Works Shared: The Social Forms of Vancouver Poetry of the 1960s and 1970s

by

Donald M. Hunter

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**Examining Committee:**

Glenn Deer, English
Supervisor

Adam Frank, English
Supervisory Committee Member

Kevin McNeilly, English
Supervisory Committee Member

Richard Kurth, School of Music
University Examiner

Margery Fee, English
University Examiner

**Abstract**

My dissertation examines how strategies of collaboration and collectivity are at work in the poetry of several poets who resided in Vancouver in the 1960s and 1970s: bill bissett, George Bowering, Martina Clinton, Frank Davey, and Maxine Gadd. It investigates works published in *Tish* and *blewointment* within a spirit of group work and sociability. I examine this "poetics of sociability" (Daniel Kane's term), while acknowledging the fluidity of the term "collaboration," which will give way to more contextual terms such as "collective" and "communal." However, while these aspects of collectivity challenge the myth of the solitary author, and are in line with the communal ethos of the period, my study also investigates how these writers resisted or adapted these group models and asserted their own individual authorship. This dissertation is intended to serve as a broad survey of the early works of bissett, Bowering, Davey, but also as a recovery and inaugural scholarly engagement with the works of Clinton and Gadd. I employ the methodology of close reading texts by all these authors, expand upon it by interpreting documentaries of the period, and examine an audio recording of a poetry reading.

The introduction surveys the theorization of collaboration in post-1945 North American poetry. My second chapter then introduces *Tish* and analyzes the responsive, collective nature of the work published in that magazine, with particular attention to a new collaborative form invented by Bowering and Davey, the "twin poem." The raw materials of the poetry of these *Tish* poets is seen to emerge from a context of group work, or as Robert Duncan terms it, "works shared." The third chapter introduces the journal *blewointment*, and looks closely at how its editors, bissett and Clinton, shared their domestic space and represented it in their works. The fourth chapter examines how George Bowering exploits the form of the anthology and risks the "anti-social" in his book *Curious*. And the fifth chapter looks at, and listens to, how Maxine Gadd uses the platform

of the public poetry reading to circulate her unpublished work, and to express doubts about sociability and collectivity.

**Lay Summary**

This work is a study of Vancouver poets of the 1960s and 1970s, with a special focus on two important magazines published in the city at that time, *Tish* and *blewointment*. My aim is to help contribute to an emerging discussion of the importance of Vancouver literature, especially in its earlier formations. I see this work partly as a cultural history of Vancouver in that time period, particularly as I examine a number of works that explicitly depict the city before the rapid growth of the 1980s and beyond. In addition to adding to the critical work on bill bissett, George Bowering, and Frank Davey, I also want to recover the importance of lesser-known Vancouver writers, such as Martina Clinton, Maxine Gadd, and Red Lane.

**Preface**

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Donald M. Hunter.

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**Acknowledgements**

This work arose out of my previous scholarship on collaboration in New York School poetry of the 1950s and 1960s. This dates back to my B.A. Honours project at the University of Alberta, supervised by Dr. Dianne Chisholm, and my M.A. at the University of Victoria, supervised by Dr. Luke Carson. As the work changed form and crossed national and provincial borders, my discussions with my supervisor, Dr. Glenn Deer, have been invaluable.

**Chapter One: Introduction**

How do myths structure how we look at writers, the communities they belong to, and the texts they write? This dissertation confronts the myth of the solitary author, and seeks to place the Vancouver poets under investigation here within a context of literary community, collaboration, and collective work. However, studies of literary communities can themselves take on the quality of an origin story. Michael Davidson begins his book *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetry and Community At Mid-Century*:

> The writing of literary history invariably takes mythic forms. A new school,
> movement, or aesthetic credo often emerges from a series of enabling fictions
> that structure the reading of a given text. Inaugural moments like the premiere
> of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*, the Armory Show, the arrival of Tristan
> Tzara in Zurich, and the meeting of Picasso and Braque have become, for better
> or worse, the luminous centers around which modernism has been formulated.
> Such moments galvanize public attention and give to the desultory evolution of
> literary history the illusion of purpose and direction. But these enabling fictions
> of origin often obscure creative dissension and opposition that are a part of any
> literary movement. (1)

These opening sentences serve as a useful reminder to the scholar writing in the genre of literary history: Davidson claims "fictions" pervade the histories of literary communities, and that these romantic pitfalls are inescapable. In his scheme, the history of the San Francisco Renaissance is constructed from a complex of existing myths (of the frontier space of the West, for example) and verifiable historical events (such as workshops and readings), that surround an epiphanic moment when the movement *emerged*, namely the legendary poetry reading at the Six Gallery

on October 13, 1955. This event, Davidson notes, was recounted most memorably in Jack Kerouac's novel *The Dharma Bums*, which fictionalizes the main attraction – Allen Ginsberg's reading of his then-unpublished long poem *Howl* (3). Kerouac conjures the scene in mythic terms, calling the reading "the night of the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance," and claiming "I was the one who got things jumping" by collecting money from the audience to purchase "three huge gallon jugs of California Burgundy" to start the bacchanalia (*Dharma Bums* 13-14).

For Davidson, this origin story helps to "galvanize public attention" – thus creating an audience and a potential community of readers – but it also "obscure[s] creative dissension and opposition that are a part of any literary movement" (1). The narrative of the Six Gallery moment emphasizes Allen Ginsberg's landmark recitation of *Howl*, but effaces the participation of other, less declamatory readers that evening. The four other poets present at the Six Gallery reading– Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen – are pushed to the background of the story, subordinate to Ginsberg's headlining act. Davidson writes that Kerouac's "ecstatic picture" glosses over important points that need to be recovered in a more accurate portrayal of the city's literary scene: important poets such as Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer are not present at this birth, and the ideal unity Kerouac depicts excludes the divergent readings on display that evening from the other four poets. Davidson provides a closer examination of the San Francisco Renaissance by focusing on these other actors – Duncan, Snyder, Spicer and Whalen – as a portrait of diversity, rather than a simplified unity.

The history of innovative poetry in Vancouver is still being written, by authors such as George Bowering, Clint Burnham, Frank Davey, and others who question smoothly narrated cultural history. Yet it would be an exaggeration to claim that it is as mythologized as the revered

San Francisco Renaissance movement, with its Beat celebrities (Ginsberg), its venerable theo-

rists (Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer), and its publishers and hosts (Lawrence Ferlinghetti and City

Light Books). Yet Vancouver occupies a position within Canadian literary history which is sim-

ultaneously mythical *and* marginal. Within the thinly populated, spread-out map of literary Can-

ada in the 1960s, Vancouver is on the edge, both geographically as a terminus point in the West

and metaphorically because of its history of avant-garde and experimental writing. Christian Bök

notes that "[c]ontemporary, experimental poetry in Canada owes much of its recent origin and its

active legacy to a pair of historical narratives, both reiterated so frequently that they verge upon

mythic status": the first is the story of the Vancouver Poetry Conference, and the second is the

Kootenay School of Writing (KSW) conference held in the same city in 1985 (97). Reviewing

the particular impact of *Tish*, which was founded in Vancouver in 1961, Gregory Betts writes

that "the well-mythologized geographic politics and literary pugilism surrounding the TISH

movement's inauspicious beginnings often outweigh critical assessments of the magazine's con-

tribution to Canadian letters" (65). C.H. Gervais writes that *Tish*'s "influence upon poetry in

Canada is undeniable and considerable," and even surmises that "the magazine's poetics may be

responsible in some way for the poetry of bill bissett, Joe Rosenblatt, and the Four Horsemen"

(9). The politics and pugilism Betts attributes to *Tish* arise out of the group's fiercely critical

stance in editorials and reviews in early issues, which asserted the kind of Projective poetics the-

orized by Charles Olson, and which occasionally drew vexed correspondence from poets on

*Tish*'s mailing list. However, Betts asserts that "the myth of this contestation […] quickly dis-

solved and was demonstrably erased by 1968 in the spirit of a common avant-garde" (65).

Through all this contention and conciliation, the marginal avant-garde outpost of Vancouver

as represented by its boisterous explorers in *Tish* becomes seen as central. Gervais claims that the

editors of *Tish* go on to influence poetic experimentation in Canada, including "the development of sound and concrete poetry" (9). Stephen Collis, in an entry in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, claims that "[a]s a vanguard movement in an aesthetically conservative and soundly postcolonial country, *Tish* pointed the way to a more engaged practice, enabling later devels. [sic] such as the Toronto avant-garde that formed around bpNichol and Steve McCaffery, as well as Vancouver's Kootenay School of Writing" (1439). Both Gervais and Collis articulate some significant claims about *Tish* and Vancouver: first, that the magazine enables avant-garde work to flourish in Toronto, suggesting that Vancouver is now the literary center which instigates "engaged" work that opposes the "aesthetically conservative"; and, second, that *Tish* enables later avant-garde formations in the city, such as the Kootenay School of Writing (KSW). Gervais also credits *Tish* with the development of sound and concrete poetry in Canada, an outsized claim for its centrality to the nation's experimental poetics. Christian Bök responds to critics who argue a direct link connects the poetics of *Tish* and the KSW: he asserts in "Tish and Koot" that "[e]ven though the two coteries share analogous interests, and even though members of the former group have mentored on occasion members of the latter group, the relationship between these two coteries involves no genealogy of hereditary succession" (98). A look at the *Princeton* index, in which Collis's entry appears, reveals that there is no entry for Vancouver's *blewointment*[1] magazine, and only one brief mention of bill bissett, the poet most associated with that poetry journal, in a long survey of the "Poetry of Canada." The somewhat grandiose claims for the centrality of *Tish* seem to obscure the contributions of *blewointment* to the development of Vancouver and Canadian avant-garde poetics, a problem this dissertation addresses.

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[1] The magazine's name is rendered differently as *blewointmentpress*, *blew ointment*, or *blewointment*. I have chosen to use the latter throughout, unless quoting others who favor other variants. I reference books published by bissett as blew ointment press, without the italics.

The importance of *blewointment* within the civic and national avant-garde needs to be truly recognized, for, while it maintains a minor notoriety, its legacy is eclipsed time and again by *Tish* in historical accounts and runs the risk of being erased from literary history[2]. This magazine published throughout the 1960s and 1970s, was devoted to experimental local poetry, and its adjunct press published many books by experimental Canadian writers, a large number of whom were women, such as Martina Clinton, Candas Jane Dorsey, Cathy Ford, Maxine Gadd, Gwen Hauser, and Carolyn Zonailo[3]. In fact, with its emergent focus on concrete and visual poetry, it could be argued that *blewointment* had as large or a larger impact on developments in Toronto avant-garde poetics: bpNichol, whom Collis refers to in his *Tish* entry, published often in *blewointment* and subsequently put out bissett's first book, *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* in 1966. Nichols' and bissett's status as important avant-garde writers can be traced back to early experiments with visual space and line arrangements in *blewointment*. That these developments get linked solely to *Tish* contributes to a pervasive problem in the narrative of Vancouver poetry in which *Tish* is canonized and *blewointment*'s contributions go largely unspoken and unexamined. Thus, one of the goals of this dissertation is to properly reframe the discussion of early 1960s Vancouver poetry with *blewointment* as a major contributor to the literary activity in the city.

I want to connect these myths of origin and constructions of centers and margins to a set of terms that will recur throughout this dissertation: collaboration, collectivity, and sociability. Though these terms will be defined more strictly later in the introduction, collaboration involves

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[2] In 1983, bissett sold the press to David Lee and Maureen Cochrane, who changed the name to Nightwood Editions. They, and subsequent owners of the press have worked on extending and commemorating bissett's work.

[3] Butling and Rudy note that *blewointment* "[p]roduced five volumes to 1968, followed by un-numbered 'speshuls,'" the last one appearing in 1978 (3).

some type of multiple authorship, the collective involves group activity, including the production of little magazines, but also exploration of poetic theory, and sociability refers to aspects of group or community solidarity. These terms are at odds with another persistent myth of literary historiography: the myth of the solitary author. This myth often separates writers from the communities they emerge from and belong to. For example, while poets such as George Bowering, Frank Davey, and Fred Wah are still remembered as being part of the collective editorship of *Tish*, *blewointment* is usually portrayed in the historical record as under the sole control of bill bissett. Ken Norris, in *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-80* confirms the idea of *Tish* as collective when he observes that "*Tish* had seemed monolithic," while the journal *Open Letter*, founded by Davey, "show the young poets attempting to assert their individual styles and views of poetry" (125). On the other hand, discussions of *blewointment*, such as Geoffrey Hancock's entry on English-language national literary magazines in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, typically refer to the other major little magazine in early 1960s Vancouver as "bill bissett's radical *blewointment*" (1345).

Why are Bowering, Davey, and Wah still remembered as contributors to a long-gone little magazine, while *blewointment* is considered a bissett solo project? For a poetry community whose origin is often traced back to the Vancouver Poetry Conference, in which a multitude of American and Canadian poets participated, the concepts of social and collective forms of work should be emphasized, to complement cultural histories of contemporary poetry communities in New York City and San Francisco by Daniel Kane and Michael Davidson. Poets in 1960s Vancouver may have occasionally felt that they were in a marginal literary backwater, yet their engagement with contemporary avant-garde poetry outside their civic and national borders reveals how the city's writing communities were built through collaborative and collective effort: the

visits of the American Black Mountain and San Francisco Renaissance poets; and the influence

of *The Floating Bear*, a Beat/New York School poetry journal, on the editorial collective of *Tish*.

**The "Vancouver Poetry Conference"**

The "luminous center" around which Vancouver (post)modernism has been formulated is arguably the 1963 "Vancouver Poetry Conference." Although the founding of *Tish* in 1961 can be considered the starting point of contemporary avant-garde writing in the city, the 1963 event has been significantly depicted after the fact as a watershed moment which influenced more than just local poets. While not as well-known as the Six Gallery reading, this event has become a modest legend of its own, most notably in Robert MacTavish's documentary *The Line Has Shattered*: the narrative usually centers around the group of eminent practitioners of the New American Poetry who visited Vancouver in the summer of 1963 to give readings, lectures and workshops at the University of British Columbia. The New American Poetry is the label for a diverse group of poets who were anthologized in Donald Allen's 1960 publication *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*, a collection of post-war U.S. poetry in the avant-garde tradition of William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, H.D., and others (Allen, "Preface" xi). The "New" in the "New American Poetry" signifies more than just "contemporary": it is "new" also in the sense of the Modernist slogan (often attributed to Ezra Pound"), to innovate and "Make it new." The "new" also carries the connotation of opposition to the contemporary strain of "academic verse" prevalent in American literature of the time (Allen xi). Alan Golding states that the Allen anthology "helped promote and canonize ideas of field composition based on Charles Olson's "Projective Verse"; a (re)definition of poetic form as immanent and processual; a poetics of dailiness and of the personal (as distinct from the confessional); and a poetry of humor and play (as distinct from wit)"

(180-181). Allen divided the poets in the anthology into five groups: the Black Mountain Poets, the San Francisco Renaissance, The Beat Generation, the New York School of Poets, and a final category of "no geographical definition … [including] younger poets who have been associated with and in some cases influenced by the leading writers of the preceding groups, but who have evolved their own original styles and new conceptions of poetry" (xiii). The visitors to UBC featured members of these groups, save the New York School: Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Charles Olson and Philip Whalen. For the young poets of Vancouver, these representatives of a "New American" poetry might have seemed like exciting alternatives to the colonial Canadian poetry they had been exposed to in school: Frank Davey writes in his memoir *When Tish Happens* of the perceived lack of "admirable models" (58) amidst his impression of the "empty cultural space" of Canada (62).  Allen's post-war survey of the American poetry landscape provided these models, and it also included key theoretical statements such as Olson's essay "Projective Verse." Davey confirms this excitement of discovering the New American Poetry, writing that he was "especially struck by Olson's declaration that the poem can be viewed as an 'action' that the poet does […] Doing something has always felt more significant to me than the thing done" (98).

Like the Six Gallery origin story for the San Francisco Renaissance, the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference serves as a fixed point bookended by important, previous "background" activity (the visits of Creeley and Duncan, the establishment of *Tish* magazine, all pre-1963) and which also points to further activity: Jack Spicer's Vancouver Lectures of 1965, and the Berkeley Poetry Conference of 1965, which, according to Peter Gizzi "was in part a response in the United States to the success of the previous Vancouver event" (xxiii). But I want to return to Davidson's concept of how literary history is constructed out of "enabling fictions." It should be noted that

the "Vancouver Poetry Conference" was not really a conference at all. In fact, it was a summer undergraduate course offered by the English Department of the University of British Columbia: English 410, a 3-credit class held from July 24 to August 16, 1963, nominally helmed by UBC professor Warren Tallman (Butling and Rudy 3). While it was presumably never officially referred to as a conference while it was in session, this after-the-fact appellation suggests at least one enabling fiction about Vancouver poetry that I would like to problematize in my study: i.e., the view that its poetics is consumed with theoretical and academic debates. That is, I would like to trouble the assumption that the site of Vancouver poetry is on its major university campus, and not also elsewhere – on the streets, in domestic spaces, and even among the surrounding geography of the Gulf Islands[4]. Perhaps the view that *Tish* begat avant-garde activity in Vancouver arises concurrently with this construction of an academic "conference" held at UBC, but it is important to note that many of the poets associated with *blewointment* were UBC students as well, though Warren Tallman's survey of the Vancouver scene, "Wonder Merchants," places them explicitly as the "downtown" poets.

My aim is to rebalance the discussion of literary activity in the city at formative moments in the 1960s: while the split between "Tish" and "downtown" can still be detected in talk about Vancouver poetry, it is important to note that *blewointment* poets such as bill bissett and Martina Clinton, were present at the 1963 event, as well as Jack Spicer's 1965 Vancouver lectures, and enacting the lessons found there in their own poetry and poetics. Despite Tallman's categorizations, we can see the poets of both *Tish* and *blewointment* as "Vancouver" poets who shared

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[4] Maxine Gadd, for example, left Vancouver for Galiano Island at one point, and some of her poems that I will be discussing were written outside of the city.

space (in classrooms, at parties, etc.) and work (producing separate magazines that featured work with an interest in the avant-garde).

**Wonder Merchants**

Warren Tallman was a University of Washington-trained professor who began working in the English Department at UBC in 1956. His essay "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver during the 1960s" was first published in a 1974 "Canadian" issue of *boundary 2*, a journal founded in 1972 that even today continues its focus on postmodernist literature, founded by American William Spanos and Canadian writer and professor Robert Kroetsch. Tallman's essay is an impressionistic blend of myth and analysis, tracing the path of American modernism's "introduction" to the mythical Western frontier of Vancouver via Creeley, Duncan and Olson, and a rejection of an Eastern Canadian literary tradition of humanism. He begins the essay by considering the audience at a Robert Creeley reading at the University of British Columbia in 1962: terming it a "puzzler" that the unprepared spectators' response (Creeley's first major book had not yet been published) was so "enthusiastic" and "appropriate" (175). Tallman finds the answer to the puzzle in "something like Vancouver innocence," but also "because they [the audience] were not caught up in a scheme of classifications," which permitted them to "respond directly to Creeley's qualities and quick-handed sensibilities" (176). Tallman describes the assembled throngs (several hundred people attended the reading) in terms of innocence and inexperience, and similarly portrays the space they inhabit – the "West" – as an "open, empty western region" that almost magically becomes peopled after the visits of American poets such as Creeley and Robert Duncan, who had visited a year earlier (181). In fact, Tallman essentializes geography throughout "Wonder Merchants" in such a way that we might see it as a literal extension of Dean Irvine's discus-

sion of the marginality of Canadian modernism in his introduction to the book *The Canadian Modernists Meet*, where he critiques the view that our national modernist poetry is "belated" or lagging behind the more dominant strains in Britain and the U.S. In Tallman's case, his claim that Canadian literary modernism emerges in Vancouver in the early 1960s, in concert with the guidance of influential "New American" poets, is consistent with this narrative of national modernist marginality, in which Western Canada's coastal edge becomes the *locus amoenus* for the establishment of Tallman's capital-M Modernism. He writes that "Modernism caught on in the Canadian west because it was right for the west, where the environment is so open and undefined that the self stays open and undefined, child-like perhaps, easily given over to a sense of inner wonder" (185). Tallman peppers "Wonder Merchants" with some unfortunately stereotypical types and tropes, revelling in the West's palimpsestic spaciousness where "only Chief Crazy Foot could walk the footless hills" and the return of "the Modernist spirit, like buffalos come back again" (194). Tallman indulges in copious Indigenous appropriation, "indigenizing" poets such as bissett and Gadd, and concluding the essay with a call to "Rouse Indians from their long pub slumber and toss them in with old artifacts, fish, totem poles, potlatches, and whaling canoes pouring from their eyes […] You, Chief Crazy Foot, down from the hills, lift it in your winged and featherd hands and pour it into the waiting vase" (207). He exploits racialized language and imagery when he connects Fred Wah's writing to his "half-strain of Chinese blood" and his home in the Selkirk Valley as a kind of "mysterious … Shangri-La" (200); and describes Roy Kiyooka's "Japanese origins" and "inner eye for the fineness in things" accounting for his "strict formalizing impulse" (205).  Tallman's pervasive essentialism in "Wonder Merchants" can also be detected more subtly when Tallman divides the writing groups found in the city according to geography.

The Tish group is made up of UBC students who get their group name from the magazine they began publishing in the fall of 1961: in *A Magpie Life,* Bowering writes that the name of the magazine/newsletter – an anagram of "shit," was suggested by Robert Duncan (209). In the classifying schema of literary history, anyone who published regularly in *Tish,* or who served on the editorial "board" of the magazine is seen in the Tish/UBC camp: this would include George Bowering, Frank Davey, Lionel Kearns, Jamie Reid, and Fred Wah. All of these poets were students at UBC who went on to have productive writing careers, but in many ways, they are still seen to be "Tish" poets. Of course, grouping these poets together effaces diverse writing strategies and individual subjectivities and also obscures the creative dissension and discussion that the poets fostered within the pages of the journal, much in the same way that the Six Gallery origin story of the San Francisco Renaissance eclipses the contributions of four other poets performing that evening. But to be a Tish poet signifies something perhaps more important than unity in terms of Canadian poetics, as the label has often been applied pejoratively, to mark the suspicious American mentors and precursors of these Vancouver writers: a 1970s study of *Tish,* by Keith Richardson, is titled *Poetry and the Colonized Mind* and carries a preface by Robin Mathews which excoriates *Tish*'s involvement in the "U.S. invasion and colonization of a part of the poetic culture of Canada" (7). These attacks on Tish are notable not only as expressions of the intense cultural nationalism of 1960s & 70s Canada, but also reveal deep apprehensions about the group's theoretical and experimental tendencies.

The "Downtown" group is sketched in Tallman's essay, "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver During the 1960s," Of the Vancouver scene, Tallman writes

> Two related groups were drawn into the vortex of energy swirling in the *Tish*

place, one willingly, the other with a certain interested reluctance.[5] […] The more

reluctant ones lived 'downtown,' Gerry Gilbert, Judy Copithorne, Maxine Gadd,

bill bissett, Roy Kiyooka, John Newlove. Already oriented towards modernist art

… and interested in the American poetry *Tish* was emphasizing, they distrusted

what seemed a heavily academic orientation that all the *Tish* editors were students

[…] What *Tish* did not have for the downtowners didn't come clear in decisive

ways until the original energy began to wobble in spring, 1963. *Tish* continued

that summer and then, intermittently through to 1968. But almost as if energy

were being transferred from one centre to another, in October, 1963 bill bissett

stepped in with *Blewointment Press* and a poetics that had not been in the *Tish*

vortex began to come alive. Bissett [sic], himself an energy vortex and wonder-

merchant, became the new centre for the energy that *Tish* had generated. (196)

Tallman's timeline here brings *Tish* to the forefront (to inaugurate the "vortex of energy" that

gets carried on by later agents), yet it also reveals another group of poets in the city "already ori-

ented towards modernist art" as well as "the American poetry *Tish* was emphasizing." The tem-

porality here suggests that these "reluctant" but sympathetic downtowners existed concurrently,

or perhaps even *prior* to, the founding of *Tish*, which indicates that the "energy" latent in Van-

couver (to lapse into Tallman's Poundian/Olsonian register) might already have been activated

before 1961. Tallman, though, firmly locates the source of the "original energy" in the environs

of UBC, and separates the other group temporally and geographically in his scheme: relegating

them "downtown" and as successors who channel this vigorous *Tish* energy into establishing a

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[5] Tallman's "willing" group consists of future editors of *Tish*, including David Cull and Daphne
Marlatt.

work of their own. While Tallman's framing here bestows a certain chic street cred to the downtown group (who apparently dwell far away from the groves of academe), it places them *after* *Tish* in his chronology and avoids seeing them as contemporary literary workers in the city.

My intention here is not to criticize Tallman for his myth-making (he is invaluable as a scholar, commentator, and organizer), except to point to his essay as a defining document in the creation of a cohesive narrative of Vancouver poetry and poetics. He helpfully directs our attention to *blewointment* as another rich source of poetics in Vancouver, which departs from *Tish* in its implied lack of academic and theoretical frameworks. Also, since Tallman's emphasis on collective energy is destabilized somewhat by focusing on bissett as the sole producer of the magazine (Martina Clinton and Lance Farrell were co-founders), I aim to reframe the discussion of *blewointment* and *Tish* both as collective enterprises, to substitute plurality and multiplicity in place of the drive for a unified narrative of local literary history.

My argument, then, is that whatever picture we have of the Vancouver avant-garde poetry community – besides the primary texts in *Tish* and *blewointment* – is structured largely out of Tallman's formulations in "Wonder Merchants," which presents the already-existing myth of the open frontier space of the Canadian West along with nascent notions of the city's poetry scene of the 1960s being divided into a serious theoretical group (*Tish*) and a more street-wise, less academic group (*blewointment*) who "inherit" the energy produced after the first group disperses. Peter Culley, in a 1992 essay on Downtown poet Gerry Gilbert, sees in this kind of narrative the seeds of an "Authorized Version" of Vancouver literary history, which allows the downtown poets in only as a "footnote" because of a perceived "capitulation" to *Tish* ("Citizen Gilbert," n.p.). At the very least, we could say that this history is prone to a persistent slippage, in which Downtown/*blewointment* gets alternately included and excluded. It is crucial to revisit and revise Tall-

man's project of historicizing experimental Vancouver poetics and the collective energy which produced it, so it will be necessary to firmly embed *blewointment* within this process without subordinating it to *Tish*. And, since Davidson cautions that enabling fictions create historical myths that "obscure creative dissension and opposition," one way to study the collective energy of 1960s Vancouver poetry is to look at how practices of sociability and collaboration produced the early work of Vancouver poets, as recorded in two important local literary magazines of the early 1960s, *Tish* and *blewointment*.

**Theorizing Literary Sociability and Collaboration**

The myth of the author as solitary genius is as potent and persistent as myths of origin or place. Collaborative writing is often seen as a challenge to this myth of creativity. Mark Silverberg writes of the post-war avant-garde's "sense of exhaustion with notions of self-expressive identity and object-based art" and terms subsequent developments as a "wide spread challenge to conventional ideas about the work of art as the unique expression of a singular creator" (3-4). Silverberg here frames collaboration as a wider, cross-discipline practice: while Abstract Expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock were still being hailed as heroic, singular (and tortured) creators of uniquely individual art works, poets of the "first generation" of the New York School[6] were joining together with lesser-known contemporary artists to produce playful, composite works that straddled the categories of literary and visual arts. The "second generation,"

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[6] The New York School of poets, one of the groups or movements featured in Donald Allen's 1960 anthology, *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*, consists of a "first generation" (established in the 1950s) including John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara and James Schuyler, a "second generation" of the 1960s, including Ted Berrigan, Joe Brainard and Ron Padgett – all of these mentioned were prolific collaborators, within the coterie and with visual artists such as Larry Rivers and George Schneeman.

who were active from the 1960s onwards, amplified this interest in collaboration and produced magazines (including *"C"* and *Angel Hair)* which published many collaboratively authored texts. Ultimately, Silverberg is positive that collaboration is a provocation to outmoded concepts of literary creation.

Others see collaboration not so much as an all-out assault on the myth, but as something which impedes or inhibits its perpetuation, a resistance to solitary creation developed within a context of sociability suggested by New York artists and poets. Daniel Kane, detailing the history of the Poetry Project at St. Mark's (a venerable institution in the New York literary landscape for many years), notes that while the Project promoted well-known personalities such as Ted Berrigan, "it also depreciated the value of authorial and individual presence through acts of collaboration and political organization" (*All Poets Welcome* 194). Kane sees collaboration not as an eradicator of authorial presence, but rather as a practice which defies conventional standards of literary value. Most studies of literary collaboration note how a text with more than one author is regarded as an aberration or a novelty, underscoring a critical bias towards the myth of the solitary author (who *alone* can produce a masterpiece). Kane introduces the notion that collaboration is a practice whose main end is *social* – maintaining or creating a social bond between two or more writers – rather than producing a work of high literary value. In fact, Kane has coined the term "poetics of sociability" to describe poetic texts which reveal the interconnections between social life and collaboration (*All Poets Welcome*, 162). "Sociability" is the spirit of group cohesion that results from a collaboratively-written poem at a party, for example: the goal of that activity is not to produce a masterpiece, but rather to have fun and to create something new.

I follow Andrew Epstein in defining the "social" in poetry as "the material realities of writing communities, especially how they relate to such things as the construction of community, the

strategies of poetic careers, the nature of gender roles, the processes of canonization, or the institutions of poetry, both establishment and underground" (7-8). However, Epstein critiques current studies of literary community and collaboration that seek solely how the social processes behind poetic community produce group solidarity, rather than instances of resistance and "disruptive individualism" (34). I find such resistance and individualism in Bowering's poetry collection *Curious* (the focus of Chapter 4) and Gadd's spoken commentary at her poetry reading at Sir George Williams University in Montreal (discussed in the final chapter).

My view of the social in this dissertation also has been shaped by Karen Burke Lefevre's assertion that "rhetorical invention is better understood as a social act, in which an individual who is at the same time a social being interacts in a distinctive way with society and culture to create something," which conflicts with the still-prevalent "Platonic" belief that literary production is the act of a solitary creator (1). Lefevre also introduces the idea of "hidden enablers" involved in the act of writing, including "those whose criticism prompted further invention; and those who created an environment in which that writer could invent" (30). The "hidden enablers" under consideration here are other poets, spouses, and publishers, and the environments discussed are, by turns, academic, domestic, sometimes supportive and sometimes competitive.

Some who have produced studies on collaborative authorship, however, do not see the practice as a significant challenge to the myth of the solitary author. Linda Karell writes that "[t]he traditional, seemingly straightforward definition of collaboration as the creation of a text by two or more individuals working together … leaves our underlying belief in the unique creativity of the individual author intact" (2). Wayne Koestenbaum sees it even more starkly, suggesting that collaboration could be defined "as a dark satanic force that redeems authority by inverting it, a principle that pretends to undermine literary property while secretly strengthening it: a collabora-

tive work equals Authority squared" (9-10). Each of these comments center on the problem of defining the concept of collaboration or multiple authorship, which Karell attempts to solve by "employing the term collaboration in its widest definition" (xx), and which Koestenbaum side-steps by concentrating his study of double authorship as an attack on "dogmas … of sexual pro-priety" rather than literary "property" (8-9). Koestenbaum's contribution to theories of literary collaboration is to point to the sexual dynamics at play in a co-authored text, especially the sub-merged homosocial, or explicitly homosexual desires that might be read into one.

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of this writing on collaboration derives from these theo-rist's refusal to engage with any "seemingly straightforward" definition of the practice (Karell 2). Studies of literary collaboration and multiple authorship written by Karell, Koestenbaum, Jack Stillinger, and others are useful, but they look chiefly at collaboration arising from alternative arrangements such as the writer-editor relationship, or intertextual borrowing amongst other col-laborative acts, and do not analyze any of the array of literary texts produced in the last 70 years specifically written by two or more authors: the "straightforward" definition. Famous partner-ships such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, Pound and Eliot are covered in many of these studies, but the wide selection of post-war avant-garde collaborations by New American Poets, such as the "cut-up" method of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, or *Bean Spasms*, by Ted Berri-gan, Joe Brainard and Ron Padgett, are unacknowledged. However, defining collaboration in a broader sense, as Karell and Stillinger do, allows leeway for related terms which arise in any sus-tained analysis of the practice, such as "collective," a term which seems more specifically rele-vant to the works under discussion here. This term helps me to escape the conundrum of collabo-ration's broad definition as a single work produced two or more authors, by suggesting a group of affiliated writers working on individual projects related to a central project or concept.  More

than a mere synonym for "collaboration" – this related term of the "collective" underscores group aspects of literary *work* that I wish to emphasize, rather than literary *play*, a notion usually attached to New York School collaborations.

