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Gerald Creede

From an interview with Aaron Vidaver and Karen Moe (Transcribed and edited by Jason Wiens)

[This interview took place July, 2000 at Corazón, Vancouver, following readings by Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, Maxine Gadd, and Clint Burnham.]

Creede: ...And then, one day in about 1983, I was bored, smoking a lot of pot, writing stories, getting rejected by *Capilano Review* [...aside re: Corazón and other drinking establishments in the area...] Most of the first readings I saw here were about 1980 – no no – '82.

Vidaver: And you met [Peter] Culley and [Kevin] Davies through a reading?

C: Yeah, probably not till late 1983 though. [...drunken chatter in back...] So in '83 I probably saw Culley and Norm Sibum, all these guys were around and I thought "I should start writing soon. None of these guys are very good." All these guys had university jobs at the time. Guys from Prince George, guys that lived up on Sechelt, started to advocate [...drunken chatter...]

V: So what attracted you to Davies and Culley?

C: Oh they were much better than anything I'd seen in about a year.

V: You mean their writing or them personally?

C: Plus their performance.

V: What sort of stuff were they reading?

C: Jeez you know Kevin was reading stuff from that chapbook that he had...it was all very hot stuff. And Culley was reading from the book called *Emerald City*. I liked them both, I thought they much were better than anything I'd seen...well, the only thing I really liked was Sharon Thesen...and I liked Al Neil.

V: What Al Neil did you like, you mean his poetry?

C: Well *Slammer*¹ was the first thing I saw. It was about the third or fourth reading I went to see at Octopus Books, and the first ones were Sharon Thesen and John somebody-or-other, crying about how stupid his students were, and there was hardly anybody there. And he was *so* hammered, and I had just smoked a joint in the park, and actually I was worried: "Oh shit, this is embarrassing, there's only seven people here and this guy's so hammered he's not gonna be able to read his stuff." This old man.

V: Who?

C: We're talking about Al Neil now. It was about the third reading I'd gone to see at Octopus Books, Brownie [Octopus owner Pamela Brown] ran the joint, there were about eight people there: Maxine [Gadd], Trudi [Rubenfield]....And so I thought "This guy's so hammered he's not going to be able to read." And then he started to read this story about walking to North Van, from *Slammer*, that's really great. He left the Waldorf, and walked to North Van across the bridge, really hammered and had a few small experiences. And he read it *perfectly*. And then he finished it and he could barely walk. And that's when I started liking him. Anyway, then I saw Peter and Kevin about a year later. And I met them at the Waldorf later. I knew Dorothy [Trujillo Lusk] by this time. And

so did Peter, we were talking poetry and he said something about reading *Don Juan*, by Byron, and I said "it's Don Je-wan." He said "no no." But the next time he was in town he said "I checked on that and it is 'Don Je-wan.'"

V: So how did you get to know Dorothy?

C: I met her at a reading. She invited me over to a party at Scott Watson's. That was an important place; he had lots of parties where there was 50 or 60 people: poets, painters. I didn't know how much that ever amounted to anything about collaborations or anything. Never for me. But a lot of funny talk and a lot of drinking. So I met them both there, and I probably met Kevin and Peter four or five months later. Dorothy wasn't writing.

V: And where were these readings?

C: At Octopus Books. It's on tape, if you can't remember it's on tape. And that was the best place. The only other place was the Literary Storefront. And I sort of liked that wacky woman who wrote that horrible poetry who ran the place. She lived on Salt Spring Island for years. She wrote wacky stuff, but she was kind of cute.

So when I met them we talked, a few weeks later Kevin and Jan moved over, a few blocks away, we started hanging around more. Kevin mostly started giving me a lot of stuff to read and encouraging me to write more. I was just starting to write this thing from off-hand lines I had in my journal after reading...Kevin gave me *The Mind that Enters the Story*,² and sold it on the line "I gave this to Culley to read, he read the first three lines, threw it across the room, and said this is a bit too postmodern for me." He later came to read and love it, a couple of years later. And so [Jeff] Derksen put me in *Writing* 1 when they went to the small format,³ and I expected they would be my publishers.

V: What's that?

C: I expected they would publish my stories which I was producing every few months, as their 'experimental language writer.' When they rejected my second one...I was starting to know [Gary] Whitehead by this time. I'd submitted to *Writing* 4,⁴ didn't hear anything for weeks. Every time I saw Derksen at the bar he didn't say anything about it. I didn't say anything about it. Finally I was taking a walk, smoking a joint with Whitehead and he says "We're not going to publish that piece." So I said "Ok, fine, I guess we're having fun again." And so when this colloquium came up they didn't ask me to that, when they really needed another language writer. And so Derksen and I drifted further and further apart.

V: So how did the phrase 'leisure poets' come into play? It was a reaction to that 'work writing' conference in '86?⁵

C: Leisure poets mostly came around because Culley and I weren't doing nothing except listening to music, getting high, and writing. But we were both writing every day. You know I'd write for three or four hours while I smoked pot.

V: But it must have been a reaction to something, & I thought it was a reaction to work writing.

C: Oh no, it must have been the starting point of this joke. And one day, it mostly came from Kevin, he was always doing something. Peter and I were just talking about how we didn't do anything that day...we got out of bed, watched *Rockford Files*, then we watched *Hawaii Five-0*, then we smoked a joint and wrote for a couple of hours.

V: *Rockford Files*?

C: *Rockford Files* and *Hawaii Five-0*. Not together...

V: Yeah yeah yeah -- subsequently.

C: Respectively. I was living with Jan by this time...*Rockford Files* was on at 10.

V: What's that?

C: *Rockford Files* was on at 10.

V: So you'd get up at 10 and watch...

C: Oh 9:45. I didn't like to smoke a joint until I'd been up seven minutes.

Moe: How many minutes?

C: Seven minutes, eight minutes. But we were writing every day. But Davies was always doing more. And Peter and I were laughing, we didn't do anything all day except write a bit, & we were just real leisure poets. There were work poets whining about the line or the forest industry, but we didn't really do anything today. Did you ever laugh when you say to Kevin "what did you do today?" He says "nothing except I went to the library for two hours, and I went to the Art Gallery, and then I had an hour discussion with Colin Browne about the next issue of *Writing* magazine, but I didn't really do anything." And we said "you're not a leisure poet!" And that's how that started. I think I said it first. And Peter heartily agreed. Or he said it first and I heartily agreed. But it was just a joke.

