

**Jeff Derksen**

## **National Literatures in the Shadow of Neoliberalism**

The concept of a national literature is deeply spatial and temporal, and in this position paper, I would like to work at the nexus of these two concepts to propose a possible mode of investigating tendencies, through the example of Canadian literature, within national literatures (or what could be called nation-scale literatures) at this juncture of globalization. A beginning position, then, is to trouble the strain of cultural language of globalization quick in proposing that nation-states and national literatures would dissolve upwards into a global culture - not necessary cohering into a world literature but launching from and circulating through other scales and articulations. This strain is not a simple reflex against theories of the cohesive and unitary nation, but is tied to shifts within the definition and possibility of culture as well as historical changes in the role of nations in this post-euphoric moment of globalization -- a moment distinguished by the ideological software of neoliberalism.

Cultural theory too is tugged through these shifts, taking a “national turn” that focused on “the concepts that produce a people” (Denning 89), leading to a “break between the theme of the national-popular and those of hybridity, flexibility, and the diasporan” (Denning 10). This break in the wake of culture critique (kulturkritik) is intersected by two vectors that cohere from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and globalization theory. First, libratory theories of culture (ranging from a cultural studies emphasis on consumption, a turn to the local as a site of resistance, to the potential of a hybrid global culture) runs parallel to hegemonic theories of culture (often figured at the national-scale); second, the pull of homogenization (either into global culture or into commodity culture) and the push of heterogeneity that would bring the global possibilities of new articulations (from new forms of citizenship and identity to radical displacements of civil society) identify the poles of the globalization vector. This admittedly loose schema catches some of the tensions at play in the possibilities and determinates of culture as they cut across the uneven geography of globalization.

Obviously, actually existing cultural practices and formations exceed this schema, yet out of this theoretical nexus, a commonsense springs, becoming a touchstone within cultural theories of globalization. One is to read both the global “culture of transnational corporations” and the “alternative global culture” through a “relatively ahistorical logic of global cultural flow, produced, commodified, consumed,

hybridized, co-opted, and resisted” (Denning 32-33). This non-situated spaces of flows view, itself a nexus of tendencies from Castell’s critique of Lefebvre to economic global economic utopianism, simultaneously balances on the strength and rush of global processes as it does on the relative weakness of the nation within globalization.

In order to solidify some aspects of this uneven present that theories of culture strive to define and engage with, I use the nation-state as a fulcrum space within the territorial structure of neoliberal globalization rather than an absolute space or as a container that can equally hold and isolate bodies, literatures, and economies. By turning to what critical geographers have identified as the “lost geography” of globalization, I hope to strike the tension of a critical cultural discourse that imagines the nation-state (as a spatial scale and as an apparatus for organizing everyday life) to melt into the flows of globalization against theorists of the state who argue for a powerful retooling of the nation-state within globalization and who, indeed, see the state and forms of governmentality as central to the neoliberal project. The question that emanates from this position is not how have national spaces been eroded and unraveled, but rather where have national spaces reformed and what are the possible politics of these spaces and literatures? This has the advantage, I feel, of not disarticulating the nation-state from either the production of global neoliberal space, nor positioning the nation outside of the processes of globalization. Placing the nation as a central engine of globalization, and as a historical platform of globalization, renders it difficult to hail the nation back as our defense against globalization, either culturally or politically, but it has the advantage of avoiding, as Peter Hitchcock argues, “the mystifications that accompany the juxtapositions of the Nation State and the global economy” (3). It also has the advantage of tracking how new cultural spaces are opened, new publics imagined, and how critical cultural practices address this present moment.

The cultural potential of locating the nation-state as a scale within neoliberalism, and a scale that is (and has been) central to capitalism rather than a poorly fabricated modernist model that is done away with by reflexive globalization, is realized in creative practices that jump into and off of the altered or transformed space of the nation in order to engage with neoliberalism in both its duration and in its decisive or representative moments. On the one hand, this can be characterized by forceful examples of “nationalisms against the neoliberal state”, to paraphrase David Lloyd, and, on the other hand, as the cultural use of nation-scale politics that address

neoliberalism as it is embedded in state actions, urban territories, and as a cultural project the cuts across spatial scales (and arguably becomes a form of global cultural logic). I'll look at several tendencies visible within contemporary Canadian literature: poetics which provide a "global" critique of the cultural and economic logic of neoliberalism while also being embedded into the national scale; a poetics which returns to the refigured discourse of the nation within neoliberalism; and the narrative construction of the city as a global neoliberal space of consumption.

From a shift in postcolonial theory that saw it, "engaging in the process of 'imagining' the nation," and then "embarking on what is seen as a much more sophisticated examination of identity and hybridity" (Szeman 26), to early statements such as Stephen Owens' that "In the contemporary literary world the very possibility of 'national literature' is dissolving rapidly", to Arjun Appadurai's influential command that "We need to think ourselves beyond the nation" (158), to Hardt and Negri's space and nation annihilating Empire, to the cosmopolitics of a global civil society, the nation has been imagined in a manner that sets its legitimacy, space, and validity into question. This view is strikingly at odds with political theories of the nation-state within globalization that see it maintaining a refigured yet key role. From Linda Weis's argument against a "new era of 'state denial' " (epitomized by Kenichi Ohmae's *The End of the Nation State*), to Ellen Meiksins Wood's long view that "'globalization' is characterized less by the decline of the nation state than by the growing contradiction between the global scope of capital and its persistent need for more local and national forms of 'extra-economic' support" (177), to Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell's phase theory of neoliberalism that sees the "roll-back" stage of neoliberalism leading to a "roll-out" stage of neoliberal state forms, to Aihwa Ong's view that neoliberalism both "fragment[s] and extend[s] the space of the nation-state" (7), we have a differentiated discourse available to situate the role of nation-states and cultural practices in the present moment.