Karell does acknowledge that there are problems with the "inclusive, everything-is-collaboration approach," citing Heather Hirschfeld's objection to expanding the meaning of the term beyond "simply two or more writers working on a fictional text" ("Introduction," xx). Hirschfeld asserts that "to use the term for any of the multiple activities and people that make possible a literary endeavor, or to insist that literary work is by its nature collaborative – risks evacuating the term of analytic meaning," which Karell states is a "risk [she is] willing to take" (xx). But studies such as Karell's and Stillinger's arguably also maintain the "single author" hypothesis due to their heavy concentration on individual writers such as Wallace Stegner, John Keats, William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot: while it is a venerable deconstructionist project to decenter the autonomy of canonical writers, the intense focus on them paradoxically preserves their centrality. Not only this, studies of canonical authors and their collaborative "sources" neglect analysis of the important aspect of *sociability* that occurs when two or more authors write together, and which even structures the collaborative text they produce. Karell passes over the possibilities of dyadic (or triadic, etc.) collaborations: she writes that "collaboration – when it is recognized at all – is usually seen in its simplest, least threatening guise as two or more authors writing together to produce a text" (xxxi.) Yet here she implicitly acknowledges that one of the ways that collaboration is maligned lies within the notion that only a single author is capable of producing a "masterpiece": the text written by two or more authors has been historically devalued and ignored in literary criticism, hardly "recognized at all." The "threat," not as "simple" as it may seem, is to long-held standards of literary value that posit the solemnity and solitude of

the act of writing, whereas something within the collaborative act appears frivolous and fun-seeking – in a word, social. Therefore, I intend my study of Vancouver collaborations to examine this poetics of sociability (Daniel Kane's term) within the practice, while also acknowledging the fluidity of the term "collaboration," and its "multiple and sometimes radical reinterpretation[s]" (Karell xx). This means that the term "collaborative" will give way to more contextual terms such as "collective" and "communal."[7] Thomas Hines provides a succinct definition that interestingly sees collaboration as labour *in process*, rather than as an end product: he describes collaboration as "the work artists do together to produce a joint creation" (qtd. in Silverberg 2). The various kinds of collaborative arrangements I will be looking at always involve this notion of *work*, and how writers share the labour, or the *space* of a literary "work," rather than seeing collaborative partnerships as an inevitable doubling of the solitary genius myth (circumventing Koestenbaum's charge of "authority squared").

### Sociability and Collectivity

Daniel Kane uses the term "poetics of sociability" to emphasize the importance of the "communal impulses" behind the collaborative texts of the second generation of New York School poets ("*Angel Hair*" 92). For Kane, and others taking up the notion of sociability (such as Andrew Epstein), the prerequisite of friendship and its attendant conviviality is an essential aspect of any New York School collaborative text, and can even be felt in many singularly-

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[7] "Cooperation" is a term raised by Duncan in "For the Novices of Vancouver": it suggests a practice different from "collaboration" in the New York School sense. The "twin poem" is cooperative because they share a common topic or concept, but not in the form of one single-authored text. "Collective" denotes group work (which can include three or more authors) that reflects and builds on common concepts or forms. "Communal" describes work that arises out of, or represents "living together," domestically or in close physical proximity within a shared community.

authored poems by Berrigan, O'Hara, and others, especially in texts that are directly dedicated or addressed to colleagues. Kane distinguishes between this notion of sociability and the type of joint authorship practiced by Language writers, another group noted for its collaborative tendencies. Kane cites Barrett Watten's description of a Language-oriented "aesthetic of collective practice" as somewhat different than New York School sociability (100). Noting the strong assertion of individual authorship in a multi-authored work such as *Legend*, written by five Language school writers whose names and discreet sections are "clearly marked and paginated in a table of contents," Kane sets this against collaborations in New York School magazines such as *Angel Hair*, *The World*, and *Adventures in Poetry*, which attempt to decenter or efface the concept of the author, through group pseudonyms (an example would be Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett's collaborative alter ego "Harlan Dangerfield"), or by publishing group works anonymously (100). Kane believes that writers writing "independent from the collective," as in the *Legend* example, compromises the spirit of sociability. This seems to have something to do with the attribution of individual authors attached to the text, but also could be related to the fact that the New York School works are typically composed by writers writing in the same room at the same time, whereas *Legend* is composed by authors relatively "distant" in space and time[8]. The notions of sociability and collective practice show that there are nuances to the term "collaboration": words like "collective," "cooperative," and "communal" do not mean the same thing, but instead signify different angles towards the aspect of sociability that Kane valorizes. Groups that emphasize an "aesthetic of collective practice" (such as the Language school) are perhaps less

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[8] The fact that many New York School collaborations were composed by authors and artists together in the same room is illustrated by John Ashbery: "the poems that Kenneth Koch and I wrote together … had no raison d'etre other than being in the same room" (qtd in David Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry*, Manchester UP, 2000, p. 58.

interested in cementing social bonds than they are in experimenting and defining a poetics. This aesthetic of collective practice applies to both *Tish* and *blewointment*, who use their respective journals to publish the results of their group poetic investigations. The seriousness of this work-shop mentality might appear to supersede the type of open play that Kane describes, yet there is still room within collective practices for notions of sociability.

Kane also recognizes another nuance which he calls a "collective sociability" which arises from writers sharing the space of the little magazine (104). This collective sociability invites a variety of individual writers and texts into the space of publication and this sharing of space affects interpretation of these texts within the context of the other works that precede or come after it. This means that authors of diverse backgrounds – say, a writer from the New York School and a Language writer, or a *Tish* writer and a *blewointment* writer– can have their work linked together in a spirit of sociability, which goes some way to exploding the emerging binary between these groups. The notion of collective sociability allows us to read the individual works within a magazine or anthology as pieces of a whole, which creates a collaborative space. Kane's notion of collective sociability also provides a significant role for the reader within the collaborative relationship.

For example, looking at a Frank O'Hara poem in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* alongside one by Charles Olson (who was significantly chosen to lead off the work) allows us an interesting hermeneutic exercise: the reader is permitted to see in O'Hara's poems a kind of response to the form and content of Olson's – even if they were not composed as such – in the same way that a two-person collaborative text might feature a "push and pull" quality between the authors. O'Hara – in the middle of an anthology bookended by Olson's "The Kingfishers"

and "Projective Verse" (included in the "Statements on Poetics" appendix)— sounds a note of

gregarious, playful resistance in "Hotel Transylvanie," where he writes:

> but I hold on/I am lyrical to a fault/I do not despair being too
>   foolish
> where will you find me, projective verse, since I will be gone?
> for six seconds of your beautiful face I will sell the hotel and
>   commit
> an uninteresting suicide in Louisiana where it will take them a
>   long time
> to know who I am/why I came there/what and why I am and
>   made to happen  (Allen 270)

This passage benefits from a reading which activates the concept of collective sociability. Here,

the final stanza in "Hotel Transylvanie" harks back to Olson's "The Kingfishers" in its use of

slash marks, or virgules, instead of commas[9]. O'Hara adapts Olson's Projectivist notation to sub-

versively insist on the primacy of the lyric "I" ( "… I hold on/I am lyrical to a fault/ I do not des-

pair…"): "I" appears eight times within the passage, but O'Hara significantly sounds the possi-

bility of its loss in the face of "projective verse," which is trying to "find" him. While it bears

superficial similarity with "The Kingfishers," O'Hara's poem lightheartedly but emphatically

counters Olson's call for "getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego" (*Select-

ed Writings* 24) with a witty deployment of a staged, lyric self. O'Hara could be articulating an

objection to a certain tendency in avant-garde American poetics that questions the lyric "I,"

something that Alice Notley takes up in her essay, "O'Hara in the Nineties," where she writes

> Why shouldn't a 'person' speak? The tyranny of Western civilization hasn't been
>
> imposed by poets, as much as we rail at each other to be careful: from the literary

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[9] "The Kingfishers" begins: "What does not change / is the will to change" (Allen 2). Olson asserted that the slash (/) creates "a pause so light it hardly separates the words," in opposition to the comma, "which is an interruption of the meaning rather than the sounding of the line." (Lehman 539).

angle it's been imposed by those who make use of us, who choose, who compile

lists and course plans, academies, universities, courts, editors, publishing houses,

reading publics. Why shouldn't "I" speak? (6).

This is a response to the potential paralysis that might afflict a writer in the face of the many

confident assertions of the death of the author, by theorists who, as Stillinger points out, behave

as "authors of their *own* texts" (187, his italics). Notley contends that all people have "a secret

self, a rather delicately pondering inner person" and that "[m]uch of poetry exists to communi-

cate with this entity" (5), portraying the writing of poetry as a collaborative dialogue with the

self, which allows room for the writer to collude with the myth of the solitary author. Stillinger,

in his study, claims there is no "compelling reason for wanting the myth to cease to exist" (187).

And Karell acknowledges that the "myth … for women writers, may continue to be valuable as a

strategic deployment" (xv). These comments create the possibility of playing with the myth for

one's own purposes, underscoring the previously asserted subversive connotations of the term

"collaboration." With some ironic distance, O'Hara rehearses the death of the author (in this po-

em, committing "an uninteresting suicide") in a poem that depicts a self-absorbed speaker whose

identity can only be posthumously interpreted: "it will take … a long time/ to know who I am."

The myth of the solitary author does not die, though the literal death of the author is imagined

here. The final lines sound like a potted version of projective verse theory (the self posited in

physical terms, being "made to happen"), only instead of being rendered as a *process*, here it is

compared to a sort of autopsy. Perhaps O'Hara was responding to a mythic tendency in the por-

tentous theoretical statements of Olson and others: as O'Hara stated in a 1965 interview with

Edward Lucie-Smith, he felt that Olson appears too "conscious of the important utterance, which

[…] is not particularly desirable most of the time" (13). In any event, this passage advances a

stance on poetics and theory that becomes more visible due to its close proximity to Olson's work and the way this proximity invites contextual response.

Reading and interpreting instances of collective sociability are acts consonant with Karell's mission to employ the term collaboration in a wider sense, which also show how anthologies and little magazines are spaces where two or more authors can be in dialogue, as well as how writers and editors who compile these publications work together to provide editorial policies of consensus or variety. Karell writes that terms such as "inspiration" and "influence … keep the myth of individual authorship and creativity enshrined" (xxi). Avoiding these romantic terms puts us in a position to see *Tish* not as a mere extension of Black Mountain poetics on Canadian soil (as it often is), but instead as a kind of collective engagement with several other contemporary literary centers: Davey cites the New York magazine *Floating Bear* as a "model" for *Tish*, as well as Montreal's *Delta* and Cid Corman's *Origin*, which began in Boston, and ends up as an online journal in the 2000s ("Introduction," 7). *Tish* is usually considered to have emerged from two wellsprings of New American Poetry – the projectivist poetics of Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and the San Francisco Renaissance – but, by looking past standard notions of "influence," we can see how *Tish* responded to contemporary work coming out of other cities and coteries. Furthermore, by rejecting the term "inspiration," we see how the work published in *Tish* arises out of collective processes: instead of waiting for epiphanies, the *Tish* poets shared reading, discussed theories, and circulated the poems that were produced out of this practice.

A notable feature of *Tish* editorials and poems in the first 19 issues is the quality of "address" to other poets – within the collective and from without. A relevant example of this is found in Fredric Wah's editorial, "A Sound Direction," published in issue 3: "No one gives a damn about you, the one, but you the intermingler, and becoming bigger by this, are more important" (51).

These comments carry some interesting connotations. Wah is directly stating that individual identity is of less importance than one which mixes with others. As a statement in favour of collective practice, this is unequivocal. Yet the notion of being an "intermingler" might ring differently in the ears of *Tish*'s cultural nationalist critics, such as Robin Matthews, who argue for the undesirability of transnational collaboration[10]. Wah's editorial throughout carries the masculine, rally-the-troops tone of Olson's manifestos: "Remember, you guys, any sound can come in..." (51). Countering this boisterous, homosocial language, Marian Zazeela (an avant-garde New York sculptor and musician associated with LaMonte Young and the Warhol crowd) writes a letter to the editor, included in issue 5, which lambastes *Tish* for their perceived insularity. She writes, "Why is it you all feed on each others' derivative little drippings? Don't you have minds of your own? Can't you function independently at least of each other?" (93). Zazeela is offended by the agglomeration of group work in the early issues of *Tish* which build on (or attempt to make sense of) Charles Olson's Projectivist statements. She objects to work that comes "out of" other's work: she points to "F. Wah's sucking **Margin into Lines** out of F. Davey's **Problem of Margins**, out of after all C. Olson **Projective Verse**" (93, Zazeela's emphasis). In his introduction to the omnibus edition of the first 19 issues of *Tish*, Frank Davey confesses he is "embarrassed" years later by the cocky juvenilia on display in the early numbers of the magazine, but asserts that this group work "compressed and accelerated [the] development" of the individual writers, and notes that his own "pretentious article on margins is quickly given a serious and usable dimension by Wah" (9-10). Zazeela, on the other hand, is concerned with upholding the standard of individually-created work: she writes, "more important is the poem, which is promis-

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[10] Wah's use of the word "intermingle" also seems prescient of his later critical work on racial hybridity.

ing, but not yet really fantastically interesting, or brilliant (i.e **ART**) which I trust is yr goal?" (93).

There is no direct riposte to Zazeela's letter in *Tish*– perhaps the editors decided to let her call for bold-lettered, capitalized "art" stand or fall on its own. But publishing the letter, albeit without response, puts Zazeela and her ideas within the collective space of the magazine, adding her voice to the debate. Her letter, in conjunction with the later criticism of Canadian national- ists, is evidence that the *Tish* writers are often seen as "collaborators," because her defense of solitary creation underscores the notion that joint work is of lesser value, incapable of producing the masterpiece that must be the goal of every writer. At this point in their development as writ- ers, the *Tish* poets were actively publishing their work and letting their peers critique and com- ment on it: the little magazine served as "workshop." Collaborative practice, like musical im- provisation, is *responsive*: an individual author can respond to a line or an idea in a collaborative text, and a collective practice resembles improvisation as members respond to particular ideas put forward by others. In a collaborative poem written by two poets, this feature can be more sa- lient – one poet can be read as responding directly to the other after a line or stanza, the improvi- sational quality becomes the form and content of the text. Even in a collaboration which is gov- erned by formal rules of response (for example, a collaborative Shakespearean sonnet, or a lipo- gram), the contributors will produce lines that "play off" or respond to elements suggested by their partner.

Within the broader sphere of collective practice, "response" involves poets working on theo- retical problems or concepts in separate, individual texts that are part of a group discussion. In this way, poems in both *Tish* and *blewointment* can be seen as part of a larger context of group work, or collective practice: *Tish* works largely on extending projectivist poetics in the local are-

na, and *blewointment* poets examine the visual and spatial properties of the poetic line. While I am arguing that *blewointment* poets have been given less critical attention than *Tish* has in literary historical accounts, I am not claiming that the two magazines are opposed to the other's practices or aesthetics. Since members of both groups attended formative community-building events such as the Vancouver Poetry Conference and the Jack Spicer lectures, it is reasonable to assume that their experiments and results might overlap at some points. For example, *blewointment* poets such as bill bissett, Martina Clinton, Judith Copithorne, and Maxine Gadd are concerned with communal and domestic life in some of their work, a subject that also underpins George Bowering's *Curious*. However, while the collective project of *Tish* is to experiment with projective poetics, especially concept of place or *locus*, *blewointment*'s collective project is about representing *space*, either the empty void between letters on the page, or a more direct linguistic treatment about domestic living arrangements.

**"Works Shared"**

After *Tish* had published its first 12 issues, the American poet Robert Duncan wrote an anniversary essay entitled "For The Novices of Vancouver." In it, he summarizes and celebrates the achievements of the poet-editors, writing that "[w]hatever else 12 issues of the journal are, they show an accumulation of works shared" (254). Duncan is not only discussing the total output of the magazine – individually authored poems and essays – but also referring to the "twin poem" form "invented" by George Bowering and Frank Davey, which Duncan later terms "as far as I know, an original form, an inventive development in poetry" (257). Briefly encapsulated, the twin poem form consists of one separately titled poem each by Bowering and Davey, on the

same topic or event, which is then published under an "umbrella" title.[11] Duncan's hesitation about the potential "originality" of the form is interesting because it suggests a significant difference between the "twin poem" and the kind of collaborative poetics that was then being practiced by Duncan and *Tish*'s contemporaries – the New York School of Poets.

The New York poets were the most enthusiastic group within the New American Poetry who pursued the possibilities of collaboration, producing numerous co-authored works (poems, novels, paintings and films) and even publishing a special "Collaborations" issue of their journal *Locus Solus* in 1961, featuring a historical survey of collaborative works spanning time periods and languages (Japanese *renga*, French Surrealist "exquisite corpses," and their own texts). Duncan explicitly refers to this in his essay, asserting that the twin poem is a "happening of a cooperation" compared to "the collaborative poems anthologized by Kenneth Koch in *Locus Solus 2* – the collaborative is a form of wit; the cooperative is a form of magic" (257).

Duncan puts the twin poem into a separate category from the collaborative poem – but why? He seems to imply that the "collaborative" is simply a form of verbal play, compared to the more impressively transformative properties of the "cooperative." Drew Milne, discussing T.S. Eliot's influential article "The Metaphysical Poets," notes the literary-historical process whereby the category of wit "took on a pejorative flavour associated with quick smartness, rather than with the lively, knowing powers of poetry," and adds that "much of the energy of the New Criticism went into salvaging the intellectual qualities of wit" that had been reclaimed by Eliot (329). Duncan perhaps devalues "wit" because it works towards a functional sociability, while he seeks a more transformative outcome of group work that furthers "the lively, knowing powers of poet-

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[11] *Tish* published six twin poems altogether, all written by Bowering and Davey excepting the final one, by Davey and Fred Wah.

ry." Duncan locates the "magic" of the cooperative twin poem precisely in its temporal and spa-

tial properties: he writes that Bowering and Davey's "Two Poems For The Critic"[12] "was the

first evidence of the major magic … sharing the place and time of the poem as the two poets do

there" (254). This raises the question of the "scene" of the collaborative or cooperative poem; as

Mark Silverberg notes, a co-authored work "can take many forms. Authors may work in close

proximity to one another … or may be distant in time in space" (2). The scene of these twin po-

ems is usefully described by Frank Davey.

Davey, in his memoir *When Tish Happens*, explains that the twin poems were written face-to-

face with Bowering, at their "makeshift partner's desk" in their shared TA office on the UBC

campus (130). He recalls the enthusiasm that arose from being placed in partnership with Bower-

ing, looking back to that time (but in the present tense) that "[w]e plan to write poems every day

and shove them across the desks at each other, shouting 'So there!" and "Take that!" (130). This

accounts for Duncan's comment about them "sharing the place and time of the poem"; the two

poets literally are in the same room together, bouncing ideas off of each other. Davey observes

that the first twin poem is "in a way the textual correlative of the shared writing space of our

front-to-front desks" (135). The collaborative poem can also share the same kind of space: New

York School poets such as Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett composed poems by having each au-

thor alternate lines, in a call and response fashion similar to Bowering and Davey (these kinds of

poems can be found in *Bean Spasms*, first published in 1967, and recently in a new edition from

Granary Press). Yet what makes the twin poem "original" to Duncan, lies in a simple but signifi-

cant spatial and temporal distance – for Berrigan and Padgett the poem is happening line-by-line

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[12] "Two Poems For The Critic" was the first twin poem, published in *Tish 3*, consisting of Bow-ering's "Literary Criticism" and Davey's "No Vision But In Things: 10"

towards completion, while one poet involved in a twin poem is responding to the other who in-augurates or instigates the poem. These temporal and spatial matters complicate the separation of the "cooperative" and "collaborative," since both kinds of work can occur in the same social en-vironment – together in a room or office. Yet Bowering and Davey's twin poems present a very clear-cut demarcation between their individual subjectivities, writing not (in Berrigan and Padgett's case) the same text, but separate texts in conversation with each other. The "textual correlative" that Davey mentions is the border between their desks, which doubles as a border between their texts. The cooperative space emphasizes the *work*, rather than the *play* found in the collaborative space. It also seeks to retain the identity of the individual contributors to the text, while the identities of those involved in a collaborative joint work are more difficult to trace back to a source.

The cooperative is interested in transforming the "work space," rather than the identity of po-ets engaged within a collaborative process. This is detailed in "Two Poems For The Critic," which describes Bowering and Davey's shared office, which was once a science lab, and is now the site of a different kind of experimentation. Bowering's half of the twin poem, "Literary Criti-cism," presents at its close a unified text of its own, an English research paper the graduate stu-dent/poet has written in the former lab space. Davey's poem, "No Vision But In Things:10" re-sponds by depicting the destruction of a failed poem, enacted through a violent "incision" using a knife presumably left behind by the former occupants. The twin poem consists of a structure that permits the poets to play with, or compete against each other: Davey takes up elements of Bow-ering's opening salvo – the "neatly-ordered" manuscript of "Literary Criticism" is reduced to fragments. All of the five poems that Bowering and Davey wrote together are later separated

from its twin in a way that resembles this surgical "incision," and presented as singular texts in their respective collections, *Points on the Grid* and *Bridge Force*.

I have structured this dissertation to balance and intermingle the writers found between the pages of both journals I am studying. I alternate chapters between *Tish* and *blewointment*, because collaborative and collective practice encourages exchange and response. Shifting focus between the two magazines is an attempt to disrupt a singularly linear chronology which places *blewointment* as a successor to Tish. I introduce *Tish* in the second chapter, not because I believe this journal preeminent, but simply because that little magazine is chronologically first (appearing in 1961), even if many of the *blewointment* poets were living and working in the city before Bowering, Davey, et al. turned up at UBC. Oscillating between *Tish* and *blewointment* then allows my study to move synchronically, revealing the particular ways that each collective explored and introduced concepts relating to collaboration. The third chapter presents *blewointment*, which began its run in 1963. Chapters 4 and 5 then make the move to studying individual authors who "belong" to the respective journals – George Bowering "from" *Tish* and Maxine Gadd "from" *blewointment*. Though it might seem counterproductive to risk a return to the solitary author, the selected works of these poets are studies within a context of sociability, but I also study how these works resist and respond to collective and communal tendencies.

Chapters 2 and 4 of the dissertation focus on the concepts of collective practice and sociability, as applied to the *Tish* poets. My focus will largely be on two writers of the *Tish* collective – George Bowering and Frank Davey, but Kane's notion of sociability in the first chapter partly guides my close reading of other *Tish* writers, such as Red Lane and Fred Wah. Chapter 2 analyzes the numerous "responsive" texts published by these poets in the magazine: poems, essays and editorials that work through specific concepts such as "locus" and "margin"; and the

"bridge" poems endemic in early issues. "Locus" is seen in Bowering's poem "Locus Solus" (a reference to a Raymond Roussel book, as well as the title of a New York School-edited journal, contemporary with *Tish*, which valorized collaboration), which attempts to present the poet's city perceptions bodily, a proprioceptive act that Bowering will term later "a polis behind the eyes" (*Curious*, n.p.). "Margins" can signify topographical border spaces, the visual frame of the page, as well as expressions of physical desire, as seen in Red Lane's "Margins" series, which also playfully mocks the theoretical pretension of his academic colleagues. "Bridges" connect many of the poets in *Tish*, and are most evocatively rendered in poems collected in Frank Davey's book *Bridge Force*, the title of which also alludes to a strategy in the game of bridge to induce a bid or move from another player, which resonates with the concept of collaboration and response. All three of these subjects can be linked to Tallman's geographic metaphors in "Wonder Merchants," and the *Tish* texts that center on these ideas will be seen as collective attempts at articulating "place" and "self" in projectivist terms. This collective practice, I argue, possesses elements that show the difference between more "straightforward" collaboration and Duncan's "cooperation." Chapter 2 then delves into Bowering and Davey's "twin poem" form, to clarify the difference between these two strategies, and to emphasize how *Tish* diverges from New York School-style collaboration, which is more emphatically "social," whereas the Vancouver poets are concerned with the transformative properties of language, which is perhaps where we can locate Duncan's reference to "magic." The notion of magic, language, and alchemical transformation returns in the final chapter on Gadd, a nice reminder that Vancouver writers shared and worked on common concepts, regardless of group affiliation.

Chapter 4 looks at George Bowering's 1973 book *Curious*, a collection of 48 "portraits" of his writer friends and acquaintances. *Curious* presents us with a little-used element of literary

sociability, because the subject of the portrait (examples include "Charles Olson," "Frank Davey," "Fred Wah") becomes an implied reader, and the content of each portrait risks alienating or offending the reader. Terry Whalen notes the "odd, almost equivocal nature of the poet's attitudes towards others, his emotional movement between endearment and very sharp contempt" and asserts that "such an equivocal attitude to others is also visible in the poet's relationship to his readers in many of his other works" (33). How much does this perceived equivocation violate an assumed contract of sociability, with colleagues and readers, and with colleagues *as* readers? What are the risks that come with moving beyond rhetorical address and dedication to a more sustained and substantial critique of writing (and the writer)? This chapter also looks at how a kind of homosocial exchange is at work here, that is directly linked to the "So there!" and "Take that!" of Bowering and Davey's twin poem form. Most portraits in the book are of male poets, some portrayed as mentors ("William Carlos Williams"; "Charles Olson") and some as rivals ("Brian Fawcett"; "Irving Layton"): the "emotional movement" that Whalen mentions is especially evident in the representation of male-male friendship. *Curious* can also be seen in terms of collaboration and cooperation in its very form: Bowering takes much from Gertrude Stein's "word portraits," and Bowering's use of the form often finds him speaking in the style of Stein's accretive sentences, but also occasionally lapsing in the "voice" of his subject, pointing to a potential "fusion" of subjectivities that will be discussed further in the *blewointment* chapters.

**"Covivant Collaborations"**

In a "thank you" blog post addressed to those who attended his curatorial talk on "Expanded Literary Practices" in Vancouver, Michael Turner mentions that he "could have made more of bill bissett and Martina Clinton's partnership in the production of *blewointment* magazine. In-

deed, a whole new exhibition could be conceived based on covivant collaborations."[13] Turner

uncovers a fresh perspective on the topic of collaboration, one that addresses a newly-emergent

social dynamic of the early 1960s. The term "covivant" was coined later to describe the situation

of unmarried, cohabiting couples: an arrangement, as Richard Lederer notes, that used to be de-

scribed as "living in sin" (65). Lederer avers that the word – a blend of French and Latin which

simply means "living together" – expunges this moral judgment and instead "captures and coa-

lesces the intimacy of *lover* and *significant other*, the cohabitual accuracy of *roommate* [and] the

sexual equality of *fiancé(e)* and *partner*" (ibid).

   When *blewointment* began in October, 1963, bissett and Clinton were living *and* working to-

gether: they formed not only an editorial but a domestic partnership. Although *blewointment*

started operation post-*Tish*, as Tallman correctly asserts in "Wonder Merchants," the precedence

of the "downtown" group is confirmed by none other than Frank Davey himself, in the October,

1962 issue of *Delta* that he guest-edited. Davey identifies three groups existing in Vancouver at

that time, the first he mentions before moving to the "newer group" of *Tish*:

>    flourishes within the abstract-hung walls of the shabby West End houses of the
>
>    downtown bohemian set. Somewhat connected with the Vancouver Art School,
>
>    and somewhat with the unemployment and social assistance offices, but mostly
>
>    wandering on their own, these people, John Newlove, Fred Douglas, Roy Kiyooka
>
>    have acquired the reputation of "beatniks" – but more by their life than by their
>
>    writings. Their proudest boast is their nearness to "life", and, characteristically,
>
>    their fierce independence and experimentalism displayed in painting, music,

---

[13] *websit*, March 8, 2010. Turner's exhibition, titled "to show, to give, to make it be there: Ex-
panded Literary Practices in Vancouver 1954-1969" ran at the SFU (Burnaby) Gallery and dis-
played many interdisciplinary works by Vancouver writers and artists of the period.

ceramics, sculpture, prose and marriage, as well as in poetry.

<div align="right">("The Present Scene", n.p.)</div>

Davey does not explicitly mention bissett and Clinton in this passage, however, his reference to the "fierce independence and experimentalism displayed in … marriage" suggests their unconventional relationship. Attached to this independence and experimentalism is a concomitant "bohemianism": abstract art on the walls of shabby downtown houses, art-school pedigrees, unemployment, alternative living arrangements and finally, Davey contends, a "boast" that their art truly represents "life." Although there is the sense that he is being slightly cavalier and dismissive of the "bohemian set," Davey encapsulates some valuable objects of study. He gestures to the interdisciplinary nature of the downtown group's work ("painting, music, ceramics, sculpture, prose"), which Turner will take up in his exhibition on "expanded literary practices." One distinction between the *Tish* and Downtown groups is found in the latter's greater commitment to cross-discipline experimentation, and another (provided by Tallman) in the Downtown poets parallel interest in "modernism," as well as the fact that most of that group stayed in Vancouver during most of the 1960s, while the *Tish* poets dispersed to different graduate programs in North America. But Davey also introduces the critical notion, popular in bohemian circles, of the inseparability of life and art; *blewointment* poets such as bissett, Clinton, and Lance Farrell, were working on representing their daily struggles through visual and textual experiments with space.

The opening poem/essay in the inaugural issue of *blewointment* is a response to Leonard Forest's 1963 National Film Board documentary, *In Search of Innocence*, which is an impressionist look at Vancouver's artists and poets (and which also features appearances by many of the downtown poets). The response alludes to the concept of collaboration in conjunction with Forest's depiction of the daily life of these Vancouver cultural producers:

> you show Lance Farrell, myself,
>
> others, we have establishd our answers    by living
>
> outside the society to be concerned whether   self is
>
> created or is real/and/or   pure   outside the society
>
> and unfortunately become labelld beatniks […]
>
> you also were "honest" in that you did not lie to state
>
>  since we are artists we all love each other and help
>
> each other and more than anything else are somewhat
>
> like movie stars ("About In Search of Innocence," n.p.)

Since this text leads off the first issue of the magazine, it can be seen as a manifesto, or statement of principles. The text is not specifically attributed to bissett, but the first-person perspective ("Lance Farrell, myself,/ others") and orthography (the spelling and the spaces between words) are significant stylistic aspects of his work. However, these formal properties of the text are shared by other *blewointment* poets: in fact, Forest's documentary shows several downtown poets reading their poems in a way that accounts for these idiosyncratic spacings. bissett, Fred Douglas, and Lance Farrell perform dramatic pauses, emphasize particular words, draw out consonantal and vowel sounds, and run words together. The proliferation of plural pronouns ("we" and "our") signal that this is intended as a collective statement. The first passage here questions the concept of individual subjectivity ("whether  self is/ created or is real…") but also depicts bissett and his peers as an isolated community: "living/ outside the society."  The statement here presents a complicated set of spaces, marked by separations and inclusions, and the self's potential as something unbounded and plural, which points to an aspect of collaboration that Silverberg is dubious of when he writes that "we need not romanticize the collaborative process as a

mystical fusion of subjectivities" (2). However, it is this possibility of a "mystical fusion" inher-
ent in the collaborative process that I want to examine (as well as the desire to "romanticize" it).
Duncan has strictly separated the "cooperative" and "collaborative" as forms of "magic" and
"wit," respectively. Silverberg, in the introduction to a study of New York School collaborations,
preemptively negates an emergent "mystical" quality of the collaborative process. I want to ar-
gue that Duncan and Silverberg articulate the contradictory elements involved in any kind of
group literary activity. Writing texts together can imply a cooperative element, which, in the case
of Bowering and Davey, is a co-authorship which is shared but also distinctly individual. A
"mystical fusion" is made possible when the partners subsume their identities, or is attained
when the collaborative process unifies the participants into one (work). Yet within any of these
spaces, there might be an element of competition and dissension which bissett comments on in
the second passage excerpted above, and bissett's particular engagements with social spaces will
be taken up in Chapter 3.

