OPEN LETTER

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bpNichol + 21

Guest-edited by Lori Emerson

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Contents

a seeing of your writing: An Introduction

Lori Emerson

I introduced the previous special *Open Letter* issue on bpNichol (13:5), in "'a writing of your seeing': An Introduction," by noting that "this special issue of *Open Lette*r is the first of two issues which follow-up on the 1998 issue of *Open Letter* 'bpNichol + 10' in the hopes of re-enlivening and, especially, broadening the critical landscape of Nichol's works." With a range of young and experienced, Canadian and American, cutting-edge critics and poets, this second special issue completes, I believe, the fulfill-ment of that promise.

It should come as no surprise, then, that this issue begins with **Kit Dobson's** appropriately titled "Openings" which attends to Nichol's rarely attended-to ephemera. These function, Dobson writes, "at a material level, to destabilize concretized – or concretizing – notions that we might hold about his work." More, we (re)learn that "it is, it turns out, impossible to read bpNichol" – an impossibility that **Clint Burnham** might see as at least partly driving Canadian critics' anxieties about Nichol's relation to the canon and to institutionalization. But the anxiety is not simply limited to questions of 'what shall we *do* with bpNichol?' but, Burnham writes, "the very textual anxieties that attend critical discussion of Nichol's texts ... are themselves symptomatic of unresolved contradictions in the legacy of postmodern (which is to say, boomer-generation) poetics." Nestled next to **Stephen Cain's** "Hopelessly Devoted: The Sacred and the Sloppy in bpNichol Criticism," one can't help but to wonder whether the prob-lematic criticism he writes of isn't itself one of these symptoms?

This first cluster of essays on twin problematics of writing/reading writ-ing on bpNichol is followed by a second cluster on Nichol's equally rarely attended-to sound poetry – first **Leif Einarson** lays out for us the ways in which Nichol's later sound poems "enable various otherwise imbalanced and silenced cultural geographies (physical, textual, visual, and oral) to resonate (or re-sound-notate) with one another." **Stephen Scobie's** essay on "Generations Generated" follows to remind us not only of the possibil-ity of close-reading this impossible genre of the sound poem, but also of the ways in which the medium of the message – whether it is a digitized sound recording or audio-tape technology – inevitably does become part

of the message. This cluster of essays on sound is completed by a collaborative piece by Atlanta Poetry Group members **James Sanders and Mark Prejsnar** who write of how the influence of the Four Horsemen, the collaborative sound poetry group to which Nichol belonged, has penetrated even the deep south.

Exploring not just the collaborative efforts of the Four Horsemen but a wide swath of collaborations that Nichol and Steve McCaffery undertook together, **Stephen Voyce** then writes compellingly of the need "to acknowledge the frequency with which 'bpNichol' signifies as a proper name dispersed and reconstituted as other *collective* nouns. Indeed, a sizeable set of texts within Nichol's canon cannot properly be called 'his own'...." **Paul Dutton's** essay follows, providing both an anecdotal view of the life/works of Nichol and a biographical account of the particulars of some of Nichol's legendary collaborations.

This cluster of essays loosely on collaboration is proceeded by a final grouping of pieces by and on young, up-and-coming critics and poets who stand in a sort of lineage of practice that has emerged as part of the legacy of Nichol. From **Jonathan Ball** writing on derek beaulieu and **derek beaulieu** writing on conceptual writers Sarah Jacobs, Sarah Cullen, and Emma Kay; to **Steven Zultanski's** genre-defying, conceptual, generative "essay" on Nichol; **Natalie Zina Walschots'** writing out of/through Nichol in "vol a went"; **Marie Buck's** American-inflected perspective on bpNichol Lane; **Brad Flis's** equally genre-defying biographical-critical-collage piece that wanders through a whole range of Nichol's own anti-fiction fiction works; and, finally, **Carl Peters'** vignette on the decay of history in one particular anti-fiction fiction piece by Nichol, *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid*. All of these works have clearly and generously answered the call to, as I put it in the Call for Papers, "broaden the critical landscape of Nichol's works" by writing from the perspective of "young and emerging scholars/writers who are part of a generation that never knew 'Barrie' or 'beep.'"

I must, then, end with a sincere thank you to Frank Davey for publishing these special issues and to *all* who contributed to them – surely we have set the stage for so much more to come.

Openings: bpNichol's Ephemera

Kit Dobson

The best thing about reading bpNichol is the impossibility of reading bpNichol. Nichol consistently reminds us of the impossibility of the closed archive through his production of and commitment to ephemera, to small works produced for specific purposes in specific times and places. Irene Niechoda argues in her *Sourcery for Books 1 & 2 of bpNichol's* The Martyrology that "Nichol's sprawling patch of ephemera defies the catalogue" (9). Which is not to say that one should not try, however, to understand Nichol's work. And, specifically, to understand its open-endedness. (Those who are aware of just how much ephemera there is out there from Nichol – his broadsides, short pamphlets, early computer works, collaborative pieces – will have to excuse the extremely limited and idiosyncratic sampling that I am able to discuss). jwcurry has spent many years assembling what he calls *A Beepliographic Cyclopedia*, an early portion of which was included in the *Open Letter* festschrift for Nichol in 1986. This project has become a massive, eight-volume planned work that includes entries on every Nichol work – as well as every work on Nichol. It is a monumental task that resists completion, of course, since work on Nichol is ongoing, but it marks a fascinating attempt to understand the output of one of Canada's most prolific, eclectic, and provocative poets.

Nichol's commitment to ephemera functions, at a material level, to destabilize concretized – or concretizing – notions that we might hold about his work. Lori Emerson writes in the introduction to the first of these two special issues of *Open Letter* to mark the twentieth anniversary of his passing that *The Martyrology* has become the favoured work of Nichol's, that it is privileged to the exclusion of "his other, still to this day, astonishingly varied work" (8). In this she parallels Frank Davey's earlier concern that "*The Martyrology* has been transformed by many of its readers into Nichol's most consumable, didactic, and conservative text," one that reinstates "humanism, the sentient subject" ("bpNichol + 10" 10). Emerson notes, moreover, that criticism of Nichol has often operated through both real and imagined relationships to the poet, relationships that have limited how his work might be understood. This is especially true for *The Martyrology*, prompting Christian Bök to argue that critical readings of Nichol have preferred "to indulge in hagiolatry," rein-

stalling Nichol's humanist moments as his most avant-garde through their privileging of his life-poem above his other works (62). With Nichol's ephemera we are given the opportunity to continue to explore and explode the canonicity – or at least centrality – of what are seen as Nichol's key works. One cannot understand Nichol as a writer without considering projects like grOnk and Ganglia, or his collaborative work through the Toronto Research Group and the Four Horsemen. The ephemera gives those of us who never knew bpNichol a line into his work, a way to upset the privileging of the individual consciousness by seeking alternatives to what we might think we already know.

This approach to Nichol's ephemera parallels some of the strategies used for reading *The Marytrology*. Nichol's famously complex life-long poem contains many things, but one of the most important is his personal cosmogony of the saints. The saints' punning names and fragmentary stories – which appear in snatches throughout the long poem – make them objects of reverence for Nichol, but they also worry him. They become figures that he cannot seem to let go of, a fascination that links, surely, to the declaration in book two that

> i knew when i headed home tonight
> the whole poem graphed in my mind
> i'll never make it

He is faced by a huge plan, a massive amount of imagined material on the saints, and the project of addressing, in many different ways, his relationship to those saints and the world. The reverence that the saints receive worries the saints, also. In *Ad Sanctos*, the posthumously published libretto that Nichol collaborated on with Howard Gerhard, which appeared as book nine of *The Martyrology*, the saints seek the tomb of Saint Valentine. Sanctity is questioned and, in the end, the saints disband into several factions, opting for a life in the world. Sanctity is de nied and the chorus tells us that the saints "gave it up. all that 'me me me' of / sainthood." Similarly, *The Martyrology* questions processes of canonicity and canonization, both religious and literary. Nichol questions his own position, his lyrical self, and progressively dismantles it, having the voice of "a writer" state in *Ad Sanctos* that

> . . . i have withheld details, confused
> by this business of a story
> a life story. ah but i have rushed on &
> told so many, &
> still the clamour for more, details.
> details. who had thought to embrace death

      & deny immortality as a saint.
      as a saint would, dying.

The passage is ambiguous: does the writer deny immortality as a saint would also do, embracing martyrdom? Or deny immortality in the role of a saint? The scraps of narrative that Nichol resists giving out suggest a conscious parallel between the saints and his role as a writer, his anxiety about autobiography. He states in a shuffle text in *Open Letter* that

> the hardest thing about using autobiographical detail in the long poem is to get the reader to accept it as what it is: words in a book revealing exactly the amount of information necessary for that moment of composition. autobiographical information seems to raise the desire for more such information, as if knowing it would somehow increase one's appreciation of the text . . . . ("Things I Don't Really Understand" 73)

But there is a perceived push for more, for a life story that would constitute a hagiography of the author – to supplement the martyrology of the saints. Try as Nichol might to dispel this desire, it persists for readers, and, as the poem proceeds, begins to affect its very composition.

    This desire to upset the self has been important to critical readings of *The Martyrology*. Douglas Barbour suggests that "the problematization of the 'i' (and of the writerly ego it so often signifies) is one of the major thematic threads of *The Martyrology*" (172). He explores Nichol's deployment of pronouns in order to uncover the poem's "polydimensionality," its openness towards multiple, open readings (188). Smaro Kamboureli reads the long poem as one in which "the autobiographical impulse pervades," but is deliberately disjointed (148). What she terms Nichol's "elliptical self" "remains," she argues, "a tantalizing figure, its completeness kept in abeyance" as the lyrical self of the poem is progressively disrupted (155, 150). She states that "the poem, by resisting a unified notion of the self, also resists any reader's attempt at 'figuring' out the different selves and their interrelationships with (their) others" (161). Nichol cannot be pinned down in *The Martyrology*, and it is in that interplay of discussing and undermining the ever-slippery self that one possible focus of the poem emerges. Frank Davey writes that "the poem contains numerous elements which underline the possible connections of [its] 'i' to Nichol's own life," but, at the same time, observes that Nichol at points has "played with the latent egotism of 'I' or 'i,'" working towards a "symbolic de-privileging of the pronoun" ("Exegesis / Eggs à Jesus" 41). The selfhood that Barbour, Kamboureli, Davey, and others have proposed, open and expansive, cannot be pinned down, cannot be finalized in *The Martyrology*. It resists concretization, canonization, and / or under-

standing, pushing readers further and further into Nichol's poem – and his other work – at the same time as it pushes them away from achieving reconciliation. In the first of the bpNichol + 20 issues of *Open Letter*, Rob Winger described the selfhood of "You Too, Nicky" – a text that can be placed both inside and outside of *The Martyrology* – as one that is "not so much fragmented as it is multiple, portable, varied, contradictory, and, unflinchingly, unapologetically, utterly inclusive" (13). More than a postmodern, deconstructed self, patterns of subjectivity in Nichol's *Martyrology*-related work indicates a move towards a radical openness that, above all else, resists.

Resists what, exactly? Those boring old notions of the ego, certainly, but what else? There is a lot of resistance in Nichol's work. His ephemera has pursued similar tactics, and, as such, offers further ways for thinking about these arguments. The often-reprinted piece *The Complete Works*, for example, displays a playful contempt for the idea of ever achieving completion. *The Complete Works* was distributed in 1969 as a single, folded sheet of blue cardstock in a limited edition of up to one-hundred that circulated as one of the texts in the Ganglia series. Its cover announces, in minimalist terms, that it consists of

Inside, viewers find the keys of Nichol's typewriter reproduced as fol-lows:

§ " # $ % _ & ' ( ) * +
˚ 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 - =

Q W E R T Y U I O P ?
q w e r t y u i o p /

A S D F G H J K L : ^
a s d f g h j k l ; `

Z X C V B N M , . ç
Z x c v b n m , . é

---

* any possible permutation
of all listed elements

The complete works of bpNichol, then, consist of every possible permuta-tion of the keys, every possible stroke in any possible combination. This Nichol is the Nichol of a million monkies typing on a million typewriters for a million years, a Nichol who contains all of the works of world litera-ture and all of those to come. The self that we associate with Nichol is, in this simple gesture, tossed out the window and we are left to contemplate what, indeed, the possible permutations of the keyboard might become in this context.
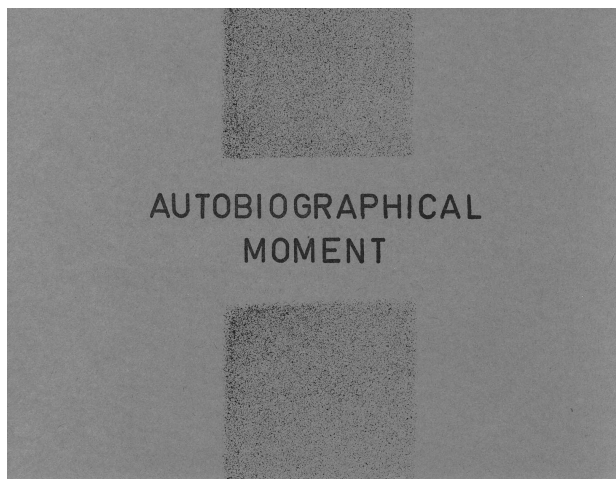
Nichol's commitment to such ephemeral production was life-long (like *The Martyrology*), extending right up until his death – and beyond. And his ephemeral pieces maintain this interest in upsetting selfhood, destroying any sense of ontological certainty that we might develop about the poet. One of his final pieces, printed by jwcurry, announces just such an intention through its deceptive title, "Autobiographical Moment." This piece was set to be printed by curry on the day of Nichol's untimely death in 1988, and was delayed until the twenty-third of October of that year, when it was printed in an edition of one-hundred-and-fifteen. The promise of self-revealing is utterly defeated on the inside, where a single word, "limbp," is printed. A clever, and typical, pun on his own name, the one-word poem evokes and frustrates the search for the self.

For Nichol, the permutations of the keys of his typewriter and the letters of his name extend, moreover, into other concrete poems and projects. Nichol produced an astonishing array of works, from poems embroidered on pillows and other textiles (with Ellie Nichol) to poems printed on the backs of matchbooks like the following, "water poem #3," printed for the National Book Festival in 1985:
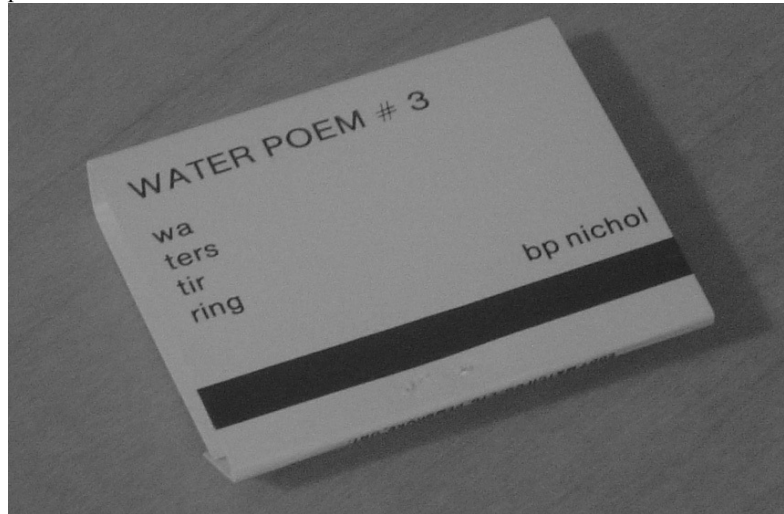
While sometimes happenstance, and effective to various degrees, what is notable is the compactness of Nichol's poem, its sparing use of a few words to upset the commercial potential of the matchbook-as-advertising-space. Among the pillows and embroideries that I have seen or discussed with others are ones that extend the water poem sequence, as well, play-

ing with the words and images of the elements in visual poems. The re-currence of water imagery suggests a sliding sense of the world, one that is difficult to hold onto, one that is released in molecular form into the environment.

The struggles with the individual that these pieces promote are pre-cisely the sorts of subversions that Nichol returns to – and are, as such, healthy reminders of the problematics of literary and critical politics that would seek to understand Nichol's writing *in toto*. Nichol's attitude to-wards academic interest is well-summarized, if anecdotally, through his minimalist piece *NOVEL*. This piece consists, again, of a single sheet of folded cardstock, yellow-beige. The cover is simple:
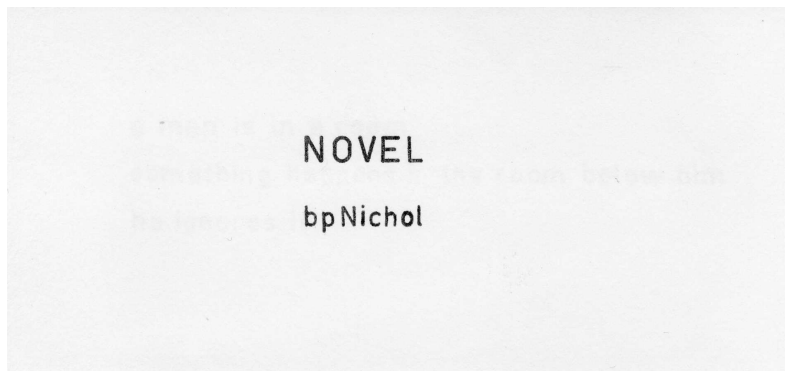
Inside, three lines of text read as follows:

> a man is in a room
> something happens in the room below him
> he ignores it

Printed in an edition of 190 in 1982, this piece illustrates a commitment to questioning our interest in the "something" of narrative, of authorship, of progression. We know extremely little: who is the man? Where is the room? What happens? And why does he ignore it? At the same time, none of the details matter. We have been given one possible novel in a radically condensed form, and we can infer the rest. The novel is self-suf-ficient as it stands, although, as with *The Complete Works*, it is a radical over-statement, a claim towards an impossible completion that is both ridiculous and ridiculously simple at the same time.

The path through Nichol's ephemera is a difficult one to follow, how-ever, because of a lack of availability of sources and a lack of reprints, as Frank Davey lamented in his introduction to the bpNichol + 10 issue of *Open Letter* when he wondered how one can "ensure the continued cul-

tural circulation of difficult texts that often interrogate cultural practices or subvert the conventions and proprieties on which canonicity has usually rested" ("bpNichol + 10" 6). The two posthumous anthologies of Nichol's work, *An H in the Heart* – edited by Michael Ondaatje and George Bowering in 1994 – and *The Alphabet Game* – edited by Lori Emerson and Darren Wershler-Henry in 2007 – reprint some of Nichol's short pieces in addition to his major works. Both reprint *The Complete Works*. But there are struggles apparent in both books. In *An H in the Heart*, commonly reviled by Nichol purists, who note that Nichol once stated that he wouldn't publish with the book's publisher, McClelland & Stewart – but also the most accessible introduction before it went out of print – the selections of Nichol's work are characterized in part by the relationship between Nichol and his editors. Their selections display Nichol as their admired friend and poetic ally, and they create a particular version of Nichol, one that is composed of collected fragments. These risk, as in any anthology, constituting an image of Nichol as a consumable whole. Ondaatje and Bowering do, however, leave Nichol open when they opt not to include excerpts from *The Martyrology*, pushing readers towards other sources in order to better grasp Nichol's work. *The Alphabet Game*, a more rigorously academic book produced by younger critics who did not know Nichol personally, includes excerpts from *The Martyrology* and longer works, but is careful to keep the reading of Nichol an open, ongoing process. Emerson and Wershler-Henry have launched an accompanying website – bpnichol.ca – which includes downloadable files of many sources, and they include discussions of Nichol and his works in the apparatus of their printed text, pushing towards the openness that his work demands. At the same time, they opt not to include elements from Nichol's myriad collaborations in their book (Ondaatje and Bowering do, sometimes without acknowledgment), nor do they discuss his commercial work. There is an effort in both anthologies to see Nichol as remaining in process, but the anthology is a difficult site for such work.

There remains an impression among those who have written about Nichol that it is becoming difficult to discuss his work, to see it as open. Emerson suggests as much in her introduction when she argues that writing about Nichol has become limited in part because of generational gaps. For the generation that did not know Nichol – among which I count myself – there can be no sense that either the poet or his works can be, finally, understood. Unknowability persists, and this unknowability creates spaces for new work that might exceed that which has been enabled by the scholars and authors who knew bpNichol. This unknowability is a major theme in *The Martyrology* and all of the works that accompany it,

but the monumental status of Nichol's life-poem creates the expectation that that poem alone will enable the comprehension of his work. Instead, Nichol's masses of ephemeral works need to be reckoned with in order to not only flummox the "i" of Nichol's work, but, moreover, to prevent the work itself from ever achieving a state of fixity. It is, it turns out, impossible to read bpNichol.

Acknowledgments

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Anxieties, Orthodoxies, and History in (the 1990s critical reception of) bpNichol's *The Martyrology*

Clint Burnham

The starting point for this essay is the 1997 anthology *Beyond the Orchard: Essays on* The Martyrology, an interesting text not least for how it collected some of the new generation of Canadian critics' voices in response to a canonical text of the avant-garde. I start by looking at the beginnings of some of these essays, detecting in their rhetoric an anxiety about precisely this encounter with the canon, with institutionalization, reading in particular the essays of Carol Stewart and Glen Lowry in this regard. I then turn to questions about that very institutionalization, an institutionalization that is surprisingly ignored in the collection, except as a generator of said anxieties, and, again, except in Jeff Derksen's text. This institutionalization, I argue, has to be engaged within a much more critical, which is to say social, manner, looking at Nichol's text not merely in terms of its formal pyrotechnics or its amenability to feminist or postcolonial or poststructuralist readings (which readings have been the doxa, let us admit), but also by locating it historically, a historical location that can connect the internal mechanics of the text with late-capitalist publishing and academic social spaces in Canada. I conclude with a meta-theoretical inquiry: that is, into the question of engaging with criticism itself as a literary-critical practice, drawing on the Lacanian theory of Slavoj Žižek, who in various pronouncements has located the critical in the realm of the Super-Ego, as that which guarantees and demands our pleasure. My argument then is that the very textual anxieties that attend critical discussion of Nichol's text at the beginning of the third decade after his death are themselves symptomatic of unresolved contradictions in the legacy of postmodern (which is to say, boomer-generation) poetics.

I.

What are we to make of the anxieties that young critics evince in their critical engagement with Nichol's *Martyrology*, and especially with regard to the text's and indeed Nichol's canonicity? This anxiety manifests itself in various ways in the essays in *Beyond the Orchard*, a collection

edited by Roy Miki and Fred Wah and pulled from a seminar on *The Martyrology* that they ran simultaneously at Simon Fraser University and the University of Calgary in 1994-1995. Evidence of this anxiety includes a quotation from Nichol himself – a talismanic and almost modernist reference to the author as authority (if not the Name of the Father: but, given the obsession with the father/fader in the first three or four books of the poem, entirely, of course, in the spirit of Nichol) that we see at the start of Carol Stewart's "Neutral Space that B(l)inds" (*BtO*, 161-170):

> I'll begin with some words from bpNichol, taken from an interview with Clint Burnham called 'Nichol Interviewed: On Book 6 Books':
>> I wanted a writing that would relate that [the notion of process through time – *note by CS*] in some way, a writing that would not pretend to an omniscience or to an authority that it didn't have and could, therefore, partake of the real world. That's my notion of what I'm trying to get at, a writing which partakes of the human condition in the sense that we're all vulnerable. (295)
>
> This passage displays the writer's attempt to be humble, or, to elaborate a writing strategy that would undermine the classical god-like and didactic authority of the privileged authorial perspective …. (161)

There is no small irony, of course, in quoting an author, in turning to his authority, as a way of demonstrating that he is trying to shuck off said privilege. Thus, while Stewart is seduced by Nichol's "attempt to be humble" (no writer is humble), seduced by the Father, that is, her strategy is itself rhetorical, which is to say, it allows Stewart to avoid acknowledging her own agenda or textual ideology. Stewart's is very much a strategy of containment, a term she appropriates from Fredric Jameson in order to misread Nichol. For when Nichol declares that he wants "a writing that would not pretend to an omniscience … and could, therefore, partake of the real world ... of the human condition in the sense that we're all vulnerable," the worst possible critical stance is to take Nichol at his word, instead of asking first of all how accurately his comments match up with *The Martyrology* (for of course the text's tussling with the saints throughout the early books can be read in a classic Oedipal manner as its very attempt to assert and accumulate authority); what it means to "partake of the real world" (which real world, aside from autobiographical references to friends and family, and the geography encountered on the way to or from poetry readings, is neglected in favour of the fantasy of the cloud/saint narratives and word play), and what it means in a performative sense to declare that "we're all vulnerable." Indeed, one might say that the *desire* for a writing that partakes of the real world (for surely this is a desire

here of Nichol's, and should be treated as such, with full respect and dignity – or, more precisely, it is a desire in the performative sense of Nichol's to be *read*[1] as desiring "to partake of the real world), this desire is then the desire of the author to escape the fantasy that is literature and engage with the Real. Rather, the problem lies in the palpable contradiction one sees between such a statement and a writing project that quite clearly situates itself as between fantasy and the Real. For is not the project of *The Martyrology* both some deconstruction of literature via a thematic of the letter (more accurately, to appropriate the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari, we should see *The Martyrology* as a rhizomatic text, one ceaselessly deterritorializing not only modernist literature but also itself, in the celebrated autophagy of the later books w/r/t the early books) and also the positing of an antinomy in literature *qua* literature between fantasy and the Real?

Consider the appearances of the fantastic and the historical in the various beginnings of *Book 1*:

- the quotation from Gertrude Stein
- the half-title[2]
- Jerry Ofo illustration #1
- from *The Chronicle of Knarn*
- Ofo #2
- title-page
- quotation "from the Writings of Saint And"
- dedication
- Ofo #3/Book I
- "the breath lies"
- Ofo #4/The Martyrology of Saint And
- poem proper (?): "*As to what auguries attended his birth …* so many bad beginnings …"

We can see how these various false starts (or, more accurately, interventions by Nichol into the interstitial matter that surrounds the poetic text) veer from the historical to the fantastic: the Stein quote, half-title, title page, dedication, they are all historical in that they either reference the idea of history (Stein's anti-historicism is historic in that it presumes a break with Santayana's glib pedagogical view – "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it"), or they are the trace of this historical overdetermination of the text (the bibliographic matter), *or* they introduce the historical situation of Lea Hindley-Smith and Therafields (Ashok Mathur's essay [*BtO*, 94-101] is an excellent re-consideration of *The*

Martyrology in light of this social context). The Ofo images, the opening poetic passages of the Saints and *The Chronicle of Knarn* (which latter presents a quasi sci-fi text and suggests both the Christian Symbolic of C.S. Lewis' Narnia series and Hayden White's distinction between chronicles – or pre-capitalist chronological listings – and history proper), the quotations and floating texts ("the breath lies") all constitute fantasy either in the everyday sense of an imagined narrative (as much of the idea of a "martyrology" of saints derived from language evidently is) or a meta framework/generic structure (fantasy as structure).

Here, then, three points need to be added. First of all, we can, following Žižek, argue that fantasy often enough in culture turns out to be more real than the Real. Second, we should perhaps distinguish between the Real, the Imaginary (or the fantasy) and the Symbolic (the realm of language, of the Law). In this sense, the fantasy of the saints and their martyrology constitute Nichol's intervention into the symbolic, into the tyranny, as it were, of language (this of course is the post-structuralist doxa). Third, the text of *The Martyrology* then becomes a site for the struggle between the historical and the Real, a struggle that necessarily infects its critical reception and that should be located in relation both to the ideologies of the Canadian postmodern and to late capitalism in general.

In this last regard, then, Carole Stewart's text is most illuminating in a footnote on her use of Jameson's idea of strategies of containment.[3] For what Stewart does here is quite remarkable: she argues in effect that Nichol's poem arouses a fantasy content – the free libidinal subject, slipping and sliding in the play of signifiers that has so entranced Nichol's apologists – only then to contain that fantasy with the essentially idealist structure of language. To take only one of Stewart's highly charged moments:

> [I]f the reader feels uncomfortable praising god, well, that's ok too; as Stephen Scobie tells us, these saints of address 'may be approached in several ways: as word games, as mythological characters, and as language' (111). (As if there was much difference in this highly idealist framework.) The framework is idealist and positivist because it focusses on the divine in the matter, which in this case is langauge, instead of on the processes of historical production and the driving economic force that creates and produces matter. (162)[4]

But note that the anxieties in Stewart's text turn out to be extremely productive, for, if they are symptomatic of a kind of bad faith with regard to the postmodern canon, they also lead to a genuinely new way of reading both Nichol's text and its reception.

II.

Such anxieties in critical writing on Nichol is nothing new, of course: as Doug Steedman notes (*BtO* 120), Anne Munton's use of the term "utanik-ki" is introduced with a degree of anxiety. But let us look at a more manifest example of such anxieties and see what they tell us about the status of Nichol's work.

Again at the beginning of his essay, Glen Lowry quotes from Nichol – in this case, from *The Martyrology* itself, followed by a dedication that mimics Nichol's own (or even Nichol's mimicry of his dedication with the dedication to Book 3).