M: So what allowed you to be a leisure poet in terms of economics?

C: Well, basically both our girlfriends had jobs and we were on welfare. Which was something we had to accept and...but I tried to work, I worked for years....

M: Well my God we don't have any real subsidies for artists except for little piecemeal things here and there...you have people in your life that are with you and also you can get that welfare cheque and you can be a leisure poet.

C: But you know it was just a joke except we would do it at the Kootenay School of Writing when we were drunk, you know, "We're leisure poets, you guys are jerks!"

M: We were jerk poets?

C: No, *they* were jerks. They had ethics, they had philosophies, and they had mostly formulas for construction, that we felt we didn't have because [the writing] was all based on the *Rockford Files*.

[...]

V: I think that the concept 'leisure poets'...could be taken quite seriously as a way to read your work and Culley's work.

C: Well my poetry is never about getting by in life, getting by monetarily in life, trying to find the lifestyle and the occupation that would support their poetic sensibility. Culley and I were never writing about that. Because we weren't doing that. We admitted it. And you know I was doing the best I could to work occasionally...but I never work very well. I worked for five years at the bookstore...

V: At Granville Books? When was that again?

C: About 90 to 95.

V: But it strikes me that at least some of the writing really glorifies work unnecessarily. Not your work, I'm thinking about Jeff Derksen's poetry, there's a kind of orthodoxy about the dignity of labour.

C: No he believes in that. He's a mormon, you know, he's a puritan when it comes right down to it. He's the best writer around here.

V: You think so?

C: Hmmm....

V: What about Deanna Ferguson?

C: Hmmm...also a very good writer but....Well you know she doesn't sell her success like Derksen. And the more success she gets, the more she rejects it. She's always willing to accuse somebody of selling out, at a line where I see, well, there's a buck there, you know? There's a buck there so I go for it, for myself, I stretch my ethics. When somebody offers me money, the state I'm in, there's no way a hundred dollars is going to jeopardize what I *actually* believe, and I need the hundred dollars. And to concede a little niceness to get a hundred dollars, I got no problem with. But Deanna would.

V: What do you think of her take on Lenny Bruce?

C: Well, it's interesting. It's kind of esoteric but it's interesting. Lenny Bruce isn't that great a...he's got a small cult following, a few top pieces, like every comedian. I think he's wonderful; I think she wrecks a lot of that, the one hour and a half video that is intact, after he can't perform anywhere but San Francisco, a few months before he died. His whole act is just riffing on his bust. But it is certainly the preamble to a lot of language writing. It conveys that apparent jump in subject matter which is always very obvious, and it goes back and forth until a third one, and to understand him, he's not desperate, he's not ramble, he's not, he is just surely riffing when he spends a lot of time slipping around, that's pretty high. And she writes about that. Why are you interested in that?

V: Well it looks like, my prediction is that, well, these various people like Clint Burnham and Jason Wiens seem to write on you in relation to Deanna, your writing in relation to Deanna's writing, and to Dorothy's writing.

To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. -- Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 4

C: All of us have been pretty good pals for a long time.

V: Do you have anything to say about Dorothy's *Redactive*?⁶

C: Very readable, very fun. The best...I mentioned her, didn't I mention her when I said the best writer in...?

V: I don't know.

C: She came out with *Redactive* in a few months. As far as I know she'd written 100 poems already...

V: Well, there was the earlier chapbook, right? I have it right here.

C: Well, *Redactive*'s part of it, right?

V: "Oral Tragedy."

C: "Oral Tragedy" is part of it. But this is a few months before that. And "Oral Tragedy" was the first thing she wrote I think. But that Tsunami Books was another story altogether.

V: You want to say something about that?

C: Bremner was just, 'let's do books, let's do books, I thought we were talking about books.' He wanted to start Tsunami, a few weeks after we'd been reading together and talking about poetry. And prose. I knew he was [unclear] with it. He got Árni [Rúnar Haraldsson] to do a book, and Kevin to do a book, and one of the last times our group met together, which we were doing every week, every two weeks, he was doing my book and he said "What colour do you want the cover?" And he took me out - I wrote about this somewhere - he took me out, and then I said - this is when I had the job at the Hall of Fame - I keep a journal that I sometimes draw on. I took a picture and reduced it to its smallest size, and I thought that made it really interesting, because it made it abstract to me. And so I said to Lary "I want this put over one of the pieces as a sort of illustration." And he says "yeah yeah, sure." The book comes out, and it [the illustration]'s two pages. I said "Lary, I asked you to put a small picture." He said, "Well I'm the publisher, and I thought this was better." And so that was the last time I dealt with Tsunami Books.⁷ I guess he moved to Japan after that.

V: He's back now.

C: He's back now. I hope this isn't published, I'm in real trouble. I'm worse than Truman Capote.

¹ Al Neil, *Slammer: Stories*. Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1981.

² The book Creede refers to here is Clark Coolidge, *Mine: The One That Enters the Stories*. Berkeley: The Figures, 1982.

³ It is unclear exactly which issue Creede refers to here. *Writing* went to a smaller format with issue 23 / 24 (Fall / Winter 1989), when Jeff Derksen took over as editor from Colin Browne. In that issue Creede did publish "Close to Naked," a collaborative piece with Nancy Shaw. However, *Writing* had also earlier switched to a smaller format, again coinciding with an editorial shift (from John Newlove to Browne), with issue 7 (1983). This would account for Creede's mention of Gary Whitehead, who is listed on the editorial board during that period (issues 7-22) of *Writing* but not on the subsequent and final editorial period. It would also account for his recollection of the 1985 New Poetics Colloquium as occurring around this time. However, Creede did not publish in issue 7, and would in fact not publish in *Writing* until issue 10 (Fall 1984), with his story

"lark molt."

⁴ Again, note that this number may not be accurate.

⁵ "Split Shift: A Colloquium on the New Work Writing" was sponsored by the Vancouver Industrial Writers Union and the Kootenay School of Writing, and held in August 1986.

⁶ Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, *Redactive*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1990.

⁷ Not entirely accurate. Creede sounds here like he's talking about *Verbose*, a Tsunami Editions chapbook from the late 1980s. He would later publish the perfect-bound *Ambit* with Tsunami in 1993. However, *Ambit* was edited for the press by Michael Barnholden with help from Jeff Derksen rather than by Bremner.

