the appropriate way. The sensation of the “uncanny,” to recognize oneself in the misrecognition of something, speaks to how Bök’s sound poem ruptures the distribution of the sensible (135). Through the “artsy robot,” the audience begins to recognize themselves and acknowledge and hear *machinic speech* (135). The audience, who recognizes themselves in the human speaker, must also acknowledge as a consequence that they are recognizing themselves in the artsy robot who is a cyborg. However, the artsy robot is not the only thing to cause a feeling of uncanniness in the addressees and prompt a redistribution of what is visible in the sensible. The words from “Mushroom Cloud” also prompt a sensation of uncanniness in the audience because although the words are recognizable, they are not functioning as they should. They are chosen for their phonetic value and not for their meaning; therefore, like we recognize ourselves in the misrecognition of something, the “artsy robot,” we recognize words in the misrecognition of these same words.

The poems of the *Cyborg Opera* manage to rupture the distribution of the sensible because they bring visibility to *machinic* speech (in other words *cyborg* speech), something completely different from *logos* and *phôné*. Haraway argues that

cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them [the cyborg] as other. (55)

Bök's sound poem "Mushroom Clouds" reclaims words, the "tools" that have "marked [the cyborg] as other," by using them not for their meaning but for their phonetic value (55). But Bök's performance of "Mushroom Clouds" also allows cyborgs to reclaim the human. Bök notes himself that in his performance, he becomes an artsy robot; when he becomes the artsy robot, he becomes a tool seized by the cyborg that sought to mark the cyborg as other — he is both cyborg and cyborg hostage ("When Cyborgs Versify" 135). In *The Cyborg Opera*, not only is an artsy robot creating poetry, but the artsy reboot is misusing words and producing poetry in *machinic* speech. We are forced to reevaluate our sense of self, what counts as speech, and who can create poetry.

Moreover, Bök notes that his sound poetry is inspired by music, but not that of the jazz era like the beatniks or slam poets. Instead, he is more inspired by techno or house music, claiming that "the poems [from *The Cyborg Opera*] use words to compose a kind of 'spoken techno' — a vocal genre whose music emulates the mechanical rhythms and cacophonous melodies heard in the throb of our machines" (134). These "cacophonous melodies" are examples of *machinic* speech becoming audible. During sound poetry performances, the audience typically

needs to consider what it means to have someone refuse to address them with *logos* speech, but in the case of Bök, they need to consider not only this but also what it means to hear the voice of the *machinic*, the cyborg, address them through poetry. The “injurious speech” is not *phoné* but *machinic speech*. The “injury” done to the audience is not only caused by poetry no longer functioning to order the “essence” of the body, as with *The Four Horsemen and Kemp*, but also due to poetry working to showcase the cyborg — a figure that in the distribution of the sensible remains anonymous, especially as a “political animal” and as an artist.

The sound poem “Synth Loops”¹¹ is another example of the *machinic* speech becoming visible. The first stanza of the sound poem is as follows:

Bhm—T—Nsh—tpt’Bhm—T—Nsh [thsss]—
 BhoBho-TT-pf H-TT — BhoBho-TT-Nsh [thsss]
 Bhm—T—Nsh—tpt’Bhm—T—Nsh [thsss]—
 BhoBho-TT-pf H-TT — BhoBho-TT-Nsh [thsss]
 Bhm—T—Nsh—tpt’Bhm—T—Nsh [thsss]—
 BhoBho-TT-pf H-TT — BhoBho-TT-Nsh [thsss]
 Bhm—T—Nsh—tpt’Bhm—T—Nsh [thsss]—
 BhoBho-TT-pf H-TT — BhoBho-TT-Nsh [thsss] — Bhm! (137)

It comes with the following key notation:

¹¹11 To hear the poem, go to the following link: https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/BokStudio-111BokChristian_07_SynthLoops_UPenn_4-20-05.mp3.

Sound	Musical Association	Sound	Musical Association
Bhm Bho Bhõ	Kick Drum (Classic) Kick Drum (Classic) Synth Drum	T TT tpt	High Hat (Closed) High Hat (Double) High Hat (Combo)
[K] MmmNsh	606 Snare Drum Reverb Effect 909 Snare Drum	Ung Ush	Techno Bass Techno Bass
Pff pfH	Snare Drum (Classic) Snare Drum (Reverse)	b k p	Kick Drum (Quick) Rimshot (Quick) Kick Drum (Quick)
Thm	BrushedSnare	[thsss] [vvvhb]	808 Snare Roll ReverseKick

Table 2.0: Christian Bök, Key to Notation, “When Cyborgs Versify,” *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound* (2009)

Bök produces these sounds via the human body; however, these sounds are machinic. The human body with Bök becomes an instrument, a tool that is co-opted by the cyborg, as Harraway would say (55). The sound coming from the human body during Bök’s performance is simultaneously human and machinic. It is the voice of the cyborg via the body of the human. Bök notes that when *The Cyborg Opera* is “performed by a human being, [the poetry] transforms the versifier into a kind of athletic, musical engine — one able to spit out each word with the accuracy, if not the velocity, of a rivet,” as though they were a machine (124). Therefore, when these poems are performed, the performer becomes seized by the cyborg and allows the cyborg within to become visible.

Moreover, “Synth Loops” is inspired by beatboxing. Bök notes that the “the beatboxer must learn an alphabet of resonant plosives and sonorant baritones, all of which combine, like letters, to form a fund of alien words that, when spoken at a fast pace, generate the acoustic

illusion of multiple machines operated at the same time” (136). Bök, although not the first to note the machinic elements of the human voice, is perhaps the first to use the elements of beatboxing as sound poetry. While beatboxers might be seeking to mimic music when they beatbox, Bök does so with the intent of making obvious the human as cyborg. As such, Bök shows us how it is possible for us to have anonymous elements even within ourselves. Moreover, his use of beatboxing shows us how sound poetry is influenced by popular culture, which suggests that cyborg and *machinic* speech have been making appearances in the distribution of the sensible prior to Bök via beatboxing but have remained unaccounted. Bök’s sound poems showcase the *machinic* speech and how, to a certain extent, we are ourselves machinic. Bök’s sound poems allows *machinic* speech to be made visible underneath the distribution of the sensible, rupturing what we think qualifies as political animal to show us that there are other types of political animals that exist, such as cyborgs. While The Four Horsemen and Kemp refused to speak in *logos* and made *phôné* the language of poetry and dissensus, foregrounding the human body, Bök makes visible neither *logos* nor *phôné*, nor the human body, but instead the *machinic* speech and *machinic* body. By making *machinic* speech visible, Bök makes it possible for the cyborg to be seen as a political figure, a genuinely activist political animal. With Bök, poetry is no longer solely for a human audience or created solely by the human; instead, machines and human cyborgs can now create and enjoy poetry.

Okuuuuuuurt!¹²

Sound poetry forces us to reevaluate not only what we define as poetry but also what we define as a political being. With sound poetry, language becomes physical since poetry is taken off the page. It becomes about the utterance of the physical and corporeal body. As such, it creates dissensus, thereby disrupting what counts as poetry, who can create poetry, and who can access poetry. The Four Horsemen demonstrated that poetry no longer needs to have an organizing function; instead, poetry can be guttural, visceral, and physical. It can depend on in-the-moment improvisation and on the poets' and addressees' energies connecting. The Four Horsemen show us that a political figure can be visible while speaking in *phoné*. Kemp demonstrated that sound poetry can show up in the realm of popular culture, and that, although it can be tempting to understand it through the scope of *écriture féminine*, it is best to understand it as cyborg writing — a form of writing that is neither imperialist or totalizing but completely outside the distribution of the sensible. Bök further demonstrates the ways sound poetry produces dissensus. If anything, he shows us the results of dissensus by showing us how sound poetry can bring visibility to a new mode of doing speech, *machinic* speech, and bring visibility to a new type of political being, the cyborg. Sound poetry demands a reevaluation of what we understand to count as poetry, as speech, and as a political being underneath the distribution of the sensible. In other words, sound poetry not only ruptures the modes of doing poetry, but ruptures what we consider to be a political animal, and what can count as political speech.

¹² Cardi B is known for making sporadic noises while talking and in her music. In an interview with Jimmy Fallon, she explains why she makes various noises and what they mean. She says the sound “Eeeeeooowww!,” done in a low pitch, is appropriate to make when someone tells you “they have a new job, but it’s like, you know, it’s not exciting” (Fallon, Jimmy, and Cardi B). The sound “Eeeeeooowww!,” done in a higher pitch, is appropriate to make when “you’re pushing” (Fallon, Jimmy, and Cardi B). She says the sound “Okuuuuuuurt” has three variations. The short version is appropriate to make when you want to “check someone” (Fallon, Jimmy, and Cardi B).

Braune notes that “the difference between sound poetry and music is typically political,” and that music is typically assigned a privileged position as “music” in relation to a subject position imbued with the power to name music *as music* (108). “Music” is therefore a central and organizing hegemonic form of aurality while sound poetry typically occupies the margins of the sonic (108). Except *The Cyborg Opera* disrupts this divide between sound poetry and music, as does Kemp and The Four Horsemen. More to the point, music has always included elements of sound poetry, and not only through beatboxing but through singers’ vocables. For instance, such singers as James Brown and Michael Jackson have always included the sounds of the body in their songs. Most recently, Cardi B has gained notoriety and popularity for the odd sounds she makes in her music and while she speaks. It is not that sound poetry is in a subjugated position to music, and therefore not political — it is subjugated because it is political, dissensual. In other words, it is policed. The moments the sounds of the body appear in music are moments of sound poetry blurring the boundaries between the counterpublic and the public. When elements of music appear in sound poetry, either because of how sound poetry is distributed or because of how it sounds, it is the same thing. These are all moments where *logos* is challenged. They are moments when the Ivory Tower contaminates mass cult and vice versa. They are moments of dissensus.

