STUDIES

"my body of bliss": Judith Copithorne's Concrete Poetry in the 1960s and 1970s

by Eric Schmaltz

Reflecting on her role in Vancouver during the 1960s, Pauline Butling examines the "sexist" and "subordinating structures" that she found concealed within the hierarchies of her literary communities (141). Indeed, Warren Tallman's essay "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver during the 1960's" (1974) inadvertently confirms this problem in its laudatory criticism of Vancouver during that period by misleading readers to believe the writing scene was largely composed of competing masculine personalities. Tallman's essay mentions only six Vancouver-based women poets in his account.[1] One ramification of such criticism has been the displacement of key contributions by women to the development of non-lyrical poetry in Canada. This is especially true for Canadian concrete poetry, an area in which numerous women poets have been eclipsed by their male counterparts as the practice grew outward from Vancouver to be embedded within national and international literary networks. Instead, male poets like bpNichol, bill bissett, and Steve McCaffery have been celebrated for their "Poetically self-conscious, theoretically sophisticated, but unorthodox" concrete poetry (Drucker 128), which is largely created by the détournement of typewriters and copy machines. Their work, however, is not representative of those concrete poets whose identities do not conform to the white masculinity that largely occupies the critical discourse. As such, crucial discussions regarding other bodies—especially non-male bodies—and their intersection with concrete poetry and writing machines are necessary additions to the existing discourse.

This article is prompted by the problems posed by the displacement of women from concrete poetry in the 1960s and 1970s, and examines how the work of one woman concrete poet in particular—Judith Copithorne—

navigates the complex intersection of concrete poem, body, and writing machine in ways that bissett and Nichol, but especially McCaffery do not. To initiate this conversation—which I hope will continue beyond these few pages—I turn to the early concrete poetry of Copithorne whose hand-drawn concrete poems strongly figure into this context, and uniquely contrasts the technologically-driven concrete poetry produced by her male counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s. Copithorne's work is a compelling challenge to the threat of bodily effacement posed by mechanical writing technologies at the dawn of the computing age. To execute such analysis, this article proceeds in four phases, beginning with a necessary examination of the context from which Copithorne's work emerges and the dominant machine-based concrete poetics of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, I theorize Copithorne's poetic as an anticipation of N. Katherine Hayles' discussions of virtuality and the computing age to problems of bodily effacement as well as Barbara Godard's theory of *texte de femme*. Once situated, I examine the significance of Copithorne's methodology with especial attention to how her unique hand-drawn methods intersect with issues of embodiment posed by analog writing technologies at the dawn of the computing age. From there, I will look at several concrete poems by Copithorne which serve as exemplary samples of her work before I conclude.[2]

Concrete Poetry and the Computing Age

In *Designed Words for a Designed World* (2015), Jamie Hilder describes concrete poetry as a practice concerned with "how computers have affected our relationship to information" (*Designed Words* 3). While Hilder's study mainly focuses on global concretism, his definition is applicable to the proliferation of concrete poetics in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s. The role technology played in the development of art and culture was a crucial topic of investigation for a coterie of Canadian artists and poets who were deeply influenced by Marshall McLuhan's theories of media and its impacts on physical and psychic human life.[3] Criticism of concrete poetry from the 1960s and 1970s is largely characterized by materialist and media-based analyses with an emphasis on the role of the typewriter—an information machine that, like the computer, radically affected the Western notions of expression and communication. Lori Emerson confirms this when she describes the era as a period of "*activist* media poetics" (87), and situates poets such as

Nichol and McCaffery as proto-hackers who were "hacking reading/ writing interfaces" (87) such as the typewriter. Referring to this aesthetic as "dirty concrete" (signalling a difference from cleanly designed and minimalist concrete poetry), poets such as Nichol, McCaffery, and bissett are seen as forerunners of Canada's concrete movement, and have been celebrated for pushing their media beyond their functional limits as a response to the dawn of the computing age. Positioning concrete poetry as a mode of composition in direct relationship to machines does not necessarily mean that all concrete poetry is composed with machines as illustrated by my examination of Copithorne's hand-drawn poetry below. Rather, this definition characterizes concrete poetry as having a distinct relationship to writing machines regardless of whether they explore or actively swerve away from machine-based modes of writing.

Emerson's and Hilder's descriptions of concrete poetry—especially typewriter-based concrete poetry—as a practice concerned with the conditions of the computing age open important questions regarding writing machines and embodiment. McCaffery's celebrated text *Carnival*—specifically, *the second panel, 1970-75*—clearly exemplifies what Emerson describes as a form of proto-media hacktivism, and directly intersects with the bodily issues this paper highlights. Though McCaffery is certainly not the only Canadian concrete poet, his work— especially *Carnival*—is representative of Canadian concrete at the international level. The poem is multi-directional, coloured with both black and red typewriter tapes and the additional employment of rubber-stamps, xerography, hand-lettering, and stencils to create a large-scale, chaotic page-based environment. Adding to this disorder is the frequent use of textual-overlay and abstract shapes, usually created from repetition of letters and words in a single area and fragmented lettering. Emerson describes McCaffery's writing as a "means for his attempts to achieve a calculated annihilation of semantic meaning" (114). Indeed, the work itself must be annihilated for, as the reader is instructed, one must destroy the book—removing the pages from the codex and arranging these panels in a predetermined order—to read it. In so doing, McCaffery rejects the typewriter's propensity toward the standardization of language.

