New Ecologies of the Real: Nonsimultaneity and Canadian Literature(s)

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I

It has become a critical commonplace to conceive of Canadian literature in the plural. "Canadian literatures" or "the literatures of Canada" are phrases that once mainly referred to the distinction between English and French texts. Now they often designate other ethnically, racially, or otherwise defined writing practices that are perceived as subsets of Canadian literature. This is the consequence of critical work that has sought to dismantle, here in Canada and Quebec as elsewhere, previous, more monolithic accounts of national literature. Such work has been combating their essentializing effects in favour of what Pierre Nepveu, in the last chapter of his ground-breaking volume *L'écologie du réel*, called already in 1988 a "pluralité des centres" (219).[1]

While numerous critical changes have intervened since Nepveu's book, the emphasis on pluralization has sometimes homogenized writing practices that often rely on different forms of knowledge and can express and facilitate dissimilar relations to a — however conceived — "real." Critical evocations of "the literatures of Canada" or "Canadian literatures" can seem to imply a grouping of similar constituent parts, suggesting a critical mandate that would mainly consist in helping more of these heretofore overlooked or undervalued literatures to come to the fore. This work indeed remains a continuing and important challenge. I want to argue here, however, that a mere insistence on pluralization can run the risk of masking differences that include specific forms of "nonsimultaneity" or *ungleichzeitigkeit* (Bloch). Such differing relations to time also imply different views of space, point to different functionalities of formal modes and genres, and influence how texts relate to audiences and intervene in the public sphere.

The purpose of this essay is to consider some of the implications and potential tasks inherent in this problematic. Given the occasion of this special issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* — to reflect on where we are after the past forty years in Canadian literature — it seems appropriate to begin with a glance back. I will not be the only one here to point to Frank Davey's 1976 attack on thematic criticism in his now-canonical essay "Surviving the Paraphrase." While it is not the main focus of my essay, I will use Davey's piece here in an argument for the value of reading formal elements of writing (which Davey emphatically endorsed) in Canadian literatures with reference to, and indeed as dependent on, specific contextual factors (which Davey saw as detracting from the "intrinsic" qualities of writing) that often determine their function and meaning. His text responded to a remarkably successful — and in his words "dominant" (5) — critical approach that sought to define a thematic specificity of Canadian writing and thus facilitated its recognition as a national literature.[2] One of Davey's concerns was a concomitant functionalization of art, which reduced writing to its perceived social dimensions. "Most of the weaknesses of thematic criticism stem from its origin in Arnoldian humanism," Davey wrote, "a tradition in which both the critic and the artist have a major responsibility to culture. In this view, the artist speaks, unconsciously or consciously, for the group" (6). Davey mostly targeted poet and critic D.G. Jones, who in *Butterfly on Rock* had claimed that "[artists] participate in and help to articulate . . . a supreme fiction . . . that embodies the dreams and nightmares of a people, shapes their imaginative vision of the world, and defines, as it evolves, their cultural identity" (4).

Davey diagnosed in such reflections a disregard for the "intrinsic qualities" of language and a reductionism he judged to be "extra-literary" at best and "anti-literary" at worst (6). Whatever the merits of his claim, however, thematic criticism with its attendant cultural nationalism undoubtedly played a major role in putting Canadian literature on the map — including Davey's own writing. More than that, it was part of a larger attempt at de-colonizing Canadian culture (albeit perhaps more vis-à-vis the United States than Great Britain). While thematic criticism is not exempt from the ambivalences of white-settler cultural expression (especially regarding its own positionality in relation to First Nations concerns) that have been scrutinized in discussions of Canadian postcoloniality, its anti-colonial impulses have deservedly prompted the

inclusion, for example, of texts by Frye and Atwood in a section entitled "Anti-Colonial Nationalism" in Cynthia Sugars's anthology of English Canadian postcolonial critical texts, *Unhomely States*.[3] Sugars has also repeatedly underlined the continuing importance of "nation" as a category of resistance and of the local in Canadian postcolonial studies ("Worlding" 34; "Can" 117).