Netta Barzilia’s song “Toy” was submitted to the EuroVision television song competition on behalf of Israel and won. A catchy pop song, it begins with the popstar singing:

Ree, ouch, hey, hm, la

Ree, ouch, hey, hm, la

Ree, ouch, hey, hm, la

Ree, ouch, hey, hm, la

Ree, ouch, hey, hm, la

Ree, ouch, hey, hm, la (Barzilia).

Throughout the rest of song, random sound poetry-like verses contaminate the traditional pop song. In verse one, the sound poetry-like line appears, “Welcome boys, too much noise, I will teach ya / (Pam pam pa hoo, turrām pam pa hoo).” In the pre-chorus another sound poetry like verse appears, “He’s a bucka-mhm-buckbuckbuck-mhm boy / Bucka-mhm-buckbuckbuck I’m not your bucka-mhm-buck-mhm-buck-mhm.” However, these moments of sound poetry in popular culture do not suggest that sound poetry is essentially mass culture, but they speak to sound poetry’s dissensual effect and how it bridges across different publics. It might be relegated to the counterpublic, but showing up in the public creates a new public which contains the dominant public, counterpublic, and the anonymous.

If anything, academia’s inability to acknowledge sound poetry’s ability to appear in popular cultural, to recognize these brief moments of sound poetry in popular culture, speaks to our need to continue to police how, where, when, and to whom poetry appears. It speaks to the need we feel to maintain our position within the Ivory Tower and the distribution of the sensible. However, sound poetry’s dissensual effects, its ability to rupture what we consider speech and what we consider poetry, and its ability to show up in popular culture and to disorient the artist, the academic, and the worker alike, might be a way for us to open up the conversation of “what is the point of studying literature?” My working-class family might not be able to feel moved by The Four Horsemen’s sound poems, but they would be able to connect to the sense of disorientation felt by other listeners. The teenager not interested in art would be able to discuss

Cardi B's sounds, just as my working-class uncle would be able to identify with the grunts of
The Four Horsemen.

CHAPTER 3

#instapoetry and the Blog: In Defence of rupi kaur

[A blog] opens up the media-making process to multiple progressive voices; it flattens the hierarchy that exists whenever news is presented as the ‘active’ author separate from the ‘passive’ audience; and it claims not to represent ‘the monolithic truth but an assembly of many people’s views.’ Which is to say: like it or not, poetics are public, and the public is commenting.

— Erin Wunker and Travis V. Mason, *Public Poetics*

Digital and social media, like the printing press, have prompted a reordering of how we read, how we write, and how we take up space. Blogs, especially, have allowed us to read, write, and interact in alternative ways. Writers view the blog as a way of getting their work out there and noticed. Academics see blogs as a way of making academia accessible. I have a blog. My supervisor has a blog. My colleagues have blogs. Blogs are our way of saying, “Hello! I write things. I think things. I’m here.” We view the blog as something that makes poetry and poetics accessible to new publics and as a platform that allows for new voices to be heard in poetry and poetics. However, I disagree with the notion that the blog is something inherently radical and overtly accessible. The inclusiveness of online publishing is often greatly exaggerated. It effectively altered the ways “we” read and write, but whoever is reading and writing is mostly the same. The “we” that can now read and write in new ways is the same “we” as before. This restructuring of how we read, write, and interact did not change who is audible and visible, and,

yet, we continue to view the blog as something that changed what counts as poetry or who has access to poetry underneath the distribution of the sensible. Blogs have simply moved the conversation online; who is talking and listening is still the same — the “we” of academia and literary institutions.

Paradoxically, I began my introduction by suggesting that Stephen Collis’ blog, *Beating The Bounds*, manifested a moment of dissensus in the distribution of the sensible when his blog post, “The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby Mountain,” was pulled into the courtroom and presented as poetry *and* as evidence by Kinder Morgan lawyer Bill Kaplan in the fall of 2014. The original blog post was clearly prose; however, Kaplan relabeled it poetry as if making the words poetry and emphasizing Collis status as an activist poet rendered the blog and Collis more dangerous. I read this as an example of poetry manifesting dissensus because poetry should never be considered evidence nor should it ever show up in a court of law. In my introduction, I also questioned Eden Robinson’s statement that Stephen Collis is “Canada’s most dangerous poet” (Robinson). I argued that Collis only fits our preconceived notions of what counts as an “activist” poet. Collis, as a poet, blogger, activist, and professor, shows up in the distribution of the sensible in a way that is expected and ordained. He functions as an activist poet should in the distribution of the sensible, and his activist poetry also navigates space in a way that is expected. The content and the format of his poetry is what we have come to expect from activist poetry; it is countercultural, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and pro-environmentalist. Therefore, his ability to do politics as understood by Rancière is hampered by Collis’ placement within the prevailing distribution of the sensible which, though oppositional, nevertheless maintains consensus. Collis’ blog, like his poetry and himself, shows up where it should, how it show, and to whom it should.

In the introduction to their book, *Public Poetics*, Erin Wunker and Travis V. Mason argue that a blog

opens up the media-making process to multiple progressive voices; it flattens the hierarchy that exists whenever news is presented as the ‘active’ author separate from the ‘passive’ audience; and it claims not to represent ‘the monolithic truth but an assembly of many people’s views.’ Which is to say: like it or not, poetics are public, and the public is commenting. (Wunker, Erin, and Travis V. Mason 13)

They suggest that the blog blurs the lines between author and audience, opens up the conversation of poetry and poetics to new publics, and brings together diverse voices. In other words, they suggest that the blog ruptures the modes of doing poetry and poetics, brings attention to the anonymous, and manifests new voices in the discussion of poetry and poetics. Wunker and Mason propose that besides Collis’ blog, “there are other information sites of digital discourse in the Canadian context—rob maclennan’s long-running blog, the Canadian content of Jacket 2, ... the Buffalo Electronic Poetry Centre,” and Sina Queyras’ blog, *Lemon Hound* (13). According to them, *Lemon Hound* is of special significance. They argue that unlike other blogs, *Lemon Hound* “is an intervention that calls attention to the asymmetrical power relations in poetic production and subsequent critical interventions” (13). In its origins, *Lemon Hound* was a one-person blog fronted by Sina Queyras. She wrote about the New York art scene and the books she read. Since then, it has gone defunct and risen multiple times in a variety of ways — most recently, in Fall 2017, as a bi-monthly literary journal. Although Wunker and Travis never clearly state why *Lemon Hound* is of special significance, we can assume that it is because Queyras originally

began *Lemon Hound* in order to address the matter that “there are not enough women engaged in the discussion of poetry and poetics,” as she notes in her blog post “Women blogging women,” and because *Lemon Hound* has now morphed into an online literary journal—something we often think of as progressive in academia and literary institutions (*Unleashed* 40). Yet, digitizing poetry and poetics does not guarantee that it becomes visible to new publics and does not guarantee that anonymous voices will become audible. Blogs, even Queyras’ and Collis’, do not necessarily “flatten... the hierarchy that exists” in literary institutions (Wunker, Erin, and Travis V. Mason13).

Queyras, in her article “Public Poet, Private life: 20 Riffs on The Dream of a Communal Self,” argues that “to blog is to change mediums. It’s to change the act, the space, and pace of writing and publication as much as it is speaking out” (38). However, Rancière writes, that

the arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible. Furthermore, the autonomy they can enjoy or the subversion they can claim credit for rest on the same foundation. (*Politics of Aesthetics* 19)

Therefore, although the blog is capable of altering the “functions of speech” in which we read and publish, because of its means of production, it does not quite alter “the parceling out of the visible and the invisible” because blogs are ordered much like the book format and order information in much the same way (19). For example, we go to Collis’ blog to find something countercultural, environmentalist, and anti-capitalist, while we go to Queyras’ blog to find

discussion about literature and art. True, we access blogs differently than we would a book; we do so online and via a laptop, sometimes on our phone, and it is quicker and faster, but we are not confronted by anything out of place. With the exception of accessing poetics online, the mode of doing is the same. Queyras has noted that the new version of *Lemon Hound* “is a literary journal with reviews, correspondents, and space for curators to work and gather archival materials related to visual art, poetry, and poetics” (“Private life: 20 Riffs on The Dream of A Communal Self” 39). She says it will be “maintained by many” and the “I is finally, truly, a communal I. I is we” (“Private life: 20 Riffs on The Dream of A Communal Self” 39). However, I question whether the “I” is truly communal. The new version of *Lemond Hound* is simply an online journal, and as such, it still maintains all the power dynamics of a traditional print journal; more to the point, *Lemond Hound*’s “Masthead” section highlights that the founder and editor in chief is Sina Queyras, suggesting that the hierarchy within the “many” is not as egalitarian and as radical as Queyras describes. Moreover, we often argue that a radical feature of the blog format is that it allows readers to discuss among themselves (“Masthead”). However, Queyras even notes in her blog post of Tuesday, August 14th 2007 that “one wonders why readers of a forum such as a blog meant to disperse ideas, thinking and influence, continually privilege the voice/ blogger over another?” (*Unleashed* 115). Blogs, as she suggests, although intended to open up the conversation to diverse voices, are still author-centric and privilege the voice of the blogger. Therefore, although the material and information are quickly accessible due to being digital, *Lemon Hound* and other blogs like it do not rupture how poetry and poetics function in the distribution of the sensible. Although blogs change where poetry and poetics appear, the who and how of poetry and poetics are the same.