Of the many critiques of McCaffery's *Carnival*, perhaps one of the most compelling is Andy Weaver's reading in his "'the white experience between the words': Thoughts on Steve McCaffery's *Carnival, the second panel: 1970-75*." Weaver's reading of *the second panel* recognizes the problem of white-male privilege inherent to the text. In his

Introduction, McCaffery suggests that one can enter the text using one of many definitions of the word, "CARNIVAL" which in this case comes "from Med. L. carnelevale, a putting away of the flesh and hence a prelental language game" (n. pag.). This becomes problematic for Weaver because, as he notes, McCaffery's text is a call for "moving past the physical body, towards an ideal relationship between mind and language" (Weaver 135). The validity of McCaffery's poetry as a political project becomes problematized since this negation of the body ignores the conditions that deny other bodies—visible minorities, disabilities, queer bodies etc.—the luxury of leaving their material body behind. These bodies are restrained by the social conditions and stigmas against their bodies that the systems of the material world have produced. *Carnival, the second panel* thereby ignores "the socio-political and economic differences that cause real strife in the world, an oversight that leaves the text dealing with ethereal problems at the expense of offering any thoughts on practical matters" (Weaver 136).[4] It is important to recall here the claim made by Butling that opens this paper and her recognition that women poets of the period were faced with sexism and subordinated to a gendered hierarchy of community organization.

McCaffery's disregard for the body is problematic for a variety of reasons related to social politics; however, *the second panel* also perpetuates precisely the issues raised by Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999), where she examines the rise of cybernetics, virtuality, and dis/embodiment. Identifying 1950 as the beginning of the computer age, Hayles argues that this point is marked by "the erasure of em-bodiment" wherein "'intelligence' becomes a property of the formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human life-world" (xi). McCaffery's call for the "putting away of the flesh" (*Second Panel* n. pag.) echoes the rhetoric of the mid-twentieth century cyberneticians, cited by Hayles, who have also understood "information as a kind of bodiless fluid that could flow between different substrates with-out loss of meaning or form" (xi). *Carnival, the second panel*, may pose a resistance to the corporatization of language, but it problematically suggests that the material body and mind can be separated, using the typewriter as a mechanism that prompts this schism.

As Hayles suggests, the denigration of the somatic register poses significant problems. Emphasis on virtuality and a belief in information as a "bodiless fluid" (xi) runs the risk of oversimplifying material processes thus ignoring the world as it actually is: a complex network of

signifying bodies, materials, and affects. This is especially problematic for women poets in Vancouver who were beginning their practice in the 1960s, amid a literary culture that was largely dominated by male personalities who could afford to ignore their body because it permits them to move through literary communities with ease.[5] So, while McCaffery urged his audience to disregard the somatic register, it is precisely because of the somatic that Copithorne's work has been regretfully marginalized.

In fact, Copithorne was well aware of her marginalized position within the literary community as a woman-identified concrete poet. Paraphrasing a conversation she has with Copithorne, Emerson writes on her blog: "back in those days, dirty concrete was considered pretty 'out there' and women were already having a hard-enough time getting noticed for less 'out there' work" ("Women Dirty Concrete Poets" Emerson). Further articulating an acute sense of her own dislocation, Copithorne writes to Gary Barwin, "there seemed to be a quite strong feeling at that time here in Vancouver that to do anything that might represent [what] might seem to be disordered was at least a foolish thing to do and perhaps crazy or at least not 'proper' and perhaps even 'bad'" (Barwin n. pag.). Significantly, Copithorne's poetry does not explore the limits of writing machinery; rather, Copithorne's work explores the possibilities of a concrete poetic created through different movements of the hand, frequently referring to her work as "poem-drawings." I suggest that as much as McCaffery's *Carnival* intervenes into the machinations of the typewriter, Copithorne's work is a calculated reaction to the typewriter as a mechanical mediator between body and language. In part, it is this difference—as well as being a woman—that has displaced Copithorne from narratives and theorizations of Canadian concrete poetry. In this way, Copithorne's early work of the 1960s and 1970s is doubly "out there": her poetry circulates within a niche of non-lyrical poetic culture and does not correspond to the dominant, machine-based mode of that particular culture. That being said, it is this displacement and difference that makes Copithorne's work particularly important for the discourse of Canadian concrete poetics.