In the context of my concerns here, it is striking to note that the anti-colonial articulation of culturally located specificity, as it was performed by the critics taken to task by Davey, recurs regularly in the heralding of the pluralized "literatures of Canada." While these literatures have significantly transformed Canadian canons and the literary landscape, the driving forces behind them have often followed identitarian impulses. Taken in some critical commentary to simply make up "Canadian literature," these pluralized Canadian literatures also rebel against the colonizing power of this homogenizing and essentializing designation in the singular. Yet while they are in many respects its negation, their identitarian self-articulations share important aspects with what they critically deconstruct. We have left the earlier phase of Canadian literary criticism critiqued in "Surviving the Paraphrase" behind, yet some of its issues are surely still with us, albeit in different or displaced forms.

A good number of diasporic or First Nations/Native writers in Canada, for instance, would probably not object to the idea that some (or perhaps even most) of their work is related to "the dreams and nightmares" — to take up Jones's phrase cited above — of groups that share historical and present-day experiences. Like other artists they certainly refuse a one-dimensional functionalization of their art — especially when asked to respond to prescriptive ideas regarding their work. Thomas King's "A Seat in the Garden" is an example of a parodic response to such prescriptive expectations,[4] and both George Elliott Clarke and Lawrence Hill have pointed out that literature cannot possibly be restricted to the creation of role models.[5] Yet while these artists may not want to speak — to cite again the offending passage above — "unconsciously or consciously, *for* the group" (emphasis added), and while they often emphasize internal differences to work against essentializing homogenization, they may well suggest in their work ways of perceiving history, the present, and other aspects of the "real" that are germane to a particular set of communally shared experiences.

As a consequence, the worlds their readers are invited to inhabit are inflected by particular centres of gravity that can bring about particular segmentations of what is commonly thought of as a singular "real," as well as highly heterogeneous productions of time and space. Such variations on what we think of as *a priori* forms of knowledge can also be directly linked to the formal and artistic choices and the language of literary texts. The fact that these multiple force fields and different times and spaces exist simultaneously within the same (Canadian) time and space invites fresh examination of the different valencies that seemingly identical formal elements might have in their own particular contexts.

II

"Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics" is an essay by philosopher Ernst Bloch that begins with the following remarks: "Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be here today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others. Rather, they carry earlier things with them, which are intricately involved" (Bloch 22).[6] Written in 1932, the essay is primarily concerned with an archaic past invoked by an immiserated German middle class and other societal elements ready to look for answers in fascism. But Bloch also detects in the past a positive rather than reactionary differential with the present, and especially resources for what "seeks life not destroyed by capitalism." In his dialectical parlance (evoking other thinkers related to the Frankfurt school),[7] this "nonsynchronous" differential supplements "synchronous contradictions" and offers a "*negativity* which . . . overturns the present-day conditions" (34). This negativity is understood as affording not only different perspectives but also as the grounds for a critique that results in change. Importantly, as with much of Bloch's writing, his perspective on the past aims directly at not-yet realized possibilities in the present and thus at transformations leading to another future.

Reading Bloch's paper today, with its insistence that other factors can only "supplement" the inherent contradictions of capitalist production and its view of the proletariat as the only driving force of positive change, one is reminded of Frantz Fanon's despair at reading Jean-Paul Sartre's "Orphée noir." Fanon realized that for Sartre "my effort was only a term in the dialectic" (Fanon 132), to be sublated "into the

objective, positive, exact idea of *proletariat*" (Sartre xl). Yet Bloch's idea of multiple, imbricated time, the notion of heterogeneous time-spaces (with their potential futures) existing in the same here and now, has remained relevant to subsequent research interested in the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous. In his conclusion, Bloch himself begins to envisage "the problem of a multi-level dialectics" (36) and claims, more specifically, that a "[m]ultispatial and multitemporal dialectics, the polyrhythm and the counterpoint of such dialectics," are crucial for the decisive stages of the dialectic, which are "the critical, noncontemplative ones that intervene practically" (37). Critiquing a mere contemplative Hegelian "totality of recollected knowledge" (37), Bloch ends by insisting on a dialectic that "can only be a noncontemplative one, or one that possesses the wealth of the substance, not in gilded pasts, but in the actual heritage of its end in the Now — in short, one that gains *additional revolutionary force* from the *incomplete* wealth of the past" (38). By the end of his essay, then, Bloch arrives at a "polyphonous dialectics" (38) that is spacious enough to allow for various nonsynchronous remainders to play a decisive and interventionist role in creating change.