Culturally and politically, the possible positions toward the nation in Canadian state theory and cultural criticism are more tangled, complicated by our relationship with the USA and the relative clarity of the national project of culture building. For instance, in contrast to Hardt and Negri, Leo Panitch does not see the nation-state giving way to a stateless globalization or centerless Empire. For Panitch, even a narrative of the shifts in the state function in global capital that takes it "from buffer,

to mediator, to transmission belt ...is perhaps too brittle” (Globalization and the State 21). Instead, he is definitive in posing that “...capitalist globalization is a process which also takes place in, through, and under the aegis of states; it is encoded by them and in important respects even authored by them; and it involves a shift in power relations within states that often means the centralization and concentration of state powers as the necessary condition of and accompaniment to global market discipline” (Globalization and the State 13).

Nor do Canadian literary critics, even as they cast CanLit (and the nation) in a perpetual crisis, predict the demise of the nation-state and the folding up of the tent of Canadian literature, or the flipping of the CanLit downtown condo to an offshore owner. For instance, nation-scale politics can be hailed to resist erosion from the outside, shown in Frank Davey’s call for a politics against “multinational capitalism” through “participating in the arguments of a nation that is being continuously discursively produced and re-produced from political contestation” (24). Or, in a very different political register, the idea of the nation separate from the state can be evoked to stabilize internal restructuring as in Stephen Henighan’s crisis of representation within the nation caused by postcolonialism and globalization. Or, closer to trends of “cultural transnationalism” (Hitchcock) or “critical transnationalism” (Lee), Roy Miki calls for a national pedagogy within globalization that “would not only reveal that globalization is not a movement ‘beyond’ the problems of the nation-state, but a mode of translation in which previous hierarchies undergo reconstruction in their ‘interaction with transnational cultural referents’ “(95). Paul Hjartarson joins this urgency by proposing, “Now, more than ever, cultural critics and theorist need to understand not only culture’s relation to the nation-state or how nation-states are transforming themselves in the global era, but the changing place of national cultures and literatures in those developments” (110). In an alternative politics of nation formation, Daniel Heath Justice argues that, “[t]o dismiss nationhood from analysis, especially when it is the concern of Indigenous peoples themselves, once more silences Native voices and perspectives and reinforces the dominative power of Canadian colonialism” (149). Perhaps because of the persistent troubling of the fictive unity of Canadian identity and of the reflective cohesion of Canadian literature that marks a strain of CanLit criticism and denies Canadian literature an “immutability” (Kamboureli 35), we do not see a fatal anxiety of the global throughout Canlit: the nation is understood as constructed and affective, and

the state as an apparatus cut by both antagonism and possibility. Nonetheless, we do have a language of the “unraveling” of the national narrative (Miki), and of the “persistence of the nation” (Szeman) that hints at the relative separation of the national project from global processes. This hesitation reflects a stage, I believe, in the cultural negotiating of the nation-state in relation to globalization - a hesitation theoretically propelled from a number of positions, yet a hesitation that is pressured by the urgency of the neoliberal project and its imagination of the nation and the state.

### **The Imagination of the Nation and State in Cultural Theories of Globalization**

Given the historical relationship of the nation-state with globalization, the nation is not the most obvious formation to be threatened by global processes. Yet, why has the nation and the nation-state emerged as the weak point within globalization? From a cultural angle, I believe there are three interlocked positions that have downplayed the importance of the nation-state within globalization. Curiously, a time-released Leninism that obliquely agrees on the withering away of the nation (rather than his view of the state being eradicated) within dramatically new or intensified processes of globalization drifts through both cultural views of the nation and free-market utopianism. This perspective, which is perhaps receding at the moment, cohered through an accumulation of theoretical shifts, arising out of tendencies in notions of space and metaphor, a theory of the weak state rather than its adaptive or transformative qualities (see Weis), and the radical openness of poststructuralism “mapped” onto the political terrain of the nation and embedded into identity formation loosened from the determinates of capital.

First, spatially the nation is imaged in two manners that separate it from the production of space globally. Built metaphorically as an *absolute* space that is a pre-existing field or container which holds the national economy and contains national identities, the nation-state is seen as static in its spatiality, vulnerable to spaces above and below it rather than tied into these other scales via spatial practices that cross scales. When Appadurai asserts that “The nation-state relies on its legitimacy on the intensity of its meaningful presence in a continuous body of bounded territory” (Modernity 189) he invokes an absolute space, a space ready to be breached.<sup>1</sup> And, in a related articulation, the nation is also figured as an *abstract* space independent of

the social processes that produce it: social processes are understood to be “happening ‘in’ or ‘across’ an equally given spatial field” (Smith and Katz 74) in absolute space, rather than space and the relationships between spaces being the outcome of social production. This “deadening of space”, as Smith and Katz argue, lends power to metaphors that escape the problem of space: this is played out through metaphors of flows, erosion, dispersal, and a deterritorialization uncoupled from reterritorialization.

Secondly, in a serial shift, the nation-state-state is exempted as an actor within globalization and is generally viewed as the vulnerable point with a false and fragile unity rather than an enduring adaptive structure with a political, economic, and affective function. This radical disarticulation pits globalization *against* the nation-state rather than grasping the historical role of the nation-state within capital accumulation at a global scale. This is first set in motion by imagining the nation as an absolute space: like a modernist architectural module, it can plugged in or lifted out of the structure of globalization. Viewed from scale theory, which embeds the nation-state into sociospatial relations ranging from the body to the globe, “[t]he national scale... represented a platform for globalization that already preceded and produced it” (Smith “Scale Bending” 203). If national economies and state functions are understood as dissolved (rather than extended and altered) by global processes, then the nation-state as a scale necessary to capital is jumped over or replaced by the articulation of new scales rather than a reterritorialization of nation-scale politics. The nation unplugged rather than refigured.

