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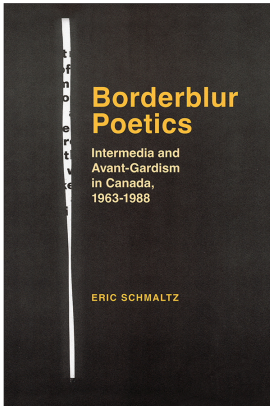

BORDERBLUR POETICS: INTERMEDIA AND AVANT-GARDISM IN CANADA, 1963-1988

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Sound Poetry

AAAAAAAHHHH

—The Four Horsemen (1982)

ahh, ahhh ahhhh

—Penn Kemp (1987)

On the occasion of the 1970 spring equinox, people assembled at Nathan Phillips Square in downtown Toronto at exactly noon for a one-minute event called the Scream-In. Anticipating a turnout of a thousand attendees, poet, Ryerson Institute of Technology psychology teacher, and event organizer George Swede obtained a permit for the gathering, but, according to the *Globe and Mail*, only a relatively small group of seventy-five people turned up. Photographs published by the *Globe* and the Toronto Italian-language newspaper *Corriere Canadese* suggest that there was perhaps closer to the one hundred and fifty attendees. But regardless of the numbers, for that whole single minute—from exactly 12:00 to 12:01 p.m.—participants loosed a roaring cacophony to achieve what they hoped would be the "World's Loudest Sound Poem." As the minute concluded, their collective scream "withered to a sigh."[1]

While overlooked as a noteworthy moment in Canada's literary history, the Scream-In neatly exemplifies Canadian sound poetry's estrangement from the dominant literary culture of the day. Swede planned first to herald the arrival of spring, and second, to encourage participants to gather "to seek the elusive identity" of Canada.[2] "If a person can't get to the square to scream for the Canadian identity," continues Swede, "he should stop where he is at that time and scream for it on his own."[3] Swede's latter stated intention flirts with the rhetoric of cultural nationalism, but he explained that "screaming establishes contact with the subconscious mind, that well-spring of all activity,"[4] thus situating the Scream-In as a moment connecting participants with the immediacy of their place and company through expressivist action. The actual minute-long scream suggests that a nation's identity is not produced through literary themes or images; rather, it stems from an ongoing commitment to voice, action, connection, and process. Swede, then, seemed to be parodying Canada's urgency to define itself, and by extension its literature, since this act of collective screaming—void of semantic content—emphasizes the futility of those efforts. If taken with the dose of irony that would seem to be implied by Swede's statements on the event, the Scream-In refuses the Canadian literary discourse of the CanLit Boom and its overstated authority over the formation of national literary identity.

Swede is among the lesser-known figures of Canadian avant-garde literary history, though his Scream-In certainly enriches the story of Canada's literature. I start this chapter with the 1970 Scream-In since it underscores many of the topics of interest here—namely, sound, poetry, networks of affiliation, and literary paratraditions—and because 1970, and the collective screaming of at least seventy-five people, inadvertently marks the momentous arrival of a sonic wave in Canadian poetry. This year is also remarkable as it saw the formation of an undeniably influential Canadian sound poetry collective: the Four Horsemen (comprised of bpNichol, Steve McCaffery, Paul Dutton, and Rafael Barreto-Rivera), who, Joe Rosenblatt has written, dug their "electromagnetic spurs into the flesh of our complacency, inspiring the tribe."[5] Indeed, they joined the forces of their vocal talents to forge connections to an international network of poets while stoking the imaginations of like-minded poets and performers in Canada and abroad. Their work inspired companion ensembles who explored similar poetic terrain, including Owen Sound (Michael Dean, David Penhale, Steven Ross Smith, and Richard Truhlar), Re: Sounding (Stephen Scobie and Douglas Barbour), and First

Draft (Susan McMaster, Colin Morton, Andrew McClure, and others), while working alongside kindred solo performers such as bill bissett (who also performed with bands such as the Mandan Massacre), Penn Kemp, and others. With sound poetry, the network of affiliated Canadian poets expanded just as the intermedial dimension of borderblur extended into sonic realms.

