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## Introduction

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Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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## INTRODUCTION / AVANT-PROPOS

Ours is a time of the rule of measure. More and more spheres of life are being parametrized, measured, and standardized. Such technologies as psychometrics, sociometrics or biometrics are increasingly invading our lives and are used, for better or worse, by experts and policy-makers to justify decisions and courses of action (“taking measures”). Measuring has become a potent instrument of regulating and engineering the social, cultural and economic life of whole populations, and, at the same time, it ensures individuals’ compliance with a set of social norms that define a “good life.”

Ours is a time of the rule of excess. Zygmunt Bauman, among others, sees excess as the defining feature of “liquid modernity,” or indeed the internal *norm* of consumer capitalism. We are witnessing an exponentially growing number of cultural representations which are excessive, transgressive, and “monstrous” in one way or another. Politics and economy are not exempt from this rule of excess, either: the present economic crisis is a result of excessive consumerism fuelled by the excesses of the financial market “gone wild,” while the Agambenian “state of exception” turned into the political norm masks the excesses of unchecked executive power.

Still, “the time is out of joint,” as Hamlet said, which necessarily puts us today beyond all measure in the negotiation of meanings shaped by the dialectics of measure and excess. This time is ours, too, yet we barely know how to measure it and, consequently, recognize ourselves in it. According to Jacques Derrida, this time can be time itself, but also

the temporality of time, or else what temporality makes possible (time as *histoire*, the way things are at a certain time, the time that we are living, nowadays, the period), or else, consequently, the *monde*, the world as it turns, our world today, our today, currentness itself, current affairs: there where it’s going okay (whither) and there where it’s not going so well, where it is rotting or withering, there where it’s

working [*ça marche*] or not working well, there where it's going okay without running as it should nowadays. (Derrida 21)

One could claim that being “out of joint” has always been a salient feature of what we evoke when speaking of Canada and Canadianness, as both have needed to be constantly readjusted. Even though “I am Canadian,” proudly yelled out by a certain Joe in a popular ad campaign for a brand of Canadian beer, can be seen as a potentially normative statement supposed to suggest the standards and values recognized by all Canadians, it also calls forth a certain instability when it comes to what we want to understand as Canadian identity.

The current issue of *TransCanadiana* aims at relating Canada to the complex interplay between the (modern) compulsion to measure and the (postmodern) urge to go beyond any measure. Ostensibly dedicated to the virtue of moderation, Canadian culture is also producing intense contestations over the boundaries of the “proper,” the “orderly” and the “presentable.” Indeed, the very concept of Canadianness could be seen as an overwhelming space that might be (re)read as a dialectic suspense between measure and excess, restriction and transgression, unity and plurality, homogeneity and heterogeneity, identity and hybridity. The authors of the articles gathered in this volume cover a wide range of issues and approaches including formal and aesthetic considerations, geographical and historical contexts, social and political norms, and more. We have divided the articles, perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, into two sections: “The Incommensurate” and “Hors norme.”

The first section stresses the idea of lacking adequate tools for various kinds of measurement: of Canadian space and nature, for example, or of formal equality and civil participation. The incommensurateness addressed in this section presupposes the existence of a standard measure that proves inadequate. In Macura-Nnamdi, Rankin and Nawrot-Adamczyk the parameters are predefined by the Canadian governmental-bureaucratic machinery dedicated, as it often claims, to promoting multiculturalism (Macura-Nnamdi), gender equality (Rankin) and fair treatment of the First Nations (Nawrot-Adamczyk). Ewa Macura-Nnamdi discusses M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land* in the context of Canada's multicultural rhetoric, derived – if indirectly – from an underlying hegemonization of whiteness and a victimization of the racialized Other. Macura-Nnamdi stresses consumer capitalism's role in the relative normativization and assimilation of immigrant Others, as “passage into Canadian multiculture equals an assumption (and continual practice) of consumer habits.” L. Pauline Rankin looks closely at recent “gender mainstreaming” policies pursued, with more or less commitment, by Canada's state institutions as well as some feminist organizations. Those policies have been accompanied by measurement instruments designed to assess the effect of policies on gender equality and, conversely, the effect of gender on the performance of policies. The emergence of the so-called SlutWalks in 2011