Thirdly, as a space arrested in development and made brittlely static, the nation had a set of textual biases derived from poststructuralism projected onto it. This bias solidified the nation as an apparatus that closed meaning at a national scale, as well as arresting the emergence of contestatory and resistant possibilities from the subnational, the local, the urban, the neighbourhood, and the body. The problem of the fixed nation can then be overcome by pluralization, hybridity, and excess that breaches its ability to lock the chain of signification at the national. Part of a progressive “desire to transgress the codes of Nation” (Hitchcock 14), this tendency can also be read, as Timothy Brennan forcefully argues, as “part of a set of ethical postulates popularized by poststructuralist theory: the striving for ambivalence as a matter of principle the ardent belief that answering a question forecloses it...” (139). While this set of postulates certainly circulate easily in globalization theory, it is also

important to question, as Rey Chow subtly warns, that: “If textually vigilant poststructuralism specializes in foregrounding the alterity that is inherent to, that is an inalienable part of, any act of signification, has it not, by the same token of its insistence on linguistic self-referentiality (or inward-turning), essentialized such alterity (or its process of reinscription) in the form of a final determinant - a lurking reference, no less? (63). Spatially, alterity as a final determinant can lead to a privileging of “deterritorialization” as process disarticulated from “reterritorialization”, and without really taking into account the contestations in the production of space: absolute space is broken apart to release a contained mobility (of meaning, of culture, of identity) into the potential of global flows and hybrid spaces. These spaces can only be figured as spaces of alterity by reducing other spaces to spaces that foreclose potential. That this language of flows so closely parallels the language of trade and of finance, as many commentators point out, creates a troubling nexus of the language of neoliberalism and the qualities that cultural theories of globalization (figured through a non-vigilant poststructuralism) take as a virtue. To jump out of the container of the nation - its lid held down by the oppression of the state or state policies (with the state imagined in a singular way, which cuts so deeply against the ways that we see the state mobilized *against neoliberalism* today) -- into the libratory flows of global potential cannot be the only imagined state of a cultural politics.

These shifts are played out within, as Timothy Brennan argues convincingly, “... theory [that] conjures an abstract state as its enemy - outside space and time...” (20) and “as a monolithic ghost rather than a variable political form” (XIII.) This aligns with a general understanding of the state as a “special repressive force” (Engels quoted in Lenin 18), not predominantly of labouring people, but through the management and repression of identities, the administration of culture, and maintenance of narrowly national interests in the face of global forces of heterogeneity. Caught in absolute space, the nation-state then became a container to escape, or the apparatus to be eroded away by global flows. In another view, “the life of the state”, as Gramsci puts it, can be “...conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria...between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups - equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only to a certain point, ...(quoted in Harvey “Marxian Theory” 277). Gramsci’s “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will” holds hegemony unstable to a

certain degree as it oscillates between coercion and force, mediated by corruption (and can there be a clearer model for post-euphoric globalization!).

Just to be clear in my position-taking, I'm not proposing a uniform benevolent state that should be heralded as localized force field against globalization, but neither am I aligning with the abstract state as enemy, an abstraction that tends not to account for contestation of the state by social actors (and particularly how, at this historical situation, the state is being tilted against neoliberalism in particular conditions in Latin America) nor seeing a state-led model necessarily as a "progressive alternative to globalization" (see Panitch "Globalization and the State"). States function, internally and externally, in a much more complicated and varied manner than this both in terms of their articulation to emergent publics and transnational social actors as well as new forms of surveillance, repression, and interpellation. Viewed as a process with adaptive capacities, the state works through the relations of economic and political power, juggling the conditions of capitalist accumulation and strengthening property rights (key today for the neoliberal state) while also providing a structure for social reproduction. Yet, it can also be a platform from which political claims are made.

What is at stake, aside from the necessary and important position-taking within cultural theory (which is perhaps even more vital at the nation-scale in CanLit debates), is the way that the political is figured in relation to the cultural, and the possible spaces where a public sphere or civil society can materialize. Nancy Fraser has defined the shift in which "it has ceased to be axiomatic that the modern territorial state is the appropriate unit for thinking about issues of justice, and that citizens of such states are the pertinent subjects of reference. The effect is to destabilize the previous power structure of political claims-making - and therefore to change the way we argue about social justice" (71). This shift that Fraser describes is also common to the narrativization of neoliberalism, which plays off of the diminished role of nation in political representation and securing rights while relying on the state to push drastic neoliberal reforms. Yet rescaled notions of rights and citizenship that jump up to the global, or cohere around cosmopolitanism, are not so clearly liberatory. Chantal Mouffe argues against David Held's model of cosmopolitics and of Hardt and Negri's view that "The demise of the sovereignty of the nation-states is perceived as a new stage in the emancipation from the constraints of the state" (Mouffe 108). For Mouffe this is a "post-political" position that does not grasp hegemonic neoliberalism



and rejects the modern concept of sovereignty in order to auger in a supposedly more democratic model not attached to national or regional politics. This politics that tries to annihilate space by pluralism is difficult to imagine and is at odds with actually existing place-based politics - from the politics of water in Bolivia and India, to the struggle for land rights by First Nations in Canada, to neighbourhood formations countering gentrification. In a proposition that opens political possibilities, Neil Smith suggests that today we are in a “period of scale reorganization in which an inherited territorial structure no longer fulfills the functions for which it was built, [and] develops new functions, or is able to adapt to new requirements and opportunities” (201). This series of shifts do not dissolve the nation as one of the possible scales of a public sphere or a civil society, rather it opens the question to how nation-states function within neoliberalism and what the stakes for the nation-state are.