Copithorne's early concrete poetry anticipates key aspects of feminist thinking in literary studies that would be influential for her generation of writers. Specifically, Copithorne's poetry anticipates Barbara Godard's theory of transgression and women's writing, articulated in her essay "Excentriques, Ex-centric, Avant-Garde: Women and Modernism in the Literatures of Canada" (1984). Building on the work of the French feminist Hélène Cixous, Godard describes what she calls "texte de

femme" which is writing that is "diffuse[d], disorder[ed], circular, multiple, unpredictable, unstructured and uncensored" ("Ex-Centrique" 64). This kind of women's writing, occupies a "de-centred position [that] allows, indeed ensures, that their gestures, language and writing will be ex-centrique, ex-perimental" (58). Copithorne cultivates a textual disorder and externality with her poetry wherein language and imagery oscillate between sense and nonsense, signal and noise. For example, in the first visual poem from her 1970 collection *Runes,* there are short phrases such as "Peace – Love – Good Health – May the War End and until it does I love you" (n. pag). Scattered among phrases like these are asemic explosions of lines, dots, and patches of crosshatching. Adding to this sense of dislocation, these poems do not read from left to right, top to bottom; Copithorne's poetry defies conventional Western reading practices. Instead, her language rhizomatically moves among these abstract textures and structures. Copithorne's texts occupy a de-centred location in an extreme way—located on the outside of not only mainstream poetry but also on the fringe of a male-dominated, experimental literary community. It is precisely the ways that her work diverges from the dominant machine-based concrete poetic that makes her work particularly important: her concrete poetry addresses the threat of bodily effacement and the rising prominence of communication as a "bodiless fluid" (Hayles xi) posed by the mechanization of the computing age. Copithorne develops a concrete poetic grounded in the fluidity of the body, highlighting its mobility, limits, desires, and affects; it is an embodied poetic that turns the reader's attention back to the body to criticize patriarchal dominance and the dehumanizing machinery that characterizes the poetry of the time.

Gender and Machines

In the 1960s, Copithorne developed a strong voice in her artistic and literary community. In an interview with Lorna Brown, Carole Itter describes Copithorne as one of the "astounding young women" of Vancouver's scene, "who insisted that their statements be heard, and that they could be artists" (Itter n. pag.). Indeed, active in the media of poetry and dance, Copithorne's work stretched across local and national literary networks. Copithorne was an active member of Intermedia Society, an artist-driven collective dedicated to exploratory art forms located in the downtown. She also frequented events at Vancouver's other main artistic

hubs including Kaye's Books on Robson Street, Little Heidelberg Coffee House, the Sound Gallery, and Motion Studio (Copithorne "Introduction" 55). She was also a contributor to internationally-distributed poetry periodicals including *blewointment, Ganglia,* and *grOnk* wherein her concrete poetry prominently featured. She has over 40 publications including books, chapbooks, pamphlets, and broadsides with a variety of publishers including blewointment, grOnk, Oberon, Very Stone House, Intermedia Press, Curvd H&z, and Coach House; she has self-published under the moniker Returning Press. She has been featured in numerous anthologies of concrete poetry including *The Cosmic Chef* (1970), *Four Parts Sand* (1972), and *New Directions in Canadian Writing* (1971). Her concrete poetry far exceeds the page, and has been featured in several notable exhibitions including the *Concrete Poetry Festival* at the University of British of Columbia (28 March-19 April 1969) as well as *Microprosophus: International Exhibition of Visual Poetry* at Avelles Gallery in Vancouver (9-28 September 1971). All of this activity permitted Copithorne to see Vancouver as a place where "Many things seemed possible" ("Introduction" 54) but she admits, despite her seeming inclusion within the local and national literary networks, that "It was not easy for Vancouver women poets in the early 1960s" ("Introduction" 58).

Of the poets published in anthologies and featured in exhibitions, Copithorne is likely the first poet to experiment with the intermixture of image and text, preceding many of her peers who actively and consciously explored concrete poetry. A 1964 issue (2.3) of *blewointment* features the first full intermixture of text and image, produced by Copithorne, in what will become her, then, signature hand-drawn style (see Appendix A).[6] These poems were published only a month after visual artist Pierre Coupey's dry-transfer lettering suite "The Alphabet of Blood" in a June 1964 issue of *Delta* (#19).[7] In contrast, Copithorne's suite of concrete poems is hand-drawn with thin line-work. The first, of three images, depicts the body of a nude woman with flaming hands, and with text integrated into the lower-half of the graphic:

> This was
> drawn
> last year
> yet until I dreamed of it
> this afternoon when
> I laid with

you in the sun

I never knew what I had done! (Copithorne "untitled" n. pag.)

The intermixture of text and image in this poem is reflective of Copithorne's understated impact on the magazine's concrete aesthetic. From 1964 onward, *blewointment* features an increasing amount of work situated at the intersection of visual art and poetry. It is important to note too, that Copithorne's experiments with text and image precede bissett's own extensive poetic experimentalism that comes to define his career. It was not until 1966 that, as Tallman recounts, bissett finds his own poetic voice and "moves into word-mergings, soundings, [and] chantings" (66). Prior to 1966, bissett mainly painted and wrote lyric poems that experimented with the deconstruction of narrative, not yet fully embracing his unique orthography. By 1964, Copithorne was exploring her own word-mergings, foregrounding the importance of the body and materiality to Canadian visual concrete. Copithorne's poem here is also prophetic in terms of concrete poetry's complex emergence in Canada. Like the perplexing chronology stated by the speaker, the poem "was / drawn / last year" but only realized later when the speaker "dreamed of it" (Copithorne "untitled" n.pag.).[8]