> we gather around to talk at night
> within this house we've built
> discuss the problems of the day
> the way things went
> how we felt about it
> (Book 3, sect. VIII)

> For Kate, Karlyn, Mark and Ashok with whom all of this has been possible. Literally. (*BtO* 59)

This double (or triple) strategy does a number of things: first of all, by finding in Nichol's poem a mirroring of the social structure of his own (Lowry's) text's parthenogensis (the anthology evidently had its origins as much in students' social and domestic spaces as in the academy), Lowry asserts the relevance of *The Martyrology* to his own critical project – later anxieties notwithstanding. In fact, one might say that anxieties in Lowry's text – including both the problematic of academic canonization and the rhetoric of criticism that seeks to align *The Martyrology's* formal radicality with both evaluative hyperbole and critical/political radicalism[5] – are themselves as much about performances as anything else. That is, Lowry must be seen to kick against such pricks as Victor Coleman or myself in order not to seem to be as much of a conservative modernist as are we.

Secondly, and in like fashion, Lowry's simulacra of Nichol's dedication does two things simultaneously. First, it elevates his essay's status from mere student paper. Such rhetoric assures both author and reader that this paper has an audience beyond one's thesis supervisor; one is addressing one's peers. Second, the strategy defuses or pre-empts in a curious way Lowry's own criticism of Nichol's appropriation of his original dedication, in Book 3: "Nichol's use of these intertexts or delayed starts, at least on one level, reveals a self that is at odds with the elliptical subject of the modern *scriptor*" (*BtO* 61). While Lowry is correct in seeing Nichol's textual strategies as indicative not of some Barthesian writing-machine

but instead of a community, a social context, surely this is also the motivation for his own appropriation of Nichol. Thus Lowry's relentless – one might say obsessive – critique of almost every author he cites – from Stephen Scobie and myself to Roland Barthes – is actually *contained*, in the Stewart/Jameson sense, by his strategy of establishing at his text's beginning his fidelity to Nichol's text.

   Lowry's strategy of containment works as follows. Throughout the text one sees a fairly standard line of late 20th-century literary studies, whereby the literary canon is denounced as a Eurocentric project, blind to its own repression or appropriation of indigenous texts, national frameworks, and critical radicality – thus far, like much of *Beyond the Orchard* (but, to be fair, like much of late twentieth-century literary criticism, from Tilottama Rajan and Geoffrey Hartmann to Marjorie Perloff) is, again, standard rhetoric. But while these forays into *Ideologiekritik* seem to awaken a desire in the reader for a truly liberatory critico-political stance, that desire is then constrained or stymied by the opening rhetoric (an opening that is a foreclosing) of Lowry's text. And it really could not be any other way: as I will argue below, it is in the nature of the critic not only to guarantee pleasure, but also to control it, to mark it as off-limits.

III.

But there is another kernel of the Real that lurks in Lowry's text: for a signal anxiety in his text has to do with the problematics of canonization, or at least academicization of Nichol's text in the Canlit community. Again, here he is in good company: not least Nichol himself, who wrote in 1987 "The big struggle with a work like THE MARTYROLOGY is (a) to stay 3 jumps ahead of your critics (so you're not influenced by them) & (b) to keep it interesting."[6] That is, to fall back on psychoanalytic terms, Nichol here is showing an anxiety about the project slipping from a matter of authorial desire – to keep it interesting, say – and critical drive. Drive is the status of perversion, of a reversal of desire, what Lacan calls its "fundamentally dissident nature … the theoretical disjunction between the tendency, its direction, and its object … its involvement in a conceptual systematic" (543), or, as Žižek further elaborates, "insofar as I cannot see the point in the other from which I'm gazed at, the only thing that remains for me to do is to make myself visible to that point" (163). Which is to say, Nichol's anxiety can be located precisely at the point at which he or his work becomes the object of a critical gaze, and not just any critical gaze, but a critical gaze in which he is *influenced*. And that influence, following the word's etymology (from the Latin *influčre*, or to flow in [O.E.D.]), surely designates an anxiety that is as sexual as it is anti-criti-

cal. Since, that is, for Lacan, the bodily openings are the spatial zones in which we find the "very delimitation of the 'erogenous zone' that the drive isolates from the function's metabolism" (303), we can see that for Nichol staying ahead of the critics, ahead of us, is of prime importance.[7]

But even so, one should not take Lowry's protests too seriously, as when he notes that "when *The Martyrology* becomes the centre of a graduate course, everything changes" (59), or "it is very difficult (for some of us) to accept a priori the counter-hegemonic drive of Nichol's lifework" (59: the parenthetical remark "for some of us" is telling here, signifying as it does a properly Leninist or Althusserian sense of the vanguard critic, but also a liberal need to quantify that vanguardism within the parentheses); or that "students coming to *The Martyrology* at this historical juncture are coming to a favourite text of an *influential* wing of the Canlit establishment" (60, my emphasis), or "the list of critics who have written about *The Martyrology* reads like a current who's who of Canlit (or contemporary Canadian Literary studies)" (73n2). And I do not mean that one should argue, *contra* Lowry, that the ascension of Nichol or his texts to canonicity is in reality the result of interminable internecine and institutional struggles (what one might call, following Raymond Williams, "the long march through the English Department"), but, also, that, as he knows well, the canon as a construct is a necessary form of social value.

This is, tellingly, the conclusion or assumption with which Jeff Derksen begins his essay in *Beyond the Orchard*. Derksen, like many of the contributors – Ashok Mathur, Nicole Markotic, Susan Holbrook, Dean Irvine, Carl Peters, and Louis Cabri – already were and/or went on to have formidable reputations; really, we can see how the graduate seminars out of which this publication ensued were themselves a very effective way for "an influential wing of the Canlit establishment" to reproduce itself as a discursive formation. Roy Miki and Fred Wah were/are two key scholars, *The Martyrology* is a key text: no wonder the course attracted ambitious students. Unlike Lowry's text, which frames its left radicalism within a textual strategy that defuses such radicality, Derksen's essay leaves the space open for a critique of the canonization of Nichol, a space created by its turning away from such concerns to Nichol's place in the genealogy of North American poetics.

This work of Derksen's is accomplished in the following manner. Derksen's essay, "Mapping Minds, Mapping Frames: *The Martyrology* and its Social Text" (50-58), begins with the strong statement that "[t]he defining critical space surrounding bpNichol's *The Martyrology* is a particularly charged ideological space. This constitutive space itself is defined by the contrasts and struggles of a community of writers and critics

…" (50). Indeed, these two sentences suggest the most fruitful inquiry into Nichol's text: which is to read it as the sedimentation of an institutional struggle in the fields of the Canadian academy and Canadian literature. In this reading, the fugitive status of Nichol's text marks its marginality even while Nichol's work in general assumes, for the naïve student yet unversed in the bitter struggles of the academic department and marketplace, a disproportionate stature, the very stature that is the sign of both its success and failure. Success in the sense that the reprinting of Nichol's works in the 1990s was the sign of political debates and cultural activism; failure in that such struggles inevitably turned on a text from a white male writer that in its poetics are to be found a liberal humanism expressed in postmodern praxis; inevitably, the critical focus – formalism – on such praxis – and either vulgarization or critique (from the left or right) – elided an investigation of the institutional and capitalist conditions of Nichol's canonization.

In such an investigation, the following considerations may be included. Nichol's function in the small press bohemia of Toronto and Vancouver in the 1960s and 1970s – as well as the trajectory of same in the 1980s and 1990s. The struggle over Coach House press as both enterprise and sign (or brand) in the late 1980s and early 1990s – including the naming of the alley behind Huron street as bpNichol Lane. The role of such outsider figures as Nicky Drumbolis and jwcurry (the latter now at work on an annotated and probably unrealizable complete "beepliography" of Nichol's work). The status of such celebritization as the *Open Letter festschrift*, the bpNichol memorial ceremony at Harbourfront in Toronto in 1988, and the bpNichol chapbook award. And analysis of any connection between course adoptions of Nichol's texts since the 1970s and sales of same. The analysis of Nichol's work from feminist and post-colonial and post-structuralist points of view (Tostevin, Miki, and Scobie are exemplary) and the paucity of Marxist or materialist accounts – and the relation of Nichol's humanism to these critical stances. The status of Shirley Neuman's rumoured biography of Nichol, and the Brian Nash documentary *bp: pushing the boundaries*. The reception of Nichol's work abroad, from the concrete moment of the 1960s to his limited incorporation into North American L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E (via McCaffery?).

This is only a start – and no doubt some of this work is underway – towards a consideration of Nichol's work, of *The Martyrology*, not only as an idealist text, but as a material text, one that was written (is still being written?) and read under institutional and late capitalist constraints, constraints which themselves generate new critical possibilities as well as shutting down others.

IV.

But I would like to conclude this paper by thinking about the strategy – deployed here as well as in a number of essays in *Beyond the Orchard* – the strategy, that is, of examining the critical reception of Nichol's text. Of course, such a technique has entirely respectable precedents and may be claimed to be the doxa of contemporary literary studies. And such interpretations of textual sedimentation (as Jameson has termed it[8]) no doubt unearths many critical insights. What does it mean to turn away from the poet, from the poetry, and to concentrate our gaze, our critical gaze, on the critic, on the critic's prose? Is this not an abjuring of our responsibility to literary culture, a responsibility to maintain the danger and radical foment of certain poetic moments? But consider some comments in Slavoj Žižek's *Interrogating the Real*, the first volume of his collected essays. There Žižek, citing G.K. Chesterton, argues *apropos* of the detective story that it is not the criminal who is the ultimate transgressor, but rather the detective: "Civilization itself is in fact the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions … morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies" (117). So too, Žižek claims, for Lacan: "the greatest transgression, the most traumatic, the most senseless thing, is law itself: the mad, superegotistical law which both inflicts and commands *jouissance*" (118). And this law is, in our cultural realm, most often enunciated by the critic, and thus it is with the work of the *critic* of *The Martyrology* that any account of *The Martyrology* must eventually come to terms. But this is not to gainsay the pleasure with which one reads the poem, for pleasure itself – aesthetic or sexual – enjoyment, that is, "enjoyment is not something that comes naturally to the subject, as a realization of his or her own inner potential, but is the content of a traumatic superego injunction" (*Interrogating the Real*, 329); and that "traumatic superego injunction", is, as Nichol well knew, merely another way of referring to the critic.

Notes

1. The interview with myself that Stewart quotes was first recorded for a radio broadcast at CJUV student radio in Victoria and then, after being edited on tape and then in transcript, reviewed and further corrected by Nichol, published in *Reading ≠ Writing the Martyrology*.
2. In the original publication of 1972, the half-title followed immediately the quote from Stein. In the 1977 edition (in which Nichol had "deleted certain sections of Books I & II & rewritten others as well as correcting some typographical errors that appeared in the first edition") that was reprinted as facsimile in 1992, a

two page list-poem that begins "of those saints we know the listing follows" follows the Stein quote; this poem was a separate folio inserted between Books I & II in the 1972 edition. See also Niechoda, 56-57.

3. It should be noted here that Jameson's idea can be read as a post-Vietnam era critique of U.S. foreign policy in its very bellicose terminology – that is to say, unlike Althusser, Jameson sees very much the possibility of some strategies failing, just as the U.S. intervention into S.E. Asia failed to contain communism. Similarly, we do not have to sympathize with the jihadist tendencies in the various Sunni or Shia factions now at war with the U.S. and each other in Iraq (which U.S.-led occupation enters its fifth year as I revise this essay on 19 March 2007) to see that the Bush doctrine of "democracy" in the middle east is scarcely less able to contain anti-imperialist insurgents some thirty or more years after the Vietnam era.

4. This is the place to note my indebtedness to my former teacher, Stephen Scobie, who in the 1980s not only directed my attention to deeply theorized and deconstructive readings of postmodern Canadian texts but always did so in a way that encouraged independence of thought.

5. This latter critique of Lowry's seems to me to be the most germane of his essay.

6. Postcard to author, n.d. (envelope franked August 13, 1987). See accompanying illustrations.

7. We could extend this further: since, for Freud, such complexes of the drive have also to do with childhood sexuality (Lacan 179), perhaps this also has to do with Nichol's attitude toward *The Martyrology* as record of his own childhood – described in the 1975-76 *Capilano Review* interview (Niechoda 99).

8. See his interview, *Diacritics*, v.12, Fall 1982, Pp. 72 - 73.

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Hopelessly Devoted: The Sacred and the Sloppy in bpNichol Criticism

Stephen Cain

Frank Davey's introduction to the *bpNichol + 10* issue of *Open Letter* (1998) discusses how Nichol criticism began to shape itself in the first ten years after his death and makes also some cautionary remarks about potential dangers for future scholarship. Along with Davey's warning to "keep the bpNichol texts from being taken over by careerists" (10) – as well as his belief in the "urgent need to bring Barrie's most radical work back into print" (11) to strike a necessary contrast to the "ambivalent humanism" (10) of *The Martyrology* and the "bpNichol" as represented by the editors of the *H in the Heart* anthology – Davey also makes some positive remarks, concluding his essay by noting the "best hope for continued cultural relevance for the writing known as 'bpNichol' lies with writers like Barrie himself …it lies also with new generations of writers, like [Christian] Bök … [Peter] Jaeger, Lori Emerson, and [Stephen] Cain, who didn't know him personally, and who are burdened neither by a friendship with him nor by a need to struggle against it" (12).

  In this same issue, Bök takes on the task of beginning to sort through this "new generation of writers," dividing these new scholars and poets into camps which are either comprised of "awestruck disciples" (63) of Nichol (Adeena Karasick and Irene Niechoda, among others) or those who are more critical of the hagiography of Nichol and who dispute the upholding of *The Martyrology* as the most representative Nichol text (for example: Glen Lowry, Louis Cabri, and Jeff Derksen). A reading through the other essays in *bpNichol + 10* would also suggest that Scott Pound and Peter Jaeger belong to this latter list. Thus, even at this (relatively) early point in posthumous Nichol criticism, lines were being drawn by younger academics and poets. Although implicit in Davey's introduction is the idea that younger scholars will be liberated by the lack of personal connection to Nichol to write about his work in innovative and radical ways, the discourse of Nichol criticism in the last 20 years has not become "free" but instead has bifurcated into contesting critical camps based on those who cling to biographic and humanistic concerns (regardless of personal connection to the author) and those who wish to either interrogate and/ or valorize his radical writing.

This division is nowhere more apparent than in the collection of sketches and drawings published by Talonbooks in 2002 as *bpNichol Comics*, edited by Carl Peters. Not mentioned in either Davey's or Bök's list of scholars of Nichol ten years ago, Peters appears to have risen to such prominence in Nichol criticism as to be entrusted with access to Nichol's unpublished writing held at Simon Fraser University. Unfortunately, Peters, an academic who declares affection for his subject, has produced a sloppy and misconceived collection of work by Nichol. Even overlooking its egregious typographic errors, its inaccurate bibliographic data, and its repetitive and uninformative introduction and head notes, the edition's deepest flaw is Peters's reductive attempt to represent Nichol exclusively as a devotional poet whose only literary predecessor is Gertrude Stein.

All of these elements are present even within the first four pages of *bpNichol Comics*. Across from the title page Peters has placed a Nichol cartoon depicting a seated Milt the Morph by a window with a large face looking through; above Milt a speech balloon reads: "Hi kids! it's METAPHYSICS time with today's guest GOD the father" [ii]. Notwithstanding that this is not a particularly interesting or representative Nichol cartoon, what this placement and choice of illustration does is to overdetermine the reading of Nichol as a spiritual artist which, in fact, only represents a small aspect of the material to follow. Peters's insistence on placing Nichol's work in a lineage descending from Stein is made manifest a page later with an epigraph from a Stein text that Peters claims is called "Lifting Bodies" [v]. Of course, there is no Stein work that bears this title – one assumes that he means Stein's well-known long poem "Lifting Belly." These three elements – the devotional, the influence of Stein, and Peters's complete stylistic sloppiness – characterize the rest of the collection.

Further evidence of that last quality appears with a near relentlessness. Well-known artists and authors are frequently misspelled: Laurence Sterne as "Laurence Stern" (26), Claes Oldenburg as "Claus Oldenburg" (19), for example, and complete sentences repeated verbatim on a single page (17). One could, charitably, attribute these errors to a copy editor's negligence, but surely a proofreader could not introduce such errors as a reference to a Stein text entitled *The Geographical History of America and/or The Making of Americans* (26). Here it appears that Peters has confused two separate Stein collections as a single one: *The Geographical History of America or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* (1936) and *The Making of Americans* (1925). Is this mere nitpicking? Perhaps, but how can readers trust Peters's claims about Stein's influence on

Nichol, or his insistent representation of Nichol as a devotional poet, if Peters cannot keep simple titles correct – especially regarding authors that he professes to know well?

The answer is: we can't. In his review of *bpNichol Comics*, Paul Dutton characterizes Peters's criticism as "commentary rife with solecisms, solipsisms, and unwarranted conclusions" (21), a list of problems which, I would add, also includes pointless assertions based on illogical reasoning and scant textual evidence. Peters's primary rhetorical strategy seems to be to state that a condition exists because he claims that it is so. For example, early on in the introduction, in discussing the playfulness of Nichol's comics, Peters concludes a paragraph by stating "So let us suppose that bpNichol's comics are often parables" (15). And that's as far as he goes with this idea. No definition of a parable, or examination of why Nichol's illustrations would fit under this genre, follows. Peters simply moves on to discuss Nichol's concept of the "language trap." Further, and more troubling, is Peters's continued, unqualified assertion that Nichol's artwork "always" functions in particular ways. Examples are plentiful: "The frame in a bp cartoon is always an embrace" (50), "The self is always under scrutiny in Nichol's scripts" (64), "We need only observe any bpNichol cartoon or frame to know that this is indeed always the plot" (64), "Movement in a bpNichol cartoon or drawing or poem is always a, or perhaps even *the* structural trait" (64), "By making us aware of the surface as well as the surface details of writing, notation, or drawing – as he is always *always* doing – Nichol makes the reader aware of the geography of the composition of space – hence the frame" (64), and "The frame in a bpNichol cartoon is always the master over a figure…" (72). Wait a minute, I thought the frame was always an embrace?

These types of unsubstantiated claims also characterize Peters's attempts to critique other scholars' interrogations of Nichol's textual humanism or poetic subjectivity. In his introduction, Peters asserts that "The *bpNichol + 10* issue of *Open Letter* attempted to invent a post-humanist bpNichol" (14), a construction that Peters rejects since Nichol "remains a devotional writer after all" (14). To defend this view against those, primarily Bök, who would characterize *The Martyrology* as a conservative text, Peters offers this rebuttal:

> the construction of a post-humanist bpNichol reveals itself to be equally possessive and self-serving. At the end of that issue [*bpNichol + 10*] readers will find a reproduction of Nichol, circa 1970. It is an incredibly kinetic image, even spectral one, and puts the lie, appropriately through a ghostly image, to much of the issue's attempt to fabricate a post-humanist Nichol. (15)

It is hard to imagine how this argument works: how exactly does a dramatic photograph of Nichol succeed in putting "the lie" to the detailed critiques of several scholars who postulate that Nichol remains a Modernist poet (at least in *The Martyrology*) who seeks "ontological reassurance" (Bök 64) rather than a Postmodernist who questions all aspects of ontology and epistemology? While one could certainly dispute the arguments of Bök and others regarding Nichol's construction of subjectivity, it would have to be done in a more conscientious and thorough manner than merely talking about a photograph – as in fact, Miriam Nichols has done so in her persuasive essay "Subjects of Experience: Post-cognitive Subjectivity in the Work of bpNichol and Daphne Marlatt" which utilizes Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben, Žižek, and many others, along with close textual readings to demonstrate the complexities of Nichol's construction of subjectivity as process.

Similar to his attempt at critiquing the post-humanist construction of Nichol, Peters's claims about the spiritual aspects of Nichol's writing are equally specious. In the same introduction Peters writes: "Certainly there is nothing more daring – nothing more 'experimental' – than a (post-modern) writer who chooses to speak to his God!" (15) This is a strange assertion for Peters to make, to suggest that the act of being a religious poet is in itself a radical gesture when, in fact, through much of literary history it was the religious writers who were also the most innovative – Christopher Smart, George Herbert, William Blake, G.M. Hopkins, Hugo Ball, e.e. cummings, and Dom Sylvester Houedard, to name just a few. There should be no surprise in finding connections between spirituality and innovative forms: they are often found in tandem. Throughout *bpNichol Comics*, Peters continues to emphasize the importance of religious matters to Nichol's oeuvre which, while certainly an aspect, hasn't the importance with which Peters attempts to invest it. As Nichol himself comments in a prefatory remark to the Four Horsemen performance *Live at the Western Front*: "when I set out to write *The Martyrology*, I did not intend to talk about God in the poem… I've got to admit I don't walk down city streets talking to God. It's a funny thing that comes into the poem and I decided a long time ago that anything that came into the poem I would keep in the poem" (video recording). This, combined with Nichol's essay "Talking About the Sacred in Writing" in which he articulates a religious faith more 'pataphysical and linguistic than devout, should suggest that Theistic elements in Nichol's poetry are merely one part of his motivation in writing, perhaps no more important than his finding inspiration in Ornette Coleman's music or in *Dick Tracy* comics.

Unfortunately, matters do not improve as one moves beyond the introduction to the body of *bpNichol Comics*. Dutton has delineated, in the aforementioned review, the numerous poor editorial choices Peters makes, ranging from squandering 25 pages of the collection on storyboards for a short story with few illustrations by Nichol, to including ten pages of juvenilia when a few samples would suffice, and, most damningly, misidentifying a large sequence – and commenting extensively on this misrecognized section – as *John Cannyside* when it is in truth *The Lives & Loves of Captain George*. But beyond these colossal blunders there is little evidence that Peters has thought about how to organize this collection editorially. There appears to be no order for the sequences included, certainly not alphabetical or thematic and, while initially the collection seems chronological, midway through the edition the sequences begin to appear undated or starkly out of chronological order. Throughout, Peters also appears confused about chronology, writing that a 1975 notebook contains sketches for *A Gift for the Giver* (235) but then claiming a few pages later that there is no date for the composition of *A Gift for the Giver*, although "it was likely created in the early 1970s" (247).

Peters is also maddeningly repetitive in his commentary on the various sequences included in *bpNichol Comics*. He quotes extensively from "The Natural Thing," an early poem of Nichol's – and exactly the same passage each time – on three occasions in the collection (39, 161, 234) without making clear why this poem is particularly important (and it doesn't appear to be) or what it illustrates about Nichol's cartoons beyond the fact that it was composed around the same time that some of the sketches were. The phrase "new humanism" is also mentioned dozens of times in the collection without a clear definition of what this entails and, moreover, as Dutton reports, this was "a term that Nichol used once, and never elaborated on [yet] is tossed around by Peters as though it were a developed concept" (21). Additional concepts that are repeated *ad nauseam* yet are often undefined or misidentified include Stein's "bottom nature" as well as her distinction between identity and entity, but most irritating is Peters's continual use of term "no/tation" to talk about Nichol's composition. As far as I've been able to discover this is not a word that Nichol himself wrote in this way and, try as I might, I cannot understand what purpose the virgule serves in this term. What two concepts are being created by that instability? That there is no notation in Nichol's notation? That it is a negative or non-notation system? Is it emphasizing the "note" of notation? What could "tation" by itself possibly suggest?

I could continue citing Peters's numerous failures as an editor – including his inability to his justify inclusions, to present accurate readings of

images, or to provide proper context for sequences – but it is by this point clear that *bpNichol Comics* is a travesty that does a great disservice to a meticulous artist and poet. Why not dismiss this publication outright and leave well enough alone? For two reasons: the first of which is that, even after the publication of *bpNichol Comics*, Peters has continued to receive invitations to publish critical writing on Nichol and, in each case, has produced shoddy work. For example, in his endnotes to a chapbook reproduction of Nichol's *True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid* (above/ground, 2005), Peters continues to repeat himself, to employ uncalled-for stylistic tics (writing "uv" for "of" and "sd" for "said" although Nichol does not do so in the text under discussion and seemingly without thematic or practical purpose for Peters's argument), and to make completely unfounded assertions such as "Nichol loved to tell stories; that made him the greatest story-teller uv our time; his stories are parables" [10].

The second impetus behind this critique of Peters's criticism is that in a comparative review of *bpNichol Comics* with *Meanwhile* (a collection of Nichol's essays edited by Roy Miki) that appeared in *Canadian Literature*, Peters's collection seems to be lauded over Miki's beautifully designed and executed collection. According to Kathryn Grafton, Miki's text is problematic in that he "chooses not to preface or footnote [Nichol's] writings" (159) and due to the fact that it lacks an index. Peters's edition, on the other hand (which also lacks an index), is "insightful[]" (160) and, in conclusion, Grafton writes that "while Miki encourages readers of *Meanwhile* to arrive at their own sense of textual unity, Peters frames Nichol's comics for his audience" (160). Yet what is the use of providing such a distorting frame for readers? Why direct readers down wrong paths, send them on fool's errands, and otherwise mislead them with unsubstantiated claims and incorrect information? Miki's collection which, in contrast to Peters's scattershot organization, carefully dates each essay of Nichol's, and has full bibliographic details of first publications and revisions, as well as a clear and rationally constructed conclusion, is a model of thoughtful editing. That it could be viewed as lacking in comparison to Peters's editorial work, and presented as such in a prestigious journal such as *Canadian Literature*, is troubling.

Returning once again to Davey's introduction to the *bpNichol + 10* issue, he describes how, at the death of an author "an institutional group of textual custodians comes into being – scholars and editors who present themselves as caring as passionately about that author's text as the author once did." (8) In the case of Nichol, during the subsequent ten years since Davey wrote, various custodians have emerged with varying degrees of editorial abilities, and all with their own agendas. In addition to the divi-

sions between those who knew Nichol personally and those who didn't, between those who are disciples and those who are critical of Nichol and his writing, we now have the division between those who approach the material with care and those who are haphazard. I had initially planned to add a warning to Davey's lists of cautions at this point: for the estate of Nichol, and those who control the archives and special collections, to be careful of who they allow to edit and represent Nichol's work, especially his unpublished writings and notebooks. Yet, in retrospect, restriction of access and controlling material is not in the spirit of Nichol's own generosity or publishing practice while he was alive. Rather, there should be a plurality of scholars contributing to the discourse of Nichol's writing, some contesting, but with the caveat that there needs to be greater care taken in the publishing and reviewing of his work.

That is, none of us, whether we knew Nichol or not, can 'own,' or say we best represent the writing of Nichol or the image and construction of 'bpNichol' the writer. Like many artists, Nichol's writing contains contradictions and multiplicities: he is both a devotional poet and a political poet; a post-structuralist poet and a Romantic poet; a poet of love and a poet of anger; an elitist and a populist; and the list continues. It is neither the death of Nichol, nor the deaths of the critics, scholars, and poets who knew bpNichol personally, nor subsequent generations of critics yet to be born, that will 'liberate' the work or escape the prejudices and preconceptions that have limited the reading of Nichol's body of work thus far. I don't believe that it is ever possible to do so, but certainly, at the very least, we can approach and represent the writing of Nichol with as much care and precision as possible.

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The Unquiet Poem: bp Nichol's Re-sounding Cultural Geographies

Leif Einarson

"[I]f it's blank, white and 8 ½ by 11 it's basically telling you you better get busy and fill it up if you ever want to get a book published" (Nichol, "The "Pata of Letter Feet" 355). This is the dialogue that bp Nichol introduces in much of his work, between the "page" and "you." This paper moves inside such dialogue, investigating the plural "we" of modern print culture, particularly in the English 'colony' of Canada. Whether we are aware of it or not, there is a dominant tendency to see the page in a reductive and restricting way: if the page is filled and published, it is used effectively; if it is empty and unpublished, it is an unused and meaningless wasteland. There is, however, much more to the page than just this. It may be that we are so far 'inside' print culture that the values and effects of such a predominantly silent, visual culture are, ironically, too transparent and normalized to be consciously knowable.

This is a feature of all print cultures around the world today. Canada may, however, be considered a particularly literary colony. Canada is one of the first nations in the Western literary tradition without immediate geographic roots in "Old World" oral cultures like those of Homer's *Iliad* or Cædmon's hymn. English-Canadian culture and society began decidedly in colonial text and print, with the utilitarian and appropriative journals of explorers and the highly literary ramblings of settlers and tourists. The 'settlement' and 'discovery' of Canada is, of course, an ideological construct that to a certain extent excludes and 'writes' over indigenous oral modes and cultures. When Susanna Moodie came to Canada, for instance, she viewed the geography as a non-literary and un-cultured wasteland to be conquered, colonized, and 'filled' with visual print culture. In the history of 'Canadian' culture, this settlement ideology is a formative "example of the ascendancy of the eye over the ear that lays the groundwork for the eventual domination by print (the eye) in our culture" (Nichol, "Sound and the Lung Wage" 106-7). Nichol is one of the first to "chart"[1] the disturbing effects of this dominant and normalized colonial ideology upon the cultural geography of Canada.

Nichol's work demonstrates that the dominant practice is still to colonize and civilize the empty page, that space of white wilderness, as

though it were of no cultural significance, as though it were pragmatically present but otherwise silent and invisible. If we consider the fundamental state of cultural 'being' and 'practice,' particularly of print culture, has anything changed since the colonization of the Canadian landscape by Europeans? The landscape was seen as superficially utilitarian then, an un-patterned challenge to the so-called 'first' settlers and founders of Canada. In the 1970s and 1980s, after decades of urban sprawl, bp Nichol found himself working in a time when much of Canadian literature and criticism had turned to silently deliberating over the visual 'survival' of the printed Canadian canon. As a poet and a critic, Nichol works with the realization that, "for most writers, [the surface of the page] is, unfortu- nately, so utilitarian, so taken for granted that it is, for all intents and pur- poses, a non-issue" ("The "Pata of Letter Feet" 355). There was "*no* ta- tion" of the page's geography, and for many writers and readers there still is "*no* tataion." In light of his theoretical writings, this paper analyzes Nichol's "Self-Portrait" and his sound-poem "Art in Upheaval", consider- ing how Nichol's poetics enable various otherwise imbalanced and si- lenced cultural geographies (physical, textual, visual, and oral) to resonate (or re-sound-notate) with one another.

