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Between 1966 and 1974, faculty members of Sir George Williams University in Montreal hosted the Poetry Series—a program of poetry readings that was conceived as an ongoing encounter between local poets and a diverse range of writers from across the United States and Canada. Through analysis of sound recordings that document the Poetry Series, this essay demonstrates how these poetry events enabled anglophone Montreal poets to encounter and engage with contemporary national and international poetic philosophies and practices. The Poetry Series is interpreted in terms of efforts to define a national Canadian literature in relation to American poetics, as a platform for the performance of contending definitions of modern and avant-garde poetic practice, and as a site for developing models of artistic community. The poets whose recorded readings are analyzed include Al Purdy, Robert Creeley, Irving Layton, Jackson Mac Low, and George Bowering. In a broader sense, the essay works to read a coherent archive of documentary poetry recordings as an archeological trace of the cultural significance of the poetry reading series in the 1960s and 1970s and to consider the methodologies most useful for engaging critically with an historical audio record of a series of cultural events.

Entre 1966 et 1974, des membres du corps enseignant de l'Université Sir-George-Williams à Montréal organisèrent une série de lectures poétiques perçue comme une rencontre permanente entre des poètes locaux et divers écrivains venant d'un peu partout aux É.-U. et au Canada. Grâce à l'analyse d'enregistrements audio qui documentent cette série de lectures, le présent article démontre comment ces rassemblements ont permis aux poètes anglophones de Montréal de former des liens et de débattre des philosophies et des pratiques contemporaines nationales et internationales. La série de lectures poétiques est interprétée en termes d'efforts déployés pour définir une littérature canadienne nationale par rapport à la poétique américaine, en tant que plateforme pour présenter des définitions contraires de pratiques poétiques modernes et d'avant-garde, et comme lieu de création de modèles de communauté artistique. Les poètes dont les lectures enregistrées sont analysées ici comprennent Al Purdy, Robert Creeley, Irving Layton, Jackson Mac Low et George Bowering. Dans un sens plus large, le présent article veut présenter un ensemble archivistique cohérent d'enregistrements documentaires sur la poésie en tant que relevé archéologique de l'importance culturelle de la série de lectures poétiques dans les années 1960 et 1970, et examiner les méthodologies les plus pratiques pour traiter de façon éclairée des archives audio historiques d'une série d'événements culturels.

Any literary historical description of the 1960s in Canada must take into account the many diverse and often fervent efforts to define what was distinctly Canadian about Canadian Literature, the nearly equal number of attempts to articulate what was new in and about Canadian writing, and the widespread participation of poets in novel ways of delivering their work to audiences. The present essay will approach two of these issues—the distinctiveness and novelty of Canadian poetry—by considering the significance of the third, the important revival of the poetry reading as a site of aesthetic mobilization and dissemination during this period of Canadian literary history. As Robert McCormack noted in a 1962 article devoted to the poetry reading phenomenon in Canada (and North America) during the 1960s, "Across the country—and up and down the continent—the poets have been coming out of their lairs to read their works in all kinds of likely and unlikely places. University lecture halls, libraries, art galleries, coffee houses and night clubs have all seen them reciting their verses to sizable crowds" (28). According to McCormack, the key benefit of these readings was their ability to render complex modern forms of poetry accessible and intimate, due to the authority of the poet/reader over the delivery of the work, and the kind of "emotional interaction" that the poetry reading allows between the poet's work and the listening audience (29). From the perspective of the present essay, an additional potential benefit of these reading activities is that they represent a unique site from which to explore the implications of encounter between a geographically localized poetry culture and a diverse range of poetics manifest in the individual performances of itinerant poetry readers. Given the ephemerality of an event such as a poetry reading, this benefit can only arise for the literary scholar if a reading, or even better, a coherently organized series of readings, is amply documented either in print or audio recordings.

An organized poetry reading series can be significant in a variety of ways, depending not only on the specific geographical location of the scene of encounter but also on the position it takes in relation to established cultural institutions, traditions, theories, and practices. For example, the reading series that led to the development of the St. Mark's Poetry Project—a locus of self-consciously anti-establishment and publicly oriented poetry creation—developed in relation to the kind of literary heritage it drew from and the formalist tradition it positioned itself against, its framing of poetry as a communal effort, the literary presses with which it affiliated, and the specifically non-institutional venues it chose "as a staging ground for an alternative community" (Kane 2003, xv). The reading series that will organize the discussion of the present essay, by contrast, emerged from the organizational efforts of professors and writers working within a Canadian university. Between 1966 and 1974, faculty members of Sir George Williams University

(SGWU, now Concordia University) in Montreal hosted a series of poetry readings that was conceived as an ongoing encounter between local poets and a diverse range of writers from across the United States and Canada. An article in the SGWU annual publication *Post-Grad* describes it as "a series of controversial poetry readings" that attracted hundreds "of dedicated students, staff and guests—often practicing poetry themselves" plus poetry-lovers and "curiosity seekers" (*Post-Grad* 1967, 13, 18). One of the benefits noted was the "opportunity to hear several new poets who write specifically for live reading rather than for the printed page" and the "effect" of the series is described as that "of a group of people sitting together in deep discussion" (19). Sponsored by "The Poetry Committee" of the Faculty of Arts, the SGWU English Department, and the Canada Council (13)—and organized primarily by English professors Howard Fink and Stanton Hoffman, fine arts professor Roy Kiyooka (1966-70), and George Bowering (1967-71), with contributions at different times from Wynne Francis and Irving Layton (1966-67), among others—these readings ultimately involved more than 60 poets from across North America.[1]

Audio recordings of these readings, known simply as the Poetry Series, were made using mobile reel-to-reel tape machines. The SGWU audiovisual department was undergoing a process of substantial renewal in 1966. Room H-110 in the recently completed Hall Building, where many of the series readings took place, was fully equipped for recording and monitoring, and the university's newly established Recording Services Department was available "for the recording of tapes 'on location'" (Oberfeld 1966, S-4). While other reading series were organized at this time period (for example, the Contact Poetry Series [1957-62]), in retrospect, the SGWU Poetry Series is differentiated as a potential object of analysis by its audio documentation. In "reading" these recordings—that is, in listening to them and interpreting them—I will be focussing on how the poets and their poetics were positioned and framed in relation to each other as discernible in the substantial extra-poetic speech (the introductions and poets' remarks) that frame and punctuate the readings, as well as on the manner and methods of performance the poets used to deliver their poems. I will also draw upon information gathered from relevant print sources, correspondence, oral history interviews with participants, and scholarship concerned with branches of North American modernism to help develop an understanding of the significance of these recorded events within their historical context.

The Poetry Series recordings document an important transitional moment in the history of English-language writing in Quebec. It brought and introduced American writers such as Robert Creeley, Michael McClure, Charles Reznikoff, Ted Berrigan, David Bromige, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Koch, Jackson

Mac Low, and Jerome Rothenberg to the Montreal poetry community. In addition, many local figures—such as Layton, D.G. Jones, Michael Gnarowski, Henry Beissel, and Richard Sommer—also participated in readings. The series also brought in major Canadian poets from outside Quebec, people like Al Purdy, bill bisset, Frank Davey, Eli Mandel, Earle Birney, and Margaret Atwood. Thus, the archive represents an audio record of a local poetry community interacting with and literally performing itself alongside contemporary national and international poetic philosophies and practices.