Copithorne's privileging of less mechanical writing media is significant for a variety of reasons. First, it becomes a way of folding both of Copithorne's artistic modes: poetry and dance. The latter of the two is a fully embodied art, founded on principles of kinesis and proprioception. Second, it offers an expansion of Canadian concrete poetry discourse as a largely mechanized mode of poetics. Unlike some of the work by her male-counterparts, Copithorne's poetry and her choice of hand-drawn methods is significant because the relationship between typewriters and women's bodies is troubling. In his book, *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting* (2005), Darren Wershler identifies critics whom have hailed the typewriter as the mechanical device that "was the major means of women's emancipation" (86). Due to an increasing demand in clerical work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women were more frequently employed in secretarial positions including the position of what has come to be referred to as the "Type-Writer Girl" (a rather demeaning title). However, as Wershler points out, the typewriter led to "losses of power" as well as "gains" (86). While women were gaining employment, equity was not the primary goal for businesses employing these women: women were paid significantly lower wages than men and as "more Type-writer girls joined the workplace,

corporations restructured themselves to ensure that these women would rarely if ever enter the management stream" (91). Furthermore, as Wershler points out, many women were attracted to employment because popular culture painted a glamourous image of the Type-Writer Girl, yet this "imagery exaggerated the independence of the Type-Writer Girl, [and] it did so only to imply that part of her longed to be swept away by the right man" (93). In effect, "fiction and advertising alike turned the Type-Writer Girl into something of a fetish object" (93). For these reasons, the typewriter's role within the history of women's emancipation has been overstated, and should garner some skepticism.

Wershler's account of women and the typewriter pronounces the complex and alienating relationship of the two at the material level, yet a large majority of the labour performed by women typists was also exploitive at an immaterial level. Much of what typists transcribed at this period was information received in dictation from men in superior positions. The information that women typists worked with is a transcription of powerful men's voices, and not an expression of their own ideas. In other words, women's labour—in assemblage with the typewriting machine—is doubly estranged since not only is it the first step in exploitative labour practices of women workers, but this information was employed in the service of men operating as agents of the capitalist marketplace. In the clerical space, women were relegated to a mechanical status, a conduit for the transference of information within a capitalist economy. In this way, the typewriter anticipates the conditions of the computing age and its problematic conceptions of embodiment. While the typewriter became increasingly ubiquitous and anticipated computers, men's voices had already become perceived as a "bodiless fluid" (Hayles xi) that could be transmitted through an assemblage of women's laboring bodies and analog writing machinery. Considering this narrative of media archaeology, it becomes clear that McCaffery's typewriter-based concrete poem *Carnival* is problematic because it poses white-male privilege as a universal experience. At the helm of the typewriter, women were unable to write themselves onto the page. In Copithorne's decided swerve away from the typewriter, she also refuses to entangle herself within its alienating mechanisms. Instead, Copithorne seeks to write her body upon the page, to allow her body and its movements to take up space among a network of discursively dominating male practitioners.

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Analyses

In her early concrete poetry, Copithorne makes the body apparent by using graphic design tools such as sketching pencils and calligraphy pens, which require precise movements of the body in ways that are distinct from typing machines. Gregory Betts notes that Copithorne's work "bring[s] the body back into the text by breaking the monotony and standardization of type" (167). Similarly, Caroline Bayard finds that Copithorne's concrete poetry traces "a narrative in space, and more than a transmitter of lexical meaning, each letter is carried across the page as a trace, as aesthetic and graphic energy of a specific mood, of a specific feeling" (142). Similar threads connect Bayard's and Betts's criticism: both draw attention to the importance of the body—its movements, feelings, affects, and capacities to take up space on the page. However, I suggest that Copithorne's work is not merely "breaking" the standardization of type nor is it simply a "trace" or representation; rather, it is an embodied concrete poetic that responds to the gendered politics of writing media and literary culture in the 1960s and 1970s. The typewriter requires the movement of hands and fingers to register a mark upon the page—the result of a type hammer striking typewriter tape and page—thus the mechanical apparatus effaces the movements of the finger. Conventionally used, the typewriter has the capacity to render only the force of the typist. A forceful application of the finger upon a key might register a bold mark on the page or even puncture the paper. That being said, this is not possible on all typewriters, and is the *only* way by which the body is clearly registered on the paper. Hand-held writings tools, like those used by Copithorne, much more effectively render movements, speeds, and pressures of the body upon the page, affecting the overall texture, size, and style of the piece. In this way, the body is an integral part of the hand-drawn text's composition.

