Poetry Installations for the Toronto 2015 Pan / ParaPan American Games:
The Poetry of Sport and the Sport of Poetry

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Abstract
This paper presents the findings of a project I created as a member of the Latin American Working Group for the Toronto 2015 Pan and ParaPan American Games occurring in July and August, 2015. As an Ignite community partner of the Games, and in collaboration with York University, the project aimed to explore the proposed core values and mission statement of the TORONTO 2015 Games, whose stated mission was to “ignite the spirit through a celebration of sport and culture”, embracing core values of “joy, purpose, accountability, collaboration and results.” The creation of “poet-tree” installations and webpages (creative and photo captured real life installations at various locations, websites, or in physical sculptural and movement formats) with poems or poet’s names from the diverse regions of the Americas evoked the sports and the spirit of the culture of each place, and in particular of the connection across the Americas to the Toronto 2015 Pan / ParaPan Am Games. I track the project’s progress and present these findings as viewed through recent developments in performance theory and embodied literary theory; the relation to identity, expressions of place and negotiating inter-subjectivities to reflect upon the network of realities which exist beyond national boundaries, as hemispheric and complex conceptions of words and physical action in representations of being. This type of wor(l)d-making is examined by presenting the poems and poets contained in the installations, to trace the expressions found in these examples connecting sports and culture, or reveal their disjuncture.

Keywords: poetry acts and installations, e-poetry, sports, embodied arts, performance theory
Introduction

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In this paper I aim to track the project’s progress and present these findings as viewed through recent developments in performance theory and embodied literary theory; the relation to identity, expressions of place and negotiating inter-subjectivities reflecting realities that exist beyond national boundaries, as hemispheric and global networked conceptions of words and physical action as a representation of being. This type of wor(l)d-making is examined by presenting the poems and poets contained in the installations, to trace the expressions found in these examples connecting sports and culture, or revealing their disjunctures.

Parameters of the Texts in Installation and Web-Based Formats

Since the inception of the Pan / ParaPan Am Poet-Tree Project in February 2015, poems received have totaled between 39 and 10 per month, for an overall total of approximately 125 poems to date (July 2015). This data is displayed (below), as a range of entries sent per month (series 1); then subdivided by category of submission—whether (a) sent as an original poem or image composed for the project, or pre-existing and sent in to the installation (series 2); or (b) as the name with or without cited verses of a “favourite” poet from one of the 41 represented nations (series 3); the overall total is indicated in the last column (series 4).

![Poet-Tree 2015 texts/poets](image)

Figure 1: This image summarizes the number of entries.

The listings by country and generation can be found at the project website: www.yorku.ca/laps/dlll/ignite. Additional names of poets added to this list were complemented by my research for the 41 countries.
The project, an IGNITE community partner of the Games, welcomed York University members and those of the greater community, including international authors across the Americas, to send in original poems or verses of their favourite poet from one of the 41 represented countries competing in the Toronto 2015 Pan / ParaPan American Games. Each submission, with a sent poem or with the name and/or verses of a poet, was entered to win a monthly prize (from February to August 2015). Poems could be in any of the languages spoken in the 41 countries, to feature sports and poetry in dialogue during this largest multisport and international gathering in Canada to date. Sources consulted were mainly online anthologies for invitations sent. Course related materials were also integrated, such as co-curricular assignments provided to students in Spanish program courses such as AP/SP 3210 Aspects of Spanish American Literature, AP/SP 2200 Introduction to Spanish Literature, and language courses at all levels in Spanish and Portuguese at York University. Calls were also circulated to Latin American cultural and non-profit organizations, universities across Canada and the United States.