The third chapter looks at the collective practice of *blewointment*, especially with regard to
bissett and Clinton's poems in early issues which explore textual space between words and let-
ters, and how these spaces, as evidenced by the glimpse given in *In Search of Innocence*, are
used as a "score" for performance. The very few scholarly articles on bill bissett's work tend to
focus on his later concrete output, so studying the early stages of his visual poetics within a
group context can help to provide a fuller picture of this important writer's overall *oeuvre*. This
chapter also looks at the social spaces these poets wrote and performed in, examining the bohe-
mian domesticity that Davey mentions in his *Delta* article. Another NFB film documentary, enti-
tled *Strange Grey Day This*, presents a glimpse into bissett's daily existence, yet it does this by
representing him as the classic solitary artist and leaves others in the community out of the pic-

ture, contributing to a romanticized image of him that persists to this day. Martina Clinton, bissett's editorial and romantic partner, published three short, fascinating chapbooks with blewointment press, and I will consider how these works represent the "other half" of bissett's domestic picture, but also explore their own wild poetic experimentation. By looking at the overall collective sociability of the *blewointment*/downtown group, and by recovering a writer such as Clinton, the "downtown" scene can be properly placed on the literary map of Vancouver as a diverse cooperative whose influence is as lasting as *Tish*'s.

The fifth and final chapter examines the lasting influence of *blewointment* and its presence in the local literary landscape by studying the early work of Maxine Gadd, a poet still active today. Raised a "red diaper baby" by socialist activist parents, Gadd's poetry, in works such as *Guns of the West*, *The Hippies of Kitsilano*, and the more recent *Backup to Babylon,* is an exemplary record of the city and its shifting ideals of community and sociability. Moving around, and out of the city, literally and figuratively, Gadd maps the city from these early days to the present time. She encompasses many of the poetic strategies and concerns outlined throughout, along with a consistent appeal to "myth," in a way that brings my study, which hopefully questions the narratives surrounding literary communities, full circle, rather than to a happy ending. In this chapter, the setting shifts from Vancouver to Montreal, specifically examining the audio record of a poetry reading Gadd delivered at Sir George Williams University in 1972. Gadd, a poet who exists outside the center of the geographically marginal Vancouver poetry community, uses the platform of the public poetry reading as a site to circulate her unpublished works, and also to critique some of the unexamined assumptions of the idealized terms "collective" and "communal."

## Chapter Two: "Joining the Metaphor": The Collective Practice of *Tish*

The *Tish* authors examined in this chapter who have developed successful careers might wince to have their early writings revisited and analyzed by someone many years later. Yet it is an important step to take since George Bowering, Frank Davey, and Fred Wah (the most well-known trio of the "first run" of *Tish*) are inextricably linked together through their participation in a little magazine published a half-century ago: these three poets are still being read in light of collective work begun as undergraduates, so an examination of what this "collectivity" means requires going back to their early juvenilia printed in *Tish* numbers 1-19. This chapter seeks to trace the collectivity which binds these venerable Canadian authors, even to this day, by looking at selected poems and critical statements in *Tish*, whose aims are specifically collective and co-operative. Marian Zazeela's strident letter, published in *Tish* 6 and referenced in my introduction, helpfully points to one possible response by a reader not part of the collective: she attacks the magazine's editors for "feed[ing] on each other's derivative little drippings" and for not being able to "function independently … of each other"; yet she also cuts them some slack for seeming to be "young innarested guys trying to … scare up a little light in yr corner of the globe" (93). Zazeela's response illuminates key concepts in this chapter's interpretation of *Tish*'s collective work as an attempt to provide a needed social dimension with which to generate "solitary" works, as distinct from other forms of multi-author collaboration: that is, Bowering, Davey, Wah, and company share concepts and content, but transmit their ideas through individual texts which invite – or even *provoke* – further response, and which "talk back" to earlier texts published in the magazine. Zazeela also significantly alludes to some important ways that gender operates in these early works – these "young innarested guys" produce works that carry a distinct kind of sociability in their expressions of manly bonhomie, and also in how poets such as Bower-

ing and Lane seem to undercut the portentous and possibly pretentious poetic theorizing of Davey and Wah.

The most salient example of this tendency that incenses Zazeela is seen in a series of texts in the pages of *Tish*, which develops out of Davey and Wah's careful, scholarly consideration of the "margin" as an element of individual poetic expression. The "margin," as Zazeela hints at, is not merely a space on the page for these young poets, but also represents their circumscribed social world, as students located in a small cultural backwater on the edge of Canada's West Coast in the early 1960s, far from communal literary movements in major centers such as Zazeela's New York City (which could count the Beats and the New York School as two cosmopolitan literary groups within its borders). These connotations of marginality inform Bowering and Lane's "margin" poems, which are investigated here as homosocial texts which seek to restore the real presence of the body in response to Davey and Wah's brainy academic musings. This exchange, from "high" (Davey and Wah's critical statements), to "low" (Bowering and Lane's bawdy poems), is something that Zazeela cannot fully appreciate, because the poetics of the *Tish* group are still in process when she is writing: she reads and criticizes the perceived haughty tone of Davey and Wah, but must wait to see Bowering and Lane bring their colleagues' heady intellectual labour back "down to earth." Daniel Kane's notion of "collective sociability" as a way to read disparate texts within little magazines is adapted here, to see how a series of concepts can be worked on collectively over the space of several issues, rather than as a means of interpretation for just one issue or anthology. The collective concerns of "margin," "locus," and "bridge," though postulated as theoretical matters, are arguably more interesting in terms of the complex homosocial, and sometimes juvenile, social dynamics revealed by those who join in the group work.

In his retrospective introduction to *Tish No. 1-19*, an omnibus edition of the first 19 issues of the Vancouver poetry magazine/newsletter *Tish*, Frank Davey makes note of the particular ways the editors worked on a set of specific theoretical concerns and concepts together:

> my pretentious article on margins [in Tish 3] is quickly given a serious and usable dimension by Wah [Tish 4]. In T5 we see Bowering turn theory to metaphor and begin a substantial series of 'meta-margin' poems. By T9 the late Red Lane joins the metaphor to begin a significant series of his own. Similarly, Bowering is able to feed quickly on a bridge metaphor I propose as early as T1; David Cull can work with sequence forms and Amerind imagery established by Dawson; Bowering and I both follow Fred Wah's lead away from rhetoric and toward personal syntax and diction. ("Introduction," 10)

Davey here identifies a number of poets associated with *Tish* – Bowering and Wah are future poet laureates of Canada, while Cull and Dawson are now mostly forgotten. Lane, as Davey notes, died tragically young – in December 1964, after the first editorial run of *Tish* had run its course and Bowering, Davey and Wah had left Vancouver. Davey somewhat ambivalently positions himself as the prime mover who instigates the activity, albeit in a less than aggrandizing way: his "pretentious article" published in the third issue of *Tish* entitled "The Problem of Margins" is made "serious and usable" through the intervention of Wah. From there, theory turns to practice, as Bowering responds to Davey and Wah's theoretical statements by launching a series of poems which consider the concept of "margins" from a metaphorical and metaphysical perspective, but he will also soon introduce – possibly in an intervention of his own – an earthy and erotic tone into his poem "The Problem of Margins," which cheekily appropriates the title of Davey's "pretentious article," which began the discussion. The bawdiness continues and is amplified in Lane's series of "Margin" poems, where the concept becomes mostly nominal: Lane's poems are

uniformly titled "Margins," yet these texts are largely left-justified and do not experiment with the typographic or conceptual possibilities suggested in Davey and Wah's theoretical meditations.

The passage of this particular concept from hand to hand points to the social dynamics underpinning much of the work published in *Tish*. Part of Davey and Wah's discussion in their essays centered around the question of "locus," which Davey defines as the "physical/ psychological/ physiological" location or position of the poet ("The Problem of Margins" 65). Another important term introduced is "stance," which Wah compares to a baseball player's batting stance "taken in readiness of what might be coming" ("Margins into Lines" 82). Wah's simile might at first conjure up the heroic potential of the solo athlete (or author) trying to overcome hostile forces and to manufacture an individual achievement – possibly a home run, or a masterpiece; or perhaps just a "single," or a poem. This individualist/sporting connotation is further bolstered by the idiosyncratic character of each player's batting stance at the plate. Yet there is also the impression of the individual involved in a team dynamic – whether he (and the gendered, homosocial aspects of the simile are significant, as I will discuss later) is the only player on the "field" at the moment. This ancillary notion of the "field," in turn suggests Charles Olson's Projectivist notions of the poet as situated in, and arranging a "field" of activity; "field" also evokes Jack Spicer's later metaphorical conversion of this poetic field into a baseball diamond in his series "Seven Poems for the Vancouver Festival." When Lane "joins the metaphor," he is not only joining the "team," he is also creating a link in the chain of metaphors which simultaneously allows him to begin "a significant series of his own," as well as to provide the possibility for future responses through "marginal" works by members of the group.

Davey's allusion to another figure of speech – the "bridge metaphor" he introduces in the first issue– is in turn figured as "feeding" another poet that is Bowering. Davey perhaps derives this language from Marian Zazeela's antagonistic letter to *Tish* where she colorfully accuses the young Vancouver poets of "feeding on each other's derivative little drippings" (*Tish* 5, 93). Davey alters the accusatory tone to assert the positive connotations of providing literary sustenance for his fellow poet, although the idea that Bowering is "quick" to seize on this morsel also suggests the potentially competitive nature of this group dynamic. All of these transformations or manipulations of metaphors and similes are figured by Davey to result, somewhat paradoxically, in a movement "away from rhetoric … toward personal syntax and diction." At this early stage in their poetic careers, the *Tish* poets needed to work collectively in order to produce "personal" and individual works, and, as Davey indicates in his passage, they often sought to articulate themselves in *serial* form. Through organizing their individual works as a series of responses to a set of conceptual concerns, the *Tish* poets created ongoing, processual texts that dominate the pages of the magazine in its first editorial run, as well as their early poetry collections (Bowering's *Points on the Grid* and Lane's *Collected Poems* – published after his death – are filled with poems on "margins," while Davey's *Bridge Force* compiles the entirety of his "bridge" series). This chapter will look at the configurations of these three conceptual nodes – margins, locus and bridges – and how they are collectively worked on, in poems, essays, and statements found in *Tish*. In particular, I will be reading these texts for how they reveal important dynamics in the articulation of group sociability, which includes cooperation, but also competition and conflict. "Locus" and "margin" are terms in seeming opposition to each other: "locus" implies stability and centrality, while "margin" signifies being *outside* these categories, though Davey's inaugural essay strives to resolve the significant tension between these concepts. The "bridge" acts dialec-

tically, as a "force" which brings margin and locus together, and which also stands as a symbol of the desire for, and the difficulty of traversing challenging social spaces.

**"The Problem of Margins"**

Before Davey ostensibly begins the group discussion on margins, an editorial call for communiques to *Tish* is published in issue 2. This notice reveals that the editors desired both contact and dissent, along with submissions that cohered with their investigation of projectivist poetics. At this early stage, the editors are establishing an academic, yet also boisterous tone for the magazine and its contents, to set it apart from other contemporary avant-garde literary journals. While individual poems published by authors in *Tish* often depict isolated, disconnected speakers, this editorial moment wedged in between poems in *Tish* 2 constructs the magazine's pages also as a space for direct and lively communication and connection:

> **POEMS** needed
>
>> to fill up spaces
>
> like this
>
> **LETTERS** too
>
>> will be printed
>
> especially
>
>> **OBJECTIONABLE ONES** (*Tish No. 1~19*, 47)

While not explicitly regarding the "problem" of margins, this notice notably presents its call for submissions in the form of an unconventionally lineated text, which resembles many of the poems found in Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* in its use of radical spacing, Lawrence Ferlinghetti's in particular. It is, however, more obviously a plea for par-

ticipation and debate: a call for both companionship and dissent, although the emphatic request for "objectionable" letters seems a little imprecise (are the editors really inviting offensive, insulting responses, or do they more likely want to engage in lively disagreement?). Before margins are theorized in *Tish*, they appear in expectantly social and formal terms, as a call to fill empty space, for dialogue and response (in whatever form that might come), and in the guise of a recognizably "New American" poem which *emphasizes* empty space.

This sense of empty space(s) is something Lance La Rocque picks up on in his article on *Tish* poetics, "The Other Side of Utopia: The Opacity of Perception in the First Run of *Tish*, 1961-63." La Rocque sees the poetry of *Tish* making unique use of Black Mountain poetics and phenomenology; he writes that the *Tish* poets "discover an unexpected and unsought-after truth" through the Black Mountain approach, which is "that the self is an effect of social organization not escaped by fiat, and that their particular social world demand[s] an atomized, anti-communal self" (51). Thus, despite their tendency to publish assertive manifestos in the vein of their mentor, Charles Olson, these proclamations do nothing to help them escape from the reality that their "social world" inhibits the possibility of them attaining the lofty utopian ideals to which their poetic statements aspire. La Rocque elaborates that "*Tish* writers in general inhabit a psychic space caught between two divergent impulses: valorizing a small "h"-heroic individual against the big city, embodying modernity, and a keen awareness that it is precisely the fragmentation of the modern city that produces such an individual" (60). A reader who turns to *Tish No. 1~19* for exemplary "Black Mountain" poems might in fact recoil at the frequency of despairing moments in these young *Tish* poets' works, especially when they are rendered in bolded, all-caps typography, as in James Reid's "Autumn Again":

If **YOU WERE HERE**

If you were here,
                    my hands would be stretched toward you
like leaves

**AS IF CONTINUALLY MISSING THE POINT**      (*Tish* 2, 42).

Or see Bowering's "**LONELY THIS MORNING**," in issue 2's "The Sunday Poem" (48); and

Davey's "**FUCK YOUR DISTANCE**" ("Bridge Force," *Tish* 13, 271). Yet, while their poetry

does, as La Rocque maintains, recurrently depict isolated speakers unable to connect with others,

we might see the "Poems Needed" notice in Issue 2 as an early confrontation with this emerging

problem – as their individual works feature the "social world" fading away, or simply not having

materialized at all, *Tish* poets see the space of the little magazine and the page as a possible al-

ternative *locus* for this social world, recognizing that the magazine carries the possibility of "col-

lective sociability."

    The concept of collective sociability is put forward by Daniel Kane, in an article on the 1960s

American poetry journal, *Angel Hair*: Kane compares two divergent texts by Bernadette Mayer

and Jack Anderson published in the magazine, and notes the hermeneutic possibilities of analyz-

ing them in conjunction with each other, rather than as separate works (346-350). In this article,

as well as in his book *All Poets Welcome*, Kane frames the poetry of 1960s New York City as a

"communal effort," with poets working in collaborative and collective ways (including the estab-

lishment of little magazines) to build poetic communities (*All Poets Welcome*, xiii- xiv). Collec-

tive sociability can encompass a group of diverse writers and texts which all feature in the same

magazine or anthology, yet it can also signify the long-distance communication possible between

those writers found on the margins (i.e. the *Tish* poets in Vancouver) and those in other marginal

spaces (one example would be Hamilton poet David McFadden), or even in well-known literary

centers (Zazeela writing from New York City). If the metaphorical "bridge" of the city in

Davey's poetry "operates more as an anti-bridge, a metaphor for the failure of metaphor, in that it creates distances rather than spanning them" (La Rocque 58), then the metaphoric potential of the bridge can also be recovered through long-distance literary correspondence, which provides some semblance of the stable and substantial sociability the *Tish* poets desire. *Tish* poets resist the "atomized, anti-communal self," not in their individual texts, but within the space of the little magazine, which permits a flourishing and sometimes dissenting community. The magazine it-self is an escape from the limitations imposed on them from a society which demands anti-communal positions, and the poets and editors of *Tish* use the little magazine to push the stultify-ing margins of poetics and community. As poetry and politics in the 1960s became interested in notions of communality, *Tish* uses figures of margins, locus, and bridges to investigate how each poet within the collective shares civic and social space.

**Margins and Locus**

   *Tish* poets are interested in investigating personal and shared spaces but more specifically, their individual perceptions of their place (or locus) within the sometimes-alienating grid of city streets. Being "marginal" in both a geographic and cultural sense leads them to center themselves in their investigations, which they do through the frame of mentors (such as Warren Tallman, Charles Olson and Robert Duncan), but also in their own critical and poetic statements which are highly responsive, in the way that the editorial call discussed above invites. In "The Problem of Margins," Davey writes that

>          in a universe so uncertain/chaotic to the far-probing eye, the one thing the poet must
>
>          (of necessity) trust is himself. No less, or he has nothing; no more, or he exceeds his
>
>          capabilities. All he may (with hope of accuracy) write about are features/effects of the

universe that come to him and/or flow through him. In short, his involuntary immediate

perceptions. And the only position from which he can (with accuracy) write is the one

(physical/psychological/physiological) **IN WHICH HE IS STANDING**. (65).

This passage shows that not all the theoretical statements and manifestos in *Tish* posit a Utopian

world of holistic connections. Davey maintains that the "universe" is "uncertain/chaotic to the

far-probing eye" and, in the face of this, argues for a kind of self-sufficient response wherein the

poet trusts only his own immediate perceptions of the universe, as they arrive to him, or "flow

through him." The specter of the isolated speaker is represented here in a way that might seem a

far cry from Davey's earlier statement that "I write poetry because I am alive – a mass of living

sensations – and human – intelligently perceptive of sensation […] There is no such thing as an

isolated image…" (*Tish* 1, 19), which La Rocque cites as one of the magazine's "ebullient, life-

affirming statements about the role of poetry and the poet, about the possibility of community,

and about recovering a non-appropriative relationship to the world" (49). Yet in both passages,

Davey is speaking of relations explicitly in terms of *self* and *the universe*, and not directly ad-

dressing social or physical concerns. Although real, everyday social relationships (friendships,

romances) are desired and depicted by the *Tish* poets, Davey's early formulations here deal with

the individual poet communing with other forces, prior to more practical questions of inter-

personal connections or community.

Davey is handling the concept of "proprioception," which Charles Olson defines as " 'one's-

own'-ception/ the body itself as, by movement of its own tis/sues, giving the data of, depth"

("Proprioception" 182). Davey states that "margins shift in location … as the physi-

cal/psychological/physiological/ reality of the poet moves […] the margin is **ALWAYS** in the

poet" (66). The margin is also "where the line starts" (65), and lines "are vocal connectors,

bridges, tram lines, that make the poet's/ **LOCUS** directly accessable [*sic*] to the reader" (66).
Davey's essay nicely brings up the three nodes of margin, locus, and bridge in a way that attempts to unify them, but also in a way that thoroughly complicates the easy assimilation of the categories of the individual and the social. Wah clarifies the matter considerably in the first paragraph of "Margins Into Lines," where he writes "[i]t is understood that poetry today takes on the color of a relational utterance. This essentially points to the relationship between the poet's individual sensibility and the universal sensibility, **OUR** environment" (82). Another triumvirate is implied here: the poet's "individual sensibility" is related to the "universal sensibility," which in turn is part of "our environment": the poet is both individual and an element of the universe which he occupies and shares experientially with others.

**The Practice of Margins**

Putting "individual sensibility" into action is seen in Bowering's applications of the concept of margins in his own poems. In the texts I look at in this section, Bowering embodies or materializes the abstract notions of metaphor and margins in a way that "objects" to them being conceived as only products of the mind, detached from physical experience. This "objection" also contains a species of sociability which is seen in how Bowering alludes to other poets in other places, as seen in the poem "Locus Solus," which hints at his relationship with avant-garde poets in literary "centers" (in this case, New York City). One result of Bowering's engagement with the marginal is to produce a *Tish* sociability which has a distinctly contrarian tone.

The first poem to explicitly address the "problem of margins" is Bowering's "Metaphor 1":

    (My speech obsessed by language,
    the very riding thru me of the
    meta-phor
            thru me & away on a trip

past the margins of the mind)

A tree
an oak tree
an oak with a tree house
nailed between its branches
                              stands
                              in the field
                              of my mind,
                              growing, or
                              staying grown

until I invest it with birds
brocading its limbs of reach,
sending back skippidy hop
patterns

         **STOP**
             it off
         it is enough
         it is in the moment
         it is for ever

         :done
         &
         :there                          (*Tish* 5, 95).

The poem begins on the topic of speech and language, although the opening lines are enclosed in

parentheses, which suggests that the speaker's words in this stanza are an aside, a marginal apos-

trophe to the reader or an interlocutor. When the titular figure of speech appears, it is halved by a

hyphen (line 3), perhaps to emphasize the etymology of the original Greek *metaphorein* "to carry

across." This, the most basic meaning of "metaphor" becomes its own metaphor for Bowering,

carrying with it the sense of trying to bridge spaces, to carry meanings across voids, to connect

"points," or "margins," and perhaps even individuals to each other. As La Rocque notes, the

"aim of the *Tish* editors' poetry is to exercise a capacity to track, graph or map, and to relate in-

timately to the places out of which one emerges" (50). This is evident when perusing *Points on

the Grid* – Bowering's appropriately-titled first full-length collection, published in 1964 – which

also proliferates with references to "margins" and "metaphors." This inaugural poem, however, appears more immediately connected to Davey and Wah's *Tish* essays, with its early attention to margin and locus, though treated in a more abstract than proprioceptive fashion. Bowering depicts the making of poetic images in almost Romantic terms, and he portrays the poet who purposefully "invests" or transmits images from one mind to another through the power of imagination alone. The poet constructs images in an aggressive, accretive "House That Jack Built"-manner: "A tree" becomes "an oak tree," which in turn becomes "an oak with a tree house." The mind, as the locus for this poetic inventory, is represented as operating independently of the body, unlike Wah's analogy of the poet's "batting stance," which he is prescribed to take "in readiness of what might be coming" (82). Bowering's "Metaphor 1" moves from the abstract to the particular, a significant movement that continues in later "margin" poems by himself and R.S. Lane, as we will see. Yet here, this movement happens only within the poet's mind, and divides, rather than bridges, the mind from the body.

A later poem by Bowering ,"L.S." (published in *Points on the Grid* as "Locus Solus") perhaps more effectively represents the concept of sensory data entering the poet proprioceptively, as substantiated by its first section:

Attaching toes to Vancouver downtown sidewalks over-

sluiced with rain water

> under billowed concave black
umbrella dripping around me

> eyes down on neon reflections
wiggled in the gutter

> cursing & moving alone
next to shoulders of down looking strangers
soggy in the rain                                              (*Tish* 7, 134).

This poem, unlike "Metaphor 1," has a "point of view" outside of the poet's "mind's eye": the speaker of the poem is embodied immediately in the first line; in fact, we might almost sense the poet coming back to earth from the lofty heights of "Metaphor 1," as "[a]ttaching toes" provides the sense of *touching down* or landing. The decision to begin in this way is important, since Davey states in "The Problem of Margins" that "[w]here the line starts is where the poet starts. And the poet must start (and stay) **WHERE HE IS**" (65). This poem, which conjures "locus" in its very title, must remain more grounded than "Metaphor 1." "L.S." promises a more concrete locus than the earlier poem through its attachment to a specific locale: "Vancouver downtown sidewalks." While the poem, as Davey dictates, "stays" true to its locus, the shifting margins and lines carry the impression of the poet looking around, and receiving sensory impressions proprioceptively with darting eye movements: "eyes down on neon reflections […] next to shoulders of down looking strangers" (l. 5, 8). There is a sense of disconnection in this poem, but it could be described as an *intimate* disconnection, of the speaker sharing discomfort with his fellow pedestrians, of "moving alone" alongside *others*. There are also some subtle social relations hidden in the poem's title: "L.S." stands for "Locus Solus," which is topically pertinent, but also a reference to Raymond Roussel's 1914 novel of the same name, which in turn is the title of a contemporary journal of poetry which published five issues in 1961 and 1962. In an article on the magazine, Terrence Diggory notes that the phrase *locus solus* "marks a private space both in its meaning (solitary place) and its derivation … [the Roussel novel] provided a secret meeting ground for the New York School poets" (298). Diggory helpfully points to the potential of finding shared social experience in reading, and the way this might produce community (which here resembles a kind of secret society). In this way, Bowering's poem reveals openings that play against the theme of being lost in the crowd: those who *read* the poem and recognize the refer-

ence are granted symbolic access to this "society" – however, this possibility is more submerged under its original, abbreviated title in *Tish* 11.

The rest of "L.S." is devoted to a kind of Projectivist reconstruction of a summer hike the poet took "down the side of old Blue Mountain/ [where] it was a hundred & twenty/ in the shade/ but there was no shade" (l. 12-15). Bowering attempts to perceptually re-member the arduous walk, not by means of a Romantic recollection in tranquility, but by placing the body – rather than just the working of memory – back into the scene. "L.S." concludes with "the final walking home/ respecting the sun and taking it easy/ planting feet in long easy strides": rejecting a rainy-day reverie for present-tense narration, and significantly returning the poet's gaze back to his physical perambulations – "planting feet" in a reflection of the opening's "attaching toes."


**Manly Margins**

The emergence of the body in "L.S." can be linked to other forms of literary sociability, especially as we track how the presence of the physical body is emphasized in further *Tish* poems which deal with margins. Michael Davidson, in his essay "Compulsory Homosociality: Charles Olson, Jack Spicer and the Gender of Poetics" in the collection *Guys Like Us* examines the "compulsory character of homosocial literary communities, both hetero- and homosexual, in generating innovative poetic practices" (21). Davidson argues that the consensus within New American poetic avant-gardes (including poets of the Black Mountain school, or Jack Spicer's circle) is maintained through various manifestations of masculine domination. He notes that the "authority" of the speaker in the New American Poetry of the late 1950s

> derives from an ability to instantiate physiological and psychological states through
>
> highly gestural lineation and by the treatment of the page as a field for action. In the

rhetoric of Black Mountain poetics, the poet scores the voice – and by extension the body – through lines that monitor moment-to-moment attentions. The poem's authenticity resides not so much in what the poem says as paraphrasable content but in the ways the poem displays its own processes of discovery. Many of the terms for such performance (gesture, field, action) derive from abstract expressionist painting for which the heroic ideal of physicality serves as the aesthetic as well as communal precedent. (29)

Many aspects of *Tish* poetics are predictably on display here: the concern with the "physiological and psychological" is echoed in the language of Davey and Wah's essays on margins, as they struggle to articulate the formal and physical properties of their poetry; the experimentation with "gestural lineation," evident in Bowering's poems, but also in the essays which feature prose with linebreaks, as well as copious use of bolded, capitalized letters for emphasis. The "lines that monitor moment-to-moment attentions" brings to mind Bowering's "L.S." Yet what really strikes me is how Davidson's analysis of the homosocial foundations of avant-garde North American poetry communities sheds light on the "margin" poems of Bowering and R.S. Lane. These poems largely abandon formal experimentation in favour of a more standard lyric form which, taken as a series of responses to Davey's "problem of margins," ends up establishing a kind of collective sociability through the representation of an idealized female physicality, mediated through a quasi-heroic, male mastery. Furthermore, the poems that follow emphasize the responsive quality of the collective interest in "margins"; and these responses affirm the masculine conventions required by the scheme Davidson identifies.

Bowering continues his investigation into the problem of margins with his contribution to a "twin poem" published in *Tish* 5 entitled "Two Poems For A Girl With Guitar." Bowering's half is titled "The Problem Of Margins," a direct steal of Davey's initial manifesto. The appropriation

of Davey's title is in turn a clear echo of Bowering's later appropriation (in *Tish* 7) of the title

"Locus Solus." Bowering's acts of appropriation are mischievous, yet they also carry a sugges-

tion of competition or rivalry: it is as if he positions himself as having the final answer, in this

case, to the problem of margins. In any case, these titular appropriations foreground the texts as

responses to other writers (Davey, Roussel, and possibly the New York School writers who also

take the name *Locus Solus*). Bowering's conceit in his "The Problem of Margins" is to transform

Davey's original theoretical consideration into a lyric poem of sexual desire. It opens

> The darker top of a woman's stocking
> is a margin,
>             the meta that
> strikes horizons into the eye-wielding mind
> of me.                                          (108)

Bowering is later apologetic for this kind of youthful outburst, stating in an interview that it rep-

resents "[t]he only way you could open up to moment-by-moment excitations – I mean, look

what age I was; everybody was walking [sic] like that at that age" (Bayard and David 91). The

language of the poem, and his later defense of it, remain grounded in the language of propriocep-

tion, but the gaze here is no longer directed at the "walking" body of the poet, as in "L.S." – but

at a fragmented female object of desire. The Modernist-sounding "Girl With A Guitar" (the title

evokes High Modernists such as Pablo Picasso or Wallace Stevens) is instantly compared to a

"woman" in Bowering's first line, but her own corporeality is effaced by the gaze fixed on a fet-

ishized item of clothing, and only a fragment of the garment itself: "the darker top." Bowering

depicts his vision here as an aggressive exchange: being "struck" by beauty is akin to a kind of

bludgeoning, while his vision is likened to a kind of weapon – "the eye-wielding mind." The

"meta" found in "Metaphor 1" is also present here, yet here it's used to delineate the border be-

tween fabric and flesh, not to take the reader into an extended consideration of language, but ra-

ther to mark the territory that he will share with his partner in the twin poem. The idea of ex-

panding margins, or of the "moveable" margin of the poet's locus explored in Davey's essay and

"L.S." merely becomes a punchline at the end of Bowering's "The Problem of Margins" – ad-

dressing the "girl," he writes:

> You – did you know
>               (tell me not)
>                       that you had lifted
> a wanderlust in me? Did you realize
>    that
>          sitting there
>                   I had begun to move
> against my margins?                    (108-9)

Bowering's consideration of the theoretical "problem" his colleague Davey originally posed is

brought down to earth as a sexual euphemism. Since the poem's title is the exact same as

Davey's essay, it may be read as a raunchy response to the "pretensions" to seriousness that

Davey later finds in it. Yet it can also be seen as a homosocial attempt by Bowering to provoke a

response from his pensive colleague in the competitive environs of his shared office space with

Davey, where the two aspire to "write poems every day and shove them across the desks at each

other, shouting 'So there!' and 'Take that!'" (Davey, *When Tish Happens* 130).

   Davey's response, in his "half" of the twin poem, reveals the way their social relationship is

mediated through the figure of the "girl with a guitar":

> Your body
>             especially those legs
> perfect and pressing ripe
> in an invisible
>                 perhaps maiden-form,
> you keep walking
> thru my hallways and doorways
> roadways and highways
> summer picnic places
>     winter writing places
> smiling

> sometimes lingering
> hand-tapping and retiring
> into the wind
>              beyond              ("For The Guitar-Girls," *Tish* 5, 109).

Since the twin poem form invites direct response, Davey picks up on the fixation on the female body, intensifying the gaze to include both legs, as well as an "invisible/ perhaps maiden-form" brassiere. Davey's poem reverses the tumescent imagery of Bowering's, with the female "perfect and pressing ripe," perhaps in response to the male presence. "For The Guitar-Girls" imagines the desired object reciprocating, though eventually "retiring" into the "beyond" suggested originally by Bowering's "meta." The libidinal subject/object of the twin poem allows the two poets to share their desire, though Davey defuses the "excitations" of Bowering by safely ushering the woman out of the scene, once she is no longer needed to mediate their now-sated desire. The libidinal exchange between Davey and Bowering is a common trait of male collaborative writing. Like Davidson, Wayne Koestenbaum is another scholar who has adapted Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of homosociality in literary texts; in *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*, Koestenbaum writes that "men who collaborate engage in a metaphorical sexual intercourse, and … the text they balance between them is alternately the child of their sexual union, and a shared woman" (3).  Robert Duncan also notes the erotic undertones of this homosocial collaboration in his essay "For The Novices of Vancouver," where he writes of the twin poem form that "[j]ust as between lovers, so between poets, experience is transformed from an isolate sensory impression and becomes a shared medium" (*Tish* 13 256). Although "Two Poems For a Girl With a Guitar" is inaugurated by Bowering's glancing reference to Davey's theoretical essay, the ultimate aim here is not to experiment or extend the poetics of the group, but instead to subtly test and reinforce the social bonds between the two poets, through the sublimated, mediated, and metaphorized sharing of a woman, or "girl" in this case.