The Arts & Insanity: Breaking through to a more whole geography of the subject & society.
Nichol's "Self-Portrait"[2] not only illustrates his own view of his self, but also establishes his complex psychological and social approach to cultural geographies. The layered grid, an effect that appears in a few of his "alle- gories,"[3] seems to represent the visually rendered influence of the (archi-) textualized sub-conscious upon the perception of the self-concept and the subject's conceptualization of his/her world. Nichol grants incarnate form to the textual and architectural features of language and culture that are often taken for granted when considering physical geography. The result is a visibly structured (or post-structuralist) space. Similarly, in "Narrative in Language: The Long Poem," Nichol explains "that in Wildwood Park in Winnipeg the different streets &/or sections were named after the let- ters of the alphabet so that when I was first learning the alphabet I was also learning my way home" (394-95). Through this autobiographical an- ecdote, Nichol demonstrates that the location of the self in the physical geography of the rural town is parallel to the establishment of the self within the textual geography of the alphabet.[4] As so many of Nichol's allegories demonstrate, the processes of identifying and forming the self and the other[5] in modern print culture are as much a function of the physi- cal geography – the civil planning and architecture of the city – in which

one grows up as they are of the graphic planning and architecture of textuality within which one learns to "sign-if-i-can-see/say" ("The "Pata of Letter Feet" 357). Thus, the cultural territory of the subject, from Nichol's (self-)perspective, is a woven ground of both the infrastructure and architecture of the textual as well as civil and physical spaces we inhabit.

The influence of orality in print culture is another matter. Depending on the relationship between orality and textuality, the space that Nichol presents in his "Self-Portrait" can seem either limited, ordered, and trapping to the subject and society, or somewhat free and psychologically balanced. Nichol works in the conditional state of the last "s" sound of "sign-if-i-can-*ce*." He breaks the word "significance" down into the cultural activity of "signing if I can." But the mode of this activity is uncertain: it can begin either "see" or "say," visual or oral, the former being dominant in contemporary culture, the latter being repressed, avoided, even shunned. As Nichols says, "our alphabet is a visual one which developed much more from the pictograph than from any phonetical base" ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 106-7). Thus, an increasingly silent and visual culture comes to depend upon "the ONE STATEMENT = ONE MEANING dictum" as an imbalanced cultural geography or "groundwork" and a secure, ordered place of habitation (110). This is akin to what Walter Ong identifies as "typographic control," that mode of writing that is ideally suited to pragmatic mass-production, ignoring and even presuming to make the page transparent as a culturally important geographical surface:

> Typographic control typically impresses more by its tidiness and inevitability: the lines perfectly regular, all justified on the right side, everything coming out even visually, and without the aid of the guidelines or ruled borders that often occur in manuscripts. This is an insistent world of cold, non-human, facts. 'That's the way it is' – Walter Cronkite's television signature comes from the world of print that underlies the secondary orality of television.[6] (122)

The rigid boundaries and reproductions of "the ONE STATEMENT = ONE MEANING dictum" are akin to the utilitarian approach to the surface of the page, the colonizing of it without consideration for that geography as a site of balanced cultural "sign-if-i-can-see/say" ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 110). Viewed in this way, masses of subjects in this megalomaniacal "Self-Portrait" seem trapped in silence by the same, overarching textual grid.

However, Nichol argues and demonstrates that "both the arts & insanity are attempts to break out of this trap" ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 110). Nichol's "Self-Portrait" does not portray a typographical, "perfectly regu-

lar" and controlled grid, but rather a flowing hand-drawn grid, no one part being exactly the same as another. As the birds fly unhindered and the paths flow freely before the ambulatory perspective of the "self," so too this "Self-Portrait" seems suggestively free in its awareness of textual influence upon the process of the individual subject's perception and formation. Accordingly, the architectural grid of "Self-Portrait" also suggests that the history of architecture is intimately connected to that of poetry: both of these arts have been subjected to the trapping typological forces of modern print culture. It is because print culture "dealt a decisive blow" to oral culture, Nichol hypothesizes, that "there is no problem vexes architects more than how to create a perfect acoustical environment. "One theory to account for this is the belief that greek & earlier architectures were based on the ear as opposed to (as is the case in the 20th century) the eye" ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 106). This printed blow was perhaps dealt, as Scott Pound suggests, in a period of a semantic and ideological shift during the

> interval between Greek and Roman culture: the period when what an oral Greek culture understood as rhythm became what a literate Roman culture thought of in terms of metrics.
> [. . .]
> The Romans treated rhythm according to spatial categories like symmetry and proportion. The result is that, in subsequent Western treatments, rhythm does not exist independent of a pattern. (56-7)

However, simply because typographic pattern has for millennia been an internalized aspect of Western culture does not mean it should be taken for granted or resigned to the sub-conscious alone. The grid and "archi-textual" space of Nichol's "Self-Portrait" is metrical only in so far as it resembles a typographic grid and consciously expresses the internalization of typographic control: it is not the trapping typographic grid of an "insistent world of cold, non-human, facts" (Ong 122). Nichol's grid is a rhythmically flexible hand-drawn grid that demonstrates an awareness of the inevitable internalized influence of typographic print culture while also embodying the flow and openness of more indeterminate harmony (or effort towards harmony) between the oral and the visual aspects (the "say" and the "see") of cultural "significance."

"Self-Portrait" is, however, a strictly visual allegory operating only in the visual medium. In "Sound and the Lung Wage" Nichol argues that "the medium thru which that harmony [of see/say] can be achieved is human sound", and it is in his sound poetry that Nichol's performances carry the most weight (105). Indeed, the experience of listening to (as well as

watching others listen to) Nichol's sound poetry powerfully portrays the imbalance he perceives at work in the oral/textual relationship of modern print culture. I have heard people call Nichol's sound poetry "bizarre", "incomprehensible", "disturbing", and "funny." Most often the response to his sound poetry is, in my experience, silence and an uncomfortable inability to respond. Nichol's sound acts seem to breach that visual code of typographic control and composure that is so dominant in print culture. A sound poem can elicit a response similar to that of hearing someone shouting on a subway, or a child screaming in a supermarket, or an adult becoming orally expressive in public in an 'inappropriate' way. These are frequently 'seen' as signs of a lack of control and composure, or perhaps even of psychological instability.

   Print culture seems to have affected not only a move away from orality, but also a deeply rooted psychological incompatibility with it or aversion to it. In "Sound and the Lung Wage," Nichol observes that "man has a strange fear of vowel sound   nowhere is this better illustrated than in the tragic story of the gradual extermination of the wild wolves" (104). Nichol hypothesizes that it is primarily this fear of wild wolvish vowel howling that has motivated the irrational drive to exterminate the animal as well as to 'pen up' psychologically disturbed people who seem to make similar sounds or whose oral behaviour does not conform with the dominant sense of order. In the tradition of Germanic poetry, mythology, and law, wolves were commonly associated with lawlessness, outlawry,[7] and with the apocalyptic end of the world: in the myth of *Ragnarök*, the Twilight of the Gods, there is "a wind-age, a wolf-age" in which the wild vowel rages until the "world falls to ruin" (trans. from Dronke 19). Influenced by his time spent working at Therafields, Nichol seems keenly aware of the psychological role of this deeply rooted fear and aversion for vowel sounds. In his interpretation of the "Hopi indian creation myth" he identifies an exemplar of the psychological disorder that brings imbalance and destruction to the entire cultural world. At the beginning of the world, Palongwahoya was born, and

> [. . .] it was his job to go forth & praise the creator to open his mouth & sing when he did this he set the vibratory axis of the earth in motion so that the earth vibrated in tune with the vibratory axis of the universe   [. . .] then men ceased singing & retreated into their homes & began to use speech only to communicate between themselves & the world began to vibrate out of tune & the creator destroyed it   ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 105)

In Nichol's paraphrasing of this myth, the turning point involves a retreat into the private and contained interior environment of the visual cultural

abode. This disruptive movement identifies an underlying cultural allegory that is parallel to the modern retreat into the silence and security of the typographic and predominantly visual textual system: seeking the security of a dominated, colonized space, we seem to have become trapped in an unbalanced "Self-Portrait" quite unlike Nichol's.

The Unquiet Page: Sound poetry and re-sounding Canadian geographies. In his sound poem "Art in Upheaval", [8] Nichol has various geographies play off of one another, struggling to break through to that harmony or balance. In this poem, the author supposedly recites an "essay,"[9] but the page itself enters into a sometimes antagonistic dialogue with the author. Nichol grants the printed page, the site of textual geography, a voice of its own: it shuffles and crinkles to establish what could be called the key movements of this performance. This is evident in the very first sounds of the title pages of this 'essay':

> Author: Art in Upheaval
> [page speaks]
> Author: An essay
> [page speaks]

Because the performance is oral, we cannot be 'visually' certain if the page's voice signals an actual turning of the page,

as though the title were on this page,

and the sub-title were on this page.

If that were the case, then the page's voice would signify the page as a "real"[10] structural feature of the text that the author recites: only two or three words are written on each of the first two pages. Conversely, we are also unable to tell if the page's voice has nothing really to do with the visual structure of the text itself: there may simply be a collection of blank or 'waste' pages, the voices of which the performer is using merely as 'sound props' to establish the page-ness of this performance.[11] How we conceptualize this uncertainty is an exercise in hearing "The "Pata of Letter Feet": if we struggle to work out that either/or situation (either the page is simply a sound prop, or it is the reality of the way the visual text is printed), then we are immediately situated in the task of "actually dealing with the reality of that surface [that geography] and of the marks [we] place [or read/hear] on it" ("The "Pata of Letter Feet" 357). Nichol immediately places his audience in that conditional state at the last syllable of "sign (but only) if i can s . . . (what? see? say?)." If we only choose one perspective or the other, without attempting to actually find a balance within that conditional state, then there is *no tation* and we 'see' only a waste of paper, a geography of white wasteland.

The upheavals of tone, measure, and rhythm in "Art in Upheaval" dramatize the page as it struggles with the modern expectation of silence and suppression, becoming a character in a dialogue, with an agency and history of its own, and with its own agenda. Nichol's point is well made: the printed page has cultural voice and influence, with a historically testified range and embodiment of its own. Whether the audience is able to (or chooses to) see it and hear it, the page is both an internalized technological force that has shaped modern cultural geography, and it is also a critically important surface of cultural geography in itself. It is through the metaphors of glacial movements and geographical 'upheavals' that Nichol's sound poem examines the complex history of these cultural geographies. Each of the movements of the performance is signaled by the voice/turning of the page itself. And each movement in turn expresses a particular voice of a landscape in upheaval, the geography supposedly being that of art itself, as the title suggests, and, by implication, of Canadian cultural geography.[12] For instance, at about 2:23 of the performance, the page speaks and heralds a new thematic movement:

>   [page speaks]
>   Author: The birth of the ice-age theory.
>   Paper.

> Waaaaaaavessss . . . .
> Driffftttptfptf . . .

Nichol performs the "birth of the ice-age theory" as though the material "paper" forms massive, prolonged and gradual waves of drifting white influence that ebbs and flows over our cultural geography. The textual and physical geographies merge into a unified conditional state in which the page becomes as a glacier, a force and medium of extensive and age-old geographical shaping that is omnipresent even if unnoticed or absent. Most unlike a passive white wilderness awaiting colonization, this "ancient" technological force has, over the millennia, deeply gouged and scored its influence upon the cultural landscape. It is as though the omni-presence of this force contributes to its transparency, as if the conditioned silence of internalized masses of print culture has fostered an aversion to any expression, any "upheaval," of this ongoing ice age of the page.

However, the page will be heard, both in Nichol's work and in culture in general. While the page's voice in "Art in Upheaval" does not seem to have much variation for the most part, it does not merely signify the mo-notonous turning of a monolithic page. Though limited in range, the page does speak with subtle variations in tone and amplitude, supposedly re-sounding within the body of the page itself as a cultural force that inter-acts with the spoken words and sounds. But the influence of the page also breaks out through the body and voice of the author himself. At about 2:52 of the performance, the author bursts out a reiteration of "MASSES" that is suggestive of sub-conscious and suppressed depths breaching the superficial inhibitions of a typographically conditioned and composed visual culture. The attempts at suppression by the author demonstrate a need to make those geographical "masses" quiet and composed in order to noiselessly pass over them with "*no* tation," leaving unacknowledged and un-expressed the conditional state of cultural "significance" presented by the textual moraines that proliferate in Canadian print culture.[13] Thus, at about 2:53 of the performance, immediately after the emphatic re-iteration of "MASSES," the page speaks in a relatively quiet and soft voice, as though it reacts to the "MASSES" and feels stifled, shocked, disturbed. Conversely, it may seem as though the hand that moves the page, the hand of the author, wants or commands it to 'feel' more silent and transparent, either for the author's comfort, or for the audience's, perhaps both. The page is characterized, not without nuance, in an interactive relationship within the performance, reflecting the effect of the inhibitions and manip-ulations of the dominant mode of perception in a silent print culture: cer-

tain aspects of the cultural geography are suppressed in fear of the sound of "MASSES" of accumulating cultural debris.

Despite the turbulence and "upheavals" of the performance, "Art in Upheaval" ends with a distinct tone of meditative resolution and balance between the textual and the oral. Towards the end of "Art in Upheaval" the author says that "We shall deal in some detail in the pages that follow, but we shall not exhaust the list." He then begins a sequence of breathing sounds that acts as a transition of sorts: in much the same way as at the end of "Pome Poem" Nichol suggests through the rhythm of his breathing that the poetic energy and 'significance' of the performance exists or seeks to exist in sound as "an expression of the total organism" ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 104). Thus, in "Pome Poem", the Nichol runs through a sequence of phrases, saying that

> What is a poem is inside of your body,
> >   inside your head
> >   inside your fingers
> >   inside your toes
> >   inside your belly
> >   inside your heart
> >   inside your eyes
> >   inside your nose
> >   inside your ears
> >   inside your lips
> >   inside your voice[14]

At this point Nichol reverses the underlying cultural allegory represented in the Hopi myth: through 'voice' Nichol moves *out* from the potentially silent, predominantly visual, and concretely corporeal habitations for the poem, into the abstract spheres of emotional concepts like "happy", "woe", and "loving." The poem then concludes with "What is a poem is inside of your breathing." As "breathing" is repeated like a meditative mantra of sorts it slowly merges until seamlessly one with the rhythm and tones of breathing itself, "embodying" the meaning of Nichol's poem and freeing the poem so that it "IS NOW CONSTANTLY HAPPENING IN OUR LIVES" (*ABC: THE ALEPH BETH BOOK* n.p.).

This merging of the word and the body through breathing is quite antithetical to the dominant practice of silent reading in modern print culture. Noise and loud orality in a library environment are, for instance, considered even more disturbing and unruly or 'wolfish' than a child screaming in the supermarket, or an adult yelling on the subway. A library is a place of silence. Various utilitarian 'sound props,' like pages and letters, should be seen, not heard. Study carrels even cage the sound of turning pages.

Ear-phones keep private whatever sound is being listened to by separate individuals, sound which usually has nothing whatsoever to do with the reading at hand. This silent reading environment is not simply a culture of silence, but almost an a-cultural silence: "Quiet! I'm trying to read." There is also the utilitarian ideology that the pages should be filled, the bookshelves in libraries colonized, suggesting a psychological need to "use words to push away" the blank, unstructured space (Nichol, "Sound of Lung Wage" 105). This seems in part to be the compulsive writing of a "massified" "megalomaniacal" society ("Interview w/CB & JD" 169) in which "the full range of human voice is neither explored nor expressed," leading to repression and mental illness ("Sound of Lung Wage" 105). Thus, as Nichol argues, sound is feared, like wolfish vowel howling. Inhibited, psychologically disturbed, people come to fear the full range of the human voice, feeling embarrassed by it because of an internalized textual disorder.

In contrast, the merging of sound, body, word, and breath that resolves several of Nichol's sound poems is much more akin to the highly meditative and spiritual act of reading as it was practiced by some of the first people to introduce the textual Latin alphabet to the oral culture of Old English narratives. For monks in medieval England the process of 'reading' a text was both oral and visual. As Jean LeClercq observes, for these monks "to read was to hear": "in the Middle Ages, as in antiquity, they read usually, not as today, principally with the eyes, but with the lips, pronouncing what they saw and with the ears, listening to the words pronounced, hearing what is called the 'voices of the pages'" (15). This is the symbiotic relationship between orality and textuality that Nichol achieves at the end of "Pome Poem" and "Art in Upheaval."

There is, however, one important difference: the typographically controlled technology of the printed page is an internalized force in modern print culture. Appropriately, at the end of "Art in Upheaval" Nichol's breathing merges into the rhythm and tone of the shifting and moving page itself. The poem closes with the voice of the page as though it were united seamlessly with the voice of the human body itself. For Nichol, the oral and the textual must be symbiotic for the act of cultural "significance" to be whole and balanced. Nichol announces that "We shall deal in some detail in the pages that follow, but we shall not exhaust the list", implying that the "delivery" of this "paper" is not a breathing exercise of waste in some sort of either/or mechanical, utilitarian exhaust system. Rather, that conditional "significance" moves towards an "expression of the total organism," including the body and geography of the page itself, as well as that of the author ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 104). Whatever

tenuous resolution we are left with at the end of this performance seems to reside in the page itself as an expressive and internalized cultural geography.

"Self-Portrait" and "Art in Upheaval" are just two examples of many in bp Nichol's work that demonstrate attempts to find a form that will enable various cultural geographies (physical, textual, visual, and oral) to resonate (or re-sound-notate) with one another, thus bringing to the forefront the cultural geographies that have become increasingly suppressed, colonized, and silenced. These forms move towards an "expression of the total organism" ("Sound and the Lung Wage" 104), of a more complete and harmonious resounding of various cultural geographies. Immersed in modern print culture, however, we are perhaps not sufficiently aware of what is being expressed and what is doing the expressing: thus we are prone to colonizing, controlling, and dominating, rather than "Waiting", like Nichol, who positions and depositions his self within this flowing, fleeting and yet endlessly repeating movement, trying to "sign if i can s-". Here, destabilizing the silent, static text, we make the "move into talking about words as sentences, into reading, as deliberate gestures, the chance collisions of word particles" ("The "Pata of Letter Feet" 370). This is the punning, the nuptial marriage[15] of letters and words in a textual as well as "pataphysical oral/aural play, the result being "in language the closest effect in poetry to both chording and/or playing clusters in music" ("The "Pata of Letter Feet" 370). Instead of being driven by internalized textual impulses, seeking to fill, colonize with visual structure, Nichol's forms find guidance in the "pataphysical movement between word and letter, being in-formed by listening to the sounds of the "Pata of Letter Feet.

Notes

1. See Florence Stratton's article on "Cartographic Lessons: Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water.*"
2. "Self-Portrait" is from a journal ("4 January 1979") in the bp Nichol Papers, Special Collections, W.A.C. Bennett Library, Simon Fraser University. It is also reproduced on the front cover of *Beyond the Orchard: Essays on the Martyrology*. Ed. Roy Miki and Fred Wah. Winnipeg: Hignell. 1997.
3. Particularly "What is Can Lit?" (*Meanwhile* 118-119), but also the layering and framing of other "allegories."
4. This predominantly textualized self/civil-engineering demonstrates that the colonization of Canadian geography has resulted in a highly textual and visual domain: Nichol's "Wildwood" is no longer the adversarial, oral, and un-patterned "Wildwood" that Moodie encountered in the early 19th century.

5. Nichol identifies the formation of the self and other as the symbiotic activities of how "I am who am" and "how I see the world" (*Love* "Frame 1"; "Narrative in Language" 395).

6. The secondary page-ness of websites is a further example of textuality and "the world of print" being internalized.

7. *Vargr* ("wolf") is used in Medieval Icelandic law codes to refer to outlaws.

8. "Art in Upheaval" is available in mp3 format at http://ubu.wfmu. org/sound/nichol_bp/Nichol-bp_Sound-Poems_06-art.mp3.

9. It is significant, of course, that the root of *essay* in French and Latin is "to try", to make an attempt to break through.

10. The potential for confusion here between 'real' and what is simply interpreted as 'visual' is integral to Nichol's points about the supremacy of the visual in contemporary culture: visual structure seems, in some respects, the only reality. 11. Nichol chooses to keep the page utterly silent in other recordings, if there is in fact a page present at all: there was not always a page present in Nichol's performances, nor was there always a page present in the history of human culture. Also, the notion of the page as a 'sound prop' rings with a sort of textual truth that parallels the page to an alphabetic sign, those too being arbitrary sound props in their own Saussurian way.

12. At 3:10, and particularly at 3:28, of the poem, Nichol makes the difficult and conscious effort of articulating "CANADA", suggesting that the movements and upheavals that the poem portrays are part and parcel of the national activity of cultural "sign-if-i-can-see/say."

13. See the layers of 'moraines' in "What is Can Lit?"

14. "Pome Poem" is also available in mp3 format at http://www.ubu.wfmu. org/sound/nichol_bp/Nichol-bp_Sound-Poems_02-pome.mp3

15. See "Two Words: A Wedding" on page 107-8 of *As Elected: Selected Writing/bpNichol.*

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Generations Generated

Stephen Scobie

It's a late October morning on the west coast of Canada. The sun is streaming through my window; indeed, it's getting in my eyes, interfering with my writing. It was that same sun that created the Egyptian Pharaohs, and was worshipped by them. I know that shortly I'm going to be writing about Ramesses III, builder of tombs, the greatest ruler of the 20th Dynasty; and his name means "The sun has fashioned him." I will let the sun shine in my eyes until it clears the frame of my window, on this Sunday morning in October, when we have declared an end to "daylight saving time."

The sun strikes through the thinning branches of a camellia bush. Squinting against it, I generate a code on my computer. A few clicks on the keyboard – www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Nichol.html – and the voice of bpNichol comes into my room. Again.

I never fail to be struck by this multiple strangeness. Barrie's voice, which I knew so well, which was as close to me as a physical vibration, but which now comes to me out of my computer's small speakers, distant and disembodied. His voice, which once I could feel across the wavelengths of a room. ("She gets you on her wavelength," Leonard Cohen sings about Suzanne, "And she lets the river answer.")

So much of that wavelength depended upon bodily presence. "Sound poetry" was all about body: the enacted, physical embodiment of voice. Not the dry, academic, impersonal tone of the printed page, but the voice, the body in front of you, performer to audience, grunting, sweating, breathing – above all, breathing. The 'disembodied' voice of recording seemed at best second-best; at worst, a betrayal. Yet for all those who would listen to him now, it is the only possibility left.

For Barrie is dead, which is not an accident. Death, as a condition of possibility, was always to be understood as the context of his most 'live' performances. In the moment when he seized upon breath, he addressed us from beyond the already accomplished fact of death. He was always, in Jean-Luc Godard's phrase, "à bout de souffle," at the limit of breath, staggering like Belmondo down that Parisian street, breathless.

The recording he leaves behind, for succeeding generations.

That word too says death: each generation comes, and then passes. But at the same time, it says life: each act of physical generation, sexual pro-

creation. produces the new life which will succeed it, and record it. "Those dying generations," writes Yeats, "at their song."

In audio-tape technology, "generations" refer to how many copies you are distant from the 'original' performance. So: sometime in the early 1980s, bpNichol conceived a sound-poem called "Generations Generated." Maybe he tried it out to himself, in private (Generation #1). Then (I'm guessing here) he tried it out in public performance (Generation #2). Then he agreed to record it for a published tape called "Ear Rational" (Milwaukee, 1982: Generation #3). Then, many years later, this recording was posted as part of the above-cited bpNichol website (Generation #4). Then this recording was downloaded by me (Generation #5 x n) many times, in the course of writing this article.

But still the question remains: what is it of *Barrie* that I hear? I hear his 5th-generation voice. But I can remember (2nd generation) his living voice – though I never heard him read this poem. So it always disconcerts me to hear that voice again: so intimately, here in my private study, with the sun streaming in my window, and yet so distanced, coming from the speakers on my computer, downloaded from the Internet. His voice resonates in my room, and I shudder to hear it. Yet I am now like one of those who never heard him live; all I have left is a mechanical recording. It isn't Barrie's voice any longer; it's just another text.

The text of "Generations Generated" is based on the names of two Egyptian Pharaohs, the first two rulers of the 20th Dynasty: Set-nakhte Merer-amun-re User-khau-re Setep-en-re (1185-1182 B.C.), and Ra-messes Heqa-iunu User-maat-re Mery-Amun (1182-1151 B.C.)[1] Setnakhte was not one of the more distinguished Pharaohs, but Ramesses III was one of the greatest of Egyptian rulers, victorious in battle and a great builder of tombs. The names carry a familiar dichotomy: they are both 'proper' names, designating unique individuals, and 'common' nouns, with definable meanings. For example, "User-maat-re Mery-amun" (a phrase which Nichol repeats insistently) means "Powerful is the Justice of Re, Beloved of Amun."

Nichol takes this list of names and repeats it over and over, in various permutations of order and combination, for over nine minutes. The names (at least as he pronounces them) are heavily rhythmical, with one strong stress and two weak stresses; the strong stress falls either on the first syllable or the middle syllable, never on the final syllable. The effect is predominantly dactylic, a falling rhythm.

On the one hand, then, the poem is strongly referential, insisting on the proper names, and on their proper repetition: their genealogy. These are the Pharaohs (kings, gods) who initiated a dynasty. The names insist upon

their connection with the great divinities (Re, Amun) and with each other (each Pharaoh bears within his own name the names of his ancestors). In the echoes of the names, we hear dynastic succession being enacted; we hear the generations being generated. The correct recitation of these names would have been an essential component of court life and ritual.

But on the other hand, there are at least two counter-strains of meaning being suggested. Firstly, the circular repetition of the names works *against* the ostensible meaning of dynastic succession. We do not proceed in a linear fashion from generation to generation; rather, we get stuck in a single loop of father and son. Ramesses succeeds, but Setnakhte does not get left behind. Only at the end of the poem does the voice break into what sounds like a more sequential narration. Generations, that is, are not only generated but re-generated. The names of antiquity fall back on themselves, becoming a non-referential chant.

That is, secondly, the poem problematises reference by becoming abstract, by moving into the realm of pure sound. Like so many sound poems, it is, in Bob Dylan's words, an "exercise in tonal breath control." Listening to it, you soon forget or subdue the referential function, and give yourself over to the experience of voice and tone and rhythm. You may still be aware that these sounds you hear do have historical meaning; but at the same time you acknowledge these particular combinations of vowels and consonants as freely chosen, arbitrary constraints on what the voice will be permitted to sound this time. It becomes a mantra, an exercise for meditation. The repetition of the chant suspends the rational faculty which would trace historical succession, and leaves you with pure sound; rhythm; voice.

It is the voice (even in a multi-generation recording) which generates the poem. The insistence of the voice in all its moments: the gulp of breath taken in, expelled; the occasional hoarseness; the fall of rhythm through the descending syllables; the exultant rise to a new cycle of repetition. It is a poem you immerse yourself into (its nine minutes could easily be much longer), so it is also a poem about time. Time which passes, as one generation of Pharaohs succeeds another, and time which does not pass, but instead repeats, cycles back on itself, suspends succession in the sacred space of repetition.

Thus, "Generations Generated" has become for me the emblematic poem by which I want to remember bpNichol. That recorded voice speaks to me, not from *beyond* his death, but from *inside* his death, at its very core. I never hear "generations" without the accompanying Yeats adjective, "dying," and the following Yeats celebration, "at their song." This

time, and every time I repeat "this time," Barrie is singing. He's singing for me.

Notes

1. I take the listing of names, the definitions of their meaning, and their transliteration from the website http://members.aol.com/egyptous1/ chrono.html#timeline, which in turn acknowledges Peter A. Clayton, *Chronicles of the Pharaohs: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers and Dynasties of Ancient Egypt.* I have no information on what source Nichol used, or what form the transcription of the names took in it; nor have I been able to trace the text which he reads in the last minute of the poem. Similarly, I do not know whether his pronunciation of the names would meet with the approval of Egyptologists.

Apocalypse Now: The Four Horsemen Burn Through Atlanta

James Sanders and Mark Prejsnar

> But this animal seemed to receive my civilities with disdain, shook his head, and bent his brows, softly raising up his right fore-foot to remove my hand. Then he neighed three or four times, but in so different a cadence, that I almost began to think he was speaking to himself, in some language of his own.
>
> – Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

What a great name – the Four Horsemen. So much about the group is already there in the name. There is the reference to the harbingers of the fiery end of the world, a reference which is both completely apt because Rafael Barreto-Rivera/Paul Dutton/Steve McCaffery/bp Nichol are in fact trying to bring about the end of the 'word,' its dominance over poetry, and wonderfully ironic because their performances were funny and entertaining, in marked contrast to their biblical antecedents. And "horse/men" in the sense of a Houyhnhnm/Yahoo cross (borne out by the group's mixture of sense and nonsense). And also the Deleuzian concept of "becoming animal." And unlike the names of the group's contemporaries – Konkrete Kanticle, Owen Sound, JGJGJGJG – the name "Four Horsemen" has a more playful ring to it, much more rock n' roll than poetic or intellectual (the Four Horsemen is in fact the name of a current metal band).