Blogs brought poetry and poetics out of the “book” and into the digital milieu, but they essentially order poetry and poetics in the same hierarchical way. Blogs might allow poets and academics to publish their work more rapidly, and allow for easy access to their work, but it does not mean that their work will reach new publics, nor does it make new publics visible to them or them to new publics. As Queyras even said, “the internet can be a very small world if you don’t know where to look” (*Unleashed* 30). We might think of the blog as capable of making poetry and poetics accessible to new publics and as making audible new voices, but for the most part, the blog format simply allows the established institutions of poetry and poetics and the already audible voices to become digital. If anything, blogs are only a new digital way of maintaining the power relations in poetry and poetics and their associated publics. They give more space to those who are already audible and to the modes of poetry and poetics which are already visible. Blogs are not transformative insofar as they do not inherently constitute moments of dissensus.

Beyond the Blog

Notably absent from Wunker and Travis’s list of sites of digital discourse is anything *other* than the blog, which illuminates the extent to which blogs have become the appropriate site for digital course in academic and literary institutions. However, poetry and poetics have been showing up in other digital and social media apps, such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumbler, Instagram, *etcetera*, in far more innovative ways. The most significant absence from Wunker and Travis’s list is perhaps Instagram. I suggest that in terms of digital sites of discourse that have altered how we read and write poetry and poetics, as well as prompted significant alterations in regards to who is doing the reading and writing, we should look to Instagram. In terms of poets who have curated a

site of digital discourse that can effectively intervene in the fabric of literary institutions and prompt change in the distribution of the sensible via poetry, I suggest that it is neither Queyras nor Collis but rupi kaur. kaur is easily Instagram’s most famous and notable poet, and it is precisely her use of Instagram that has redefined what we consider poetry — something many experimental poets are trying to do. And it is precisely her use of Instagram that has allowed her to talk about such issues as race, class, immigration, alcoholism, trauma, and rape to a wide and various public— something many progressive poets are trying to do as well.



Figure 3.0: @rupikaur_, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

Figure 3.1: @rupikaur_, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

Figure 3.2: @rupikaur_, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and launched on October 6th 2010 for iOS phones and on April 3rd 2012 for Android phones. In March 2012, Facebook Inc. bought the app for \$1 billion in cash and stock; however, Instagram continues to be managed independently by its co-founder Kevin Systrom. According to Bloomberg Intelligence, it is worth

over \$100 billion USD (McCormick). In June 2018, the platform reached 1 billion monthly active users, and it is expected to reach 5 billion monthly active users within five years (McCormick). Instagram is an app that allows users to upload photos and videos to one's account. These photos and videos can be organized with tags and location information and edited with various filters. An account can be made public, where everyone can see, like, and comment on a post or private, where only pre-approved followers can see, like, and comment on a post. Users can scroll through their feed, which shows the videos and photos of those they follow, or they can scroll through their explorer page feed, which is an assimilation of photos and videos selected by an algorithm that considers who they already follow, what genre of post they typically like, the time of a post, the hashtags associated with a post, and the overall popularity of a post. Users can also search for images based on hashtags and on locations. Often, Instagram users are not only mindful of the look of their singular posts, but also of the overall look of their account; users are careful to curate a specific aesthetic. Instagram allows everyday users to share photos of their everyday life and also allows large companies to market their products either by creating an account for their company or by asking large Instagram accounts to advertise for them. Instagram accounts can be dedicated to a variety of things, such as dogs, memes, skincare, celebrities¹³ (see figure 3.3), feminism, fandoms, niche hobbies, *etcetera*.

¹³ Selena Gomez is the most followed Instagram account with a hundred and forty-two million followers.



Figure 3.3: @selenagomez, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

It has also given rise to a new mode of doing poetry and poetics, what has now become known as “Instapoetry.” Instapoetry consists of verses which are often short and easily digestible. Instapoets publish their poetry by posting an image to their account. With the poetry being in the image, instapoets are not only mindful of their words but also of the overall look of their individual posts and accounts. Instapoetry, then, is as much about the words on the page as it is about the visual image posted. According to BookNet Canada, “Canadian vendors sold 154 per cent more print units in the poetry category between 2016 and 2017.... and eight of the 10 top-selling titles last year were written by poets who gained prominence by sharing their work on Instagram” (Bresge). The impact of Instapoetry on literary institutions cannot be underestimated in terms of it having resuscitated the sales of poetry and in terms of it reaching new publics.

According to some critics, Instagram poetry has reinvigorated poetry, while according to others, it has ruined poetry. Instagram poetry has been described as “contrived, reductive, formulaic, shallow, lacking in both form and content, transient and trivial, low-brow and cliché” (Miller). Instagram poets have been “accused of everything from unoriginality to blatant plagiarism [and] critiqued for their accessibility, sharability, and marketability” (Miller). However, this pushback against instapoetry does not minimize its effect on literary institutions and academia. If anything, this misrecognition of instapoetry’s value speaks to its dissensual capacities. Because instapoetry is a new mode of doing poetry, we do not have the appropriate ways to discuss it, nor do we know where it should be ordered in the distribution of the sensible. Moreover, critiquing instapoetry for its “accessibility, sharability, and marketability” speaks to the way the “we” of academia and literary institutions wants to police what counts as poetry, how poetry should show up, and to whom it should show up (Miller). Instagram has made visible a new mode of doing poetry, made visible poetry to a new public, and opened the discussion of poetry to new publics; it has taken poetry not only outside the book but outside of academia and literary institutions. It has democratized poetry. Therefore, I suggest that in terms of digital sites which have “flatten[ed]....the hierarchy that exists” in poetry and poetics, we should turn not to blogs and bloggers but to Instagram and Instapoets (Wunker, Erin, and Travis V. Mason 13).

rupi kaur has been at the forefront of instapoetry. She has over three million and a hundred thousand followers on Instagram, over two-hundred and nineteen thousand followers on Twitter, and her first book, *milk and honey*, has sold over two million copies worldwide and has been translated into more than twenty languages. Her second book, *the sun and her flowers*, which was released in October 2017, has already sold more than one million copies. She is

twenty-five years old, born to immigrant working-class parents, and from Brampton, Ontario, Canada. Initially, she published her poetry exclusively on Instagram, but when she reached a certain level of social media fame she decided to self-publish her work in book form. She sold over ten-thousand copies before being picked up by Simon and Schuster Canada.

The following poem (see figure 3.4) has close to three-hundred thousand likes. The imagery of the poem, like the meaning, is obvious: men do not have a right to comment on the body hair of women. The hand drawn image that accompanies the poem emphasizes the meaning



Figure 3.4: @rupikaur_, “🍷 a throwback. Page 169 from #milkandhoney,” posted August 8th 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

of the poem: body hair on a woman is as natural as the plants, shrubbery, and flowers that grow in nature. What is not obvious is how this poem might be an act of dissensus. However, Walter Benjamin has a way of thinking about writing that allows us to see kaur’s work as transformative, progressive, and genuinely activist. In his article, “The Author as Producer,” he

argues that for a work to be of “quality,” it must have the right literary tendency as well as the right political tendency. For Benjamin, the right literary tendency

must be able to instruct other writers in their production and, secondly, it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be the better, the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process — in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators. (98)

In other words, the right literary tendency is what creates new modes of doing poetry for other poets, and it is more impactful the more it does so on a mass scale. Concurrently, the right political tendency is that which is on the side of the proletariat, the oppressed, or what Rancière calls the anonymous. That which has both the correct literary tendency and the right political tendency has the correct literary technique. Ultimately, the question for Benjamin is not where a work finds itself “vis-a-vis the social production relations of its times” but “what is its position within them” (87). When determining the political value of a work, “the rigid, isolated object (work, novel, book) is of no use whatsoever” (87). Instead, “it must be inserted into the content of living social relations” which means “production relations” (87). For Benjamin, production relations are “directly concerned with literary technique” (87). A poet’s literary technique is what “makes literary products accessible to [their] immediate social” (87). A work’s literary technique, in order to effect change, must find itself directly involved in the production relations and must find itself directly rupturing the systems that seeks to maintain the status quo of the production relations which favour the bourgeoisie — the accounted. Literary technique is a way of thinking about art not in terms of its content or literary form, but in the way it makes its way in the world and the effect it has in the world.

Therefore, if we follow Walter Benjamin and see literary technique rather than content and style as primary, then kaur's work stands out as the most transformative and most influential among experimental and activist poets. Her literary technique demonstrates a radical redistribution of where and how poetry shows up and of when and who produces poetry. kaur's use of Instagram has allowed her to centre herself precisely within the production relations of her time and has allowed her to leave a better writing apparatus at the disposal of other writers. In other words, it has allowed her to have the correct literary quality and the correct political tendency. According to Benjamin's standards, kaur might be our generation's proletarian writer. I argue that it is kaur, more so than Queyras and Collis, who has intervened in our social fabric and impacted the way we do poetry and poetics. Rancière states that practices of art "contribute to the constitutional form of a commonsense that is 'polemical', to a new landscape of the visible, the sayable and the doable" (*Dissensus* 157). He argues that

perhaps one of the most interesting contributions to the framing of a new landscape of the sensible has been made by forms of art that accept their insufficiency ... or by artistic practices that infiltrate the world of market and social relations and then remain content to be mere images on cibachrome, screens and monitors. They use those fragile surfaces to compose a proposition on what it is that is given to see to us and an interrogation of the power of representation. (156)

kaur's instapoetry is such a practice of art. Her mode of doing poetry, which is dependent on Instagram, has not only "infiltrate[d] the world of market and social relations" through the use of "screens and monitors" and "interrogat[ed] the power of representation," but it has also accepted

its own “insufficiency” since it refuses to directly situate itself against the literary and academic institutions that seek to police and dismiss her literary technique (156). Therefore, I argue that it is Instagram, more so than blogs, that has ruptured the distribution of the sensible, making visible new modes of doing poetry and poetics and new voices, blurring the lines between the public and counterpublic. kaur has changed poetry and poetics in ways that challenge the academic and artistic assumptions around it; therefore, another contender for the title of most dangerous Canadian poet might perhaps be the often disregarded and mocked instapoet rupi kaur. I argue that kaur’s use of Instagram allows poetry to navigate space in a way that is dissensual and, moreover, forces the distribution of the sensible to repartition who, how, and when one has access to poetry, as well as what we consider poetry and who can produce poetry. Her literary technique has made visible a new mode of doing poetry, a new type of poetry reader, and a new poetical public.