Bloch's essay is interesting reading with regard to current accounts of counter-hegemonic knowledges and critiques of Western narratives of progress and modernity. Its relationship to recent discussions of haunting or the postcolonial gothic in Canadian literature is equally intriguing (see, e.g., Sugars and Turcotte, Goldman), given that they, too, address forms of simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous. What is for me one of the most salient vectors of Bloch's essay, however, and what distinguishes it from some of the more past-oriented perspectives of other approaches, is its emphasis on the *future* and on the interventionist force of nonsimultaneity, and thus its connection with "subversively utopian" (34) impulses. Among other things, as Bloch says, this "Not-Yet" is driven by "those very elements in the past which are not past and continue to be effective" (37) and thus an "*incomplete* wealth of the past" (38).[8] In other words, these are developments and events that have not been resolved in the course of history and that are not "sublated" or superseded in a dialectic of perceived progress that emphasizes their pastness in order to claim their irrelevance in the present.

The sheer interventionist potential of nonsimultaneity in minoritarian contexts has been evoked with particular force, for instance, in a recent essay by Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations."[9] In the

context of his wide-ranging examination, Coates describes a meeting "in the early 2000s" in Tulsa, Oklahoma, between Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree and "the survivors of the 1921 race riot that had devastated 'Black Wall Street.'" He cites Ogletree's amazement at "seeing these black women and men who were crippled, blind, in wheelchairs" asking him to represent them in a lawsuit for reparations. As Coates puts it: "The past was not the past to them."[10] Reparations, and the demand for them, represent a particularly striking example of how the seeming past can be an active part of the present.

Coates's general argument is that the present situation of many black people in the United States is determined by past injustices (he discusses especially real estate practices that led to the systematic impoverishment of many black home owners) to such an extent that the past often *is* the present. Saidiya Hartman has made a similar point with reference to the ongoing consequences of slavery: "This is the afterlife of slavery — skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery" (*Lose Your Mother* 6). These are only two examples of black writers emphasizing that the lifeworld and reality of different groups who ostensibly live in the same here and now are often pervaded by an entirely different sense of time and space, a difference often caused by specific events and experiences that motivate particular ways of relating to what we call the real. Instead, there are ecologies of synchronously existing but otherwise nonsynchronous time-spaces — ecologies marked by systemic interrelationships that are not governed, however, by the hierarchical dominance of hegemonic projections of time and space — that also inform and transform particular forms of speech and writing, and in turn are influenced by them. These include not only fictive genres but also testimony, memoir, or manifesto, attendant modes and tones, relations to potentiality and expectations for the time to come (for justice, perhaps, or closure), and manners of addressing audiences (for instance as judge, confidant, or implied opponent). The meaning and implications of particular formal aspects of language and writing, I would argue, then, depend on — and can be transformed by — their function within such time-spaces and their histories.

III

Canadian literary spaces abound with what one might call "heterochronicities" — unevenly related, heterogeneous times and their related spaces (heterochroni/cities if you will) that seem insufficiently circumscribed by phrases such as "Canadian literature(s)" and that confound Canadian deictic markers of here and there and now and then. The idea of "heterochronicity" eschews the more normative connotations of a term such as "anachronism." Discussing temporality and the seemingly anachronistic presence of pizza and microwave ovens in "A Coyote Columbus Story," a writer as exquisitely conscious of time and timing as Thomas King has noted, "The vision of time is that there really isn't such a thing" (qtd. in Davis 56). King's remark counters the notion that "that's the way things were way back then" (qtd. in Davis 56-57). The "progress" of time, in King's perspective, does not separate us from the past and is not necessarily meliorative — or progress at all.[11]

This is not the place to begin an inventory of the many heterochronicities that can be observed in Canadian writing. In what follows, I want to examine instead only some examples, drawn from black Canadian writing and cultural expression, to illustrate the malleability of time in this regard.