   The Four Horsemen still resonate today because sound poetry is still such unfamiliar turf for most[1] and because they are a group and the cultural bias in favor the lone poet is still a strong one. The Atlanta Poets Group, a collective of writers/performers to which we both belong, has been heavily influenced by the Four Horsemen. While we have our diverse influences, everyone in the group would list the Four Horsemen as important to what we do (and probably to what any poet should do). What follows is a list of some of the characteristics of the praxis of the Four Horsemen as we have experienced them through recordings and written materials.

1. Collective Identity. The Four Horsemen were and still are the foremost sound poetry ensemble[2] and are arguably the premiere performance group in modern poetry. The collective identity of the Four Horsemen is a dense

identity, such that Barreto-Rivera/Dutton/McCaffery/Nichol were the integral and exclusive members of the group. The Four Horsemen was not a permeable organization like Dada or OuLiPo, and when Nichol died, so effectively did the group's identity. When one of the members was absent, the group consciously rebranded themselves "The Horsemen" rather than "The Four Horsemen" (although this essay uses the Four Horsemen to denote both except where expressly indicated otherwise).

The denseness of this collective identity occurs not only across performances but also with respect to the performances themselves. More often than not it is the Four Horsemen and the Four Horsemen alone up on stage: the group operated more like an individual poet on stage rather than the kernel of a larger a network with other performers joining, colluding, leaving. They did experiment occasionally with collaborative performance (The biographical blurb on the group in *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue* mentions collaborations with Jerome Rothenberg, Jackson MacLow, Joe Rosenblatt, Murray Shaefer and Higgins himself (Nichol and McCaffery 95). However, out of all the performances on record in Paul Dutton's archival recordings of the group,[3] only one performance includes other poets actively participating: a show with Joe Rosenblatt, Joan Goddard and Paul Pascal at the Actors Studio Lab in 1971. There were also a few performances with other musicians, such as the jazz improv group CCMC, and there were some performances that included direct collaborations with the audience, such as group chants.

In both their rhetoric and practice, the Four Horsemen downplay the individual in favor of the group. Nichol in his introduction to the *Prose Tattoo*, a selection of the Horsemen's performance scores, stresses that the "moment of group identity is what is striven for" in the performance (ii). In the simultaneous polyphony of the group's performances the voice of the individual is often unrecognizable, barred from the listener. Not all of performances involve all of the Four Horsemen nor do all of the pieces performed at a Four Horsemen performance include all of the members. Twelve of the 26 performances that are in the Archive include solo pieces and these tend to occur earlier in the lifespan of the group. However, the vast majority of the pieces in the Archive are performed by all Four Horsemen. The task the Four Horsemen set for themselves as a group was clear: "[to replace] the traditional author with a complex machine assemblage generating performances that take the form of pulsational escapes from meaning and being, their release effected as a community of 'agent/ poets' functioning as a complex interrelation of transistors" (McCaffery 183).

2. *Polyphony*. One hallmark of the Four Horsemen is the multiple performer piece. Not only do most pieces consist of sound from multiple performers, but the sounds are often simultaneous or overlapping. Even in the case of pieces performed by only one of the performers, given the frame imposed by the denseness of the group's identity (and the branding of the performance as a "Four Horsemen performance"), a polyphony still exists, albeit in the form of one performer emitting sound and the other three emitting silence. To this might be added that even today it is unusual, to the point of being startling, when poetry theory mentions "polyphony," meant as we do here. Many different discourses, especially in academe but also outside it, instead use the word to mean "intertwining several different thematic or formal threads." Sometimes a structural, sometimes mostly a semantic, 'many-voicedness' is intended. So for instance several critics and scholars have referred to *The Cantos* as polyphonic. This use of the term, a metaphoric use of it really, has to be set to one side if we are to begin to discuss actual polyphonic poetry. That the metaphoric usage comes so unselfconsciously to many commentators says a lot about how underdeveloped real polyphony is, even now (both as theory and as practice) in the world of poetry.

3. *Anarchy/Homogeneity*. With respect to their performances, hierarchy is absent among the Four Horsemen. While there were differences between the individual performers within a piece in terms of content (sound, gesture, equipment),[4] these differences all occur on the same functional plane. In terms of function, the performers are homogenous: no one conducts the others, no one acts as the director of the piece, and no one really is the leader/composer (see the Improvisation paragraph below). In short, there is no division of labor of the type one sees in the film or music productions (producer, director, composer, performer).

4. *Live Performance*. For the Four Horsemen the live aspect of performance was paramount. According to Nichol: "[Recordings] remove the living performers from the audience's presence, and freeze what should be an ongoing process" (ii). A Four Horsemen performance is intended to be a event in which audience and performer participate together. Most of the interaction between the Four Horsemen and its audience is person-to-person. Except for a very few pieces (like the version of "In the Middle of a Blue Balloon" in which a prerecorded version was used) the Four Horsemen did not play with or problematize the concept of a 'live' event through devices like lip-synching, video feed, imposters, etc.

They did record several of their performances, publishing a few of those on records and cassettes. However, to the Four Horsemen them-

selves, this was an experience inferior to attending the original event itself. The Four Horsemen were after a process-based community of listening/performing. The audience of a recording of their performance is on the most basic material level not able to participate in this community.

5. The Acoustic. The Four Horsemen emphasize the acoustic over the electronic. This emphasis is already present in Nichol's statement above that a recording is inferior to a live performance. And within the live performance itself, technological manipulation of the voice is discarded, and the unaided voice/body is foregrounded.

The vast majority of sounds in Four Horsemen performances come from the human voice and body. Most of the sounds are vocal; less common are sounds generated by a performer interacting with an object (musical instruments are played, newspapers ripped, fingertapping, etc.). There are only a very few instances in the Archive where the bodies of the performers within the performing space itself do not generate the performed sound. One such instance is a performance of "In the Middle of a Blue Balloon" at York University in 1972 in which a radio plays (the amount of channel-changing or other manipulation by one of the performers is not discernable in the recording). Also, as mentioned earlier, in another performance of the same piece at the University of Alberta, Edmonton in 1980, a prior recording of "In the Middle of a Blue Balloon" is played during the performance.

McCaffery writes "As a group the Horsemen have a decided preference for the pure acoustic, eschewal of microphones, of electroacoustic treatment of any kind" (1978, 35). Clearly this preference is not absolute, since at the very least microphones were used to record many of the group's performances and it would be difficult to believe that there weren't some performances in which the room's PA system wasn't used. Nevertheless McCaffery's (and the Four Horsemen's) goal of the sound of the voice/body in its natural state is driven by a concern that the voice treated with an electronic process "loses the pure vocal energy that marks the kinetic axis of the piece" and that the voice processed on tape marks a return to writing. (1978, 35-36).[5] The fact that McCaffery himself did a tape treatment of the Four Horsemen in 1981 called "Waiting for the Parousia" is the exception that proves the rule, an example of a known road not taken.[6]

The acoustic hard-line of the Four Horsemen stands in deliberate contrast to the highly electrotechnical nature of continental sound poetry (e.g., Henri Chopin), and reflects a historical divergence between continental and Anglo-North American practices. The Four Horsemen play

John Henry, using multiple voices to match the sonic energy and variation available to electronic manipulation. There are moments in the recorded performances, especially those in which the Four Horsemen are accompanied by musical instruments, that the sounds created leave behind their human qualities.

6. *Semantic Spectrum*. The pieces performed by the Four Horsemen exhibit different degrees of semantic occlusion. On the one hand there are the pure sound pieces where referential meaning is avoided. As the Four Horsemen chant in "Schedule for Another Piece: A Theory of Practice": "a full political economy of the poem must involve total assassination of every signifier." These sound pieces are the ones most associated with the Four Horsemen. However, in many pieces, including ironically the "Schedule for Another Piece," there is a great deal of semantic lucidity where lexical clusters are audible in varying degrees, rising in and out of the phonetic soup. And there are pieces which are semantically 'transparent' (many of the solo pieces fall into this category) although parataxis, metaphor, and other poetic devices are employed. Paul Dutton writes that "if some ineffable emotion demands recourse to human sounds beyond the realm of conventional verbalization or if the communication of a particularly pleasing rhythm is hindered by the imposition of intellectual or verbal constructs, then let the everyday word depart to make way for that which is most immediate; yet if the specificity that words, syntax and sentences supply lends itself best to a poetic impulse, then let words, syntax and sentences hold sway" (44). Although their emphasis is on the protosemantic, the Four Horsemen are ultimately democratic pragmatists, using the full range of Zukofsky's upper limit music and lower limit speech.

7. *Improvisation*. There is also a spectrum of improvisation into which pieces performed by the Four Horsemen fall: on one end is the completely spontaneous and unaided improvisation; on the other end is recitation of a poem on a page. Most Four Horsemen pieces fall towards the first end of the spectrum. When used, scores were considered by the Four Horsemen as "a scheme of opportunities" (Nichol ii), as the site of "what is approached to be resisted, what is refracted, what is reacted to" (McCaffery 1978, 34). Spontaneity, even in the face of a prepared text, was the creative act: "The individual group members as improvisors are what bring the pieces alive, much more so than any composer we could identify. Composer is an inadequate term for sound poetry" (Nichol ii).

8. Relative Time. The beginnings, endings and changes of a Four Horsemen performance (even when scored) are changed by the performers according to feel, without reference to an external agent such as clock or metronome. Grids in the Four Horsemen's scores often indicate transitions, but many of the scores don't indicate transitions at all (some scores are extremely graphical and nonlinear). "We structure our pieces," McCaffery writes, "very much along the lines of a piece of string containing a series of knots.... Hence the importance of audition, when we listen we know; when we know, we can effect a transition" (1978, 34). Among the performers time is problematized – it is something to be worried about. This problematic adds another dimension to exchanges between the performers. Rather than a series of points which mark the flow of time, time in the performance is a process powered by a sequence of intensities. Instead of measurement in terms of seconds and minutes, there is merely earliness and lateness.

A Four Horsemen performance also problematizes time for the listener. "Sound poetry must be a memory poetry – " the Four Horsemen chant in "Schedule for Another Piece: A Theory of Practice," "the vital connection is the human memory interacting with human sound but only for the lifetime of your listening ears." All poetry (and all art with a temporal dimension) implicates memory, but the polyphonic pieces of the Four Horsemen push around the listener's memory and therefore her experience of time as the listener's ear wanders among the different vocal strands, following one for a while then grasping the whole before moving on to another one.

The physical continuum of time is left intact by the Four Horsemen performance. Allan Kaprow suggests that one could conduct a Happening "over the course of several, days, months or years, slipping it in and out of the performers daily lives" in order to "release an artist from the conventions of a detached, closed arrangement of space" (712). To our knowledge, this type of interruption of physical time was never practiced by the Four Horsemen. After all, maintaining the temporal continuum is consistent with the communitarian goals expressed by the Four Horsemen. It is within the unbroken physical continuum of time that the Four Horsemen expose time (through memory) as heterogeneous.

9. The Comedic. There is a theatricality to the Four Horsemen, but it is a specific theatricality – comedy. Gerald Bruns points out that all sound poetry lacks solemnity, speculating that "sound is inherently comic precisely because of its resistance to repression and containment" (49). And it is difficult to listen to the Four Horsemen and not smile during the cat howls, baby talk, belches, laughter, melodies.

Outside of the humor occasioned by pure sound, the Four Horsemen make theatrical gestures to further the comedic. In a performance at the University of Alberta in 1980 McCaffery bookends the show with a silly murder-mystery soliloquy called "Johnny Toronto." There were quasi-Vaudeville routines such as "Night Speech." Props were sometimes utilized. The visual component, the gesture, was integral to the performance. In the video clip of the Four Horsemen performing from the documentary *Poetry in Motion* (available for viewing on You Tube at http://www. youtube. com/ watch? v= ahUdQd_ YtwM) one sees saliva flying, heads wagging, notational gestures. The (faux?) expressiveness of the performers' voices also lends a goofiness to the performances. The oscillation between sincerity and irony, between ecstasy and archness keeps the listener off balance.

10. *The Room*. Of the performances in the Archive, all of them take place where one would normally hear a conventional poetry reading: colleges, radio studios, poetry festivals, art galleries, rehearsal areas. In short, in rooms of one sort or another. As far as we are aware, the Four Horsemen did not do random performances in public places (again in contrast to the concept of the 'happening'). Their performances occupied a static, theatrical space.

Striking parallels exist of course to the Horsemen's work (even though few if any ensembles have come close to the level of their achievement, in complexity *or* extensiveness.) One of the most remarkable aspects of sound poetry and the performance/polyphonic dimensions of poetic writing is how they repeatedly reinvent themselves, at some distance in time and space – and sometimes with limited overt reference to work that's been done before. The Four Horsemen built on aspects of zaum, improv and performance spectacle that were pioneered by early avant-modernism: Dada, the Cafe Voltaire, Hugo Ball and Klebhnikov. Also, the International Festival of Sound Poetry, held annually between 1968 and 1980, provided an important context for the Horsemen's career.

Quite a number of contemporary poetry performers explore aspects of complex performance-poetry, although not all of them are familiar with the Four Horsemen's career or opus in much detail. (And, aside from those pursuing performance directions in the most straightforward way, there are fascinating side-paths, such as Bruce Andrews' early book, *Love Songs*, which presents a dazzling array of experiments in the formal/format study of just what a poem is [or can be]. Many of the pieces in that book are scores for multiple voices, systematically exploring some of the ways that such compositions can be notated. It's fascinating to exam-

ine *Love Songs* next to the scores that the Four Horsemen have published. Such a juxtaposition suggests that there is a very wide range of ways poetry performance can be indicated on paper; that there is what might be called an instability regarding such notational issues ... probably a fecund and positive state of affairs.)

One analogue and descendant of the Four Horsemen is our own Atlanta Poets Group, a group active over the last ten years. This loose grouping has written and performed more than fifty performance pieces during that time, employing some of the dimensions discussed above, notably polyphony, improvisation, live performance, semantic occlusion and the comedic. This was initially a group that shared work written for one voice (or for silent reading). Its first group performance foray was "Weather and Land Forms for Radio: A Cartography for Two Voices," the result of a call by a local radio station for poets to read; this piece, written and performed by Randy Prunty and John Lowther, utilized major tempo shifts, use of technical and scientific language, considerable changes in dynamics (volume), and movements between clarity and indecipherability. This example led to the composing and live performance of other pieces. Many were elaborately written to achieve an effect of counterpoint between anywhere from 2 to 9 voices, while others allowed for considerable improvisation by the performers within a larger set structure, and yet others consisted almost entirely of improvisation. These pieces also range from unbroken lexical English, to pure sound poetry, with a large number using a mixture. Very clear themes are sometimes present (often enough political); on the other hand, very frequently (as with the Four Horsemen) there is nothing that can be thought of as a conventional paraphraseable theme. Also of interest is the point, mentioned above, of notational instability. We have developed a panoply of notional methods – a number independently re-inventing approaches used by the Horsemen or by Andrews in *Love Songs*, or by others, and a number apparently unique.

One of the fascinating things about these developments is that several years into our career as a performance unit the APG acquired and studied a number of Four Horseman recordings, and these certainly had a profound impact on our work. But we were already doing poetry of a very similar character before that, when some of us were only slightly acquainted with the earlier group, and a number of us really didn't know them at all. As mentioned above, this seems to be characteristic of the way performance and sound poetries have repeatedly appeared, disappeared and reappeared across time.

Steve McCaffery ends his essay "Voice in Extremis" in *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* contemplating the legacy of the

sound poetry movement that culminated in the Four Horsemen and other sound poetry ensembles of the 1970s. His conclusion is ultimately that their legacy is a destruction of "the logocentric binary of speech and writing" (2001, 186). For us the legacy of the Four Horsemen has been perhaps more affirmative and specific, more functional. The Four Horsemen are not a model for future poetic activity (any more than any single author or practice could or should be). However, the points outlined above, the problems the Four Horsemen spotlight, showing both their successes and the limits of their strategies, are the nodes which those of us who do group sound poetry think and rethink (and most importantly, play with) in order to form trajectories. They are points of departure. Saddle up.

Notes

1. Gerald Bruns: "To my mind sound poetry constitutes the most difficult and imponderable form of art in our culture. It is without question the most underresearched form of modernist or contemporary art." (45-46).
2. There were other sound poetry groups that existed around the time of the Four Horsemen (Owen Sound, Konkrete Canticle and JGJGJGJG) but the Four Horsemen were the first of that era, and whether fairly or unfairly, outshine those others today.
3. A four CD compilation of Four Horsemen performances from 1971 through 1988 and cited below. Subsequently in this essay we have just referred to it as the "Archive". We are grateful to Lori Emerson for providing us a copy of these recordings.
4. For example, Nichol describes a performance of "In the Middle of a Blue Balloon" where he and Dutton fight while Barreto-Rivera stands silently and McCaffery appears to watch another version of the piece on TV." (i-ii).
5. While one can follow (though one might not agree with) the argument that one must reject manipulations of the recorded voice in order to transcend writing, it's difficult to pin down the group's neoluddite logic with respect to performance itself. Why is the technological line drawn at electronic devices? Why are mechanical (musical instruments) and chemical (McCaffery gargles with dish soap in one piece) permitted filters on the "pure vocal energy" of the performer but not an electronic filter like an amplifier or feedback or an echo-effect?
6. The Horsemen (minus bp Nichol) also did a radio performance on December 1, 1988 in which they performed a voice-over of a previously recorded piece. Because this performance occurred after Nichol's death, query to what extent it can be firmly located within the Four Horsemen catalog anyway.

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The Practice of Community: bpNichol and Steve McCaffery in Collaboration

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> [I]n a mêlée there are meetings and encounters; there are those who come together and those who spread out, those who come into contact and those who enter into contracts, those who concentrate and those who disseminate, those who identify and those who modify…
> – Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*

In his introductory remarks for the *Open Letter* special issue "bpNichol + 10," Frank Davey asserts that the critical industry devoted to Nichol's work had tended to deify the personality of the poet by conflating 'bp' the person and the body of texts associated with his name.[1] In the same issue, scholars such as Lori Emerson, Darren Wershler-Henry, and Christian Bök echo Davey's complaint; the latter two indicate that such celebratory criticism has taken *The Martyrology* as the centerpiece for a largely anecdotal and honorific approach to his oeuvre, precisely because his longpoem, Bök argues, "lends his life work an imaginary coherence, unifying his career under the reassuring, but inhibiting, aegis of humanistic legitimacy" (66).[2] Bök and Wershler-Henry call for critics to explore the rich heterogeneity of his literary practice, finding alternative paths through his early concrete texts in *Journeying & the Returns* and *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer*, his creative translations, the pataphysical experiments collected in the *Love/Zygal/Artfacts/Truth* tetralogy, *The Adventures of Milt the Morph in Colour*, the TRG research reports, and both his solo-composed sound pieces and those performed with the Four Horsemen. Of course, this is not to suggest simply that an alternative set of texts should usurp *The Martyrology* as the privileged "centre" of Nichol's canon; rather, these scholars indicate that a more comprehensive approach is needed to characterize the complex array of practices collected under the proper name known as 'bpNichol.'

Judging by this brief shortlist of Nichol's less frequently cited works, it would seem that his copious literary production is complicated further by the extensive number of collaborations he undertook with several poets, artists, and musicians during his lifetime. Leaving aside his numerous interdisciplinary projects and his invaluable work as an editor of *Gronk*,

Ganglia, and the *Cosmic Chef*, gatherings that brought together an international consortium of concrete and sound poets, Nichol's literary collaborations traverse a wide range of activities. In addition to his research with Steve McCaffery as part of the TRG and the performances of the Four Horsemen (both projects continued for more than a decade), Nichol and McCaffery co-authored several poems, including "Parallel Texts," "Collborations" [sic], and *In England Now that Spring*. A text such as *Six Fillious*, furthermore, combines creative translation with experiments in multi-authorship by six poets in three different languages, and at present a novel composed by the Four Horsemen entitled *Slow Dust* remains unpublished. Years after these formative investigations into the possibilities of collaborative authorship, Steve McCaffery would remark that Toronto during the 1970s had become a tangible site of "'community building' … an attempt at *communitas* on the level of improvised poetic composition" (Cazé 31). If the goal of earlier criticism had been to distinguish 'bp' the person from the 'author function' that marks a body of literary texts, then as critics we should insist upon a further step: to acknowledge the frequency with which 'bpNichol' signifies as a proper name dispersed and reconstituted as other *collective* nouns. Indeed, a sizeable set of texts within Nichol's canon cannot properly be called 'his own,' a fact that might potentially encourage the sort of biographical analysis that hamstrings the reception of his work. That is, when collaborative writing is not ignored altogether, critics tend to explain its perceived idiosyncrasies by recourse to anecdote, rather than to assess the formal methodologies that inform such works.

Careful attention to the numerous collaborations undertaken by Nichol, McCaffery and several other poets in Toronto during the 1970s and 80s is well beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, I'd like simply to establish a working definition of poetic collaboration, one that Nichol and McCaffery largely point towards. Second, I'll then briefly propose a (non-exhaustive) taxonomy of those practices that Nichol and McCaffery develop both as co-authors and together as part of larger literary collectives. These texts traverse four broad and often overlapping areas of experimentation: (i) research, (ii) performance, (iii) translation, and (iv) textual composition.[3] One might begin to think of these activities as provisional unities within the collectively produced canon of several authors, functioning as points of convergence where poets congregate and amalgamate. In this sense, we might begin to conceive of collaboratively written texts in terms of the community formations they imagine.

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The notion of an author as the sole creator of a work is a fairly recent formation, as are the attendant institutions that codify this prevailing definition into laws of copyright. In *The Construction of Authorship*, Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi argue that the legal category of the author is "informed by the Romantic belief that long and intense legal protection is the due of creative genius" and that "the notion that the writer is a special participant in the production process – the only one worthy of attention – is of recent provenience" (5, 16). These critics insist that the myth of solitary genius conceals the social manufacture of literature, which involves the collective cooperation of those who write, edit, publish, and disseminate literary works.[4] Taking up a similar position, other scholars have sought to characterize the social field of literary production as a broadly collaborative endeavour. Jack Stillinger observes that contemporary studies of authorship have produced two antithetical positions: on the one hand is the death-of-the-author scenario championed by Barthes and modified by Foucault, and on the other are the now less frequently cited arguments by E. D. Hirsch and P. D. Juhl, who invest in the author "an importance approaching apotheosis or deification," whereby the author is the sole determiner of meaning (v). Stillinger challenges both positions, stating that "a work may be the collaborative product of the nominal author and a friend, a spouse, a ghost, an agent, an editor, a translator, a publisher, a censor, a transcriber, a printer, or – what is more often the case – several of these acting together or in succession" (v). That contemporary literature (and experimental literature in particular) has tended to privilege process over product would validate Stillinger's suggestion that scholars should be interested in the logic of multi-authored heuristic strategies and their implications for interpretation.[5] Reconceptualizing the modes of production and dissemination that enable literary practice as a collective endeavour is useful, but perhaps more might be said regarding the methods of collaborative writing that authors invent – particularly among the litany of avant-garde poets over the course of the twentieth century who consciously experiment with collaboration as a means to subvert conventional theories of authorship.[6]

For Nichol and McCaffery, collaboration marks a radical departure from the "singular genius" model that Woodmansee and Jaszi historicize. In an interview with the former, conducted by Pierre Coupey, Dwight Gardiner, Gladys Hindmarch, and Daphne Marlatt, Nichol describes the initial response to the performances of the Four Horsemen:

> When, for instance, The Four Horsemen started, the first thing we had to overcome was that everybody knew my name and nobody knew the rest of

the group's names. Okay, so what you have is "bpNichol and The Four Horsemen." It sounds like I got this back-up group of Motown singers tapping their toes …. no way – group, group, group, group, you know, think of it as a group. This was a very hard process. People don't want to think of writers as groups. They're fixed on writers as the single consciousness …" (148)[7]

Both Nichol and McCaffery make similar contentions in the TRG reports, contending that their research was the product of a "We-full, not an I-less paradigm" (11, 149). McCaffery insists in an interview that collaboration involves a "therapeutic antidote to the private, writing self. It demands interaction and renunciating single control." Such tactics disturb the supremacy of univocality, problematize intentionality, and discredit the proprietary nature of authorship by contaminating the "cellular integrity" of the subject (74). Notice that Nichol and McCaffery's "we-full" (not "I-less") paradigm stops short of a wholesale erasure of the author, advancing instead a poetics of authorial assemblage and synthesis. Rather than eradicate the writing subject's "cellular integrity," they mutate a body of writing by integrating their labour in such ways that foreground pluralistic methods of composition – that is, the writing should announce its own communal process and the multiple subject it constructs. One might think of collaboration as the creation of a porous or semi-autonomous writing subject. This is perhaps more obvious in performative collaboration, where the visual and aural elements make clear the interplay and fusion of bodies and voices. Yet, alternative strategies of multi-authorship are evident in Nichol and McCaffery's research, translations, and poems as well.

(i) Research. The TRG reports afford significant investigations into the material production of the book, non-narrativity, and translation, not to mention an important contribution to the study of non-canonical twentieth-century writers. However, the reports also function as a laboratory for experimentation with several modes of collaboration.[8] Nichol describes the method of dictation used to write the reports in an interview with Caroline Bayard and Jack David:

> We've always typed. We type with maybe one of us typing what's in our mind and then we kick an idea around. And then maybe I dictate to Steve while he types. And maybe I'm typing, and he's dictating to me. And I'm adding something as I think of it. And then we go over it, and go over it. So it happens at the time of writing. And part of it is just getting that moment together. (31)

What emerges, according to McCaffery, is a "general economy in dialogue" (10). An unavoidable consequence of this synthesis of discrete

contributions is the introduction of errancy and spontaneity into their discourse – what both men refer to in the reports as the "particle drift" between a "mini-community of two" (144). Just as one records the thoughts of the other, the writer might deviate into his own personal discourse, unbeknownst to the speaker. Thus, their technique involves elements of indeterminacy and playful censorship that generate a final postulation based on approximations that belong exclusively to neither. And yet, this description of their method characterizes but one aspect of the collected reports. With no prior knowledge of their method of dictation, the reader encounters various strategies of co-authorship: some reports feature an ostensibly singular or unified voice, others introduce two un-attributable voices in disagreement, while in other reports, such as "Rational Geomancy: A Re-Alignment of Kinship (II)," a double band structure separates two discrete texts in juxtaposition.[9] Further still, TRG activities include a collaboratively produced photo comic strip; a series of pataphysical games whose authorial credits include design, development, and playtesting, indicating a playful acknowledgment of the multi-authored production of such games for commercial manufacture (197); and the third report ("Language of Performance of Language") features an assemblage of collaborative writing, conceptualist performance, and intermedia composition.

For instance, in "Collbration No. 2" [sic], the first of sixteen "performed essays" comprising the third TRG report, performers are instructed to sit facing one another at identical typewriters. A single roll of paper is fed through the carriage of both machines, "forming a connected paper chain." Both performers continuously type the phrase "WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF COLLABORATION?" on successive lines until the roll tightens and the paper tears in two (228). That the page is both shared and torn emblematizes a key feature of co-authorship. Rather than characterize their efforts as the symbiosis of an ideal community of writing subjects, their work together consists of an intensive field of action marked by dialogue and conflict, convergence and adaptation, dramatized by their coming together and moving apart. A single page might accommodate a unified assertion; it might also facilitate disagreement.[10] In this sense, McCaffery and Nichol suggest that collaboration takes on an ethical dimension, as they conceptualize the page as a shared space wherein they mutually develop a poetic process.

(ii) Performance. A number of scholars describe the circumstances that brought Paul Dutton and Rafael Barreto-Rivera together with Nichol and McCaffery – the latter of whom insists that they were "a community of

two alongside of which grew that community of four[,] … extend[ing their] range and interest in collaboration" (91).[11] It suffices to say that McCaffery is careful not to suggest that the Four Horsemen were some-how a logical extension of the TRG, but rather an inter-related yet distinct configuration of multi-authorship. In the introduction to *Prose Tattoo*, Nichol describes the laboratory conditions that enabled the creation of their pieces: members of the group would "bring fragmentary lines, half-formed ideas, dreams, works in progress … out of which, thru a kind of bricollage, the compositions take shape" ([i]). Soon after their initial ex-periments with improvisation, the group devised a notational system com-prising a four-part "grid." Nichol notes that the grid functions to "notate transition points … define who's doing what when, with whom, & what elements they have to work with" ([i]). Within this structuring frame, however, elements such as pitch, rhythm, duration, and coloration remain unstable and un-repeatable. It would be inaccurate, therefore, to assert that their compositions are purely spontaneous or improvised; each perfor-mance involves an interplay of fixed and unfixed elements, semantic and non-semantic sounds, pre-determined materials and unplanned adapta-tions. Stephen Scobie identifies juxtaposition as the group's principal structuring technique, while McCaffery emphasizes a process of assem-blage and transition:

> We structure our pieces very much along the lines of a piece of string con-taining a series of knots. The knots have a double function as both points of coherence (where everything comes together) and as points of transition (where everything changes). The Horsemen's extended pieces, in this light, become studies of the problematics of transition. (34)

"Coherence" and "transition" indicate points of connection and movement between seemingly incompatible sounds, sign systems, and bodies. The listener-viewer of a Four Horsemen piece negotiates the interaction of its morphing elements; these "knots" or clusters fuse provisionally in "col-lectivizing structure[s]" – each time in different multiplicities of bodies, texts, and voices that disperse and re-assemble. Hence, McCaffery argues, their aesthetic practice "homologizes" certain states of collectivity: "the movement from isolation into community, the problematics of commu-nity…[and] the collectivization of the self" (33). Each Four Horsemen performance might be thought of as a particular sort of communal forma-tion that assembles to create molecular social subjects.