Via the poems and images inspired in the concept of the installation at York University’s Keele campus—a large site with labyrinthine challenges to locate and traverse—the project linked with other locations through online sites or in physical formats such as meetings, events and performances. In tandem with the research I conducted on this area, these resonances have shaped the expression of the project.

email: poet.tree2015@gmail.com
website: www.yorku.ca/laps/dlll/ignite
facebook: /POETREE2015
twitter: @poetree2015

Materialization

Poets from each of the represented countries in the Games were invited to send poems, electronically, or handwritten on materials with fibres from each of their countries of origin. Also, poetry aficionados were invited to share the names of their favourite poets to be included in the installation and to submit these electronically, by regular post, or in physical artistic formats. Most opted to send their texts via email or utilizing the online submissions system (machform).

The materials for the project’s installation of poems are almost 100% all of recycled, re-purposed materials. York University’s spaces were invoked as a reference to the location of the tennis centre and its athletics facilities as official venues for the 2015 Pan Am Games, and as the site of the opening ceremonies for the Par Pan Am Games.

The installation was rendered of paper, string, light adhesives, pinecones, tree branches found in and around Ontario, leaves, discarded wrapping materials, glue, ink, spray paint, feathers, and pencil.
The placing of the texts followed an organic process of arranging these as they were sent in to the project, and as time allowed each week or every two weeks. This represented not the tracing of a map but a sensorial gathering of and placement of textures, perceiving the Pan American ensemble of poems and images as notions of the identities juxtaposed in time and in collectivity.

Poets who embraced the project call and sent in works have included the following: Miguel Avero (Uruguay), Andrés Bazzano (Uruguay), Evgueni Bezzubikoff (Peru), José Cantero Verni (Argentina), Didier Castro (Colombia), Martín Cerisola (Uruguay), Roberto Cruz Arzabal (Mexico), Andrea Durlacher (Uruguay), Ernesto Estrella Cózar (United States/Spain), Kela Francis (Trinidad and Tobago), Paola Gómez Restrepo (Colombia/Canada), David Hernández (El Salvador), Hoski (Uruguay), Lasana Lukata (Brazil), Leonardo Lesci (Uruguay), Irene Marques (Portugal/Canada), Néstor Rodríguez (Dominican Republic), Gustavo Gómez Rial (Uruguay), Santiago Pereira (Uruguay), Marco Quezada (El Salvador/US), Dan Russek (Canada), Priscila Uppal (Canada), Carmen Urioste (Spain/United States), Enrique Winter (Chile), Ed Woods (Canada), Edgar Yáñez Zapata (Venezuela/Canada).

The movement from the singular to the plural manifestation of self-understanding is complex, a radical departure from predominant individualism evident in 21st century notions of self. Inherent in this is what Luce Irigaray has presented in her 2002 book, Between East and West: From Singularity to Community (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism. In the lack of differentiation from a group, a person has no say nor autonomy from “group think” (many times created in a part we do not control, but whose discourses present us with already made structures). As Irigaray points out, we feel most comfortable studying history today. We may also feel the absence of a connection to a larger sense of self, as that posited by our possible “plural” selves, as Butler and Athanasiou offer as a way to address our social concerns. Where can we trace the intersections of these potentially revitalizing forms?

In Hypterext 3.0, George Landow traces how we read in hypertext, contrasted to the traditionalist approach privileged since the Gutenberg revolution of print. From the perspective of post-structuralist through, as Landow posits, an expanded type of reading, prevalent since the internet age, engages the phenomenological full spectrum of senses, privileging a mobile approach to the text that does not follow a linear approach (though aspects of linearity may be retained), but rather a path that is unique to each receptor/viewer. This approach was highlighted in the installation’s formation, taking as Landow did, the notion of the rhizome to reveal the process: “As Deleuze and Guattari explain, a rhizome is ‘a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real’ (12). Maps and hypertexts both, in other words, relate directly to performance, to interaction” (Landow, 2006: 60-61). The body’s space, time and action prevailed as foci at each stage of the project, without abandoning the praxis of writing/reading.
Figure 2: This is an image of the installation taken on May 31, 2015.