Copithorne ostensibly announces her difference and the capacities of her hand-based poetic in her book *Release* (1969), in an untitled poem-manifesto. "There is another Order / to things," she writes (7), articulating the stakes of her poetic for us (see Appendix B). The necessarily broad invocation of "things," speaks to all aspects of material life: systems, bodies, language, affects, and so on that become reconfigured in her poetry. Though not explicitly stated, this gesture toward the possibility of a new order suggests a dissatisfaction with the current order, which I

recognize as the patriarchal conditions that ordered her communities as well as the increasing effacement of bodily materiality. Furthermore, she writes that this alternative order can be figured through "the games / that children play," "a doodle," and "delight" (7). Each of these elements corresponds to Copithorne's practice: there is indeed something playful about her work; the abstract graphics of her poetry might otherwise be referred to as doodles; and delight invokes affect and pleasure that are integrally bound with bodily processes. It is precisely from the body and its processes that Copithorne's poetry emerges, seeking a new order. She writes,

> produced from
> my body of bliss
> growing
> beyond
> my mind (7)

Hayles reminds us that during the dawn of the computing age, intelligence becomes a crucial property of Western culture thus placing the mind as the central locus of the period (xi). However, Copithorne's poetry is produced from that which grows "beyond" the mind. Beyond the mind is the body; this is where Copithorne locates her poetry and from where a new order may be attained. It is an order wherein intelligence, bodies, materials, and affects are intricately bound. Atop these words is a drawing of a winged-creature, sitting on the opening words about to take flight, suggesting that this mode of bodily poetry offers agency and a pathway out of the "order of things" (7) as they are.

The first poem of this same collection announces Copithorne's position of resistance to the conditions of her time and to poetics as they are with her title: "No" (n. pag.). The decipherable language of the poem, embedded within the curlicues of an abstract hand-drawn graphic, elaborates on the opening sentiment:

> No
> I say
> I don't have to play
> games your way
> I can play any game
> I please
> and still say
> No (n. pag.)

Copithorne's "No" is matter-of-fact assertion of independence, announcing a poetry that is composed entirely from pursuing her own impulses. "Play" is a foundational concept to many of the works published under the guise of concrete poetry in Canada. Nichol and McCaffery, in "The Open Ladder Essay," articulate the stakes of "play" for poetry. While this report was published in 1992 (and only performed in full in 1982), play with text and image was a driving force for many concrete poets long before they articulated the stakes.[9] Despite the seeming innocence that accompanies "play," the idea of play in poetry is encoded. Much of what is considered "play" in concrete poetry corresponds to a playfulness with writing machinery as in McCaffery's *Carnival*—a title that even foregrounds playfulness by gesturing toward the carnivalesque, a time of revelry and masquerade. Less recognized is the type of play that Copithorne's concrete poetry seeks to articulate. She plays with her hands—following not the program of a typing machine, but following her desire for movement as her hands, clasping a pen or marker, pull across the page to create what might otherwise be read as harmless doodles. Instead, doodles are imprints of the body on the page as it interacts with writing materials. In doing so, Copithorne refuses to "play the rules," resisting what was becoming, at the time, an aesthetic norm of machine-driven concrete poetics.

Copithorne's work more broadly rejects gendered norms that pervade the 1960s. In *Release*, she expresses dissatisfaction with conformism and stereotypical roles for women in an untitled work (see Appendix C); she writes, explicitly addressing women in a hand-drawn script, "Little girl you've become a fuss budget, a worry wart, a harried house wife, Let it all go, Let it all go, Let go / fly free" (5). The language she uses such as "fuss budget," "worry wart," and "harried" denigrate women in these roles and illustrate the ways they demean and dehumanize women, reducing them to a vague quantity of material, a benign growth, or a burden. In response, the poem encourages the implied reader to "Let go" and to "fly free" (n. pag.), anticipating Godard's theorization of radical women's writing as that which occupies an excentricity, both as eccentric and external to the norm. The desire for escape is genuine; however, the form of the poem complicates the notion of flying free. The asemic aspects of the work are dense and reflective of a labrythine structure. These thick lines claustrophobically encapsulate the semantic text, suggesting that the possibility of escape may be difficult to accomplish. The poem reveals a

tension between the speaker's mind that seeks freedom from the roles assigned by patriarchal order and those restrictions placed upon the speaker's body, reflective of the precarious position of women artists within a patriarchal literary community.

Copithorne's "Wild Flowers," from the same collection, addresses similar concerns of patriarchal dominance and stigma. The speaker expresses an uneasiness with the way she is perceived by the gaze of a potential lover; she writes,

> Would you
> love me
> if you knew
> how many men
> I had had?
> Would you feel sad?
> Things are no
> longer the same
> young girls
> are changing
> or were they
> always
> that way? (n. pag.)

The speaker expresses fear that the other would not find her desirable because she has been with an untold number of men (perhaps many, but not necessarily so), drawing attention to the stigma of slut shaming and to the fallacy that one man should own the sexuality of a woman. Furthermore, as a poem written from the perspective of an older woman (represented by the contrast between "I" and the "young girls" who are "they"), Copithorne also challenges stereotypes of innocence and chastity among young girls. The last question "or were they / always / that way?" (12-14), challenges this perspective and suggests that women's sexual identities are not necessarily changing, but that patriarchal perceptions have always been false. Copithorne's final lines suggest that women have always had more agency than many men have been willing to acknowledge.