(iii) Translation. Nichol and McCaffery suggest a similar point of focus between their various textual and performative collaborations and the function of creative translation. Texts such as Nichol's *Translating*

Translating Apollinaire and McCaffery's *Intimate Distortions: A Displacement of Sappho* – books that Nichol refers to as "conversations with the dead" (75) – experiment with homophonic and homolinguistic techniques whose effect might be thought of as the errant dictation of a ghostly collaborator. *Homophonic* translation involves a process in which the poet translates the sound of a foreign language instead of its sense (privileging the signifier instead of the signified). [12] Consider the following line of Robert Filliou's poem when transformed homophonically from French into English by Nichol: "c'est l'hommage dansant" / "sailor magic dance on" (46, 2). *Homolinguistic* translation employs the same formal operation, but within the same language. In conversation with McCaffery in 1987, Nichol contends that such strategies, like their textual collaborations, integrate a "readerly activity" into the process of writing; McCaffery agrees, stating further that "both translation and collaboration suggest that creativity is not integral/expressive but dialogic/relational" (75). In this regard, *Six Fillious* constitutes a limit case of translation as cross-cultural collaboration. The text consists of five translations of Robert Filliou's *14 Chansons et 1 Charade* by Nichol, McCaffery, George Brecht, Dieter Roth, and Dick Higgins, composed in three languages using normative, homolinguistic and homophonic techniques. Here is an example from the poem's opening interlude:

Filliou	Brecht
c'est l'hommage dansant	here's an homage in dance
au **m**ammifere **m**	to that **m**ammal **m**
m le **m**alheur **m**onsieur	**m** for **m**isfortune **m**an
madame le **m**alheur **m**	**m**a'am **m**isfortune **m**
Nichol	**McCaffery**
sailor magic dance on	air song imagine dense
tho momma fear him	target may maul him
emily my whore my sewer	infamous fortune my en-
my dame'll lure him	ema amiss farts your name
Roth	**Higgins**
hier wird ein tier gefeiert	here's weird, a deer's a-feared.
und zwar der säuger **m**	and what's with the soy, dear? *i am*.
m **m**eine herren !	*i am*. mine the heron,
der **m**issgriff **m** **m**eine damen !	the mischievous *i am*. mine the
	dumb one!

McCaffery's contribution consists of a homolinguistic translation of Brecht's normative reproduction of Filliou's poem. The refrain repeated throughout Filliou's version, which Brecht translates literally to read either "here's" or "it's an homage in dance," is transformed by McCaffery seven times: "air song imagine dense," "it's sane imagining a dunce," "hits a numb urge intense," "hats on oh midget ants," "i'd sign him agendas hence," "eats sand or margined hens," and "hitch a name merge intense" (18-19). Their multi-authored experiment treats Filliou's poem as public property, creating wild permutations that destabilize and mutate its original meaning. The author becomes one in a series of filters through which the poem's sound/meaning travels and transforms. Unlike their methods of research and performative collaboration, both of which unfold in real time and involve a mutually conceived act of community formation, creative translation is more properly an appropriative strategy. *Six Fillious* is composed of discrete contributions by several authors and thus fails to achieve the same level of subjective integration. That said, the text invites the reader to reconsider appropriative strategies as collaborative writing, dramatizing the communal production of meaning involved in such practices.

(iv) Textual composition. Although the Four Horsemen used writing – both in terms of pre-written material and notational scores – it was of secondary importance to the spontaneity of oral performance. Co-authored works by Nichol and McCaffery such as "Parallel Texts," "Collborations," or the title poem of *In England Now that Spring* foreground somewhat different approaches to poetic process. In the latter, for instance, the authors create a unified singular voice through the personal plural "us," unlike "Parallel Texts" or many of the TRG reports, which introduce two differentiated (but un-attributable) speaking voices to denote disagreement or deviation. Given their interest in collaboration as a "general economy in dialogue," this would seem an odd decision. The poem was written over a three day period from May 8 to 10, 1978, during a visit to England's Lake District (in between performances at the Sound and Syntax Festival in Glasgow on May 7 and Canada House in London five days later). Composed as a quasi-travel log between the two poets, "*the spirit of Wordsworth*" haunts the poem, "*returning brindled*" (41). Indeed, the location of the poem's composition and the several echoes of Wordsworth indicate a re-routing of the famous walking tours that led to such poems as "Tintern Abbey."[13] It is at this point that readers familiar with the genesis of such poems will note an inside joke informing McCaffery and Nichol's text. Despite Wordsworth's conception of the author as a solitary

genius, many of his poems are the product of intensive collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and a reliance on the writings of his sister Doro- thy.[14] Woodmansee and Jaszi observe that just as "communal and collabo- rative writing practices disappeared with the ascent of the originary genius-proprietor," such practices "persisted not only in everyday and technical writing, but among the very writers who contributed most sub- stantially to the Romantic reconceptualization of this activity" (3). McCaffery and Nichol underscore this contradiction, as "the history / dis- seminates in / birdsong," yet if the lake provides the site where "language quakes & begins," then it does so as a "confluence of tongues" (42-44, 57-59). Language begins to build: "a common thread / links these inks these / walls of words" (190-92), slowly integrating the architecture of their two semiotic systems, like a house whose subsequent additions be- come indistinguishable from the original structure. The unified voice of the poem – disrupted by dialogue and polyphony in their other collabora- tions – here comments ironically on the genesis of an authorial model that sought to exclude collaboration in literary composition.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In constructing a history of poetic collaboration, we might begin to think of these efforts (in Deleuzian/Guattarian terms) as a particular sort of authorial machine: a *TRG – Four Horsemen – Six Fillious* assemblage, continually connecting and disconnecting, adapting and redeploying as rhizomes of communal activities. My intention has been to consider multi-authorship's challenge to normative theories of writing and briefly to map a few of the strategies explored by members of the Toronto avant- garde during the 1970s and early 80s. My approach, therefore, has been largely descriptive rather than evaluative. Of course, communities are forged by inclusions *and* exclusions, and, consequently, I neglect several important issues: for instance, I make no mention of the erotics of com- munity, in particular, the homosocial dynamic of an all male network of poets, nor do I consider the role of audiences and readers as participants of a community that constructs a text's meaning. Further investigations into the communal practices of the Toronto avant-garde would need to account for these concerns. Nonetheless, twenty years after Nichol's death, it is precisely at these intersections within the author's canon – where a nexus of authors and texts converge – that he generates lines of flight for writers today. This would entail a notion of poetic practice as a literary commons that authors might jointly occupy, a set of strategies one might accept or reject, amplify or modify. This would mean a notion of

community that eschews allegiance to intractable aesthetic axioms, choosing instead to commit oneself to a mêlée of unpredictable encounters.

Notes

1. See Frank Davey's "bpNichol + 10: Some Institutional Issues Associated with the Continued Reading of Texts Known as 'bpNichol'" *Open Letter* 10.4 (Fall 1998): 5-13. Davey makes similar arguments with particular reference to *The Martyrology* in "Exegesis / Eggs à Jesus: *The Martyrology* as a Text in Crisis" in *Tracing the Paths: Reading ≠ Writing "The Martyrology,"* Ed. Miki Roy (Vancouver: Line/Talonbooks, 1988) 38-51.

2. Lori Emerson's "Nicholongings: because they is," Darren Wershler-Henry's "Argument for a Secular *Martyrology*," and Christian Bök's "Nickel Linoleum" appear in *Open Letter* 10.4 (Fall 1998): 27-33, 37-47, and 62-74.

3. My choice to exclude collaborations involving Nichol and McCaffery with artists and musicians is partly due to the constraints of a short essay; but also, interdisciplinarity and adaptation theory have received comparatively greater attention than literary collaboration. See, for example, Dick Higgins' *Horizons, The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1984) and Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT P, 2000). However, a broader study of Nichol and McCaffery's collaborations would certainly include these texts in addition to their editorial projects.

4. William Wordsworth advocated enthusiastically for copyright reform in the British parliament. In 1837, he lobbied on behalf of his friend Thomas Noon Talfourd, who introduced a bill that would extend the term of copyright to 60 years. For an extended account of the interconnected development of Romantic concepts of creativity and intellectual property rights, see Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994).

5. Additionally, Heather Hirschfeld notes that multiple authorship had long been considered a "critical and editorial embarrassment" (610). Beginning with the New Bibliographers, she argues, analysis of collaboration strictly involved "deciphering who penned what lines or who set what copy." This approach, she contends, "depended not only on a notion of authorship and literary activity as a solitary and autonomous endeavor but also on a commitment to, or a faith in the value of, the procedure of dividing, labeling, and identifying individual contributors as a good in and of itself." See her article, "Early Modern Collaboration and Theories of Authorship," *PMLA* 116.3 (Summer 2001): 609-22. Such a model of authorship is the logical extension of a properly Cartesian subject. Once critics of collaborative texts divide literary works according to such categories of selfhood, they betray the very challenge to such categories that collaborative authorship necessarily affords.

6. Consider that although multi-authored poetry is generally speaking a marginalized practice, it is a hallmark of numerous literary movements: including the Dadaists, Surrealists, Beat Poets, New York School, the Oulipo Group, members of the St. Mark's Poetry Project, the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Group, and Spoken Word poetry, in addition to forms such as Renga or Chaining, and strategies of textual appropriation and sound poetry more generally. One might also point to internet poetries, whose complex algorithms occasion collaborations between poets and computer programmers.

7. This tendency to reduce the Four Horsemen's group practice to a "single consciousness" still occurs. Recently the performance troupe Volcano staged an ambitious and largely successful show called *The Four Horsemen Project*, synthesizing their sound poetry with visually engaging multi-media and exceptional choreography; yet, among the thirty-six sound pieces, visual poems, and film footage clips used during the performance, no less than twenty were either solo-composed pieces by bpNichol or filmed interviews of him speaking. One might also cite George Bowering and Michael Ondaatje's *An H in the Heart* anthology, which mistakenly attributes several of Nichol and McCaffery's co-authored texts to Nichol alone.

8. For a comprehensive assessment of the TRG reports' principal concerns, see Alan R. Knight, "The Toronto Research Group Reports: A Myth of Textuality" *Line* 5 (Spring 1985): 90-103; Adeena Karasick, "Tract Marks: Echoes and Traces in the Toronto Research Group," *Open Letter* 8.3 (Spring 1992): 76-89; Caroline Bayard, *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Postmodernism* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1989) 60-67; Susan E. Billingham, "Inscription vs. Invocation: *The Martyrology* as Paragram" in *Language and the Sacred in Canadian Poet bpNichol's The Martyrology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 2000) 85-133; Christian Bök, "Canadian 'Pataphysics: a 'Pataphysics of Mnemonic Exception, *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2002) 81-97); and Miriam Nichols, "A/Politics of Contemporary Anglo-Canadian Poetries: The Toronto Research Group and the Kootenay School of Writing" in *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*, Ed. Romana Huk (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2003) 66-85.

9. McCaffery indicates a similar interest in the dialogic possibilities of recension and the footnote, in which text and note occupy and compete within the same textual field of the page. See McCaffery, "Richard Bentley: The First Poststructuralist? The 1732 Recension of *Paradise Lost*" and "Johnson and Wittgenstein: Some Correlations and Bifurcations in the Dictionary and the Philosophical Investigations," in *Prior To Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001) 58-74 and 75-104.

10. In an interview with Peter Jaeger, McCaffery recalls that the Four Horsemen "workshops and practices were the sites of tremendous labour and disagreement; there were extreme differences in personality and opinions. Oxymoronically, it was at times of upset and near-dysfunction prior to performing when the group performed at its best" (90).

11. See, for example, Rafael Barreto-Rivera's account of the group's genesis in the liner-note contained in *CaNADAda* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972); see also, Stephen Scobie, *bpNichol: What History Teaches* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984) 68-76.

12. In *Rational Geomancy*, Nichol and McCaffery assert: "If we no longer consider translation as being necessarily an information service – the one tongue's access into other tongues – then it can become a creative endeavour in its own right" (32).

13. Wordsworth famously writes his *Guide to the Lakes* (begun in 1810 and finished in 1835) as a commercial venture, although the author's "principal wish [is] to furnish a guide or companion for the *Minds* of Persons of taste, and feeling for landscape" (34). In an introductory note to the second edition, Wordsworth claims that the *Guide* was written "in the same spirit which dictated several of the poems, and from a belief that it will tend naturally to illustrate them." See *The Illustrated Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes*, Ed. Peter Bicknell (Exeter: Webb & Bower, 1984) 7.

14. See, for instance, Jack Stillinger's "Multiple 'Consciousness' in Wordsworth's *Prelude*" in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 69-95; and Wayne Koestenbaum's "The Marinere Hath His Will(iam): Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*" in *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 71-111.

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bp Anecdotingly

Paul Dutton

He was a few months younger than me, and a whole world wiser. When I first encountered his work, though, I considered him a fraud. "The kinds of charlatans calling themselves poets these days," I would complain to anyone who'd listen. "There's this one guy takes the word *turnips*, jumbles up the letters a bunch of ways, and calls it poetry!" Hell, I knew what poetry was: I'd studied it at university, had been writing it for several years, had had some poems in my college paper, and had recently been published in a poetry journal: I was a *pro*, for chrissake. And I kept up. I read poetry in books and magazines, listened to it on records and at public readings, and continued to sharpen my appreciation of it and skill at it through discussion with friends and through reading critical essays and reviews. So I knew. Poetry was about beauty – in language, in feeling, in thought. It was about depth, wisdom, and truth. It was high-minded stuff, and I aspired to having a mighty high mind. None of this trivial "turnips are / inturps are / urnspit are / tinspur …" bullshit for me. Where was the high-mindedness in that? More importantly (though my underdeveloped self-awareness made me oblivious of this concern) what was there of *me* in such nonsense?

What I was missing in bpNichol's "The Historical Implications of Turnips" was, of course, the invention of poetic neologisms like *runtsip* and *spinrut*, not to mention the layered implications of a word like *punstir*, which simultaneously rendered *punster* in phonetic spelling and created an evocative, neologistic image. I viewed as facile and pointless what was in fact well-crafted, highly original, and immensely sophisticated – a playful exploration of language, grounded in an appreciation of words as objects, a fascination with language as subject, and a realization of its visual and sonic dimensions. Enough beauty, depth, wisdom, and truth in that enlightened sensibility to fuel a lifetime and more of poetry, which it proved to do for Nichol.

The transformation in my perception of Nichol and his work was, of course, a gradual one, and it began with my meeting him, which came about in this way. At the age of twenty-four I began finally to face up to some facts about myself: I was a writer who wasn't writing, an activist who wasn't acting, a scholar who'd flunked university, an intellectual

drifting through a succession of menial, dead-end jobs, a man without credentials, a gregarious individual with limited social contacts – in short, a person with lots of potential and no sense of how to realize it. On top of all that, I had a history of psychiatric incarceration (I still can't decide if I was depressed because I flunked university or flunked university because I was depressed), and I was starting to feel that old familiar sense of desperation. I needed help. So, psychiatry having proved useless, and word having reached me of a group of lay psychotherapists who tailored their fees to fit the client's budget (next to nothing, in my case), I took myself to what I had heard called "The Admiral Road Group," named after the street in Toronto where most of the group's therapists at that time lived and practiced.

The therapist to whom I was assigned knew squat about poetry, but he knew how much it meant to me, and could tell that I existed in a virtual vacuum of poetic contacts or contexts. One day he asked if I'd be willing to have him show my poetry to his friend, bp Nichol (who hadn't yet closed the space between his initials and his surname). I'd lost some of my over-compensatory cockiness in the couple of years that had elapsed since my first encounter with Nichol's work; I was entering a more exploratory phase in what little writing I was doing; I really had no solid literary connections, and it seemed like a good opportunity to get some informed feedback. When word came that Nichol found my work good and had offered to meet with me, I very much appreciated it. And in anticipation of meeting him, I had a compliment ready: I'd seen in *Canadian Forum* a poem by him that I had genuinely liked, featuring a radical effect that I thought worked very nicely. I was looking forward to meeting him and conveying to him my positive response to his work.

On the 1969 February evening arranged for my visit to Nichol at his home on Brunswick Street, he was tucked up in bed with some minor winter ailment, which didn't, however, prevent him from receiving me in his room. He complimented me on my poems, and I, after thanking him, complimented him on the new one I'd seen of his, mentioning where I'd come across it. "Oh? Which one was that?" he asked, conducting a search among some books or papers for something he wanted to get for me, having risen from his bed to do so, standing unselfconciously in his underwear. I described what I'd read, the words *sumwhere, anywhere* repeated over and over, other words imbedded at intervals, creating a poetic impression; very effective, I thought. "Yeahhh … I think you'll find that's actually by Bill Bissett," he said, his tone so gentle and matter-of-fact, that I was left feeling guiltless at my blunder, less concerned about my social gaffe than about how I'd managed somehow to have read one name

and have thought it another. If I can be allowed a moment of self psychologizing, I'd say the reason I'd done so was because of my eagerness to have something to enthuse about in his work – a kind of non-Freudian slip, if you will. When I left Nichol a little later that evening, it was with an offer from him to publish five of my poems in his magazine *Ganglia*. I was very pleased indeed, and didn't feel a bit like a charlatan.

Nichol was at that time working as a lay (i.e., non-medical) psychotherapist with this Admiral Road Group, which soon after was incorporated under the name Therafields, Nichol being appointed its vice-president. Therafields had two focal locations, one in downtown Toronto, where offices and group houses were operated, and the other in Mono Mills, about a ninety-minute drive north of the city, where a farm served as a weekend retreat for extended group-psychotherapy sessions. Many of us in therapy lived in group houses, and all who were in psychotherapy groups (almost everyone) at some time or other made it to the farm. There was naturally, and in varying degrees, some amount of social interaction, and I occasionally bumped into bp in some capacity or other. In these peripheral contacts with him, he sustained interest in and support of my writing. His intention of publishing those five poems of mine in *Ganglia* wasn't exactly fulfilled, because it was around then that his publishing interest shifted to his mimeo mail-out package *grOnk*. But he did offer to pass editorship and publication of *Ganglia* on to me and several other literary tyros around Therafields, and my five poems appeared in the course of the two issues for which we continued the magazine. Throughout this period, I was still struggling with my writing, and took advantage of bp's proximity to seek guidance from him, He gave it in five words: "You're a good writer. Write."

> *He feared baldness. There was baldness in his family, and he expected it to get him, so he grew his hair long to compensate for future loss. He perceived present loss every time he had a shower. It never occurred to him that everyone found strands of hair in the drain after showering. Photos reveal that his hairline at forty-something was no different than at sixteen.*

Sometime in the spring or summer of 1969 I attended a Nichol reading in a series that George Swede ran, called Poetry and Things, conducted in an artist's studio on Yonge Street near Bloor (those were the days! – rents at Toronto's Yonge and Bloor that artists could afford). Nichol devoted at least part of his reading time to a duo performance with David W. Harris (who had not yet declared himself David UU, which was supposed to be pronounced "double you," but which of course almost always got pronounced "you-you," because people encountered it in print). Listening to

Barrie and David chant and otherwise sound out at top volume through a PA system in a tiny room was an experience that simultaneously scared the shit out of me and thoroughly excited me. I next heard Barrie read solo and acoustically, which was less intimidating, especially because this time the soundwork he did included humour; and I soon after started working up sound poems of my own. Prior to hearing Nichol I'd known of neither sound poetry nor the Dadaists, and it wasn't until after working with The Four Horsemen that I began to educate myself in the broader historical context of the genre that I'd taken up.

Nichol always maintained that The Four Horsemen was Rafael Barreto-Rivera's idea, but it was in fact bp's. The displacement was typical of Beep, whose generous nature it was to spread credit around. The way the group came about was as follows. bp gave a reading at the St. Lawrence Town Hall, in which he included sound duets with a writer recently arrived from England, about whom he had been talking to me quite a bit at this time, one Steve McCaffery (bp and Harris, bp and McCaffery – Nichol was intent on extending his sound-poetry ventures beyond solo work). In the audience that night was Barreto-Rivera, whom I had known for a number of years, and whose wild enthusiasm for the performance (expressed in loud laughter, much to McCaffery's annoyance) led him to send a note to bp, with whom he had some acquaintance, expressing an interest in getting together with Nichol and McCaffery "to jam." Barrie knew I was beginning to explore sound poetry (I'd run a couple of my efforts past him) and, after talking things over some with McCaffery, picked up the phone to call me, tremendously excited at the prospect of a four-man sound poetry group. I eagerly accepted his invitation to join in the venture, and I heartily endorsed the group name he proposed: The Four Horsemen. So, while Rafael started the ball rolling, it was Beep who fielded the team. He also provided the field for the game to be played on, devoting another of his readings at Poetry and Things to collaborative works, the first half given over to Nichol-McCaffery duets, the second to Four Horsemen quartets. We had, in fact, not worked up group material, having so far gotten together only to familiarize ourselves with each other's solo work. That first performance in late May of 1970 consisted of solo pieces by each of us, with collectively improvised backup by the other three, the evening concluding with an audience-participation chant led by Nichol. The response by the audience of fifteen or twenty people was wildly enthusiastic; the four of us sure had a hell of a lot of fun; and the decision was made over beer after the reading to get together and work up some repertoire.

As a youngster, he was one of those people who, an elder brother of his has recalled, would read the dictionary – not just consult it, but read along in it.

At some point in 1970 bp approached me about jointly conducting a poetry workshop within the Therafields community. God knows what made him think I was qualified for the role – not that I thought so when he asked me. It was only long after the workshop concluded that I was able to admit to myself that I had been more a candidate for learning than I'd been a qualified mentor. Maybe Barrie knew I needed help with my writing but was too proud to enroll in a workshop. Anyway, having been assigned the task of writing up the promotional announcement for distribution within the community, I mentioned in the description that there would be featured, among other things, the study of historical poems through structural analysis. At the first meeting, Beep dismissed that notion with a brief "I don't know how that got in there," and proceeded to conduct the workshop along more immediate, less academic lines, dealing exclusively with poems brought to the workshop by the participants. His approach was to guide, not instruct, and he did this by drawing out responses to the poems from the fellow participants, moderating the discussion according to standards of respect for the poem under examination, of an appreciation of its character and integrity. He was careful to confront and, if need be, suppress any destructive criticism that might arise, and to safeguard against attempts, intended or not, to highjack somebody's poem by imposing on it preconceived styles or other external presuppositions. The focus was always on realizing the potential of the individual poem, and while bp certainly offered his own worthwhile remarks and observations, there was nothing in his manner or methods that would in any way foster replication of his own writing style (I've known more than one leader of a course or workshop in literature or other art whose primary teaching skill would seem to be churning out carbon copies of themselves).

Throughout the workshop Nichol repeatedly emphasized the notion of fidelity to what the poem was trying to say, of following where the writing was leading in both form and content, realizing what the language had to offer. Though these are not necessarily the phrases he employed, they capture what he very clearly conveyed. Years later, in "You Too, Nicky" (published in *Gifts: The Martyrology Book(s) 7 &*, the phrases he did employ in this regard were these: "I only know the poem unfolds in front of me, in spite of me, more in control than me. It's not that the poem has a mind of its own, but that poetry is its own mind, a particular state you come to achieve." For me, the workshop, while dealing with technical

aspects and elements of craft, was primarily about a kind of creative sur-
render to higher forces, getting caught up in the currents and course of
language, rather than giving precedence to one's own opinions and
subjectivities. It was that which gave new direction to my writing, and
which I have striven throughout my career to maintain. It has also been a
touchstone for determining my taste in literature and for assessing the
quality of the writing I encounter in my reading both for pleasure and for
professional purposes.

The open, expansive, and exploratory attitude implicit in Nichol's ad-
vocated approach to writing, with its focus on listening profoundly to
what was emerging from within the language, strikes me as part and par-
cel of how he viewed himself as a writer, which, as he often stated, was as
an apprentice to the language.

> *Somewhere in the Nichol papers is a letter to George Bowering that has at
> the bottom a drawing of Nichol's cartoon creation Milt the Morph, with
> elongated arm curving around to squeeze the bulb of a hand-horn whose bell
> emits the signature* Beep.

To a non-prolific writer such as I, who generates text more as an extru-
sion than as a rippling flow, and who needs lots of mental space to get
down to the task at hand, the ready ease with which Nichol could turn on
the creative tap was always (and is still) a source of wonder. Outside of
those gift-from-the-gods moments when a concept or sequence of words
pops into mind and impels me to write, I need to set myself up with a
solid amount of dedicated time, usually in solitude, in order to get the
ideas moving and the form taking shape. Barrie, though, could have a few
minutes free time in an airport departure lounge, or standing at a bus stop
even, and out would come the notebook and pen and he'd be immersed in
the process of whatever piece of writing he had underway.

In the less weighty matter of signing books for people, Barrie had a
similar ready ability, coming up with imaginative inscriptions, instantly
creating a unique little drawing or clever, personally pertinent dedicatory
phrase. And I, in the same circumstance, generally came up dry, much as I
tried to invent distinctive and memorable little comments, occasionally
sitting stalled, pen poised, brain blank. One occasion on which I became
thus intellectually stranded was with bp's copy of a new book of mine
sitting in front of me. He waited while I wrestled with the problem, finally
leaning towards me with an amused smile, saying, "Paul, 'To bp – fondly,
Paul" would be fine!"

Another example of Beep's seemingly effortless creative production
was his Las Vegas Poet routine, which I was one of a privileged few to

witness, in what I believe was, regrettably, his one and only performance of it. Assuming the slick demeanour of a casino entertainer, he solicited from the audience subjects for poems, which he then improvised on the spot. I wish I'd had shorthand skills to preserve the brilliance of the results he produced – but suffice to say the vapid glitz was only in his parodic performance style, not in the poems he made up, which had both style and substance.

> *Early in his career, when some poems of his were rejected by a litmag, one page came back with a footprint on it. He never forgave the poet-editor who had thus offended him, and whose writing he anyway disparaged. Some twenty years later, spotting this writer's newest book on the washstand by the toilet in my apartment, Beep sneeringly observed, "I see you're keeping _____'s latest where it can be put to best use."*

Nichol's interests and enthusiasms were eclectic, extensive, enduring, and assiduously pursued. He sustained throughout his life a love of comics, begun in childhood. He turned that love to artistic purpose in his brilliantly original, visually sophisticated comics poetry, but he also realized it in a major collection of original Sunday funnies and of a vast array of comic books kept meticulously organized and up to date, Viewers of Ron Mann's documentary film *Comic Book Confidential* will, if they watch through the end credits, see a full-screen splash (one of those comics graphics featuring a centre formed by circularly converging parabolas) with the emblazoned dedication "for bp." Not only had Beep been one of the two principal consultants for the film, which surveyed the history of comic books from earliest days to the mid-1980s, but every comic book shown in the movie came from his own collection. His comics collecting didn't stop at the funny pages and comic books themselves. There were also the mass-market paperback editions of strips and the videocassettes of movie cartoons. As well, the guy had sprung for at least a couple of original comic strip drawings that hung in frames in his house – a *Beetle Bailey* and a *Moon Mullins* if memory serves me well. And he was a sucker for the attendant comics and cartoon merchandise, a prominent feature of his office being a large, fully functional Mickey Mouse phone, a rotary dial at Mickey's feet, the handset smilingly proffered, cradled in the cartoon character's right hand. Also, for a period during the 70s when friends were sharing a Florida vacation home, Nichol made at least two trips to Walt Disney World, which he adored – and yes, the visits were made before the birth of his daughter: he didn't need a kid as an excuse to enjoy kid's things. And I recall him expressing, from an adult perspective, his enthusiasm for Disney's proclaimed aim to create a human and hu-

mane environment. Can't help but wonder, though, what his sentiments might be today, in light of revelations about the Disney "private government" (Richard E. Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse*, Yale University Press, 2001) and its abuse of individuals and organizations, both in relation to the theme parks and to copyright issues. There is, in circles concerned with copyright, a phenomenon known as the Mickey Mouse effect: every time copyright has been about to run out on the cartoon character (eleven times in the last forty years, according to British author John Lanchester), Disney lobbyists have influenced Congress to extend the U.S.A. term of copyright.

But back to Nichol in his own time. His eagerness for the latest issue of *The Incredible Hulk* or *Daredevil* (to name but two) was easily matched by his hunger for first editions of books by Gertrude Stein or Wyndham Lewis (again, but two). Collector? Hell, he was more of an archivist. When Al Purdy published a volume of selected poems at some point in the 70s or 80s, bp asked me excitedly if I had yet bought a copy. I told him I'd decided not to, because I had most of the poems in the books they originally appeared in. To this he replied, "Yeah. But it's a new Purdy book!" That in itself was enough to ensure *his* purchase of it.

The scope of Beep's extensive poetry library was equal to that of his fiction and literary criticism sections. Then there were the science fiction books – or, if you prefer, speculative fiction – and the detective novels. In relation to the latter, by the way, permit me this minor digression: I'll never forgive the son of a bitch for revealing, in an *Open Letter* article on narrative devices, the narrative trick that identifies the murderer in Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which I'd not read at the time, and the ending of which just doesn't have the same effect when you already know what's coming.

Another of the abiding loves reflected on Barrie's bookshelves was that of children's literature. L. Frank Baum's *Oz* books were particular favourites of his, and he had a close familiarity with all the classics of the genre. Were he alive today, I'm sure he'd be up to speed on Harry Potter and Lemony Snicket. It's no accident that he wound up writing for children's television programs such as *Fraggle Rock* and another one that I recall him working on just before he died.