Bowering's de-emphasis of the theoretical possibilities of the marginal, along with his bawdy metaphor of "expanding" one's margins is taken up by R.S. (Red) Lane, in several poems of his published in *Tish*, all entitled "Margins" – a series that Davey notes in his retrospective which opens this chapter. Lane, who died at age 28 in Vancouver in 1964 of a brain aneurysm, is described by Bill Manhire in *The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry in English*, as "a pop poet of the early Sixties who has assumed a slightly mythic standing in Canadian poetry" ("Patrick Lane," 334[14]). Manhire's interpretation of Lane as a "pop poet" is interesting, as Lane's poems in *Tish* and his lone, posthumous book, *Collected Poems*, are indeed quite different from the projectivist concerns of his colleagues. While Manhire sees Lane's poetry in the context of the Pop Art movement of the early 1960s, some idea of the mythic status he alludes to can be found in a contemporary review of *Collected Poems*, which concludes, "This is a god who walked away. Lane was a poet who had a sure and total knowledge of his own life and gave this vision away for nothing more than the solace of your walking by his side" (Sutherland 55). While Fraser Sutherland, the young reviewer here, seems to have taken leave of his critical faculties (soon to be honed as a regular writer on poetry in the *Globe and Mail*) in favour of extravagant encomium, this assessment of Lane is something the poet himself cultivated in his truncated career.

In a poem entitled "Big Benzedrine (an open letter to George Bowering)," Lane addresses his friend directly and critically:

> It's as simple as this.
> People are the opium of the people.
> You need people
> Not pot.
>
> You've made two mistakes in your life

---

[14] Red Lane's biographical information is found in the encyclopedia entry on his brother, Patrick Lane.

And everything that is happening to you now
Is a result of them.

The first is that
You didn't screw the hometown girl.
The second is that
You argued with me that
Intelligence came before knowledge
And went away
Believing you were right.
And because of these
There is no spontaneity in your life.
Only impulse.

You have the chance to make two more
And either one will kill you.

The first mistake will be made
If you go back to the university
In the fall
Or ever again.
The second will be made
If you fail to see the truth
In all I am saying to you right now.

I don't expect you to.
Even as Kearns failed to see the truth
In "an epitaph for the walking dead"
So will you fail to see the truth in all this.
For I do not think that you as yet
Have passed the mirror stage.

But unless you do
You will spend your naked nights
Shouting
    Give me back my rib.
And your days on fire
Crying
Because you cannot get your shadow sanforized.

                                                (*Tish* 12, 238-239)

Lane's poem here introduces some ideas that will reappear in his "Margins" series, the most sali-

ent here being the rejection of the "academic" in favour of an unadorned and spontaneous mode

of address. Lane begins by exposing Bowering's isolated existence, asserting that he needs "peo-

ple/ Not pot." The drug reference, and the poem's title alludes to Bowering's poem "benze-drine," published in *Tish* 9 (199), affirming the potential for responsive appropriation that we saw in Bowering's use of Davey's title "The Problem of Margins." Although Lane suggests that people rely on each other as one might "opium," he clearly believes that Bowering can learn more through "real life" social channels, something he is presumably lacking in his current state as a scholar/poet. Lane regards Bowering's attraction to academia as something which saps him of a vital, masculine life-force: his institutionalized mode of thought prevents him from "screw[ing] the hometown girl"; it inhibits his potential for "spontaneity" in exchange for pro-grammed "impulse," and Lane predicts a metaphorical death for Bowering if he continues his university education. Bowering and his academic endeavors are implicitly linked to images of feminization and impotence in the last stanza, with the allusion to the Biblical myth of the crea-tion of women (Adam's rib), and the reference to sanforizing, which is a chemical process of shrinking fabric. In "Big Benzedrine," Lane projects the image of a confident, street smart, mas-culine speaker who provides a forthright, if pessimistic, pep-talk to his wayward friend. The melancholic undertone in the poem – that Bowering will undoubtedly fail to understand his friend's talk – belies Lane's assured persona, yet it also helps to develop the mythic image that was to come after his early death. Sutherland's statement that Lane "was a poet who had a sure and total knowledge of his own life and gave this vision away for nothing more than the solace of your walking by his side" mirrors the poet's own assertions of truth in "Big Benzedrine," and also the poem's conflicted connotations of camaraderie – especially the thwarted desire for social connection that La Rocque pointed out as a *Tish* specialty. Lane will continue to build on this image of the poet as speaker of the "non-communal" self in his "Margins" series published in *Tish* 13, which significantly rounds off the group discussion of the topic.

The first and second of Lane's series of four "Margins" poems put the spotlight on the *Tish* poet as an "isolated being … defined by [his] inability to see larger relations"  (La Rocque 51). In the first poem, the speaker waits outside a café for a woman, only to falter at the prospect of talking to her. In the second poem, the speaker describes a humorous encounter with a stray dog – the two staring each other down until the poet laughs aloud "for all mankind/ but the night echoed back my sobbing" (*Tish No. 1-19* 261). The third poem again features the poet in another fruitless encounter, this time with a speaker unable to respond to a child's naïve questions, which concludes with him dismissing the child to "Go outside and play" (262). Each of these poems resembles "Big Benzedrine" formally, in their simple diction, and short, largely left-justified lines. These conventional formal features are arguably Lane's attempt to retain some aspect of a holistic self in the face of a "social world" which demands "an atomized, anti-communal self" (La Rocque 51). Lane's staunch maintenance of the traditional borders of poetic lineation is oddly compatible with Davey's clarion call that "**WHERE THE LINE STARTS** is the margin […] And the poet must start (and stay) **WHERE HE IS**" (65). While Lane's immovability might appear anathema to *Tish*'s poetics of the margins, it actually corresponds with Davey's further comments on the connection between the margin and the ideal of self-reliance: "Because in a universe so uncertain/chaotic to the far-probing eye, the one thing the poet must (of necessity) trust is himself" (65). This sounds a bit like the emerging mythic image of Lane as a poet with "a sure and total knowledge of his own life" (Sutherland 55), although Davey, introducing Lane's "Margins" series in *Tish* 13, counters that these poems "provide a composite picture of the man that is quite different from the cocksure (tho skillful) poet of 'Big Benzedrine'" (*Tish No. 1-19* 257). The idea that Lane's series constitute a "composite picture" sees Davey reading his more traditional, seemingly "cocksure" colleague in terms of his accordance with, rather than deviance

from, *Tish* poetics: Lane, who depicts himself as deserted and isolated in his poems, is squarely seen by Davey as an important practitioner of the group discussion on "margins," who looks past Lane's conventional formal aspects to discover a more complicated, composite self represented therein.

**Bridges**

La Rocque asserts that "Davey's metaphorical bridge operates more as an anti-bridge, a metaphor for the failure of metaphor, in that it creates distances rather than spanning them, and destroys rather than embodies meaning" (58). It is my proposition that we must take these instances of "metaphor" —margins, loci, and bridges— to see them instead as material for *group work*, rather than as discretely individual works or expressions. These three metaphors that proliferate through the first 19 issues of the little magazine are concepts or theories that may be explored, advanced, furthered, or even adjusted or obstructed by any member of the group that chooses to write on them. The bridge might be used by Davey as an anti-metaphor for disconnection, yet it also represents the social potential inherent for the group in the poems that they write and publish in the magazine which are instigated *by* the metaphor. The "twin poem" that Duncan recognizes as an "inventive development" (256) is the material, textual form of the metaphorical bridge which spans *two* subjects, as opposed to the despairing speaker of Lane's "Margins" series, and which La Rocque detects in Davey's individual bridge poems.

Frank Davey's 1965 poetry collection, *Bridge Force,* is mostly comprised of poems originally published in *Tish*, many of them constituting a "bridge" series. The title, though, is also significant because it carries with it the connotation of collectivity and response that we see in the group discussion on "margins," as well as in the twin poem form: in the game of bridge, a

"force" is an individual player's move to induce a certain bid from another player. Bowering be-

gins and ends his poem "Metaphor 2" (his half of the twin poem "Two Dialectics For Bridges,"

published in *Tish* 6) by indirectly addressing his partner Davey:

> There is no bridge force
> but on the ocean
> no stanchion
> stands in earth
>
> but a
> metaphor
> a span
>
> convinces men
>                 sailors and
> poets
> that they are moving there
> on the hump back bridge
> that
> gives a man a chance
> to travel from himself
> to someone else
> at the other pinned in point
>
> no bridge force though
> he is
> either really sailing
> or swimming like a fish     (129)

Bowering explicitly cancels out, in lines 1 and 18 of the poem, the phrase that Davey selects for

his own bridge series. Bowering might be responding to Davey in the same manner of "The

Problem of Margins," by making a pointed reference to his colleague's work, but he also links

his refutation here to his earlier poem "Metaphor 1," meaning that this poem is not only a re-

sponse to Davey, but also part of a sequence of his own. Bowering replaces the notion of "bridge

force" with his own understanding of poetic creation, which "Metaphor 1" depicts as a move-

ment from the abstract to the particular, as visual stimuli is worked through the poet's imagina-

tion. Like "Metaphor 1," where the scene – or the poet's locus – does not become animated until

the poet "invests" the scene, there is no metaphorical potential in the "bridge" unless it "gives a man a chance/ to travel from himself/ to someone else/ at the other pinned in point." La Rocque, in "The Other Side of Utopia" observes that Bowering's *Tish* poems often present a disconnected speaker driving his car aimlessly around town, the "car space" (which La Rocque links phonetically to "carapace," or a hard protective shell) locking the poet into a permanent "image of containment" (56). Yet here we see how Bowering finds an escape from the "demand" for an "atomized anti-communal self" (La Rocque 51): the bridge and the twin poem allow for mediation and movement amongst these isolated individual subjectivities. This mode of "travel" and exchange is not figured as "utopian"; in fact, the call-and-response quality of the *Tish* poets' work within the nodes of margin, locus, and bridge is, as the twin poems under discussion here suggest, dialectical – collaborative and argumentative.

Davey's ultimate response to Bowering's denial of the "bridge force" does not come in his half of "Two Dialectics for Bridges," but in a poem published in the next issue (*Tish* 7) entitled "A Repudiation For G.B." This poem is evidently a more direct response because, unlike his contribution to the aforementioned twin poem, Davey re-uses much of Bowering's diction in "Metaphor 2":

> The force
> I am here
> (omni-impotent as usual)
> The riding of metaphors
> hump-backed liners across oceans
> is all wet
> and swimming is
> (as they say)
> for the fish                    (lines 3-12, 140)

Davey's response is constructed from the raw material of Bowering's poem: "metaphors" are likened to modes of transportation, the "hump back bridge" of Bowering is transformed into a

"hump-backed" ocean liner, and the misshapen imagery here could be linked to the kind of collective writing on display: "twin" poets work together in one "hump-backed" body, or perhaps the even more suggestive "beast with two backs" out of Shakespeare, which carries the potentially erotic charge of this shared writing. Another interesting exchange happens in this passage, as the "omni-impotent" lyric "I" of Davey is juxtaposed against an equally singular "they": Bowering's phrase "swimming like a fish," which ends his earlier poem, is rendered as an axiom, as something "*they* say" (emphasis intended). These twin ruminations on the metaphor of the bridge provide alternatives to the "anti-communal self" that would keep individuals on only one side of the bridge, or only within their carapace, or car space.

All the poems in this chapter are social, even if they express isolation and marginality: the poets work together as a group on metaphors, "to track, graph or map … the places out of which one emerges" (La Rocque 50). Avoiding the dead-end of the "anti-communal self," a poet like Bowering imagines selfhood as being like a point on a map, with the potential "to travel from himself/ to someone else/ at the other pinned in point" ("Metaphor 2" 129). The rigid, straight direction of a metaphorical bridge is not the "force" which will connect these two points, but instead calls for some bends or turns in the act of perception.

Bowering's poem "Tuesday Night," published in *Tish no. 7*, unites the figures of margin, locus, and bridge in a single text, and exemplifies how a poet can subvert the "grid"-locked city and escape its alienating effects:

> When the city huddles down
> to sleep – and round
> the corners lights on poles
> tremble tighter patterns out and down
> the rolling streets in pairs and strings
> in ski-jump movement to the sea –
>
>       I know

> where I am –
>
> out west in the city –
> Point Grey pointing west in the middle
> of the night of rest extending to the sea –
> hoving nightly away from the middle
> of the city held together by bridges
> in a surface-tension-taut-catching bend –
>
> > of bridge
> > pinioned Vancouver
>
> where I know where I am –
> on the arcing point reaching westward
> bulge of high-dry-happy-dare hysterical
> daytime Vancouver – subdued nightly –
> down and huddled – hoving westward light –  (136)

Bowering opens with an image of communality, imagining the city as it "huddles down/ to sleep," initially refusing to represent the city as an unbending grid of streets and terminal points, a depiction which does get aired in the second stanza ("the city held together by bridges/ in a surface-tension-taut-catching bend") and its following couplet ("of bridge/ pinioned Vancouver"). This opening picture of civic union is emphasized by the first stanza's use of euphony – alternating patterns of anapestic and iambic meter – that are in turn de-emphasized as meter by the enjambment of the first two lines, which do not end at the expected point. A more traditional rendering of the lines in the first stanza would perhaps look like this: "When the city huddles down to sleep/ and round the corners lights on poles […]." This opening gambit creates an effect of insinuation, of moving around corners, or of perception being spread out in unexpected directions, which contrasts with the language of grids and architectural tension and rigidity, that arrives in the second stanza. The rigidity of civic space and infrastructure is also challenged by how Bowering describes light: "lights on poles/ tremble tighter patterns out and down" in lines 3-4, and the use of the word "hoving" in lines 12 and 21. The former description defies the fixed

quality of illumination from a streetlamp – resisting the "spotlight" effect which could be seen as a type of surveillance – and this moving light leads to further deconstruction of grid spatiality: the light travels down "the rolling streets" which then culminates in a "ski-jump movement" to the couplet's strong assertion of identity within this civic space: "I know/where I am." Further-more, the use of the unusual word "hoving" – which means to "hover, lurk, or loiter," accentu-ates the poem's subtle opposition to a grid which coerces citizens to move in set patterns.

The second stanza depicts the poet's particular location as a refuge from the grid: the peninsu-la of land known as Point Grey is figured as a kind of arrow ("pointing west in the middle/ of the night of rest") and as a place that promises respite from the rigid architecture of the city. It is sig-nificant that this haven is not figured as an opposite, or as a pastoral landscape which rejects mo-dernity and urbanity. Rather, Bowering portrays this alternate space as a feature of the landscape *and* the built environment, or, as a possibility existing within the grid itself – a "bend" or "arc" that slightly alters one's perceptions, if one looks closely enough. This leads to a second declara-tion of the poem's refrain ("I know where I am") in the third stanza, which insists, above all, on the importance of the notion of *locus*. Here Bowering shows us the combination of margin and locus in actual practice: he claims identity and belonging by spatially (on the space of the pages, that is) moving out of the margins. That is, he places his five-word declaration ("I know/ where I am") as a kind of speech act, which is enhanced by its visual separation from the stanzaic blocks of text. Thus, Bowering illustrates a practical "solution" to "the problem of margins." The mar-gin, figured as a psychic space (the feeling of being marginalized within the nation, as well as the city) and as a potential space in contemporary poetics, is combined here and it results in Bower-ing taking a "position" which affirms the value of both communal and individual identity.

This final stanza also sees an increase in the use of hyphens, a punctuation mark that proliferates throughout Bowering's poem. Paradoxically, hyphens in "Tuesday Night" are used to *separate* and *join*: in the second line of the poem ("to sleep – and round"), the hyphen is deployed to do the work of the *margin* – that is, it is there to note where a pause should be, instead of being rendered as a linebreak in traditional prosody. From there, hyphens are used almost as if to keep "pointing" or directing the reader towards something, but also to interrupt the flow of images, or to "hover" on a particular image. The hyphen is also used to join images together, as in lines 14 and 19. The poet creates an interesting effect by stitching nouns, verbs, and adjectives together ("surface-tension-taut-catching bend"; "high-dry-happy-dare hysterical daytime Vancouver") to create phrases that consist of multiple moods, states, or concepts. Yet Bowering is selective with these hyphens, and significantly omits the marker in the poem's second "couplet" (lines 15-16): "bridge/ pinioned Vancouver." Since Bowering has previously (in "Metaphor 1," discussed above) used the hyphen as a way to separate and signify parts of words and their meanings (i.e., "meta-phor", to carry across [a meaning], like a bridge), we might surmise that Bowering is playing with this combination of the bridge and the hyphen purposefully. Bowering has previously, in "Metaphor 2," denied that there is a "bridge force," so his claim here that Vancouver is "pinioned" (i.e. pinned, like an entomologist's butterfly) is complicated by the absence of the hyphen. He signals that the bridge is a metaphor whose meaning fluctuates as much the other images in "Tuesday Night," whereas his colleague Davey sees the structure more rigidly as a barrier to connection, or to revisit La Rocque's summary, "Davey's metaphorical bridge operates more as an anti-bridge, a metaphor for the failure of metaphor, in that it creates distances rather than spanning them, and destroys rather than embodies meaning" (58). Bowering disagrees, seeing the bridge as a more ambivalent symbol, and the mandate of *Tish* allows for this dissension with-

in the group work format of the little magazine. Just as Bowering and Lane reframed Davey and Wah's theoretical notions in the "margin" poems, Bowering here responds and refigures the concept of the "bridge" in a way that combines his perspective with Davey's: the bridge has the potential to bring people together as much as it has the power to take them away from each other.

**Chapter Three: Domestic Spaces: Creativity and Collaboration in blewointment**

When I was around 14 years old, I visited the Moose Jaw Public Library and came across *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, which contained a poem by bill bissett, titled "christ i wudint know normal if i saw it when." This poem begins with an unpunctuated refrain: "were yu normal today did yu screw society" repeated eight times. From there, the poem becomes a torrent of "run-on" phrases, strange enjambment, and scatological language:

> did yu blow cock eat c*nt make a good
> business deal and still relate were yu are
> yu happy were yu good just once did yu today
> have an existential moment in no time were yu
> normal today did yu screw society … (362)

This poem constitutes my own microcosmic "Six Gallery" moment: in my personal history, that summer day in 1985 or 1986 was "where it all began" for me and poetry. I have not much recollection of my experience with poetry — modern or otherwise — before this point in time, but I must have been interested in poetry enough to have wandered from the Children's section of that beautiful, sandstone building in Crescent Park, to the upstairs section containing "Literature." What I can be sure of is being thrilled by the display of irreverence and rebellion that the bissett poem still holds for me. I had no context to place this kind of poem in: I didn't know if the misspelled words, the lack of punctuation, and the awkward line breaks were intentional, or the product of a raving amateur. Yet I was intrigued. From there — or so the legend goes — I sought out more Canadian poetry, and came across an anthology of poetry edited by Al Purdy, *Storm Warning*. This collection included photographs and biographies of the authors. The photo of bissett revealed to me the image of the *bona fide* poet: tousled hair, a ratty sweater, a faraway look, and what appears to be a large "blow-pop" ring on his right index finger: I was ready for

Bohemia. Years before my recognition of bissett's image, Vancouver poet Jamie Reid also describes his appearance in similar paratextual terms, noting bissett's "haunted look," his expression of "sleepy, cat-like sensuality and a kind of surprised bemusement" — resembling "the poet in the drawing on the cover of a popular paperback anthology of modern French verse — sensitive, starved, ragged" ("Th Pome" 15).

*Storm Warning* included four poems by bissett, and each poet in the anthology is accorded space for a critical statement of poetics, much like Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*. bissett's statement is a short run-on sentence which laments the economic realities faced by poets such as himself occupied with "sailin thru the fleshy bardos" ("Statement" 36). One little-examined aspect of bissett's poetics appears in the first poem of bissett's that Purdy has selected, "th average canadian nose bleed." This poem might be one of the most formal poems in bissett's corpus, consisting of nine more-or-less uniform looking tercets, akin visually to William Carlos Williams' "The Yachts." "th average canadian nose bleed" is a fairly conventional narrative poem that happens to be set in a prison (bissett was serving a sentence for a marijuana bust), and only really diverges from "proper" lyric form in bissett's habitual flouting of standardized spelling and punctuation. The little-known aspect I am alluding to comes in bissett's depiction of a movie screening of the Hollywood film, *The Rainmaker*, "such a beautiful film, th message,/ yu are what yu see yrself/ to be…" ("th average canadian nose bleed," 33). bissett, the bohemian poet *par excellence* is an aficionado of mainstream studio films, as a thorough scan of his poetry will reveal: the full-length book *Stardust* is the best evidence of his fandom. Yet, in this poem the "10pm curfew struck long befor/ this really great movie etc. was ovr," leaving bissett, his fellow inmates, and even the "regretful" guards lacking the consummation of the promised epiphany of the movie's conclusion, and by extension, the ending of the lyric po-

em. The suggestion I want to take up from this poem is that bissett is astutely aware of the "im-age" that an artist can perform and control — whether poet, painter, or Katherine Hepburn in *The Rainmaker*. While I won't suggest that bissett purposely meant to strike the pose of the *poete maudite* in his *Storm Warning* photo-op (my suspicion is that he would have chosen a more out-landish outfit to do so), I am claiming that bissett has, at other times, deliberately crafted a public image and legend that adheres to him today and which sticks — not always negatively — to any work of criticism on him.

It is helpful to consider how bissett's public images can be conjured by different types of par-atexts. Steven E. Jones succinctly summarizes French narratologist Gerard Genette's concept of the "paratext":

> The paratext is a multilayered system of frames around a text that help determine its
>
> reception, from naming the genre ("mystery") or implied audience ("trade paperback" or
>
> "bestseller"), to advance reviews printed as blurbs, or the footnotes and index, even an
>
> author's photo, all of which affect how the book is read and interpreted. (Jones 7)

Genette conceives of the paratext as something which influences the reception of a *book*; howev-er, if we apply the term to the broader definition of "text," we can then extend the concept to acknowledge how author photos and critical statements in an anthology contribute to the recep-tion of individual poems. In some ways, bissett's author photo disrupts one conventional view we might have of him: the poet, while wearing a paint-stained sweater, has short hair instead of the possibly-expected mane of long hippy hair. Other poets' photos in the anthology display the more up-to-date bohemian fashion of the day, most notably Howard Halpern, who has long hair, a headband, a psychedelic-patterned shirt, and a Jew's harp in his mouth. The author photos in

*Storm Warning* are placed in a group over the early pages of the book, so that you see the poets before you read them.

What is the purpose of including the photographs of authors within the anthology? One reason is surely to "personalize" the author, and to reject the objective aims of New Criticism, where the poem under study is ideally unsullied by even the name of the author. Another reason might be to make visible the notion of the "group"; even though the poets included in *Storm Warning* have disparate poetics, showing them together provides a sense of a united front. For myself, however, the paratext of the author photo of bissett became my first experience with the "legend" of bissett, an "author function" that I encounter in the small body of criticism of his literary output over 30 years after "meeting" him in that quiet library. I have attended poetry readings where hosts refer to bissett's "shamanic" and "trickster" qualities. These comments derive from a public image he has built himself, and which seeps into much of the criticism of his work, sometimes at the risk of hagiography. Warren Tallman, in "Wonder Merchants," writes that bissett began "as a downtown bohemian-Modernist," but then "shifted later to a wild west self and has since shifted beyond that into an Indian self" (204). The depiction of bissett as "Indian" seems to derive, interestingly, from Jack Kerouac's final interview. In that interview, published in the Summer 1968 issue of *Paris Review*, Kerouac endorses bissett as a "great poet":

Kerouac: You know who's a great poet? I know who the great poets are.

*Paris Review*: Who?

Kerouac: Let's see, it is William Bissette of Vancouver. An Indian boy, Bill Bissette, or Bissonnette.

*Paris Review*: Let's talk about Jack Kerouac.

Kerouac: He's not better than Bill Bissette, but he's very original. (qtd in Carlson, 44)

Around the period of the late 1960s, bissett's experiments with sound poetry began to incorporate chant, which possibly leads to Kerouac's assumption that bissett is an "Indian boy." However, over a period of almost 50 years, bissett's adoption of Native imagery and practice has led to a certain legend building up around him as "the shaman of Canadian poetry" (Carlson 33). Whether this shamanic tendency is necessarily linked to an appropriation of North American First Nations culture is debatable, yet it does lead critics such as Tallman to attribute "Indian" status to the poet, and the fact is that the appellations of "shaman" or "trickster" (Rogers 11) are repeated at conferences and poetry readings to describe bissett. It is my contention that we need to examine as well as discard certain aspects of bissett's legendary public image if we are to be true critics of his work. However, I am not advocating a wholesale revival of New Critical methodology in examining bissett: this chapter intends to look at how his public image (which, admittedly, is only really known amongst a small population of Can Lit scholars and poetry readers) was constructed in the early 1960s by himself *and others*. I will be looking at two film documentaries of the period which feature bissett, one which portrays him as the "solitary artist," which directly feeds into my youthful response to bissett's work in the Moose Jaw Public Library. The second shows him as one amongst many, as one figure in a group portrait. It is important to re-situate bissett within this context of sociability and collectivity in order to puncture the heroic myth that surrounds bissett, and this approach allows other poets, such as his domestic partner Martina Clinton, and his colleague Lance Farrell, to come into view as contributors to the establishment of Vancouver avant-garde poetry.

In my introduction, I observed that theorists of collaboration persistently point out that collaborative practices challenge the trope of the artist or writer as "solitary." Critics who study col-

laboration in literature put the poet in relationship with others, and reveal how literary works are produced, not through solitary genius or inspiration, but through their connections to other authors. Of course, in literary history, poets are often seen as parts of larger groups or schools, and in the recent critical turn towards the social and the collaborative, more articles and books are appearing on the topic of friendship and its role in literary production. This chapter intends to expand this examination of affiliations to see how the category of "family" can operate, even amongst underground, bohemian artists who tend to reject societal values. It will look at how the concepts of the collective and the collaborative operate among the group of poets in 1960s and 1970s Vancouver who regularly published in *blewointment*. The idea of the "communal" will be introduced in this chapter, using Daniel Kane's terminology found in *All Poets Welcome*. In his study of the Lower East Side New York poetry community in the 1960s, which included Allen Ginsberg amongst others, Kane writes that

> [f]raming poetry as a communal effort parallels community-building work typical of the 1960s and changes established notions of what constitutes authorship and literary production. Most obvious, Ginsberg's naming of poets as "community and family" underscores the tacit acceptance of poetry as a group phenomenon and threatens the prevailing romanticized conception of the author as a solitary inspired figure. (xiv)

Kane's work has been influential in studies of post-war American poetry (often called "The New American Poetry," after Donald Allen's similarly groundbreaking anthology), and has reframed much of the debate about this period in terms of the social. Criticism in this vein attempts to look at how the social networks, affiliations, and friendships between poets contribute to structuring a poet's individual work. *All Poets Welcome* shows the use that poets of the New York School made of collaboration, particularly multi-authored poems and texts which were meant to mark a

social occasion, even something as simple as showing up at a friend's apartment. My chapter on the *Tish* poets reveals that their concept of collaboration leant more toward the "collective" side: the "twin poems" of Bowering and Davey maintain the borders between individual authorship, even as "group work" is being done. This chapter wants to take up this methodology of seeking for the social roots of a work, in an attempt to correct a persistent problem in the small but growing body of criticism on bissett's work. The residue of "romanticized conceptions" of bissett's literary output and his public image will be cleared away in order to show how *group work* and partnership helped to develop his own influential poetics. Perhaps more interestingly, I would like to approach the idea of the "family" within the possibly unlikely environment of Beat-era avant-garde poetics.

In 1960s and early 1970s Vancouver, Kitsilano was the center of communal, hippy culture. However, Jamie Reid, in an article about bill bissett, notes that this community arose out of an earlier, more "Beat" literary formation that was scattered around the city: in the West End, Coal Harbour, and even in the more conservative Point Grey, near the University of British Columbia ("Th Pome Wuz A Storee" 15-21). As the years progressed and the borders of the city's bohemian quarter became more stable, bissett's living arrangements, documented in poems of the time, were less fixed. Through most of this period – the time of the foundation of *blewointment* and his first book – bissett was in a domestic partnership with another poet, Martina Clinton, and the two of them were raising a child together. This familial, communal relationship was integral to the earliest days of *blewointment*, and it is one of my aims to recover the contributions of Clinton to the literary culture of Vancouver. Since bissett at this time was a "family man" and part of a domestic and artistic partnership (both he and Clinton co-edited the magazine), how did he come to be seen as a unique, solitary figure?

**Two Portraits**

A significant document of 1960s Canadian poetry, Maurice Embra's 1965 film portrait of bill bissett, *Strange Grey Day This*, depicts the poet in Romantic fashion: as a solitary beatnik rebel, adrift not only from society at large, but even within the bohemian counterculture where one would expect a "Beat" to thrive. The film opens with bissett standing on a downtown Vancouver street, surveying the passersby with an expression that might be best described as a combination of youthful wonder, vulnerability and superior *hauteur*. The poet's voiceover comment early in the film – "I don't exist in terms of group affiliation" – sets the tone for the majority of the 27-minute documentary. bissett, surrounded by crowds, is represented as one who stands apart, and the portrait that follows firmly maintains this position. He is never shown in company with others, and his solitude is emphasized with "long" shots of him walking over the Granville Bridge alone, supplemented by a melancholy soundtrack punctuated with the sounds of nature (seagulls, the tide rushing in at Kitsilano Beach).

Embra shows bissett in "work" spaces: at the Vancouver Public Library, site of his former job as a shelver, and in the artist studio, amongst a myriad of canvasses painted by the poet and painter, bissett narrates his struggles with the daily drudgery of work in the library, claiming that he "wanted to work until I was full of sweat, when I came, quote, home at night … I wanted to work so hard that people I didn't like would approve of me." His comments here reveal a suspicion not only towards the more traditional beatnik antipathy towards a straight job, but there is also the telling barb directed towards the notion of 'home' being a haven one retreats to after a day of hard work. bissett seems to be not only denigrating the notion of an honest day's work, but also the separate space of the family home.

The other workspace featured in the film is bissett's studio. We see the artist, wearing a sweater backwards, oblivious to the large hole in the ceiling, looking over his vast collection of abstract canvasses. Again, the voiceover reaffirms bissett's opposition to societal constraints; he states that the goal of his art is "to make something that is really only there - itself - that doesn't spill over into references of hostility, organizations, clubs, status groups, social machinations, maneuverings …" This particular strand is further explored in bissett's recollection of an art exhibition he participated in and that, in the gallery director's words, was intended to "get Vancouver art on an international level." bissett's eventual disgust with the event comes not from this uplifting goal, but from the perceived posturing and expenditures of social and cultural capital that he witnessed. The end result of bissett's work - the installation of his painting in a group exhibition - reveals to him once more the machinations and club mentality that he seeks to avoid in his studio:

> people who for the last, maybe, three years wouldn't speak to me - they knew who I was, they had heard about me, I knew who they were, I had myself a few times spoken to them but they would no longer speak to me because I wasn't making it in whatever club they felt I should be making it in - came up to me that night of the opening , sort of behind my back and said, "Congratulations, boy, you've made the grade." And if that's what becoming a well-known Canadian painter is … I really don't want it. (Embra)

Apart from the mention of one friend at the event, who with bissett attempts to inject some levity into the proceedings by instigating an imaginary gun battle, *Strange Grey Day This* depicts an artist and poet with an almost unbearable lack of social connection, and who sees the possibility of connection as fraught with compromise, or, a word he uses in the studio narration, "ickiness."