### **Scaling Literatures and Neoliberalism**

If, in the restructuring of the geography of globalizat0n and the spaces of the nation, “[e]ntrenched assumptions about what kinds of social activities fit properly at which scales are being systematically challenged and upset” (Smith 193), as we see in the discussion of rights and citizenship, it is time to ask how the scales of a national literature are actually challenged and upset. To ask such a question does not presume the disappearance of national literatures, nor the recuperation of earlier national-cultural projects. Likewise to return to the question of the nation in the shadow of neoliberalism is not a turn to regressive nationalism (so often posed as the default option for the nation within globalization and a force we see in the USA today), but a question of scale bending in which a politics is bent from its usual scale in order to form a new politics within neoliberalism. Can a national literature adapt to new formations and opportunities and still remain recognizable as a national literature? Is the national a category that can be utilized beyond a distinction within a global commodity culture and beyond its own political borders? Can the critical terrains of transnationalism be imagined as simultaneously national, linking cultural projects into a new or adequate cultural formations without uploading into the ether of cosmopolitanism (and this is a question to be asked of new avant-gardist formations as well)? Can the nation also be turned outward, as a platform of engagement rather than being reflected back onto the nation-state in the continual reimagining of the

cohesive community (pressured from the inside by the restructuring of the state and from the outside by the processes of globalization)? As I've suggested above, in radical formations of democracy that are not "beyond hegemony" (Mouffe) or imagined in a smooth space of globalization, the national is not a scale that can be pulled out of the project of democracy (and it is key to note that democracy, rather than transformation, is the organizing call of anti-globalization politics at the moment).

Throughout this position paper I have been using scale theory in order to propose another spatiality other than the global flows model. While the scale model has the advantage of making space more material in globalization and the restructuring brought by neoliberalism, it also provides the possibility of highlighting discursive practices. Eric Swyngedouw argues that "Scale becomes the arena and moment, both discursively and materially, where sociospatial power relations are contested and compromises are negotiated and regulated" (140), and Sallie Marston proposes scale matters because "scale making is not only a discursive practice; it is also the tangible outcome of practices of everyday life as they articulate with and transform macro-level social structures" (173, *Scale and Geographic Inquiry*). But, scale has the disadvantage of implying a nested set of spaces stable in their relationships, or the reflection of a given hierarchy, and that "local to global conceptual architecture intrinsic to hierarchical scale carries with it presuppositions than can delimit entry points into politics - and the openness of politics - by pre-assigning to it a cordoned register for resistance" (Marston et al 427). I have been using scale in a broader way, I hope, in which "scale is the spatial repository of structured social assumptions about what constitutes normal and abnormal forms of social difference" (Smith 197) and as a way to recognize "spatial difference." Following Smith, I'm proposing that, in the spatial restructuring of neoliberalism, the nation-state has not been overcome, but has been transformed and extends throughout globalization both as engine and as platform. As a result, our expectations of what occurs at what scales has also been bent rather than broken. This restructuring is not isolated to the deterritorializing of globalization, but is linked with the reterritorialization of neoliberalism.

Spatially, neoliberalism is drawn out through two tensions familiar to discussions of national cultures and globalization - the macro-political, which sees neoliberalism as an "economic tsunami" (Ong) or "totalizing economic master narrative" (Roberts, Secor, Sparke) and the "path-driven" (Brenner & Theodore)

emphasizing how neoliberalism from above is adapted to local conditions and practices as it migrates and is picked up by various governmental structures (for instance, the manner in which neoliberalism is becoming policy in Canadian cities). Temporally, neoliberalism gets stretched out from an economic seed in neoclassical economics (Lebowitz, Tabb), springs from a kernel in liberal philosophy of the 17 & 18<sup>th</sup> century (Smith *Endgame*), breaks ground in a brutal legitimization by the “Chicago Boys,” the gangsters of free market economic lead by the unlikely Al Capone of the market, Milton “Hidden Hand” Freedman. David Harvey, in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, chooses Tuesday, September 11, 1973 -- the day of the coup overthrowing Salvador Allende that levered Pinochet in power -- as the date, and Chile as the place, of the first “neoliberal state experiment” (7). Following this forced introduction, Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell describe two strong stages or mutations of neoliberalism: “roll-back neoliberalism” and “roll-out” neoliberalism”. Roll-back neoliberalism of the 1980s sought to retract social programs, social entitlements, and nation-scale regulations to liberate the global market and to unfetter the individual, the nation, and the city for vigorous activity in the market. Roll-out neoliberalism, from the early 1990s, is characterized by government intervention that projects neoliberalism beyond freeing the market to a broader engagement with “new modes of ‘social’ and penal policy-making, concerned specifically with the aggressive reregulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalism of the 1980s” (389). Peck and Tickell associate these changes with neoliberalism’s engagement with both an “external” crisis (blamed on the institutions of welfare state) and with the “internal” contradictions and conditions created by neoliberalism itself. Yet both of these phases point to a contradiction in the neoliberal relationship to the state. As David Harvey points out, this shift from “government” to governance”, creates “the paradox of intense state interventions and government by elites and ‘experts’ in a world where the state is supposed to not be interventionalist” (*Neoliberalism* 69).