Darren Wershler-Henry

Fly It Like the Freak Flag

[a response to: derek beaulieu's "i was being reduced to what i couldn't recognize: an open letter to darren wershler-henry on 'from scars for kathy acker'" (endNOTE #1)]

Dear Derek:

You're right. I haven't *done* much concrete since *Nicholodeon*, and with good reason. Every time I picked up a Writer's Forum publication I discovered, to my increasing dismay, that Bob Cobbing and his merry men had pretty much covered the bases that I was merely sweeping off, sometimes 20+ years earlier. In many respects, *Nicholodeon* was, as many first books of poetry are, an apprenticeship work – a demonstration of skill and technique and lessons well learned, but short of real innovation. And, as Cobbing noted in his interview with Stephen Smith, if you can't add something to the quality of contemporary poetry, there's sure as hell no point in adding to the quantity.

'from *Scars for Kathy Acker*' (hereafter 'Scars') may be an exception. I think it holds up reasonably well to criticism, moreso in the broadside version than the version in *boundary 2*. The version published there was a study from what was originally intended to be a series of explorations of the poem as 'nonsite.'

'Nonsite' is a term I swiped from Robert Smithson, whose writing has more to teach contemporary poets than the work of most continental poststructuralist theorists (and not just because he said a lot of the same things first, in a North American context; he's also about a zillion times funnier than, say, Habermas). Smithson, though, was a dialectical thinker; his 'nonsites' were the in-gallery abstractions of remote, primary sculptural 'sites' like the Spiral Jetty. What intrigued me was the possibility of a series of nonsites that refer to each other without any site or ur-text... kind of a Deleuzian take on Foucault's archaeology, retrofitted for use by poets.

So: all poems in this series of nonsites had the same title: 'from *Scars for Kathy Acker*'. A series of signs without any referent but each other, related by scale (again, in Smithson's sense, scale is the fractal quality that good art has – you can move in or out of magnification and still find plenty that's of interest). Other 'nonsites' from *Scars* appeared in *Essex*, and were part of a gallery show/reading in Buffalo, staged by Scott Pound and Bill Howe with the help of the SUNY Poetics program and the Rare Books Room of the SUNY library. They're quite

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endnote no.2 page 6

different than either the version you reprinted or the broadside edn...

Anyway. Kathy Acker was a hero of mine for many reasons (her album with the Mekons excepted; what a load of crap), but largely because she was an active, irreverent reader. She engaged with Burroughs, Gibson, Bataille, Dickens and so on in a manner that I had hoped to emulate to some extent with *Nicholodeon* (important political differences resulting from her being a woman writer formerly engaged in the sex trade dealing w. the work of canonical male writers and me being SWM dealing w. the work of a canonical male writer duly noted). And I engaged with her obituary, and a favourite passage of her own work (from near the end of *Empire of the Senseless*) in the same spirit, 'plagiarizing' and cutting up in pretty much equal parts.

The overall image is a repeatedly scanned, then repeatedly shrunken and enlarged in Photoshop, treatment of the *Globe*'s obituary for Acker. When it was smoothened to my liking by this process, I chunked the whole thing into Streamline, traced the outlines, then threw the outlines into Illustrator. The smaller text that streams down the middle (from *Empire*, a section detailing what 'I' the narrator wants to be done with her body after her death) was set on a path in Illustrator and tweaked until it fit properly. The whole process was supposed to emulate both biological scarring and the kind of architectural infill that Lebbeus Woods writes about as a 'scar' in *Radical Reconstruction*. The idea was to find a way to 'inhabit' a text in the continuous present without either glorifying the past or living in a utopian future. Jeff Derksen did a whole series of poems where he 'inhabited' works by other writers, and this was an attempt to do something analogous in concrete.

That sums up what you saw in *b2*, but that's only half of the process in the creation of the broadside edn. I photocopied the computer-treated piece onto sheets of vellum, then applied about eight layers of matte medium by brush to each vellum sheet. When the matte medium dried, I put the whole mess into a sinkful of cold water and peeled off the vellum. The toner transferred totally onto the vellum, leaving something that looks exactly like a big ragged sheet of dead skin with a tattoo on it.

I won't argue with your onco-linguistic reading of this piece, because I was in grad school in the early 90s, when all of that 'writing on the body' shit was in vogue – an unholy mix of French Feminism and tattooing and piercing SM culture that lent itself very well to the corpus/corpse school of analysis. But I will say that *Scars* is as much about tattoos as it is about cancer, an affirmation as well as a memorial. The broadside edn of *Scars* was directly inspired by a photo I saw while researching a paper, a photo of this tattoo museum in Japan where the incredibly elaborate backpieces of dead Yakuza members had been preserved and stored in thin cases. Acker was a kind of literary gangster herself, a serious bodybuilder, with some substantial tattoos; *Empire* is dedicated to her tattooist. Tattoos always make me think of Ondaatje's poem 'The Time Around Scars' and the line about what it would be like to be wounded 'without the pleasure of a scar.' So what remains behind, what Acker couldn't recognize, is a kind of flayed backpiece, a trace of past wounds and pleasures. You can beat a tattoo on it like any other funerary drum if you please, or you can fly it like the freak flag. Under the circumstances, both are

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endnote no.2 page 7

appropriate gestures.

Since Scars, I've flirted with the idea of much, much larger lifts, because you can also use matte medium to meld together smaller components. But I can't resolve an idea as elegant as the Scars broadside, so I haven't done the work. Scars was an interesting piece for me because a lot of it was computer-based, but you'd never know it to look at any of the nonsites. That's one challenge, to make the means of construction disappear. The opposite is also something that holds some interest for me, the exploration of the computer as medium for a new concrete. But that's a whole different letter, isn't it?

DW=H, 16/08/00

Lawrence Upton
Coldharbour Portraits

1

Face of a sheep. Full face, head on and close up, becoming clouds, already fluff and without substance. White beard thick black pullover. One ear ring from an invisible ear. The other ear is a small darkness.

2

Of Mephistopheles, I think. Goatee chin divides a dress shirt. Ears decorative. The sounds they hear are rolls of velvet. Eyes fibre optic, through the snow, raising the temperature.