marks, according to Rankin, a growing dissatisfaction with the technocratic approach to gender equality and serves as “a cogent reminder to women’s movements of the power of transgressive politics as a viable route to political change.” Izabela Nawrot-Adamczyk points to the normativizing force of the Indian Act of 1876 through its exclusionary definition of “real indianness” that continues to affect indigeneous people’s lives. Barbara Kijek, in turn, claims that the standard through which Susanna Moodie attempted and failed, in her famous memoirs, to measure Canadian nature was, misguidedly, inherited from England. *L’arrière-pays* that Étienne Beaulieu relates to in his reading of Ringuet’s *Trente arpents* can be seen as a metaphor of the immensity of Canadian space. Even though this “*sentiment de la prose*,” as Beaulieu calls it, can be historically traced back to the New France period, he relates it to the incommensurability which is beyond every historical moment. In fact, we can experience it when “going through a territory, opening a book and meeting someone unexpectedly, as everyday life could plunge without warning into a buried reality which is much more real than what makes the everyday life of our societies.”

As most of the articles in “The incommensurate” section make clear (most vividly Rankin’s), the inadequacy of the measuring apparatus often calls for action that questions and transcends the adopted measures and norms. Thus, the articles in the second section continue, to some extent, reflection on various artificial “standards,” yet the emphasis falls more on the instances when the standard or norm is disturbed or transgressed. Ildikó Szilágyi’s paper deals with the interplay of measure and excess with reference to the forms of 20th-century Québécois poetry. Szilágyi shows how poetic forms, measured or being beyond measure, are involved in the construction of the meaning and produce stylistic effects. Alicja Żuchelkowska uses the notion of *hors norme* to discuss narrative strategies in the works of two Acadian writers: France Daigle and Antonine Maillet. As the author argues, while Maillet draws on the potential of the oral expression contrasting with a regular narrative structure, in Daigle’s *œuvre* the key role is played by silence which fragments the narrative code. The rejection of the traditional forms in order to hear minority writers’ voices is also a central point of Mélanie Curé’s article devoted to the Manitoban francophone writer J.R. Lévillé. Consciously subversive and manifestly transgressive, Lévillé’s prose breaks away from the conventional modes of spreading through literature the culture of a minority seen as a community and focuses on an individual experience. In Alina Grygierczyk’s contribution the uniqueness of Polish women’s immigrant experiences (as compared with a “standard” Canadian narrative) is highlighted by various techniques of life-writing (e.g. the use of Polish words and phrases). As she concludes, “in their life writing texts, Kojder and Drzewiecki employ excess and push the limits of what critics consider autobiography precisely because they invent new forms of narrative to suggest both the range and the

instabilities of their hybrid identities.” Finally, Daniel S. Larangé discusses impasses of the internationalist postmodernity which seems to have erased disparities in favor of an ubiquitous homogeneity. Leaning on Bauman, Lyotard and Maffesoli, he claims that postmodernity, conforming to its outrageous penchant for measuring, labeling and classifying in the name of the common we are supposed to share, makes the (multimedia) world fall straight into a sad and daily grotesque. Larangé’s reading of the work of Naïm Kattan becomes particularly interesting in such a framework, whereas what he calls “québécoisité” offers itself as an answer to globalization.

The volume also contains selected parts of two MA theses that participated in the 2011 Nancy Burke competition for the best MA thesis. Jacek Mulczyk-Skarżyński’s thesis on the dialectics of alienation in the plays of Michel Tremblay won the first prize (shared with Alicja Śmigielska, not represented in this volume), while Jolanta Dziuba’s thesis on dehumanization and rehumanization of the Canadian First Nations as depicted in Lee Maracle’s work received an Honorable Mention.

### **Works Cited:**

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*. Trans. by Peggy Kamuff. New York and London: Routledge, 1994.