Sound poetry in Canada grew out of and in tandem with the development of concrete poetry, both as a widening of the form (concrete poems were often performed as sound poems) and as a separate mode in itself. Marshall McLuhan's comparison of the written and spoken word elucidate this turn toward the utterance in dynamic performance and helps explain sound poetry's prominence as one face of borderblur poetics: "The written word spells out in sequence what is quick and implicit in the spoken word."[6] If Canadian concrete poetry is an intermedial form in dialogue with visual media, then oral transmission, according to McLuhan's claim, can be understood as a more immediate and flexible means of pursuing similar goals. Sound poetry is inherently intermedial, prompting us to reconsider the borders between poetry, music, sound art, and performance. For some sound poets examined in this chapter, the body is the locus of poesis. Sound poetry typically explores a range of linguistic (words, phrases, etc.) and extralinguistic soundings (breathing, laughter, howling, grunting, body slaps, etc.) that are projected from the inner and outer surfaces of the poet's body. In this way, acoustic sound poetry (in comparison to electroacoustic sound poetry) is often a practice of immediacy and intimacy, happening in real time and in performative contexts, like the choreographed howling of the Scream-In. For other sound poets, however, electroacoustic devices—microphones, recording equipment, etc.—posed opportunities to de-familiarize and expand the possibilities of vocalization in poetry. Both acoustic and electroacoustic sound poetry are representative of intermediality for the way they often bring together aural, visual, linguistic, and gestural modes of artistic expression, including singing, acapella, chant, prayer, drama, vaudeville, and other kinds of performances. When compared to the concrete poetry of the previous chapter, which was shaped by the increasing interaction between linguistic and visual modes, borderblur's specific Canadian formation of sound poetry is informed by the mutating conditions for sound and sound technologies during the same moment.

On this last point, I look again to the diagnoses offered by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who recognize the international arrival of *postmodernization* and *informatization*[7] in capitalist modes of production in the mid- to

late twentieth century. As described by Hardt and Negri, this shift signals a transition away from industrial modes of labour toward "service jobs (the tertiary), a shift that has taken place in the United States, since the early 1970s," including in the sectors of health care, education, finance, advertising, and entertainment,[8] occurring in "the United Kingdom, and Canada" around the same time.[9] These very topics thematically occupied much of the poetry examined in the previous chapter. Among the many implications of this shift, the role of affect in social and material contexts takes on a new life in these later-stage capitalist countries. The arrival of *affective labour* announces a mode of work "characterized in general by the central role played by knowledge, information, affect, and communication,"[10] and "marks a new mode of becoming human."[11] Here, we might catch an echo of Nichol's claim that in the 1960s a "new humanism" was afoot.[12] Nichol, living amid these conditions, could sense these changes. While Nichol limits his assessment to a vague but compelling wording, Hardt and Negri explicitly recognize that affect comes to bear on the postmodernizing economy in unprecedented ways, especially a postmodernizing economy that is reliant upon the homogenization and standardization of feeling and expression. Consider, for example, the last chapter's discussion of advertising and how it relies on the manipulation of desire. In a context in which affective labour is becoming a dominant mode of production, the body's processes, expressions, and feelings are rapidly standardized to serve commercial and capitalist interests as they gain increasing control over the affective aspects of life, especially in Western countries.

The transnational conditions of affective labour, as Hardt and Negri describe them, are the conditions and premises that, directly and indirectly, shaped the work of sound poetry practitioners in Canada at this time. Swede's 1970 Scream-In exemplifies this: it was motivated by an attachment between participants secured through expression while parodying Canadian literary discourse. If affect is "an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation," and "is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise),"[13] then Swede's Scream-In is undeniably an affective poem that articulates body-to-body relations through sonic expression. As such, Swede's gathering reclaims affect from nationalist and commercial contexts by binding people together outside of those frameworks. It eschews the efforts of Canadian writers and publishers to bolster a literary economy of printed books that contributed

to Canada's rapidly developing national literary identity. I understand these underlying aspects of the Scream-In to be indicative of a major factor that shapes and motivates Canadian borderblur sound poetry during this period. This chapter examines how the conditions of postmodernization—and specifically the emergent role of affect within it—informed sound poetry as it circulated within Canadian borderblur's network of affiliation.