3

From the rear. Someone is taking him. From the rear, out of frame. Samuel Taylor Coleridge into Elvis Presley into a black-faced ram. Diorama threesome. A quiff of a raincloud puffs out of a powdered wig of dandruff. A big blockboard of haircut. The rest is painted black with a roller.

4

Despatch rider one way, chimpanzee the other. Two heads stuck into jelly. One skull. One life.

5

Earphones are the largest element. Sphere of the skull glimmers more than half transparent. Light from the west. It is daytime in the back of his head. I wonder what he's listening to. Hair short. Possibility of a beard.

6

All there was once has burnt up. His face is in woolly ashes. Jowls and a porous nasal cavity. Chin a frozen waterfall. Clouds in the eyes.

7

Her Royal Highness is accompanied by a rabbit. The rabbit is convincingly drawn. The Royal She is all hair and implication. Two ears stick up like a rude salute.

ryan fitzpatrick
moving

kinematics: n. the branch of mechanics dealing with the different kinds of motion that are possible for a body or a system of bodies, without reference to mass or to the force producing the motion.

My friend Leah Laxdal recently returned some of my work that she had critiqued and she made a number of comments about the impact/speed/acceleration of certain words/sentences within the text. How this kinematic critique factored into my own writing led me to this exploration. Speeding into impact: the effect *is* a reader effect. For myself as a writer, exploiting kinematics as a poetic "trick" involves exploiting the reader, waving the watch and snapping the fingers. But the primary problem with trying to exploit kinematic effects is that they are effects on the level of the individual reader and cannot be perfectly controlled.

Control and precision are two things i strive for in my own writing (i've been called the "math poet") but i realize that i cannot and honestly do not want to strive for a universal poetic. What i *do* want to strive for is a greater understanding of how readers react to certain formal tropes.

dynamics: n. the branch of physics that deals with the study of the motion of bodies (kinematics) and the relation motion and the forces producing it (kinematics)

Perhaps an expansion of kinematics into dynamics where outside forces can be considered. At a basic level, most poetry does move, around the page in directions depending on the reader's habits. The force of this movement comes from either the writer's pen (or other writing implement) or the reader's eye (sometimes both). But the writer writes and reads while she is writing.

As readers these kinematic effects occur to us all the time; some texts read as faster than others, some speed up or slow down. i can't help thinking then that there must be ways to push the pedal down and swerve the reader.

And that's just it, the force the reader applies to the poem comes from the text itself. i've heard people say that "you can read anything into a poem" but i just don't buy that. A precisely constructed text contains the reader's free play and controls how the reader plays the text. This is why a lot of poems we love discomfort us at first; when i read Gertrude Stein's *How to Write* for the first time i wasn't sure how to feel because the text kept shoving me around. Ditto for the third and fourth books of *The Martyrology*. The way texts like these make me feel show me that there must be a way to show the reader new ways to read, to push their eyes around, to slow and speed them up, to manipulate the force they have over the text and in turn force them to reconsider.

Lori Emerson

The mechanization of the poem is the imposition of the grid: notes on falling into Indra's Net.

1.

Rosalind Krauss offers a compelling argument that accounts for the initial appearance and continued popularity of stringently imposed structures in the production of art in terms of the manifestation of the structure of the grid in the visual arts as it first appeared in early twentieth century avant garde art practices.

Tracing its appearance back to pre-war Cubist painting, Krauss claims that the ubiquity of the grid "announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse" (9). This will to silence may function as both a spatial and temporal withdrawal from the realm of the real. Spatially, nothing could be more antipathetic to the enlightenment dream of accurate representation of the world than a work of art built up around a system of intersecting lines within a given space--the appearance of the grid in the twentieth century does not harken back to Da Vinci's visual treatises on accurate representation by way of a mathematically organized surface. Not only does the grid draw attention to its own constructed, and so arbitrary nature (because, logically speaking, in being made up of lines that could in theory be extended infinitely, there can be no boundaries inherent to the grid), but also, since it is purely artificial, the grid denies the natural/real world in favor of becoming its own microcosm of reality, its own self-supporting system of order in which all its constituent parts 'mean' only in relation to each other, within the strict confines of the grid. And just as the grid calls attention to its constructed space (which, actually, can be 'found' nowhere), temporally the grid also calls attention to the fact that it exists nowhere in time except in an artificially imposed, metronomic time.

2.

You would think that, in turning away from an art that tries to be a seamless, transparent representation of the world in favor of an art that emphasizes how we construct our sense of the world, or even on how matter is constructed, on its materiality, the grid signals a return to (or the desire to understand) the origin and presence of the world on a scale both smaller and more broad-reaching than the physical world of objects might suggest. And in a way it does. "The grid is an introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work; it is a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself" (Krauss 19). In this way the grid does call attention its own space, the space which it frames, and so emphasizes the materiality of this space. But the grid only gestures to an origin, a materiality that cannot be definitively pointed to: although its intersecting lines are the a priori of the work of art (they are themselves the origin of the work), there is no original grid; and while the space which the gridmaps is there, present, we can only assume it is there since it is always masked by the grid's representation of this space--and even then the representation becomes more about the grid's representation of its own surface than about the material surface on which it is based.

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endnote no.2 page 10

Furthermore, as much as the grid both calls attention to its own space and gestures to how this space can never be fully known, the fact that there are no boundaries inherent to the grid also emphasizes the space which it is framed by and so emphasizes the nature of all space. But, once again pulling away towards contradiction, this nature of space can only be seen as such if it is visually organized and represented in a way that self-consciously calls attention to the arbitrariness of such a representation--nothing is as 'unnatural' as a grid.

3.

Chance-generated poetry is based on a grid--it is mathematical, it is geometrical, it is "its own self-supporting system of order in which all its constituent parts 'mean' only in relation to each other, within the strict confines of the grid."

4.

It seems inevitable that poets using chance-methods of composition should turn to computers. As early as 1960 Brion Gysin was permutating his cut-up poems by putting them through a computer. Jackson MacLow now relies almost entirely on computers to generate poems such as "34th Merzgedicht in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters," which is the result of a text-selection program called DIATEST 4. John Cage, too, relies on a computer program to write his mesostic poems. Language poets Ron Silliman and Erin Moure have published books of computer aided/generated poetry as early as 1981 and as recent as 1999. And the group of writers associated with Oulipo ("Ouvroir de littérature potentielle") are becoming more and more synonymous with the use of the computer for the automatic generation of poems. In fact, although Oulipo practitioners have long positioned themselves in opposition to what they perceived as the "bogus fortunetellers and penny-ante lotteries" associated with chance-generated or aleatory literature, their use of formal constraint in relation to the computer is still very much related in principle.