I am arguing that the current perception of bissett in the Canadian poetry community is that of a "singular" figure, and that Embra's portrait coheres with Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtrivon's comments that "traditional biographies … have typically described creativity as an extraordinary (usually male) individual's solitary struggle for artistic self-expression" (7).  This valorization of heroic artistic solitariness is perhaps not as prevalent as when the Embra film came out, yet I want to resituate the emerging critical discourse on bissett in terms of his place in a larger community. There is an earlier film document of bissett, along with other members of the Vancouver art and literary scene, titled *In Search of Innocence* that I would like to turn to now. This 1963 National Film Board production, directed by Leonard Forest, does not focus on individual authors, musicians or painters; in fact, most of the participants in the documentary are not named (and those who are named are identified via Forest's voiceover narration.). Forest's strategy is to show all these cultural figures in relation to each other, an idea emphasized through the appearance of the Al Neil jazz combo, who provide not only the soundtrack, but also the visual and aural background for a performance section with Fred Douglas. Forest frames the film through music as well as the painted image, showing the artist Jack Shadbolt working on a canvas from beginning to end. We see the painting as Shadbolt is in the process of creating it, and the improvisational music the Al Neil Combo works "in concert" with the words and intonation of Douglas, as he reads to an audience at the Cellar.

Some revelations emerge from Forest's decision to show Vancouver artists and poets in terms of relations and friendships; for one, we notice how many of these figures cross disciplines (are artists *and* writers, just like bissett in *Strange Grey Day This*). Forest also introduces the notion of friendship — *In Search of Innocence* begins with scrolled text which begins, "This is a film born of friendship" — but he also shows Fred Douglas and Roy Kiyooka debating the concept of

"speed and spontaneity" in someone's living room. This moment echoes the competitive arguments present in the work of the Tish poets. The film also raises awareness of a peculiar, possibly "local" reading style, by documenting bissett, Douglas, and Lance Farrell in performance. As mentioned before, Douglas reads with musical backing; we see and hear Douglas sway to the band as he recites a poem in a lilting, slack-syllabled way (Douglas has a habit of making words like "start" sound like "stert," although the B.C.-born artist and writer might be affecting a Nova Scotian accent here). He reads: "What is happening on this dark green chesterfield, or couch, or, you know, bed - is we are on it, doing, like intangible verbs to each other's curves. The most knowledge is nakedness, like with no clothes on, we crawl - this is what is happening, over and across, in and under, doing like I say…" Douglas is chewing gum, smoking, as well as hearing the band, elongating words like "chesterfield" and exaggerating the sibilance of the 's' sounds in "nakedness" and "clothes." The poet performs the words sinuously, accentuating the poem's subject matter of decadent pleasure, but also creating an effect of making the words slide "over and across, in and under…" the sound of the band. Douglas' performance shows that the phenomenon of reading poetry to jazz accompaniment was present in Vancouver, but more importantly it reveals the relevance of reading "in concert" - the combination of words and music constitute new meanings, being drawn out through performance and collaboration.

Another scene in the film features bissett and Farrell reading in a dilapidated warehouse space. We are removed from the bohemian pads, studio spaces and location exteriors that pervade the rest of the documentary. The effect of seeing the two poets in this unhomely interior space, with no furniture, wallpaper or any touches of domestic habitation, increases the alienation expressed in the texts they read. Both poets read in starkly different registers: Farrell recites his text quickly, with clipped pronunciation and a sense of aggression, whereas bissett's poem is

read with spaces/pauses between words, and exaggerated intonation, much like Douglas's poem, yet with an affected high-pitched, almost campy tone. The poem bissett reads is the first of two "poems from the climate" published in the first issue of *blewointment*:

somebody   feed   th   ocean       QUICK
cause         elephants       have
perfect   pitch
and
i
am
th  elephant
boy      cum
home  to
roost                                      (1:1, October, 1963, n.p)

The spaces (approximately rendered here) determine pauses, so that each word is slightly more drawn out than normal speech. "QUICK" in all caps signals a point where the poet reads that specific word louder than the rest. Words like "QUICK,"  "pitch," "i," and "boy" are intoned in various inflections: lisping and exaggeratedly enunciated by turns. The "dropped" line after elephant indicates a visual cue for bissett to read "boy" in an extravagantly deep voice, countering the "queer" inflection of "QUICK." "Pitch" is one of the words that bissett over-enunciates, neatly emphasizing that the articulation of words, and how we impart them influences the reception of the message (giving some glimpse into the contrast between the "queer" and the "masculine" tones of voice). The performance is made stranger by the reverberant acoustics in the abandoned warehouse. The negative space "scored" by the poem is filled by the reverb of speech sounds created by the largely empty space of the warehouse.

   The next poem Farrell reads is a satirical "warning" to painters who write poems, which Forest frames with the poet in a closer shot than the previous recitation. We see more clearly that the

space is used as a studio, with the same kind of abstract canvases found in *Strange Grey Day This* placed against the walls (in fact, this might be the same studio as the one seen in the Embra film). Farrell's performance contains an undercurrent of threat and violence, complementing the poem's intimidating tone: "Painters are painters/ and you should stop writing poems, painter/ or I'll attack you with my sculpting tools, you hear? … Gooood." Farrell expresses the last word of the poem in an exaggerated utterance that underlines the idea that how one says something influences how it is to be understood. He delivers the lines in a tone reminiscent of a gangster in a mid-20th century film, emphasizing the undertone of violence present, but also with a campy irony mixed in. *In Search of Innocence* uncovers a wide array of dramatic reading styles among Vancouver poets.

If the scene with bissett and Farrell reading becomes confrontational, a more tranquil representation of interior space comes with the introduction of the artist Joy Long in the film. The voiceover that begins the segment with this Vancouver artist states of her, *in media res*, "And you are somebody's wife and some child's mother […] sometimes you are led back into half-remembered inner spaces, somewhere beyond your own childhood innocence, somewhere beyond innocence, into silent spaces, where child's play itself is a protest against darkness and death…" The film's title, *In Search of Innocence,* centers on this passage from the film.  While there is no one central figure in the film, it is Long's artistic practice that motivates the consideration of an artistic quest for "silent spaces" beyond innocence. The paintings of Long's that are shown in the film all depict faceless female children in a state of play. Forest shows these artworks in full colour, in contrast to the studio settings, which shows the artists and their surroundings in black and white. We see vibrant primary colours on the children's clothes and the jump ropes, and, in the last canvas of Long featured, a dark and foreboding black background is con-

trasted with the red dress and red balloon of a dark-haired girl, an apt illustration of Forest's comments that "child's play itself is a protest against darkness and death." Fittingly for a film that bills itself as "a romantic view of art and life in Vancouver," the concept of a prelapsarian childhood is heavily emphasized here.

However, it is interesting that Long is portrayed in familial terms as "somebody's wife and some child's mother" when the rest of her portrait insists on going beyond or outside the boundaries of identity. By contrasting the studio scene of bissett and Farrell, with that of Long and Farrell (Forest's edits seem to show Farrell in the studio with Long as well), I want to now draw out the concepts of the "collective" and the "familial." The romantic view of bissett and Farrell in their space aims to situate them in an artistic or literary milieu, whereas Long's segment sets her art in relationship with her identity as a wife and mother. I want to challenge the essentialized and gendered view of Long, while at the same time retaining the space of the familial as a worthwhile avenue of study for the *blewointment* poets, especially bissett and his young family: his partner Martina Clinton, whose poetry takes up many pages of the magazine, and their daughter Ooljah, who is also an occasional contributor to the journal.

While the later film, *Strange Grey Day This* portrays bissett as the central subject of the documentary, and furthermore as a solitary figure, in Forest's earlier film bissett is presented as a partner, as we see him reading in tandem with Farrell, and even hear him as part of a group voiceover performance of a text towards the end of the film. According to derek beaulieu and Gregory Betts, in the Afterword to the reprinting of bissett's *Rush: What Fuckan Theory: A Study Uv Language*, Forest's film "inspired bissett, and consequently the aesthetic orientation of *blewointment*, with its disavowal of 'control over the art' and its preference for an embodied rather than articulated poetics" (127).  If bissett was loathe to formulate his poetics into official,

theoretical statements (*Rush* was only written because bp nichol made it a stipulation of a loan given to bissett after nichol won a major prize), then what can we say about an "embodied" artistic and poetic practice? What does this entail if bissett's work (along with that of his colleagues) is produced in a collective, communal, and familial environment?

**"negative space paintings in the wicker crib"**

Sam Perry's introduction to bissett's first book, *We Sleep Inside Each Other All*, published in 1966, is an emphatic illustration that bissett's work was seen by his early critics as one branch in a network of collective and even familial structures. These collective and familial ties clearly contribute to the critical interpretation of his works at this stage of his career. Perry's introduction is written in the style of Kerouac's "spontaneous prose," which aims to alter linear connections in favour of a free association of ideas and relations, colliding and juxtaposed with each other. This makes it a difficult text to follow because so many "threads" in Perry's stream-of-consciousness prose seemingly disappear, only to emerge later as just a small phrase within a heavily subordinated, run-on sentence (and the disruption of this orderly style of literary analysis is probably one of the attractions for writers like Kerouac and Perry). Perry terms these phrasal units "word channels," and states in his opening sentence that "[t]he human race are news for us to hear only if we are listening to this word channel among all the incoming channels of perception" ("Introduction," n.p.). Perry's language here suggests that he, like the *Tish* poets, is interested in Charles Olson's theories of poetry.

Very early on in the introduction, Perry makes the move of portraying bissett as a member of a family with a rigid hierarchy: "Bill Bissett was born in Halifax, his father The Judge, as soon as that became impossible time when he desired figure skates to draw his patterns, not playing the

game" (n.p.). Without needing to provide a classic Freudian analysis of the relationship with the "Father," we learn of bissett's (Perry does not adhere to the now-standard lowercase rendering of the poet's name) early struggles within the family unit[15]. Perry's sentence seems to be a fragment of a narrative concerning a son who rejects "playing the game" (perhaps hockey?) in favour of more effeminate pursuits ("figure skates"). In the next "word channel," Perry reveals the much more ideal family that bissett is a part of now: "Martina sez RAY OF SUNSHINE, Ooljah their daughter sez 'The Bissetts'" (n.p.). Somewhat ironically, the unconventionally-named daughter of this bohemian couple figures the family in the conventionally patrilineal manner: one imagines a sign on a suburban door announcing the family residing within. Perry implicitly provides us with two versions of "family": the specter of the authoritarian father, which indeed appears in two poems in *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* addressed to bissett's father, the final one concluding "Our seed can/ not coldly live" ("Third Letter to my Father," n.p.). The ideal of the 1950s nuclear family, with its rigid patriarchal structure is dismissed by bissett, in favour of an image of his place in the family as "being the tree with branches/ cared for and related to each other" (ibid.).

Perry, in his elliptical, spontaneous prose, shines a light on bissett's domestic life, in contrast to Maurice Embra's portrait of the wholly solitary artist. It is significant that Perry connects bissett's domestic partners - his wife and child - to his artistic and literary work in an introduction to his first book of poetry. Martina Clinton and Ooljah Bissett are not "behind the scenes" bit players; rather, Perry figures them and bissett as members of a family unit — part of a "home" life. This becomes emphasized even more as he references Embra's film: "Studio film called Strange

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[15] bissett's father was Frederick William Bissett (1902-1978), a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. As a lawyer, he famously represented Viola Desmond, who legally challenged segregation policies after being removed from reserved seating for whites in a provincial cinema.

Grey Day one hour from seven months. Every space magically composed rocco & junk sculp-

ture, Martina new says ENVIORNMENT & McKluhan" ("Introduction," n.p.). The reference to

the "Studio film" plays on the distinction between "studio" and "on location" filming in cinemat-

ic terminology: the former is shot in a controlled, possibly indoor environment which simulates

the "real," whereas the latter forgoes this method in favour of filming outside, in the streets.

While I don't suspect that Perry is casting aspersions on Embra's documentary, his words here

do suggest a separation between the environment of the artist studio and the home space of the

family. The implication is that Embra's "studio film" is not a completely faithful reproduction of

bissett's real work environment. Perry's word channel method moves immediately to a picture of

what could be either studio or domestic space "composed" of "rocco" (most likely "rococo")

decorations and "junk sculpture." Studio and domestic space are amalgamated in one sentence of

Perry's: "negative space paintings in the wicker crib new baby search for THE RENT." The

"negative space painting" possibly refer to the artworks that we see in both Embra and Forest's

films, yet they could also refer to the poem-pictures that bissett, Clinton and Farrell publish in

*blewointment*. The two spaces inspire work but are also used to display work: that is, we see the

studio space in Embra's film doing double-duty as a "gallery," whereas, in poems in the maga-

zine, the home space becomes the subject of the text. The "new baby" and "THE RENT" are ma-

terial realities that become aspects of the "everyday" content that is stitched into the visual form

of the texts of bissett and Clinton in particular.

These early critical manifestations of bissett — Embra's solitary artist; Forest's group mem-

ber, and Perry's family man — all converge in Warren Tallman's 1973 summation of the Van-

couver literary scene of the period, "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver in the

1960s." In this article, Tallman categorizes the main groups Vancouver poets of that time as ei-

ther "Tish" or "downtown" writers. Tallman figures bissett as the inheritor of the "energy" creat-

ed by *Tish*, which was winding down as Bowering, Davey and Wah were finishing their degrees

and moving out of the city to graduate schools around North America:

> almost as if energy were being transferred from one centre to another, in October, 1963
>
> bill bissett stepped in with *Blew Ointment Press* and a poetics that had not been in the
>
> *Tish* vortex began to come alive. Bissett, himself an energy vortex and wonder-merchant,
>
> became the new centre for the energy that *Tish* had generated. As *Tish* continued on a
>
> still important but wobbling pivot, *Blew Ointment Press*, a house for the houseless
>
> bissett, began to push the Modernism into new dimensions (196).

Leaving aside Tallman's interesting emphasis on a particularly Vancouver version of "Modern-

ism," I would like to focus on the figuration of bissett as a "centre," and the *blewointment* as a

"house." As we will see, at the time that Tallman is writing about, *blewointment* was a collective

journal, with no fixed editor on the masthead, just as *Tish* was. "Wonder Merchants" is laudable

for being essentially the first critical survey of Vancouver's intensified poetic activity in the

1960s, and Tallman exhaustively includes a long list (with brief commentary) of poets, who are

awaiting rediscovery even now: Judith Copithorne, Maxine Gadd, Gerry Gilbert, Roy Kiyooka.

It is interesting that Tallman views *blewointment* in terms of domestic stability (a new house

helmed by the father figure bissett) as *Tish* "wobbles" and its poets leave the city for opportuni-

ties elsewhere. In an indirect way, Tallman expands on Perry's association of bissett with the

family unit, though he doesn't enumerate any other members and only implies that the other po-

ets in the magazine reside in the house with bissett. Yet Tallman's attempt to fit *blewointment*

into a chronological, geographical, and hierarchical framework starts to reveal fissures when ex-

amined closely.

While *blewointment* indeed appears for the first time in October 1963, coincidentally at the moment that *Tish* is "wobbling," it can't be neatly asserted that it simply takes up where that faltering mimeo leaves off: many of the poets in the early issues of *blewointment* were poets whose presence and literary activity in Vancouver predate the appearance of the *Tish* poets at UBC. In fact, writers such as Claudia Cornwall and Jamie Reid present evidence of a thriving, Beat-influenced coffeehouse and bookstore culture in Vancouver existing independently of the *Tish* group. For example, in an interview with Barry McKinnon in a 1988 issue of *Open Letter*, Gerry Gilbert, a poet whom Tallman associates with the "downtown" poets, remarks that *Tish* were seen as "the new guys on the block" (60). As for the "downtown" distinction itself, bissett concurs that the designation is "primarily accurate" (McKinnon, "bill bissett," 76). However, he goes on to complicate the notion of a stable geographical center by listing various neighbourhoods in the city he has lived in: Point Grey, Coal Harbour, downtown, and East Vancouver; this mobility does indeed suggest a potential "houselessness," but which Perry positively depicts in his introduction as "Buddha glow from Yew to Fleming Street" (n.p.). Tallman's label of "downtown" is a useful attempt to affix a group identity, but it also carries connotations of that unacknowledged, pre-*Tish* Beat lineage that complicates the more linear history posited by Tallman in "Wonder Merchants." It would perhaps be more appropriate to call bissett and his compatriots the "blewointment" poets, but "downtown" also carries with it an irresistible frisson of the street that seems intent on creating more distance between *Tish*'s "UBC" location even though bissett, Copithorne, Gadd and Gilbert all attended the university as well (not to mention that bissett recalls that the early issues of *blewointment* were produced in communes in Kitsilano) (McKinnon, 73-74).

The assumption that bissett was the long-term prime mover for *blewointment* may also be primarily accurate, but in interviews and retrospectives, bissett is careful to label the magazine and press a collective, even communal effort, displacing himself as the "centre" of Tallman's narrative. In a long, retrospective interview with Barry MacKinnon, bissett remembers the early days of the magazine as a joint effort with his partner Martina Clinton, and specifically includes her input as a quotient in the formation of the magazine's visual poetics:

> Me and Martina Clinton were working the press together for the main part of the mid-sixties — 63-67. Before this starting, ie. the press, we would take all night, all day, in going over how we wanted to present the language on the page, paper, to let — have the poem to be a map for the mood/statement, show and tell of feeling message, articulate space between the words for pause-emphasis-measure visual presence of that poem, itself shape, where that is becoming the sound story rhythm picture — all the elements of poem making showing, being there for the reader, the writer, the poem — each poem is so different. And as it indicates there, we got a lot into poetics, what later became known as poetics. We just wanted to write. (74)

bissett's comments here point to the earliest phase of his "visual" poetics, and furthermore, they situate this phase in a context of partnership. He gives due credit to Clinton as co-editor and explains the poetics that the two were developing in *blewointment*: a poetry of "articulate space between the words" as a kind of score for the reading, and of "visual presence" as an essential element in the meaning of the poem — the poem as picture. A scan of many of the poems in the first years of *blewointment*, authored by bissett, Clinton and also Lance Farrell, reveals the intense concern these poets had with the use of negative space and the placement of words on the

page. To return to these early issues of *blewointment*, and to recover the poetry of a crucial figure such as Clinton could be a valuable contribution for the study of experimental poetry in Canada. At this stage, bissett's poetics were being constructed in conjunction with other poets, much like *Tish*'s poetics. However, what is additionally interesting is that bissett and Clinton's poetry is also written in the context of an even more intimate partnership: they were a couple, as well as a father and mother of a child. When I look back at Perry's phrase from his introduction to bissett's *We Sleep Inside Each Other All* – "negative space paintings in the wicker crib" – I see the aspects of collective poetics and domestic partnership entangled or entwined. So how do poems by bissett and Clinton, in these formative days, reveal the connection between formal experimentation and content which sheds light on the everyday domestic life of these bohemian, downtown figures?

**Bohemian Domesticity**

While the *Tish* poets are often seen as the academic branch of the experimental strain of Vancouver poetry, Tallman explicitly connects the poets of *blewointment* to the streets, thus setting up an interesting "town and gown" dichotomy.  However, as Frank Davey's memoir *When Tish Happens* makes clear, "downtown" and *Tish* writers would often meet at parties. He paints these scenes of sociability in a long passage:

> … bill [bissett] and John Newlove, Gerry Gilbert and Fred Douglas have been coming to
>
> some of Warren's [Tallman} parties and meetings, and to Jamie's parties now that Jamie
>
> has a place of his own downtown. Warren's parties are brightly lit, and people come to
>
> drink and talk. Jamie's are dark and shadowy, with Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* seemingly

always being played, and the tobacco and marijuana smog so thick one's eyes start to

sting. Uptown and downtown. (145)

Davey's depiction of the interiors of Vancouver parties matches similar scenes in Forest's *In Search of Innocence* and Larry Kent's feature film *The Bitter Ash*, set in Vancouver and released in 1963. Parties are not only a place to meet colleagues and share stories and ideas, but to imbibe and to listen to jazz. Tallman, a professor at the University of British Columbia, holds parties that are "brightly lit" and which encourage conversation. Jamie Reid's parties in his new downtown apartment are less chatty and the environment is "dark and shadowy." We start to really see the notion of a particular type of bohemian interior space in Davey's passage: the "pad."

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, North American media was fixated on "beatnik" culture, and magazines, newspapers and films were especially eager to imagine what strange kinds of life took place inside the "pad" of a bohemian. The November 30, 1959 issue of *Life* Magazine contains an article by staff writer Paul O'Neil, entitled "The Only Rebellion Around," which is captioned by a satirical "portrait" of a supposedly typical interior space belonging to a beatnik family. This family consists of a bearded male beat "wearing sandals, chinos and turtlenecked sweater and studying a record by the late jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker" (114) ; a "Beat chick dressed in black" tending a coal stove (114); and a "Beat baby who has gone to sleep on floor after playing with beer cans" (115). It has to be inferred that this is not a real family: the scene is so staged for the camera that the mother, father, and even the baby are clearly models. Yet *Life*'s obvious goal here is not to represent reality, but to propagate a moral panic amongst its readers and to delegitimize the very notion of a beatnik "family." Even Gregory Corso tries to imagine this possibility in his tour-de-force poem, "Marriage," which ends ambiguously and disjunctively, "yet well I know that were a woman possible as I am possible/ then marriage would be possi-

ble" (*The Happy Birthday of Death*, 29-32). The poem cycles through scenarios of possible bohemian domesticity, but can't break through to any conceivable image that doesn't replicate the standard vision of the nuclear family, leading Corso to conclude that he will be left "bereft." In *Life*'s own Bizarro World rendering of a family, the core values and gender roles appear to cohere with the ideal nuclear family structure: the man is the active one in the partnership (he is observed to be "studying" an album cover), and the woman is attending to the domestic work. Whitney Chadwick writes that the "identification of a woman artist's creativity with the innate and powerful generative forces of nature places women's productions outside the mediated sphere of male cultural activity. Men study and think; women feel and generate instinctively" (38-39). In this portrait of a family, the hip chick — no matter how much she rejects societal values — can still only be a homemaker, while the husband is a thinker and a do-er. *Life*'s faux tableaux labels one household object in the beatnik pad as a "typewriter with half-finished poem," which is beside the stove and which is presumably a failed salvo of poetic inspiration abandoned by the man (114). Yet what if the poem therein was not his product, but instead was a work in progress of the woman, put on hold in order to perform her wifely duties? What would this poem look like? Alternatively, what if the unfinished poem in the typewriter was a collaboration by the hip couple? I want to now look at how Martina Clinton's poems in *blewointment* play with the tropes of the beat Mama clad in black, armed with unconventional notions of child-rearing. The broader question I pose in this section is the following: how do sociability and ideals of collective and communal partnerships operate in private life, behind closed doors?

Jamie Reid remembers Clinton as "a dark, seemingly sullen and mysterious presence, often silent, who sometimes broke out in excited utterance of startling eloquence and insight" (22). The latter part of Reid's description could be applied to her poetry as it appears on the page, with

many spaces between letters, and words and lines scattered over the page in "composition by field" style. A poem from the second issue of *blewointment*, approximately rendered here, illustrates these points:

she   is   black
   black

like  my  life    is    black
     said   the  port-a-geeez
         /.
       man

life  is  better  here
    no   sea   an   sky
      but
  madness
 in   one   eye …       (1:2, n.p.)

Are the opening three lines a sincere expression of beatnik Existentialism or parodic of it? Clinton attributes the sentiment to a "port-a-geeez" (Portuguese?) man, cleaving his identity through some unexpected punctuation. Clinton is possibly deprecating a kind of poetry that reduce bohemian women to "beat chicks in black": as accessories or metaphors for pseudo-profound poets. I would argue that Clinton both recognizes and subverts the trope of the "girl in black," usually silent and often the "muse" of Romantic-minded poets such as the "port-a-geeez" man. A scene in one of her poems resembles a scene in *Strange Grey Day This*, where bissett talks about his house being the target of vandalism and taunts by the local schoolchildren who label him a "beatnik": Clinton's poem adds the additional qualifier of "mother":

  nine   year    oldboyeyesteal

   MINE WITH TEARS

red jackets

yelling

theres that mother

black

stocking

edgaze                                        (*blewointment* 2:2, Apr 64, n.p.)

In Clinton's telling, the figure of the silent, black-clad beatnik mother is imbued with a certain power: the ideal of the mother who perhaps has "eyes in the back of her head," or can shut down an episode of childish behaviour with a single stern look is at work here. John Maynard, in his book *Venice West,* notes that contemporary media portrayals of the (male) beatnik often vacillated between cartoon images of the "good" beatnik (a sidekick, like the fictional Maynard G. Krebs in *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*), and the "bad" beatnik who was "represented as a social misfit, perhaps a psychopath" (4). The beatnik, in the public eye, is either ineffectual or menacingly powerful: Clinton's response to this gaze is to assert her presence by simply returning it.

A 1962 TV pilot for *Suzuki Beane*, adapted from Sandra Scoppettone and Louise Fitzhugh's book published the previous year, finds the middle ground between the media images Maynard discusses, playing the notion of a beatnik family for laughs. At the beginning of the pilot, Suzuki — who appears to be at least 8 years old — introduces the viewers to her inert parents: her father, Hugh (she uses their first names) "likes cool poetry and meditates," and her sculptor mother, Marcia is "swinging chick" who constructs works from scrap material that Suzuki collects outside their "pad on Bleecker Street."  Hugh (portrayed by Harry Dean Stanton) is shown on the

floor in the fetal position, while Marcia is immobile as well, staring intently at her latest creation:

both are unaware of their daughter's presence. Here, the parents have the quality of the zany

Krebs character, but an implicit judgement is present in how they absolve themselves of their

parental duties. The image of deadbeat Beat parents recurs later in an episode of *The Simpsons,*

where Ned Flanders's "freaky beatnik" mother and father appeal to a psychiatrist to help them

with their delinquent son: their do-nothingness is summarized hilariously by the black-clad, be-

ret-wearing mother's plea: "You've gotta help us, Doc - we've tried nothing and we're all out of

ideas!" Clinton's poems again seem to be aware of this stereotype of the neglectful bohemian

parent, which she thwarts in poems addressed directly to her daughter.

Clinton and bissett had a daughter in 1961 who they named Ooljah. Some of Clinton's

poems in early issues of the magazine refer to the imminent arrival of the child:

set
  my
    jaw

put   my   house
in    order
create     furnishings

 all with a tone of great fragility
               great  protuberances lit  from  within

  made  by  my  hard gut butting   hands           (*blewointment* 1:2)

This poem reveals some anxiety about the baby: she is alternately a guest whose appearance re-

quires putting the "house in order," and a permanent resident who demands the creation (not the

purchase) of new "furnishings." The anxiety is seen in the "set … jaw" and the "gut butting

hands," though these feelings are also countered with a sense of the baby being a miracle ("great

protuberances lit from within"): another common view of the birth of a child. It is possible that

bissett and Clinton rented or shared an actual detached home at this period, but the choice of the

word "house" — even if the couple's living quarters was an apartment or shared accommoda-

tions — more solidly denotes the new domestic order in their lives: a baby makes your domestic

space a "house," even if a metaphorical one.

In fact, another Clinton poem published in a later issue of *blewointment* explicitly compares

her body carrying the baby to a kind of dwelling:

```
my    cunt   HAS
                  rooms
                  wooms
                  tooms
     infantesismall      feet
                  digging     joy
     MAMAhood    swoons
                        suddenly
                              DEAR   IS   MY   FLESH
     ANd    great
                  little  one ,
                  so  hard  to  maintain    .
  no      image      of     for
                  you   are   making
                  of    how
                  you    will     be
                                    out
```

<div align="right">(From "8 Poems," 2:3, Aug. 64)</div>

Many of Clinton's poems, like this one, are concerned with linguistic play, transformation, and

creation. Her incantation of "rooms/wooms/tooms" soon morphs into "swoons" in the poems'

seventh line. She has a habit of creating Joycean compound words, seen in "infantesismall" in

line 5, and the first of the "8 Poems" of hers in this issue features a "bevyofboats driftinginthe

harbor." This process of transformation and creation can be directly linked to her own pregnancy, and the transformation of her own body (cf. with the "great protuberances" in the previous poem discussed). The celebration of corporeality, bodily creation, and transformation soon gives way to more practical material realities: the baby will be "so hard to maintain" (line 12). But Clinton ends the poem with an implicit statement of parental intent which indicates that the child will be free to create her own "image" once she is out of the mother's body.

In "Freudian Song For Ooljah," in *blewointment*'s second issue, Clinton predicts that her daughter's life will chart the same bohemian domestic course that she and bissett are on: "yull moan yur yuuth/ away in/ rumantik attics/ like yur parents" (1:2, Dec. 63, n.p.). Like many of Clinton's utterances in her poems, there seems to be a combination of irony and defiance here. The exaggerated description makes the scene in this poem seem parodic, as in the poem featuring the "port-a-geeez" man, which contained similarly "rumantik" sentiments. The defiance appears in the poem's final line, which states "yu always haveto (sic) have an/ enemy" (*blewointment* 1:2, n.p.). As a "Freudian Song," the poem is interesting for forecasting, rather than retrospectively diagnosing a child's problematic relationship with her parents. It is almost as if Clinton is defending herself from any future conflicts with her child by framing them in terms of Freudian development; stating, in effect, that the family's unconventional domestic arrangements must inevitably lead to antagonistic and disruptive behavior.[16] In a poem which directly addresses her daughter, Clinton is again fending off real, imagined, or implied charges of bad motherhood (seen in *Life* and *Suzuki Beane)* by responding with a witty, beatnik version of the "this will build character" argument to Ooljah.

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[16] However, following in the anecdotal tradition of children born to countercultural parents, Ooljah would later change her name to the more common "Michelle."

Clinton's poems in early *blewointment* issues are worth recovering because the voice within them articulates the experience of a female "Beat" usually rendered silent, through media depictions and personal reminiscences. As a record of the struggle to make ends meet and to maintain artistic integrity, the poems are elliptical, humorous, but also experimental. The lines in "Freudian Song For Ooojah" addressed directly to her daughter also play with the same rejection of spelling conventions and punctuation as her partner bissett. Significantly, these lines of Clinton's point out the collective experimentation of *blewointment* in a context of family relations – a much different kind of affiliation than friendship.

In an article on the Cubist artists Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Whitney Chadwick notes that "[m]odern art histories, with their almost exclusive focus on individual production, provide little in the way of a model with which to evaluate creative exchange within partnerships" (32). She then makes the assertion that even feminist criticism – which allows Sonia Delaunay and her works to "stand alone" – rely on an underlying "assumption that she can be neatly fitted into the mould that he forged, that *his* modernism and *her* modernism are for all intents and purposes the same; they were after all a couple" (33, italics hers). Due to their interest in "simultaneity" — multiple events occurring at the same time — and their official union as husband and wife and as artists, Chadwick suggests instead that we see in their partnership evidence of a "synergistic creativity," which allows for a critical view that rejects hierarchy or looking for "who did what first" (38). Clinton and bissett's poems in *blewointment*, and in their early, individual publications, reveal shared work on the level of form and content. As bissett directly acknowledges in the interview with Barry McKinnon, both he and Clinton conceived of "the poem to be a map for the mood/statement, show and tell of feeling message, articulate space between the words for pause-emphasis- measure visual presence of that poem, itself shape, where that is becoming the

sound story rhythm picture" (74). Clinton and bissett's shared poetics are also framed explicitly

by bissett in terms of shared editorship of *blewointment* in the interview. His words in this inter-

view point to possibly the earliest phase in his concern with visual poetics, which would be de-

veloped further in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, after his relationship with Clinton end-

ed. At this early stage, the work of presenting the poem visually on the page is not only a collec-

tive, but a communal and family effort, as Clinton and bissett were living and raising their child

together. Thus, while many of bissett's own poems in the magazine are moving towards a more

complete visual abstraction, the content of some of these early poems deal with daily routine,

and the struggles of bohemian domesticity.