Then there were the other collections. He was a games freak: the multitude of board games he'd acquired served as the basis of occasional games parties at one of the shared houses he lived in before he and his wife Ellie began their family. At the games evenings, each room in the house was turned over to a different board game, participants circulating at will. His focus was on the latest stuff, so when I found a newly pub-

lished book about board games from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, with full-colour, playable illustrations, I snapped it up as an ideal Christmas present for him, some historical background for his contemporary mania. Shoulda known: he already had it.

From board games, it was a logical progression to computer games. I honestly don't know if he collected them, but he played them, and I just can't figure how he found the time. Because in the midst of all these leisure activities (his comics collection didn't just sit there, he'd spend hours with it; and he played the board games far more than just at the parties he threw; on top of which there was all the reading time spent on the sci-fi and detective novels; oh, and the time spent keeping up to date with and shopping for the newest publications) … in the midst of all these and other activities, he was churning out an enviable body of literary work distinguished by its breadth of media and styles, its depth, versatility, and originality.

Of course, the passions manifest in his collecting (oh, and we're not finished with that – I'll be getting back to it), also fed his art. His literary output bears testimony to the broad spectrum of interests and influences he sustained from the general field of literature, spanning ancient Chinese poetry to the multiple manifestations of contemporary Canadian and international poetry and prose, with a special emphasis on the avant-garde stream from the early twentieth century on. There was, as already mentioned, the comics poetry. His dual obsessions with comics and kidlit are reflected in his adaptations of a couple of his *Fraggle Rock* scripts for commercial comic-book spin-offs. And the handful of children's books he wrote earned him an entry in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. As for the board games, Beep's contribution to an abandoned Four Horsemen collaborative novel, *Slow Dust*, included the invention of a fully worked-out board game played by two of the characters.

And then there was music. I've already written extensively on its role in his oeuvre ("bpNichol and the Past Present of a Future Music," *Musicworks* 44, Autumn, 1989). Musics of every genre from pop to high art had their impact on his poetry, fiction, soundwork, visual work, and music theatre. Suffice to say here that his record collection covered broad ranges of jazz, rock, pop, and what I like to call scholarly music (by which I *don't* mean academic) – he kind of compositions that are sometimes identified by the oxymoronic and technically inaccurate, but readily comprehended, term "contemporary classical." He was equally enthusiastic about Ornette Coleman as he was about Tony Bennett, about Maurizio Kagel or R. Murray Schafer as about Rod Stewart or the latest music video. He knew the lyrics to countless songs of the 40s and 50s, pop and other: Ev-

ery time I read or think of the lines "neki hokey / voice music" in *The Martyrology*, Book 5, Chain 3, I wonder how many readers besides me recognize the nonsense-phrase title of the obscure 50s R'n'B song by the Cleftones; and from composer John Beckwith I have an account of Beep bringing to their meeting on a music-theatre collaboration about a lounge singer a pile of old pop-song sheet music that was clearly not bought for the occasion but previously collected.

> *I was embarrassed to hear him take on a French accent in speaking English to French poets at an international festival, and when I mentioned it to him, he said he didn't intend it, it just happened. Years later, in my continuing struggle with the French language, I noticed that my understanding of spoken French is much improved by hearing the language spoken with an English accent.*

The Horsemen were returning by rail from a gig in Montreal, and we fell into conversation with a guy some several years our junior. As our fellow traveller's comfort with us increased, it came out that he was extremely attracted to a young woman seated a little way down the car. He kept turning to look at her and remarked a few times on how beautiful she was. Finally, bp, pointing out that the seat beside her was vacant, suggested that the guy just go over and strike up a conversation with her. Oh no, he couldn't do that. Well, why not? Oh, he couldn't do that, it was just … But Barrie casually pursued a line of questioning the general shape of which was a sequence of logical challenges that gradually eliminated the succession of rationalizations the guy produced to justify his hanging back. I've forgotten the details, but I do recall two of the highlights.

The first was Barrie's securing at one critical point, the guy's agreement that there was, as Beep put it, "some bigger issue involved, right?" From this foothold he guided his client in this unbooked appointment to the realization that the bigger issue was one of low self-esteem, evidenced by the young man's hitherto unacknowledged belief that a woman so beautiful would never want to talk to him.

Well, as the old saying has it, the truth shall set you free. Or, as the mid-twentieth-century psychoanalyst Karen Horney once put it, "the discovery of a truth about oneself still implies a dawning recognition of a way out." Especially when you have someone easing you in the right direction, which is what Beep did with this guy, positing a series of questions and suggestions that led to the second highlight that's stayed with me, which was when the subject of this spontaneous therapy session got up, confidence bolstered, and took himself down the car to the object of his obsession, with whom he sat conversing for the rest of the journey.

Turned out that, as the guy later reported, she was meeting her boyfriend at the station in Toronto. But that, of course, was a secondary concern, and the main mission had been accomplished.

Reflecting on that incident now, two things occur to me. One is, I reckon people were getting their money's worth all those years Beep was making his living as a psychotherapist. The other is, Barrie was operating with this guy similarly to the way he ran that poetry workshop – counseling, suggesting, guiding, never imposing his opinions, always drawing out the other, letting the decisions be theirs.

> *He was never comfortable calling himself an artist. He referred to himself simply as a writer.* Artist *meant someone who drew or painted. Ironically, one of his singular achievements was his unique fusion of writing and drawing. He was, if anything, the consummate artist.*

bp made people feel special, and he did so because he saw them that way, recognizing and respecting their individuality. He also had a gift for astute and unerring insight into people's personalities, something that many who are so endowed apply in cynical or manipulative ways, but that Beep put to the most benign of uses. He drew out people's strengths and downplayed, without ignoring, their weaknesses, treating flaws or troublesome traits as things merely to be mindful of and to work around. Because he could incisively read people, he was able to put his finger on points of common interest that could bring together those with seemingly unbridgeable differences. And bringing people together was something that mattered very much to him, the concept and practice of community being one of his core preoccupations. It began with family and rippled out from there through various spheres, including the personal, professional, civic, and linguistic. Within Therafields, which occupied his energies for so many years, community was as central a focus as psychotherapy. Nichol's creative life was also oriented towards community, his many collaborative alliances dispersed among fellow writers, visual artists, musicians, filmmakers, and performers. As an editor, his activities beyond his own grOnk and Ganglia Press occurred within entities that, at least in their beginnings, were communal editorial collectives – Coach House Press and Underwhich Editions, the latter of which he initiated and engineered. Community is, of course, a major theme in *The Martyrology,* where the place of the individual in the community – the "me" and the "we" as he expressed it in that work – is repeatedly explored. And his entire artistic practice was integrally centred on a commitment to the vast communal enterprise of language in all its manifestations.

The last book of *The Martyrology*, the libretto and score *Ad Sanctos*, concerns the search by a group of pilgrims for the grave of St. Valentine. When two graves are discovered, each by a different person, each of whom adamantly claims to have discovered the true grave, the community of pilgrims splits into two factions, each going off to one of the two graves – except for three characters, one of whom is the character i, who stands baffled and lost, dejectedly observing, "But we were so close." There's an ambiguity in that statement, which can equally mean "We were so near to our goal" or "We were so intimate with each other," but either way it is an expression of loss and bewilderment. In addition to the poetic ambiguity inherent in "But we were so close," there is the ongoing ambiguity of having a character named i, with its obvious but inconclusive invitation to the reader to identify the authorial I with the character i. (In this regard, it is interesting to note that when *Ad Sanctos* was given a workshop production in Toronto in 1990, the actor playing i, whether by chance or design, had the same hair colour as Nichol, and a somewhat similar build.) Knowing bp as I have, I cannot dispel the sense I get, at this point in *Ad Sanctos*, of a subtext here – and I want to emphasize that this a personal perception, not to be taken as reductive of the work, nor in any way conclusive or absolute, and very possibly not even right. So, with that caution made clear: I believe that, because this libretto was written shortly after the dissolution of Therafields and in the midst of a rancorous division of editorial direction at Coach House Press, i's devastated incomprehension and disappointment is a dramatic expression of Nichol's own emotional response to how things turned out for the two communal enterprises that were so central to his life for so many years, one of which evaporated completely, the other of which was transformed by schism.

> *On a Horsemen tour of B.C., our pictures on a poster in Prince George had been tagged with various pop artists' names, bp's labelled Sid Vicious for some reason. Somewhere else there was a newspaper write-up referring to him as bo Nichol. And in Vancouver, when we met his mother at the reading and told her what a remarkable son she had, she replied, "I still just see him as my baby." Thus did he come to be known in the group as Baby Bo Vicious.*

There is one small authorial error in *The Martyrology* that has bothered me for years. It is minor, but recurrent; and in all instances could be rather easily corrected, though it's likely not to be: too much trouble for too small a matter. I guess part of what bothers me about it is that I didn't twig to it while Barrie was alive, when I could have pointed it out to him.

Even then, it would have already been in print, so, likely too late. Oh well. Anyway, for what it's worth, here it is.

The error, a common one in writing and publishing, is the misspelling of the past tense of the verb *lead*, which past tense is correctly spelt *l-e-d*, but is often misspelt *l-e-a-d*, a confusion with the spelling and pronunciation of the metal *lead*. The confusion is reinforced by the fact that the present and past tenses of the verb *read* share the same spelling but with different pronunciation. You can read a book, and once done, the book is read; and you can lead a horse to water, but once done, the horse is led, not lead.

The points in *The Martyrology* at which Barrie fell into the *lead* for *led* error can be readily spotted by a close reading of the text, and the corrections could be made in subsequent printings. The one point at which a correction of the misspelling might be thought to be a problem is in *Gifts: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&*, in the "july 6th" section of "read, dear." The relevant passage is "where are we lead / when we follow their lead // what I read / is read, dear." While it could be argued that correcting the first line to "where are we led" constitutes an undermining of authorial intent, the authorial intent here is in fact misguided, being an invalid wordplay based on a misspelling.

> *In the summer of 1982 I was out of work. I had a surefire wrongful-dismissal suit pending settlement, had freelance work coming in, and received a bequest from my mother's estate, but was still grinding my teeth and agonizing over not having a job. Beep, who had once declared, "Dutton, when better frets are fretted, 'tis you will fret them," played up the absurdity of my anxiety by doing a turn on the Harvey's comic book* Richie Rich*, which bore the subtitle* The Poor Little Rich Boy*, dubbing me Dutty Wutty, the Poor Little Unemployed Rich Boy.*

From a point somewhere in the early 80s, bp had been experiencing back and leg pain that progressed in a continuous crescendo. I believe that suspicion centred on something to do with the sciatic nerve, and sometime around '84 or so, back surgery provided some little relief. This was soon negated, and the diagnosis shifted to osteoarthritis. He endured unceasing pain throughout the ensuing years, his response to which, at least in part, was tinged with distinctive humour: he delighted in telling the story of his lying in bed one night, kept awake by the pain, and thinking, Oh God, why me?! – whereupon there occurred to him this answering thought: Why *not* me?

Finally, in 1988, the doctors discovered a non-cancerous growth pressing on his femur. Because of the growth's size and location, its removal

required a major operation of some ten hours duration. It was scheduled for late September. At some point in the summer, I received a phone call from bp, who was in the Maritimes working on a new kids' TV program. After some small talk, he got to the point of his call: word had reached him that I was mightily depressed after learning of his pending surgery, and he wanted to reassure me that it wasn't a question of "the big D" – by which, I knew, he meant death. That prospect had, in fact, not occurred to me, nor did I give it another thought. But the poems that Barrie was writing that summer, the ones pouched on the inside back cover of *Gifts*, reveal that he knew full well what a very high risk of "the big D" he was in fact facing. And it really should have been obvious to anyone who knew, as I did, the nature of the operation – unless that person just didn't want to admit the dire possibility.

There was another clue that I missed, for which, first, a little background.

Barrie loved Christmas and everything about it. As a gift to family and friends he would send out private print runs of either new works or excerpted passages from past publications. The content was in most cases unrelated to Christmas: poems from "The Plunkett Papers"; visual poetry on a card or in a chapbook; an eight-page comic book that he wrote and got a comics artist to draw; things like that. He revelled in the atmosphere of the holiday season and all its traditions, including of course the exchange of gifts. I myself had pretty much withdrawn from all that by the 1980s, but one concession I did make towards it was a gift exchange with bp, conducted in the course of a visit during the Christmas period.

Sometime in August of '88, Beep invited me up to his place for a visit. He'd told me in advance that he had something he wanted to give me, and he made clear his conviction that I'd be tickled pink about it. *He* was clearly tickled pink at the prospect of giving it to me. When I got to his place, Beep, gleefully excited, introduced the subject by saying that he had intended to give this item to me as a Christmas present, but it was "just too good to wait that long for," and then brought forth a large, white, hardcover tome entitled *The Duttons of Dutton*, a history of the early generations of the lineage, beginning with the first individual to use the English place name as a family name.

I was indeed tickled pink. We looked together a bit through the book, and had a pleasant, late-summer, early Christmas visit, only bp aware of the real reason for it. Not until after the surgery had tragically proved to be too much for his constitution, and I had realized how aware he had been of the danger he was in, did I appreciate the generosity of the gift – not simply the book, but the time taken from the massive and weighty

tasks he had to complete before entering hospital: setting his affairs in order, drawing up a will, settling the million other provisional readinesses that had to be prepared, completing work on *Gifts: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&*, not to mention *Book 9*. And god knows what else.

I've sometimes wished that I'd been able to take my cue from what he did, the hint he surely never intended, and to give him a reciprocal gift, some talisman of hope for success with the surgery.

Instead, perhaps, for others, and somehow for him, this.

Blurring the Borders/Bordering the Blurs: bpNichol and derek beaulieu

Jonathan Ball

In an essay celebrating *St. Art*, a posthumous gallery showing of bpNichol's visual work, curator Gil McElroy laments the relegation of concrete poetry to its contemporary consideration as "little more than the bastard child of a brief and embarrassingly unfortunate transdisciplinary fling" (10) between the literary and visual arts. Yet, as the exhibition itself attests, Nichol's visual work is regarded with growing respect in Canada, although it is relatively neglected by comparison to his multi-book poem *The Martyrology* (conventionally considered his enduring work while the visual poems are often regarded as ephemera). Nichol is without a doubt Canada's most well-known and beloved practitioner of visual poetry, whose considerable and eclectic body of work continues to attract attention and praise.

Nichol's literary inheritors, by and large, have not been so lucky. As derek beaulieu, a Calgary poet best known for his visual work, states with chagrin: "the attitude is no longer 'those who can do, and those who can't teach,' but 'those who can do, and those who can't make concrete poetry' […] it exists on the margins of the margins" (Interview). If this is so, then on the margins of the margins of the margins exists a genre of which beaulieu may be the sole practitioner, depending on how this genre comes to be defined: the Canadian concrete long poem. While the *series* has long been a staple medium of concrete exploration, beaulieu's recent projects, *The Newspaper* and *Flatland*, narrow and sustain poetic interest to seemingly absurd lengths. Though these projects tend to be considered as conceptual art works (which they are, in some respects), they also draw upon the tenets of performance art, particularly insofar as the bodily performance of labour is present, as a trace, in the finished poems.

Nichol and beaulieu share an interest in *borderblur*, a term coined by Dom Sylvester Houédard and used by Nichol at times to refer to concrete poetry.[1] The term foregrounds the interdisciplinary nature of the visual work Nichol was interested in, and his desire for constant interrogation of the borders between artistic disciplines and genres. This interest is shared by beaulieu, along with the restlessness that typifies Nichol's oeuvre and which led Karl Young to flatter Nichol as "a seeker, not one who con-

cluded things" ("A Brief Sketch"). As beaulieu's body of work evolves, it exhibits less in common with Nichol's oeuvre, but beaulieu has maintained the sense of play and possibility that Nichol privileged, and continues to push boundaries to blur writing, visual art, conceptual art, and performance art, while seeking to challenge and expand upon the Canadian long poem as a genre.

What I offer in this essay is a modest survey of beaulieu's work in the light of Nichol's influence, with particular attention paid to *The Newspaper* and *Flatland* projects, which seem to represent a new (though anticipated) direction for beaulieu. In doing so, I gesture towards a poetic of the Canadian concrete long poem, an admittedly ill-defined concept which begs (and, I feel, deserves) further and more detailed study.

wax frog fractals

Nichol's influence on beaulieu is most obvious in beaulieu's collaboration with Gary Barwin, *frogments from the frag pool*, published in 2005 but written mostly between 1998 and 2001. The book is a collection of "translations, responses, remixes, and new takes on Matsuo Basho's famous frog haiku" (*frogments*, back cover), a project which Nichol himself undertook: "[Nichol's] last variation, apparently never published, was simply a capital letter Q" (Young, "A Brief Sketch"). The visual poems in the Barwin and beaulieu book are hand-drawn and cartoonish, like much of Nichol's own work. The poems also share Nichol's humour and wit. Two typically Nichol-esque poems are "ripples (in glass houses)" and the punningly titled "ponderous." The former consists of two nearly identical sets of three circles, each inside the other, to imitate ripples in water. Below the first set of ripples is written "a. throwing stones" and below the second set is "b. jumping frogs" (52). The latter poem is a single-panel comic in which a self-reflexive period considers its own existence with Zen-like aplomb. Each circle leading up towards its thought balloon (which contains only an identical period) serves as the letter "o" in the words "frog," "pond," and "plop" (89), a comically minimalist translation of the Basho poem which recurs throughout the book and which was first proposed by Houédard.

Although *frogments* was written earlier, beaulieu's first published book is *with wax*, a series of poems concerning the history of printing that might be considered the author's first foray into the long poem genre. The poems are primarily composed in a fractured prose style, with a series of concrete works interspersed throughout, which seem more influenced by Bob Cobbing than bpNichol, an influence carried forward into *fractal economies*, beaulieu's third book and first publication of exclusively vi-

sual work. Somewhat jarring, then, but also anticipated by projects like *with wax* and the machinic aesthetic of *fractal economies*, is beaulieu's shift with *The Newspaper* and *Flatland* to a hybrid genre that might be identified (if only provisionally) as the concrete long poem.

The Newspaper
The Newspaper project is a set of 124 paintings which stand as visual translations of the July 18, 2002 edition of the *Calgary Herald*. To produce these poems, beaulieu replaced the newspaper's text with a series of painted rectangles corresponding to the content of the articles, "assign-[ing] each category a different hue, and then each article within each category a varying shade of that hue" ("News Hues," 18). The resulting poems "resemble[e] Piet Mondrian's highly modernist geometric paintings" (18), but also recall a poetic series by bpNichol and Barbara Caruso, *From My Window*. Caruso describes the series as conceived by Nichol and executed by herself:

> I […] asked [Nichol] to show me what he had in mind. He drew the contours of four vertical rectangles (the "window"), put "Monday" above them and the word "blue" below them. I questioned him closely. He wanted the series to have seven images, one for each weekday. The name of the weekday would be the only change in the configuration of each page. The word "blue" would occur on all of them; the colour "blue" would change. bp described the changes as "light, darker, darkest, and bright" from Monday through Sunday. […] I wanted to make that visible, not by making one blue and graduating it from light to dark, but by making seven blues, each a new intermixture of pigments. Not only would the value of the colours change, but the hue itself would change so the printed word "blue" would have new meaning on each page. (58-59)

Although the similarities between the two series may seem incidental, beaulieu himself points to *From My Window* as an early influence on *The Newspaper* (Interview). For beaulieu, the austere nature of Nichol's concept belies its poignancy, and that both *From My Window* and *The Newspaper* involve poeticizing a daily occurrence (the observation of shades of sky in the Nichol/Caruso collaboration and reading the newspaper in beaulieu's series) is certainly of note.

In speaking of *From My Window*, beaulieu asks: "how does that blue change from day to day and actually create a narrative?" (Interview). The same question might be put to *The Newspaper*: how does the size, shape, and placement of each block in beaulieu's canvas, when considered in sequence (as the pages of the newspaper from which they stem) produce a narrative? In this instance, the narrative is not about the events recorded

on July 18, 2002, but the decisions made concerning the presentation of this information. The most striking aspect of *The Newspaper*, for me, is the overwhelming amount of shades ranging from gray to black, which are omnipresent. This is the colour chosen to represent advertisements. Indeed, part of the series is comprised of 36 pages of flyers – page after page of gray/blacks, the dark heart of the otherwise colourful series, a bleak comment on the consumerist ideology permeating this supposedly objective medium. Wordlessly, through these mute shades, *The Newspaper* reveals and comments upon the medium's reliance upon, and interpellation by, corporate interests. This self-reflexive commentary, always inherent within the form of the medium, is made plainly visible by beaulieu's decision to empty the newspaper of its content in order to highlight its formal composition. Without having to write a word, simply by taking a visual inventory of its contents, beaulieu is able to mount a critique of the capitalist impulses at work behind the newspaper's objective façade. According to beaulieu, "Marshall McLuhan […] observe[d] that reading a newspaper was an experience of cubism in the everyday world" ("News Hues" 19), and McLuhan's dictum that "the medium is the message" (23) is implied in beaulieu's critique.

Although beaulieu does not cite *From My Window* as an influence in "News Hues," an artistic statement regarding *The Newspaper*, he mentions the work of two more immediate predecessors:

> For a year, Nancy Chunn rubber stamped and collaged on top of every front page of *The New York Times*, creating *Front Pages*. Kenneth Goldsmith's *DAY* transcribes every single word in a single copy of *The New York Times* into a single monolithic volume. (19)

There is an obvious though perhaps overlooked difference between these two projects and *The Newspaper*. Instead of similarly choosing *The New York Times*, beaulieu has chosen the *Calgary Herald*, a local newspaper, as the subject of his colourful autopsy. This choice seems motivated by convenience, as in many respects it does not matter which newspaper beaulieu uses, since his interest is in the newspaper genre itself, not in any particular publication. In replacing the text with blocks of colour, beaulieu effaces the particulars of the paper and its content in order, as already stated, to emphasize its form. At the same time, though, it is clear that Calgary is not New York, and lacks New York's metropolitan quality. New York has come to represent, synecdochically, all cities, and since the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, America itself. Calgary lacks this synecdochical relationship with the notion of a modern metropolis or with Canada itself. More commonly, Calgary stands in an antagonistic relation-

ship with Ottawa and the rest of the country, stereotyped as a right-wing, oil-rich city. In this light, beaulieu's choice of the *Calgary Herald* might be read as a critique of Calgary's capitalist impulses, and effacement of its particularities as a rejection of this newspaper whose content has been voided but whose corporate ideology remains clear.

Perhaps this reading is not intended by beaulieu, but it is certainly possible. In like manner, it is possible to consider this refusal of particularities as a reaction to the poetic precedent set by the Canadian long poem, especially the subgenre of the prairie long poem and its emphasis on vernacular language and the particulars of place. In effacing the *Calgary Herald*'s text, beaulieu has, consciously or not, refused the vernacular possibilities of this source text. Likewise, by selecting a local newspaper and then rejecting its local content in favour of a global generic form, beaulieu has chosen not to develop the interest in place that gives its name to the prairie long poem. Yet beaulieu seems to want to carve out a lineage for *The Newspaper*, and his following project, *Flatland*, one that involves both concrete poetry *and* the Canadian long poem:

> Why wouldn't *Flatland* or *The Newspaper* be considered a long poem? A Canadian long poem? *Flatland* is a 98-page poem of a static poetic concern, which is basically a long poem. One hundred pages of continuous engagement with a single subject – to make a very basic definition. There is a big resistance to looking at conceptual writing in terms of how we understand poetry already, and in Canada that's the long poem, that's the sequence, that's the writing of the body, all these various things. (Interview)

The influence of the long poem as a genre on beaulieu's work cannot be overlooked, even if its influence passes down to beaulieu only as an anxious refusal of its conventions. Re-invoking the term *borderblur*, beaulieu's affinity with Nichol in terms of this interest in transgressing disciplinary boundaries may be brought to bear on his recent practice, which seeks to develop lengthy series of discrete concrete objects that beaulieu insists on discussing in literary terms. It is paramount to beaulieu that his visual works be considered as *writing*, and *read* as such. Discussing his frustration with pursuing publication of *The Newspaper*, beaulieu states:

> To me, people don't *read* what's hung on a wall. They *look*. I hang *The Newspaper* paintings on the wall, and people *look* at them. I would love to get them published as a book, because then people would *read* them. Even better, to get them published as a newspaper. (Interview)

This insistence on concrete poetry as writing, and beaulieu's apparent desire to situate his work within the context of Canadian literary history even as he eschews the established conventions of this national literature,

speaks to his desire to produce a body of work that, like Nichol's own, transgresses generic limitation. Refusing to distinguish his visual art from writing, beaulieu contributes to the corpus of Canadian literature by rejecting its tropes, the conceptual borders of beaulieu's transdisciplinary blurs, gesturing towards the possibility of the concrete long poem.

Flatland

An important, and easily overlooked, aspect of *The Newspaper* is the fact of its existence. This fact is commonly disregarded in discussions of artistic works, yet it is significant – beaulieu has *produced* these poems after lengthy and extensive labour. Whatever else we might say about *The Newspaper*, we can at least say that it seems to exist. Artistic works, in a fundamental way, are records of their own production, and contain within themselves traces of the process of their composition. In this sense, *The Newspaper* might be considered as performance art – poems whose size, abundance, and varying hues attest to the substantial practical labour involved in their creation. After beaulieu's establishment of a conceptual basis for the project, each page of the *Calgary Herald* stood as a blueprint for a painting which then had to be produced in a uniform and systematic fashion, without room for improvisation aside from the mixing of hues – a monotonous process, the execution of which, according to beaulieu, took two and a half years.

If one of the borders that *The Newspaper* project blurs is that between writing/painting and performance art, each painting standing as an allusion to the bodily labour involved in its birthing, then *Flatland* blurs this border further. For this project, beaulieu created a "page-by-page response to E. A. Abbott's *Flatland* [...] tracing, by hand, a representation of each letter's occurrence across every page of text," thereby reducing Abbott's novel, a Victorian satire about a science-fictional world possessing only two spatial dimensions, "to a two-dimensional schematic reminiscent of EKG results or stock reports" ("Flatland," 38). The resulting poems are pleasing aesthetic objects) which operate as 'pataphysical maps of the movements of letters across each page of Abbott's original text, "from the first occurrence of each letter on the first line through the first appearance of each of those same letters on each subsequent line" ("from *Flatland*," 67). There is a hint of Nichol-esque humour in this concept, fancifully tracing the trajectories of letters as they move from line to line, taking up new positions in new words, but the real joke almost seems to be on beaulieu himself: "*Flatland* to me is a performance, but it's more of a Sisyphean task, and it's totally ridiculous. 'You did what? You traced somebody else's writing for a year?' […] It's just ridiculous" (Interview).
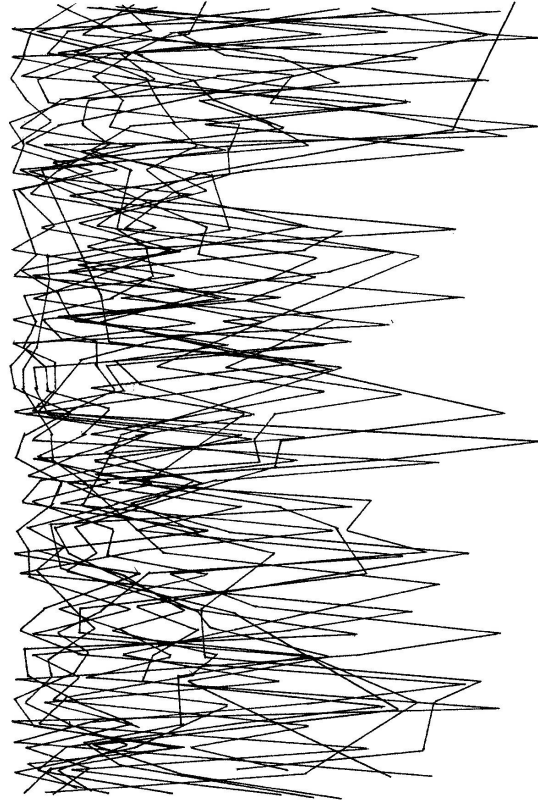
A page from "Flatland."

At the same time, the text of beaulieu's *Flatland* stands, more seri-ously, as a record of the very mannered reading to which beaulieu has subjected Abbott's novel in order to produce his own text, "a record of authorial movement" ("from *Flatland*," 67). If *The Newspaper* paintings allude to the performance involved in their own creation, the lines of beaulieu's *Flatland* literally stand as records of beaulieu's labour to trace over Abbot's pages. In an authorial statement on *Flatland*, beaulieu states: "I am increasingly fascinated by textual forms [...] and the way that form and content are linked. My work has become about long genera-tive acts which produce traces of performative reading" ("from *Flatland*," 67). However, while *The Newspaper* reveals fundamental formal ele-

ments of the newspaper which are often overlooked, involving the medium in its own self-critique, *Flatland* avoids making similar moves. Tracing only between the first occurrence of letters on each line, ignoring all other occurrences of these letters, and beginning his work anew on each page instead of continuing to trace trajectories across the entire text, beaulieu refuses a number of opportunities to comment on typography and the book form. Moreover, the poems of beaulieu's *Flatland* respond specifically to the content of its source text in sly ways, even while beaulieu effaces this text, whereas *The Newspaper* does not.[2]

Flatland and *The Newspaper* are also evidence for beaulieu's interest in the generative possibilities of text. Through the rigorous, sustained performance of stereotypically un-creative acts such as tracing and a sophisticated version of paint-by-numbers, beaulieu has produced wordless treatises on the generative nature of art and the creative possibilities of text. Furthermore, these texts, by alluding unromantically to the labour involved in their production, demystify the process of artistic creation and place what might otherwise be considered esoteric art within the realm of the everyday. While the average person may consider the composition of *Paradise Lost* above their own creative abilities, certainly anyone could trace over the pages of that book, even somebody unable to understand a word of the text. This is not said to disparage beaulieu's artistic accomplishments, or the labour involved, but rather to point out the democratic impulse present in beaulieu's work. Instead of choosing to display technical expertise above the attainment of a common practitioner, beaulieu has elected to emphasize the labour involved in his visual productions – and to imply that such creativity is not only laudable but within the reach of a less accomplished artist. Although beaulieu's visual aesthetic is more similar to Cobbing's than to Nichol's, Nichol's favouring of a casual, hand-drawn style in the production of many of his visual works has some parallels to beaulieu's penchant for minimalist, machinic execution. The result is similar in each case: an emphasis on the concrete nature of language and writing and on the generative possibilities of text, and an insistence on the blurring of borders between writing and other artistic, and sub-artistic, disciplines.