The geographical distinctions between the local (Montreal), national (Canadian), and international (mainly American), and the aesthetic distinctions defining a diverse range of poetic forms and practices audible in the series suggest different ideas about authorial purview, poetic purpose, reach, and imagined poetry communities in relation to each other. Attempts to define what Canadian literature is and to account for its status in relation to the rest of the world—topics of great debate during this period—represent another important frame for these performances. Organizing committee member Howard Fink has remarked that Canadian and American poets were selected and sometimes paired up in the Poetry Series so that they could be considered in relation to each other, in part because it was felt that "the only way Canadian literature was going to be properly responded to, understood and evaluated was if comparisons were made with American" literature (Fink 2012). Further, the reading series documents multiple and, at times, competing versions of literary modernism pronouncing themselves from the podium and challenging Montreal students, readers, and poets to reconsider the position that English Montreal writing held in relation to the future of Canadian and North American literature. The status of the medium of audio documentation—the audio tape itself—as an element of the performances that can be heard in this audio archive is yet another interesting issue to consider. Where such audio documentation would have been understood by a poet like Layton as one means among many of preserving the distinctive features of his poetic voice and identity for posterity, and thus is approached as an inherently transparent documentary medium through which the exemplary, expressivist poetic event is preserved, tape is used by a poet like Mac Low as a medium of poetic construction that complicates the temporal status and exemplarity of the poem and poetry event. In short, the Poetry Series recordings provide the literary critic and historian with substantial avenues of inquiry and interpretation. The present essay approaches this audio archive with the aim of understanding what the Poetry Series meant in the context of the English Montreal poetry scene, and in a broader sense, reads a coherent archive of documentary poetry recordings as an archeological trace of the cultural significance of the poetry reading series in the 1960s and 1970s.[2]

**Canadianization/Americanization**

In one of the first recorded readings of the Poetry Series (a reading featuring Canadian poets Phyllis Webb and Gwendolyn MacEwen held in November 1966), organizing committee member Roy Kiyooka explains the initial rationale for the series program:

> we have not attempted to make the series an exhaustive coverage of any particular school or faction of poetry. Nor has our concern been an attempt to seek out the so-called great poets. Our choices have been made with the desire to present to you, hopefully, the possibilities of utterance that is more than parochial. In short, this is our attempt to sound just that diversity that so much characterizes the North American poetry scene. (Webb 1966)

Eclecticism characterized the selections made in the first year of the series, which included readings by Anthony Hecht, who cut his poetry teeth under the guidance of John Crowe Ransom at Kenyon College, and John Wieners, a student of Charles Olson's who moved to San Francisco where he then associated with Jack Kerouac, Spicer, and Ginsberg. Webb's work was developed, initially, in relation to that of Scott, Dudek, and Layton, while MacEwen's circle included the young Margaret Atwood and Milton Acorn (to whom MacEwen was briefly married). The committee's prepared commentary stresses a catholic selection process within the field of North American (rather than American and Canadian) poetry with an aim to transcend a localized or parochial perspective. It is an interesting way to frame an encounter with American and Canadian poets considering the growing significance to scholars and poets in the 1960s of identifying the distinctive elements of Canadian (as compared to American) literature.

By the late 1960s, it had become important to ask whether Canadian literature was a viable cultural category and whether America (i.e., the United States of America) was a creatively beneficial friend or culturally dominating foe. Scholars of both Canadian and Québécois literature were theorizing the nature of their own cultural and linguistic colonization (by the US and their European forebears), and the possibility of a literary practice that could represent the locus of resistance to such cultural domination.[3] According to Jeffrey Cormier, two primary concerns of Canadian cultural nationalists associated with the "Canadianization Movement" of the period were "the ever increasing number of non-Canadians who were working in Canadian cultural institutions" and "issues of Canadian content" (2004, 7). For example, Robin Matthews, an English professor and early leader of this movement, focussed his organization efforts on challenging the hiring of American professors in Canadian universities. Having identified Simon Fraser

University and the University of Calgary as the worst offenders in this regard (around 1969), he mobilized faculty and students to protest in favour of changing hiring policies both within his own institution (Carleton University) and nationally (25). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Canadianization issue—whether it concerned cultural identity or US economic influence over Canada and Canadian education—received significant coverage in the national and international press, and was a major topic of public debate (34-39). The campaign would have had varying meanings for members of the Poetry Series committee. Howard Fink, a native Montrealer, felt that both Canadian *and* American literature were underrepresented in Canadian curricula and hoped to explore comparisons and connections between the two. Stanton Hoffman, an American who followed closely the latest developments in US writing, would have seen such initiatives as unnecessarily parochial (Fink 2012). Bowering, the keen student of Americanist Warren Tallman at the University of British Columbia (UBC), saw Matthews as a type of "national fascist" who misunderstood the great potential of applying the methods of new American writers like Olson and Spicer to an exploration of the Canadian experience. American influence was not at odds with the development of Canadian literature, in Bowering's opinion (2012).

I mention these details about the meaning of Canadianization not only because it would have coloured the positions of the Poetry Series selection committee members, but also because it cast different kinds of nationalist inflections upon the articulations of modernist poetry in Canada and informed arguments about poetic form and innovation that can sometimes be heard in the series readings. For example, Al Purdy read in the Poetry Series (13 March 1970); Bowering introduces him "as the most Canadian of all possible poets" and then goes on to note that Purdy was "currently making an excursion amongst the academics at … in other words, straightening people out at Simon Fraser University" (Purdy 1970). This last comment suggests that Purdy (as "people's poet") was straightening out the academics, but also that Purdy, "the most Canadian" poet, was straightening out the Americanist bias of the Simon Fraser faculty. Purdy lives up to Bowering's characterization of him as an exemplary Canadian poet. He begins his reading by elaborating upon Bowering's comment, explaining that he joined the academics recently "because all the American members of the department at Simon Fraser have guilty consciences so they wanted a Canadian on the staff." He then proceeds to introduce his first poem, "About Being a Member of Our Armed Forces" by situating himself exclusively within a Canadian tradition, as if no other poetic tradition ever really existed for him: "When I started to write poems about sixty-eight years ago, Bliss Carman was the only one writing. So I imitated Bliss Carman, and this first poem is a sort of imitation of Bliss Carman" (Purdy 1970).

By identifying Carman (a Canadian poet living in the United States) as the solitary forefather of Canadian poetic practice, Purdy presents his own work as having begun in ignorance of other national canons, and most notably European and American modernist poetics. Even as his awareness of other poetic modes developed, a certain degree of national insularity prevailed in Purdy's poetic practice and performance. Consequently, the reading functions as a performed record of Purdy's individual journey through his own country, engaged in activities, encounters, and scenarios that define him as a Canadian poet, in poems about living in Vancouver and Montreal, being broke in Ontario, and going "up to Baffin Island on some government money" (Purdy 1970).

Throughout the reading, Purdy performs in a clear and unassuming, folksy voice, responding to his audience's reactions to the final lines of poems with colloquial queries in a Canuck idiom ("Funny, eh?"—following his reading of "Floating Down the North Saskatchewan River") and self-deprecating summations ("I don't know what that means, but it must be profound"—following "Flight 17 Eastbound"). It is the reading of an exemplary Canadian observer writing about the "real" things that Canadians do and feel in a language that is artfully colloquial and spoken in a manner that combines conversational intonation with the recognition of speech rhythm as having the potential to communicate in more formally organized patterns than the everyday timbre his poems attempt to emulate. Purdy acknowledges his formal self-consciousness around the status of colloquial Canadian speech at one point in his introduction to the poem "Dark Landscape" where he explains how "it starts in a very prosy way, and is meant to sound that way, and then the rhythm quickens" (Purdy 1970). The voice of the Canadian poet as it is heard in his performance alternates between "prosy" speech and quickened rhythm. Purdy's reading in the Poetry Series enacts what Frank Davey has called "the 1960s concern with fullness and presence, which in Purdy's case leads him to seek the immediacy of apparently unedited speech at the same time as he acknowledges thematically the gap between the word and its referent" (2002, 52). As artful and self-conscious of "the gap between the word and its referent" as Purdy may have been in his approach to poetic performance, and as aware as he was of his own status as a "Canadian" corrective to his American colleagues, the reading as a whole gives the sense of an inviolable confidence in the stature of the Canadian poetic voice as a unitary and self-sustaining entity. Purdy's poetic voice is positioned as already beyond the issues that informed the Canadianization debates, and as somehow impervious to concerns about American or cosmopolitan modernism as it relates to Canadian poetry. His reading performance highlights the quintessential components of theme, language, and persona that reinforced what Mark Silverberg has called "Purdy's coeval canonization and

Canadianization" between 1965 to 1975 (2000, 233), and that set a benchmark for what Canadian poetry was supposed to sound like.