A rather uncharacteristically straightforward lyric poem in a 1964 issue of *blewointment* dis-

penses with formal experimentation and is a record of a difficult day as a parent:

> The   radio   broadcasts   <u>Boheme</u>
> and     we    bite   our     nails.
>
>                                 Why   will    she
> not become quiet.   We've not paid th rent,
> and the Health Inspector won't like a baby
> living   here   in this warehouse.                    ("Art Is Long: Life Is Short," 2:2)

There are no spaces between individual letters within words in this poem, which suggests that

this poem would not be performed in the drawn-out way a text like "somebody feed the ocean"

would. There are spaces between words, but as the poem becomes more "narrative" (in the lines

discussing the rent and the Health Inspector), the discourse becomes more standard or conven-

tional. The poem is a tableau of domestic discomfort: bissett's legs are "killing" him; the infant

is in a state of distress, and the tenants are in a precarious situation that threatens them with evic-

tion if the baby is discovered and the rent isn't paid. The poem appears to be a wistful, even qui-

etist depiction of the artist's life: suffering for his or her art in a draughty garret, a romantic cliché accentuated by the poems' title, which comes from the distorted translation of the Latin aphorism of Hippocrates [*ars longa, vita brevis*]. The scene is a much less ironic view of the life lived in "rumantik attics" in Clinton's "Freudian Song For Ooljah." The more traditional "romantic" pose in "Art Is Long: Life Is Short" is amplified by the reference to Puccini's opera *La Boheme*, the plot of which centers around a diverse group of struggling artists who live and band together in a Paris hovel. Significantly, the first act of the opera sees the landlord paying a visit to the tenants in order to collect three month's back rent – in response, the artists ply him with drink and get him to confess that he has cheated on his wife, which allows the artists to kick him out of the apartment, and to allocate the money they would have spent on rent on a wild evening out instead. Thus, while the poet/renter in "Art is Long, Life is Short" arguably revels in a kind of apolitical, Bohemian reverie, the allusion to the famous opera carries an echo of that modest tenant rebellion that suggests a less disengaged stance is possible.

The term communal and the inclusion of family and friendship networks enriches the study of collective and collaborative practices in literature, and carries with it the connotation of sharing spaces together. This applies to the *blewointment* poets, not only in having two of the editors cohabiting together, but in the special presentation of the very first chapbook published by blew ointment press (i.e., the small press, not the namesake journal). In 1964, Martina Clinton's *Notes From Our Elders* was released, consisting of six poems originally appearing in *blewointment* Volume 2, Number 2. Like the magazine, *Notes From Our Elders* comes in a "folio" size, which is larger than the standard size of a chapbook (which would usually be in "octavo" — or 6" by 9" size), or a magazine (which might be "quarto" — or 9 1/2" by 12" dimensions). For *blewointment*, the larger size is important in order to truly represent the editorial vision of "poem pic-

tures" with much negative space on the page. Yet it is also to allow the inclusion of more than one text per page, so that a sample page of *blewointment* might contain three texts by three different writers. *Notes From Our Elders* is compiled by selecting several poems from the series of the same name by Clinton in the early 1964 issue of *blewointment*, but significantly, the book is presented without excising the texts by other authors. Thus, the first text in *Notes From Our Elders* is actually a short story by Gladys Hindmarch; there are poems by Bob Hogg and Kurt Lang on other pages sharing space with Clinton's poems; and there is even an unattributed prose piece in the book that turns out to be an autobiographical piece by bissett. The unusual presentation of *Notes From Our Elders* might simply be evidence of a cavalier or spontaneous attitude to publishing (simply reproduce Clinton's poems from the magazine without deleting the other texts), but it could be argued that the book amounts to an (accidental?) anthology in which Clinton's poems happen to predominate. The possible motive of categorical anarchy is supported by bissett, who - in the interview with McKinnon — states that the editors of *blewointment* were intent on "fooling around with all our numbers — volume something, number something. None of it makes sense" (76).

It is significant that the first publication of blewointment press (the small press, not the magazine) is – intentionally or not – an anthology, even if it is officially catalogued as a work by a single author, Martina Clinton. The act of including texts by other writers in a short book attributed to Clinton signals a lack of concern or interest in the concept of the solitary author and an affirmation of the communal ideals of the 1960s. Harking back to Tallman's description of *blewointment* as a "house for the houseless bissett" (196), *Notes from Our Elders* is an announcement that the journal's small press has other poets living in the metaphorical household.

In this way, the boundaries between the notions of "group" or "collective," and "family" blur or merge.

One of the goals of this chapter was to challenge the heavy emphasis on the "legendary" or "solitary" aspects of bissett's public image (as niche as this may be), at this time when serious criticism on this crucial Canadian poet is emerging. By situating bissett's early work in the context of the collective, collaborative, and now the communal, we gain a clearer picture about how his media image was constructed, and how in some ways it conceals the social networks and affiliations that went into the production of an important magazine and press such as *blewointment*. Returning to the social environment of early 1960s Vancouver and to early documents of the literary community at the time allow us to view bissett and his companions as collaborative innovators and community-builders. Furthermore, this broader picture allows us to recover the individual contributions of a largely-forgotten but intriguing poet, Martina Clinton, and how the domestic partnership between her and bissett went into their poetry, permitting a deeper consideration of the everyday lives of these writers, and does not just focus on their important formal innovations. bissett is studied largely for his stature as an international figure in visual and concrete poetics, but the early visual experiments in *blewointment*, by bissett and his partner Clinton, are fascinating also for the picture they paint of domestic, bohemian life in 1960s Vancouver.

**Chapter Four: "Our Poems Make a Family": George Bowering's *Curious* Sociability**

The previous chapter dealt with how domestic life and family arrangements appeared in the poetic output of two *blewointment* writers. This chapter swings back to the *Tish* group and focuses on a work that arose out of George Bowering's own living situation, his 1973 book *Curious*. In his later memoir, *How I Wrote Certain of my Books*, Bowering states that *Curious* was "a kind of continuation" of his 1972 publication *Autobiology*, a work that mixes autobiography with fiction (47). Ian Rae notes that the covers of *Autobiology* feature complementary family photographs: Bowering as a child with his mother on the front, and as a father with his own daughter on the back. "Framed by these portraits," Rae writes, "Bowering's text explores new kinds of continuity in his writing by tracing his genealogy and translating it into a literary form" (*From Carson to Cohen* 152). At the time of composing *Curious*, Bowering was teaching at Simon Fraser University and living at the York Street Commune with other Vancouver writers such as Stan Persky and George Stanley. In *How I Wrote Certain of My* Books, Bowering simply notes that "the house was in Kitsilano, and was important to the book" (48). On the subject matter of the book, he further states that "each piece" in *Curious* "is a portrait of a writer of my acquaintance, two of whom lived in the commune, and one who would move in when five others moved out" (48). Here Bowering explicitly links the idea of the "portrait," signified in *Autobiology* by actual family photos, with a literary form: *Curious* portrays people Bowering has met, and in some cases, lives with.

For *Autobiology*, Bowering coined the term "biotext," a term that Rae says "has become increasingly important in Canadian criticism because of the growing interest in life-writing practices that cross over into fiction and highlight the construction of multiple selves, identities, and bodies through writing" (152). *Curious* expands the familial frame established by *Autobiology* by

including both photographic and literary portraits of 48 of his friends and colleagues in writing. In addition to the written texts, the book contains 27 photographs of some of the featured figures, most — but not all — captioned for identification. However, since *Autobiology* was a mix of autobiographical material and fiction, and *Curious* is a "kind of continuation" of that work, we might assume that the word portraits of real-life figures in the book are similarly constructed and potentially concerned, as Rae states that *Autobiology* was, with "multiple identities, identities, and bodies through writing." Bowering himself warns against reading the portraits as works of biography, writing in *How I Wrote Certain of my Books* "if you are interested in the way I treat my friends and acquaintances in my writing, remember the caution at the beginning of the book: 'The characters in this book are all creations of the writer's imagination. Any resemblances to actual people, living or dead, are coincidental'" (49). It is important to recognize that Bowering's portraits are seen from his own – sometimes pointed – perspective, and the image that he captures is not the same picture of a subject that a camera could record.

In *Curious*, as in *Autobiology*, Bowering wants to "[trace] his genealogy" as a writer and to "translate," as Rae puts it, his relationships with the figures that populate his personal history as a writer (152). In the poem/portrait "Al Purdy," Bowering explicitly links the concept of kinship produced by writing; connecting himself with Purdy, he writes that "[o]ur poems make a family" (n.p.). In this way, the collection of texts in *Curious* comprise a kind of writerly photo album, replacing family by depicting a group of writers through descriptions of appearance and activity (in addition to the selected photographic images at the end of the book). For example, many of the portraits in the book begin with active sentences, introducing the titular figure by describing what they look like or what they are doing: "He was coming down the stairs so large …" ("Charles Olson," n.p.); "She came down the stairs like Gertrude Stein…" ("Margaret Randall,"

n.p.); "He had a round belly…" ("Philip Whalen," n.p.). These portraits begin with immediate observations, but they also show how subtly the notion of relations are present in them. That is, the portraits show Bowering's initial response to the writers he has met (recollecting what vantage point he takes up to make observations of their physical presence), but also how they might, like Margaret Randall, be placed within a context of literary portraiture, beginning with Stein.

Bowering himself has noted the incentive he took from Stein's word portraits of friends and contemporaries; in his recollection in *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, he writes that "I was getting the Steinish prose down flat, and giving myself permission to push off into other ways of making responsive sentences" (47). In the chapter on *Tish*, the idea of "responsive" writing was explored, distinct from the kind of collaborative work that was being produced by the New York School, whose joint works were a fusion of subjectivities: two or more authors contributing to the same work. In a "responsive" work, the author responds to a text or idea explicitly written or suggested by another author, but each work maintains its status as a text produced by a solitary author. This responsiveness can be traced to Olson's pronouncement, in "Projective Verse." that dictates that "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION" (17). The "twin poems" of Bowering and Frank Davey were studied as works that exhibit *responsive* qualities: each poet reacting and responding to the words, or perceptions of the other. In the case of *Curious*, Bowering confirms that the form of the work derives from his study of the sentences of Gertrude Stein. In this way, Bowering foregrounds the book's subtext of sociability and influence between writers, by being styled after a writer that has influenced his work. It also fits into a collaborative model of generating writing which he established with Davey when they were part of *Tish*.

So what did Bowering's friends and critics make of such a book? There has been very little critical work written on *Curious*, save for some short reviews in defunct 1970s Canadian literary journals, and a scattering of statements one can glean from articles and considerations on Bowering's larger body of work. Terry Whalen writes that

> *Curious* ... is for the most part designedly low-key in the degree of its artifice primarily because Bowering is merely recording his surface impressions of some forty-eight poets he has met. What is interesting about the suite as a whole ... is the odd, almost equivocal nature of the poet's attitudes towards others, his emotional movement between endearment and very sharp contempt. (n.p. *Canadian Poetry*, web)

Whalen notes the book's "movement between endearment ... and contempt," which raises the question of how some of the writers portrayed may have themselves responded to their portrait. Bowering courts controversy and risks resentment; in fact, he has expressed mild disappointment that the collection did not stir up as much trouble as he had anticipated:

> I thought I'd get into some fights with *Curious* and I didn't get into the ones I thought I'd get into. The only really serious one was with the Bromige one: we used to be friends and correspondents, but are just cut off from each other now. His friends hate me. There were a few other responses I heard about. That [*Curious*] was a book in which I admitted feelings that I may not have done when I was writing lyric poems because I wouldn't have thought about those things. (Bayard 97).

Bromige's umbrage might derive from reading into his portrait a variety of veiled criticisms, or perhaps damning his work with faint praise. Bowering might be using the form of the portrait as an "open letter," as Red Lane did in his poem "Big Benzedrine" (subtitled "an open letter to

George Bowering") published in *Tish* 12. In that poem, Lane advises Bowering to abandon university and embrace "spontaneity" (238, line 16). In "David Bromige," Bowering casts his judgements on Bromige's poetic lineage less confrontationally, yet he ensures he is being clear when he writes "That is the relation but I am still talking/ about him" (*Curious*, n.p, lines 34-35). On Whalen's scale of the book's "movement between endearment and … contempt," this would be placed somewhere in the middle. Yet there is no doubt the critical subtext of the poem caused tensions between Bowering and Bromige's circle.

   *Curious* is a book that arises out of a poet's social life and contains statements meant to place Bowering himself in relation to his various writing communities. One thread I will be introducing in this chapter is how the book adapts the notion of the social and the collective in a way that comments on, or resembles, the form of the anthology.  In the introduction, I noted the galvanizing appearance of Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* to poets such as Bowering. Allen's anthology neatly categorizes the selected postwar American poets into groups (Black Mountain, the Beats, the New York School), but it also represents all the authors therein as a kind of united front against the more traditional lyric poetry produced by the writers in Hall, Pack and Simpson's *The New Poets of England and America*. In the introduction to the anthology, Allen makes the strong claim "for the new American poetry, now becoming the dominant movement in the second phase of our twentieth-century literature and already exerting the same influence abroad (xi-xii). Allen's anthology could be unique because, in presenting the "dominant movement," he actually presents a loose collective of different poetic schools or groups. The group of poets portrayed in *Curious* may not be as eclectic as the differences between the New York School and Black Mountain; however, there is a model of the collective presented with the collection of photographs of poets at the back of Bowering's book. In the previous chap-

ter, I briefly noted the visual presentation of Canadian poets in Al Purdy's *Storm Warning* anthology, where the photo of bill bissett allows the impressionable reader to project a romantic image onto the writer. These kinds of "projected images" are simultaneously created by and reproduced through films such as Forest's *In Search of Innocence* and Embra's *Strange Grey Day This*. The selected author photos in *Curious* present a picture of a temporary collective, and in some cases, subvert the presentation of the "solitary author." Author photos, even in anthologies, tend to show individual authors, whereas the photos at the back of *Curious* show those portrayed in a variety of settings: surrounded by others at parties, or in family scenes.  These photos do more than present a monolithic collection of poets, they also show the kinds of social relations these poets have - in these pictures, they are also mothers, fathers, and friends.

   *Curious* is concerned with the notion of anthologizing a developing collection of writers, mostly from the postwar period, most of them Canadian; and even more, Bowering is interested in his relationship or position with regard to each of these writers. As Rae says, the bio-text traces Bowering's genealogy because it looks back to important predecessors, yet it also looks to Bowering's contemporaries and comments upon the current scene. The greater number of the 48 portraits represent then-current Canadian poets. The conceit is, as Bowering states in *How I Wrote Certain of my Books*, each portrait is a picture of a poet Bowering has met (48). Yet the book comes at a time when "Can Lit" is coming into its own as a serious object of literary study, and also when *Tish* writers such as Bowering, Frank Davey, and Fred Wah are establishing careers in academia and producing literary criticism as well as books of poetry. Thus, *Curious*, a book written by one poet but representing (textually and visually) many, is also a version – possibly a parody – of an anthology.

Bowering's "twin poem" partner Frank Davey authored his own unusual version of an anthology, *From There To Here*, published in 1974 - one year after *Curious*. Davey's work displays "objective" Aristotelian organization, compared to the subjective Bowering text. Davey's book contains 60 short critical essays (each averaging about 2 pages) on important Canadian writers of the period. Just as Bowering's work risks offending his subjects with his critical subtext in portraits such as Bromige's, so does Davey's work with its confident, scholarly declamations on the work and worth of Canadian writers. Both books reveal that each poet/critic is at the stage of his career where he may risk being offensive. Each work is also creating a kind of album of allies and adversaries, though with slightly different tones. Where *Curious* is most unlike *From There To Here* is seen in its more sweeping social scope: Bowering's subjective and "untested" statements expose how judgements of other poets are guided by unwritten rules governing the field of New American/North American Poetry. The following sections of this chapter outline Bowering's representation of his poetic predecessors, and how this version of a postmodern anthology relates views on gender and male sociality within a larger poetry community beyond just one little magazine like *Tish*.

**"A Polis Behind The Eyes": The *Curious* Charles Olson**

The first portrait in *Curious* is of Charles Olson, the American poet who also kicked off Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* anthology. It is possible that the portraits in Bowering's book could be randomly ordered, but the early pages of *Curious* contain portraits of poets whose careers began before him: Olson, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Jack Spicer, and Stephen Spender. It does seem significant that the book has so many "elders" at the opening of the book. This suggests that Bowering intends to introduce the writers who have been most in-

fluential to him at the beginning, approximating a chronology. I say "approximating" because the portraits of William Carlos Williams and Stephen Spender, whom Bowering mentions encountering before Olson, come after the Black Mountain poet. Olson's personal and poetic significance to Bowering is signalled by permitting him pride of place in the book, the more contemporary "father" to the older generation of Williams and Spender. Bowering portrays Olson within this chronology, as the oldest and wisest figure in his pantheon: "Older than Byblos earlier than/ Palestine & possesst of an alphabet before/ the Greeks he came down on our heads/ like buckling stairs" ("Charles Olson," n.p.). This opening text distorts the sense of linear time, but it also plays with the idea of size, scale, and perspective.

Another reason for the inclusion of Olson as the inaugural portrait in *Curious* has to do with his *stature*. Bowering's claim that he had "the Steinish prose" of the portrait form "down flat" is reflected in the abstract angles by which he renders Olson's immense presence. In the portrait, perspective is also distorted, as Bowering "sees" Olson alternately from the top of the stairs, or the bottom. He can never be face-to-face or eye-to-eye with the older poet in a literal sense: "I introduced myself/ and I was looking at his belt buckle which/ was crooked" (lines 6-8). In another passage, Bowering metaphorically plays with the idea of Olson's stature, by showing how language represents concepts such as generosity and respect on a sense of "scale": "He is so big we are/ in awe of him but he was always giving/ large pieces of himself & we never call him/ by his name made short he was so tall" (l. 11-14). Bowering portrays Olson as magnanimous, but the description also shows how this paradoxically means a kind of diminishment or reduction of the giver. This balance is restored in how reverence towards Olson extends to never calling him "Chuck" or "Charlie." Olson is also depicted as a figure who is hard to comprehend, both physically and intellectually, due to his literal height and his theoretical opacity:

> [a] friend today said he never understood anything
> he wrote or said & my wife said there is
> an honest man. I said I understand lots &
> lots I dont understand. (lines 15-18)

Multiple perspectives are also revealed in these lines, as the friend who admits that he finds Olson's work incomprehensible is lauded as "an honest man" by Bowering's wife. Bowering again plays with scale by suggesting his own understanding of Olson is produced by reading "lots": he seems to hint at a relation between Olson's physical stature and his prolific output, and implies that careful reading and consideration of this outsize corpus will produce at least a partial understanding, similar to seeing "parts" of the man. Yet these lines also convey the social relations that will permeate the rest of the book, as the friend and Bowering's wife weigh in and deliver their own perspectives on Olson. Bowering includes the impressions and perceptions of his friend and wife to produce a *social* portrait of Olson which also shows how others see him.

In "Charles Olson," Bowering also introduces the idea that our perception and understanding of others are produced through language. After being introduced to Bowering, Olson says

> hello & said
> this must be Angela but he didn't re-
> member Angela has yellow hair at least in
> the poem. The words enter at the eyes &
> meet their neighbors & eventually know
> everyone there, a polis behind the eyes. (l. 24-29)

The notion of capturing someone from so many different angles results in a kind of "dismemberment," shown in the enjambment between lines 25 and 26 ("re- / member). Throughout the portrait, Olson himself is built up and broken down in a manner akin to Cubist painting, or of

course, the Steinian portrait. Yet the idea of meeting someone you've only read about or corre-sponded with is also revealed here. Olson's initial encounter with Bowering's wife Angela is humorously errant because he presumes or forgets something he is supposed to have read about her hair colour, rather than to have seen firsthand. The effect could be a slight dig at Olson for not reading Bowering's work as closely as Bowering does Olson's. Yet it also shows how writ-ing produces social relations: while most of us cannot physically see eye-to-eye with the 6'7 Ol-son we can decipher and decode his meanings through his "words [which] enter at the eyes." Just as the friend in the poem does not "get" Olson through reading him, Olson does not quite "get" whom he is being introduced to because of a gap in his knowledge produced by not "reading" the correct version or portrait of Bowering's wife. The first portrait in *Curious* shows how misread-ing can occur, but also the antidote, by putting words in literal relation and proximity to each other (as "neighbors") as a corrective. This process is moreover seen as a kind of community, or "polis"-building.

Bowering's choice to open the album of poetic family and friends with Olson is significant because it points to the importance of homosocial relations in the book. Michael Davidson as-serts that Olson's 1950 manifesto "Projective Verse" is the "best place to begin studying the formation of male community in alternative poetics," by which he means the post-1945 Ameri-can poetic avant-garde, highlighted in Donald Allen's anthology (*Guys Like Us*, 33). Davidson specifically notes how the profusion of gendered language in Olson's influential treatise on poet-ics creates a men's-only kind of space. Davidson maintains that, "[e]ven allowing for the gender inflections of the day, Olson's use of the masculine pronoun seems extreme"; Davidson cites multiple instances of "boys," "brothers," "man," and "king" throughout "Projective Verse" (33). Davidson further asserts that if Olson's essay were simply "the work of a single individual it

could be seen as the product of an isolated sensibility in revolt against the New Critical strictures […] But the essay is, in fact, a collaborative work, constructed out of letters" between Olson and Robert Creeley (34). Davidson further notes that a "third interlocutor" is behind the ideas in "Projective Verse," namely Frances Boldereff, "an independent scholar … librarian, and typographic designer with whom Olson shared a long and intimate relationship" (34). While leaving Creeley out of the equation of the manifesto might stem from the same notion of maintaining the borders of individual authorial identity in collective work (compare with Bowering and Davey's "twin poems"), Davidson says that Boldereff's exclusion reveals that "Olson's phallic theory of literary inheritance can admit the authority of Williams, Pound, Creeley, [Edward] Dahlberg, and others, but not of strong women" (34-35). Thus we see another strong border space defended by certain purveyors of the "New American Poetry": in addition to maintaining the sanctity of the author function, or the singular author/artist who signs his own work alone, there is the tendency of authors such as Olson and Jack Spicer (whom Davidson treats also at length in the chapter) to participate in a "compulsory homosociality." Davidson fuses Adrienne Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality" and Eve Sedgwick's concept of male "homosociality" to describe how groups or schools of poets develop a "male solidarity and sodality" through the absence of women (30). The word "sodality" that Davidson uses carries theological connotations of brotherhoods and confraternities which emphasize religious practice that excludes women.

However, *Curious* does contain portraits of women poets, though only 8 out of 48. As far as anthologies of poetry of the period though, this is still more than Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (4 out of 44) and more than Ron Padgett and David Shapiro's *An Anthology of New York Poets*, in which Bernadette Mayer is the only female poet represented out of 27 authors.

Following from Davidson's theoretical amalgamation of Rich and Sedgwick, in the next section,

I analyze how Bowering's book both includes and excludes women within a homosocial *polis*.


**Gender, Sexuality, and Homosociality in *Curious***

   In an interview, Bowering mentions that "[t]he first poet I ever heard read in my life was Ste-

phen Spender and the second poet I ever heard read in my life was Marianne Moore"

(Bayard/David 81). This interview is from 1976 and many of Bowering's observations pertain

either directly or indirectly to *Curious*, which at the time was one of his most recent books. He

compares his encounters with Spender and Moore in terms of nationality as well as perceived

attitudes towards their audiences. He writes

> Stephen Spender shocked me because he'd been a hero of mine when I was in Grade 11.
>
> He shocked me because, here's this guy with a hanky up his sleeve standing up there
>
> offering these poems. And I thought, Gee, it's not real. But he was English so his
>
> experiences were way different […] Marianne Moore brought it a little bit closer, partly
>
> because of her nature. She was a person who just … would start and say, Let's read your
>
> poem. And start talking about your poem. Say, that's wonderful, marvelous. And she had
>
> an accent that I was familiar with and I had always loved her poetry, too. (81-82).

In these comments, Bowering replicates several ideas that are found in his portraits "Stephen

Spender" and "Marianne Moore" in *Curious*. Spender, another elder, is regarded with suspicion

because of his class status, national origin, and self-presentation (and, as I will show, Bowering

indirectly links this to gender). Moore is seen as generous, American and to exhibit more "natu-

ral" female traits such as being supportive and nurturing. The extent of Bowering's "shock" in

the face of both Spender and Moore's actual physical appearance as "poets" has much to do with the concepts of sexuality and gender and how they fit into a homosocial vision of polis.

The portrait of "Stephen Spender" begins:

> I just had trouble remembering his name.
> I was surprised by how tall he was
> & he had white hair & a pink face
> & colored shirt brown or red
> & a hanky stuck up his sleeve
> & I don't remember what he said     (lines 1-6)

The portrait is framed as a memory exercise that recalls "the first poet I ever saw" (line 7). The reader is set up to expect an irreverent recollection when Bowering immediately asserts he has "trouble remembering" the British poet's name (line 1), yet then goes on to list in detail the colourful garb and appearance of the aging poet. We see again the recurrence of the "hanky stuck up" Spender's sleeve, and the image of the handkerchief appears three more times in the poem, in lines 14, 16, and 32. Spender's "hanky" symbolizes a class striving that Bowering obviously finds distasteful, if we apply the notion of being "stuck up" to an attitude detectable in Spender's poetry, and not just his sartorial choices. The elder poet's fashion sense indicates that he adheres to an outdated, rigid, and British vision of social order, which extends to his poetry. While elders such as Olson, William Carlos Williams, and Jack Spicer are venerated in *Curious*, Spender and his ilk are seen as *enervated*; regarding Spender and his audience, Bowering writes, "what the hell are poets I wondered,/ men?  old men?" (l. 12-13). In one final image that links clothing to writing, Bowering writes of Spender "walking away gently taking/ care of himself surrounded by people wearing/ jackets covered with dust" (l. 21-23). The implication is that both Spender, his poetry, and his audience are out of fashion.

This poem also contains a surprising fit of homophobic temper. Bowering's poetic persona seems divided between being affable and contrarian, but his rumination on Spender leads him to a hostile comment directed at another poet-target, W.H. Auden. Comparing Spender with Auden, Bowering writes

> Auden
> was better & first but I didnt see him
> till 1971 & I hated him that no talent
> easy work soft life faggot with his
> witty insults.                                    (l. 26-30).

To understand Bowering's inflammatory statement on Auden, we should look at how it resembles the stance of one his revered poetic elders, Jack Spicer. Davidson writes that

> Spicer's tough-guy stance configured homosexuality within an almost Calvinist sense of
>
> moral imperatives. The battle for poetry had to be waged against the twin evils of
>
> femininity and assimilation. Effete or effeminate forms of gay behaviour were not
>
> permitted. When asked about Spicer's relation to poets of the New York School, Landis
>
> Everson said that he (Spicer) didn't like them, especially John Ashbery. "Spicer called
>
> him 'a faggot poet.' (42).

One feature of the concept of "compulsory homosociality" is that American poetry collectives of the postwar period insisted on replicating mainstream social attitudes pertaining to women and homosexuals, even if they saw themselves as progressive or contained homosexual poets within their own ranks, as the Spicer circle did. Thus, while Bowering can write affectionate portraits of homosexual poets such as Allen Ginsberg, he (a heterosexual poet) is more specifically reacting to the "effete or effeminate forms of gay behavior" inherent in Auden's use of wit in his literary

works. In the introduction, I noted Drew Milne's observation of the literary-historical devaluing of the concept of wit, from the height of its popularity amongst the Metaphysical Poets, to a "pejorative flavour associated with quick smartness, rather than with the lively, knowing powers of poetry," before a revival in the Modernist period (Milne 329). However, for many North American poets of the postwar period, the term still held negative connotations. Bowering associates the "witty insults" of Auden not only with homosexuality, but with his Britishness, judging from the close proximity of the previous putdowns of Spender's hanky and the class-laden images attached to his colleagues. Bowering's criticism of Auden reveals a judgement that "work" laden with wit and other suspiciously queer qualities is "soft," unlike the rigid traits of his projective peers. Nonetheless, to a modern reader, Bowering's use of the term "faggot" is shocking, as it reveals a straight male poet directing hateful language towards a gay male poet. Even framed as an attempt to knock one's elder down a peg, Bowering's epithet is highly offensive, and appears the more egregious as he might be appropriating Spicer's own perceived "license" to use the term.

In the United States, Auden's "witty insults" and wit's particular "quick smartness" are most obviously associated with the poets of the New York School, the group of poets who rarely enter into any discussion of U.S. influence on Canadian poetry (especially regarding *Tish*, who are most often associated with the Black Mountain, Beat, and San Francisco Renaissance groups.) Spicer's extreme dislike of the surface qualities of Ashbery's (and, by extension, New York School) poetry does not derive from any simplistic claim of "self-hating" homosexual identity, but instead from Ashbery and the New York School's witty queerness. Daniel Kane even notes how the performance style of New York School poets reveals the connection between wit and a perceived gender identity:

the rebellious avant-garde poet is literally cocky in the face of an unappreciative audience

as he embodies a kind of gay (cock-y?) lighthearted wit typical of O'Hara and

[Kenneth] Koch and generally atypical of a poet like Olson, who tended to position

himself in public as an impassioned, possessed, and wholly male figure. (25)

Here, the idea of a queer reading style is given a positive spin, and it could be seen as a kind of reverse phallic retort to the masculine performance styles of Olson and other New American poets. Instead of amplifying masculine identity, the New York School poets indulge in the verbal quickness and effete qualities of wit as a marker of poetic prowess. In some cases, this means a straight male poet such as Ted Berrigan and a female poet such as Anne Waldman emulating the campy cocktail-party banter of their "first generation" elders O'Hara and Ashbery. It is important to locate this tendency as a possible source of Bowering's inflammatory response to Auden. The idea of a camp or queer reading style is also applicable to last chapter's discussion of the *blewointment* poets Lance Farrell and bill bissett; their tandem performance in *In Search of Innocence* revealed the confrontational aspects of reading in a kind of heightened, anti-masculine style, with voices at a higher register and a lisping quality present. Theirs should not be mistaken as a parody or "impression" of a queer performativity, but rather a pushing of the boundaries of acceptable gender presentation (note that bissett had objects thrown at him in a reading at the Cellar). Nonetheless, it is not just a matter of taste that Bowering denigrates Auden as an "easy life soft work faggot": this revelation comes to him when finally *hearing* the British poet read his works. Auden's voice, conflated with Spencer's hanky, becomes part of a complex of signifiers of embodied homosexuality. Bowering reacts with a kind of panic, of which the violation of homosociality is only one part. As Kane states above, a poet like Olson attempts to position himself "as an impassioned, possessed, and wholly male figure." Bowering, who places Olson first in

*Curious*'s portrait gallery, follows suit and his similar alignment leads him to state this blunt stance on gender and masculinity.

In "Stephen Spender," the poet is judged by the company he keeps, as well as by his fashion choices, which leads to Bowering's explicit commentary. The New American Poetry, whether it is practiced by American or Canadian poets like Bowering, is governed by textual sumptuary laws which dictate who belongs in what group, and how they "show" their affiliation. Spender and Auden obviously exist outside of the group Bowering aligns with because of how the elder British poets seem to embody a class structure, a suspicious reverence for the past, and a violation of homosocial restrictions on perceived feminine traits. Much of the same applies in his portrait of the elder poet Marianne Moore, except his statement on gender and sexuality is implicit. Many of the portraits in *Curious* dwell on details such as clothing and personal appearance, which suggests the way we look at a photograph. However, Olson, Spender, and Moore are not included in the compendium of author photos at the end of the collection. If we see Bowering as "taking" or "painting" a portrait of individual poets, it is interesting to attend to what qualities or features stand out to him. The advantage of expressing portraits in words is that the writer can tell, as well as show: behavioural tendencies can be drawn out as well as physical details. Moore, the first female poet treated in *Curious*, is immediately and repetitively presented through the use of the female pronoun, "she." It's not unusual for Bowering to refer to Moore in this way, but what stands out is the repetition and emphasis on her gender, which becomes the structuring rhetorical device for the portrait:

> She
> in a famous three corner hat.
> She
> in a black velvet dress it looks as if it came
> from an attic out of a box from an earlier
> time with a zipper on the side that will

not do up & close. ("Marianne Moore," n.p.)