Questioning the Cadence: Sound, Nation, Affect

Sound is deeply entangled with the dominant Canadian literary discourse, and specifically the idea of what it means to create Canadian literature. It informed the work of Dennis Lee, Canadian lyric poet and co-founder of House of Anansi in 1967—the year of Canada's centennial. Lee struggled to triangulate a relationship between sound, poetry, and national identity. In "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space" (delivered first as a talk in Montreal in 1972), he explains that the immediacy of aurality is essential for developing a national literary identity. Lee describes a period of writer's block, or what he calls "silence," that he began to endure in 1967. He struggled with the absence of a distinctly Canadian language under the pressures of American and English colonial influences. Lee's language, he felt, was not his own. This resulted in a period of authorial silence during which he was unable to authentically write with an earnest sense of himself. Lee found a solution in listening to what he describes as *cadence*: "the medium, the raw stone. Content is already there in the cadence. And writing a poem means cutting away everything in the cadence that isn't that poem," until the "poem is what remains; it is local cadence minus whatever is extraneous to its shapely articulation."[14] Lee's solution, to listen to the cadence of the local—or "what is already there"—was his way of overcoming the debilitating problem of external, imperialistic pressures to build an authentic national literary identity.

While Lee's privileging of the nation was a position that many Canadian writers shared, an interest in the relationship between listening, nationalism, and international influence is far more complex than Lee suggests. On the one hand, if we take his notion of listening literally, we must remember that the geographies and cultures that comprise Canada have many of what R. Murray Schafer refers to as *soundscapes*. The sounds of the harbours on the East Coast are perhaps out of tune with the sounds of the fields of the Prairies since the sounds in each of these locales appreciably differ. And of course, one can sense significant differences without travelling great distances: the

urban soundscape of Kensington Market, in downtown Toronto, conspicuously contrasts with the soundscape of the farm fields of the Niagara region. I confess that I may be taking Lee's notion of listening too literally; however, certain questions arise: What sounds actually comprise the cadence that Lee is listening to? What and who does he not hear or ignore? Does Lee listen for the Indigenous peoples who sounded on this land long before him? Since so much of Canada's population is made of first- and second-generation immigrant families, what exactly is distinctly "Canadian" in these soundings anyway? As Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai, and others remind us, nationalism is an imagined project, not something innate to the land. Some would make a case that the sound of Canada is a multicultural soundscape, but that is not what Lee here conceives. Instead, he makes a case for a mythological cadence that emanates from Canada without considering that what makes up his idea of Canada is necessarily cultivated and contrived. Despite Lee's romantic portrayal of the cadences of Canadian life, Canada at that time, like other Western countries, was undergoing significant shifts in its sonic composition, and these changes complicate any suggestion that a geographical space has a particular cadence. Rapid changes in social and material conditions, and the emergence of a world wherein borders are believed to be, as bissett says, "dropping off,"[15] brought with them the sounds of other spaces and times, and these were conveyed by new technological means.

By declaring the arrival of a new phase of capitalism in Western countries based on the manipulation of affect in the mid- to late twentieth century, Hardt and Negri draw attention to the changing role of feeling and expression for persons living in post-industrial countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The conditions of this economic model are felt in all aspects of life, according to these authors, and affect plays a more significant role in that it modulates human behaviour on a molecular scale. They do not define affect in terms of emotion,[16] nor the swerve of sensation;[17] however, their argument suggests that communication—and I would suggest the communication of emotion—is changing within this paradigm. Within an economy characterized by affective labour, the body's processes, expressions, and feelings are forcibly standardized and calibrated to serve this post-modernizing economy. Myrna Kostash confirms that the shift toward a new capitalist modality, characterized by affective labour, was felt by Canadians before the 1970s:

> As the percentage of the Gross National Product (GNP) represented by government revenue grew greater and greater, so did the percentage of the labour force employed by the state: 12.6 percent in 1956, 16.3 percent in 1962 and 19.1 percent in 1966. Besides the professionals, these workers were the clerical staff and the service and support staffs. By 1964 the Canadian Union of Public Employees would be the second largest union in Canada after the United Steelworkers of America.[18]

With clear statistics and data, Kostash corroborates and expands Hardt and Negri's claim, highlighting the shift toward an affective economy in Canada as early as the 1960s.