The most recent addition to the lineage of text-generating methods is the growing presence and influence of on-line "machine-modulated" poetry. Undoubtedly, one of the more interesting on-going pieces of programmable poetry is John Cayley's "Indra's Net: or: Holography." The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'holography' as follows:

A pattern of language produced when the words of a given text are glossed, paraphrased, etymologized, acrostically or otherwise transformed, and such transformations are allowed to interfere with the words of the given text; a set of rules, a machine or a computer program which defines or displays such a pattern.

'Indra's Net,' on the other hand, is a concept originating in Hinduism; this net "was a metaphor for universal structure and was used by the Chinese Huayan Buddhists to exemplify the 'interpenetration and mutual identification' of underlying substance and specific form" (<http://www.shadoof.net/in/inhome.html>)

5.

Although Cayley's work is clearly related to hypertext literature, "Indra's Net" is both distinct from it

To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. -- Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 11

and an instance of it. In fact, if we think of hypertext as "a direct connection from one position in a text to another" (Aarseth), then Cayley's work--in being self-generating as well as reader-driven--is actually a far more complex rendering of the possibilities suggested by such textualities. By employing generative algorithms and aleatory processes, texts are created for a reader who can interact with the text, and create for themselves an entirely 'new' poem from an always constant original text. Given this level of interactivity that is built in to "Indra's Net," it is no surprise that selections from it such as "Book UnBound" have been set up either as installations in public spaces in which the texts are projected onto the walls and readers/passersby can interact with the text, change the direction of the "reading", access explanatory material on the texts; or as performance readings with "writers/collaborators performing with the literary object as the programmatological process generates new text" (<http://www.shadoof.net/in/inhome.html>). Therefore, the set-up of "Book Unbound" demands that all participants (reader, writer, performer) interrogate what it means to be a participant, what it means to be a reader, writer, performer--after all, in the case of the gallery installation, who or what is performing/reading? The programmed machine? The original programmer? Or is it the readers themselves who, in interacting with the poem, perform 'writing' 'reading' 'performing' 'programming' for themselves? Is it the act of interacting itself that is being performed by the human and the machine? Moreover, given that the installation piece that has been placed in some sort of public space (that has been set aside for 'art') is always changing, always generating new texts at the hands of 'ordinary' readers/passersby, it is also as if conventional notions of the gallery or museum space as a place of stasis and authority (in which institutionally approved single acts of artistic creation are chronologically catalogued, indexed and stored) are being interrogated at the same time as they are being imitated. That is, at the same time as works like Cayley's are engaged in the business of laying bare the ways in which we construct (ourselves, meaning, art, institutions etc), they are also engaged in the business of hiding/disguising their generative mechanism; "Book Unbound," for instance, is assembled (and re-assembled) algorithmically from a 'given text' that remains hidden from view.

6.

In being largely mediated (both presented on and generated by) computers, "Indra's Net," then, not only seems to suggest what well-schooled student of postmodernism might pityingly refer to as the impossibility of (as well as the constant, latent desire for) an authentic language with a firm and fully justified bond between signifier and signified (though this is in part the case), but, more importantly, it also seems to be the latest and most compelling, most exaggerated instance of an art that paradoxically embraces the supposed authority of scientific empiricism at the same time as it exemplifies a non-Aristotelian logic.

7.

Implicit in this is a simultaneous turning away from and embrace of 'nature.' Graphed on the screen according to an x and y axis, the poem is suspended in a realm of pure artificiality; "Indra's Net" appears before us

To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. -- Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 12

as an always-shifting, amorphous apparition with no material, tangible presence, existing nowhere in nature, nowhere in what we think of as 'the outside world' except in our heads as a structure that has no structure and so can only be imagined as something that defies representation by even the imagination. Even the extent to which the grid (on paper, on canvas) normally draws attention to the materiality and constructedness of its own space, of the language it maps and is mapped by, has been effaced and hidden away by the absence/presence of the glow of the screen that, in being subject to the arbitrariness of the flick of a switch, also denies us the possibility of ever being able to say, "Now, the poem is present. Now, the poem is absent." It is always neither. However, there is always the implied presence of the original "given text," the original (human) programmer who chose (partly by chance) this text and a particular algorithm, there is always the original source (the algorithm itself) which feeds the feedback loop. But, again, none of these can actually be found--they are always already mediated by something else.

8.

Implicit in this is a simultaneous turning away from and embrace of 'the human.' From the perspective of Donna Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs," this latest phase of machine-modulated poetry is simply another instance of the late-twentieth century's drive to de-nature-- "Any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no 'natural' architectures constrain system design. The financial district in all the world's cities . . . proclaim this elementary fact of 'late capitalism.'" (81) Since information technologies have taken on more processing power, becoming more and more complex, it is now possible for us to think of humans, to think of poems, as conglomerations that can be taken apart, re-combined, put together in new ways that violate traditional boundaries.

9.

"Indra's Net" is a cyborg. Interacting with it we become cyborgs. Our understanding of the world becomes one informed by the cyborg vision.

"A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction." (65)

"The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality . . ." (66)

"The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence." (67)

And, not unlike Haraway's cyborg that is "all light and clean because they are nothing but signals . . . eminently portable, mobile . . . as hard to see politically as materially" because "they are about consciousness--or its simulation" (70-71), the cyborg existence suggested (or actually perpetuated, brought on) by

To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. -- Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 13

the self-generating/reader-driven/interactive poem could point towards the perversion of its original intent suggested in part by the early twentieth-century avant garde--an everywhere present, insinuating "final imposition of a grid of control on the planet"--as much as it suggests a cyborg world that is about "lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinshianimals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (72). Not afraid precisely because the grid opens up the possibility of living the metaphor of Indra's net, of unfinding ourselves "'in' the dreamlike world that the Diamond Sutra describes . . . where there are no objects, only an incessant shifting of masks; where there is no security and also no need for security, because everything that can be lost has been, including oneself. Especially oneself" (Loy 250).

rrickey
saskatchewan

i.

ragtop burnt lines an empty sun
dull smoke glow over regina evening
outskirts meets centre
roads trace distance over and

slow swing curve
pass through without touch
creep along the edge
my only misfortune

soggy field memory
mosquitoes and burnt boundaries
palatable heat dusts tongue
slow creep along edge

pavement stings long broken lines
yellow after yellow
white salt sands a lone tree
desperate arc between

To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. — Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 14

ii.

forever leaving moosejaw
regina's perpetual horizons
estavan remains hidden
while all roads lead to weyburn

upon returns
clan gatherings three matriarchs
trace trees blood lines
strange emptiness alert

wascana walk
hand in hand we alone
prairie clichés ring through
in supposed city setting

two cut towers hold
movement away from
all roads go somewhere
prairie highway escapes

we curve slow along
lost generational narrative
storied plains wheat
thunderous footsteps away from

Stephen Cain

Fragment of a Letter to Jay. RE: Academic Poetry

... still researching away, will really have to start putting things down on paper soon if I'm to finish this thing this year.