List of Figures

Notes

1. Most notably, in "some afterwords" for *the cosmic chef: an evening of concrete*, which Nichol edited.
2. The emphasis on the two-dimensionality of the text is an obvious parallel, but perhaps most clever is beaulieu's decision to trace only the first occurrences of each letter on each line. In addition to allowing for enough white space to produce interesting patterns, these "first-class" letters are privileged over their brethren without just cause, recalling the rigidly hierarchical society satirized in Abbott's *Flatland*. Also, by proceeding page-by-page instead of continuing to map trajectories across the entire text, beaulieu refuses movement through the third dimension (imagining an axis intersecting pages when the book is closed), which is generally not possible in Abbott's *Flatland*.

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Conceptual writing & bpNichol

derek beaulieu

What I currently find most interesting about conceptual writing – as exemplified in the work of Sarah Jacobs, Sarah Cullen and Emma Kay[1] – is the engagement with Robert Smithson's concepts of the 'site' and the 'non-site.' Robert Smithson, while best known as a landscape artist, also wrote on the relationship of the written word to sculpture and art, treating language as "a material entity, as something that wasn't involved in ideational values" (Cummings 294). The site / non-site relationship both troubles and informs conceptual writing. Smithson writes that his "sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas – i.e. 'printed matter'" ("Language" 61). Smithson's dichotomy of site and non-site is explained by Gary Shapiro where the site is "the source of material or the place of a physical alteration of the land" and the non-site "its parallel or representation in the gallery" (2). Smithson articulates this differentiation as a means of troubling the gallery space, as interfering in one's expectation of how the gallery economy is constructed, where the non-sites are "maps that point to an area" outside of the gallery space proper, although Smithson's claiming them as 'maps' is troubled; he explains that "the pieces that I do on a landscape are maps of material, as opposed to maps of paper" (Toner and Smithson 236). The site, then, is "a place where a piece should be but isn't. The piece that should be there is now somewhere else, usually in a room" (Heizer, Oppenheim and Smithson 250).

Smithson's own *Non-Site, Franklin, New Jersey* – as an example of the site/non-site dichotomy – consists of five trapezoidal wooden boxes each containing a proportional amount of ore from an area designated in a series of five aerial photographs. This non-site references both the site of Franklin, New Jersey through the aerial photograph, but also through abstracting perception of the site itself. Smithson prompts the viewer to "think about the limits of their spaces and how to extend them beyond the walls of [the gallery]" (Smithson "Earth" 182). This ideation of the exhibited 'non-site' as a physical, material map which points outside of itself is a useful means of approaching conceptual books such as Sarah Jacobs' *Deciphering Human Chromosome 16: INDEX to the Report*.

Jacobs' text is available through information as material – a press dedicated to "work by artists who use extant material – selecting it and reframing it to generate new meanings – and who, in doing so, disrupt the

existing order of things" (back cover copy) and published by Simon Morris and Nick Thurston (themselves both authors of conceptual writing) under the *information as material* imprint. Tellingly, Jacobs is not referred to as the 'author' of *Deciphering Human Chromosome 16: INDEX to the Report* but rather as the 'co-ordinator', for the text is an over 500 page volume printed in microscopic type consisting of all of the mapping of human chromosome 16 as found in public domain texts online. Jacobs' text is, in fact, solely the index to a downloadable free PDF available on the publisher's website, making the *INDEX* a double non-site. Not only does the *INDEX* point to the actual texts as compiled and 'co-ordinated' by Jacobs through information as material, but it also refers to the site of the original public domain text available at *Project Gutenberg*, and ultimately to the chromosomal research which results in these mappings ([2]). Smithson's insistence that the non-site points to "a place where a piece should be but isn't" is ironic when applied to Jacobs as her *INDEX to the Report* is sold at £19.50 despite the fact the source texts – those indexed – are available free online at the very internet storefront which makes the index available (Heizer, Oppenheim and Smithson 250). The purchasable non-site of the non-site *INDEX* points to the economically absent centre.

§

Sarah Cullen's *Maps* (see Fig. 1) consists of a series of non-signifying maps, created by a 'pendulum drawing device' Cullen created from found materials, which maps her progress on a series of walks around Florence, Italy (Cullen [27]). *Maps*, then, is a writing created by rote, where "language 'covers' rather than 'discovers its sites and situations" (Smithson "Museum" 78). *Maps* is a Smithsonian non-site which points to the empty centre of the site of Florence. Cullen's *Maps* cover the site of Florence, and the author's presence in that space but also do so in a way which doesn't articulate the site itself.

Sol LeWitt, in his "Sentences on Conceptual Art" – 35 sentences which operate both as a manifesto and as a piece of conceptual art in their own right – postulates that

> 28. Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. […]
> 29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course (222).

This shared processual base for conceptual art and conceptual writing is not to suggest that conceptual writing is a temporally-displaced adjunct to conceptual art, but instead that the two can be seen to share æsthetic val-

ues, and that conceptual art can be understood as a moment of Oulipian "anticipatory plagiary."

As defining as Smithson's articulation of the site/non-site relationship, LeWitt's statements on mechanical procedurality are also vital for conceptual writing, as "[t]o work with a plan which is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity" (LeWitt "Paragraphs" 214). LeWitt and Smithson's statements on mechanical procedurality and resistance to humanist subjectivity seems even more relevant. LeWitt and Smithson wrote in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a generation of writers later, and these statements seem even more charged. In his 1968 statement "Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth projects," Robert Smithson proclaims that "poetry being forever lost must submit to its own vacuity; it is somehow a product of exhaustion rather than creation" (107).

§

Exhaustion, as a creative methodology, is an interesting response to the poetic sensibility of the long poem – as typified by Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*, and in Canada, bpNichol's *The Martyrology* – which is compositionally arranged around a humanist exploration of place, compositional time, subject and subjectivity. As Craig Dworkin points out in a recent piece on Kenneth Goldsmith, the collecting / accumulating aspect of conceptual writing becomes a substitute for the humanist drive at reflection (15). bpNichol, in his 9-volume *The Martyrology*, uses language to paragrammatically explore both semantic and personal meaning. While known as an inveterate collector, at no time does Nichol attempt to find a "way of avoiding subjectivity" (LeWitt "Paragraphs" 214) but rather creates a fractal subjectivity within language:
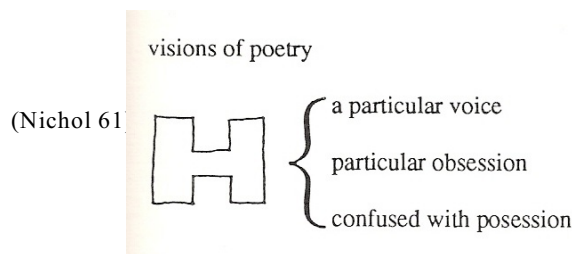
Nichol's obsessive use of language – such as his penchant for the letter "H" – while echoing the obsessive collector-minded mentality of conceptual writing, differs by focusing on the author himself as the ultimate subject of the poetic project. Walter Benjamin argues that "[t]he collector

dreams his way […] into a […] world […] in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful," (Benjamin 9) and in *The Martyrology* the reverse is true – Nichol, as collector, dreams of a world where language represents fractally. For Smithson "each poem is a 'grave'[…] for […] metaphors" where "[s]emantics are driven out […] in order to avoid meaning" instead of reiterated at the paragrammatic level ("Museum" 80).

Nichol's exploration of the long poem in "Narrative in Language: The Long Poem" contains some dictums which move towards conceptual art:

> At a certain point you decide to start with what's in front of you. There's no point despairing of a subject, or carrying on some misguided search for a 'great' theme when all you have to do is start with what's in front of you. (392)

This passage also nicely foreshadows Goldsmith's suggestion that "[w]riting needs to be as simple as possible – just put a net up and catch it" (qtd in Perloff 82). Nichol's concentration on the poetic, however, pushes the conclusion of his quote towards a more humanist conclusion:

> the blue lines, the ink, the pen, the letters the pen shapes, the words the letters make, the table, the window, those leafless trees, these leaves in this notebook in front of me, you – the stuff of poetry (392).

Nichol's move from "what's in front of you" to "the stuff of poetry" is the shift that is avoided in conceptual writing, the idea that the content of the "stuff of poetry" is "those leafless trees […] me, you" and that poetry must ultimately be bound to the person, to the experiential. Interestingly, however, in the same essay Nichol does continue to track writing into a series of statements which elucidate conceptual writing quite well:

> Ordinary language is the hardest to write. […] The minute you write or say the word 'ordinary' you draw too much attention to it & it ceases to be; ordinary that is. Extraordinary when you point to it [….] The extra has to do with singling it out. So that what is extraordinary in language is how what is ordinary is ordinarily transparent or invisible to us (392).

§

Emma Kay's *Worldview* successfully negotiates the schism between the humanist drive and the conceptual compositional strategy where "language is built, not written" (Wheeler and Smithson 228). *Worldview* is nothing less than Emma Kay's exhaustive history of the world – from the Big Bang to the year 2000 – written entirely from memory. Like bpNichol's *The Martyrology*, *Worldview* is highly personal, but instead of dwelling on experience, and the inherent ability of language to fractally represent meaning, Kay delivers in the flattened, infallible tone of a high

school textbook a history of the world which is created not through import or sociological subject matter but purely on the idiosyncrasies of Kay's own (faulty) memories. *Worldview* spends only the first 75 (of 230) pages on the history of the world until the 20th century, focusing on the encyclopedic reiteration of history primarily from the artist's lifetime; it is also indexed for easy reference. The index itself, much like Sarah Jacobs' *INDEX*, works as the non-site documenting the site of Kay's memory while it also appropriates the flawless tone of cultural authority. A sample section of the index to *Worldview* reveals Kay's own selective sense of history:

> HIV, 156, 181
> Holland, 45, 57
> Holliday, Billy, 113
> Hollywood, 86, 99, 145, 190, 195
> Holocaust, 92, 95
> holograms, 129
> Holyfield, Evander, 197
> (220).

Worldview is a maddening text, as it testifies that a contemporary artist could actually conceive of a world where 'Aerosmith' (p. 132) and 'Archimedes' (p. 16) have the same historical credence. Kay presents a text which is both encyclopedic in purview but also centered on the fallibility of personal recollection.

§

Worldview's non-interventionalist practice is typical of much conceptual writing, as the filter between the 'ordinary' and the 'extraordinary' becomes a theoretical one – one that is explored through Smithson's ideas of the 'site' and the 'non-site.' Cullen, Kay and Jacobs all accumulate language and representation in a way that foregrounds the materiality of text. Materiality here is not one of humanist poetic – 'the stuff of poetry' – but rather one that is developed through the sheer mass of the extraordinary ordinary.
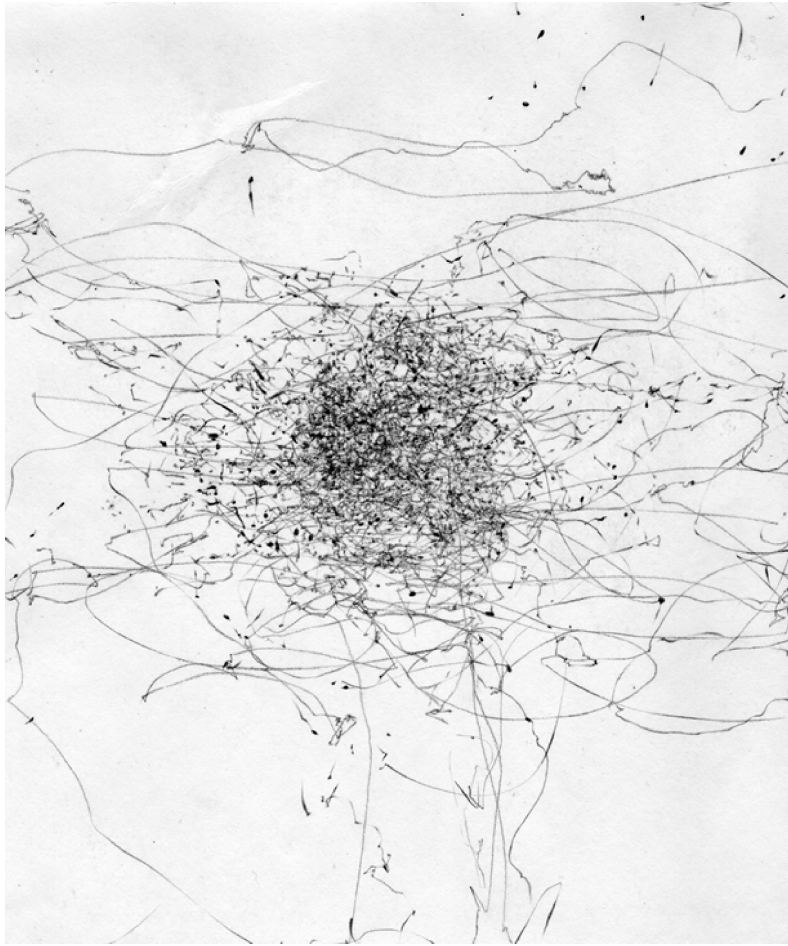
Fig. 1 Cullen, Sarah. "October 12 2004; 12:45pm Clockwise around Duomo 4 times by bike."
Used with permission of the artist.

Notes

1. And while outside the scope of this article, I would include (though by no means limit this genre to) Fiona Banner's *The Nam*, Caroline Bergvall's "Via: 48

Dante Variations," Christian Bök's *Eunoia*, Dan Farrell's *The Inkblot Record*, Michael Maranda's *Four Percent of Moby Dick*, Simon Morris' *Re-Writing Freud*, Nick Thurston's *Reading the Remove of Literature*, Darren Wershler-Henry & Bill Kennedy's *The Apostrophe Engine* and Darren Wershler-Henry's *The Tapeworm Foundry* as exemplary editions in this field. Refer also to Craig Dworkin's *Ubuweb Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (online at: http://www.ubu.com/concept/) for additional works. Kenneth Goldsmith is probably the highest-profile practitioner of conceptual writing; his work is explored at greater length in Lori Emerson and Barbara Cole, eds. *Kenneth Goldsmith and Conceptual Poetics. Open Letter.* 12.7 (Fall 2005).

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Men Write What Men Mean: The "Pataphysics of bpNichol's *Zygal*

Steven Zultanski

The late great Jean Baudrillard writes something to the extent of "We must replace dialectics with a 'pataphysics." bpNichol makes just this replacement in poems such as the 16 "probable systems" in *Zygal: A Book of Mysteries and Translations*. But due to the explicit "pataphysical nature of the "probable systems", it's easy to overlook the fact that *Zygal* is constructed "pataphysically *as a book*.

Nichol does not limit his interest in imaginary science to quasi-scientific poems, but actually replaces a materialist conception of dialectical montage with a "pataphysical "montage."

Instead of making contradictions apparent, Nichol embraces a simultaneity in which truth and verity blur and falsity ceases to be a question. According to Wikipedia, 'Pataphysics "is a philosophy dedicated to studying what lies beyond the realm of metaphysics. It is a parody of the theory and methods of modern science and is often expressed in nonsensical language."

My claim, sometimes

The late great Sergei Eisenstein writes something or other about "art's task to make manifest contradictions of Being." The contradiction of Being made manifest in Nichol's work is that between textuality and 'reality.' For Nichol, humanity is constructed through language while obviously existing outside of language.

Language is unstable and the production of certainty through language is equally unstable.

The first poem of *Zygal* contains the lines: "I am these words / these words say so / somwhere I exist separate from this page / this cage of sounds and signs." "Somwhere" is unspecific because the limits of the text and the self are indefinable, though they do "exist."

Similarly, we can read Nichol's love of the letter H as a 'making manifest' of this same contradiction. The H is an I on its back, the personal pronoun pronounced silently, as a breath, - breathing reimagined as the assertion of selfhood, but also silence. Ac-

cording to Wikipedia, the letter H, in "its lowercase form [h], represents the voiceless glottal fricitive, and its small capital form [H], represents the epiglottal fricitive." The key words here are "voiceless" and "capital."

rendered illegible by the essay which hopes to make

The late great Albert Einstein writes something again, "an illustration of instantaneous action. Woman with pince-nez. Followed immediately – without transition – by the same woman with shattered pince-nez and bleeding eye: impression of a shot hitting the eye."

A semi-personal example: this morning I sat in a Waffle House in Buckhead, Georgia. Next door stood the Buckhead Plastic Surgery Center. By juxtaposing Waffle House (America's Place to Work and To Eat) with a plastic surgery center, class contradictions are immediately apparent.

The fantasy of class mobility takes one no further than the Waffle House, and the fantasy of complete physical transformation takes one next door if one has enough money to get there.

Here we can see cultural fantasies of individual transformation (physical and economic) in their vulgar, realistic forms.

In this way we can consider reading all of the strip mall landscape as one extended dialectical montage. Driving (everyday life) could then replace film as the most revolutionary artform. According to Wikipedia, montage "offers discontinuity in graphic qualities, violations of the 180 degree rule, and the creation of impossible spatial matches." Moreover, Wikipedia reports that Eisenstein writes, "montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots,"

wherein "each sequential element is per-ceived not next to the other, but on top of the other."

it, is that 'pataphysics and "pataphysics

The late great Louis Zukofsky writes something about how poetry could strive for what is "objectively perfect." Like Eisenstein, Zukofsky's materialist poetry may be read as dialectical, as a 'making manifest' of material contradictions, using parataxis instead of montage.

Nichol's poetry, on the other hand, uses parataxis to make manifest *subjective* contradictions. In this way, "pataphysics does not so much humanize science as highlight the distinctly human elements of scientific thought – that is, all of them. Language itself becomes expressive, not autonomous but also not identical to the poet who reframes this expression.

For example, Nichol's poem "Self-contradiction," consists of handwriting reproduced in the book-form, a form which voids the 'authenticity' of handwriting. The body of the poem, "abcdefghijklmNO" reframes the alphabet as the poet (having intent), but this intent inherent in the alphabet is only expressed subjectively, by the poet.

The poem that precedes "self-contradiction," "Line Telling: 1," consists of a scribbled and wobbly capital "H, " a breath made unstable on the page. In its wobbliness, it is nearly not an "H," just as in its reproduction, the handwriting is nearly not handwriting, though we must recognize it as such.

The poem that precedes "Line Telling: 1," "early october poem," eschews textual experimentation in favor of direct emotional address: "there is a path that leads there thru a wood that I have traveled / often from an urge to be alone / a lady who is flesh & vaginal / I take for my own."

Here the object of love is fleshy, not textual. Love happens to be expressed textually, through poetry, but this doesn't have to be the case. Love can be expressed bodily, and though sex is textual, it cannot be reduced simply to text. This sort of literary 'montage,' poem on poem, makes manifest not contemporary dialectical contradictions but contemporary emotional contradictions, the subjective space of the love-life.

Lovelife, as tied to the body, appears fluid as the body appears fluid in the midst of an unstable science. In Nichol's case, the love poem appears unstable in the midst of unstable "pataphysical poems. According to Wikipedia, Einstein's theory of relativity "overthrows Newtonian notions of absolute space and time by stating that distance and time depend on the observer, and that time and space are perceived differently, depending on the observer."

do not so much negate scientific thought

The late great Christian Bök writes a line along the lines of "no view can offer a norm for other views." Perspectivism seems to coincide with "pataphysics, but not simply. In place of relativity, I'd propose that "pataphysics is the objective expression of subjective understanding. The usefulness of "pataphysics is not that it undermines science or gives away the secret of science – that it is imaginative – but rather that "pataphysics accepts that scientists already know this – hence endless debate - and consciously work within imaginative boundaries.

What is uncertain is not necessarily 'truth' itself, but the knowledge of any one person in an age of information.

It's always been true that everyone is a layman, in that no one has access to all ideas, but with modernity's eruption, and the division of knowledge, the universal laymen (the educated bourgeois) know less than ever.

With the speedy reproduction of data and concepts, the amount of information any given person does NOT have access to increases manifold. We can thus read Jarry's 'pataphysics as a response to the quantity of truth, and not simply the quality of truth (which is of course effected by the quantity).

To put it another way, 'pataphysics is not simply a parody of scientific thought and reason, it is the expression of the inability to assimilate or differentiate a wealth of reason. It is the reflection of the experience of living in an age of scientificism.

Of course there are problems in the production of certainty and reason, and everyone knows this, but everyone believes in science anyway. We absorb more information than we can test. It's not that we don't believe in truth, but we literally don't have time to test for truth everywhere.

If we have access to information, we live 'pataphysically. You may already be a 'pataphysician (i.e. you are). According to Wikipedia, 'pataphysics "is a parody of the theory and methods of modern science and is often expressed in nonsensical language."

as reflect the expression of scientific thought in an "information age."

The late great Alfred Jarry writes about 'pataphysics and says something like "if a coin is dropped and falls once, it is only by chance that, if dropped again, it would fall again."

'Pataphysics, as Bök rightly points out, posits exceptionality as the rule. In "for steve," a poem addressed lovingly to a friend, Nichol writes:

```
        as they are
        objects in the world we live in
        carry us far
                    ther a
        way
            from
                    each
```

other
    than
        they
           should

Objects (letters, words – things) disperse, and in their dispersion people disperse. In this dispersion, a function of alienation, people are 'carried away' from the objects (knowledge) and from people (love).

        It is note-wor-thy that the next poem in *Zygal*, "probable systems 6," plays with both the letters of algebra and the letters of English. In the math of language, "QUES-TION MARKS" becomes "QUSTION MARKS" becomes "(QUS)CHOYN MARKS" and finally becomes "QUSTION MARKS" again.

        Not only is knowledge dispersed, but the question itself is dispersed, making the an-swers to such questions nearly irrelevant. If the word "question" cannot even be uttered in a stable way, how does one arrive at an "answer?"

        "pro-bable systems 6" is followed by an translated invective and this invective is followed by a love poem. The human task of understanding is overdetermined by the human tasks of insult and affection. According to Wikipedia, "This may be taken in several senses."

Nichol's "pataphysical book is produced in the midst
of a mass media culture

The late great Henri Lefebvre writes this sentence in a book, "Reason is located outside the real in the ideal."

        At first glance, it seems like "pata-physics inhabits this same location.

        For if "pataphysics is simply the rever-sal of reason – irrationality, unreason – then it would also be an ideal.

        In-stead "pataphysics, like a materialist dialectic, becomes concrete in its "swerve" between (and synthesis of) rationality and irrationality – now spaces where verity and falsity take the same shape, and science appears naked as the world it describes.

        Nichol's "probable systems" describe noth-ing, and yet appear rationally sound.

        This sort of play, rationality put to the test of the imaginary, does not simply highlight the arbitrary aspect of sci-entific production of certainty, it attempts to illustrate the certainty of the imaginary, the reason inhabiting every thought, every whim, the realism inherent in the most fantastical or 'irrational' writing.

Imaginative writing then becomes all writing, and science becomes poetry again, which it already is, anyway, as we understand it via language. According to Wikipedia, Alfred Jarry wrote, "If you let a coin fall and it falls, the next time it is just by an infinite coincidence that it will fall again the same way; hundreds of other coins on other hands will follow this pattern in an infinitely unimaginable fashion."

and illustrates "pataphysics' location in an overall dialectic

The late great Karl Marx writes something somewhere saying, "The environment shapes man and man shapes his environment," because he's a dialectician. "Pataphysics extends the second half of this equation, and distorts the first.

The environment that shapes man and is known by man through scientific discovery is repositioned, regulated to the imaginary. In this formulation, man's knowledge (imagination) shapes man, and so man shapes his environment, which is necessarily imaginary.

In this way, 'Pataphysics exploits the lack of an objective world, and sets up a relative individuality instead.

However, with the explosion of mass media, the tables have turned. Instead of a turn-of-the-century relativity, we are faced with a mass media relationality, in which 'man' understands herself through news media that she doesn't actually believe or understand.

For example, an article in the *NY Times* on string theory will simplify and sensationalize its subject, and many readers will assimilate scientific theory outside of a rigorous or scientific context. The verity of the reader's knowledge of the world is no longer a question. When truth and falsity blur then the positive dialectic will not suffice.

String theory itself is not under scrutiny, but the book report version of string theory leads to real spiritual and political beliefs. 'Pataphysics becomes the physics of everyday life.

According to Wikipedia, "Practically every country in the world now has developed at least one television channel. Television has grown up all over the world, enabling every country to share aspects of their culture and society with others."

in which the subjective experience of absorbing and repelling fragments
of scientific information transcends itself (as "pataphysical poetry) to

appear as the objective truths of subjective understanding

The late great V. Adoratsky quotes the late great V.I. Lenin as writing in Russian something like, "'Pataphysics is the objective expression of subjective understanding of the bourgeoisie with camouflaged idealist conceptions of the bourgeois philosophers." The act of disbelieving what one believes causes a crisis in belief – leading to the premature conclusion that truth is naturally (ahistorically) untrue.

Instead of partial truth, which leads to limited conceptions of agency, untruth leads to nihilistic passivity. As such, I would argue, there is something that is not quite 'untrue' about Nichol's poetry – it does not give up truth so much as locate truth in raw experience.

The love poems do not deconstruct affect via textual experimentation, but materialize affect via textual experimentation.

By 'swerving' from the path of dialectical parataxis, 'pataphysical parataxis makes the contradiction of dialectics manifest – total synthesis is impossible but necessary. In making this contradiction manifest and preserving the very truth of the contradiction, "pataphysics transcends the contradiction (once again part of a dialectical process) and proposes a new truth – that the whole can be known as a sequences of partial and subjective truths.

Truths can be arranged collectively, but not unconsciously.

The arrangement and rearrangement of these truths is the positive radical proposition of 'pataphysics.

Humans make human things – governments or love.

These things exists and one feels them.

The mirror hall of knowledge itself is a single mirror, in that it reflects accurately – how could it not? – a single image – different angles of the same object. According to Wikipedia, bpNichol "received his elementary teaching certificate from the University of British Columbia in 1963, but he only worked a brief stint as a teacher. He had audited creative writing courses while in university, and his life moved in that direction after about a year of teaching. It is safe to say that Nichol was at least partly responsible for changing the way subsequent Canadian poets deal with text and even meaning itself."

in his work.

vol a vent

Natalie Zina Walschots

to recall

your mouth inkpots
each cleft scrawls
hangnail ghosts

your toenails pencil
blue sueded softshoe
each shimmy shreds

yawn in your maw
brimming cavitites
grind phonemes

res
    sonant
con

garble snifters
you heave a chuckling hawk

spitoon rings

radios   wave

*

far me

each syllable dovetails
each joint into socket
  a head board
my head pillows
an oh's downy hillock

vowels pop thought balloons
      e e   e   e
   u   u
 o
                a   a
(y)
 y r l tt rs sq   r   d nc

piano to pillow
the bed you built

I dream molecules and galaxies and tongues and belches

*

lope

your cumulous crushes granite
stomps thunderhead galoshes
chews tinfoil

my cirrus bums a light,
coughs smoke rings and spaghettios
grins licorice

your stratus sprays ozone
clatters through a tapedance
never keeps it down

my nimbus shoots and ricochets
splattersbuckshot
holepunches constellations

*

        cloud poke

        sheet metal deluge
        severs your breath

        your tongue lunges
        lingers over crumpled letters

        you mouth over each broken stem
        trip on each bruise

        *

a door

our lover
lower dear
dire
    lower

your upper cut
lowers each capital's case

resembles err
      air
        ing

blue better dear
          lower

*

counting

I call you a letter rustler
as you flank a branded aitch
each triangular hoofprint
an ah

your plump thumbing
above the gumline
herds the shearlings throatward

stampeding throatward
you swallow thundering

and here hear my margins
full of hoofbeats and breath

*

or

on tongue I hold
the hole of the holy donut

you double flop
each gutted vowel
belly up their wholes

walls of o collapse
between molars
          o o o o
       o   o
     O   O
    O   O
   O   O
  O   O
 O   O

 O   O
  O   O
   O   O
    O   O
     O   O
       o   o
        o o o o

dribble down the page
          down your chin
          bubbling grin

of babble
          oo
letters sc   ped

chew your cloud

*

our unleavened leaved
dapple holy throat

*

aspirate the stairway

slab of paragraph
bricks
        of text
corner optic
        cop-out

your switch hairpins
for keys and wait
twist our copper wires

we toe
our cue card
towing graph
from granite

kowtow to giggles

*

                   bower bard
                          egg spackles
my
              i   i
                     w   nd
          she   ld
gait

you kiss lines
flaw feline
scratch catgut
get caught
squeeze a cloud of grey matter

you whistle
teethcubes
arrest my brainstem
inflate a head

your voice
blusters razorwire
that flays speech
ohs catch barbs
squealing, deflate like pufferfish

*

frenetic con

you tether my oriole
gargling gravel
you egg me on
to build a gravel nest

aloud, your columns
curl, i queue against your palate

two thinshelled decades
frail as parentheses
insulatesyour heartbeat
but each every o is an egg
backlitlit by a lightbulb
I can see each muscular squeeze

h(0h) (0h) (0h)h
hhhhhhhhhhhhh

*

your razed pages
are torn to tidbits
scattered to feed
monkfsh and koi

*

fragments
            of shell
stick in my teeth
I crunch
on thought baubles

left cold now
they ink you bate
against my uvula

I feel the scratch of eggteeth

*

your seems rip

I trepan your skull
for a dash of blue

a tip   of the slung
a grip on the rung
a slip to eclipse

memed since rhyme
they've clad you in stanza
vestements consonants long

your ghost in gridlock
stands on the hood
                cussing

*

you tent my calm
I dwell in lung
hum leather

below my squawking throatward
a flutter safe as blouses

tens come
count tense

    allow
lowly almost
my tent walls wave
at your chuckes and coughs
my wind at the whim
of your esophagus

bellows

            oh low hola oh lolly oh holly hallelujah

outspoke by a cloud poke
you mouth behind
I'm not a puppet
a megaphone with yolk
on my face

sucker holepunched
you holler shrapnel
sharp holy
yes

b & P in bpNichol Lane: A Look

Marie Buck

If one is an American poet-tourist going to visit bpNichol Lane in Toronto, right behind Coach House Books, on a bright and chilly January day, she sees at the entrance to the lane a No Parking sign defaced by a lowercase b:

Something I especially like reading in Nichol's work is the letter H. In *Probable Systems 18* Nichol writes:

> H circa 1950
> H I can never go back again
> before H
>   A to G
> winnipeg manitoba
> w in m
>   i in H (Nichol 26-7)

and in the autobiographical note that follows, Nichol recalls growing up in an area of Winnipeg that was divided into lettered sections. In 1950, there was a flood and Nichol's family had to leave H-section for a time.