kaur: A Proletarian Writer

kaur was already an established instapoet when a picture of her bleeding through her pants during her period was censored by Instagram. kaur responded by reposting the image (see figure 3.5) and captioning it with an unapologetic critique of the very platform that helped her create her following. She stated that she would “not apologize for not feeding the ego and pride of misogynist society that will have my body in an underwear but not be okay with a small



Figure 3.5: @rupikaur_, “thank you @instagram for providing me with the...,” posted March 25th 2015, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

leak” (“Thank You @Instagram for Providing Me with the Exact Response My Work Was Created to Critique. You Deleted a Photo of a Woman Who Is Fully...”). Eventually, Instagram allowed the post. She was already famous prior to this censorship, but Instagram’s attempted censorship enabled her to attain a new level of notoriety; following the controversy, kaur septupled her Instagram followers. Yet, it is not the magnitude of her following that makes her work dissensual. What makes her work dissensual is her literary technique, which confounds the prevailing assumptions about poetry, its place, and its readership. Her mode of doing poetry, which depends on Instagram and on a verse which does not require prior literary knowledge, allows her to reach a wider audience, some of which is divided into Wagner’s public and the counterpublic, and some of which is divided into neither because they are part of the anonymous.

Benjamin refers to Sergey Tretyakov and the newspaper as the exemplary author and

literary genre that shows the most solidarity with the proletariat. Benjamin argues that Tretyakov exemplifies what it is to be an “operative writer,” a writer who shows sympathy with the proletariat (88). According to Benjamin, “an operative writer’s mission is not to report but to fight; not to assume the spectator’s role but to intervene actively” (Benjamin 88). Tretyakov, in 1928, during the collectivization of Russian agriculture, reported for Moscow newspapers but also went to the Communist Lighthouse commune to understand and experience what was happening. This, in turn, influenced his fiction book *Field Commanders*. Benjamin argues that we might think of Tretyakov as more of a journalist and propagandist than a creator of literature due to even his fiction reading as type of reportage, but this is precisely why he said Tretyakov is significant. He says, “we must rethink the notion of literary forms or genres if we are to find forms appropriate to the literary energy of our time” (89). He says novels, tragedies, epics, and *etcetera* have not always existed, and so we should not assume that these forms or genres of literature will always be relevant or accurately reflect the struggles of each generation. He suggests that while Tretyakov is an exemplary writer, the newspaper is the literary genre which most appropriately reflects the “literary energy of [his] time” (89). According to Benjamin, the newspaper effected a literary change insofar as it allowed “science and *belles lettres*, criticism and original production, culture and politics” to find themselves part of the same literary assemblage but without being connected or ordered (89). For Benjamin, the newspaper is an “arena of this literary confusion” that is only organized depending on how the reader navigates the text (89). The newspaper, according to Benjamin, undercuts the hierarchical ordering of literary genres because the politician and the farmer approach the newspaper in the same way

(89). He says both the worker and politician navigate the newspaper in a similar way because no knowledge is privileged over any other form of knowledge (89).

I suggest that Instagram is our generation's newspaper and that kaur is our generation's operative writer. Instagram functions in a similar way to the newspaper inasmuch as one's explorer Instagram feed is determined by an algorithm that considers who one follows, what genre of post one typically likes, the time of a post, the hashtags associated with a post, and the overall popularity of a post. Instagram is an assemblage of middlebrow and highbrows texts; like the newspaper, it is an "arena for literary confusion" (89). Our own feed can also be an "arena for literary confusion" depending on who we follow (89). On Instagram, although we might not expect it, there are scientific discussions like there are discussions of class, race, gender, recipes, selfies, memes, *etcetera*, and kaur's poetry shows up randomly in this assemblage. Her poetry could appear beside a picture of someone's dinner like it could appear next to a #BlackLivesMatter post. All posts are given equal weight, whether a meme, a gender related post, or kaur's poetry. How we approach Instagram is entirely dependent on how we as readers choose to navigate the app.

Moreover, kaur's literary technique, like the literary technique of the journalist, positions the poet not at a special status but at the level of the reader. kaur's use of Instagram allows her to blur the lines between poet and reader. Benjamin argues that

the unselective assimilation of fact goes hand in hand with an equally unselective assimilation of readers, who see themselves elevated instantaneously to the rank of correspondents. . . . The reader is always prepared to become a writer, in the sense of being one who describes or prescribes. (90)

And so the worker, “as an expert - in no particular trade, perhaps, but anyway an expert in the subject of the job [they] happen... to be in[,] gains access to authorship” via the newspaper because in the newspaper the “authority to write is no longer founded in a specialist training but in a polytechnic one, and so becomes common property” (90). The politician and the worker find themselves in the same position when navigating the newspaper because no information is privileged over any other. Likewise, on Instagram, kaur’s followers, like the newspaper readers, find themselves “elevated instantaneously to the rank of correspondents,” rupturing the divide between author and reader and the hierarchy associated with such a binary relationship, creating new relations of production in poetry (90). More so, they can make their opinions known by commenting or liking a post, much like we would when writing to the newspaper. Although we might think commenting and using the “like” feature on Instagram cheapen the conversation because engagement with poetry is instantaneous, it simply allows the conversation to be open, current, and egalitarian. On Instagram, because the format is like that of the newspaper, followers “gain access to authorship” (90). On Instagram, everyone’s voice counts equally, and every like is equally weighted.

The comment section of her poem “midweek sessions” (see figure 3.6), for instance, demonstrates both how poetry allows for everyone’s voice to count equally and how Instagram allows various types of publics to engage in poetry. It is one of the first poems on her Instagram feed, it is notably longer, and it has close to ten thousand likes. The poem is about going to therapy to deal with the trauma of having been abused by an uncle as a child. In the comment

(trigger warning: rape and sexual abuse)

the therapist places
the doll in front of you
it is the size of girls
your uncles like touching

point to where his hands were

you point to the spot
between its legs the one
he fingered out of you
like a confession

how're you feeling

you pull the lump
in your throat out
with your teeth and
say fine
namb really

midweek sessions - rupi kaur



rupikaur_ • Following

rupikaur_ 🌻 my deepest apologies to those affected by my original post where the trigger warning was included in the caption and not the poem itself. I had not thought to do that and nor did it occur to me the caption would be read after the poem. I am learning to do more and be kinder to the world everyday. I appreciate the gentle nudge and your suggestion. thank you. 🌻
chapter one - the hurting - page 76
preorder: rupikaur.com/milkandhoney

Load more comments

Illlanomran @angela.omran

angelaomran 🙄🙄🙄 don't like things like this makes me uncomfortable @Illlanomran

ellahsismael @_me_who_else_

dreamy.gene Why is there so much hate damn, I think this poem is great weather it's



8,008 likes

SEPTEMBER 6, 2015

Add a comment...

...

Figure 3.6: @rupikaur_ “🌻 my deepest apologies to those affected by my...,” posted September 6th 2015, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

section, alanarentelis comments, “It’s been an hour now that I read every post and every caption of your photos. You move me and inspire me. The depth of your soul through writing is breathtaking. I’m so happy I stumbled upon you. Thank you” (“mid-week sessions”). piggyleila comments “Omg I’m crying seriously Woww so powerful” (“mid-week sessions”). It is precisely kaur’s literary technique which has allowed her to flatten the hierarchy traditionally found in academia and literary institutions and allowed readers to become commentators. alanarentelis comments that she “stumbled upon her work” as though per chance, and it is precisely Instagram which has allowed this haphazard poetry reader to connect to poetry (“mid-week sessions”). She has allowed people to engage with poetry outside its ordered place within literary intuitions and

academia, and thus ruptured poetry's ordered place in the distribution of the sensible. Moreover, not only does Instagram allow people to connect to kaur's work haphazardly, but also her mode of doing poetry has allowed people to discuss the function of poetry and to engage in poetics. For example, the following poem (see figure 3.7) has generated debate about the function of poetry



Figure 3.7: @rupikaur_, "Page 107 🌞 #thesunandherflowers," posted March 29th 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

and the value of kaur's work. The entire poem is one line; it reads, "i want to honeymoon myself," and is accompanied by kaur's hand drawn image of a woman masturbating ("Page 107"). In the comment section of the post, readers debate over the function of poetry and the value of kaur's work. rachanaaaa99 writes that "this isnt poetry. This is a disgrace" ("Page 107").

rachanaaaa99 writes that “[kaur] isn’t a poet, this isn’t poetry” (“Page 107”). However, rainbow_em_, in reply to rachanaaaa99, writes that

it's alright to have you're own likes and dislikes of different ways of artistic expression, but we need to still have respect for the ones we dont like. We have wonderful poets that weave words into beauty whether in multiple stanzas or just a few words. The diversity of art is what makes it wonderful. “Page 107”

dark.nyte, joins the conversation and adds that “I get that poetry is supposed to be expression. But the grammar, and the meaning of it are both bad” (“Page 107”). lil.pixee comments that “ it is poetry because it presents [kaur’s] feelings in an artistic way through figurative [words]” (“Page 107”). Although it is not uncommon for people to debate online in the comment section, what is happening in the comment section of this post is a debate over the function of poetry in society and over what should and should not count as poetry. kaur’s literary technique has allowed for the mainstream public to engage with poetry. What is happening in the comment section of her post is similar to what might happen at an academic conference or after a poetry reading. Although the commenters might not have the same literary background as those who frequent academic conferences or poetry readings, they are genuinely engaged in the discussion of “what counts as poetry,” and seem excited about poetry — something that is often missing in these types of conversation. Her mode of doing poetry allows her to flatten the hierarchy between poet and reader, and allows her readers to engage in poetics, and just as every “like” has equal value on a post, every comment has equal value.