George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems* (2001) proceeds from causalities that make the presence of the past palpable (and illustrate the "simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous"). Like his subsequent novel *George and Rue* (2005), the volume features two of his remote relatives who were hanged for killing a cab driver in the 1940s. Clarke does not seek to deny that George and Rue were killers; instead, he emphasizes an overwhelming weight of the past and powerful social and historical determinants. Clarke adduces a history of economic and racial victimization that eventually is squared when victims become victimizers and then become black delinquents before the law who are punished more brutally than their white contemporaries (see Wyile 224-32). The past is hardly over in this regard, and ordains the violent and punitive times and spaces of the present.

A few lines in *Execution Poems* starkly underline these contextual forces: "The blow that slew Silver came from two centuries back. / It took that much time and agony to turn a white man's whip / into a black man's hammer" (*Execution Poems* 35). Clarke again underscores

the concatenation of violence that begets violence, and death by law, in the section headings of *George and Rue*: "Whip" (1), "Hammer" (111), "Rope" (151). He reveals in an interview how details about violence running in the perpetrators' family "convinced me that the violence that George and Rufus Hamilton inflicted upon their white victim in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in 1949, was rooted, perhaps, in the violence of slavery itself, carried forward in the family, although in a different country and a new century after leaving the United States" ("George and Ruth" 867).

Clarke's views of time, context, and causality correlate with attendant formal choices, including his use of "blackened" English. The novel's deployment of "Black maritime (Africadian) . . . speech" ("George and Ruth" 865) thus reinforces the presence of contextual elements that also mark its times and spaces. Another formal element influenced by the specific force of time and the past is the structure of the novel's narrative time, which makes it unusual in some regards. Although the novel relates the circumstances of a murder, a whodunit it is not. The culprits and their terrible deed are revealed early on, not at the end, as it might behoove a thriller. The combination of a murder story with a time flow that corresponds more to the depiction of some *moeurs de province* à la Flaubert raises interesting questions with regard to Clarke's use and transformation of genre in this case. Suffice it to say here that some of the narrative decisions that govern his text seem directly dependent on its position within the ecology of heterochronicities from which it emanates. One man's murder story is another man's witnessing, which in this case also represents an accusation of society and a call for different forms of justice.

Such formal considerations require the kind of attention to language that Davey called for in "Surviving the Paraphrase." They are also directly dependent, however, on allegedly "extra-literary" contexts. Considerations of the socio-economic circumstances and race of the protagonists, and of Clarke's reasons for formal choices that embody "the dreams and nightmares" (to cite D.G. Jones's offending phrase) of a group defined by such historical determinants, are anything but "anti-literary" in this case. These factors mark and define the perspectival lines and time-spaces artistically realized in Clarke's work. The entire function of "fictionality" may have to be further re-envisaged in the context of the particular heterochronicity of Clarke's text, which

straddles the border between documentary and fiction (and which one might hesitate to call "fiction" despite its novelistic form). In addition, of course, Clarke's deployment of time intervenes in the world and exerts civic agency. It suggests the ongoing presence and potential futurity of the terrifying time that marked his distant relatives; his *J'accuse* is directed at race-inflected forms of (in)justice, having thus an interventionist dimension that works toward transformation and a Blochian "not-yet."[12]

I have argued elsewhere (in "Ethics as Re/Cognition") that literary styles and techniques can take on different functions depending on the times and spaces in which they are deployed and that consequently formal literary concepts are fully understandable only when related to seemingly "extra-literary" dimensions. Realism and empathy are two such concepts, and they are of particular import when writing is related to the time-spaces of aggrieved communities. Realism, however, is not usually counted among the most advanced or avant-garde literary forms; hence the question arises whether literary texts automatically fall prey to outdated literary modes when seeking to create empathy.

Discussing Marie-Célie Agnant's use of realism to create empathy with older Haitian women in Montreal, I contend that a text like *La Dot de Sara*, and other works that offer transitions and translations between different contexts, can deploy older forms to new, innovative, and exciting effects. In the case of Agnant's novel, time and space are also important because of the time lag in women's access to writing in Haiti and the ensuing preponderance of oral expression there.[13] Agnant's transformation of oral modes into a written work to make her subjects visible in a Montreal context — albeit clothed in a form of realism — strike me as artistically relevant and innovative, equal in this regard to more openly experimental and "avant-garde" forms (although I am hardly seeking to deny *their* innovative potential). Such reflections on changes in the functionality of a literary mode with regard to its deployment in a Haitian-Québécois and gendered time-space seem an eminently "literary" preoccupation; they contribute to an understanding of formal aspects of writing and language that are directly marked by the heterochronicity of an identitarian perspective.