Another, perhaps even more direct connection between poetics, performance, and Canadianization politics of the period can be heard in a reading from the series held a few years before Purdy's visit that featured three future Canadianization organizers.[4] On the bill this winter semester in 1967 were Henry Beissel and Michael Gnarowski, both literature professors in the SGWU English department. Hosting the evening's readings was McGill University professor and poet Louis Dudek. Dudek's opening remarks made reference, first, to another poetry reading that was taking place across town, at McGill: "Over there, it's A.J.M. Smith from Michigan State, Canadian anthologist and well-known poet. With a poet like that, it really makes no difference what he reads or how he reads, it's just important to see him and even the tottering saint can perform miracles on occasions" (Beissel 1967). The significance of "a poet like that" lay in Smith's status as a founding poet of Canadian modernism and his role as the editor of the modernist manifesto anthology *New Provinces* (1936), which Brian Trehearne has called "the landmark publication that signaled the demise of the old school of Canadian poetry" (1989, 115) and which, according to Gnarowski, marked "a singular event in a literary process which stemmed from the origins of Canadian modernism and its beginnings in Montreal" (1976, vi). This was the (largely) Montreal-rooted yet cosmopolitan modernist tradition that Dudek identified as part of his own legacy of innovation and change.

Dudek proceeds in his introductory remarks to develop an argument for the significance of the two younger writers he is introducing in contrast to other trends in contemporary Canadian writing he has been following:

> With the current scene in Canadian writing, there are primitive types around that are hard to classify.... Well, Beissel and Gnarowski are not of this breed of poets who seem to have lost all sense of poetic organization or form, where you think that conventions, poetic conventions have been abolished and what is left are chaotic bits of internal monologue on the page. Of course, that kind of school may be very interesting to watch to see what comes out of it but at present, having watched it now for a few years, I'm a little impatient often and tired of the magazines where this material occurs because it seems so easy to turn out and anyone has these bits of chaotic monologue going on. On the other hand, there are many poets still writing who are not following the conventional forms of English metrics and rhyme and so forth, who are turning out poems or at least watching what happens, what happens with the words on the page, and both the poets we're listening to tonight are of this kind. They are very careful craftsmen. (Beissel 1967)

In these remarks, Dudek is drawing a line between good and bad, careful and primitive currents in new Canadian writing. Precisely which poets Dudek identifies with the "primitives" is complicated. Reading his 1969 survey of "Poetry in English" published in *Canadian Literature*, one gathers that this category can include poets as different from each other as Ginsberg, Cohen, Layton, Purdy, Duncan, Creeley, Gary Snyder, Bowering, John Newlove, and Michael Ondaatje (Dudek 1969, 112-19). While he is critical (and sometimes disdainful) of each of these poets in a different way, he identifies the new primitive poet and his not-carefully-crafted poems as an offshoot of the new, public venues for disseminating poetry and the popularizing gestures it demands: "The poetry-reading circuit encourages the writing of comic gag-type poems because they always go over well, whereas serious poems tend to drag." Where Cohen, Layton, and Purdy are called out as poets who like to "play for gross audience response" (114), the most unfortunate form of primitivism, according to Dudek, is that which has internalized the opportunistic effects of the live reading as a comprehensive method of composition. This kind of primitive poetry, "the results of which are already apparent in the sequel to the Tish school" lead to "the degeneration of poetry to a teeny-bopper fad," in short, to "barbarization" (115). Further, this misuse of open form is attributed to the "primitive" poet's compromising compositional self-consciousness of a listening audience.

In his arguments against new, primitive currents in poetry Dudek does not demonize American poetry per se, but distinguishes between good and bad uses of open-form precedents from American poets. As a longtime admirer of Ezra Pound, the line Dudek has drawn extends to distinguish between responsible and irresponsible uses of the Poundian tradition.[5] Popularization and playing to the audience, initially identified with "the open rhetorical line of Ginsberg charged with hysterical sensationalism" (112), is associated in Dudek's mind with a new Canadian poetics (Tish) and "the prolific publications of some of the new presses—House of Anansi, Very Stone House, Coach House, Weed/flower, Island, Ganglia, Gryphon and so forth" (115). From Dudek's perspective, Pound's rigorous approach to open forms has been abandoned, indeed, corrupted by current Canadian writers who had regrettably claimed Pound as one of their own. In the same year as the Beissel/Gnarowski reading, Ralph Gustafson, another Anglo-Quebec poet, would take a similar position vis-à-vis new Canadian writing, complaining that "The 'Poundians', by and large … are not writing well" (1967, 10). The main point to take away from such arguments about the uses of Pound in the 1960s is that a good number of Anglo-Quebec modern poets saw these new interpretations and deployments of the poetics of Pound (and William Carlos Williams) to be threatening to a certain idea of "careful" poetic craftsmanship and "writing well." The origin of this

threat, according to such arguments, was American modernist poetry, or at the very least, a misunderstanding of its import and value for the Canadian situation.

Arguments and complaints of this kind would become more pronounced as the influence of American experimental poetics upon Canadian writers grew in scope. The cultural arguments about Canadianization and the social, economic, cultural, and linguistic domination of Canada by the United States were articulated by social critics like George Grant in a manner that had great resonance for young Canadian writers trying to find their own voice in a language they felt was already owned by the massive imperial power to the south. Grant's basic argument stated that "a central aspect of the fate of being a Canadian is that our very existing has at all times been bound up with the interplay of various world empires" (1969, 63). The United States had become the latest world empire with which Canadians were inextricably bound up. The power and influence of the US posed serious challenges to Canadian writers seeking to formulate and articulate a distinctly Canadian aesthetic. As Dennis Lee would write in 1973, "the prime fact about my country [Canada] as a public space is that in the last 25 years it has become an American colony" (1974, 155).[6] Following his reading of essays by Grant that would later be collected in *Technology and Empire*, Lee formulates a way to begin to reclaim a possible use of language (even if Americanized language) for his own distinct motives and purpose in his idea that an inkling of uncolonized space persists in "the words our absentee masters have given us" in the "welter of cadence" that reside beneath "undermining silence" of language. As Lee puts it: "That cadence is home" (166). Despite this cryptic solution to the problem of language for a Canadian poetics, Lee's formulation is founded (as Frank Davey has noted) upon the pervasive relational binary of "imperial US/colonial Canada," a binary model that held significant sway in the late 1960s (2002, 44).

To cite a final, pronounced example of this binary thinking, Keith Richardson's *Poetry and the Colonized Mind:* Tish (1976), was uncompromising in its stance against the apparent Americanization of Canadian modernism as it chronicled the process by which American open field poetics made their way into Canada via UBC. In his preface to Richardson's attack on the alleged anti-Canadian elements of Tish poetics and cultural leanings, Robin Matthews describes the poetic experiments of the Tish poets as representative of a "U.S. invasion and colonization of a part of the poetic culture of Canada" (1976, 7). Richardson documents what he believes to have been the poetic indoctrination in the early 1960s of student *Tish* magazine editors Davey, Bowering, David Dawson, Jamie Reid, and Fred Wah by Warren Tallman, the professor of American poetry at UBC mentioned above.

According to Richardson's hyper-protectionist account, the group of American poets Tallman introduced (both in writing and in person) to the young members of the Vancouver poetry scene

> believed itself to be in the vanguard of U.S. poetic and social liberation. However, when it tried to discuss Canadian poetics and social tradition in U.S. terms, the group revealed what might be called the imperialistic nature of its poetics by simply ignoring the Canadian identity, by suggesting that Canadian work which was unlike U.S. work was inferior, or by advocating a continent described by U.S. sensibility. (1976, 19)

This would be the most extreme kind of Canadianization rhetoric against a particular mode of American poetics and its allegedly invidious impact upon Canadian culture.

The binary that informed Matthews's association of American imperialism and poetics can be heard in local debates about the meaning and value of particular readings in the Poetry Series, as articulated in editorials and letters published in the SGWU student newspaper, the *Georgian*. For example, following the appearance of Gary Snyder in November 1971, one letter to the editor writes to "protest this genre of fake poetry which seems to derive from W.C. Williams' dictum 'no ideas but in things' which we believe is anti-poetry and anti-life" (Boxer 1971, 4); another, in the next issue, attributes such an attack to "inexcusable ignorance" and praises Snyder's reading as "a welcome relief from the insufferable dullness and second-rate poetry produced by certain Montreal poets," including "Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen" (Morrissey 1971, n.p.). Such print sources reveal how controversial and important the reading series was as a staging ground for the young, aspiring poets in the city. What poetic models best exemplified the future of a distinctly Canadian poetics within the North American context? Did the tradition of the Montreal modernists hold up against new currents in American and Canadian writing? What dicta and poetics best served the contemporary Montreal poet, and did it matter if they were not home grown? Apprentice poets like these letter-writers were incited to consider such questions, to reassess the significance of their local heroes, and to take positions on important matters concerning poetic value and national identity.