H-section was where i first learned my ABC's, and one of the things i learned at the same time was how to find my way home. if i was walking from one direction, i knew that right after G-section was H-section and H was where home was. if I was walking from another direction i knew that I came just after H so that H-section had to be the next one i'd come to.

…but something happened to me after that flood. when the water receded i had changed. i had become H obsessed. i collected the Hardy Boys. i loved Baby Huey (Nichol 28-9).

Something unique to Nichol is the fact that rather than resisting narrative in order to address its embedding of capitalist equivalences, Nichol insists on the specificity and contextualization of H. His narrating of his own subjective relationship to H is the converse of the formula L=A=N= G= U=A=G=E. That is, I can view the title $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ as pointing to the logic of the commodity form by its formulation of distinct letters as interchangeable. Ron Silliman wrote in $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ magazine:

> [w]here the bourgeois is the rising class…[t]he objects of consciousness are reduced to commodities and take on the character of a fetish. Things which appear to move "freely," absent all gesture, are the elements of the world of description (126).

Or, as Marx originally had it: "By equating, for example, the coat as a thing of value to the linen, we equate the labour embedded in the coat with the labour embedded in the linen" (142). What I mean is that the formula L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E suggests equivalence and commodification of each of its letters. $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ as a title apes and draws attention to the process by which objects are cut off from the labor and specific social relations that produce them, the process by which objects are allowed to differ only in quantity, and not in quality.

Nichol's H-obsession, then, attributes object-status to letters but insists on specificity and context for the H. Nichol insists that the H has qualities that cannot be reduced. The H is not interchangeable with other letters. A non-commodified H. A space-specific H. While the title $L=A=N=G=U$ $=A$ $=G$ $=E$ might be said to parody the commodity form, Nichol's H functions on one level as an anti-capitalist gesture.

On another level, Nichol's treatment of the H is fetishizing: the H has been reified as a thing-in-itself, with a personality and split off from its variety of other contexts. Nichol's H-obsessions moves both ways: it's a loud gesture toward a non-commodified specificity, and, in giving the H a personality, it's an unusual and loudly marked fetishization of the H.

And the H is something I think of when I see the b-No Parking sign. I am with three friends I love and wearing a hat I am fond of. It is cold and windy and sunny on bpNichol Lane. Why does the b sit there? It doesn't disrupt the crossed out P placed there to denote law. If I park my car there, I imagine the state, via police officer, will ticket or tow it.

The crossed out P has a specificity not unlike the one Nichol attributes to H. The P's job is to relay a message from the state. The b overlays that message and broadcasts a reverential Nichol reference to poet-fans and a notably unusual graffiti to everyone else who uses the lane. The state, rep-

resented by the P, has some of its signifying work appropriated by the un-
known artist who placed the b on the sign. If one is willing to extend an
anthropomorphizing of letters, or if one sees Nichol's letters as necessar-
ily metaphoric even as metaphor is symptomatic of capital's logic of
equivalences, then she reads the b-No Parking sign as enacting a sort of
social relation between letters.

 I continue down the lane and find a poem cut into the concrete. The
poem goes like this:

                    A
                  LAKE
                    A
                  LANE
                    A
                  LINE
                    A
                  LONE

According to *An H in the Heart*, Stan Bevington and David Smith set the
poem in the concrete in 1994, to mark the dedication of bpNichol Lane.
"Every day [Bevington] goes out and fills the LAKE with water"
(Bowering iv).   George Bowering writes in his introduction to that
book, a Nichol selected poems, of the difficulty of compiling a selection
of Nichol's work in book form: "…bpNichol was always trying to escape
the book… [w]hen he made books, he made books that tried to get out of
books… [m]ost of bp's modes and genres are not here in this book we
have tried to make" (xi-xii). By creating work that did not fit easily into
book form, Nichol resisted to some extent the exchangeability and thus
the commodification of writing. A concrete poem now set in concrete,
constrained to the local, unable to travel, unable to be exchanged.

 In *The Constructivist Moment*, Barrett Watten links Gertrude Stein's
poetics with an aesthetic of the assembly line (126). Nichol's poem here,
the one carved in the concrete, looks to me like a dysfunctional assembly
line: the writer produces regular, similar lines, but if each of the lines is
an object produced, they're each slightly different. Most of them must be
defunct. The fact that the poem is set in concrete – an industrial material,
but here an immobile, unproductive one – reemphasizes its static and un-
productive permanence. The poem is not easily commodified, and within
its own logic the commodities it produces are faulty.

 The concrete poem is in the shade. The lane is chilly once you're out of
the sun. A lake, a lane, a line, a lone. The poem's progression is from the
most concrete idea to the most abstract. The LAKE is filled with water

each morning. Lake to the lane that is near the lake, lane to the line one follows on the lane, lone, the solitary subject. The implied bodily gesture of pointing from the lake along a line to the abstracted self. It shows how you get there, it betrays the boundedness of the lone subject to the material world, and to language as materially effecting and circumscribing. On bpNichol Lane I see all of it together.

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city bp, everywhere

Brad Flis

Kraft Dinner, also known as KD, Kraft Mac n' Cheese, or Kraft Macaroni & Cheese, is a pasta dish of macaroni and cheese that is produced by the Kraft company. The product was originally marketed as Kraft Dinner, but is now known in the US and other countries as Kraft Macaroni & Cheese. In the UK it's known as Cheesey Pasta while in Canada it has retained its original name of Kraft Dinner. In the United States from the late 1980s to late 1990s, the marketing term "Kraft Cheese and Macaroni" was used to emphasize its flavor (advertised as "the cheesiest"); however, this term was never used on the actual product boxes, which remained labeled "Kraft Macaroni and Cheese" throughout the period.

from DAY 1 of "The Book of Days" *listen you know it's a simple thing writing the actual thing somewhere a way moving down i mean the thots somehow that's where it is*

Likely there are whole salvages manmade to be quelled, all at once, with an incentive to savings, especially that which we bring to complete as a collection, buried under state, little else. Like so many writers, brimming with their country and finding at its limit fluid order, or objects in their terrifying state, being trafficked in no-name brand new, we too, peering over journals, still alive, even now, and reading, know that some history has also come after us, though through customs.

"My uncle Rui's been a member of the O.P.P. for over twenty years now. He's what you'd call a straight shooter. Sometime in the summer of '91, when I was eleven, we were having a conversation about pop bands. He asked me what kind of pop bands I listened to. I didn't know what pop bands meant exactly. I didn't listen to much music on the radio. I told him Public Enemy and Guns-n-Roses because kids at school talked about them a lot and wore t-shirts with their names on them. He said oh yeah? He said you can't be a police officer if you listen to that kind of music, it's for punks. I didn't want to be a police officer though I may have told him that sometime before, and I didn't want to be a punk either. His comment made me feel like I'd made the wrong answer to a test he was administering, I said something wrong, didn't know what I was talking about, and I felt angry for having lied about it in the first place. When I

heard Naughty by Nature doing their song on the radio that same summer, it occurred to me as being highly unlikely that they were referring to *our* O.P.P., though I couldn't imagine what else O.P.P. stood for."

from "The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid": *this is the true eventual story of the place in which billy died. dead, he let others write his story, the untrue one. this is the true story of billy & the town in which he died & why he was called a kid and why he died. eventually all other stories will appear untrue beside this one.*

"One could, in this text, read thoughtfully through interstices of Canadian cultural materialism, the retroactivation of poetic production (speech/syn-tax/ sound) through self-conscious self-narrativizing, the terrorized gend-ered body (political/personal), historical discord and accretion. The speak-ing subject locked in a temporally recurring sequence of textual desire, reconciling difference in the chartered construction of a social homogene-ity, grappling only with itself in a world-with-counter-national-rationale, no holds barred (*as canadian as genocide* ?!). This book, this conglomer-ate of stories and text, is ugly and unhappy, but also far/reaching/out, self-textpressive. How can I mediate between the book's aggressive loneli-ness and depression on the one hand and on the other the total control and circuity of self-definition (sites of intentionality). The aim is not so much to build an accumulative/interpretive argument but rather a poetics, a socio-aesthetic inquiry into and a fleshing out (flash driving) of these ideas and aesthetic gestures which imbue and move fluidly throughout a text whose very title underscores Canadian cultural commodity, produc-tive poetic form, bodily consumption/sustenance (it is the body politic I'm tending toward), etc. The book itself subtitle-glutted, moving through vio-lence, love, and history, insular and subtle, prose that is poethic and coax-ial as the story is crucial."

The Lewiston-Queenston Bridge crosses the Niagara River gorge just south of the Niagara Escarpment. The bridge was officially opened on November 1, 1962. It is an international bridge between the United States and Canada. It connects Interstate 190 in the town of Lewiston, New York to Highway 405 in the village of Queenston, Ontario. The Lewiston-Queenston Bridge is a replica of the Rainbow Bridge at Niagara Falls. The current arch bridge replaced an old suspension bridge called the Queenston-Lewiston Bridge which was the largest suspension bridge in the world when it opened in 1851. It was destroyed by wind in 1864. Toll/customs plazas are located on both ends of the bridge and two duty-free stores are located between the two plazas.

from "The Long Weekend of Louis Riel":   MONDAY *maybe we should-*
n't have done it said the mounties as they sat down to breakfast
louis rolled over in his grave and sighed   its not enough they take
your life away with a gun they have to take it away with their pens   i n
the distance he could hear the writers scratching louder and louder

Under impenetrable biases, softened once ungirdled from our bolstered itinerancy, we discover certain vestures of supremacy, appalling though they may seem, and with obstinacy. One sits for a headshot, is laminated, processed, expedited, ready to go, all things considered. Precisely this lunge toward crisis, a volant discommorancy repledged, impostured, eager to arraign the object's self-encompassed cottage-country moral, for which we settle, by and large unhopeful, because we feel unmoved among ourselves, getting away from it all. This, of course, "it all" is as initial as interminable.

"bpNichol's *Craft Dinner: stories & texts 1966-1976* was a gift to me from two fellow poets as we studied together in Amherst, Massachusetts. One inscribed an inserted bookmark, 'Dear ~~Birds~~ Brad, You make me want to defect, but sexily. ♥ – Lawrence.' The other, 'Dear ~~Brad~~ Bart, Ay Carumba! Don't have a cow, man. Who the hell are you? ♥ – Steve.' My parents guarded against bad language and images on tv, so I wasn't allowed to watch *The Simpsons* growing up, nor *Married with Children,* nor *Kids in the Hall*, nor *Roseanne,* nor WWF wrestling, though my grandpa was a wrestler in the 50s & 60s, wrestling under the name, Bernie 'The Cat' Livingston, mostly between Toronto and Port Credit, but as far south as the old Atlanta Stadium. He now runs Livingston Carpets in Mississauga. Most of his carpet is shipped in from Dalton, Georgia, the 'carpet capital of the world.'"

from "Two Heroes": *When the fight was over & Riel was dead & Dumont had fled into the states, they went home again and became bored.*

In 1937, Kraft Macaroni & Cheese dinner was introduced in the U.S. and Canada. The timing of the product's launch had much to do with its success. During World War II, rationing on milk and dairy, and an increased reliance on meatless entrees, created a captive market for the product, which was considered a hearty meal for families. The following decades introduced improvements in flavor, shelf life and, eventually, different shapes. New shape expansions to the brand began in 1975 with spirals, and then wheels in 1988. In the mid-1990s, Kraft Macaroni & Cheese expanded into even more innovative shapes with noodles in the form of

popular kids' characters, including: Super Mario Brothers, Flintstones, Bugs Bunny and Friends, Rugrats, Pokémon, Blue's Clues, Scooby Doo! and SpongeBob SquarePants.

> Identification with the national
> group in turn includes,
> as it also did in the last century,
> the construction of a personalized image
> of the nation. The glorious
> past of this personality comes
> to be lived
>
> as part of the individual
> memory of each citizen,
> and its defeats resented
> as failures that still
> touch them
>
> – Miroslav Hroch

from "Cautious Diary": *sooner or later or perhaps in between but always there   there as in here as in there   eventually what emerges then why then how*

The book's title, having elicited from me some moment of excitement, reflects my own sense of cultural dilution/misrecognition (Kraft Dinner to craft) but also a consumerist nostalgia for those commodity objects of my youth which remain the defining/signifying markers of difference between myself and my American peers (a difference I have to continually recreate and reposition, ie. Tim Hortons v Waffle House, etc.), as well as an imagined corporate determinism (my family moved from Toronto to New Jersey when Nabisco hired my dad for "commodity procurement," then New Jersey to Toronto for same reasons but with Cadbury/Nielsen, then Toronto to Atlanta with the Coca-Cola Co.) and finally the poetic artifice (craft) itself which necessarily enters into engagement with its economic objectives, draws from and transforms these same nostalgias and cultural arrangements into narrativized and delimiting social art forms, work which keeps me/on going. But why get excited? I *did* get excited. The exact same excitement when reading Shaw & Strang's *Busted* in Northampton, opening up to the eighty-eighth page to find the Rocket Richard's john hancock in facsimile.

"Unable to adjust to the internal agonies of consciousness, valorized tomorrow, unpaid for today, the social continuity which fables its restrictions, declaring all knowledge at the vanguard. The object of totality

which pretends no outer skin, infinitely peeled, like a banana, sets out a record in the capacities of its language, being one of not many, interrupted. It is not by homology we bring ourselves to transit. It is training, this yielding, the fruits of our labours reimported by branch plant, desensitization, finance to authority, but not without general sacrifice to security, meaning sharing."

from "Ketchs": *the carpet is red sometimes sometimes the rug is static yielding to the pressure of feet crossing the floor to join you*
sometimes at night sitting by myself the room adjusting to the pressures of the day the tangible presence of those who have entered & gone away

For much of my life I have been MOVING between toronto and the states, settling in to the writing. What's new in either scene? What news to bring back with? Trying to read ahead, reading to catch up, minding the gaps. I first read bp in highschool, then seriously at UGA. Constant inspection, identification, relation (Where are you coming from? How long have you been there? Where are you going? How long will you be here? Anything to declare?) Trunk searches now an accustoming part of the procedure. Recently an orange was pulled out of my lunch and tossed into the garbage. 'Yes the orange is from Florida, but it loses its citizenship once it crosses into Canada. No foreign citrus fruit.' Tough nut. What moves along thus incapable of inspection? What ideas, behaviours, practices, provisions, imaginaries, hailed by the caprice of this free trade? All commercial vehicles keep right. What does this mean though for our writing? Whose writing? Would the real Kootenay writers please stand up and bow? I barely know what's going on right now.

from "Me & Mona": *oh where/ idea of distortion/ interesting/ almost automatic/ a continuation something like speech likes*
lately   up   down&   down & up

"We've come a long way since J. L. Kraft started selling cheese from a horse-drawn wagon in 1903. Hard work, imagination and a commitment to bringing the world its favorite foods have helped us grow into a company that touches more than a billion people in more than 150 countries. Every day. One at a time. Dive in. Look back. Think ahead. We're looking forward to spending many more with you."

you turn the page & i am here   that in itself is interesting

Modern Fiction and The Decay of History: bpNichol's *The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid*

Carl Peters

Naming comes from seeing, or vision; it comes from sight and observation: "billy the kid was born with a short dick but they did not call him richard" (1). In that same paragraph we read: "they called him the kid because he was younger & meaner & had a shorter dick." This is an observation of sorts; it is *de*scriptive: "could they have called him instead billy the man or bloody bonney? would he have bothered having a faster gun? who can tell."

Craig Owens, in "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," writes: "[the Allegorist] lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the *image* becomes something other (allos = other + agoreuei = *to speak*). He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the *image*. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement" (205; my emphasis). The first untitled part of bpNichol's short epic reads: "this is the true eventual story of billy the kid. it is not the story as he told it for he did not tell it to me. he told it to others who wrote it down, but not correctly. there is no true eventual story but this one. had he told it to me i would have written a different one. i could not write the true one had he told it to me." Nonetheless: "all other stories will appear untrue beside this one." Truth is a rumour (a supplement) of the false. That is fiction.

"this is the true eventual story of billy the kid." So begins bpNichol's novel (or anti-novel, if you prefer). So it begins again: "eventually all other stories will appear untrue beside this one." The true and eventual story of Billy the Kid begins with a demonstrative: "there is no other story but this one," the one you are reading, remember, a supplement. *true* and *this* are meant to go together. *this* one makes it the *true* one; the *true* one is *this* one. So the story goes.

The author doesn't have any answers, authors just don't, authors do. Emphasis on the verb. Billy the Kid doesn't have any answers either; he's just a character in this true story, like the author reading. Neither does the narrator have any answers. What is told is always going to be different than what you're reading. That is history. Rumour and legend are faster than history. Truth resides in this. What is this, again? Right.

Gertrude Stein was one of bpNichol's great mentors. She loved that there was no such thing as repetition, only insistence, and that was history. Readers didn't understand why she repeated a lot; well, that is what it sounded like. The phrase "the true eventual story" of billy the kid is repeated at least three times in this short epical beginning – more if you consider its many versions and permutations. What does all this self-reference mean? It means that we are reading the true eventual story of billy the kid, not Billy the Kid, and that the true eventual story of billy the kid is a reading, something read – something made. The true eventual story is everyone's story. Like I said, allegory.

There are explanations. "billy was not fast with words so he became fast with a gun" (1). the true eventual (nice word, that, *eventual*) story is billy became – *became* – the faster gun. Gradually, billy the kid became the kid, the kid with the fastest gun, the kid who wasn't much for small talk, even though he had a small, well. Did you catch the word *even* in the word eventual? That's interesting when you think about it. *this* story doesn't have a lot of ups and downs in it, it's pretty flat as epics go. Or legends, even.

History plays a part in the novel, that's obvious. It is also a kind of character. Of course it is. What makes history – how is history made? Time and place, time and pace. There is a section in this true anti-epic and allegory that is about the town in which billy died. This is getting interesting – or not. I think that's the point. Repetition as insistence is narrative. Repetition as insistence as narrative is truth. "history says that billy the kid was a coward" (2). Legend, which is different than history, says that billy the kid was a hero. billy, the truth is, didn't take either all that seriously. How can you when they are the same and different. "rumour is billy the kid." That's probably true. This is the true eventual story of billy the kid after all.

Craig Owens writes: "Allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect. The incomplete – an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin, which [Walter] Benjamin identified as the allegorical emblem par excellence. Here the works of man are reabsorbed into the landscape ["Place"]; ruins thus stand for history as an irreversible process of dissolution and decay, a progressive distancing

from origin" (206). Remember what bpNichol or the narrator said: "it is not the story as he told it to me for he did not tell it to me. i could not write the true one had he told it to me." Exactly, how would *he* even now? Naming, seeing, vision make allegory; just like observation and construction make imagination. They do not make history. There are too many holes.

   billy the kid is meek in death. Eventually, and then he is not. "as he lay dying he said to the sheriff goodbye & the sheriff said goodbye. billy had always been a polite kid" (4). Two versions of the word kid again; billy the ruthless killer made by history, rumour and legend, and billy the polite kid with the small. Now billy is in heaven (see the word even in it?), questioning *god's* authority: "if billy had had a gun he'd of shot god full of holes." Not fast with words, eh? Observe how many there are in that sentence.

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Contributors

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derek beaulieu is a teacher in Calgary, Alberta. He is the author (or co-author) of 5 books of poetry, his most recent is *Flatland* (York, UK: information as material). With angela rawlings and Jason Christie he edited *Shift & Switch: new Canadian poetry* (Toronto: the mercury press). beaulieu focusses primarily on concrete poetry and conceptual writing and has spoken on these topics internationally.

Marie Buck co-edits, with Brad Flis, the small, mostly-poetry journal *Model Homes*. She has a poetry chapbook *Life & Style,* which appears at Beard of Bees, and work also in *How2* and *Coconut*. She is studying modern and contemporary poetry and poetics in the Ph.D. program at Wayne State University.

Clint Burnham teaches in the Department of English at Simon Fraser University. His books include *The Jamesonian Unconscious* (Duke, 1995), *Steve McCaffery* (ECW, 1996), *Be Labour Reading* (poetry, ECW, 1997), *Airborne Photo* (fiction, Anvil, 1999), *Buddyland* (poetry, Coach House, 2000), *Smoke Show* (novel, Arsenal Pulp, 2005), and *Rental Van* (poetry, Anvil, 2007). Clint's writings on art have appeared in *C Magazine*, *English Studies in Canada*, *Fuse, fillip*, *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Globe and Mail*, *akimbo.com*, *Flash Art*, and in various gallery catalogues in Canada and Europe. He is presently writing a book on Slavoj Žižek.

Stephen Cain is an Assistant Professor in the School of Arts and Letters at York University where he teaches Canadian and avant-garde literature. He is the co-author, with Tim Conley, of *The Encyclopedia of Fictional and Fantastic Languages* (Greenwood), and the author of three poetry collections most recently, *American Standard/ Canada Dry* (Coach House Books).

Kit Dobson is currently a Killam Postdoctoral Fellow at Dalhousie University. His first book, *Transnational Canadas: Globalization and Anglo-*

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Paul Dutton is a poet, novelist, essayist, musician, and oral sound artist. In a forty-year publishing and performance career he has toured, solo and ensemble, throughout Europe and the Americas. He was a member of the poetry performance group The Four Horsemen, and is in the free-improvisation trio CCMC and the Canada-France poetry-music group Quintet Bras. The most recent of his six books is the novel *Several Women Dancing*, and the most recent of his five solo recordings is the CD *Oralizations*.

Leif Einarson has studied at the University College of the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, and at the University of Iceland. Currently he is a doctoral candidate at the University of Western Ontario, where he specializes in Medieval Literature, Canadian Literature, material culture, and ideologies of settlement. His doctoral thesis investigates the role of smiths and smithcraft in Old Icelandic and Old English literature.

Lori Emerson is co-editor, with Darren Wershler, of *The Alphabet Game: A bpNichol Reader* (Coach House 2007) and editor-in-chief of bpnichol.ca. She is also an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Brad Flis co-edits with Marie Buck the journal *Model Homes*. His chapbook, *Health Pack*, was recently published by The Chuckwagon Press, and his work has been featured in the *Physical Poets: Vol. 1, Glitterpony, 1913: a journal of forms,* and in the traveling art installation *Poets on Painters*. His first book, *Peasants,* is forthcoming from Emily Jacob Editions. He studies modernism and poetics at Wayne State University in Detroit.

Carl Peters wrote his MA and PhD theses on bpNichol. He is the editor of *bpNichol Comics* (Talonbooks), and has two books in press (Talon): one on bill bissett (with Jim Daems) and another on Gertrude Stein; he teaches literature, art and film at University College of the Fraser Valley.

Mark Prejsnar was born and grew up in Stockbridge, in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts. He's lived in many different parts of the US and Brazil. For a while in Atlanta he was editor of the poetry magazine *Misc. Proj.* Then, about 10 years ago, he helped found the Atlanta Poets Group, a small ensemble which gives performances, publishes their work in various formats, and edits & publishes *Spaltung*, a poetry mag drawing on the work of poets from around the country. Prejsnar's

poems have appeared in various periodicals and he has published several chapbooks. Despite the enormous wealth his poetry brings him,he also works as a librarian (just for the love of it).

James Sanders has been involved in a writing collective called the Atlanta Poets Group for several years. He has published individually and collectively in various magazines and has appeared in two anthologies.

Stephen Scobie's critical study of bpNichol, *What History Teaches*, was published by Talonbooks in 1984. He has published many books of poetry and criticism; his *Selected Poems* appeared as *The Spaces In Between* (NeWest Press, 2003). He is a winner of the Governor General's Award for Poetry, and is a member of the Royal Society of Canada. He now lives, happily retired, in Victoria.

Stephen Voyce is a PhD candidate at York University. His articles and reviews appear or are forthcoming in *Postmodern Culture*, *DQR Studies in Literature*, and the *Electronic Book Review*. Voyce is currently working on a book entitled *Brilliant Multitudes: Poetry and Community after WWII*.

Natalie Zina Walschots completed her MA in Creative Writing at the University of Calgary. For her MA thesis she wrote a ficto-critical manuscript entitled "Tonsil Hockey: After, Around and Through bpNichol's poetry." Her first book, *Thumbscrews*, has just been published by Snare Books (Fall 2007). She is the current Managing Editor of *filling Station* and former Editor of *dANDelion*. She is also the co-organizer of the fly-wheel reading series. Her work has appeared in *The Capilano Review*, *FOURSQUARE*, and *Matrix*. Natalie now writes about comic books, villains, video games and molecular gastronomy. She lives in Calgary with her husband, who is a Systems Consultant and a very good sport.

Steven Zultanski is the author of the chapbook *Homoem* (Radical Readout, 2005) and the editor of *President's Choice*. His poetry has appeared in *Antennae, FO(A)RM, Shiny, The Physical Poets*, and elsewhere.

OL's Other bpNichol 'Plus' Issues

bpNichol + 10
Tenth Series, Number 4 (Fall 1998)

Essays on textuality, secularity and memory by David Rosenberg, Billy Little, Lori Emerson, Steve McCaffery, Darren Wershler-Henry, Gene Bridwell, Scott Pound, Steven Smith, Christian Bök, Robert Hogg, Peter Jaeger, Douglas Barbour, Stephen Cain, Roy Miki.

"This issue ... is intended to examine the ways in which the transition between September 1988 – when Barrie Nichol is an active and influential member of the literary communities that receive his writing – and post-1988 – when the extent to which the work known as 'bpNichol' is read depends entirely on the commitment of others – has been unfolding. Ultimately how and by whom 'bpNichol' is read will depend on the commitment of strangers ..." (Frank Davey).

bpNichol + 20
Guest-edited by Lori Emerson
Thirteenth Series, Number 5 (Spring 2008)

Essays on Nichol's digital, conceptual, and visual poetry by Rob Winger, Kevin McPherson Eckhoff, Beckie Knight, Jim Andrews, Geog Huth, Lionel Kearns, Marko Niemi, Dan Waber, Sheila Simonson, John Havelda, Geoffrey Hlibchuk, Peter Jaeger, Steve McCaffery, Debbie Florence, Lynette Hunter

An issue "particularly focused on critical/critical-creative work by young and emerging scholars/writers who are part of a generation that never knew 'Barrie' or 'beep'" (Lori Emerson).

And Announcing –

The Martyrology: Survivors' Retrospective
Guest-edited by David Rosenberg
Fourteenth Series, Number 1 (Fall 2009)

American poet-critics read a volume of *The Martyrology* for the first time and look back on their own work of the period. Canadian poet-critics re-read a volume and look back at the 'first time' of reading.

David Rosenberg writes: The 'Survivors issue' will ... place *The Martyrology* in historical context, as a major epic in the modern period of English-language poetry, while comparing it with others from Blake and Wordsworth to Pound and Ashbery, and to the poet-critics' own work. My premise is that no other epic/anti-epic of the 19th or 20th century engages the themes of death, childhood and authorship as deeply, and that this among other aspects of its visionary uniqueness, as yet barely described, can be explored by historicizing, especially against the writer's own background of works read and written."

He adds "Neither bp nor his critics would likely object to *The Martyrology* portrayed as a 'failed epic'– nor, for that matter, would Wordsworth or Pound about their efforts, or Ashbery about his faux mini-epics. It's also fair to say that the issue will risk that interesting failure of historical self-awareness characteristic of disbelief in survivor trauma. It was the condition Nichol plumbed in *The Martyrology,* represented by the survivors of cloud town and the history of language.

US contributors include Alice Notley, Lewis Warsh, David Shapiro, Kent Johnson, Tony Tost, Chris Tysh, Jed Rasula and Susan Wheeler. Canadians include Fred Wah, George Bowering, David McFadden, Victor Coleman, Robert Hogg and Frank Davey.

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