**Bio-Symbols and Language(s)**

In this installation we see the interplay of difference and affinity. Intuitive recognition, a call from the creative impulse, a sight line of continuities and discontinuities. By merging these in the metaphor of the tree, contrasting that of the wave, “[f]-orms are the abstract of social relationships; so, formal analysis is in its own modest way an analysis of power. […] The tree describes the passage from unity to diversity: one tree, with many branches: from Indo-European, to dozens of languages. The wave is the opposite: it observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity: Hollywood films conquering one market after another (or English
swallowing language after language). Trees need geographical discontinuity (in order to branch off from each other, languages must first be separated in space, just like animal species); waves dislike barriers, and thrive on geographical continuity (from the viewpoint of a wave, the ideal world is a pond. Trees and branches are what nation-states cling to; waves are what markets do. And so on. Cultural history is made of trees and waves - the wave of agricultural advance supporting the tree of Indo-European languages, which is then swept by new waves of linguistic and cultural contact…And as world culture oscillates between the two mechanisms, its products are inevitably composite ones. Compromises, as in Jameson’s law, can be imagined in this way. That’s why the law works: because it intuitively captures the intersection of the two mechanisms” (Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature (2000) and More Conjectures (2003)” in World Literature in Theory, Ed. David Damrosch. 2014 Wiley. 165-66.)

Figure 3: This is a drawing created for the installation by Canadian Tom Jeffery.

Trees as symbols appear in many forms: knowledge, lineage, ethics, code, linkages, merriment, breakage, multiplicity, sustenance, identity vis-à-vis place, autochthonous belonging and bridging. Autochthonous as roots and branches—upwards and downwards; mobile as seed and air—beyond (feathers, home and flight) and here as my localities, shared, repositioned, fluid blooming. The predominance of the branches, linked and yet divergent, host the verses as in leaves and seed.

From a hemispheric perspective, the tree denotes diversity and connection across multivalent north-south juxtapositions. Ruptures with underlying foundations in contact, divergent and crisscrossing movements across geospatial tectonic plates, regionalisms, jumps, interruptions, convergences, webs and overviews from the labyrinths of Pan's Americanisms, its root systems, its interweaving veins of the leaves, cross-plantings, reverences: Pan and its Olympian-relations¹, all of the Pans in dialogue with the natural world, its locations, its embodiments, plural and necessarily focused in each one of us. It is as the American author Paul Auster wrote in 1947: “My skin had become a palimpsest of fleeting sensations, and each layer bore the imprint of who I was.”

The project’s conception played with the notion of the multifaceted, with “All of the Pans” in the Americas: the shepherd, musician, companion of nymphs, located, in the company of landforms². One whose parentage had many possible origins and some were unclear: in Ancient Greek mythological references it is not confirmed whether Pan was the offspring of the gods of the earth and the sky (is Rhea) or was borne from the figure of Cybele as symbol of the mountain. It is also unclear whether his father was Hermes the Messenger and Communicator of the gods, or the great head of them all, Zeus. Or even another altogether. In these etymologies of the word “pan” the
fluctuation continues in its combining form meaning either “all or every” as well as “including or relating to all parts or members”, in this case, of the Americas. Its origin, from Greek *pan*, neuter of *pas* all, relates to Greek religion and mythology, as Pan (/pæn/; Ancient Greek:Πάν, Pan) is the god of the wild, shepherds and flocks, nature of mountain wilds, hunting, and rustic music, and companion of the nymphs. His name originates within the Ancient Greek language, from the word *paein* (παείν), meaning “to pasture.” With his homeland in rustic Arcadia, he is also recognized as the god of fields, groves, and wooded glens; because of this, Pan is connected to fertility and the season of spring. The ancient Greeks also considered Pan to be the god of theatrical criticism. Another reason that the selection of the TREE as symbol for the Pan American, in this case, is an apt one in its performativity of embodiment and of the cultural. (http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pan)