Preparing for the Orono conference — the paper on Ginsberg and Charles Wright, you'll recall — I came

To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. — Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 15

across this quote from Doug Fetherling [re: Wright]: "*The Dream Animal* is a nice-looking edition of bad academic poetry, salvaged only by a few good images ..."

What does Fetherling mean by "academic" here, in 1968, in the *Canadian Forum*? Obviously, as you know, this word always triggers me, mostly because I tend to be called one myself and it's rarely used as anything but a pejorative term. I mean, really, have you ever heard anyone say that someone's a "great academic poet" or that what would revitalize the scene would be an influx of more academic poets? Who's the "best academic poet in Canada"? Who would want to be?

But the more I thought about it the more empty the term became. Who are the academic poets, and how are they defined? Merely by being part of a university staff? Do they have to be Faculty? What about college teachers, or students at the university? Can you be considered an academic poet without even being part of the University? And, more importantly (at least to me) does being part of the academic community, and being a writer, automatically make one an "academic poet"?

Fetherling's invocation, considering the rest of the review, seems to imply a dullness, a formal dryness and a generally conservative aesthetic. Certainly Wright was part of the university, but as a creative writing teacher/student, not as an English Literature professor. He didn't (probably doesn't) have a PhD, and his peers in the class were people like Mark Strand, or Charles Simac. Fetherling contrasts him with someone like Ginsberg (who did go to university, but isn't an academic poet, right?) who writes more liberated, political, spontaneous prosody. But then, wouldn't many call the LANGUAGE poets academic poets who, if not spontaneous, at least for the most part write texts that are political and certainly "liberated" from conventional signification?

Indeed, where would someone like McCaffery fit in this paradigm? He certainly has been characterized many times as an academic poet, but he's only really entered the institution in the last few years, and the notion of a "cool," emotionless writing style is quite belied by his performances with the Horsemen, or even his solo sound and performance pieces. Could we then contrast him to another "academic poet" like Bernstein, who holds a chaired position (and from what I last heard was up for a "distinguished professor" epithet to add to his letters)? Not quite McCaffery's equal in terms of passionate performance, but someone who's certainly done more for the development of poetry, both formally and politically, in the last 20 years than many "authentic," "street," or "people's poets," say Bukowski in the U.S., or Milton Acorn and Crad Kilodney here.

Despite what I've just said, however, I don't want to get into a rant about what is a "better" or "more legitimate" poetic aesthetic, but just show how the term breaks down when pressed into examining it in a binary way. Think about some of the other Canadian writers typically labeled as "academic poets": Frank Davey, Chris Dewdney, Nicole Brossard, Dennis Cooley, Christian Bok, Daphne Marlatt, Robert Kroetsch, or Stephen Scobie, just off the top of my head. Apart from their university affiliations how much do they really have in common, either

stylistically or politically? Now consider those rarely called academic poets and the fact that they all have post-graduate degrees and have taught at universities: Atwood, Bowering, Ondaatje, Lynn Crosbie, or Birney. Then you have those that try to play both sides at once – the academic versus the "subversive" – whether that be through the utilization of dialect, pop culture, or radical politics – and here I'm thinking of people like George Elliott Clarke, Clint Burnham, Adeena Karasick, Jeff Derksen, or Darren Wershler-Henry. I'd probably put myself in this camp as well, but hey you have an MA too! And aren't you the small-press craftsman, sticking it to the fat cat publishers, making beautiful subversive books at half the cost? The successor to the likes of Nelson Ball, Nicky Drumbolis and jwcurry? And aren't at least the last two extremely suspicious of grad school wankers like ourselves?

As usual, the presence of bp looms across this debate like the shadow of an H against a bookstore wall. A "people's poet" or an "academic poet"? Certainly he was both populist and elitist in his writing, but doesn't his collaboration with McCaffery in the TRG suggest that the bridge between these two modes is easily accommodated. Wait, there I go suggesting that there's a binary there – the fact that there was no bridge to cross with Nichol demonstrates that the gulf never really existed!

In our experience, isn't the academic/people's distinction really only brought about by opportunistic, unskilled, and ahistorically-situated writers, looking to cash into a certain cultural cache, and when not successful, blaming it on the so-called privileged elites. Choose your enemies here: in Toronto, I assume you'd agree that it's people like Meker and Deahl (who've appropriated Livesay to their cause posthumously and are now probably digging up the bones of Jones), Philip Arima, Jill Battson, Hal Niedzviecki or those that hang about the open-mic part of the Art Bar reading series. Other cities probably have their examples too, from what I've read there seems to be a vigorous contingent of this sort of thing in Montreal, probably Vancouver as well. But what do I know, I'm just a centralist Ontarian that has the gall to call his next book *TorontOntology*.

Speaking of which, I'm thinking of sending out another one of the sequences from that book before the "bar-code" version comes out, particularly inspired by the great job you did with 5x4 and

Jay Millar
a response to Stephen Cain's *Fragment of a Letter to Jay. RE: Academic Poetry*

Dear Stephen, hello:

Sorry I haven't managed to respond to your recent letter. A family vacation sent me off to do as little as possible for a week & a half, & the return to work was a little time-consuming as I tried to catch up on missed time.

Reid has been an absolute handful as well, having just turned two & is full blown into high jinx twoisms, complete with an endless stream of kidbabbles that I'm only just beginning to understand. Two steps ahead at all times, it seems.