Like Clarke's *Execution Poems* and *George and Rue*, Agnant's texts and their use of specific temporalities aim at transformations and another future. Such potentials of the future are directly evoked in other works that exemplify the heterochronicities which audiences are

asked to navigate in these artistic interventions in the real. One could also mention here documentaries such as *Black Mother, Black Daughter* (1989) by Nova Scotian film makers Sylvia Hamilton and Claire Prieto, or Hamilton's *The Little Black Schoolhouse* (2007), films that hinge on the intergenerational conveyance of black memories and sustain and revitalize times and spaces that are otherwise obliterated by dominant histories. *Black Mother, Black Daughter* validates the experiences of older black women that find little or no mention in public records of achievement. The film shows their importance and the value of their witnessing for a younger generation, emphasizing intergenerational contact as a site of memory that practically transforms all participants' (and the wider audiences') sense of time and place.[14] *The Little Black Schoolhouse* takes experiences of school segregation in Nova Scotia and Ontario as its subject matter, giving again value to the witnessing of black experiences and elongating their temporal reach to combat ignorance and effect change in the present and the future.[15]

Or take another example of black Canadian heterochronicities, Camille Turner's Afrofuturist sonic walk *Hush Harbour*. Afrofuturism, Turner explains, "draws from non-Western cosmologies, mythology, fantasy, science, technology and history to posit new possible futures" ("Evoking" 47). *Hush Harbour* takes listeners through Toronto's Victoria Memorial Square, recasting space in light of black Toronto history. We encounter the figures of the past (including Peggy Pompadour, the slave of Family Compact politician Peter Russell) together with the presence of Afronauts. These latter figures — entertainingly said to be guided by signals from the CN Tower — are their descendants but also transcend time and space. The walk suggests a future anterior in which black historical characters will have been the forebears of these Afronauts; yet these historical figures are also in their presence, as are we, the listeners who walk in a reconfigured space. Turner's choice of medium and Afrofuturist mode make sense with regard to the effect she seeks to convey: the very spaces we move in are saturated with other times and potential futures that revalue obscured histories, marginalized presences, and often invisible possibilities of belonging and civic participation in the space and public sphere of the city.

My last example is Wayde Compton's collection of short stories, *The Outer Harbour* (2014), whose title interestingly resonates with Turner's. In earlier work such as "Rune," a sequence about the former Vancouver

black neighbourhood of Hogan's Alley (*Performance Bond* 123-56), Compton created a remix of time and space that results in a palimpsestic simultaneity of nonsynchronicity, offering invented histories that nonetheless represent real feelings, fears, concerns, and desires of contemporary diasporic subjects ("Seven Routes to Hogan's Alley" 116-17).

The Outer Harbour adds to the remix of fictive pasts an array of possible futures. In addition, Compton's speculative fiction pairs the copresence of multiple, nonsynchronous times with the complex ontologies of characters whose existence seems to transcend also distinctions between life and death. Compton's Vancouver is further enriched by a heterocosm, a nearby volcanic *terra nova* that has arisen in Vancouver's outer harbour and is named after Mohawk poet Pauline Johnson. The naming choice illustrates the non-Afrocentrist interest in other minorities and coalition-building of what Compton calls his "assertive Afroperipheralism," as does the naming of the opening story's black protagonist after the Métis leader Louis Riel. Transformative changes of identity are ubiquitous in the volume, as is the directly related theme of migration. Riel, for instance, is attracted by the artistic performance of a "mystery migrant," who induces him to leave his previous life behind "in an act of commuting to the future" (30). That this future may well be transgressive with regard to dominant definitions of time and space is apparent when Pauline Johnson Island is symbolically occupied by a First Nations' activist and his multiracial group of friends. Like other migrants, they become "people where they shouldn't be" and are "illegal by being there" (43). Killed by the state's violent response to this transgression, however, the leader remains part of the textual "real" and resurfaces as "the insurgent" (178).