The tone of doubt, variance and fluctuation is one often associated with the definition of the Americas in poetry, such as the “CANTO A IBEROAMÉRICA” / “SONG TO IBERO-AMERICA” written by Alvaro Figueredo in Uruguay, on the occasion of a historical celebration following World War II, and winner of the Juegos Florales de México. In a section of this long poetic homage to the countries of the Spanish-speaking Americas, Figueredo referred to the “Latina estirpe” / “Latin Lineage”, and wrote:

Sí, pero no... yo dudo y creo, al mismo tiempo  
me disputan la lengua la rosa y la diatriba.  
A veces me conduce una paloma al grito  
Y un lirio agujerea a veces mi guitarra.  
[...]  
Oh Madre, dadme el cóndor que vuela más arriba  
y el cielo, el cielo, el cielo, el cielo americano.  
[Yes, but no. I doubt and I believe, at the same time.  
The tongue the rose the diatribe debate me.  
Sometimes a dove leads me to a shout  
and a lily makes a hole in my guitar.  
[...]  
Oh Mother! Give me the condor that flies even higher  
and the sky, the sky, the sky, the sky, the [Pan-]American sky.]  
(Translation by Maria Figueredo)

The symbolic representation of the tree, thus, encompasses not only the tree itself, its branches, its trunk, its leaves, but also its grounding and subterranean network fed by aquatic systems that crisscross the earth to produce and sustain life, as well as its reaching towards the sky in strengthening its growth patterns and future evolution.

**Complexities of Minding the “Latino” in the Pan American Imagination**

The Poet-Tree 2015 Project was a timely way to engage about Pan American cultural topics especially from the perspective of youth below 40 years of age. How to find methods to engage their views about what is relevant regarding diversity? The capacity to articulate the complexities of these issues, on a case-by-case basis (such as the Latin American immigrant and visitor experience to Canada) in terms of certain cultures in relation to Canada, of the international cultural exchanges from different perspectives, was an extension of the aspect of fragmentation and connectivity that
youth assume as daily occurrence. After all, the Pan Am Games are about youth: a precursor to Olympic qualification, and a coming of age aspect to each participant and to the country selected to host the event. It is, by necessity and in light of these aspects, more fragmentary and preliminary than the conception of the Olympics, which is by its very nature global and set in itself.

On another hand, the Pan Am Games coming to Toronto also made clear an experience that is common to many Canadians: that of living as part or in relation to diasporic communities which provide unique multi-perspectival advantages. The mainstay of Canadian domestic policy and national character has been multiculturalism, particularly since the early 1980s, induced by Liberalism under Pierre Elliott Trudeau, at the same time that Canada received many Latin American immigrants in that first wave of migration. Caused in part by the political crises in the Southern Cone in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina successively rocked by the crises of civil liberties through dictatorship cycles which were to last about a decade each in that period, it was followed by subsequent political strife in Central and the Northern portions of Latin America with issues in El Salvador, Nicaragua and southern Mexico into the late eighties and early nineties. More recently, Cuban migration and Colombian communities have strongly marked a presence, especially in Toronto. In this way, the connection to the country of birth gives rise to a concern for maintaining ties to one’s birth country, as well as ways to celebrate one’s roots from within the new citizenry. The internet has reshaped the ways that this can be actualized, to such an extent that some critics posit it as a new circle of belonging in itself. Especially for the younger generation, the virtual space becomes a shelter from imposed norms and limits that would hamper self-expression, such as cost factors or closures on marketing access that is controlled by media power systems. Yet, very few had heard of the Pan Am Games, let alone of the ParaPan Am games, prior to its occurrence on Canadian soil; and this is common in countries across the Americas. The Copa América is more well-known, for instance, in Latin America, focused only on soccer, and is watched fervently. Regional Games such as these, and especially those of multisport qualifier competitions such as the Pan Am Games, proceed relatively under the radar of international coverage. In a similar way, poetry can be said to the Pan Am Games of the literary world. These proceed regionally as well. Soccer is an international language. Curling is not; tennis is? How about synchronized swimming or ice skating? What literary equivalent is there for these sports? This is the year of sport in Canada, so that programmatic and infrastructure investments have taken precedence to make this a mainstream question of cultural identity.