Despite such occasional rants against the visiting American poets, Richardson's extreme kind of anti-Americanism did not gain much credibility even among the younger Montreal-style modernists. When Layton disciples like Seymour Mayne wrote letters to *Tish* in the early 1960s, they challenged the American-influenced West Coast movement on the basis of its formal decisions and the poetic results, not on the basis of Canadian nationalism. The young Montreal

writers wrote "poems," the young Montreal poet's argument would go, "not ejaculations, spittoonos, soliloquies, rambling, dribbling, drivels & inconsequentials" (Mayne 156). Pound, Williams, the Black Mountain poets, and others were not by definition the enemies of Montreal-based modernism. On the contrary, Dudek was a long-standing Poundian. Williams had written an effusive introduction to Layton's *The Improved Binoculars* (1956), stating, "[Layton] respects Ezra Pound but has no inclination to imitate him" and "despises Canada (being a Canadian), and loves and would give his heart for it" (Williams 1957, 10). More substantially, Layton was a contributing editor to Creeley's *Black Mountain Review* for about a decade, and corresponded with him regularly about art and writing throughout that period. In fact, many of the poets captured on the Poetry Series tapes can be heard to articulate their indebtedness to the American modernist tradition of Pound and Williams. The significance of such influence—beyond its identification as a focus of debate around the status of a distinctly Canadian poetics and literature—is also audible in the readings as an articulation of substantially different models of delivering a poem to an audience.

The sections that follow will provide an account of a selection of readings that involved four participants in the series (Creeley, Layton, Mac Low, and Bowering) in order to provide some paradigmatic examples of the range of modernist and avant-garde performance that can be heard in the Poetry Series archive. In the audio documentation of these distinct readings we can hear in performance a range of approaches to reading poetry out loud that represent differing models of poetics, the poet, oral performance, artistic community, and the nature of the poetry event itself. The Poetry Series was constructed from the beginning to highlight contrasting modes of poetry and poetics, with very different kinds of poets sometimes paired up in a single reading so that the difference between them would be clear (Fink 2012). The examples I have selected from the broader archive serve to illustrate what I have come to see as two discernible phases of the series (among possible others, depending on the selection of readers in any given year, and how one wishes to filter the archive). The first phase, during which contrast and difference are pursued in the programming selection, delivered a less focussed presentation of poetic diversity than the second. When George Bowering joined the Poetry Series committee and took a stronger hand in initiating programming of his own, the purpose of the series shifted from that of providing a sampling of "the possibilities of utterance that is more than parochial" to demonstrating and modelling the possibility of a new kind of *Canadian* avant-garde. Such a Canadian avant-garde, illustrated in exemplary events, would be built without anxiety upon American precedents and would be accompanied by models for an alternative kind of poetry community.

## Contending Modernisms: Models of Event and Community

In a retrospective essay on the Vancouver poetry scene of the 1960s, Tallman describes two distinct modes of contact that "American Modernists" had with Canadian writing. By American modernists he means a long and diverse American tradition of modernist, projectivist, proceduralist, and open-field poets that includes Pound, Williams, Olson, Duncan, Creeley, and even later, Spicer, Robin Blaser, McClure, and Mac Low. One example of contact between Canadian writing and this American tradition was Eastern Canadian, mostly Montreal-based (Layton and Dudek, but Raymond Souster of Toronto, too) and set in the 1940s and 1950s. The well-documented exchange between Creeley and Layton, for example, was limited in its impact on the latter poet, according to Tallman's account, because the emphasis of a writer like Layton remained an exteroceptive, ego-based humanism that was philosophically and formally resistant to the models of formal expression developed by these American experimental modes. As Tallman puts it, "Layton failed to move from perception, which fixes on the surrounding world, to proprioception, 'sensibility within the organism'" (1974, 69). While I do not posit Tallman's binary of exteroception and proprioception to distinguish Eastern Canadian and West Coast Canadian modernisms of the period, the weight of these categories can be heard to resonate to some extent in the SGWU Poetry Series as it took shape from the late 1960s into the 1970s.

The distinction can be heard, for example, in the categories and language used in the introductions to Robert Creeley before the two distinct readings he delivered, the first in 1967, the second in 1970. As poet-in-residence, Layton introduced Creeley (Fink 2012). Creeley's reading took place on 24 February and Layton would read in the series less than a month later (18 March 1967), suggesting that, in addition to serving as Layton's "farewell" performance, this segment of the series was also a staging of the significance of the Layton/Creeley relationship.[7] In listening to the introductory speeches of Layton and Creeley, one hears an articulation of mutual admiration without the acknowledgement of extensive influence on either side. Layton remarks in his introduction that "Mr. Creeley is one of the most honest poets writing today, and a very brave man, who knows the price that has to be paid for a good poem certified to endure" (Creeley 1967). In short, he casts Creeley as what Dudek would have referred to as "a craftsman," a poet invested in the composition of great, enduring poems. In his own pre-reading speech, Creeley acknowledges that he and Layton "have had a very long association," but he seems unable to articulate the significance of that association in relation to the practice of writing. If Layton's characterization of Creeley seems at odds with the process-oriented poetics he was becoming known for and exploring

with intensity at this time (Edelberg 1978, 137-43), Creeley's attempt to character-ize Layton in relation to the kind of poetry community Creeley had been work-ing to build with the *Black Mountain Review* is vague and ultimately truncated: "I think that the kind of community that, say, either Irving or myself in this way were involved with was …" Creeley begins to explain; but the sentence is never completed. Instead, he simply states that Layton "was a very decisive contributing editor for the *Black Mountain Review*, and was really a very decisive friend all those fifteen years" (1967). Layton's contributions to Creeley's poetry community, or even to his own developing poetics, are not specified. Instead, we have repetition of the adjective "decisive," used to describe Layton as editor and friend, suggesting a figure who knew what he liked and knew already what he was. Layton was less a community member than a fully formed, autonomous entity. By contrast, for his second appearance in the series, Creeley was introduced (by an unidentified speaker) not as a bold poet hero and modernist craftsman, but as "a colleague of Robert Duncan's, and the late Charles Olson's," and as "a man whose poems are close to the process of living" and who will "give you information in his poems about this process" (Creeley 1970). That is to say, for his return to the series in 1970, Creeley is presented as a proprioceptive poet writing "moments" within the perceptive experience and placing this poetic method on display through the act of the public poetry reading. Between the presentations of 1967 and 1970, Creeley had been recategorized as a "process" poet, rather than a "craftsman" of enduring lyric gems. An extended analysis of Creeley's self-presentation in each of these readings (see Camlot 2013) reveals a polite correction of Layton's characterization of him in 1967 and an outright rejection of it in 1970.

One significant frame for understanding the modern poetry reading is that of oral pedagogy. The format of the poetry reading in the 1960s and 1970s would certainly vary from event to event and from poet to poet, but it was usually char-acterized by a synthetic combination of extemporaneous personal and expository discourse, and poems read from the printed page.[8] Public readings, interviews, artists' statements performed before an audience, and the printed transcriptions of such events (in the form of interview and essay collections) all functioned in relation to poetry in the 1960s and 1970s as part of what Stephen Fredman has identified as an emerging "existential practice—an art of contexts" (2010, 182). The public poetry reading functioned as a significant way for the poet to place his work into an interpretive context in relation to specific conceptions of poetic expression, process, and practice. Much of Creeley's 1967 reading, both in the poems he selects to read and the way he introduces them, is designed to teach the SGWU audience the limitations of Layton's understanding of Creeley's contribu-tions to contemporary poetry. Similarly, Layton's sense of what a poet should be

in relation to his audience and what he might have meant in casting Creeley as "a brave man" and a poet invested in paying the price to produce an enduring poem can be heard in his own meticulously plotted public reading held a month after Creeley's first visit.