As previously mentioned, kaur’s poetry comes from a middlebrow, often excluded perspective and deals with, among other things, race, rape, female sexuality and empowerment,

and immigration — issues that many poets often attempt to discuss but can only manage to do with a limited audience as they rely on traditional modes of doing poetry such as the book *and* discuss issues that are countercultural. However, Instagram allows kaur to discuss these issues with a wide audience who might not even have intended to discuss such topics. In between the



Figure 3.8: @rupikaur_, “larger than life,” posted March 6th 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

images of memes and selfies, kaur’s countercultural poems appear and manage to connect with those who are part of the public, the counterpublic, and even the unaccounted. For instance, kaur’s poem titled “women of colour” deals with kaur’s experiences as a woman of colour (see figure 3.8). It refers to how the experience of being woman of colour cannot be compared to the stories found in books. The poem is connected to a hand drawn image of the back of a naked woman of colour and has over two-hundred thousand likes. The following poem

(see figure 3.9) deals with immigration and was posted while the media was discussing President Trump’s policy of separating families at the border. It discusses colonialism and nationalism. It is



Figure 3.9: @rupikaur_, “i am haunted by the chilling and inhuman...,” posted June 19th 2018, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

accompanied with the hand drawn image of a flag. It has over a hundred and sixty thousand likes. Her poems are not, in actuality, saying anything new. Discussing issues related to race, rape, female sexuality and empowerment, and immigration is not inherently dissensual. Moreover, these subject matters have their ordered place in the distribution of the sensible, the counterpublic, and as such are accounted. However, when traditional activist poets discuss issues such as these, their literary means of production, normally the “highbrow” poem or book, does not allow them to reach a wide audience. On the other hand, kaur’s means of production, Instagram, allows her to reach a large audience.

However, how can kaur's countercultural poems also be part of popular culture? For example, discussing female sexuality and empowerment is nothing new. Pop bands of 1990s such as The Spice Girls and Salt n Peppa where all about "girl power." The Spice Girl song "Wannabe" was about how a male lover should understand the importance of female friendships, while Salt n Peppa song "Let's Talk About Sex" discussed consent and safe sex. However, these topics entered the discourse of popular culture through song and not poetry. Though poets too have been discussing these issues, they never reached mass culture, until instapoetry. In fact, even if these issues reach popular culture, they remain counterculture, because when we label something popular culture, we suggest that it is lowbrow, easily digestible, and not worthy of serious study. We often also think of popular culture as that which is for the young and uneducated, for the naive. To be labelled as popular culture is to be dismissed by the public that has the *power* to determine what counts as actual "culture." It is to be seen as subordinate by the public of academia and art, and in our current distribution of the sensible, it is the public of academia and art which decides what counts as art and what does not. Warner notes that "a counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status," and so, although popular, these themes are still part of the counterpublic because they still are seen as subordinate (424). Moreover, instapoetry's popularity allows it to be dismissed because often, what is popular, is what is thought to be frivolous and superficial. Issues of race, rape, female sexuality and empowerment, and immigration have been part of the popular culture through song, yet, this is the first time they are part of popular culture because of poetry. What is dissensual about kaur's work, then, is that she has brought these issues into popular culture via poetry. For generations, poets have been talking about these things; however, kaur's literary

technique has brought these subjects new visibility. She has not only redefined what counts as poetry, but she has redefined how these counterculture themes appear in the distribution of the sensible.

Another example of how kaur altered the way poetry and counterculture themes appear in the distribution of the sensible is when, in the Spring of 2017, her poem “women of colour” appeared on the New York Fashion runway. kaur attended the New York Fashion Week as a guest of Prabal Gurung, who was unveiling his new fashion line. A reader of her poetry, the Nepalese-American designer closed his show with the aforementioned poem by embroidering it on a black suit (Medley). The poem’s appearance at New York Fashion Week manifested a moment of dissensus because poetry showed up where it should not, on the New York Fashion Week runway. Moreover, on June 25th 2018, kaur was interviewed by Jimmy Fallon on The Tonight Show. The first thing she said was, “I thought I’d have to become a pop-star or an actress to get here!” Fallon is quick to note that “poetry is the new pop” (Fallon, Jimmy, and Rupi Kaur) Following the interview, she read her poem “Timeless.” The poem discusses how “women grow into irrelevance,” but how in her thirties there “will be a proper introduction / to the nasty. wild. woman” she is (*the sun and her flowers* 234). Again, this is another example of kaur blurring the lines between the public and counterpublic. It is also an example of poetry showing up where it should not, in mainstream media, and an example of counterpublic issues showing up in a way they should not in popular culture (in poetry not in song, for example). kaur, discussing how she has sold so many books with *The Guardian*, has said that she finds it “weird” (Kassam). She even wonders, “How does a 50-year-old white woman relate to [my work]?” (Kassam). However, kaur’s dissensual poetics have ruptured the distribution of the sensible; she has

ruptured how counterculture themes can show up in popular culture, what counts as poetry, who is poetry audience, and what is poetry function in society. It is true, kaur's poems are overly simplistic, but using Instagram allows her to reach a large audience in a very public setting. Instagram allows her to blur the boundaries between the public and the counterpublic, just as it allows her to blur the lines between the reader and author, making a new mode of poetry visible and allowing for a redefinition of poetry.

*how is it so easy for you
to be kind to people he asked*

*milk and honey dripped
from my lips as i answered*

*cause people have not
been kind to me*

- rupi kaur



Figure 3.10: @rupikaur_, “3 years ago today i self...,” posted November 14th 2014, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

Critics, whether in academia or in her comment sections, tend to dismiss kaur because her poetry does not fit what we think counts as poetry. Her poetry is neither experimental nor “good” according to the traditional models of doing poetry. To understand her work does not require serious study, nor does it require having prior literary knowledge. However, her work is accessible for these very reasons; this is part of her literary technique too. The poem, “how is it

so easy for you,” (see figure 3.10) was originally posted on August 5th, 2015. It is also the first poem from her book *milk and honey*. The language is simplistic, the imagery is obvious, and the image of a honey pot associated with the poem accurately reflects it. The poem uses the imagery of honey and milk to suggest that kindness is a way to nourish others, and this imagery is referred to throughout her book collection, *milk and honey*, and in her Instagram posts.

She announced the publication of her second collection, *the sun and her flowers*, by posting the following poem (see figure 3.11) This is also the first poem in that collection. Here,

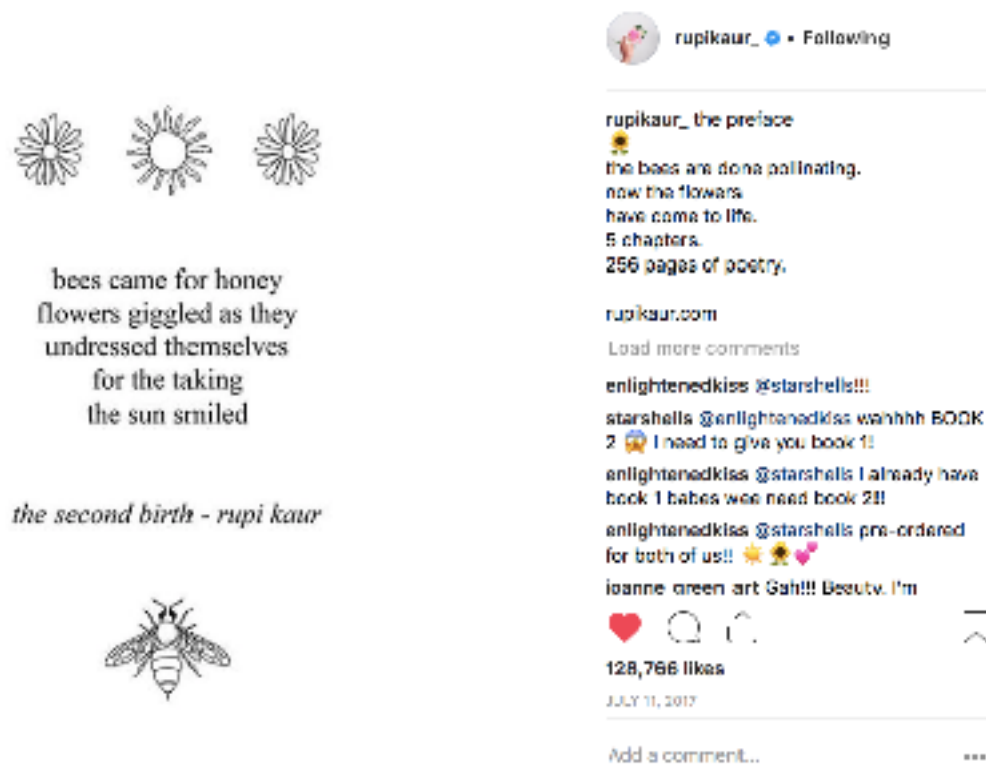


Figure 3.11: @rupikaur_, “the preface...,” posted July 11th 2017, Instagram, Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

the metaphor of honey is mixed with sun and flower imagery. It is associated with the hand drawn image of a bee, the sun, and flowers. Again, like with *milk and honey*, she refers to the

imagery of sun and flowers throughout her second collection. In kaur's works, her chosen imagery of milk, honey, sun, and flowers are what we often find in lowbrow poetry, and kaur's use of cliché, figurative language also translates to her hand drawn images. However, the short, formulaic lines combined with the hand drawn images create her visual aesthetic, which makes her post and overall account more visually appealing. Where critics of the avant-garde might be tempted to say, "I can do that!" critics of instapoetry often say the same. However, to analyze kaur's poetry, we need to look to more than the words. We must look at the words, imagery, and the over aesthetic of the image. Her poetics is concerned with the image posted on Instagram inasmuch as it is concerned with the actual style of her verse. In other words, her mode of doing poetry is more concerned about the visual posted on an interactive social media platform than it is about whether or not it engages with the traditional or experimental literary tendencies. Her work should not be dismissed because of her preoccupation with the over all aesthetic of her post. Like the book demands poetry to be ordered in a certain way on the page, Instagram demands poetry to be ordered in a certain way. Her use of Instagram and the simplicity of her verse has created a new mode of doing of poetry, and it refuses to be ordered into either the category of good poetry or experimental poetry. And although, academics, book poets, and instagramers alike might say, "I can do that!," that is part of what makes her work so powerful.