The portrait consists of seven active (though run-on) sentences that begin with "she." These opening sentences are concerned with Moore's eccentric appearance – Bowering would not be the first to remark on the poet's unusual Revolutionary War-era haberdashery: the "famous three corner hat." As the portrait is drawn or developed, however, we see Bowering begin to arrive at a much more neutral, though still gendered evaluation of this female elder. In "Stephen Spender," the poet was "surrounded by people wearing/ jackets covered with dust" (l. 22-23). Moore, whose portrait comes earlier in the book than Spender, is instead "surrounded by serious young lady student/ poets in tweed skirts" (l. 16-17). While Spender's antiquated entourage were implicitly his similarly out-of-fashion contemporaries, we see here that Moore is herself depicted as being dressed in the trappings of "an earlier/ time" (l. 5-6). The implicit judgment here comes from her mentorship of a group or generation of female poets who are at risk of being transmitted with a musty, de-sexualized kind of spinster poetics. The young ladies wear tweed, the ultimate symbol of New Criticism-era English professorial *chic*. It is also significant that they are segregated from Bowering's physical presence in the poem; they are "young lady student/ poets": the enjambment is crucial for understanding Bowering's point that these budding writers are more "student" than "poet." Meanwhile, Bowering himself is seated next to Moore ("She/ in a chair next to mine," l. 8-9), suggesting equal status. The antiquated ring of "young lady … poets" might not seem as egregious as the term "poetess" would be, yet there is an interesting resonance between Bowering's description and the title of a contemporaneous anthology of the time, the LeRoi Jones-edited *Four Young Lady Poets*, published by Corinth Books in 1962 and featuring Carol Berge, Barbara Moraff, Rochelle Owens, and Dianne Wakoski. While such an anthology does good work in promoting the work of female poets (especially correcting the dearth of

female poets in *The New American Poetry* and *An Anthology of New York Poets*), it still subordinates them through the use of the diminutive collective term "young lady poets." Marsha Bryant notes that the writers collected in *Four Young Lady Poets* were associated with the Black Mountain poets, but also observes that the anthology's "disarmingly ironic title belies the edginess within, even as *young lady* invokes a common disciplinary phrase for wayward daughters" (190). Bowering's use of the same patriarchal language to describe those who surround Moore suggests that they are smaller in both physical but also literary "stature," and in some violation of their gender roles.

Another, more subtle aspect of gender "hailing" within Bowering's portraits can be seen in his mild disapproval of Moore's supportive role to poetic upstarts such as himself. In "Charles Olson," the titular poet is depicted as being magnanimous to other writers, and this quality is positively linked to his remarkable physical stature (the poet was over 2 meters tall) Olson's generosity is seen as corresponding with his massive size: a "big man with a big heart," to use the cliché. Conversely, the level of respect accorded to the Black Mountain poet means that no one would ever address him by a diminutive such as "Chuck" or "Charlie." Meanwhile, in her portrait, Moore's critical benevolence is regarded with suspicion:

> She
> in a strange place for her looking at the
> students' poems this seems so silly now saying
> my poem was good & why did she I am
> younger now than she was then & I dont
> think it was a good poem though I thought
> so then. (l. 22-28)

Bowering is retrospectively critical of Moore praising one of his poems that he now no longer rates highly. This in turn causes him to muse on the reliability of Moore's judgement. As poetry

pedagogues, Olson and Moore seem comparable, at least in how Bowering describes their willingness to guide youthful poets. Yet while Moore's mentorship is gentle and supportive, Michael Davidson cites reports that Olson's classroom demeanor was "autocratic" and "confrontational" (37-38). He further notes how Olson managed his female students - making them sit in the hallway while he lectured, and censuring them from publication for protracted periods of time (37). Thus, while there are stories of Olson's overall generosity to back up the positive view of him in Bowering's portrait, it is safe to say that in the more formal environment of the classroom, he fostered an aggressive and misogynistic stance. If this is the critical climate Bowering is used to, then Moore's more relaxed and inclusive method of feedback might be seen as overly feminine and weak.

As Olson relegates female students to the hallways of academe, Bowering essentially relegates Marianne Moore to the past. Once again, the link to group or collective presentation is raised, as he links her work to its appearance in anthologies ("She/ in the anthologies" l.29-30), suggesting that her work's impact is lessened by being presented alongside others. But there are a few portraits of Bowering's female contemporaries in *Curious*, and these tell a somewhat different story than the spinsterized picture drawn of Moore.

While Olson's portrait reveals a potent, virile, and masculine subject, elders such as Spender and Moore do not fare so well. We saw that Spender's portrait leads Bowering into a consideration of Auden and a declamation against his work and its apparent connection to his homosexuality. And I have said that Moore is subtly portrayed as a de-sexed, spinster figure. When Bowering composes portraits of his female contemporaries, an erotic charge is introduced. In the portrait of "Margaret Atwood," Bowering's attention to his subject's appearance becomes more affirmative: "She is growing better looking all the time" (l. 12); "Sometimes she looses her hair &

it tumbles" (l. 20). The observations culminate with him stating, "I would like to see her with all her clothes off" (l. 28). Bowering also lapses into a similar sexual reverie in his portrait "Daphne Marlatt":

> (In the bath she must be remarkable among
> the white porcelain
>                             & what does she do with
> that long wiry black hair with white strands
> running thru? )                                                    (n.p., l. 13-17)

What does it mean to make these kind of statements within a portrait of somebody the writer knows? The idea of "naming names" in poetry is not new, reaching back at least to Roman poets like Catullus, who used his poems to praise patrons and settle scores, and spread rumors or gossip. More recently, it is the poetry of the many "generations" of the New York School of Poets who are seen to indulge most in the practice of "name-dropping" in poems. Bowering's method is different, because the texts in *Curious* are framed as portraits, with the subject's name as title, rather than a poem whose discourse eventually leads to a mention of a friend, colleague, or enemy, as it often does in the poetry of Frank O'Hara. Daniel Kane sees the act of dropping names in New York School poetry as establishing community and sociability. Writing on the poetic community and counterculture of 1970s Bolinas, California, a city where New York School poets such as Ted Berrigan coexisted with Beat figures such as Robert Creeley, Kane writes that "[n]aming names in the context of Bolinas affirmed the existence of an environment where cross-references could be made between individuals on a first-name basis" and that the "best tactic" for a reader faced with such casual naming "is to imagine a kind of tacit participation in a poetic community" (*All Poets Welcome* 178). This critical view validates the existence of a book such as *Curious*, which might otherwise be seen only as a cliquey yearbook. A reader should

think of themselves as invited to the "party," rather than feeling excluded. What is important is the element of "chatty disclosure of personal news" — another element that Kane notes in the New York School poem (178) — and how it can be used to profess desire, or perhaps an explicit curiosity about one's friends. Bowering uses the portrait form of *Curious*, and the inherent sociability that comes from its emphasis on direct address, to walk a thin line between writing reverent "odes" to his friends and elders (one poetic form that comes to mind), and using the space as a kind of O'Hara-esque "personal poem" in which he airs grievances, chides his subjects, pokes fun at them, and even risks offending them at times by disclosing his lustful imaginings of them.

### *Curious* as Anthology

In a later collection, 1979's *Another Mouth*, Bowering returns to the act of "naming names" and expressing desire in a poem. The third poem in the book is titled "For Angela, Sheila, Marian, Sarah, Aviva, Magdelein, Etc.":

> How I lech after them,
> the wives of poets.
>
> I seek what they know
> by instinct. They are
>
> birds in my breast, squirrels
> at my windows, wonderful
>
> metaphors constructed
> by their husbands. I
>
> have made my own, I
> watch her at parties, eyes

> of poets on her. Oh
> my page in the awesome anthology! (17)

This is a lyric poem, which seems the more likely vehicle for the expression of sexual desire than the portrait form used in *Curious*. However, here Bowering escalates the "risk" inherent in directly addressing friends and acquaintances by listing the name of his wife, followed by the first names of the wives of some of his friends, as objects of desire. Bowering shows how the potential for sociability in a poem can become "antisocial," by flatly using the verb "lech" to describe his attention to the women in his social circle. Bowering seems to want to use the medium of the poem to disclose his most private — and most socially unacceptable — thoughts. The impetus for such a poetic act might be simply to push the limits of what can and cannot be said in a poem. In this respect, Bowering's poem resembles an even more straightforward text, authored by Larry Fagin and titled "Thirty Girls I'd Like to Fuck." This text, published in a 1969 anthology of works from the New York poetry journal *The World* is an example , as Libbie Rifkin writes, "of the magazine's in-group humour; the poem is a straight list, including Fagin's wife among actually only 28 mostly recognizable names" (Jacket 7, web). Like the Bowering poem, the "recognizable names" include the wives of poets also present in the anthology. In her consideration, Rifkin labels Fagin's poem "a bit distracting" to the overall survey of the New York poetry community her article is historicizing. But it is precisely this kind of antisocial poetic practical joke, or this "homosociability" that comes from listing the names of friend's wives as desirable sexual partners, that creates a small corner of both Fagin's and Bowering's poetic communities. Seen in this way, the act of creating texts such as Bowering's and Fagin's actually solidifies male group solidarity, rather than diminishing it. The texts are tests of a group's ability to "take a joke." Fagin's text was, in fact, reproduced in a mass-market anthology of poems edited by the

poet Anne Waldman, which suggests that the work was received with a more encompassing sense of the "in-group humour" that Rifkin notes. Rifkin's article is specifically on the "gender" of community poetry institutions (such as the St. Mark's Poetry Project, helmed for a long period by Waldman). How does the homosociability of texts such as Bowering's and Fagin's fare when seen in an "anthological" sense? - that is, when they are read not as solitary works of art, but in relation to other works in a single collection?

I began the chapter by citing Bowering's statement that he conceived of *Curious* while he lived in the York Street Commune in Vancouver. Communal living in the 1960s and 1970s carried with it ideological connotations of sharing, mutual aid, and in some cases, free love. I believe these connotations come into play in Bowering's portraits and poems that deal with gender and desire. In the portraits of Atwood and Marlatt, Bowering is writing about two poets that he knows personally, and whom he imagines living with. In the poem from *Another Mouth*, Bowering acknowledges a kind of libidinal exchange with other male poets, transforming his wife Angela (a writer and critic herself) metaphorically into a "page in the awesome anthology." *Curious*, published in 1972, arrives at a time just before Canadian Literature becomes "Can Lit," and many of the authors portrayed within Bowering's collection are themselves transformed into Establishment authors, often presented side-by-side in anthologies. In a sense, then, *Curious* can be seen as one of the first "anthologies" of postmodern Canadian poetry, with a "pomo" bent of its own on exposing the relationships between these authors and the behind-the-scenes machinations as the poets jockey (or are imagined to be competing) for position within the emerging canon. Bowering's interest in metaphor similarly transforms writers who are anthologized together into writers who "live" together in a sense, and whose texts gain newer meanings from being placed in social contexts. Instead of attempting to categorize and codify these authors in a dispassionate-

ly critical work such as Davey's *From There to Here,* Bowering *invites* criticism, as well as dispenses a version of it, by laying out his passionate thoughts and in-group biases for all who choose to read *Curious* to see. And of course, anyone who reads the book must be *curious* — if one is not, they belong on the side of those who object that the book is only of interest to a select clique.

**Chapter Five: "Who's Singing Out There?": Maxine Gadd and The Poetry Reading**

Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation considered the social and the collective forms of Vancouver poetry in terms of partnership. George Bowering and Frank Davey's "twin poems" and bill bissett and Martina Clinton's representations of domestic life are instances of poets working and living together. By looking at how writers create work in these kinds of pairs within a larger scope of a group or "school" (or, more accurately for this work, while part of the collective of a little magazine), critics can look past the myth of the solitary author as literary producer. However, the previous chapter reintroduced the frame of the more traditional individually-authored work, although Bowering's *Curious* was seen to develop a special form of sociability, and it also had formal aspirations towards the multi-authored "anthology." Bowering's book risks becoming "antisocial" in his judgements and comments on writers whom he is personally acquainted with at the same time as it brings other authors into Bowering's personal and critical canon. In this chapter, I want to carry over this critique of the social and to focus my attention on a Vancouver writer who often falls outside of Tallman's civic categories of "Tish" and "Downtown." Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Maxine Gadd was often on the margins of the local literary community, though nominally thought to be one of the "Downtown poets." In his essay, "Wonder Merchants," Tallman includes Gadd in a list of poets who "are nearer in their language experiments to BLEW OINTMENT Modernism than to TISH Modernism" (86). Despite this loose affiliation, Gadd's poetry at times depicts the experience of social isolation, a condition arrived at through the intersections of geography, gender, and politics. This chapter will look at how Gadd's poems represent this isolation, and her own ambivalent response to these periods of estrangement or often self-imposed exile. It also will look at the space of the poetry reading as a

social site that allows Gadd to circulate her unpublished work and to provide commentary on her poetics to an audience.

In the late 1960s, when Gadd's first books appeared, the hippy movement was embarking on projects of large communal events and experiments in living, often with a heavy "back to the land" rhetoric attached (the conflation of the two can be heard in Joni Mitchell's 1970 song, "Woodstock," about the epochal music festival). While Gadd's poetry might sometimes approach this rhetoric, and frequently depicts living on the land (with an implicit questioning of who it belongs to), Gadd vacillates between choosing the city or the country as the site with the most communal potential. The concept of the communal is the third thread in this chapter: I will explore how visions of the collective and communal in Gadd's poetry and poetics interplay with the previously mentioned threads of social isolation and the public poetry reading. To examine these interconnected ideas, of isolation, the social (publication), and the ideal site of the commune, I will be reading a selection of poems from Gadd, as well as statements from interviews and a poetry reading Gadd gave at Sir George Williams University in Montreal (now Concordia University) in 1972. Following up on my observation in the third chapter on the unique performance style of bill bissett, Lance Farrell, and other poets associated with *blewointment*, I want to extend the practice of *close listening* to Gadd's own performative style, and how she uses it to stake out a space of her own in the poetry community. My methods in this chapter will include a concentration not only on Gadd's performance style of selected poems, which includes expressive rather than neutral intonation, but also how she uses what Jason Camlot calls "extra-poetic speech": "the introductions and poet's remarks that frame and punctuate [poetry] readings" (30). Discussing Robert Frost's readings, Rafael Allison writes that they are "choked with asides, additions, emendations, and subtractions" which "help Frost manage and guide the reception of his

poems by speaking diacritically before, during, and after performing" (61). In Gadd's case, extra-poetic speech is a tool which allows for commentary on social relations in her poetic community and expressions of discontent with its current composition. Her extra-poetic speech at the Montreal poetry reading contains critique and admiration of colleagues (much like Bowering's *Curious*), yet it also reveals a deep ambivalence about the ability, and even the desirability, of escaping the paradigm of the solitary author.

**Isolation**

It was not until 1982 that Maxine Gadd's poetry was finally introduced to a wider public. Her earliest books, *Guns of the West*, *The Book of Practical Knowledge*, and *Hochelaga*, were published in limited editions by small presses in the late 1960s. In fact, 1969's *The Book of Practical Knowledge* was self-published, whereas the two other books were put out by blew ointment press. While other Vancouver poets such as Bowering and Davey were gaining access to a national poetry audience, due to their emerging academic careers, Gadd's publication history was much more underground up until the 1980s.  When *Lost Language* was published by Coach House Press in 1982, many of Gadd's unpublished works were finally collected into an expansive volume that announced her presence as an important poet. Prior to Coach House's large "selected" volume, Air Press of Vancouver collected her first three books under the title *Westerns*. This title hints at other salient themes found in Gadd's poems: the depiction of contemporary life on Canada's west coast (as filtered through a colonial history which sees the "west" as a land of ultimate settler destiny), as well as her interest in Greek myth, the foundation of the Western canon. Gadd adapts and talks back to these mythical figures and stories, while still displaying a reverence for them.

The early books collected in *Westerns* experiment with page layout and concrete and visual strategies: many of the poems are presented vertically, so the reader must tip the book sideways to "scroll down" the page. While these salient visual tendencies aren't taken up in her later books, Gadd's earliest published poems introduce the themes under discussion here. The eponymous first poem in *Guns of the West* begins in media res:

<pre>
fit in    the hard
     hat
     this
     busi
     ness          (Westerns 4, lines 1-5)
</pre>

The spacing and lineation is very much "in line" with the practice of other "downtown," *blewointment* poets such as bissett, Martina Clinton, and Lance Farrell. Although the first two words of the poem are not necessarily alluding to the social context of "fitting in," the typographical and visual presentation of "Guns of the West" immediately signals Gadd's affiliation with a particular Vancouver writing community. These opening lines also suggest the concept of construction – in its material form, the fabrication of buildings by workers in hard hats, but also the constructions of gender and society that are under interrogation in her work from her first poem onward. If one is a reader who is familiar with the (anti)-conventions of *blewointment* poetics, Gadd would seem to "fit in" with the downtown crowd. Yet many of the poems in *Westerns* are set, appropriately enough, in a kind of frontier space outside of the city, where individuals do not connect.

The second stanza of "Guns of the West" shifts to the "streets of Palermo":

<pre>
night: the white
 woman of stone,     simpering
</pre>

                    naked
                the white man
                 of stone
                aghast, his hands over
                his genitals
        the heroes won't fuck
          their business is to stare
                        at the image of death
            that no one else sees
             and pursue it […]
                 my
                business
                        to
                        sim-
                        ulate
                    the cat     tail
                cattle      their backs
                    in creeks in
            gleam     where the mythic gold
                                can
                    i drive them
            make them go thundering? (lines 6-18; 22-33)

Gadd includes the image of a female and male statue, both made "of stone," their poses held to

suggest shame and denial: "the heroes won't fuck/ their business is to stare/ at the image of

death." The first-person speaker appears and delivers a statement of intent: her business is to

"sim-/ulate" (the word is significantly fragmented) objects in nature, such as a "cat tail" and "cat-

tle," near-homonyms that hark to back to Virgil, the Roman pastoral poet who catalogued similar

forms of flora and fauna. However, the speaker of the poem is less confident that she will be able

to take the isolated stone figures of the male and female and animate, or "drive" them into an

erotic embrace. In this inaugural poem, Gadd expresses doubt that she can assist in the consum-

mation of a union between two people. Other poets of the era speak less hesitantly about the inherent sociality behind their poetic addresses: for example, Frank O'Hara claimed "Personism" could create poetry as immediate and connective as a telephone call: "at last the poem is between two persons instead of two pages" (498). He also suggested that poetry itself has a kind of sex drive that should spur a poet's work to social and sexual ends: he writes, "As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you. There's nothing metaphysical about it" (498). And Bowering and Davey's "twin poem" form consisted of a fruitful, if competitive exchange that rested upon the premise that each poet had an active correspondent they could rely upon to produce their poems. The speaker of Gadd's poem is less confident that true social intercourse can be forged through a poem. O'Hara's implication that the sociality of a poem "between two people" is not metaphysical could shed some light on a certain reticence towards the social in Gadd's work, which is consumed with metaphysical questions. Gadd's struggle to consummate a male/female union in this early poem is reflective of her outsider status in the communities she lives in.

Like the opening poem, the next poem in *Guns of the West*, titled "May 23, 1967," also contains a series of lines that sound like another skeptical statement about poetry:

ITS NOT CRUEL WHEN THE THING IS COURSING THROUGH YOU
BUT WHEN MY GREEN STREAM IS SLOW
   THE FLOOD MUDDIES IT
  THIS IS THE USE OF POETRY
     A VALLEY ALONE; WHERE YOU'D HOPE
      ONLY ONE BEAUTIFUL WANDERER WOULD COME
WHEREAS
IF THERE IS TRULY GOLD, OR ANY METAL
THEY'LL MAKE A SETTLEMENT

AND SINK MINES                                                                    (lines 8-17)

Images of "gold" and business appear again: the metaphor of poetic inspiration acting like a

"stream" (inside the body, and flowing outside it) is perhaps conventional, yet it shares some

similarity with contemporary poetic theories such as Olson's "projective verse," in which poetry

is positioned as "proprioceptive," or perception located within the body; and also Jack Spicer's

idea of "outside," or the poet acting as a transmitter and receiver for voices that come from out-

side the body. The notion of the poem being a message "received" by the poet is emphasized by

the text being in all caps, resembling a Western Union telegram. More subtly, perhaps, Gadd's

traditional/Western mythic imagery points to a belief in the interpersonal connections between

poetic inspiration and production. She envisions "a valley alone; where you'd hope/ only one

beautiful wanderer would come." Yet this vision is pessimistically undermined as metaphorical

gold is transfigured into profits by different kinds of seekers, who will "make a settlement/ and

sink mines." Significantly, the word "settlement" may mean a place where people reside, but al-

so a legal term that connotes a payment. The landscape in this poem is pictured as a dichotomy

between an idealized interior world and a real outside world.

   Gadd's pessimism becomes even more severe when she attempts the "bridge poem" that *Tish*

poets were working on. In the interview with editors Ingrid Klassen and Daphne Marlatt append-

ed to *Lost Language*, Gadd makes this comment about the bridge as image and structure:

   MG […] the Tish people were sending bridge poems to one another. There are lots of

   bridges in this town. They're metaphors for metaphors, maybe. Transitions from one

   stage of life to another, one kind of economic situation – and the transition breaks down

   in that poem about a wrecked bridge, the failure of any kind of social intercourse in my

life. (173)

In Chapter 2, I discussed Lance La Rocque's statement that Frank Davey's "bridge" series oper-

ated "more as an anti-bridge, a metaphor for the failure of metaphor, in that it creates distances

rather than spanning them, and destroys rather than embodies meaning" (58). Gadd sees the

bridge as a symbol of transition, but also the site of a possible "breakdown." Both Davey and

Gadd see the bridge as a symbol which weakens, rather than strengthens social connection. Also,

in Maurice Embra's *Strange Grey Day This*, bill bissett is shown walking home alone over the

Granville Bridge to a moody soundtrack, after we have seen him detachedly regarding people

downtown. These Vancouver poets see (or are seen on) the bridge as a chasm which threatens

social isolation, or worse. Gadd's treatment of the city's bridges in her sole "Bridge Poem

(1964)" is even more bleak:

> And i can't forgive
> In my dreams
> there are rotting bridges
> the many spans
> of this water-involuted town
>     over the river and the inlet and False
>       Creek, the grey entrails
>         that empty onto the beaches
>           where as a child
>             i searched for gold (18, lines 20-29)

Here she depicts Vancouver, which will soon reinvent itself as a new and modern "city of glass"

in the wake of Expo '86, as already in a state of rot. Furthermore, she uses the word "involuted"

to describe the curling tendrils and fingers of water that can be seen on any map of the region,

yet this word also gives the civic geography a sense of being abstract or inscrutable. Gadd's wa-

ter imagery doesn't focus on the beauty or utility of this plenitude, rather these numerous chan-

nels give rise to a grotesque image of "grey entrails/ that empty onto the beaches." This image suggests a feeling of abjection that comes from considering the vastness of the landscape and the scale of the search ahead of the poet; this search is portrayed as a "search for gold," which brings us back to the imagery of the previous two poems. There is a sense that this exploration (for poetic inspiration, for people, for utopia/the commune) goes in many directions, only to end up with the image of "entrails" being emptied onto land. This negative imagery rhymes with the depiction of Vancouver as marginal; i.e. how *Tish* poets depicted the city as being the "end of the line," and a frontier outside of literary centers. The representation of the "search" can also be interpreted as a realization of the fraught colonial context of discussing "land" as a non-Indigenous Canadian poet.

Images of western North America permeate the three books collected in *Westerns*: the gold rush, Sacajawea, Diamond Lil. The vastness of the landscape Gadd is writing about also carries with it the problem she will have when trying to locate the ideal space of the "commune" and if it is to be found in the country or the city. Her extra-poetic speech at the Sir George Williams reading, to be discussed in the next section, puts her vacillation between these two sites on display. Gadd can never really come to a satisfying conclusion about which location is preferable, as both sites have the potential to produce feelings of isolation. Almost ironically, Gadd's version of the "bridge poem" contains images of civic loneliness, and actually connects her to another Vancouver poet, Frank Davey, who shares a similar view from the bridge.

The conclusion to "Bridge Poem (1964)" reads like this:

> A poem transcends/ through the spoken image from
> the sensual to
>         the unsayable –
> and returns.

> At the apex of the grey spans
> of my dream
> all gaped and gapped,
>     the grand black crosses of the understructure
> torn,
> the only crossing was
>     a single, slimey
>       plank.
>         Below …
>
>           the verdigris
> And always
> i crossed it
> on my hands
>     and knees (19)

Like "Guns of the West" and "May 23, 1967," Gadd includes a comment on poetry, which here interrupts the dream sequence she is relating. She locates "transcendence" in a poem as a passage from the "spoken" to the "sensual" to the "unsayable." While this is a difficult movement to track, it is significant that for Gadd, the poem begins with "the spoken image" before inspiration or experience (as it might begin for a Romantic or lyric poet), or from a perception (where a contemporary avant-garde poem might start). After this short diversion, Gadd returns to the narration of the dream, detailing the architecture of the dream-bridge with more abject imagery, describing it as "gaped," "torn," and "slimey," supported by "grand black crosses" and stained with "verdigris." Regarding the ending of the poem, Ingrid Klassen queries Gadd:

IK: At some place you're crossing it on hands and knees and I wonder what that is.

MG: That's the dream everybody that lives in Vancouver must dream. The tsunami dream. ("Squabbling Through Eternity," 171).

Gadd implicitly connects her apocalyptic vision of the end of the city to the concept of a collective unconscious. The image that Gadd asserts the residents of Vancouver share is not a utopian one, but rather one of the city's imminent destruction. The bridges that connect neighbourhoods and people become the site of a collective catastrophe. Thus, when presented with prospects of the communal, Gadd does not merely record a contemporary utopian picture of collective power, but – in this instance – presents a vision of shared destruction. She is also aware that she is participating in the local form of the "bridge poem," as she shows in her interview with Klassen and Marlatt. However, the detectable uncertainty about sharing space found in her poems also carries over into another site where a poet is specifically invited in, to share her work: the poetry reading.

## Reading at Sir George Williams University

Reviewing the recent scholarship on contemporary poetry readings, Peter Middleton writes that all the essays he has read

> stress, with varying degrees of approval, that the poetry reading "brings together an audience which wishes to participate in consuming poetry with others who also wish to do so, to acknowledge poetry, and to feel part of a community" (Stern), and in doing so they are recognizing what readers have always known. Reading aloud is a form of sociality. (75).

While the commentators on the poetry reading may offer different views about how public performance influences the reception of an author's work (or their own), Middleton records a consensus that, for better or worse, a poetry reading is a social and communal event. The audience

may gather at a poetry reading for the reasons Middleton (quoting Frederick Stern) lists, but an author may have other interests in participating. Middleton questions whether the poetry reading could be a "ritual to reestablish the authority of authorship in the face of its downsizing by the academic industry, and the performance of authorship an attempt to resist this delayering while tacitly working for different collective ends" (34). In this scenario, the author momentarily regains the presence previously bestowed upon them, while also escaping the romantic "solitary" designation and instead becomes part of a collective effort. Many authors will test unpublished work by reading it to an audience, while others use the reading to promote already-published work. In either case, however, the act of reading can also alter the reception of a text; Middleton asserts that "meaning is extended, complicated, and sometimes transformed by performance" (28). Allison notes the same effect in one of his research questions: "What other meanings get generated by readers as they speak their words aloud, speak around their poems, revise them, chuckle and laugh through them, slip up and misread and mumble?" (20).

Maxine Gadd's career has spanned six decades, and, while she has spent some time living in other places, her voice and presence has been heard and seen at poetry readings in Vancouver for most of those years. She has been involved with collectives such as Intermedia in the 1960s, feminist political groups and the squatter's right's movement in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Kootenay School of Writing from the 1980s onwards. Notably, she has appeared as a reader at series in the city in the 2010s, such as "Respondency West," a reading series which featured a main reader along with an "opener" who would speak of that poet's influence on his or work (the late Peter Culley was the poet who discussed Gadd's impact on his own work). The idea of responding to another local poet's work at a public reading highlights the topic of collectivity under discussion here, though this format is not necessarily confined to readings in Vancouver. Part

of my own experience as a poet living in Vancouver since 2006 has been my participation as an audience member at local readings. I was struck by how poets such as Bowering, Judith Copithorne, Gadd, George Stanley, and Fred Wah (to name just a few) are active participants at poetry readings whether they are on the bill, or in the audience. It's not uncommon for a reader at a Vancouver poetry reading to be interrupted or queried by one of the aforementioned writers, or for a reading to transform into an impromptu Q & A session after the reader has finished their performance. I also became aware, after attending quite a few readings and being an organizing member of a poetry series myself, how different Gadd's performance style is in comparison to others in the local community. She performs her poems in a kind of lilting timbre, which might tempt some in the audience to hark back to an idyllic image of Vancouver's countercultural, hippy history. Her dedication to performance, in a context of academic readings which seem anti-expressivist and opposed to theatricality, is something that distinguishes her style from other voices. Gadd's performance style shares some features noted in the performance of bill bissett and Lance Farrell, discussed in Chapter Three: an emphasis on expressive intonation, variant registers and voices, as well as occasional alienation effects, such as shouting.

On February 18, 1972, Gadd gave a reading, along with Andreas Schroeder, at Sir George Williams University (or SGWU, now Concordia University) in Montreal. Gadd's reading was part of a reading series at Sir George Williams that ran between 1966 and 1974. Nick Mount connects the SGWU reading series with the Vancouver Poetry Conference of 1963, writing that the "spirit" of the UBC event "helped launch a reading series at Sir George Williams University that ran for eight years and hosted more than sixty North American poets" (74). Jason Camlot quotes the SGWU annual publication *Post-Grad*'s description of the series, stating "one of the benefits noted was the 'opportunity to hear several new poets who write specifically for live

reading rather than the printed page' and the 'effect' of the series is described as that of 'a group of people sitting together in deep discussion'" (30). The official mandate of the series was to present Canadian and American poets in tandem, yet the *Post-Grad* writer points out an emphasis on performance versus print. While Gadd had several books out by 1972, much of the work she read at the SGWU reading was not published until the appearance of *Lost Language* in 1982. Listening to the recording of the event, and having seen and heard Gadd perform recently, it is my contention that Gadd attends closely to the oral and "live" qualities of her work, and that furthermore the space of the poetry reading in this period allowed her to circulate her work outside of normal publishing channels. Discussing the poetry reading as "publishing event," Rafael Allison writes, "the act of speech becomes (rhetorically at least) equivalent to, or in some kind of competition with, material publication" (85). Reading is the act of the poet making her poetry "public." Allison also observes how Allen Ginsberg's legendary recital of *Howl* at the Six Gallery in 1955 "means that *Howl*'s first and most indelible incarnation was also its most significant form of publication to date" (5). While Gadd's reading is not as epochal as Ginsberg's was, it does operate as a publishing event which allows an audience to encounter Gadd's work, possibly for the first time, live and direct.

Gadd's attention to the performance aspect of her work is notable, as there is a prevalent view that poetry readings feature poets reading in a "neutral" (flat, affectless) tone which eschews "theatricality," a norm that Marit MacArthur sheds light on:

> it is a fact that an almost puritan avoidance of theatricality – justified by the implicit
>
> belief that an understated style implies sincerity, an anti-confessional, even spiritual
>
> humility, or skepticism about the coherence of the self – now typifies the reading style
>
> of a wide range of academically sponsored poets." (41)

At this 1972 reading, Gadd delivers a large variety of work and voices many of these works in very different ways. It is my aim to listen to how Gadd performs her poetry, and to explore how this live performance influences the reception of her poems. To do this, I will not only interpret the performance of a selection of works performed at the reading but also her comments and introductions to them. Throughout her performance, Gadd offers a running commentary on the conceptual threads this chapter is looking at: isolation, publication, and the communal. The audio recording of Gadd's SGWU reading (spilt into two "tapes," as presented on spokenweb.ca) is almost exactly one hour long. The length of the reading (her reading partner, Andreas Schroeder's tape goes for about 45 minutes) allows Gadd to survey the breadth of her work, to experiment with intonation and voicing, and to provide contextual commentary on figures in local and connected writing scenes.