One of the most active poets involved in the project, Uruguayan Miguel Avero, was a case in point. Well known outside his native country in translation, he is slowly becoming more so within Uruguayan due not only to the high caliber of his poetry and narrative work, but also, perhaps more so, because of his leadership on a project called “Orientacion Poesia” he leads with two fellow poets, Hoski and Santiago Pereira. Avero was one of the first poets to respond to the Poet-Tree 2015 project’s invitation, and took not only to the aspect of contributing poetry—first sending an inedited poem on the topic of writing and the creative process—but later also in writing texts specifically for the project on the topic of sports. He is also a soccer player in Uruguay, and takes this aspect of his life quite seriously, in addition to being an avid reader and considering his main profession that of writer.
Miguel Avero is the author of a poetry collection *Arca de aserrín* (Ediciones en Blanco, 2011) and of the novella *Micaela Moon* (Travessia, 2014). Five of his poems are included in *América invertida: An Anthology of Younger Uruguayan Poets*, forthcoming from the University of New Mexico Press (2016), edited by University of Wisconsin professor Jesse Lee Kercheval. In 2012 he received a special mention in the V Concurso de Poesía Joven “Pablo Neruda” organized by the Regional Government of San José and the Pablo Neruda Foundation in Chile. He is among the young generation of poets to have a growing audience outside of his country of birth, especially in online and new anthologies in translation in North America and Europe. His forthcoming books of poetry include *La pieza* [*The Room*] and the *Que nadie pregunte por ti* [*May No One Ask about You*]). As one of three founders and directors of the collaborative educational project “Orientación poesía” [Orientation Poetry] which he leads in high schools throughout Uruguay with Santiago Pereira and Hoski (Martín Uruguay Martínez), he publishes an online anthology of “ultra” young poets titled *En el camino de los perros* [*On the path of dogs, a cited verse from Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño, perhaps the most well-known Latin American contemporary author in the English-speaking world*]: http://www.enelcaminodelosperros.com/ His poem “Water”, translated into English by Jona Colson, was published this month in *Prairie Schooner* literary journal.

**Themes: Poetry and Sports in Dialogue**

The focus on the themes of sports was perhaps the most challenging for most poets contacted, and for students and community members who inquired about participating. Does the poem have to be about sports?—most would ask. My decision to not limit the topic of the poems rested upon several factors: first, as I had seen in the objectives of the Toronto 2015 Games, its mission was to “celebrate sports and culture” (Toronto2015.com); second, its Ignite criteria particularly specified the goal of getting communities involved in the Games, termed “the Peoples’ Games”, by encouraging each to express what they felt most relevant about their culture; third, in previous iterations of cultural festivals associated with and in tandem with large, international multisport events such as the Olympics, these festivities rarely held as the sole focus the theme of sports, but rather were run as parallel events, such as the Poetry Parnassus in London during the 2012 Olympic Games. The representative poems featured there did not pertain to the topic of sports at all.