Benjamin argued that the right literary tendency is a writing or form of writing that puts an "improved" apparatus at the disposal of "other writers" (87). I argue that kaur's simple verse and her use of Instagram has allowed her to put an improved apparatus of writing at the disposal of other writers. It is not necessarily that kaur has inspired other writers to pick up their pens, or should we say their smartphones, but she has left an improved apparatus of writing at the

disposal of other writers; she has ruptured the distribution of the sensible to make it that instapoetry can now count as poetry. There are now countless other instapoets. In Canada, there is Mustafa the Poet (Toronto), Andrian Hendryx (Vancouver), Najwa Zebian (Unknown), and Atticus (Unknown). Internationally, there is Nikita Gill (London, England), Tyler Knott Gregson (Helena, United States), Amanda Lovelace (New Jersey, United States), Lang Lea (Sydney Australia), and Nayyirah Waheed (New York, United States). Paradoxically, many of these poets



Figure 3.12: @mustagathepoet, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

Figure 3.13: @andrianhendryx, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

Figure 3.14: @najwazebian, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018



Figure 3.15: @atticuspoetry, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018



Figure 3.16: @nikita_gill, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018



Figure 3.17: @tylerknott, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018



Figure 3.18: @ladybookmad, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018



Figure 3.19: @langleav, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018



Figure 3.20: @nayvirah.waheed, Instagram Account Screenshot taken August 15th 2018

had been publishing on Instagram and have books published prior to kaur. Nayyirah Waheed published *salt* in 2013, and Tyler Knott Gregson published *Chasers of the Light* in 2014. However, it is kaur who has ruptured the distribution of the sensible, thereby manifesting a new mode of doing poetry, and making it possible for fellow instapoets to have their work count as poetry in the distribution of sensible. kaur's means of production, meaning the well crafted aesthetic of her posts and her overall feed, sets her apart from many other instapoets. kaur has set the standard for Instagram poets, and the aforementioned poets gained visibility because she made instapoetry countable underneath the distribution of the sensible. She has, as Benjamin said an operative writer should, left a "an improved apparatus at their disposal" (98). kaur's fame, although often an excuse to dismiss her and her mode of doing poetry as not dissensual, only adds to her capacity to effect social and production relations. Because, as Benjamin has argued, the "the more consumers [this apparatus] brings in contact with the production process—in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators" the "better" it is (98). So in effect, although we might be tempted to dismiss the dissensual quality of kaur's work due to her fame, her fame brings more "consumers" into the "production process" and turns "more readers or spectators... into collaborators" (98). Her fame not only shows that she has made instapoetry count underneath the distribution of the sensible, but it is what ensures that she can bring the counterpublic and the public together to create a new poetical public.

Queyras has argued that

poetry is about more than content, even radical or socially active content. Poetry has to be radically conceived of 'in form,' radically in conversation with other poetry, it has to have context. It has to be deeply rooted in the history of people

and place, yes, but also deeply rooted in poetry. (“Public Poet, Private life: 20 Riffs on The Dream of A Communal Self” 30)

I would argue that kaur meets Queyras’ expectation of what poetry ought to be and do. Her poetry is “radically conceived of ‘in form,’ [and] radically in conversation with other poetry” because her mode of doing poetry has made visible a new type of poetry, instapoetry, which is radically in conversation with itself (30). It is simply not in the form that Queyras thinks radical poetry should take, and it is not in conversation with the poetry Queyras think radical poetry ought to be. kaur’s poetry is in conversation with other instapoetry. Her ability to pull together different publics, her ability to centre her poetics on her experience, and her effect on subsequent authors have allowed her to be “radically in conversation with other poetry” and “deeply rooted in the history of people and place” (30). She might not engage with canonical poetic texts in the conventional sense, but she has ruptured the distribution of the sensible and allowed for a new poetical public to manifest, which is radically in conversation with itself. In a blog post titled “Sexism in Poetry?” referring to a conversation taking place on Poetry’s Foundation blog, Queyras argued that the statistics showcasing how few women are involved in poetry and poetics should not shock anyone. She said “for my part, I don’t argue anymore — I just take up space” (*Unleashed* 116). Similarly, while artists and academics were talking and debating on how to make poetry relevant in mass culture and trying to figure out a way to make activist poetry capable of intervening in the social commons, instapoets like kaur were doing the work — they were taking up space, albeit digitally. kaur and instapoets like her were rupturing the modes of doing poetry and poetics and bringing visibility to new modes of doing poetry. They were doing while others were discussing.

A Digital Undercommons

In this chapter, I have presented kaur's literary technique as having the right literary tendency and therefore the right political tendency. However, her works notably participate in capitalism, which is ironic considering that I have argued that she is a new type of operative writer. This is where I suggest we turn to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's notion of the undercommons and study, which allows us to view kaur's participation in capitalism not as a failure. I suggest that kaur has made Instagram a place of fugitivity, a type of undercommons, and has made it possible for study to happen over the production of knowledge.

In his introduction to Moten and Harvey's book, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Jack Halberstam argues that "the undercommons is not a realm where we rebel and we create critique; it is not a place where we 'take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them'" (9). The goal of the undercommons "is not to end the troubles but to end the world that created those particular troubles as the ones that must be opposed" (9). The undercommons is a place of disorientation, fugitivity, planning, and study. It is a disorientating place because we will "no longer be in one location moving forward to another, instead [we] will already be part of the 'movement of things'" (11). It is fugitivity because it makes it that we are beings "in motion that ha[ve] learned that 'organizations are obstacles to organizing ourselves and that there are spaces and modalities that exists separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned'" (11). It is planning because it is done with others, informally, and

self-sufficiently. It is about study, because it is without the “call to order”¹⁴ and because it is about discussion and learning “rather than knowledge production” (12).

kaur’s use of Instagram allows Instagram to become a type of undercommons - a place of fugitivity, planning, and study for the anonymous. What is important to note is that an undercommons is not a “realm where we rebel,” nor is it a place of “critique” against capitalism; rather, it is a place in which planning and study happen. kaur, by using Instagram and by discussing countercultural themes and blurring the lines between the public and counterpublic, makes Instagram a place where the fugitive - an Instagram user - can join the act of study and the act of planning which was already in motion without ever intentionally seeking to rebel and critique the circuits of poetry, poetics, and capitalism. Instagram becomes a place where we participate in acts of dissensus without intention. It is a place where poetry lovers and non-poetry lovers, those who are part of the system and not part of the system of poetry and poetics, can come together, discuss, and plan. More to the point, it is a place where there is no “call to order” that hinders the learning process. Instead, followers discuss without limitation or regulation, without a “call to order” from an authority figure. It is not a place where there is thought out critique against capitalism. kaur’s literary technique is not about directly critiquing or rebelling against the system; instead, her dissensual poetry is a haphazard direct intervention into the system that seeks to dismiss her mode of doing poetry and her visibility.

¹⁴ Moten gives the example of the classroom to explain the “call to order.” He says, when he enters the classrooms, students are already talking among themselves. Some could be discussing the class materials others could be discussing personal matters. However, this is study. As a professor, he is suppose to call the “class to order.” However, this hinders “study” because it reinstates the power dynamics that exists between students and professor and makes it that “study” know becomes more about directed learning. Moten and Harney also argue that we can think of the the “call to order” as “the teacher picking up the book, the conductor raising his baton, the speaker asking for silence, the torturer tightening the noose” (Halberstam 9). To refuse the “call to order” is to allow “study to continue, dissonant study perhaps, disorganized study, but study that precedes our call and will continue after we have” (Halberstam 9).

Her poetics refuses to accept any form of policy which, according to Moten and Harney, works to stop the act of study, and any form of categorization that might act as a “call to order” (12). kaur’s poetry, due to its popularity, does participate in the capitalistic system; however, kaur’s poetics takes, or “steals,” to use Moten and Harney’s term, from the capitalistic system what it needs (26). Her participation in capitalism in part allows her to disrupt the modes of doing poetry and brings visibility to the anonymous because we have someone who is meant to be anonymous, meant to be in the position of the proletariat, using the system to their benefit. By not standing against or for capitalism, kaur steals what she needs from capitalism and creates a type of undercommons where the anonymous, the public, and the counterpublic can study. Her work, by being dissensual, by bringing different publics together, by giving a voice to the anonymous, and by using Instagram, allows Instagram to become a type of undercommons.