This figure signals Compton's interest in counter-histories (and futures) not written by the winners. He shares the island with migrants who also transcend time and space. Corralled in the "Pauline Johnson Special Detention Facility," they often "blink out" and are found outside, demonstrating "ICDP" or "Individual and Collective Displacement Phenomenon" (167-69). Compton contributes here to the production of speculative time-spaces that allow for extended ontologies, an imaginative "real" that is not circumscribed by state-controlled projections or normative definitions of time, space, and being.

Regarding heterogeneous definitions of the "real," several of the stories show a strong interest in virtual realities and gaming theory,

thematizing what one passage calls "the unlikely connection between play and policing" (160). One of the characters thus enters the world of medieval re-enactments, where he meets a group of "Shadow Realmers" in blackface (124). The related digital fantasy game turns out to be the testing ground for a "Multiple Perception Immobilization Device" developed by "the Canadian company Waking Dream Entertainment Services" (180). Employing "interactive holography" (163), the device is used for crowd control and to confuse protesters during riots. In *The Outer Harbour*, the production and projection of time, space, and other aspects of the "real" can thus lead to immobilization and detention, predicaments eluded by such figures as the "mystery migrant," Riel, and the insurgent, and by the larger migrant population exhibiting "Individual and Collective Displacement Phenomenon."

The ontological realities of these figures are transversal to the spaces and temporalities ordained by dominant projections and definitions of the real. What is at stake in the deployment of Compton's speculative and transgressive alter-realities is summed up in the statement that the future "will surely include a protracted campaign of clashing imaginations" (189). This apt comment appears in an interpolated fictive document whose title references the counter-temporalities and wisdom adumbrated in Compton's earlier volumes through a turntablist poetics of scratching and remixing, "Counter Clockwise and the G25 Riots: Fighting Fabulism with Fabulism?" (185). The wisdom of discovering new possible times in existing forms is given prominence in the earlier collection *49th Parallel Psalm* with the poem "DJ," whose titular trickster artist skillfully manipulates "this body of texts / these twelve-inch tablets of counterclockwiseness" (25) to achieve new effects, navigating time, chance, and possibility in his re-composition of previously inscribed tracks and texts.[16]

IV

Compton's work models heterochronicities through formal elements that include his various inventive uses of collage and intertextuality,[17] concrete poetry, and visual art, and on another scale his exploration of models and metaphors of time and his experimentation with the genre of speculative fiction. To return to my opening reflections, *The Outer Harbour* also underlines Bloch's remark that "Not all people exist in the same Now" and similarly seeks to extrapolate vectors from this situation

into the future. Compton shows the holographic simultaneity of, and in this case fierce battle between, heterogeneous, non-simultaneous times and spaces that are produced from different vantage points and interested positions. His work imaginatively stages a crisis that is both physically and representationally real, but that also presents opportunities for imaginative re-spatialization, re-temporalization, and redefinitions of what Karina Vernon has called a "black diasporic real."[18] Compton's speculative fictionality thus creates forms of a critical "*negativity*" that provide alternatives to "present-day conditions" (34) — to use Bloch's and Frankfurt school language again. It points to an "Afroperipheral" future and a black critical culture that is both here and also "yet to come," as Hortense Spillers has emphasized in an attempt to combine the critical impulses of the Frankfurt School with those earlier impulses articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois.

Like the other works I have invoked, by Agnant, Clarke, Turner, and Hamilton, Compton's text models time and space in ways that are marked by, among other factors, specific diasporic locations, histories, and memories and their attendant problems and questions, but it also opens up toward new possibilities in these contexts. Given the specific situatedness of the trajectories of the imagination embodied in these works, it seems necessary on the one hand to fully thematize contextual elements so that central formal aspects and choices made in their imaginative, artistic transformation can be understood in relation to these elements. On the other hand, an analysis that seeks to understand the context-dependent and thus varying implications of specific formal choices regarding time, space, language, or genre, for instance, would miss the point if it were to *reduce* the works under consideration to mere illustrations of such contextual aspects; contextual depth is needed, rather, to differentiate and illuminate the use and working of specific formal elements.