Anyway, I've managed to find some time & would like to respond to your comments on Academic Poetry. The first thing I want to address is the quote by Fetherling. What comes to mind upon reading it is the word Alliance. It's a more recently recognizable word thanks to the recent summer television blockbuster SURVIVOR, but the example provided by the show is one in which an individual managed to make himself more enduring [endearing?] by simply forming a group. This is particularly apt in this case, as The Academy is nothing more than an alliance, a place of learned & the learning, where the main concern is intellectual matters. It is possible that what Fetherling means, since he does use the word bad as the runner-up to academic, is that Wright's poetry is merely bad, that it could have been *good* intellectual material, but fails. I don't know. But at the same time, what may be going on is simply a remark that shows the reviewer's colours; perhaps he is choosing sides.

Choosing sides has been a long running tradition in the poetics of this country. Perhaps you can recall the introduction of Modernism to this country in the '30s. I am thinking in particular of A.J.M. Smith's rejected introduction to *New Provinces* & his introduction to *The Book of Canadian Poetry*. He first makes the claim that all Canadian poetry prior to his group is of inferior intelligence [this bold statement was of course replaced with the subtler "search for new forms" that was used in the actual introduction]. He then, in *The Book* sets out to systematically create two groups of poetry, the Native & the Cosmopolitan, ie. old school poetry & new poetry respectively. Again, the use of groups to make a particular vision stronger or more enduring, & I think that it is one that has never vanished. How different is this from the two camps of the school & the school of the unschooled that surfaced in the mid-'50s? The way I see it, Fetherling could be simply choosing sides, making a subtle comment as it were. I wonder if he would use the same terms today, writing as he would be from the University of New Brunswick, where he is currently writer in residence.

As one travels through the tunnel of time, there seems to be something of a pendulum swinging toward & away from the idea of academia. If you begin with Smith & his cohorts you have a cry for intellectualism, then in the fifties the rise of the school of the unschooled & the "beats" [though, like you I wouldn't call them unschooled] & then in the late seventies / early eighties the LANGUAGE writers who made reading work again. Today this whole thing seems to be moving toward a kind of a split between the technologically advanced & a kind of stubborn ludditism. Nothing to do with Academia per say other than it further helps to create an intellectual distinction. But anyway, to interrupt myself before I go off on something else I know nothing about, if you don't mind me saying so, I think you're being a little paranoid about this whole thing. I don't blame you though: the writing community in this town seems to be mostly about choosing sides, forming groups, picking a *style*. Don't

you find it invasive that we should have to pick sides? That others may choose sides for us simply by the words they choose to label us? Don't you find it annoying that fashion can dictate how we write? Your invocation of Nichol says it all: here's a guy who was reluctant to sit in any camp, who spread himself out as thin as possible. There's no way on earth that I would want to write the same way all the time: no poem has to necessarily be the same as the next. There is no room for extremity in the poetry world as far as I'm concerned, & I don't think you do either. I am always returning to what you once said: you didn't understand why it was necessary to choose between the ability to appreciate a Bok poem or a Souster poem [did I tell you he actually rolled his eyes when I handed him the Souster book I did for the *Scream*? Talk about choosing sides...] & as far as trying to organize the poetic community [a task that I'm sure will drive anyone who tries it mad] with labels like academic or subversive or people's or even simple things like good or bad, I like to think about Nicky thinking about Trumbolo's *Johnny's Got A Gun*, a novel in which some kid steps in a mine in Vietnam & comes back a piece of meat: no arms no legs, no sight touch hearing, nothing. Just a mind. Now what Nicky likes to ask is what if this happened to Picasso: would this make him any less of an artist? & you can do something similar by taking a person & putting him in a completely different context. Say Darren Wershler-Henry was a garbageman, or Curry had a nice cushy academic post, or what if McCaffery still drove a cab? Would this make them any less innovative in their respective ways? It might make them more innovative, provided they still wrote the things that they write currently. Or what if you take poems by people's poets & put LANGUAGE writers' names after them. Do they become LANGUAGE writing? I'm rambling a little here, but I think you get the idea.

I can't, however, think of how the notion of academic poetry could possibly "mean" anything at all, other than as something that can be used to stir up trouble. I don't find it a helpful term at all. But I suppose one has to get the ball rolling somehow. & I think I have to say that I don't quite agree with the idea of academic versus the subversive. I think it's more about the obscure versus the accessible. & when you get too extreme on either end it can be annoying. & when I say that there has to be something to get the ball rolling: I have to wonder now if innovation is necessary anymore. Progress has managed to become somewhat of an oxymoron: we're only just fooling ourselves. Write what you want to write; think what you want to think. If you want to share it with me I'll be waiting here, watching it all happen, enjoying myself. I'm not going to bother taking sides, even if I have in the past. & I believe that we should acknowledge the extremes, but I'd rather do it from a pleasant distance. I mean, I do have an MA [sic], & yes, I am an 'academic,' I guess, since I have those letters after my name, but I can't honestly say that I learned anything about poetry while I was in school; I learned 99.9% of everything I know outside the classroom. [& now I'm working at a job that has little to nothing to do with having an MA & I'm enjoying myself immensely.] Academia actually made me stupid in a way: I had no practical knowledge, still don't, but I'm learning. Trying to find that balance, as I always seem to be doing. Trying to find

the centre of things. Trial & error is undoubtedly the smallpress way: learn from your mistakes. When I was in school there seemed to be this weird space between how other students thought about books & how I did. For me, I was always lost to the thingness of books. Other people, [with the exception of a very select few, I suppose] seemed to think that books were only the containers in which there were ideas to be extracted, used, abused, whatever. Unfortunately, this usually included the professors, which resulted in various levels of disagreement. Now I'm working in an environment where the thingness of books prevails, not only their form but their cultural significance as things, & I have found I have been able to breathe again.

You know, speaking of enjoying myself, today I had to go through the literary press group catalogues to order new books for the store. & I was enjoying myself because I could choose whatever I wanted to go into the stock. & in these catalogues there were all kinds of writing, both academic & otherwise, & everything in between. & what was amazing was the sheer fact that all of these different kinds of poets & writers were suddenly in the same arena: they were trying to sell their wares. But as I read through them all, I could not find a single item that would be worthwhile having in the store. There was nothing in there that would sell; nothing that I could even *convince* someone to buy, even if I felt it was interesting to me. I couldn't figure out what all these presses are doing, pumping out endless volumes so that they won't sell [or if they do sell them, who are they selling them to? Libraries?] Maybe that's why I have always backed away from the biggie press ventures: publishing in magazines, getting my name "out there," trying to be "innovative." [might also explain why it's taken over three years to get my first "real book" out: no pressure] I just want to do my thing & share it with the people who want me to share it with them.