Oral interpretation in the classroom was an important part of Layton's own early encounter with poetry and informed his sense of responsibility as a poet to teach his listening audience how to appreciate his own work. He approached his readers as a teacher speaking to pupils. The goal in his public readings was to communicate the meaning and power of the poem according to the formal principles articulated by the New Criticism, which approached the modern poem as a manifestation of unity by the accord, contrast, and interaction of emotional effects, described as a formally arranged "music of ideas" (Richards 1959, 293), expressive ambiguity in which "meanings are resolved into one" (Empson 1947, 48), and the merger of "wonder and irony" through the controlled use of "paradoxes" (Brooks 1947, 8, 10). Layton would funnel these aesthetic principles in performance through the strong and present voice of a poetic persona. In this way, the poetry reading remained, from Layton's perspective, a place to celebrate the experience, thought, and voice of the poet even when contemporary literary theory and avant-garde poetic practice was at work attempting to loosen the sway of the author over his text (Barthes 1988, 168). In listening to Layton read out loud, one hears a faith in the idea of the poem as a self-sufficient system, as language coming to terms with itself (through abstract New Critical concepts like "contrast" and "ambiguity"), but these formal concepts are mobilized in combination with a less-championed New Critical idea that (in the words of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* of 1938), "All poetry involves dramatic organization … every poem implies the speaker of the poem … the poem represents the action of such a person" (quoted in Geiger 1967, 7). Layton enacts the lyric speaker in reading his poems out loud, in the way he negotiates the relationship between his prefatory remarks and his reading of the poems themselves. The introductions for any given poem are very similar, adjusted slightly depending on his anticipated audience at each performance, but always delivered with the goal of explaining something about the origin and intent of the poem, as well as providing any information that might be necessary for a basic understanding of the semantic meaning of the poem (i.e., that the "happy gods" refer to Apollo and Dionysus in "The Birth of Tragedy," or that "Keine Lazarovich, 1870-1959" is a poem about his mother who had "a wonderful gift of vituperation" [Layton 1967]).[9] In presenting his poetry orally, Layton seems to split himself in two, speaking in his pre-poem speech as an earthbound pedagogue sketching out personal meaning and frames of allusive reference, and in his poetic recitation as a voice delivering patterns of

sound that underscore and are integral to the grander meaning embedded in the poem. While this split may be typical of the way many poets read their work, the lesson Layton hopes to convey in his pedagogical, grounded voice is markedly hermeneutical and aims to ensure an appreciation of the transcendent aspects of the poem when delivered in the voice of the poet.

In setting up his reading of the poem "Keine Lazarovich, 1870-1959," for example, Layton provides details about his mother's amber necklace, Romanian coin earrings, Jewish orthodoxy, and the pride she had in her dark eyebrows, to ground some of the details referred to in the poem. More significantly, he explains the import of the central image of the poem, that of the mother's "final mouth" that is described as "a curse," "A small black hole, a black rent in the universe / Which damned the green earth." He explains this image in terms of the relationship of sound to sense: "Certainly I learned the cadence of poetry from my mother's cursing. My mother would start cursing as soon as I opened my eyes in the morning and wouldn't stop cursing until I closed them at night when I went to bed. But the cadence was what interested me and I didn't pay any attention to the words" (Layton 1967). As he grew up, his spoken preface goes on to suggest, he learned to fuse this sense of the power of cadence with that of meaningful images—"auditory images," to use Richards's term (1959, 119)—the full import of which are enacted when he turns to read the poem he has just prepared his audience to hear. In his performance of the poem, he stresses how the aged mother is so strongly associated with the cursing mouth that it infuses the entire poem with a sense of the magical power of language as a vocal weapon that can cast a transformative pall over the world. To be a cursing mouth was still to have breath enough to speak and to have agency over the world, with words. This, at least, is the lesson Layton has prepared his audience to absorb. The lesson Layton will have his audience learn upon hearing him read is the key idea articulated in his poem, "The Birth of Tragedy"—that the poet functions as the organizing point of "fruition" and mouth for the articulation of "nature's divided things." As he reads, with pronounced prolongation of the *ou* diphthong in the word "mouth"— "I am their m*ou*th; as a m*ou*th I serve"—one hears the sacred vowel sound of Yahweh voiced from the widened mouth of the performing poet (Layton 1967).[10]

In strong contrast to Layton's approach to reading his poetry before an audience, which I have characterized as hermeneutical in its pedagogical motives and consolidated by the dramatization of a unified poet/speaker, was the performance delivered by American avant-garde poet, playwright, and critic Jackson Mac Low, who read in the series on 26 March 1971. Working according to compositional and performative procedures of chance operations, integrating previously tape-recorded events into the "live" event, and calling upon numerous volunteers from

the audience to help deliver his compositions, Mac Low's reading is designed to challenge the idea of the poet as a privileged, unified subject; to complicate the status of the poetic work as a stable artefact; to obfuscate the temporal specificity of the "live" event (by integrating recordings of past events into the present performance); to highlight audio tape as a medium of creation as well as documentation; and to enact temporary, participatory communities through the process of performance. Key to what I am observing here is the connection between the performance of poetic process (as opposed to the delivery of a perfectly finished product) and the modelling of participatory creative and social communities.

The first 20 minutes of Mac Low's reading consist of him playing pre-recorded poems read in other venues, sometimes reading along or in response to the played tape, and sometimes stopping, fast-forwarding, or navigating the tape reel as part of the present "reading." The delivery of "Word Event for George Brecht"—a poem-generating scenario that takes a single word or phrase (in this instance, the phrase "anti-personnel bombs") and runs it through a series of phonetic renderings, first successive and then randomized—is introduced by Mac Low as "a kind of poem that can be done on any words" and that was done, in the example that is played for the audience, "at a reading in New York where the Russian poet Voznesensky joined some American poets in an anti-war reading" (Mac Low 1971). While this original occasion of performance is audible in the recording, so are subsequent ones that have been captured on tape. Mac Low listens with the audience to the build of his pre-recorded audio palimpsest of poetry events and then builds upon it further, live in the present. In contrast to Layton's method of reading as oral pedagogy, this mode of performance resists the production or presentation of poetry as an artefact of aesthetic meaning, but rather highlights the multiplicity of iterations that the media of language, voice, and tape, allow. As Charles Bernstein has remarked, "the Mac Lowian systematic poem refuses the normal process of identification of a 'self' (voice, persona, sensibility) in the text as expressed or revealed" (2001, 252). The poem instead reveals the *possibilities* of language, self, and relationality through the circumstance of the event that structures, but does not completely prescribe, any given performance. Mac Low functions as a language organizer or facilitator during the subsequent pieces performed in the Poetry Series. The performance of the numbered "Asymmetries," for which he involves a dozen or so participants from the audience (that is to say, of members of the local poetry community), along with many of the subsequent works performed that night—including "Stanzas for Iris Lezak" and a poem derived from language found in *Scientific American*—are aptly described by Mac Low as "collages of various times and places, as well as spontaneity in this room here" (1971). Tyrus Miller has observed that this method of collaborative collage allows the poetic

artwork to function as a "larger analogy to anarchic forms of community" (2009, 11). The poet works in his reading as bricoleur and facilitator of a temporally destabilized event. The poem and its collective and mediated mode of performance incite an experience of cultural participation that highlights the contingency of speech acts and related forms of cultural or political action. While there are no letters to the student paper to indicate how Mac Low's performance was received, it would have been interesting to see how this media-conscious and participatory model of poetic practice and performance was understood by Montreal's defenders of the more synthetic and vocally consolidated mode of modern lyric that they associated with real (as opposed to "fake") poetry.

Attendees of the Poetry Series would have been prepared to some extent for Mac Low's anarchic performance when, the year before, Duncan came to read at Bowering's invitation. Bowering introduced Duncan by noting, "Warren Tallman says he's the best poet writing in the English language, and I'd probably go further than that. It's the reading we've been waiting for, most of us, all year" (Duncan 1970). Like Layton, Duncan assumed the role of lecturer as well as performer in his appearance. He explained and illustrated the significance of the poetic approach he had helped to initiate, which had become so important to Bowering as a poet and poetry organizer. Duncan spoke for seven minutes before he read a poem, explained the importance that Pound and Williams had had for his own poetry "group," described how his poetry was "allied to the collage" and how he felt that before the poet was a speaker he was "a weaver of voices"; he stressed the importance, for his own poetic method, of Alfred North Whitehead's organic and process-oriented philosophical dictum "that we create, in every moment that we live, a past and a future" (Duncan 1970).