The host of the reading is Richard Sommer, a poet and then-professor at Sir George Williams. His introduction of Gadd is brief and does not provide the audience with any publication or biographical information, save that he mentions that both Gadd and Schroeder are Vancouver poets. Poetry readings feature statements that can be thought of as paratexts which surround the main attraction (the poems themselves). The host can use introductory comments to endorse the featured author's work, as well as to provide a critical commentary, thus providing context and a critical frame for the audience, many of whom might be unaware of a featured reader's work. Sommer's brief remarks largely center around his own relation to the two poets, though to his credit, he later assists Gadd by accompanying her (upon her request) on flute for a poem called "Shore Animals." In response to a terse introduction, the poet might then craft her own introduction to her work, to guide and inform the audience. In fact, the poet may feel the need to present a more detailed picture of their work if the host falls short, because the reception of the poems

can suffer if the audience has no context to establish the author/reader connection. In my own experience as a host at poetry readings, poets often want certain credentials emphasized or omitted from their introductions, and will make emendations if they feel the host has not done the job. Unfortunately, Sommer does not convey much information about the poets to the assembled audience. Gadd, however, does not correct or add to Sommer's brief introduction, but expresses her nervousness before reading her first poem:

> Oh boy. Can you hear me? I don't know how much projection to do. I don't know how much to talk about the poetry. My connection is very loose to the mainstream I guess, because, I don't know, I'm just not socially related to what's going on maybe in the poetry reading. (SpokenWeb)

The first thing Gadd is concerned with is the immediate problem of being understood. The archived recording contains a lengthy passage of time when Sommer and Gadd are fumbling with the microphone set-up. Allison, commenting on a similar beginning to Olson's 1965 Berkeley reading considers whether that poet's "overtly lavish recognition" of the audio equipment might be read "as an attempt not to associate but to dissociate his own voice with what is being recorded" (90). Gadd seems to be more concerned with the amplification, or "projection," of her own voice, rather than any kind of association or disavowal of it. Even with a microphone, she is unsure of how loud she should project her voice to be heard clearly. Yet her comments might also be heard as signaling trepidation about her own "projective" credentials as a poet, the moment of inaugurating the reading then gives rise to voiced doubts and disclaimers of literary value.

In these initial remarks, Gadd reveals how fraught the moment of performance is: something that might seem as natural as directly speaking to an assembled audience is exposed as a formal event, comprised of a host, uncooperative audio equipment, and expectations that the speaker

will elucidate and entertain. Peter Middleton sheds some light on the awkwardness and ephemerality of the poetry reading:

> Most poetry readings are ragged affairs taking place in venues temporarily liberated from other activities – pubs, bars, lecture rooms, art galleries, halls, and theaters where the readers stumble over stage sets, talk above the noise of drinkers returning from the bar, or try to figure out how best to use a PA system installed for other purposes (30).

The space of the poetry reading tends to be temporary, given that there are few (if any) venues that are dedicated solely to the performance of poetry. In her opening comments, Gadd also addresses another aspect of the poetry reading: it gives a poet a chance to explicate the context of their work. Very few poets choose to read their poems without any paratextual commentary or "extra-poetic speech" (Camlot 30) that might give insight into the poem's creation. For Gadd, this reading is an opportunity to circulate her work but also to provide a critique of the communities in which she lives in and in which that work was produced. At the SGWU reading, Gadd supplies candid commentary on figures in the local poetry scene, in addition to providing the audience with some elliptical opinions. Before reading a poem called "Trip," which appeared in an issue of *blewointment*, she discusses bissett admiringly as someone who had the "energy" and "confidence" to promote and publish poetry, even though "he was living poor." That said, she also remarks that a lot of the work is "real shit," and she amusingly asserts that bissett's "typing … mistakes" make her especially angry (which might lead a savvy audience member wondering if Gadd is withholding a larger critique of bissett's famously unconventional orthography). Gadd's ambivalent view of the public pedestal she has been granted extends to her seeming conflation of the poetry community with the poetry reading, as she anxiously states that "I'm just not socially related to what's going on maybe in the poetry reading." This comment recognizes that

the communal space of a poetry reading, especially one in an academic setting, puts the perform-er in a kind of competitive space, where an inexperienced reader might feel their performance and their works are being evaluated by teachers, rather than simply being welcomed into a read-ymade community.

Gadd continues her preamble to the first poem:

> I guess my identifications with words are somewhat with a West Coast hippie trip. And between the country and the city, the first feeling being, you know, the desire for purity, you know when you're seventeen or eighteen years old and you've figured the country life is it. And later coming to realize the necessity of the communal life and the city. So I think that's a task I'm going to try to set myself right here. I...this...I'm going to read first of all the second "well" poem, which I did, experienced in the country, living in the coun-try. I remember the first "well" poem, I don't remember where it's gone, because it didn't get published. I disregarded its importance, you know. I tended to take the judgment of editors, and you know, people that set themselves up as authorities, and that's why I'm here, you know. I've kept close enough to them, I guess. (SpokenWeb)

Here she presents the audience with her affiliation – "somewhat with a West Coast hippie trip" – and introduces the theme of communal life. She also displays an ambivalence with the official channels of publication, stating that the original version of the poem she is about to read was dis-carded after outside judgement, yet she also acknowledges that her presence at this reading is due to these editorial figures. Gadd's monologue before her first poem reveals the major themes of isolation, publication, and the communal. She uses the introduction to the first poem she reads to present her movements between the country and the city, and her position in the local poetry community. The poem she then reads is titled "Well poem" in *Lost Language*, but listeners of

this performance now know of its status as the "second well poem." The "well" in the poem

works as an image of poetic inspiration (the writer drawing from the well), but also as a symbol

of danger: the speaker imagines falling in and becoming stuck (*Lost Language* 17). The poem

concluded with the speaker having a pump "put over/ the damned/ thing" (17, lines 31-33). At

the end of her recitation of the poem, Gadd explicitly links the conclusion of the poem to her cur-

rent feelings about her status as poet: she punctuates the final lines by telling her audience,

"that's about where my connection to poetry is right now" (spoken web). Gadd uses her podium

to give "Well Poem" a series of other meanings – about editors, about her place in the poetic

community, and her concern about the sources of her work. In his chapter on Robert Frost's

readings, Raphael Allison notes how the American poet habitually made textual emendations and

provisional comments appended to his revered poems, allowing them to escape the fixed mean-

ings they threatened to accrue. Allison notes how

> readings could mold a poem's reception with the mere use of occasion, and Frost em-
>
> ployed numerous strategies – including contrasting vocal tones, sequence and commen-
>
> tary within and across readings, and intersplicing poems with paratexts and asides extra-
>
> neous to the poems themselves – to destabilize the ideal of coherent, self-enclosed lyric
>
> unity. (42)

Some of the strategies Frost employed included changing lines to suit the occasion, omitting

words on the fly, interrupting or punctuating his texts with jokes or remarks. Most of these strat-

egies are not audible in Gadd's reading, yet she, like Frost makes copious use of "paratexts and

asides."[17] These critical comments and glosses she produces about her poems are not meant to "destabilize the idea of coherent, self-contained unity," but instead to show how she lives both within and outside a series of larger communities: amongst fellow poets, as a woman, as a member of society. Gadd decides to cap her reading of "Well poem" to declare her desire to escape, but also her frustration with locating and tapping into a source of inspiration. Linda Karell, in *Writing Together/Writing Apart* claims that a term like "inspiration" "and [its] underlying assumption regarding authorship work[s] to preempt our recognition of the intricate involvement of often unnamed, unacknowledged participants in the process of literary production" (xxi). Yet Gadd uses her public reading of "Well poem" as an opportunity to acknowledge these participants while also preserving the image of the "well of inspiration," and how some participants in collective work act as gatekeepers, or otherwise inhibit the process of literary production. Can inspiration be thought of as something social, rather than solitary, as it has traditionally been considered?

  "Well poem" contains several lines with only one or two words, and Gadd reads them so the audience can discern the line breaks:

> By day
> the snow
> rose inch
> by inch
> raising me to
> the icy
> brink (lines 15-21)

---

[17] Genette, at the end of *Paratexts,* anticipates the current strain of criticism on poetry in performance, writing that the reading "in its delivery, its stresses, its intonations, in the gestures and facial expressions used for emphasis, is already quite obviously an 'interpretation.'" (370).

The audio archive of the reading reveals that Gadd reads these short lines in a kind of "sing-song" cadence which emphasizes the iambic pattern of the first four lines. The other sections of this poem are read in a similar slow and deliberate fashion which makes the line breaks audible, save for a passage of reported speech that arrives after the above quoted lines:

> a woman laughed:
> 'One slip
> and you'd drop head first
> straight down
> and you'd never
> be able
> to turn about.' (lines 22-28)

Gadd rushes through this passage and the woman's words as an exclamation, varying the tone in which she has performed the rest of the poem. Allison, in his analysis of Frost's performance style, comes up with the terms "sigh" and "tumbledown" to describe two dominant types of intonation that he uses: "[s]ighing is the raising of vocal pitch, elongation of vowels, and what can sound like a singing of the syllables being sighed" (53), while "tumbledown" phrasing is "rushed, quick, flat, impatient […] obliterating effects of enjambment and meter, and pragmatically seek[s] to finish as quickly as possible" (54). Gadd's own alternation of "sigh" and "tumbledown" effects in this short recitation demonstrates to the audience the difference between poetic and everyday speech. Even within the brief text of "Well poem", there is a marked tonal shift between the kind of enunciation that resembles a teacher reading to her pupils, and a more demotic manner that mirrors normal speech.

Peter Middleton, in *Distant Reading,* asserts that "meaning is extended, complicated, and even transformed by performance" (28). This performance of "Well Poem" provides a reader who has only silently read Gadd's poetry on previous occasions with aural evidence of what

Klassen and Marlatt term Gadd's "density of voice" ("Editorial Note" 7). Marlatt observes that "this very mercurial and shifting quality in [Gadd's] voice […] shifts from a nostalgia for beauty to a sarcastic comment on that, in the middle of a line" (171). Of course, this switching between poetic and everyday registers is also heard in how Gadd's reading balances performances of the texts with her personal asides and paratexts. In her commentary on "Well Poem" Gadd disrupts the idea of the text as a lyric unity by noting its actual status as the "Second Well Poem." Her relationship with editors affects the relations and ordering of her work, showing that her work does not, in fact, get drawn from a mythical well of divine inspiration. Through her mildly bitter commentary on "Well Poem," Gadd extends the poem's meaning to show how the notion of po-etic inspiration must eventually interact with the social world (of publication and editors), and the effects of the "outside world" on any poet's work. It also shows the material form of the kind of alchemical transformation her early poetry is often concerned with, because we hear of the traces of a non-existent poem which predated and predicted the Second "Well Poem." The major point I want to make about Gadd's short lyric poem is how meaning can be added to a text through performance: not only *how* words and lines are recited, but also through the extra-poetic speech given by the poet to direct the audience to nuances within the text. Gadd's ambivalent comment about editors before she reads "Well poem" reveals a complicated stance towards the concept of collaboration. She understands the importance of editorial evaluation, yet she is also pointing out that editors are "authorities" whose work often devalues the concept of inspiration, a concept Gadd still reveres.

Later in the reading, Gadd furnishes her audience with a comment on how collective work has informed her concept of "voice" in poetry performance. She tells the audience

I worked for a while with a group in Vancouver called, named, we called it "Interme-

dia." And I had the experience of working with a group, at one point there were five of

us poets, you know, or what we called poets. And we'd go around to various places, we

went to Edmonton one time, and we tried things, we tried chanting and wailing, like, was

it...who was that crazy old lady. Sitwell, Edith Sitwell, remember her? And if you ever

heard the sort of sing, the song, sing sing she used to do, you know, we tried that. And it

really worked, you know, but you'd go around and you'd say, "Do you dig the poems"

and they'd say, "I can't hear them, but we really like your voice." You know. [Laugh-

ter] So, you know, left that, you got an ache in the gut or something.

Here Gadd seems to be describing a version of sound poetry performance, akin to bill bissett's

work, or the group vocalizations of the Four Horsemen, yet she compares the act of "chanting"

and "wailing" to a more old-fashioned figure, Edith Sitwell. Gadd elides her own individual

voice with the experimentation she did with Intermedia: she implies that there was group per-

formance, but reports that the audience would tell her they "like(d) her voice," comparing it to

the "sort of sing, the song, sing sing" Sitwell "used to do." Sitwell's poetry recitals were infa-

mous in the modernist era and just after, and it is likely that Gadd and her companions were ex-

posed to Sitwell's voice through an LP recording on the Caedmon record label, *Edith Sitwell*

*Reading Her Poems*, released in 1955. Sitwell's recitals occupied a space in the social history of

poetry in performance between the private salon and public elocution lessons where it resided in

the late 19th Century, and the explosion in poetry readings occurring after (though not necessarily

due to) Ginsberg's epochal 1955 Six Gallery performance of *Howl*. Gadd may be ironically cit-

ing Sitwell as an influence, but her interest in the possibility of dramatic oratory is also men-

tioned in her interview with Klassen and Marlatt. Gadd states there that her early perceptions of

poetry were linked with performance, specifically noting a formative encounter listening to a

Dylan Thomas LP owned by her parents. Taking up a term suggested by Marlatt about

"crammed language," Gadd goes on to describe Thomas's reading style in broad terms as "the

Celtic fruity voice … the ringing in the roof of your mouth and your nose, the cathedral in there,

the archway of the gullet, it rings up there" (168). Gadd's comments on Sitwell and Thomas shed

light on her own voice in performance, which retains many traces of an older, British tradition of

dramatic recital. Interestingly, in Gadd's remarks, the audience "can't hear" the poems but ex-

press their approval of the voice delivering them.

　　In an article on the links between Christian religious rituals and the poetry reading, Marit

MacArthur observes a tendency towards one of two types of performance: the "neutral" and the

"expressivist" styles. When people complain about the dullness of poetry readings, a common

enough charge that MacArthur leads off her study with it, they are often pinpointing the neutral

intonation of poets which verges into "monotone": she writes

> A monotonous style may seem likely to bore listeners, but if the academic poetry reading
>
> serves a secular function analogous to religious ritual, the goal may be the opposite: to
>
> lull the captive audience into a state receptive to poetry. Indeed, a distaste for expressivist
>
> styles of poetry reading implies a close relation to ritual, since theater, as Richard
>
> Schechner explains, is typically associated with entertainment, and ritual with efficacy, or
>
> "results"—in religious ritual, some sort of spiritual transformation is effected, while a
>
> secular ritual may confirm a community's identity. (42)

We have already seen Middleton compare the poetry reading to a kind of ritual which creates

community through establishing the authority of authorship. MacArthur also links poetry read-

ings to rituals, though she focusses on the 'voice' of the author, the leader of the ritual. In terms

of "academic" poetry readings, MacArthur sees the "neutral" style of intonation as the dominant mode, noting "an almost puritanical avoidance of theatricality – justified by the implicit belief that an understated style implies sincerity, an anti-confessional, even spiritual humility, or skepticism about the coherence of the self – now typifies the reading style of a wide range of academically sponsored contemporary poets" (41). Seen in this way, monotony is an historical option, and one which signifies the competency of the reader in understanding context and audience. The flat, affectless voice intoning poetry to an audience of faculty, graduate students, and assorted members of the public might be used to present a postmodernist worldview and a distrust of overly expressive gestures and voices, which appear as ornamentations intended to promote an author's self-image or identity. MacArthur does not go into detail about the "expressivist" style of reading, but notes that contemporary poets as different as Kenneth Goldsmith and Frank Bidart make use of it in their performances. Goldsmith, a proponent of "uncreative writing," is an outlier, whose work is highly conceptual and appropriative, yet whose performances are demonstrative and witty.

Throughout the reading at Sir George Williams, Gadd mostly employs a version of the expressivist style, which means that her intonation is varied rather than primarily neutral. Her own characterizations of Sitwell's "sort of sing, the song, sing sing" could accurately describe her style. However, she modifies this expression within a broad range: the academic "monotone" is largely absent (except in one major exception), yet her expressivist intonation is intensified in certain poems, within certain lines. Over the course of her hour-long reading, Gadd's voice inhabits a series of registers, from a "sing-song" intonation which appears in poems which emphasize transformation, the more demotic speech patterns that occur in poems featuring relationships with other people, and an aggressive monotone that surfaces in a longer work that foregrounds

abstract language (an unpublished poem entitled "Cantaloup 29 cents"). The range of intonations that Gadd exploits is readily apparent in her poem "bee people on 4th Avenue," later published in *Lost Language*. She introduces the poem by making some comments that will seem oddly familiar to a contemporary resident of Vancouver:

> I want to read about Kitsilano, where most of ... I happened, you know, I grew up.  Kitsilano's a sort of slum district of Vancouver.  And it's disintegrating, and you probably all experienced this, you know, being city people, you know, they're bulldozing the places, there's no more cheap places to live, and so your friends, you know, you can't live there anymore, your friends can't live there anymore, so whatever you had, which was sometimes very heavy, you know, community's really beautiful, you know?  I used to go over and play music with my friends.  We had to move out, you know, because the city's being destroyed, and only the people who are well-to-do, who have some sort of stake in the city, you know, who are supporting the structure can stay.

Gadd, in 1972, is discussing the then-current gentrification of Kitsilano, formerly the epicenter of the hippy community in Vancouver (hence the nostalgic title of the section in *Lost Language* that this poem appears within, "The Hippies of Kitsilano"). It will be surprising to many Vancouverites to hear Kitsilano described as a "slum district," but Gadd's remarks on gentrification and complaint about the city's affordability still strike a chord in 2018. She laments the loss of the "beautiful" community that existed in Kitsilano, in her comments, in the title of the section of the book "bee people on 4th avenue" appears in, and in the poem itself: after reading the first lines of the poem rather straightforwardly, Gadd delivers the fourth line, "there is news: that we are no use" expressively and quickly, almost breathlessly, accentuating the word "news" and its linguistic transformation into "no use" (*Lost Language* 71). This verbal trick underscores the lack of

economic value the hippies possess, from the point of view of the "well-to-do." Other lines of the poem – "the sleek black birds pick perpetual grubs, grub/ honey, hike! heil!/ here comes the helicopter!" – are packed with sonic possibility, and Gadd gives great gusto to the features of stressed syllables, assonance, exclamation and aspiration that dwell in this short passage (line numbers). Gadd invites her audience to listen closely by emphasizing the poem's myriad prosodic patterns, rather than choosing to diminish the affect these features could produce by using a neutral intonation. She also uses the paratext of her introductory lead-in to the poem to address the audience and include them in the poem's lament for the loss of community, suggesting they have "probably all experienced this, … being city people." Her comment creates a sense of solidarity and community amongst reader and audience, and allows them to identify themselves amid the many collective pronouns of the poems.

In "bee people on 4th avenue," Kitsilano represents lost communal space, showing that the city *is* a site of communal possibility, yet destroyed by gentrification and development. However, Gadd has discovered that a "retreat" to the rural will not necessarily produce utopian communalism, since many of the poems in *Westerns* also reveal how settlers ransacked and exploited the land in search of gold, a symbol in Gadd's poetry of an object that can be transformed into positive or negative uses. The city and the country both have potential for the individual to feel solitary. Gadd is always presenting the real inside the ideal, or the modernity inside the mythical. Her ambivalence is also seen in how she presents isolation as a problem in both these quiet rural spaces, but also within larger communities. There is a kind of remoteness to being a performer at a reading as well; while an audience is obviously present at Gadd's SGWU reading (making themselves known only through their laughter during her aside on Sitwell), the event is marked by a distinct lack of audible responsiveness. Peter Middleton notes that "space is still an uneasy

participant in the poetry reading, because most readings only faintly acknowledge the location as any more than a vehicle for the generation of spoken language" (32). Allison asserts that "it's instructive to take into account the voices of others" heard on archived audio of poetry readings, "as readings are communal events" (8). The audience at this reading held at an educational institution reacts mostly with deferent or reverent silence appropriate to the setting. There is an interesting moment when a bell chimes either inside or outside the room, and Gadd asks "Who's singing out there?" This moment interrupts the flow of the performance, yet Gadd's response also suggests a query if anyone is willing to join in, a not-too-unlikely scenario given Gadd's declared affiliation to a "West Coast hippy trip." Here it is useful to recall how Jack Kerouac depicts Ginsberg's Six Gallery performance of *Howl*; in his account, it is an audience member (Kerouac himself, of course) who inspires the fervor that becomes legendary. Gadd's shorter poems, delivered in the first half of the hour-long reading, seem to invite a collective response, possibly signaled by the more expressivist intonation she uses. When the bell chimes, it becomes a moment for her to spontaneously and hopefully recognize that the audience may want to "sing" with her. At this moment, going only by her voice on tape, it sounds as if she would welcome others "chiming in." It is a moment where the collective and communal potential of the poetry reading becomes *audible*, as Gadd herself responds to something from "outside."

The last half of the reading is dedicated to longer works, after a reading of the aforementioned "Shore Animals" which takes slightly over three minutes to perform. This piece gives Gadd a chance to collaborate with Richard Sommer, the host, who playfully punctuates her words with expressive effects on a flute Gadd supplies him. Before she reads this text, Gadd offers to let Sommer read the poem in her place, but after some negotiation they settle on his accompaniment. Gadd instructs the flute to "listen": her directions conflate Sommer with the instrument he

is to play. This short extract of Gadd's overall performance reveals how a poetry reading can be a collaborative event, in addition to taking on aspects of drama (in that Gadd is directing another performer) and a musical concert. "Shore Animals" is received with enthusiastic applause: even listening to a recording of a poetry reading from 45 years ago, one can hear the delight and liberation that fills the room when another person becomes involved in the performance. The communal approval and support of the audience is palpable at this moment. The performance of "Shore Animals" discloses the intimate relation between the collaborative and the communal in the context of the poetry reading. Readers may make use of collaborative or collective strategies such as audience participation in the service of entertainment or edification, or they may proceed with the more traditional performance style which concentrates the audience's attention on words and not performance: the text of the poem itself, as well as the extra-poetic speech which helps them to interpret the poems. In the long work that Gadd recites after "Shore Animals," she presents much less commentary or annotation, and settles into her reading style, which never flags despite its length. Although it is unlikely that she intended it, the communal and collective possibilities that opened up after the collaborative performance of "Shore Animals" are foreclosed for a purposely monotone reading of a piece entitled "Cantaloupe, 29 cents." The communal space of the public reading is transformed depending on the texts she is performing, and the performance of this longer, more challenging work seems to reduce the possibility of expressive audience participation, in the form of vocalized assent or laughter.

The point I want to make here is that the sociability of a poetry reading can vary over its length; just as Marlatt describes Gadd's work as "mercurial and shifting," so might be her performance style and its concomitant effects upon an audience member's attention – from interest, to boredom, and anything in between. Gadd's poetry reading at SGWU provides her with a plat-

form to circulate her work, air grievances, and discuss issues within the poetry community (thus, like Bowering, risking being labelled "anti-social"). The poetry reading allows her to present short works that communicate her intermittent isolation, and finally to confidently perform longer, more avant-garde work. Having generous time and space offered to her, she uses the communal structure of the poetry reading to sound her important voice.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation covers a decade (plus overtime) in the development of Vancouver poetry. *Tish*, the stars of the first chapter, started publishing in 1961, and Maxine Gadd's Montreal reading, revisited in the final chapter, was in 1972 (pushing even further, Bowering's *Curious,* the subject of Chapter Three, was published in 1973). There is much more work that can be done about this period of the city's poetry community, as well as on the time before and after. My interest in working on Vancouver poetry of the 1960s and early 1970s arose out of my previous scholarship on the New York School of Poets, particularly the "second generation," who arrived in the city in the early 1960s and who established an active poetry scene by taking advantage of the cheap rents of the Lower East Side and the café culture that emerged out of the Beat poetry and folk music circuits. As Daniel Kane and other critics have noted, the second generation poets took the collaborative and social approach to poetry that their "first generation" elders – John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, and James Schuyler – had shown them in their own publications of the 1950s. Transplanting the study of collaborative practices in poetry to different soil at the same time reveals that Vancouver poets had their own influences, idioms, and ideas. While New York poets and painters such as Ted Berrigan, Joe Brainard, Kenward Elmslie, Bernadette Mayer, Ron Padgett, Tom Veitch, and Anne Waldman produced a number of collaborative books in the 1960s and 1970s, a Vancouver equivalent only appeared in 1998, *Piccolo Mondo*, written by Angela Bowering, George Bowering, David Bromige, and Mike Matthews. I quickly learned when I began writing that I would have to adjust my understanding of the term "collaboration": aside from a few poems co-authored by bill bissett and Martina Clinton in *blewointment*, Vancouver poets did not carry out this kind of absorptive approach to composition. However, I believe that contrasting the poetics of the New York School of poets has turned

out to be a productive move, considering how often Vancouver poetry's lineage has been traced only to the foot of Black Mountain.

The connections (even if oppositional[18]) to East Coast and West Coast American poetry communities can be filled in even further: for example, Jamie Reid published a term paper he wrote on Philip Whalen in an issue of *Tish*. It's intriguing to consider more research into how more marginal, supposedly "minor" poets such as Whalen stimulated the developing poetics of the *Tish* and "downtown" poets. The legacy of Canadian cultural nationalism of the 1970s still shows its effects in Canadian literary criticism and more work should be done on the impact of contemporary poetic movements and magazines in the United States and beyond on the poetry of 1960s and 1970s Canada. The inspiring and foundational Warren Tallman, an American who did so much for Canadian poetry and its pedagogy, can still animate the spirit of more cross-border pollination. Of course, there is also a need to investigate further the relations Vancouver poets had with other modernist Canadian writers in scenes like Toronto and Montreal. George Bowering's *Curious* provides a peek down this pathway.

Both *Tish* and *blewointment* established group work as their foundation. For *Tish*, it was a strategy of sharing concepts and content through individual texts which invited and sometimes provoked further response. The "twin poem" form that arose out of this workshop mentality was termed "cooperation" by Robert Duncan, in order to distinguish it from the witty verbal play and parlour game connotations of the New York School. Therefore, I substitute the phrase "group work" in place of the more unstable, or ill-fitting term "collaborative." For *blewointment* poets,

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[18] Recall Marian Zazeela's letter to *Tish* discussed in Chapter Two. Another New York writer, Carol Bergé, wrote an interestingly combative account of the Vancouver Poetry Conference in *The Vancouver Report*, published by Ed Sanders' aptly-named Fuck You Press.

group work was manifested in the early typographic experimentation with the space of the page, and also a common concern with representing and critiquing domestic space. Both magazines established a collective sociability by presenting many different local poets within their pages, creating an interpretive context that emphasizes relation. Martina Clinton's *Notes from our Elders*, the first book to be published by blew ointment press, reproduces a suite of poems by the poet first published in the magazine, leaving in the surrounding poems by other authors. As well, judging from the evidence supplied by the documentaries of Leonard Forest and Maurice Embra, the "downtown" poets were interested in performing their poetry, possibly inviting and provoking response from audiences at Vancouver locations such as the Cellar and the Black Spot.

That last sentence points to the potential for my study to be a broader cultural history of Vancouver poetry of the 1960s and beyond. This would be of interest to anyone who ponders the time when the city was both geographically and culturally marginal. Robert McTavish's 2013 documentary "The Line Has Shattered" has been instrumental in reigniting interest in the city's poetry community and its transnational connections, when poets like Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, and Phillip Whalen trod the UBC campus in 1963. My dissertation began at this point of emergence, yet I also wanted to seek the sense of "play" that went along with the group work that the large 1963 gathering emblematized. In addition to this, I have aimed to balance the discussion of *Tish* with the other major, contemporaneous poetry journal in the city, *blewointment*. The chapters presented here on both only trace a small part of Vancouver's vibrant poetry scene; I have strived to include lesser-known poets such as Martina Clinton, Maxine Gadd, and Red Lane, but I would like poets such as Judith Copithorne, Lance Farrell, Gerry Gilbert, Beth Jankola, Sam Perry, Jamie Reid and the work of many more poets published in the two magazines to be examined in depth. I was also excited to encounter the work of First Nations po-

ets based in Vancouver as my research proceeded. Skyros Bruce (now Mahara Allbrett) and
Gordon Williams are two First Nations poets who began publishing works in the early 1970s and
deserve more attention.

The documentaries my dissertation consider provide a glimpse into the public and private
spaces of these writers: their living rooms and performance venues are sighted for fleeting mo-
ments. This dissertation reclaims the importance of primary texts in magazines, as well as these
films and the audio archives, to hear and see how these texts were performed. More focus on the
social sites of poetry, readings, especially, is necessary. I envision my work beyond this disserta-
tion will revisit spaces such as the Cellar and the Black Spot, adding to the civic and cultural his-
tory of Vancouver. It is important to get the work of all of these Vancouver poets out of the ar-
chive and back into circulation. Perhaps an anthology of Vancouver poetry of the 1960s and
1970s, rescuing the wild works in *blewointment* in particular, is a project I should propose to one
of the many local small presses whose lineage can be traced back to that period.

In future work, I would also like to build on this dissertation's modest outline on matters of
gender within the Vancouver poetry community. I'm pleased to help start the critical conversa-
tion on Gadd and to recover an important figure such as Clinton, but more questions need to be
raised. How did the rise of second-wave feminism register in the works of Vancouver poets as
the 1970s rolled on? In what ways did banding together collectively affect their work, and in
what ways did they (like Gadd) try to stake out individual space as well as a writing career? I'm
also interested in the intersection of economics and women's lives, especially as seen in the
works of Judith Copithorne, a poet I dearly would have liked to have included a chapter on. And
why did Martina Clinton seem to disappear from the Vancouver poetry scene in the late
1960s/early 1970s?

There is also much work still to be done on race and Vancouver literature. I have lingering questions about the effect of Tallman's propagation of the city as a frontier space filled with literary cowboys and cowgirls, especially in his uncomfortable conjuring of "Chief Crazy Foot" ("Wonder Merchants," 194). It is crucial to continue investigating how settler-colonial discourse pervades the debates and the texts of *Tish* and *blewointment*: and our current moment, where issues of cultural appropriation are at the forefront, demands an examination of the way bissett, in particular, uses Indigenous customs and imagery throughout much of his work. My chapter on Gadd, who critiqued Tallman's version of the "Wild West," points one other direction for me to pursue. As well, the works of Asian-Canadian writers such as Wayson Choy (who attended UBC at the same time *Tish* was being produced, and was featured in Louis Dudek's survey of Vancouver writers in a 1962 issue of *Delta*), Roy Kiyooka (like bissett, a poet and painter), and Fred Wah (a recent poet laureate of Canada) are fertile ground for extended study, on the questions of race, hybridity, form, and other questions. But my dissertation has also caused me to reflect on more personal questions.

I have lived in Vancouver since 2006, and since that time I have published several chapbooks, collaborated with local and far-flung poets, and participated in poetry readings as both a host and performer. My exploration of the dynamic interplay between collaboration, collectives, and the social and communal is inflected with my personal experiences as a poet living in the city that I have also been studying. As I progressed in this work, I started to ask questions about my own reluctance to become fully involved or immersed in the collaborative, collective, social and communal aspects of both the active literary scene and the academic spaces and networks that surround me. How could I reconcile my study of the utopian possibilities of my subject matter, while remaining a stubborn hermit? I believe that my dissertation puts a finger on a little-

discussed aspect of collaborative, collective, and communal work, which is the persistent trace of individuality and self-assertion surrounding the act of writing in a time of postmodern experimentation, which might explain why multiple authorship is still so rare and remarkable. As I progressed with my research, I became dissatisfied with definitions of collaborative writing that only emphasized the radical challenge it poses to the notion of the solitary author, and not to the complications and social tensions of group literary production. I also discovered that my previous study of 1960s and 1970s New York School collaborations would not easily transfer to 1960s and 1970s Vancouver: these West Coast Canadian poets, in fact, applied the concepts of collaborative, collective, and social and communal work in ways that mostly preserved, rather than submerged, individual identity. This is seen in how George Bowering and Frank Davey separate their twin poems, how bill bissett fashions his wild and woolly Western self-image, how Bowering risks being "anti-social" in Curious, and how Martina Clinton and Maxine Gadd reveal their ambivalence about the utopian bromides about family and society that were spreading throughout that time period. I could see how these local poets were both fascinated and doubtful about the possibilities of the three C's of my study before it sparked in my own work. And I was also assisted by other, more contemporary, local sources.

Although they are not explicitly referenced, two recent studies by Vancouver-area scholars have informed my work. Clint Burnham's *The Only Poetry That Matters: Reading the Kootenay School of Writing* was invaluable for its example of combining close reading techniques with theory. Close reading remains a relevant tool for scholars of postmodern poetics, and such reading practices intersect with social concepts of collaboration. In addition, Carl Peters' *textual vishyuns: image and text in the work of bill bissett*, the first major study of the poet since Karl Jirgens' 1992 monograph, has hopefully started a trend of serious criticism on the work of one of

our most underrated poets. This dissertation adds to a dialogue started by Burnham, Jirgens, and

Peters, a conversation that will necessarily entail future sharing of work.

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