If we take this time-line, we see neoliberalism forcefully restructuring a state and entering the world system at a strong moment of the Canadian cultural project and just as official multiculturalism is expanding in the public discourse. This neoliberal unraveling of the discourses of the nation was, however, a strong period of state intervention: the rolling back of the functions and expectations of the state crossed cultural formations of the nation and resulted in moments of national crisis, not in the face of globalization, but of the neoliberalization of the state and of the

social. The flashpoints of this project are moments such as the miner's strike in the UK (reignited recently by Jeremy Deller's video "Orgreave" as part of the artistic impulse of restaging history in what Sven Lutticken calls "planet of the remake") and the Free Trade debate in Canada (part of a grand shift toward a new geography of production and consumption globally).

Given that neoliberalism is generally described as a force of individuation, privatization, and atomization, it can also be seen as a force that scrapes against the cohesive aspects of the project of the nation sprung free from the hyphen of the nation-state. The state seems to hold a knife to the throat of the national project that it (not so long ago) was active in building (and which was vigilantly critiqued by those swept into the culture industry). The necessary critique of the state by Canadian cultural interventions was taking shape just as the state was outsourcing its power to other arenas, doubling back to accommodate the critiques in a neoliberal space of super-individualization that promised both new forms of freedom (for the many) and new forms of repression and violence (for the few, both in the name of the many and in the name of the nation). The Ideologies of free trade, competition, flexible labour, "active individualism", and self-responsibility (Peck and Tickell) are the social imaginary of the terrain of roll-back neoliberalism, and roll-out neoliberalism has added an aggressive dispossession of public goods and common spaces. In Canada, we are at a temporally complicated intersection of these two phases: rolling out belated neoliberal policies after they have proven to break promises of social stability while accelerating internal inequities (Stephen Harper!), yet having cleared space and hollowed out functions in a succession of roll-backs (Mulroney! Chretien!).

David Harvey argues that a curious relationship of the nation and state exists in neoliberalism: "In principle, neoliberal theory does not look with favour on the *nation* even as it supports the idea of a strong state" (*Neoliberalism* 84). In fact, he argues, this curious relationship is necessary to the development of neoliberalism: "The umbilical cord that tied together state and nation under embedded liberalism had to be cut if neoliberalism was to flourish" (84). Looked at as also having a cultural project alongside its financial heart, neoliberalism does not so much erode the nation and state, but seeks to transform the relationship of citizens to the nation and the state, and through this, alter the relationship of citizen to citizen (now, individual to individual Here is where a dramatic contradiction arises -- taking place in a complex national temporality -- between the state in neoliberalism and the former project of

nation building. The neoliberal state, and its actions, are at odds with the type of community formation (imagined or otherwise) that would bring a nation into modernity or solidify its position in the world system. Yet a key ethos of neoliberalism is to disrupt forms of social collectivity *not based on* finance (unions withered away, anonymous mutual funds increasing rapidly). Harvey duly notes that “A contradiction arises between a seductive but alienation possessive individualism on the one hand and the desire for a meaningful collective life on the other” (*Neoliberalism* 69). This reveals a cultural project (massive, perhaps, as the previous national-cultural program) where national-subjects are asked to reimagine themselves along the matrix of neoliberal values and common sense: property rights trump human rights, state programs interfere with daily life rather than ameliorate conditions; forms of collectivity are repressive; competition between spaces and places characterize the world; and in general that one must live one’s life through negotiating the market rather than negotiating or contesting the state. Althusser’s policeman, who hails a subject in the name of the state, is replaced by the stock market or a hedge fund, calling sweetly with a state-subsidized whistle. Yet this reimagining does not do away with national difference (or nationalism), as we know, which is figured, on the one hand, as a value-added aspect in the global market (Zizek), and on the other hand, mobilized in hardened national identities played out in the race and class politics of borders and migrant labour. New flows hit new forms of hardened borders, surveillance technology, and the liminal spaces of the exception of law. A very small percentage of free-floating neoliberal global subjects above the nation are actually sprung free - Lear Jet cannot make private planes fast enough for the demand.

By proposing that there is a neoliberal cultural politics that is both an extension of earlier nation-based cultural projects and a radical refiguring of it, a number of speculative questions arise. At what scale is this project located - is it the reshaping of the earlier homogenizing threat of a global culture? What role does the state play in this project, particularly given that the state organizations that were the infrastructure for national culture have been weakened during the roll-back period? Are national literatures drawn up into the neoliberal project, or are they platforms of resistance to it? Does a national literature sway to the state or the nation? And does the narrative of *CanLit* alter when it is read alongside neoliberalism? *Stanley Park*, Timothy Taylor’s popular novel set in Vancouver, illustrates the complex tension of the

national and neoliberalism as it migrates to other scales. But this novel unplugs the nation as a scale in order to foreground the global and the urban to develop a rich neoliberal urban landscape of consumption, taste cultures, and competing forms of gentrification.

One part of my reaction to *Stanley Park* is affective, as I have lived and worked in the areas of the city that are represented, yet within that exists the challenge to read this novel as an example of the tendencies of neoliberalism as they hit urban territories and transform them. But the novel is intricate in the way that it folds localism into the global-urban nexus - this is made even more complex the way that its reception has strengthened its representational power of the city of Vancouver and of Canadian urban space. This reception, through the One Book, One Vancouver contest, which *Stanley Park* won in 2003, is at such odds with the narrow view of the city that the book actually builds, that it (both in its image of the city and in its reception) is constructive of the city, aligning with the generalization of gentrification and “urban regeneration” as a neoliberal project (see Smith and Derksen 2002). One Book, One Community contests emanate from the USA and have been picked up by Vancouver, Cambridge/Kitchener/Waterloo, and Ontario First Nations: the Vancouver version, through the Vancouver Public Library, defines itself as “a book club for the entire city, cultivating a culture of reading and discussion in Vancouver by bringing people together around one great book” (VPL Press release). Yet, *Stanley Park* itself is remarkable in the manner in which it flattens the antagonisms and contradictions of global-urban space, as well as the narrow range of racial, ethnic, class, and cultural positions it throws into the urban mix. In Mouffe’s terms, this is a “post-political” urban territory. Specifically, the novel builds a narrative of a chef devoted to local cuisine and his struggle to open and maintain his own restaurant without being bankrolled by a soulless global coffee-shop entrepreneur who has designs to blandly globalize the bistro and to use it as an anchor in his restaurant empire and in the gentrification of the Cambie and Hastings area, the border between the city centre and the most contested neighbourhood in Vancouver, the Downtown East Side. The struggle in the novel plays out as a struggle over soft local gentrification (chef Jeremy and his local restaurant plans) and hard global gentrification (Dante’s homogenous and inauthentic global empire). The landscape of gentrification that the novel builds is based on strong representations of urban frontiers (see Smith 1996) that are settled by