Nevertheless, I did somehow intend to tie in the dialogue about the sports events more directly, since it represents a unique opportunity for this. As such, a key reference in Canada in this field is poet and university professor Priscila Uppal. She has two books of poetry published specifically on the topic of sports: *Winter Sport: Poems* and *Summer Sport: Poems*, both edited by Mansfield Press in Canada, in 2010 and 2013 respectively. Poet and novelist Priscila Uppal was born in Ottawa, Ontario in 1974 to a Brazilian mother and a father of South Asian origin. Uppal is a professor of Humanities and Co-ordinator of the Creative Writing Program at York University in Toronto. Uppal served as poet-in-residence for Canadian Athletes Now during the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics and in 2011 became the first Rogers Cup Tennis Tournament poet-in-residence. The Rogers Cup takes place on York University’s Keele Campus.
Poetry has gained an international recognition as a vehicle for social integration and understanding, despite its apparent dependence on language skill and linguistic dexterity. As President Barack Obama stated recently during Poetry Month in April, “Poetry helps people understand themselves and each other” [...] “Poetry matters. Poetry, like all art, gives shape and texture and depth of meaning to our lives,” “It helps us know the world. It helps us understand ourselves. It helps us understand others, their struggles, their joys, the ways that they see the world. It helps us connect” (http://abcnews.go.com). Yet, how does it do so, especially given linguistic diversity? Translation becomes key and yet is considered secondary. In the Poetry Parnassus mentioned earlier, the works were recited in video and in live readings, in their original language without accompanying translation into English. In Canada, the translation question is even more complex given that there are two official languages—English and French—and that the official languages of the Pan and ParaPan Am Games are English, Spanish and French this year; Portuguese, though spoken by a large percentage of Latin America in Brazil, did not feature as an official language, but had to be dealt with in our Latin American Working Group, and in this project, as part of the communities we were engaging with leading up the Games. For the Poet-Tree installation itself, I placed on the tree poems in their original form as they were sent in. Translations came in to play for the video made of some of these poems, a selection of original verses which had been sent in by May 2015, and in the print materials and power point slides accompanying our main events in July or on our website.

The Body in the Wor(l)d, Pan Am Style

There is no one, unitary Pan American perspective; there are entry points, overlapping frameworks, words as ports of entry, vantage points to view the Americas from various vistas; a point of reference is necessary, to avoid falling into facile and erroneous generalizations. What is the vantage point? How does entering via different vantage points predetermine, or not, the outcome of that view?

The dominant languages position our view of the Pan American spaces. Paul Julian Smith, in his book The Body Hispanic, argues that the cultural body in society is: “Productive and subjugated: such will be the role of critics who persist in reproducing the images of a dominant order. But if we refuse the reproductive role, then we must return to a body which is particular, but not individual; arbitrary, but not random; material, but not fixed. As the most uncompromising emblem of difference, the body shows us that we need not read the same.” Thus, how to produce a map, not a tracing, returning to Deleuze’s position—how to produce a real depiction of the bodies interacting with geo-political spaces, rather than a simplified sketch of the main surface appearances? The map could guide to what is there, rather than just characterize main points of what can be described as there from only one surface perspective. Who determines the lines drawn upon the map if not a historic negotiating and struggle for dominance, for persistence, for survival of values as well as in the effort to attain physical excellence and embodied representation.

More than anything this project was born as an experiment in collaboration. At first it was an individual impulse to collect branches on my walks, to save something from the pieces left so as not to disturb that which grows naturally, connected to the source. It later became an experiment in expanded dialogue, relating this to others, to
requiring an expansion of the first impulse to solidify into something of greater scope. In relation to the notion of competing, it went beyond this to a notion of recognizing common ground, to define a point in time and space from which to appraise the Pan/ParaPan American realities as they stand now, from where we find ourselves.

Conclusion

Poetry art actions and installations (onsite and online) invite moves in to freedom, connection, community and the rarified type of expression that merges the “sayable” with the “unsayable.” A process in constant movement, anchored in the body, the plural connectivity shapes our alliances in Pan-American environments to offer ways “to think about the relational self, understood as plurality” (Butler 2014, 123). They also “confirm the importance of alliances and cohabitation across established categorizations of identity and difference, beyond the very polarity of identity/difference. The heterogeneity of precarious bodies, actions, frameworks, and affective states invites and requires continuous political work of engagement, translation, and alliance, work that veers away from essentialized understandings of identity and representation, and, of course, that effectively opposes nationalist discourses and practices. I understand that such alliances today are confronted with the challenge to engage in an intersectional political reconceptualization of class, race, gender, sexuality, and ability” (2014, 154). In this way they attempt to not only portray, or depict, tracing the real, but to perform the real in a substantive way that speaks to the body, from the body, in real space, for a purpose of connection.
References


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