In contrast to Layton's gloss on his own poetry, delivered to allow the audience's unhindered appreciation of his poems as fully realized achievements, Duncan's pre-reading talk highlighted the significance of the *process* by which the subsequent poem was generated and the way these experiments in process were shared by a group of like-minded artist-peers. Again, in the Duncan reading, and even in Bowering's opening comment about the "most of us" who had been waiting for Duncan to arrive, the performance of a poetics of process is offered as a model and occasion for the construction of a self-shaping poetry community—a model no doubt rooted in Duncan's formative readings to UBC students Bowering, Davey, Wah, and others, in Tallman's house back in the early 1960s (Faas 2001, 281-83). These were some of the lessons about the present role of the poet, poetic practice, and what these approaches meant for the poet's relation to a poetry community that Bowering worked to integrate into the Poetry Series during his stint as member of the series committee (1967-71). In Montreal, Bowering

played a significant role in transforming what had originally been conceived as an eclectic series that aimed to "sound the diversity" of contemporary North American poetry into something more defined and polemical as far as a program for the future of *Canadian* writing was concerned.

## A Canadian Avant-Garde: George Bowering in Montreal

Three years before Bowering's arrival in Montreal to assume Layton's vacant poet-in-residence post and well into his Tish activities, Bowering published an article in *Canadian Literature* surveying the youthful poetry activities for that year. Dividing his account into three categories—Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver—Bowering remarks that "Montreal has long been the main centre of Canadian writing," and "there now live some of the best of the younger poets" (1964, 55). He proceeds to consider and describe the techniques of three young Montreal poets, K.V. Hertz, Seymour Mayne, and Michael Malus. This first third of the essay suggests a deep respect and even fascination with the paternal figures of modernism—Layton and Dudek—overseeing these recent youthful activities. As the essay continues, though, Montreal shifts from having "long been the main centre of Canadian writing" to having become something of a "has been" when compared to the recent poetry activities of Vancouver. Bowering writes, "Probably the most notable phenomenon in Canadian poetry recently has been the emergence of the West Coast" (60). By 1967, when Bowering moved east, this assertion would be tested against what he found in Montreal. By 1974, when he returned to Montreal to give a poetry reading after having been out West for three years, this assertion had become a certainty in his mind. As he puts it in the introduction to his former SGWU student Artie Gold's first book, *cityflowers*: "When I moved to Montreal in 1967 it was with a head full of reveries about the great days of English-language poetry in the city, the forties feuds and the fifties, that delta fanning out full of little mags and coffee shops. In the sixties it was all gone, the avant-garde gone to Vancouver and Toronto. New Wave Canada never splashed as far East as Kingston" (Bowering 2010, 11).

One of Bowering's goals as a member of the Poetry Series organizing committee was to bring the lessons he and his peers had learned from exposure to certain late American modernists while in Vancouver in the 1960s and their subsequent experience in channelling "the American influence into a Modernism of their own devising" further east than it had yet travelled (Tallman 1974, 66-67). His curating of the series was aesthetically, pedagogically, and polemically focussed. He even referred to the information notices disseminated to inform people about the readings he helped to curate as "propaganda sheets" (Hindmarch 1969). In

addition to bringing avant-garde Canadian poets to Montreal, Bowering initiated invitations to several influential Americans as well. Bowering read with Victor Coleman in the spring semester (3 March 1967) of the first year of his post at SGWU. He then served as host and introducer to many of the visiting poets during the next four years, beginning with bp Nichol in 1968 and including Earle Birney (23 February 1968), Jerome Rothenberg (September 1969), Allen Ginsberg (November 1969), D.G. Jones and Eli Mandel (7 February 1969), Ted Berrigan (4 December 1970), Al Purdy (13 March 1970), Joel Oppenheimer (3 April 1970), the Duncan reading I have already mentioned, David McFadden and Gerry Gilbert (15 January 1971), and Kenneth Koch (19 February 1971), among possible others.

In introducing Berrigan, the first of several New York School poets Bowering booked—Koch being another—Bowering refers to the newly defined program as a "kind of avant-garde series" (Berrigan 1970). As a result of this new explicitness in defining the direction for the series, the students, faculty, and poets in the audience were exposed to performances of long poems, open forms, and other poetic alternatives to the short lyric modes that continued to dominate Montreal poetry through the 1960s. Now the audience heard David Ball reading his long piece "The Boring Poem" in its entirety, George Oppen reading nearly his whole *On Being Numerous* without intermission, and Allen Ginsberg chanting Hare Krishnah for 30 minutes prior to an hour-long performance of his musical adaptations (voice and harmonium) of Blake's songs. The younger poets in attendance at the readings—some Bowering's students and future Montreal poets and poetry organizers, like Gold and Endre Farkas—were being shown not only that poetry could be different from Montreal-based modernist precedents, but that these alternative models were available to them for the purpose of local emulation and extrapolation, just as they had been for Bowering at UBC in the 1960s (Bowering 2012). Key lessons included how the poet could function as an emblematic vehicle of the creative process and how the poetry reading could function as a force of collective, poetic participation. Where the first phase of the series provided exposure to variety, this second phase was framed as a sign of potential transition for English-language poetry in Quebec towards a new kind of Canadian avant-garde—one that embraced American open-field poetics but, at the same time, made something distinctly local of it. Bowering brought with him from Vancouver Olson's idea that you should "dig where you are at the moment and know more than anyone else does" and attempted to use his portion of the programming in the Poetry Series to illustrate how this might be done (Bowering 2012). In the end, however, Montreal was not amenable to digging for him; rather, it was a concrete island (as he would call it), with no discernable community or movement of poets. He left Montreal in 1971.

When Bowering returned to give one of the last readings in the series at SGWU in 1974, after a year on a Canada Council Grant and two years teaching at SFU in Vancouver, he brought with him a full-fledged alternative version of what the poetry book, reading, and community could be and modelled that for the Poetry Series audience in his own performance. Before the reading even begins, Bowering tests the microphone by pointing out that Al Purdy is in the room and noting his close relationship to members of the audience: "Oh, I just did a review of Al Purdy's new book of poems so maybe I'll just start off reading that. [Laughter.] I said I liked it, Al. [Laughter.] I'm related to practically everybody here" (Bowering 1974). This mic-test speech (spoken before he is introduced) allows Bowering to position himself as one who had been thinking critically about how certain, explicit models of Canadian poetry (i.e., Purdy) stood in relation to the possibility of other Canadian forms more obviously influenced by the American avant-garde. Further, his idea of being "related" to his audience carries over into the model of the reading as an inclusive atelier performance that Bowering develops as he continues.

Bowering opens with a reading of the long narrative poem "Desert Elm," and then says, "I was going to go into *Autobiology*, but I'm just going to jump right now into one section of *Curious*. I'm going to read the Jack Spicer part for Artie, and then I'll—no more favours. *Curious* is a—that's one of the books that's coming out this week. It's about, it's a book about poets, sort of, and this one's about Jack Spicer, who Artie digs." In choosing to read the poem about Spicer, Bowering gets to tell the story of his own personal encounter with that poet in the weeks before Spicer died and to give a poetic shout-out to one of his former students, Artie Gold. Already, in reading "Desert Elm," Bowering has told a story about the genetic, developmental, and geographic relationship he had with his father, noting in particular moments of apprenticeship, as when his father taught him how to hold a hammer, or how to climb a ladder and pick apples. One of the points of these vignettes in this reading context is to illustrate that "relation" grows from the sharing of knowledge and technique: "that is how one becomes acquainted, working together" (Bowering 1974). This model of relation is one of the components of Bowering's entire performance and is presented as a distinct mode of social and poetic practice that he had tried to bring to Montreal and has come to inhabit fully since leaving. It is a mode that stands in contrast to the Montreal scene he left behind, described in his book *Concrete Island* as consisting of "lonely Montreal poets" standing "without community" (Bowering 1977, n.p.).