hip urban pioneers - devotees of the Hundred Mile Diet, secret restaurant club members, and “foodies” - and shaped into new consumptive landscapes.

What is remarkable for a novel that has such strong claims on representing Vancouver within the global-urban nexus is that there is no opposition to gentrification itself in the novel even though the fictive bistro is situated just a few blocks from the former Woodward's building, a flashpoint for gentrification in the city, and the site of a major squatting action. My point is not that the novel fails the test of realist representation, but rather that it presents gentrification as a naturalized and inevitable process *at the moment* when gentrification is both being hotly contested and as it moves into a critical public discourse. Far from being a process of urban regeneration, gentrification is central to the neoliberal program for cities globally: it ties together the role of the state in opening national city spaces and asserts property rights over collective or community claims of ownership. In this light, *Stanley Park* is a complex smoothing out of the politics of urban processes in neoliberal globalization: it reflects an idealized neoliberal urban landscape back onto a city that is still in transition, and a city where political claims *against* neoliberalism take shape in the public debates about social housing and homelessness.<sup>2</sup> Importantly these claims are made to various levels of government as all three - the city, the province, and the federal government - are involved in shaping urban policies. In the post-political cosmopolitan landscape of *Stanley Park* these are absent, lifted out of the imagined community. On the one hand, I'm hesitant to reduce the novel down to a mere symptom (borrowing this term from Jameson) of neoliberalism, but on the other hand the striking parallels of a generalized neoliberal policy of gentrification that migrates globally and is picked up and adapted to local conditions is uncritically reflective of the intensely political ways in which the local is figured in neoliberalism, as well, of the ways in which a class makeover of the city characteristic of gentrification draws on a generalized culture embedded into the local. In *Stanley Park* the capability of the local to resist, deflect and alter the global (key for early formations of culture in globalization) is intimately absorbed. Through an affective relation (for we have to be vigilant not to elevate affect to a default form of resistance to globalization or neoliberalism) with the local, developed through an extended metaphor of the local as “bounty” and food, the local has its more resistant aspects buffed off - it returns as connoisseurship and taste cultures, as a value-added aspect of the global-urban experience. This subtle grasping of the local as a powerful *particular* used within a

global project is also a defining aspect of how culture has moved to a central position within the remaking of cities and also marks a shift in the *uses* of culture, as others have noted, from a reflective and constructive national project to a commodity-based relationship (see Fuller and Redo). Yet, viewed in the spatial relations that I have suggested above, this shift from *national* to *commodity* does not bypass other scales or eclipse the national entirely: there is a complex oscillation that moves a commodity culture across the spatial scales (rather than the local and the national being the particular that resists global commodity culture). Crucially, in a counter move, other critical uses of culture and creative practices spring up. Culture as a process is not boiled down to these abstractions of gleaming commodity or clear reflection of existing social and economic relations: even more so now culture is a flash point in the long neoliberal moment, a moment that arrives and develops with varied temporalities. *Stanley Park* is therefore an important book, not a mere symptom, for it makes a compelling and affective argument for a neoliberal city, a global dream city.

In contrast, several long poem sequences also jump into the contestations of the global-urban nexus and engage with neoliberalism as both an ideological software that provides the interface between spaces and places and as a growing common sense to be derailed from its logic by counter-arguments and other articulations of the global, national, local, and urban. Roger Farr's sonnet sequence from *Surplus* ranges from a philosophical investigation of the roots and logics of neoliberalism to the emergent and historical forms of resistance. It is a sequence that has a very active spatial politics, addressing positions, histories, and moments across the spatial scales. This spatiality, I think, is able to engage with the extension and fragmentation of the nation-state that I've suggested is characteristic of the neoliberal restructuring of spatial difference. Like Dionne Brand's *Inventory*, a poetics of witness processes an array of neoliberal causes and global effects - materializing the varied temporalities of roll-out neoliberalism. While Farr's work is less an affective forging of cause and effect that the global (and localized media) will not make, this sequence works off of formal disjuncture and semantic conjunction. There is no ironic distancing in the disjuncture: the "flows" that Farr tracks are more links across the uneven geography of globalization and the place-specific resistances of neoliberalism. This place is both material and localized, as well as rooted in the counter-philosophies to market logic and neoliberalism (taking in the Italian autonomists, Marxist economic analysis, and



new social movements). For instance, Sonnet III acts as a sort of phatic agit-prop address, a hailing of citizens across this uneven terrain:

Hello Citizens, here is your room.  
Here is an SGE 400 and  
Here are your demands.  
Here are some traditional actors.  
Here is a transitional stage.  
Here is a letter from West Papua it says “just leave us alone.”  
Here is a donation to the Free Jeff Luers Fund.  
Hello, are you still there?  
Here is the widening gap.  
Here is an expert to explain how it widens.  
Here is a camera, do you see how it is pointed?  
Here is a sentence in lieu of a slogan.  
Here is the story making the headlines tonight.  
Hello Citizens! Hello? Hello? (11)