Both Copithorne's criticisms of play, as a foundational aspect of concrete poetry, and her broader critiques of gender stereotypes point toward a criticism of community. This criticism is most effectively articulated in Copithorne's concrete poems that address an affect

foundational to many communities: love. In popular renderings of the time, love is perhaps the affect that is most frequently associated with the 1960s and 1970s. Love offers the utopian promise that drove the 60s generation who believed that love is the forceful affect that would allow people to overcome differences and peacefully coexist. We find traces of these ideas in a number of concrete poems by Canadian practitioners: the dichotomy of love and evil in Nichol's "Blues," cosmic love in bissett's "Awake in the Red Desert," and the tactility of love in David UU's *Touch* are just a few examples. For Copithorne, love as the foundation of communion does not seem to hold the same utopian capacity; love is something much more complicated and must first be located within the self.

One of Copithorne's untitled contributions to *New Directions in Canadian Poetry* expresses an uneasiness with love. Copithorne writes not a series of love-filled lyrics, but a series of questions: "Why is love such a strange shore?"; "Will love be enough?"; "Why do I not love enough?"; "How can I love more?"; and, "If not for love what is life for?" (47). These questions suggest not a utopian belief in the personal and political ramifications of love as an affect that binds, but rather an apprehensiveness. The visual aspects of the poem articulate this: the page must be turned sidewise to be read thus setting it apart from many of the other texts in the book; more importantly, each phrase of the poem is separated by clusters of graphics suggestive of the speaker's own sense of isolation and alienation. These questions are never answered in the poem thus suggesting that this alienation is never overcome.

Copithorne's chapbook-length poem *Rain* (1969) is an exemplary representation of her investigation into notions of love and community. I read *Rain* as a suite of related poems that oscillate between a hand-written semantic text and hand-drawn asemic script. These movements from the semantic to the asemic (and back again), speak to the affective dimensions of the text's content, especially an unspeakable sadness that marks the beginning of the text. The chapbook opens with the repetition of hand-drawn words "Rain" and "Pain" in textual-overlay with the word "sad" in the same script at the bottom of the page (see Appendix D). The visual movement of the piece is suggestive of rain falling, since the vertical stems of the letters are vertically exaggerated. The thin lines invoke the speaker's sense of fragility: not all lines of the letters connect, looking as though a pen is running out of ink. There is a pun at play here, too: the rhyme of rain, pain, and *pane* which effectively establishes a pathetic fallacy, suggestive of an emotionally pained speaker looking out

a window at rainfall. This page is followed by four separate pages of asemic clusters indicative of an unspeakable sadness, as the text moves from semantic meaning into purely visual, asemantic script (see Appendix E). Finally, on the sixth page, semantic language re-emerges and a question is posed to an unidentified lost lover, the person who rejected the speaker's body: "Can I say you were wrong when you stopped loving me?" (n. pag). These lines are written in a fragile calligraphic script, with some incomplete stems and other overwrought letters. The speaker later probes their feelings of pain and alienation in assertive capital letters; she writes,

> BRIGHT
> FLASH
> IN DARK
> NIGHT
> SOS
> SOMEONE
> HOLD ME
> I NEED WARM FLESH (n. pag.)

The last line is a call for someone to comfort the speaker, which is clarified on the next page: "not anyone / but you who / ever you may / be" (n. pag.). The page that follows consists of the word "love," thickly scrawled on the page that starkly contrasts the other scripts of the chapbook. It is at this point that the speaker takes a turn. This is not the love of someone else, but love for the self. With no other voice present in the text, the speaker turns inward and questions herself: "What are you like when you are alone? What are you like inside?" until, through this process of rhetorical questions, the speaker learns to access pleasure without the other. In dialogue with herself, she says;

> Oh please
> yourself
> please
> and go easy
> soft soap
> and elbow grease
> after all it's only
> your
> own self
> who can say (n. pag.)

Following this realization of independence and the possibilities of self-pleasure, the speaker emerges from her pain and overcomes her sense of alienation (see Appendix F). The penultimate page of the book opens with the lines: "A shore / at last / reached" (1-3). This sense of alleviation is only achieved once the speaker explores her own body and her own abilities to pleasure herself and realize that only she is the one "who can say." As a text of hand-drawn visual poetry, *Rain* enacts this trajectory toward self-pleasure since each page—with its own unique script—is an exercise in exploring the relationship between aesthetic, material, and bodily movement, as Copithorne explores the various ways her body can be rendered upon the page.

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Since the 1960s and 1970s, Copithorne expanded the purview of her writing and has transformed her practice in a variety of ways: she published a novel entitled *Heart's Tide* (1982) with Vancouver Community Press, a book of lyric poems entitled *A Light Character* (1985) with Coach House Books, numerous essays on Vancouver's literary scene, and continues to publish concrete poetry as in the case of the 1992 chapbook entitled *horizon* (1992). Interestingly, *horizon* includes some typewriter-based visual poems along with her characteristic hand-drawn elements. While this turn toward the typewriter might seem counter to my argument, these poems appear long after the peak of typewriter-based concrete poetry in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, these poems contain lines of lament like "falling behind" and "out of touch" (n. pag.) and on a following page "love lost" (n. pag). Considering that this chapbook appears long after the heyday of 1960s and 1970s concrete poetry, it is difficult not to read to these poems as Copithorne's critical glance at the ways the typewriter launched the literary careers of numerous masculine personalities that continue to dominate the discursive field in Canada.