The implications of this contrast between distinct poetic modes and community formations become especially clear in the remarks Bowering makes prior to reading from his work *Autobiology*:

> Okay, this is—*Autobiology* is a book that came out, two years ago this month, actually, '72, yeah. And I started writing it in Westmount as they say and finished it in Kitsilano. I started writing it in an expensive flat in Westmount, and finished it in a commune on the edge of the water in Vancouver and it's a story about, as it suggests, it's a story, it's a book, it's poetry, it's prose, it's something about things that have changed me in terms of my head but first in terms of chemicals and physiologically, changed my body literally and so on. So I'll just, I'll read portions of it. I toyed with the idea of reading the whole book, it's the sort of thing we do in Vancouver, like we sit down and read the whole book, and this was published the same day as Stan Persky's *The Day*, a book called *The Day*, and it's the same length, about a hundred pages, and he read *The Day* and we took a break, and he read *Autobiology* and then we took a break of a couple of hours and he read *The Day* again. But that's sort of—that happens a little—it's a little easier to take when everybody is kind of a volunteer anyway, when everybody in the audience has known all the time that this was being written and that it was going to be read, the whole book. So I'll just read parts of it so you get a taste of it. (Bowering 1974)

Bowering's prefatory remark is revealing in the connections it makes between geographical location, poetic philosophy, and community ethos. If one were to define Layton's reading with reference to a book, that book would be a *Selected Works*—a compilation of the "greatest" poems that have defined him over his entire career. In presenting his works in this manner, complete with introductory self-references made in the third person—"no Layton reading would be quite complete without this poem" (Layton 1967)—Layton developed a format of the poetry reading as a presentation of polished gems originating in moments of solitary genius to an audience that would be taught to appreciate them as such. By contrast, Bowering applies fluid generic categories to his work ("it's a story, it's a book, it's poetry, it's prose") and identifies the formal category of "the book" as the materialization of certain parameters around a period of creative production that emerged as if organically within a located literary ecology. Thus, Bowering's distinction between lyric and book represents a larger distinction in his mind between Montreal and Vancouver, and the accompanying community conditions for literary production and dissemination that each city could provide. As Bowering remarks, the audience members in Vancouver function as a collective of "volunteers" in relation to the creative process of individual community members. It is not unusual for poets

to read books out loud to each other in their entirety. This kind of experiential audience-member was not awaiting mysterious and perfectly formed lessons from the poet-teacher, but was a volunteer apprentice listening to the performance of a work he or she had been a part of throughout the process of its creation. The two reading styles represent different kinds of pedagogy, one aimed at explanation and illustration for appreciation, the other at modelling for use and adaptation. Bowering stops short of reading the whole book (and in this sense, he is accommodating the "selection" model that had a strong precedent in Montreal), and yet his 1974 performance works to model for the Montreal audience an alternative method of creating and sharing work within a literary community. His reading champions relationality, community, and process over isolation, solitude, and an aesthetics of polish. Despite his championing of a Duncan-inspired Canadian poetics, however, the respect he shows for other modes of Canadian poetry works to adapt the kind of pedagogical motive I have identified with Layton to a new, inclusive model of artistic community. Bowering's approach, in short, seems an attempt to fuse the value attributed to the individual poet's experience (as manifest in poets such as Layton and Purdy) with a less anarchic, less contingent, more Canadian version of Mac Low's participatory community.

Bowering's understanding of the dominant poetic modes or categories to choose from—the "lyric" versus the "book"—associates the former with the habitual I-centred poems of Purdy or poets of the Montreal tradition, and the latter with open and experimental longer forms that try to move beyond consolidating voice and the unified lyric self. Bowering notes in his short monograph on Purdy that people began to talk in the mid-1960s of an "open form" and "epic flavour" in Purdy's poems, and then states, "that makes no sense to me" (Bowering 1970, 77). "When Purdy tells a story, one of his major features is the person-and-voice of Al Purdy, hence lyric" (Bowering 1970, 77). The presence of Purdy's ego is what defines his poems as lyric poetry in Bowering's mind. This said, in Bowering's performance in the series one hears an unapologetic adoption of American open-field poetic models combined with the observing mind and homey, colloquial Canadian idiom that characterized Purdy's approach to presenting his work. One hears an unabashed confidence in the possibility of being an American avant-gardist in the Canadian idiom with none of the anxiety about colonization that others expressed in response to the impact of Duncan and Creeley on Canadian literature.

Between 1972 and Bowering's return in 1974, the programming in the series became less obviously focussed on the staging of a specifically Canadian avant-garde and its significant American precedents, and featured fewer poets, due to a decrease in funding from the Canada Council. Organized poetry readings had

become ubiquitous across the country, and money had to be spread thinner to support them all (Fink 2012). The complexity of the Poetry Series is partly a result of the fact that the series was very well funded until the early 1970s and this allowed the organizers to showcase a diverse range of poets. The stress I have placed in this article on the significance of one segment of the series programming is obviously not the only way to emphasize the meaning of the series in relation to Montreal poetry of the period. One might develop equally interesting critical frames for the audio of this archive by focussing on, say, Kiyooka's take on Vancouver poetry as compared to Bowering's, Hoffman's New York selections, or the apparent choices and introductory framing of other committee members. One might focus on the significance of the different kinds of poet pairings the committee chose to stage at various times throughout the series. One might consider the Montreal poets and Toronto poets in relation to each other. One might focus on the women poets who read in the series, or the most traditional or most avant-garde of the readers, and in each case reveal different yet important insights about the function of the poetry reading as a site of cultural display and argument. One might interestingly compare this unilingual English reading series to adjacent French-language series in Quebec, or to later, multilingual series that emerged from the anglophone community. The Poetry Series archive in this sense represents a repository of primary source audio that awaits ongoing critical filtering for the purpose of revealing diverse narratives about the meaning of a poetry reading series in context.

### Outcomes: The Poetry Series in Relation to Contemporary Montreal and Beyond

In the period since the SGWU Poetry Series ceased in 1974, Montreal has been host to a great variety of literary reading series, some emerging directly from the models displayed in the university series, some indirectly or unbeknownst, and others arising from alternate points of influence. One of the first organized responses to the series was a reading tour of the local colleges (CÉGEPs) by 10 young Montreal poets.[11] In his editor's note in the anthology published to accompany the readings, Michael Harris comments on the recent practice of the colleges and universities "to bring into the city poets from elsewhere in Canada and America" (1975, n.p.). This college tour, and "the establishment of the series of readings at Véhicule Art on St. Catherine Street" in 1972, were designed to provide a regular platform for *local* voices. Out of the early Véhicule Art readings emerged a loosely defined collective known as the Véhicule Poets. The readings, performances, magazine, and chapbook productions of the Véhicule Poets (from the mid-1970s on) represent the most explicit continuation of the lessons learned from the process and community-oriented avant-garde models Bowering had brought

to the SGWU series. As Bowering wrote of being a young creative writer in Montreal in the early 1970s, "young poets looking for poetry were not given much of a chance to find it outside the living legends," namely, Layton and Cohen. The SGWU Poetry Series gave such poets somewhere to look and the Véhicule Poets looked with the greatest intent at that moment (Bowering 1993, 115). The nature of the activities of this group—consisting of Farkas, Gold, Tom Konyves, Claudia Lapp, John McAuley, Stephen Morrisey, and Ken Norris—is well documented in Ken Norris's edited collection, *Vehicle Days: An Unorthodox History of Montreal's Vehicle Poets*, in the long collaborative essay "The Véhicule Poets" (Farkas et al. 2007), and in "The Véhicule Generation" chapter of Victoria Stanton and Vincent Tinguely's history of spoken word poetry in Montreal (Stanton and Tinguely 2001, 129-37).

In addition to its influence upon these subsequent reading series and events, the precedent set by the Poetry Series as an occasion to stage poetic philosophies and community allegiances persists in the critical vocabulary of some Montreal poets today. Farkas and Norris have written that Bowering's "most important contribution to the new generation of Montreal poets was the institution of a series of readings at SGWU which exposed them to the diverse experimentation that was taking place across Canada and the US.… This would result in numerous local readings and the establishment of a number of little magazines and small presses" (2007, 44). Poet and essayist David Solway reports upon the impact of the Poetry Series in a different light, arguing that the lessons learned from Bowering and the poets he brought to town resulted in the establishment of a "school of pseudo-demotic poets" in Montreal during the 1970s: "Affecting the open-ended poetics of the Black Mountain bunch as it filtered through the West Coast anagrammatic Tish movement, a byke of these early Véhiculists unleashed what seemed to many observers a veritable haemorrhage of forgettable books" (2007, 83). According to Solway, it is only the non-participating observers of this allegedly superficial "culture of belonging" who come to define the future of anglophone Montreal poetry; the non-participants ultimately flourished in "a paradoxical condition of twice solitary yet richly communal productivity" (83, 86). Solway's distinction between true and false community—and, consequently, between good and bad poetry—is articulated in terms of public versus private modes of interaction and poetic self-definition. His argument for the poetic excellence of *The Jubilate Circle*—a group of anglophone Quebec-based poets published by Signal Editions (84)—depends upon their having been subject to "two generations of neglect" and "a kind of literary quarantine" that has inoculated them against any form of publicly organized poetic practice or socially homogenizing influence (83). The argument is an elaboration of Dudek's account of the dangerous effects of the

public reading upon literary composition, that it results in "the degeneration of poetry to a teeny-bopper fad" (Dudek 1969, 115), and seems to confirm Bowering's own sense of Montreal as an isolated non-community of poets (Bowering 2012). Isolation is embraced by Solway as an authenticating antidote to the kind of public and collaborative poetry community Bowering promoted.