I say phatic agit-prop because the closing line tests the phatic function of the poem, checking to see if the connection is made, if the various conjunctures can cohere into an address made to a citizen vigilant enough to hear them: the historical avant-gardist tendency of “awakening” the political here, I think, is drawn across the terrain of the anti-globalization movement and across a number of other struggles - environmental, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist. A large claim for 14 lines, but the specific nature of the references and the semantic density of the poem leads to this. The two specific references to political action - “Here is a letter from West Papua it says ‘just leave us alone.’ / Here is a donation to the Free Jeff Luers Fund” - are drawn from such actions. The quoted assertion “just leave us alone” is the final demand from the Free Papua Movement (OPM), their statement begins: “We are not terrorists! / We do not want modern life! / We refuse any kinds of development: religious groups, aid agencies, and governmental organization....”. The website of the OPM gives the historical and political reasons for the OPM’s fight for self-determination and their refusal of development from above - currently West Papua is invaded by Indonesian troops with U.N. and U.S supervision. From that anti-colonial or anti-

imperialist context, Farr's next line brings a more "local" political engagement in relation: Jeff Leurs is an environmental activist who was sentenced to 22 years in prison for torching three SUVs in a Chevrolet dealership in Oregon. The complex linking that Farr sets up - joining very different contestations of dispossession and forms of resistance in the poem -- is also tied to the virtual communities that are made through the websites devoted to these eruptions of political moments.<sup>3</sup> This potentially global linking of struggles - the accumulation or inventory of a politics of resistance - complicates that address to the citizen. At what scale does that citizen reside? Is it the citizen of a global movement who is nonetheless place-specific - which would articulate an imagined community based not on identity but on a shared political position in relation to imperialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism?

The spatial politics, and the enjambment of politics across a global terrain, is sharpened by several other semantic levels in the poem. The combination of "Here are some traditional actors. / Here is a transitional stage," pushes toward a questioning of how historical formations of resistance and social transformation might take shape. The combination of "traditional actors" with "transitional stage" point toward the debate of emergent social actors and sites of resistance in relation to the "traditional" actors, in this case setting up a relationship of class as the engine of transformation to environmental and indigenous resistance. Here, I think Farr's sonnet reflects the shift in a politics of transformation from a temporal one (when are the conditions "ripe", to the spontaneous position) to a spatial one (where will it cohere, at what scales can action and transformation take place?) in response to the restructuring of politics globally. In terms of Smith's "scale reorganization", Farr's sonnet raises a question of how new social actors and political movements produce new spatial arrangements and bend the scales of place-based politics. This discursively counters the inevitability of a neoliberal restructuring of the social and political economy. The Citizen addressed in the poem has already been issued an SGE 400 (a lightweight Techno-Pro gasmask), a set of demands, a camera, and a "sentence in lieu of a slogan". "The widening gap" (presumably of rich and poor, as the "expert" will explain) has been designated and the connection checked: "Hello Citizen! Hello? Hello?"

I've isolated one poem from the book and the sonnet series to examine, but Farr's project itself is not isolated, rather it is tied into a growing body of poetry in North America that is critically and intensively engaged with the politics and

restructuring brought by neoliberalism. As I've suggested, this engagement is spatially complex, neither eroding nor unplugging the nation from a hierarchical spatial scale, but also articulating the effects and discourse of neoliberalism from its global heights to its impact on bodies, identities, and possible social formations on the ground. A short list of these works would include Rita Wong, Louis Cabri, Rachel Zolf, Roy Miki, Bud Osborn, Dorothy Lusk, Clint Burnham. Nancy Shaw and Catriona Strang, Dan Farrell, Larissa Lai, George Stanley, Mark Nakada, Stephen Collis, Stephen Cain, Adeena Karasick, Reg Johanssen, and, in particular Kevin Davies' highly influential book *Comp*.<sup>4</sup> I've limited this cursory list to Canadian writers, but they cannot be isolated from other North American writers nor from the translation projects that are bringing this work into Italian, French, and German. I realize too that the work of many of these writers may not be known by TransCanadas participants, that even the national political economies of publication, distribution, and reviewing are not as seamless as global flows would have us hope for. From my position as a writer and editor, the "post-national" moment of poetry and poetics in North America is a dynamic regeneration of a political project that encompasses aspects of a poetics of witness (exemplified in Canada by Pat Lowther), media critique, vigilant poststructuralism and the politics of poetic form, transnational (rather than cosmopolitan) avant-gardism, and the transnationalism of what Barbara Harlow called "new geographies of struggle." Because this formation of writers, or of this critical tendency within poetics, is itself both spread across the spatial scales - being urban, local, national, and global in many senses - it has a friction with critical tendencies that would define a national literature as a literature within the absolute space of the nation.

Yet, as I've been leading to, the Canadian writers that I have listed are engaged with a national project, working with a spatially dynamic sense of the national within neoliberalism, working through the fragmentations and extensions of the nation and the state sprung by neoliberalism and globalization. The national is not by any means the dominant scale in many of these works, but neither is it a "lost geography" made vaporous by deterritorialization. In particular, Stephen Cain's *American Standard / Canada Dry* re-engages with the left cultural nationalist project within Canadian literature, but through the intensification of the commodification of culture and history, and through the torqueing of nationalist history by the time line of neoliberalism - its progressions, coherences, and moments. Likewise, a tracking of

Dionne Brand's *Inventory* illustrates a highly varied geography, dense with information not easily excavated from the mass media, but more available through alternative networks. As an affective anchor, the body figures centrally in Brand's geopolitical landscape, but I would also argue that the nation is integral to the position-takings in this long poem. As Diana Brydon notes, Brand's work "has never been simply nation-based" (3), but it does not turn away from the place and function of the nation in neoliberalism, particularly the place of the United States in the return to the dispossession or smashing of national common goods (Iraq's oil, and Iraqi archives and museums being the most egregious examples). In this manner, it is far from the centerless empire of Hardt and Negri where imperialism is a stage relegated to bad history, and far from antagonism-free global space. As I'm pointing out, these poetic texts take the nation in both its particularities (the focus on Canada by Cain and others) as well as general (the nation as a scale within the processes of globalization). In this way, they can be thought perhaps as nation-scale literatures - with an acknowledgement that scales "operate by way of networks that are 'deeply localized' as well as being extensive in their reach" (Marston et al regarding Swyngedouw 418).