To return to another aspect of my opening reflections, I think one can argue that at least some aspects of the context-related problematic articulated in an essay such as "Surviving the Paraphrase" are still present — in different guises yet ubiquitous. The heterochronicities that are salient in the works I have discussed are but a few examples of the multiplicity of heterogeneous time-spaces produced by many other, often diasporic or Indigenous, works that are also part of Canadian literature(s). Such works create, perform, and celebrate their own sense

of time, space, and causation, and they offer their own perspectives on what might be "real" or important. The time-spaces and ontologies they propose are inspired by diverse factors and intertextualities (which Davey's essay to some extent takes into consideration, for instance, with its remarks on literary history; see 7-10), and also by experiences that are shared by particular constituencies and that can help to articulate identitarian narratives (with their "dreams and nightmares"). Artistic works are not reducible to such circumstances; yet, as I have argued, they can be seen to respond to them in their textual architecture and other important formal aspects.

To understand the changing functionality of such formal aspects — including language and genre, the use of time and space, and the forms of address and positioning of an implied audience — requires recourse to the allegedly "extra-literary" contexts that Davey saw — perhaps justifiably — as overemphasized forty years ago. Attentiveness to some of the implications of phrases such as "the literatures of Canada" or "Canadian literatures," however, reminds us that such contexts have never been absent or artistically inconsequential. Perhaps we come to see more clearly now how times and spaces are not only rendered but also visibly and audibly produced, together and in a multiplicity of ways that cannot simply be resolved or hierarchized: they exist simultaneously and both within the nation-state and beyond. These new ecologies of the real invite newly differentiated forms of analysis and response, attentive to heterogeneous simultaneities of times and spaces and their variable relation to each other and to artistic form.

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Notes

[1] Nepveu sees the elaboration of "une véritable 'écologie du réel'" ("a genuine 'ecology of the real'") as the possible result of a shifting away from national culture as a primary focus, allowing for a rethinking of "le mode d'être de la littérature et de la culture québécoise,

moins en tant que littérature ou culture 'nationales' qu'en tant que contemporaines" (10, "the mode of being of Québécois literature and culture, not so much as 'national' literature or culture than as contemporary ones"). As Sherry Simon has commented, culture for Nepveu "has become an accumulation of spaces, references, and pulsation, the very opposite of the rather monolithic entity to which earlier critics could refer" (173). My main title is obviously inspired by Nepveu's. I discuss his theorization of cultural change in Quebec, together with E.D. Blodgett's and Sacvan Bercovitch's reflections on Canadian and United States literary history, respectively, in my comparative study of North American discourses of cultural emergence, *The New North American Studies: Culture, Writing, and the Politics of Re/Cognition* (16-30).

[2] The "success" of thematic criticism does not suggest any longevity of the approach as dominant critical practice or its validity. Its dominance was rather brief, in fact, as Russell Brown has suggested in his re-evaluation of the approach (657), while its validity has been consistently contested since Davey's indictment. The effectiveness of thematic criticism to incite the critical imagination, however, is demonstrated not only by the vehemence of Davey's attack on it; Smaro Kamboureli has suggested that "it has not been so much thematicism that has governed Canadian criticism but the critics' obsession with the idea of it" ("Introduction" 20). If the reasons for that obsession go beyond later critics' wish for differential self-positioning vis-à-vis some foundational proponents of a *Canadian* literary criticism in what is, after all, still a nation-identified field, one would have to look for more enduring reasons (including the ones I discuss below) to explain why, as the editors of the 2007 *Studies in Canadian Literature* special issue on Davey suggest with regard to his essay, "Davey's challenge still resonates today" (Brydon et al.).

[3] In this context, one wonders whether a re-evaluation of the work of D.G. Jones — perhaps the most eloquent other "thematic critic" of the period — might also be in the offing. Jones offered his papers and much of his library to the Université de Sherbrooke Archives (Fortin and Godbout) before his passing in 2016. This material will now be available for researchers interested in the work of this important critic, award-winning poet, and translator, who was also a co-founder of the bilingual journal *ellipse*.

[4] The story parodies stereotypical expectations concerning the representations of Indigenous subjects.