Unsurprisingly, Copithorne continues to compose and produce concrete poetry and publishes it today. She regularly self-publishes poems, notes, and visuals to her *Flickr* page, where new work frequently appears. Much of this new work is composed digitally. The embrace of the digital may seem strange considering how Copithorne's early work actively resists machines as the primary tool for composition; however, digital tools incorporate different registers of the body, including (in some cases) hand-drawn methods. That being said, Copithorne's digital poetry

is the subject of another compelling study. My focus on Copithorne's early concrete poetry attends to recent celebrations of typewriter-based poetry and art as seen in *Typewriter Art: A Modern Anthology* (2014), edited by Barrie Tullett as well as *The Art of Typewriting* (2015), edited by Ruth and Marvin Sackner. While these collections are indispensable for critics focused on media-based writing and art, non-lyrical poetries, and media archaeology, they indulge a nostalgia for a bygone era of poetics that was, as Butling's comments point out at the opening of this paper, hindered by sexism and gendered hierarchies. With these recent celebrations of typewriter concrete poetry, it is important to look at writers such as Copithorne who were writing alongside these other celebrated poets. This is not to say that all typewriter poetry is representative of patriarchal power dynamics, but it is important to remember that there are politics embedded within this medium and Judith Copithorne's embodied concrete poetic crucially reminds us of that.

Notes

1 In total, Tallman mentions approximately 90 men and 14 women in his article. Tallman does, in fact, mention Copithorne in his essay; however, his description of her work is somewhat diminutive, suggesting that Copithorne's writing "correspond[s] closely to clothes, or furniture, the kitchen, warmth for herself and her cat" (86). Carrying on, he vaguely writes that "Her strength is to strive for a deliberate simplicity in order to resolve complicated inner reactions. By transforming the complications into the simplicities she arrives at a life style which brings a needed clarity into her values and relationships" (86).

2 I gratefully acknowledge the gracious support of Judith Copithorne and Ellie Nichol while writing this paper. With their permission I have reproduced the images from Copithorne's *Release* (Bau-xi Gallery, 1969) and *Rain* (Ganglia, 1969).

3 In 1965, Iain Baxter, Arthur Erickson, Helen Goodwin and Takao Tanabe conceived of the Festival of Contemporary Arts in Vancouver, which was nicknamed "The Medium Is the Message," a phrase coined by McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media* (1964). McLuhan was an invited guest speaker to the festival. Furthermore, in 1967 a group of artists formulated the Intermedia Society, which initially gathered to discuss the writings of Marshall McLuhan. An artist-run space dedicated to exploratory art, named Intermedia, formed soon after in Spring 1967. Copithorne was an active member of Intermedia.

4 While McCaffery's work is exemplary for illustrating most clearly the problematics posed by the intersection of typewriter and the privileged male-body, one could similarly probe striking though less potent examples of concrete poetry by bissett and Nichol. For example, one could examine the prominence of male genitalia in bissett's typewriter concrete poetry like the first untitled concrete poem of his *space travl* (1974) or select poems from his later typewriter pieces in *Ready For Framing* (1982). Similarly, Nichol's first book of typewriter concrete is titled *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* (1967). Though Nichol's typewriter concrete is "not extensive itself" (Ball 11), the title of this collection evokes fetishism and a voyeuristic gaze upon a woman's body by citing the tradition of the fan dance. These are fairly innocuous examples, but

they are worth mentioning.

5 Some nuance is needed here: not all male poets easily moved through the world at large. For example, bissett—who is seen as a leader of the small press movement in Vancouver—was routinely harassed by the public because he looked like a Beat poet (see the short 1965 documentary *Strange Grey Day This*), and was routinely harassed by the police for drug use and his non-normative masculinity.

6 Thanks to Gregory Betts for pointing out this crucial date in the manuscript for his *The Vangardes: Avant-Garde Writing in Vancouver 1959-1975.*

7 Poets like Nichol have suggested that Pierre Coupey was one of the earliest influences of concrete poetry in Canada. While Nichol has acknowledged Copithorne in his accounts of early exposure to concrete poetry, he places more emphasis on visual artist Coupey, claiming that Coupey's work was the first concrete poetry he had seen (see "Interview: Nick Power and Anne Sherman" in *Meanwhile*).

8 For more on the development of concrete poetry in Canada, see *bpNichol* (1984) by Stephen Scobie, *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Postmodernism* (1989) by Caroline Bayard, and *Aka bpNichol: A Preliminary Biography* (2012) by Frank Davey.