Embedding the nation-state, and the nation as scale, as a necessary and productive agent of the neoliberal restructuring of the geography of globalization allows a deeper historical grasp on the present: it counters the presentism of neoliberalism's claims of the end of history, of the end of geography. The post-euphoric terrain of globalization, the market utopia of the very few versus the rising dystopia the "widening gap" that we don't need an expert to explain marks neoliberalism. Neoliberalism promises modernization without modernity for the developing world, and a "level playing field" for those trying to hold onto or gain position: in this landscape of competition, nations and nationalism are neither lost nor merely regressive - they are central. It is therefore hard to speculate on the simple erosion of national literatures. The dynamic question is how have national literatures been restructured and what roles can they be pulled into or mobilized for. This sounds drastically instrumentalist, but the tendency to agree on the demise of the nation-state and of national literatures is also densely instrumental. At a moment when the expectations of where social activities, forms of governance, civil societies, cultural formations and new social actors cohere and take place is open for scrutiny, no scale or place can be excluded.

## Footnotes

1)

In *Fear of Small Numbers* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005) Appadurai writes: "Although many debates surround the extent to which globalization has eroded the contours of the system of nation-states, no serious analyst of the global economy over the past three decades would deny that whatever many have been the initial fictions and contradictions of the nation-state, these have been brought into sharper view through the deeper integration of world markets and the extensive spread of ideologies of marketization worldwide, especially after 1989" (21). He follows up with this statement: "The virtually complete lose of even the fiction of a national economy... leaves the cultural field as the main one in which fantasies of purity, authenticity, orders, and security can be enacted" (23). National economies are much more flexible than this, but if they are conceived of as being held in the container of the nation-state, then they appear brittle. A quick look at the politics of something that is both cultural and economic - corn -- will show that even a "fictive" national economy has real effects. The combination of the US national policy of increasing the amount of corn-produced ethanol in gasoline (announced by Bush in a State of the Union address), tied to the government subsidies to American corn farmers has created "the worst tortilla crisis in its modern history," in Mexico. The Washington Post goes on to report that "Dramatically rising international corn prices, spurred by demand for the grain-based fuel ethanol, have led to expensive tortillas", and prices tripled or quadrupled in six months and "urban food riots" ensued (Washington Post, The Independent). Within its own national economy Mexico has tried to put a price cap on tortilla. This exemplar moment of global connectivity does not scrub away national economies, showing them as fictive figments of a national imagination, but rather shows the fiction of neoliberal policies of an even playing field and of free trade. Only by radically reducing a national economy to a brittle process contained within an absolute space can it be declared a fiction - and to do so then leaves us with no mode of address for the very real economic and cultural transformation of neoliberalism.

One other point here: once the economic has been delinked and diminished, culture is held up as the field at which the state wields its monopoly of oppression. Yet, this move to elevate culture to step into the space abandoned by the erosion of a national economy with any effect again elides the actions of real social actors who see national-scale politics aimed at economic justice. What is actually striking in the calls for economic justice and social transformation in Latin America at the moment is the lack of the cultural. Venezuela, to use it as an example, is only now turning to the cultural aspects of what it calls "the Bolivarian revolution". Unlike Canada, the it has only in the last two years created a national museums foundation and begun to institute a form of CanCon (Ven Con?) that assures that Venezuelan music is played on the radio. In contrast, the state project of countering the national effects of overlapping neocolonialism and neoliberalism has been largely *economic* aiming first at the transformation of the national economy and then stretching out to form regional trade pacts and global alliances. Here, the cultural is belated and was not even particularly mobilized for the earlier educational, health, democratic, and property rights reforms.

2)

So smoothed over are the contradictions of the city, particularly in its representation of homelessness, that the Vancouver Public Library sponsored a “Sleepover Stanley Park Trivia Contest” that asked “Have you ever wondered what it might be like to spend an evening in Stanley Park?” . To enter, contestants had to read *Stanley Park* and answer ten trivia questions based on the novel. Successful contestants would sleep over in Stanley Park (as the homeless characters in the novel do): “Winners and their guests will be treated to an overnight adventure in Stanley Park...complete with horse-drawn carriage ride through the trees, a sumptuous candlelight dinner at Prospect Point, a lantern-lit forest walk, music and storytelling by the campfire with Vancouver artists, and a refreshing breakfast” (VPL press release). The summer population of homeless people in the park ranges between 300 and 500, although the number is hard to verify as no real census can be taken.

3)

For more information on Jeff Luers see: <http://www.myspace.com/freefreenow>. For information on the OPM, check out [www.eco-action.org/ssp/westpapua.html](http://www.eco-action.org/ssp/westpapua.html).

4)

For work specifically addressing neoliberalism by some of these authors, see *West Coast Line* 51 (2006), “Poetry and the Long Neoliberal Moment”, ed. Jeff Derksen. Also, in the introduction, I initiate some of the ideas I elaborate in this essay.

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