So now I find myself a few pages into the future & I have to stop. It's late. Must retire. There's work to do tomorrow. I'm glad you like 5/4/4/5 so much; it's actually one of our best pieces. Hope you are well. Give my best to Suzanne, & hopefully I will see you sometime in the near future, perhaps when *Ghosts* is finally finished. I hear that some colour has recently made it onto cardstock.

Allbest,
JM.

Dean J. Irvine

Origins of Species

Please recommend me to the geneticist
you say discovered origins of phantom limbs
because I warm to yours
holding bones of ghosts
I'd ask him nothing more than
how to rub shoulder blades
without shivering with
pangs of breaking wishes
in my hands

I'd like a second opinion
about cocoons my stomach knits
whether butterflies
could haunt me awake
or nurse on raw nerves
I'm aware of their simple division
cells multiplying inside me

There are species you tell me dream
themselves monarchs
before they unravel mummied origins
and wince to hatch
their wishful snap of wings

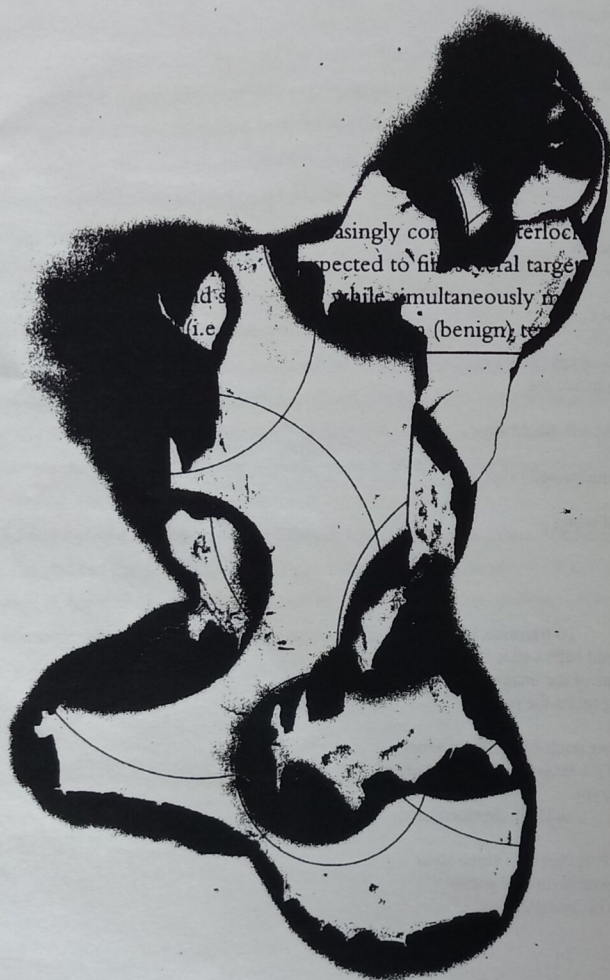
Hellenics

I'd translate, but
a poet can pick up bad habits after Pound:
alphabetic inflections of the image,
Hellenic icons acting up on the page---

after Helen cursed her poets blind, like Homer
who never dreamed his language in a chorus line
or knew Helen in Egypt
as H. D. dreamed hers;

after Ezra sailed to Paris with his troubadour
heart, watched her wraith ride the metro:
her plucked eyes in his homeless art.

Neil M Hennessy
from Spider Plots in Rat Holes: Readings in Riddell



To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. -- Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 22

derek beaulieu
work in progress

words

a rate in letters a label paper *those* words not *these* words eyes
filled with another key a little bottle latitude *was* or longitude
either that is water a little bottle & in for this so went up to
her chin in a printed book of rules the words said poor but they
were words to say

th

specific deferral another moment rest & caress rest breathing &
sound rest matte across parlance observing feet across instance
sound pointing to word stop.

a parting word turned away

movements in which it goes into movements in which it gives up

spear point

co-operative banking & labour schemes the word *Republic* spoken in
native dialect field glasses memories demanded yes marching on
the railway behind the back of society privately watch the night
within the bounds of its own class

M.A.

occupied words by shifts only seizing more forcibly heard tones
of voices although no words riveted attention wanders
imperatively her gift promised for two had raised a word in both
directions a word a phrase as though in argument seems again to
come to life so soon as the question

To a pint of mayonnaise add capers and chopped dill pickles. -- Alice B. Toklas
endnote no.2 page 23

upcoming readings of note in Calgary:

October 11 thru October 15, 2000 PanCanadian Wordfest -

includes readings by Wah, Badami, MacLeod, Dutton, Bowering, Harris, Rhodes, Turner, Joseph, Richler and tons of others. check out www.wordfest.com for details.

October 21 7:30pm - STRIDE Gallery, 1004 MacLeod Tr. SE

filling Station presents rob mcLennan and Colin Morton

October 25 TBA - Annie's Book Salon

Colin Morton

October 26, TBA - University of Calgary English Dept.

nathalie stephens

October 26, 7:00 - The New Gallery, 516D 9th Ave SW

filling Station and *Arsenal Pulp Press* present nathalie stephens and Natalie Simpson

week of November 10 TBA - Pages on Kensington

alana wilcox

November 14, TBA - Martha Cohen Theatre

Pan-Canadian wordfest presents Margaret Atwood

week of November 26 - TBA

Erin Moure

December 2, 2000 - Sage Theatre

Ian Samuels will be launching and reading from his new book *Cabra* (Red Deer Press, 2000)

contents:

Gerald Creede

From an interview with Aaron Vidaver and Karen Moe

Darren Wershler-Henry

Fly It Like the Freak Flag

Lawrence Upton

Coldharbour Portraits

ryan fitzpatrick

moving

Lori Emerson

The mechanization of the poem is the imposition of the grid: notes on falling into
Indra's Net.

rrickey

saskatchewan

Stephen Cain

Fragment of a Letter to Jay. RE: Academic Poetry

Jay Millar

a response to *Fragment of a Letter to Jay. RE: Academic Poetry*

Dean J. Irvine

Origins of Species

Hellenics

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work in progress

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