#like4like #follow4follow #solidarity

Frank Davey has argued in his article “Defence of Publicity” that “unforgivable, anti-social, self-destructive, or otherwise personally unadmirable people can write structurally and linguistically edgy texts, while kind, congenial, and politically progressive ones can have difficulty thinking past clichés” (10). We might think that between Stephen Collis and rupi kaur, that Collis is the more activist poet, but I think kaur is the most activist, even if she might be the personification of the “kind, congenial, and politically progressive one... [who] can have difficulty thinking past clichés” (10). Although Collis’ poetry deals with activist countercultural themes, Collis’ blog and work show up how they should and where they should in the distribution of the sensible, as do Sina Queyras’. There is that one moment when I think Collis’

work produces a moment of dissensus when Kinder Morgan lawyer Bill Kaplan brought forward Collis' blog post "The Last Barrel of Oil on Burnaby" and presented it as a poem. However, except for this brief manifestation, Collis' blog and poetry have continued to navigate space as they should. Queyras has been an active voice in the discussion of poetry and poetics in Canada. However, Queyras still works within the appropriate modes of doing poetry and within the appropriate modes of doing poetics. Although she has digitized poetics, *Lemon Hound* still navigates the poetical circuits in traditional ways. It does not open the conversation. In the case of kaur, she has refused to adhere to the modes of doing "good" poetry, as well as experimental poetry, and made the *cliché* a dissensual tactic. Her use of Instagram has allowed her poetry to navigate the public realm and counterpublic realm, challenging artistic and academic notions of art. Her dissensual poetry has given a voice to the anonymous, manifested a new type of poetry, and created a new type of poetry lover. Current critics might continue to dismiss kaur's poetics, excluding her from literary and academic circles; however, kaur is continuing to rupture the distribution of the sensible. Her poetry might be unrefined, but it is dissensual, and as such, it is innovative and political, making her, and not Collis, "Canada's most dangerous poet" (Robinson). We might think the impact of Instagram poetry is an instantaneous and weightless fad; however, Instagram has already showed itself to have ruptured the modes of doing poetry, who has access to poetry, who can write poetry, and how poetry shows up in society.

CONCLUSION

Although I would like to say that this project came from a desire to study experimental poetry and activist theory or from a desire to research the link between the two, in truth, it came from a place of frustration. As someone who has often been labelled as an activist and as countercultural and as someone who has always appreciated experimental poetry, I have perpetually been frustrated by the extent to which we assume in activist and literary circles that poetry can impact the world. We act as though the right poem might change the course of history, even though we have yet to find a poem that has actually prompted change in the workings of our society. There are poems that bring together marginalized folks. There are poems that speak for and to the oppressed. There are even poems that help people understand how they might be on the wrong side of history. However, these poems do not reframe the infrastructures and systems of oppression that created the need for these poems in the first place. We often think of turning to experimental poetry in the hopes that what is artistically innovative might help us innovate a new system. We see experimental poetry, whether it is experimental because of its form or its content, as being inherently activist because it challenges the dominant structures of poetry. However, even as someone with a love for the experimental, this frustrates me too. What is considered innovative poetry, as I have argued, is usually determined by the dominant public and consistently relegated to the counterpublic. Innovative poetry has its function in the distribution of the sensible and therefore, cannot engage in politics. Traditional activist poetry also has its ordered place and function in the distribution of the sensible and cannot therefore be dissensual.

In his article, "Towards a Dialectical Poetry," Stephen Collis is suspicious of the use of the word "innovative" to describe poetry. He argues that "'innovative' has become capital's word

— a code word in fact not only for productivity, but more pointedly, for profitability” (“Towards a Dialectical Poetry”). He says, “it would be a rare occasion in today’s world to find poetic innovation seditious or revolutionary” (“Towards a Dialectical Poetry”). He argues that the concept of innovation that, by definition, refers to change, revolution, and upheaval, has become intrinsically linked with the capitalistic rhetoric of progression and productivity and that, instead of challenging consensus, helps maintain the systems needed for capitalism’s success.

Nevertheless, Collis “suggest[s] that it is indeed in these directions [of change, revolution, upheaval] that we need to think if we are going to be able to recuperate a term like ‘innovative poetry’ from the ideological mechanisms of capitalism in which it is currently ensnared” (“Towards a Dialectical Poetry”). Furthermore, he argues that the terms innovative, experimental, and avant-garde have more or less become interchangeable. Like Collis, I argue that if poetry is going to be innovative, if poetry is to function as activism and disrupt the systems of oppression in place or our conventional definitions of art, then it is in this direction that innovative poetry must verge. However, like Collis, I also argue that we must be wary of whatever is labelled as “innovative poetry” because what is often labelled as innovative is often co-opted by capitalism and other systems of oppression. If we want our innovative (that is, experimental) and activist poetry to necessitate political change, then we should turn to dissensual poetry, as I have argued, because dissensual poetry works outside any kind of regulatory systems. We need to turn to dissensual poetry because it ruptures the distribution of the sensible and reorders how, where, when poetry is made visible and to whom it is presented. We need to turn to poetry that makes what and who was previously unaccounted for in the distribution of the sensible accounted. We need to acknowledge that if we are going to hear what

was previously inaudible or see what was previously invisible, it will come to us in ways that were previously unrecognizable, in ways that are unexpected.

Rancière too seems to be frustrated with the same things when he argues the following:

We may no longer believe that exhibiting virtues and vices on stage can improve human behaviour, but we continue to act as if reproducing a commercial idol in resin will engender resistance against the ‘spectacle,’ and as if a series of photographs about the way colonizers represent the colonized will work to undermine the fallacies of mainstream representations of identities. (144)

He too believes that representing inequalities artistically, which is often done in traditional activist poetry, will not prompt “resistance against the ‘spectacle’” (144). He echoes Collis’ concern about innovative poetry, which is often perceived as shocking, when he argues that “there is no reason why the production of a shock produced by two heterogeneous forms of the sensible ought to yield an understanding of the state of the world, and none why understanding the latter ought to produce a decision to change it” (144). Experimental poetry might often be shocking, but shock itself does not “produce a decision to change [the world]” (144). Instead, he suggests that “if there is a connection between art and politics it should be cast in terms of dissensus” (140). Therefore, I turned to Rancière’s concept of dissensus in order to investigate poetry that was genuinely activist and experimental – what I have come to call dissensual poetry.

I first turned to concrete poetry because it challenges how words are expected to function in the distribution of the sensible and our notions of the relationship between poetry and manual labour. Steve McCaffery’s *Carnival*, Judith Copithorne’s *Runes*, and bpNichol’s *The Captain Poetry Poems* directly challenge the modes of doing poetry that argue that poetry is for the

“masters of words.” Their dirty concrete poems brought visibility to the ways the corporeal and physical body can be involved in poetry. These concrete poems, in essence, manifested new modes of reading and writing, which prompted new definitions of not only what counts as poetry but that of what counts as literacy, allowing those who might have the capacity to read and write in the traditional sense to participate in poetry, reading, and writing. I then turned to sound poetry because it shows us that what counts as speech is arbitrary. The Four Horsemen, Penn Kemp, and Christian Bök present a new way of speaking that, like concrete poetry, ruptured the modes of creating poetry because it involved the body as well. They made it possible for a “political animal” to speak in something other than *logos* in a way that was dissensual, in a way that was truly political. The Four Horsemen and Penn Kemp show us how political animals can be heard speaking in *phôné* while Christian Bök demonstrates a new type of speech – *machinic speech*. They force us to re-evaluate our definition of who counts as a political animal and who as a “human.” I turned next to kaur to illustrate that dissensual poetry, which is genuinely activist and experimental, can sometimes be misunderstood as cliché and dilettantish. kaur shows us that genuinely activist and experimental poetry presents itself unexpectedly; not in ways that we would expect activist poetry to exist in the distribution of the sensible. kaur’s literary technique, as in her use of Instagram, broke the modes of creating poetry that dictate that poetry should exist in books or blogs and only be available to a certain type of reader – the academic, artist, or high-cultured. kaur shows us that Instagram has prompted a reordering of how we read and write and that dissensual poetry does not necessarily take the form of what we might consider countercultural poetry, such as concrete and sound poetry. I consciously titled the chapter about kaur “#Instapoetry and the Blog: In Defence of rupi kaur” because kaur has consistently been

misjudged and dismissed. To dismiss the value in her poetics does not necessarily impact her success or the revolutionary potential of her work; if anything, it damages the artistic and academic institutions that refuse to acknowledge her work. To refuse to acknowledge the impact kaur has had on poetry and poetics is to seek to maintain the distribution of the sensible. The same can be said about refusing to acknowledge concrete poetry and sound poetry. In other words, to not include concrete poetry, sound poetry, and instapoetry as poetry is to make sure that politics, as Rancière understands it, does not take place. It is to act as an extension of the police and to work towards reinstating consensus.

Something my thesis sought to address is academics and poets' desire to make poetry count to those who do not see the value in it. However, when we say we want to make poetry matter in society, what we are actually saying is that we want the type of poetry we value, what we count as poetry, to be appreciated by mass culture. Because, if anything, kaur shows us that there is a type of poetry appreciated by mass culture, one that is also genuinely activist. It simply is not the type of poetry that academics and poets typically think matters or consider to be activist poetry. By looking at dissensual poetry, I looked at poetry that is genuinely innovative and activist. Looking at dissensual poetry allowed me look at poetry that has genuinely impacted our given real and affected what counts as poetry. As Rancière argues, to intervene in the distribution of the sensible, art must "displace... art's borders, just as doing politics means displacing the borders of what is acknowledged" (157). Concrete poetry, sound poetry, and instapoetry manifest new definitions of what counts as poetry and "displace... art's borders"; as such, they displace "the borders of what is acknowledged" (157). In other words, examining dissensual poetry allowed me to find a type of poetry that could actually impact society in

“seditious or revolutionary” ways (“Towards a Dialectical Poetry”). It allowed me to look at poetry that reframed the distribution of the sensible. Academics and poets, especially those of us who formally find ourselves in both categories, might find solace in the idea that expected modes of doing poetry can be revolutionary, but if anything, this only works to make us feel valuable, especially those of us studying or creating experimental poetry since we are often relegated to the counterpublic. However, we must acknowledge our limits. We must acknowledge the limits of poetry and academia. If anything, for those of us who take on the roles of academic, poet, and activist in society, then it is clear that we must acknowledge the limits of what we do and, at the very least, not impede upon those and on what is managing to produce dissensual poetry and poetics. If we want to do better, then it is a question of us knowing our place in the distribution of the sensible. We must acknowledge that to do better is perhaps for us to do nothing at all or, at the very least, not to take on the function of the police when dissensus manifests itself through poetry only to comment on how we think experimental and activist poetry should appear in the distribution of the sensible.