9 Some literary works took the idea of play literally, composing literary board games, card games, and even a remodelled dart board. See "Andoas" (1979) by The Four Horsemen, *D'Art Board* (1986) and *Game of Cards* (1985) by John Riddell.
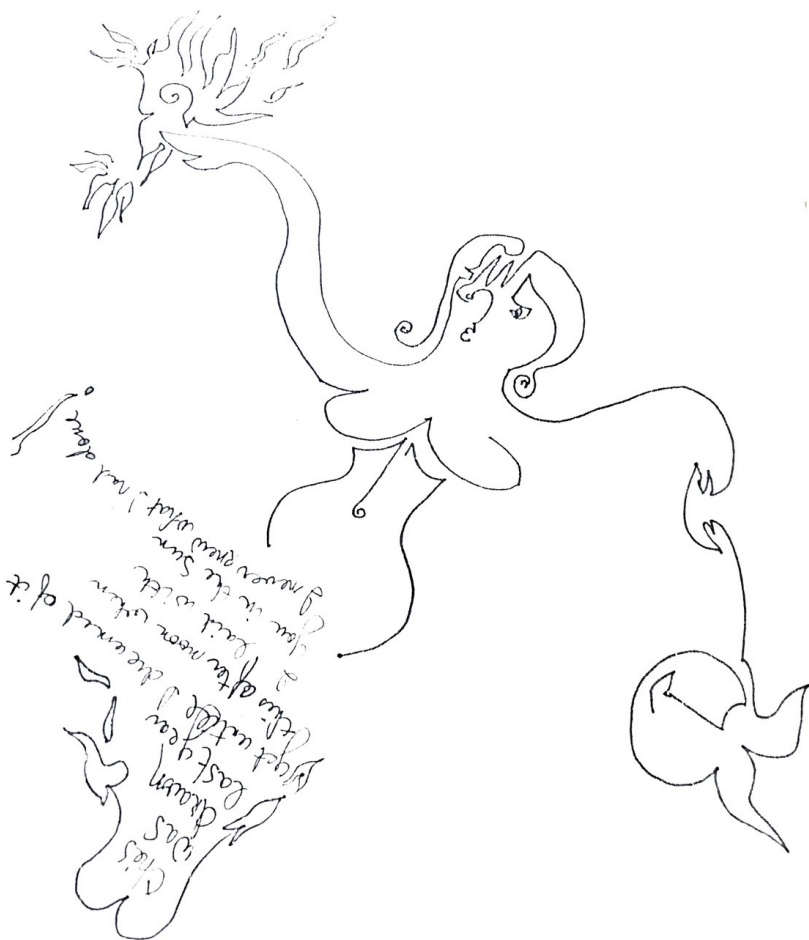
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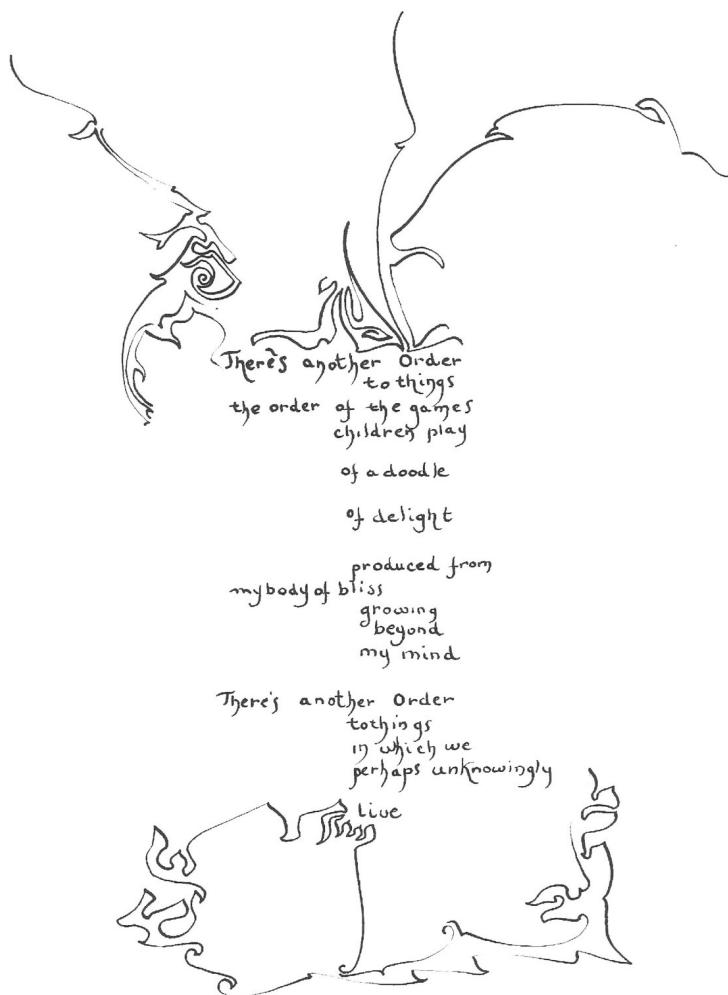
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Appendix A: from *blewointment* (2.3)

COPITHORNE

Appendix B: from *Release*

There's another Order
to things
the order of the games
children play

of a doodle

of delight

produced from
my body of bliss
growing
beyond
my mind

There's another Order
to things
in which we
perhaps unknowingly
live

Appendix C: from *Release*

Little girl you've become
a fuss budget
a worry wart
a harried
house wife
Let it all go Let it
all go Let go
fly free

37

Appendix D: from *Rain*

Appendix E: from *Rain*

39

Appendix F: from *Rain*

A shore
At last
reached

a home beyond
the dark
night sea
of rain

— Salty —