Hardt and Negri's conception of affective labour emphasizes the standardization of communication for the efficient purpose of mobilizing thought and feeling in the service of commercial capitalism—sales, entertainment, moving information, communication, etc. The conditions of affective labour play a significant role, then, not just in an individual's life but also on the scale of "social networks, forms of community,"[19] since communities are formed through processes of affective bonding. Swede's 1970 Scream-In at Nathan Phillips Square suggests that Canadian borderblur's strain of sound poetry emerged in dialogue with the rise of affective labour. In Swede's conception of the event, the collective scream was motivated by a desire to develop an attachment to nearby participants through sound, voice, and action. Though the sound poetry event writ large is a niche cultural form, one that may seem somewhat sheltered from the social and material shifts outlined above, I contend that these conditions acted upon it, at times directly forming the field within which sound poets worked, while at other times forming the background against which we can understand their work. If affect is a state of relation, then the efforts that I explore in this chapter—including the work of sound poets; the network formulated by their local, national, and international performances; and their independently produced and circulated recordings—all suggest that these social and material shifts permeated their work. I suggest, then, that Canadian sound poetry, under the auspices of borderblur, is an affective poetic form that exceeds print via the intermedial interaction of sound, language, and gesture, which is in turn shaped by the conditions of an emergent affective economy.

A Network of Sonic Affiliations

Highlighting a core tenet that shapes avant-garde literary paratraditions, Charles Bernstein refers to the work of provisional institutions such as small presses, little magazines, and artist-run reading series as a form of "social work."[20] In that work, there is an inherent affective dimension in that it facilitates tight networks of affiliation between poet and publisher, poet and audience, and poet and poet—one that is arguably tighter than those created through larger and more diffuse mainstream publishers. For the concrete poetry of the previous chapter, the poets' abilities to print their work in their own magazines, books, and pamphlets enabled them to contribute to the creation of a transnational network while facilitating connections to avant-garde communities in other parts of the world. They mailed their work to and corresponded with other artists, traded it during face-to-face encounters, exhibited together, and wrote to one another about each other's work. In this way, provisional print operations were also necessary for creating the paratradition of intermedial works that were largely excluded from Canada's literary mainstream. The sound poetry analyzed in this chapter offers a compelling case study for considering affective labour and the formation of literary traditions since it is such an ephemeral form. Even when circulated in recorded formats through provisional publishing operations, it resists the established model of Canadian literary culture that emerged during the CanLit Boom. By attending to the social and material conditions of sound poetry, we see how the paratradition is formed but also how these poets championed an alternative vision of what literary production, circulation, and reception might look like.

According to Steve McCaffery, writing in the late 1970s, sound poetry, as an international form of literary expression, advanced in three distinctive phases. The first stretches back to a period of what he refers to as "archaic and primitive poetries," including chant, song, and incantations "still alive among North American, African, Asian and Oceanic peoples."[21] In other words, this is poetry that supposedly precedes modernized and industrial formations of society, but I note that many oral traditions exist today. The second phase began in 1875 and ended in 1928, and includes Lewis Carroll and avant-gardists such as the Dadaists, Italian Futurists, Russian Futurists, *De Stijl*, and *Lettrisme*. The final period in McCaffery's timeline is his own, beginning in the 1950s, which builds on these legacies and includes international poets and

artists interested in acoustic and electroacoustic compositions, such as Henri Chopin, Bernard Heidsieck, Bob Cobbing, Paula Claire, Ernst Jandl, Jackson Mac Low, Jerome Rothenberg, Michael McClure, and many Canadian practitioners. Had it been published decades later, McCaffery's survey might be extended to delineate another phase comprised of poets who have both extended and deviated from this line, including Caroline Bergvall, Maja Jantar, Tomomi Adachi, Jorg Piringer, a. rawlings, Kaie Kellough, and many others.