Carmine Starnino's reiteration of Solway's argument in an essay on his mentor Michael Harris makes the link between poetry as a private art and literary authenticity very clear when he defines Montreal's "distinguished society" of "sidelined" poets according to their negative accomplishments of "having created no socio-theatrical buzz (unlike the Véhicule poets...)" and for having "shown no flair for the sort of platform dramatics that helped mark out Irving Layton's and Leonard Cohen's careers" (2007, 234). While Starnino presents a variety of categories in his articulation of a laudable poetics that are reminiscent of the New Criticism's vocabulary (235, 244), it is clear that the sounds he hears in his reading of a poet like Harris are not uttered in a platform voice. Rather, the "plainspeaking argot" of Harris's poetry is defined as consisting of "a kind of anti-style" (247) and is thus aligned with an authenticity defined by anti-theatricality. The SGWU Poetry Series is one historical phenomenon that helps to explain the tenor of such neo-formalist arguments as they have emerged from Montreal over the past decade or so. While the series cannot account entirely for the contemporary meaning of such contending poetry anthologies as Carmine Starnino's *The New Canon* (2005) and Sina Queyras's *Open Field: 30 Contemporary Canadian Poets* (2005), it is fair to say that the origins of these rival arguments can be heard in the poetry readings and speech captured on tape from that historical series of events held at SGWU between 1966 and 1974.

Quite beyond its implications for the subsequent activities and methods of self-definition that characterize English-language poetry in Quebec, the Poetry Series archive raises a variety of interesting questions about Canadian poetics and literary recordings that are worth further exploration. What does such a series mean within the larger context of Canadian and North American poetry? While it certainly allows us to hear the way distinct and contending poetics were framed in relation to categories of national identity and community, and it provides clear examples of some of the key precedents that inform contemporary proceduralist and performance-oriented poetics in Canada, answers to such a question will be even more fruitfully developed when we are able to sketch out a larger map of analogous repositories across the country and continent. The audiovisual situation at SGWU may have been particularly amenable to the comprehensive audio capture of this particular series of readings, but a recent survey of English-language audio recordings of poetry held at archives and libraries suggests that "there

could be a sizeable body of archival poetry recordings in Canada that may be languishing, or in need of preservation or improved access" (Murray and Wiercinski 2012). Kate Eichhorn and Charles Bernstein have both recently remarked upon the underuse of audio archives for literary research, Eichhorn citing the difficulty of working with such archives (2009, 185-87) and Bernstein noting that "the basic principles of textual scholarship have not yet been applied to the sound archive" (2009, 964). We still have some foundational questions to answer about how best to archive, aggregate, disseminate, navigate, and engage critically with documentary literary recordings.

My own effort here in articulating one historical narrative about the Poetry Series from the perspective of Anglo-Quebec poetics represents a preliminary attempt to engage with a specific kind of literary archive, a collection of literary recordings that documents a historical reading series. As scholars continue to work with literary recordings and explore the use of tools that can allow audio navigation, visualization, and manipulation that will make this archive (and others like it) accessible and useable for research, the basic principles of bibliographical and textual scholarship in relation to such a corpus can be established. Collections like the Poetry Series recordings may serve as useful case studies that will help us define best practices in the transcription of literary recordings, develop a poetics of reading and a precise critical vocabulary for articulating a prosody of poetic performance, theorize the poetry series as a cultural and sociological entity, and explore new methods of historicizing the poetry reading and poetic performance during the 1960s and 1970s, including adaptation of techniques used by oral historians towards the development of an oral literary history of these poetry events. The literary recording is a unique and underappreciated artefact of literary and cultural research. The Poetry Series archive represents one opportunity for humanities scholars to expand our understanding, not only of the history of poetics and performance in Canada, but of the technological tools and critical methodologies necessary to engage with the historical audio record of the cultural event.

## Notes

1. Fink, Hoffman, and Kiyooka initiated the series with consulting support from senior English faculty member Wynne Francis (Fink 2012). Layton served on the committee in his capacity as poet-in-residence until he was awarded a Canada Council Senior Arts Fellowship in 1967 and took a leave from SGWU (Compton 1967b). Following Layton's departure, Bowering took up the position of visiting-writer-in-residence in September 1967 (Clarke 1967) and assumed a full-time appointment as an assistant professor in the Department of English the following year (Compton 1967a). He served on the

Poetry Series Committee until his departure for Vancouver (and, eventually, Simon Fraser University) in 1971 (Bowering 1971). Other members who served on the committee periodically included English professor Richard Sommer and writer-in-residence Margaret Atwood (Fink 2012). Fink notes that one model for such a series came from his experience as a McGill student in the 1950s of a poetry series organized by Louis Dudek. Another model would have come from Kiyooka's involvement in readings organized by Warren Tallman and others at the University of British Columbia in the early 1960s (Fink 2012).

2.  Adelaide Morris (1997), Charles Bernstein (1998, 2009), Louis Cabri (2007), Peter Middleton (1998, 2005b), and Peter Quartermain (1998), among others, have recently aimed to define the poetry reading as a distinct object of analysis, while recent work by Middleton (2005a), Tyler Hoffman (2011), Laura Severin (2004), Lesley Wheeler (2008), Daniel Kane (2003), and Cameron Anstee (2009) has begun to place the role of poetry performance in historical context and render the poetry reading *series* visible as an object of scholarly study.

3.  Among the important Québécois events of the 1960s and 1970s was a series of public readings called Poèmes et Chansons organized to raise funds for the legal defense of founding FLQ members Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon. This series led into the organization of *La Nuit de la Poésie* held at Théâtre du Gesu in Montreal (27 March 1970), which featured 23 Québécois poets representing several generations and billed as the largest poetry event ever to take place in Quebec. This significant event, documented in Jean-Claude Labreque and Jean-Pierre Masse's 1979 National Film Board documentary, show the poets' awareness of and interest in the techniques of the Beat and Black Arts movements and reveals a very different sense of the connection between poetics and national identity than that heard in the SGWU Poetry Series (Labreque and Masse 1970).

4.  Henry Beissel, a professor at SGWU and a reader in the series, had shared a night in prison with Matthews when they were faculty activists at the University of Alberta (*Calgary Herald* 1964, 49). Now in Montreal, Beissel founded the Montreal Committee (a Quebec chapter of Matthews's Canadianization action frame) and organized "The Emergency Symposium on the Americanization of Canadian Universities" (1969) with the aid of Michael Gnarowski and Louis Dudek. In short, Beissel "was a leading Canadianization organizer" (Cormier 2004, 81, 71).

5.  Tony Tremblay has described how "opportune" certain of Pound's ideas were for Dudek's desire to counter strains of Quebec provincialism (2007, 95). For Dudek's correspondence with Pound, see Pound (1974).

6.  This essay was first published in Canada in *Open Letter* 11 (Fall 1973): 34-53, and then in the "Canadian Issue" of the American journal *boundary 2*, assembled and introduced by Robert Kroetsch the following year. See Kroetsch (2010) for his account of that special issue.

7.  After a decade-long correspondence, Creeley and Layton had finally met in the fall of 1962, when Layton came to give a reading at UBC where Creeley was then teaching (Faas 2001, 288).

8. For a discussion of the historical precedents in performance for mixing poetry recitation with expository lecture, see Wheeler (2008, 8-9).

9. This preparation and repetition is audible in a comparison of recordings of Layton reading these two poems at SGWU in 1967 (Layton 1967) and to an audience of secondary school teachers, members of the Carleton Board of Education, in Ottawa in 1972 (Layton 1972).

10. Yahweh is the name of the Israelites' God in the Hebrew bible.

11. CÉGEP is the acronym used for Collège d'enseignement général et professionel.

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