[5] With regard to the murderous character of Asa in his novel *George and Rue*, Clarke comments: "Must I — as writer — bear the burden of presenting only black angels, just because white society demonizes black people? To answer that rhetorical question, I say I can't assume that responsibility" ("George and Ruth" 866). Speaking about his less-than-morally-perfect character Langston Cane I in *Any Known Blood*, Hill rejects normative expectations in favour of believable and instructive imagination and dramatization. As a novelist, he maintains, "my job is to create a believable, dramatic, interesting person who seems to reflect a vital aspect of the human experience. . . . I have to be interested in human character, not in role modeling" (Hill, "A Conversation" 14).

[6] "Ungleichzeitigkeit und Pflicht zu ihrer Dialektik," which appeared later also in his volume *Erbschaft Dieser Zeit* (1962). I cite the translation of the essay by Mark Ritter.

[7] Bloch was friends with Theodor Adorno (and Walter Benjamin) and exerted a substantial influence on the Frankfurt school, but in many cases also maintained important differences.

[8] Bloch thus references in the essay that other "nonsynchronous" dimension, "the subversively utopian 'of mankind,' a 'life' which never received fulfillment in any age and is hence the final spur to every revolution" (34). Such formulations anticipate Bloch's major work, *The Principle of Hope*, a 1,500-page reflection on the ideas and utopian forces of the "Not-Yet," written during his exile from German fascism in the reading room of Widener Library, Harvard.

[9] Published in the June 2014 issue of *The Atlantic*, the essay was widely discussed and followed by further comment by the author on his blog and in his volume *Between the World and Me* (2015).

[10] Incidentally, Oklahoma was the source of black immigration to the Canadian Prairies between 1909 and 1911. Black settlers founded such colonies as Breton (Keystone), Maidstone, and Amber Valley (upon which the setting of Aster is based in Esi Edugyan's *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*).

[11] I provide a more detailed reading of the story in the context of a discussion of King's *Green Grass, Running Water* in *The New North American Studies* (78-80).

[12] Clarke's work has been used to reflect on changes in legal procedures. As David Steeves comments in a thesis on law and literature that examines contextual arguments in law, "Clarke's novel . . . is intended to place the Hamiltons' murderous act in both a cultural and historical context. . . . Clarke's contextual approach references a model for adjudication that has recently received judicial consideration" (99). I have discussed some of Clarke's work more fully in related contexts in *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered* (194-205).

[13] Agnant has commented on this situation in an interview with Collette Boucher: "En Haiti, on écrit beaucoup comparativement à la population qui peut lire. . . . Pourtant, c'est un pays où l'écriture se conjugue au masculin. . . . Comparativement au nombre d'hommes qui font ce métier d'écrivain, on dénombre très peu de femmes et lorsqu'elles arrivent à le faire, il y a toutes sortes de moyens mis en place pour qu'elles se taisent; que ce soit par l'entourage ou par les hommes qui écrivent. . . . Haiti est un pays où les femmes assurent la transmission orale, mais où, de manière concrète, très peu d'entre elles arrivent à écrire" (qtd. in Boucher 204; "In Haiti, much is written when compared to the number of people who can read. . . . It is nonetheless a country where writing is a male domain. . . . Compared to the number of men who work as writers there are very few women who manage to work in that profession, all sorts of things are put in their way to silence them, either by their environment or by male writers. . . . Haiti is a country where women take care of the oral transmission but where very few of them succeed in writing").

[14] Hamilton has cited Pierre Nora's notion of "sites of memory" ("lieux de mémoire") as a helpful theoretical framework which "brings together the private, through oral story-telling and family histories, and the public, as found in archival documents" (Hamilton, "Stories" 98).

[15] I am thinking here of Ian Baucom's reference, in *Specters of the Atlantic*, to witnessing as temporal elongation of an event. Bringing people and generations together, Hamilton's filmmaking both facilitates and witnesses itself the act of witnessing. In Baucom's words, it helps "to serialize the event and its affect and also to elongate its temporality to stretch its time along the line of an unfolding series of moments of bearing witness" (177).

[16] See Siemerling, "Transcultural Improvisation."

[17] I have not developed here the important dimension of intertextual routes and spaces; for some reflections in this regard, see Siemerling *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered* (28-30).

[18] Personal communication, 15 September 2014.

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