APPENDIX A

Names of Indigenous women, Two-Spirit and Trans people who have gone missing or died as a result of violence according to It Starts With Us

1. (Edgar) Gordon Badger, 38, murdered in Opaskwayak Cree Nation, 2-Spirit and Trans.
2. Adele Rose Mary Matinet, 22, murdered in Atikokan February 2004.
3. Adrienne Amikons, 14, murdered in Peterborough December 1997.
4. Alice Quoquat Netemegestic, murdered in Thunder Bay in the late 1970s.
5. Alissa Martin-Travers, 5, murdered in Cornwall April 2008.
6. Annie Pootoogook found dead in Ottawa on September 19th 2016.
7. Ashley Smith, 18, murdered in Fort Frances October 2007.
8. Autumn Andy, 15, murdered in Big Grassy River on June 10th 2018.
9. Azraya Kokopenace found dead in Kenora, Ontario in April 2016.
10. Barbara Kentner, 34, attacked by racists in Thunder Bay on January 29, succumbed to her injuries and died on July 4 24th 2017.
11. Barbara Loon, 34, murdered in Sioux Lookout May 2009.
12. Barbara Shapwaykeestic, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1989.
13. Bella (Nancy Marie) LaBoucan McLean, 25, fell from the 31st floor of a Toronto condo on July 20th 2013.
14. Bernadette Leclair, 16, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1987.
15. Carolyn Connolly, 54, her body was found on August 2nd 2008 near Sherbourne and Dundas Street, Toronto.
16. Cecilia Payash, 48, missing since 1957 from Red Lake Ontario.
17. Charity Keesic, 19, from Moose Factory murdered on August 2001.
18. Charlene Two Hearts, Sagkeeng First Nation, murdered, 2-Spirit and Trans.
19. Charnelle Masakeyash, 26 went missing in November 2015, her partial remains were found in Mishkeegogamang First Nation in June.
20. Cheyenne Fox, 20, fell from 24th floor of a Don Mills condo on April 2013.
21. Chloe Matthews, 11 of Big Trout Lake, her body was found in 2011.
22. Clarene Rose Panamick, 36, murdered in 1991.
23. Colten Pratt, missing, last seen Nov 15th, 2014, 2-spirit and Trans.
24. Cynthia Lynette Jamieson, 44 of Six Nations, murdered in Hamilton on June 12th 2002.
25. Debbie Sloss-Clarke, 42, found dead in her room at Gerrard and Sherbourne, Toronto on July 29th 1997.
26. Deborah Toulouse, 41, murdered in Manitoulin Island on May 18th 2002.
27. Delaine Copenace found dead in Kenora, Ontario on March 22nd 2016.
28. Denise Katherine Bourdeau, 39, murdered in Kitchener-Waterloo her remains were found in April 2007.
29. Derek Boubard, murdered, Sagkeeng First Nation, 2-Spirit and Trans.
30. Diane Dobson, 36, found dead in Windsor in Feb 1995.
31. Diane Marshall, 43, found dead in Toronto in May 2006.

32. Divas Boulanger, murdered, 2-Spirit and Trans.
33. Donna Kabatay, approximately late teens; murdered in Seine River First Nation.
34. Donna Tebbenham, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1987.
35. Doreen Hardy, 18, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1996.
36. Edith McGinnis Quagon, 42, murdered in Minneapolis.
37. Edward Denecheze, murdered, 2-Spirit and Trans.
38. Elaine Vawn LaForme, 48, murdered in New Credit on Jan 22th 2012.
39. Elena Assam-Thunderbird, 17, beaten to death on Junest, 2002.
40. Evaline (Evaleen) Cameron, 19, of Whitedog Reserve, found dead in October 1995.
41. Gloria Jean Martha Abotossaway missing since 1984.
42. Heather Pelletier, 30, murdered in Toronto, her decomposed body was found in May 1988.
43. Helen Gillings, 19, murdered in Hamilton, February 1995.
44. Helen Louise Jacobs, 73, murdered in Elliot Lake, July 2005.
45. Helyna Rivera, 25, of Six Nations murdered in 2011 in Buffalo.
46. Hilda Agawa, 63, of Batchewana First Nation murdered in June 2009.
47. Jane Jack, 22, stabbed to death in Kenora on April 28th 1995.
48. Jane Louise Sutherland, 20, her body was found on October 23rd 1984 in Hull's Jacques Cartier Park across the Ottawa River from Lowertown.
49. Jeanine St Jean, 42, of Schreiber was found dead in November 2006.
50. Jennifer Stewart, 36, stabbed to death in Ottawa August 2010.
51. Jocelyn McDonald, 16, was murdered in Kenora October 2000.
52. Jordina Skunk, 29, found frozen to death in Fort Severn First Nation on January 31st 2008.
53. Josephine Thompson, 18, murdered in 1971, her body found by the railway tracks in Macdiarmid and Rocky Bay.
54. Judie Thibault, 57, murdered in Thunder Bay in November 2000.
55. Judy Ann Quill, 33, murdered in Kenora, in March 2009.
56. Karla Desrosiers, 45, murdered in Thunder bay, in January 2007.
57. Katelynne Sampson, 7, found dead with signs of bodily trauma in Toronto Parkdale neighbourhood in August 3, 2008.
58. Kelly Morrisseau, 27, murdered in Ottawa; her body was found in Gatineau Park on December 10th 2006.
59. Laura Pilon, 22, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1992.
60. Leanne Lawson, 23, murdered in Ottawa in 2011.
61. Liana Mathewson, 44, of Sault Ste. Marie, was strangled in 2008.
62. Lisa Lynn Anstey, 21, murdered in Toronto on May 12th 1997.
63. Liz Bonnie Sakakeesic, 16, murdered in Cat Lake First Nation in 1994.
64. Loretta Lavalley, 36, was strangled in November 2008 in Brampton.
65. Lorraine Rivers, 18, murdered in Thunder Bay in March 1966.
66. Louise Lorraine Laderoute, disappeared in Edmonton, Dec 29th 1950.
67. Lynn Childforever, 20, died in 2008.
68. Mae Morton, 15, left to freeze to death outside Beardmore in 1962.
69. Margaret Perrault (Bluebird), 32, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1988.
70. Margaret Yvonne Guylee, disappeared in Toronto in 1965.

71. Mariah Wesley, 18, of Kenora was stabbed to death in 2009.
72. Mary Ann Davis, 25, from Manitoulin Island was murdered in 2005.
73. Mary Peters King, murdered in Thunder Bay.
74. Maxine Susanne Peters, 34, of Walpole Island First Nation; killed on June 13th, 2004.
75. Mercedes Stevens, 9, murdered in Kashechewan First Nation, Sept. 2006.
76. Minnie Sutherland, 40, killed in Hull on December 31st, 1988.
77. Mitzi MacDougall, 27, of Red lake murdered in 1998.
78. Pamela Holopainen, 22, of Schumacher; last seen in Timmins on December 14th 2003.
79. Patricia Carpenter, 14, her body was discovered at a construction site next to Massey Hall in 1992.
80. Paula Joy Martin, 31, died from stab wounds in April 1996.
81. Petrina Lynn Whitecrow of Seine River murdered in Fort Frances.
82. Rebecca Jean King, 22, missing since October 21st 1999 from North Bay.
83. Rena Fox, 38, murdered in Thunder Bay, February 2003.
84. Renee Neganiwina, 26, was murdered in a house fire in 2015 in Hamilton.
85. Rose (Kelvin) Osborne, murdered, 2-Spirit and Trans.
86. Samantha Johnings, 19 months, of Hamilton, murdered on December 13st 1992.
87. Sandra Kaye Johnson, 18, found dead on February 13th 1992 near 110 Ave in Thunder Bay.
88. Sarah Jane Wawia Bernard, 43, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1966.
89. Sarah Mason, 44, murdered in Thunder Bay in 1997.
90. Sarah Skunk, 43, missing from Thunder Bay since 1995.
91. Shawna Taylor, 37, died in Toronto on August 24, 2017.
92. Shelley Lynne Joseph, 40, of Six Nations, murdered in Hamilton on July 2nd 2004.
93. Shelley May Anderson, 51, from Cobalt is missing since summer 2009.
94. Sonya Nadine Mae Cywink, 31, found dead in 1994 at Southwold Prehistoric Earthworks near Iona.
95. Spring Phillips, 26, murdered in Toronto in December 2009.
96. Susan Asslin, 19, stabbed to death near Dryden in 1974.
97. Tashina Cheyenne Vaughn General, 21, murdered along with her unborn child, body found on April 26, 2008 at Six Nations, near Chiefswood Road and Indian Line.
98. Terra Gardener, 26, was killed by a train in Toronto on May 14th 2013.
99. Theresa Anne Yakimchuck, 23, is missing from Dryden since June 1973.
100. Therese Labbe, 47, body found in Mountjoy River in October 1989.
101. Theresa Wilson (Jamieson), 30, was murdered and her body was found in Thames River, Chatham in March 2011.
102. Tricia Paquette, 8, murdered in Brantford, February 1978.
103. Vanessa Tagoona, 29, found dead in Ottawa in 2009.
104. Verna May Simard-Shabaquay, 50, fell from the 6th floor of the Regent Hotel in Vancouver on September 16th 2011.
105. Verna Patricia Sturgeon, 33, was murdered in September 2010.
106. Viola Isabella Panacheese, 42, missing from Sioux Lookout since August 1991.
107. Viola Melvin, 67, murdered in Toronto on April 14th 1977.
108. Vivian Cada, 53, found dead on June 30th 2005 in apartment, at 285 Shuter St, Toronto.

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