Canadian sound poetry, McCaffery argues, began "not with Bill Bissett or bpNichol, but with Montreal Automatiste Claude Gauvreau,"[22] who in the 1950s, along with peers like Thérèse Renaud and Françoise Sullivan, explored an extension of European Surrealism known as *Automatisme* (or "automatic writing"), a term that describes writing done with a liberated consciousness (or at least without any intentional meaning to the language being put on the page). Instead, words rise from the subconscious or a spiritual or supernatural source. Gauvreau's "Trustful Fatigue and Reality," for example, is a short, characterless, and set-less play consisting almost entirely of extralinguistic sounds that vaguely gesture toward semantics, comparable to the Dadaist sound poetry. In identifying Canadian sound poetry's genesis with *Les Automatistes*, McCaffery makes an important point since he acknowledges the significance of the Québécois literary avant-garde. However, his claim also elides Indigenous oral traditions in Canada, which are conspicuously absent from McCaffery's historical overview given that he gestures toward chant and prayer in his account of sound poetry's three waves. Notably, too, by referring to oral traditions as "archaic and primitive," McCaffery has dislocated these traditions from the discourse, reinforcing the colonial view of Indigenous traditions as backwards and out of step with the present.

The absence of careful consideration of specific Indigenous traditions from McCaffery's account is noteworthy given the currency that Indigenous poetries and orature from North American, African, Asian, and Oceanic cultures enjoyed during the 1960s, specifically through poet and editor Jerome Rothenberg's 1968 anthology *Technicians of the Sacred*. As Rothenberg put it in 1984, the anthology served as a response to the "inherited view" that the "idea of poetry, as developed in the West, was sufficient for the total telling."[23] On the one hand, I find it necessary to resist the urge to subsume Indigenous oral traditions under the term "sound poetry" so as to avoid the problem of categorically determining and defining poetry from cultures that are culturally dislocated from that context. On the other hand, Rothenberg's anthology

was highly influential for sound poetry in the 1960s and '70s. It resonated, says Rothenberg, with "the sixties maelstrom" and "confronted an audience that was already waiting for it, often with more preconceptions about the 'tribal' or the 'oral.'"[24] For Rothenberg, the anthology was evidence that poetry "appeared not as a luxury but as a true necessity: not a small corner of the world for those who lived it but equal to the world itself."[25]

Some critics see Rothenberg's anthology as controversial, but it at least reminds us to treat possible connections between Indigenous cultural traditions and sound poetry with greater care. As mentioned earlier, bissett's identity as a poet, for example, is frequently linked to concepts of Indigeneity. Summarizing these connections, Scobie points out that "the oral is important, as his [bissett's] readings demonstrate—especially the chants, based on Native chanting as much as on the tradition of sound poetry, and conveying a mesmeric, meditative effect that provides one of the foundations of his vision."[26] I will note, too, that when I hear bissett's sound poetry, I also notice similarities with Buddhist chants, and indeed Buddhist practice was growing in popularity in North America in the 1960s alongside the counterculture movement. While any direct connections between bissett and Indigeneity remain unclear, the feeling of openness in the world at the time, facilitated in part by the increasing sense of international connectedness ushered in by the electronic age, led to problematic appropriations and imitations of non-Western cultural practices (as briefly discussed in chapter 1). Sound poetry undoubtedly provides further evidence of this problem. This complicates the claim that borders were "dropping off" and the assumptions of universality embedded within some aspects of the counterculture in the 1960s and '70s, of which sound poetry—and borderblur—were direct outgrowths. The turn toward Indigenous and non-Western forms of chant and prayer, which many artists in the 1960s pursued with enthusiasm, indicates that poets turned to these cultural forms to access rhythms, sounds, and modes of vocal expression that felt distinct from the sounds they experienced in their own cultural contexts. In other words, they were in search of sound, feeling, and expression to help them conceptualize the possibility of getting outside of their immediate cultures and, in Canada, colonial contexts.

An understanding of these contexts is necessary if we are to locate and assess sound poetry as a broader poetic form. Sound poetry, as it relates to Canadian borderblur, could be traced back to the early efforts and experiments of individual poets, which anticipate the maelstrom of activities,

collaborations, communities, and national and international tours of the 1970s. In tracing this trajectory, I return to some familiar figures: namely, bissett and Nichol. The Underwhich collection *Past Eroticism: Canadian Sound Poetry in the 1960's: Vol. 1* (1986) contains recordings from as early as 1964, including Nichol's "Beach at Port Dover," which is also likely his first recorded sound poem. Nichol recounted the poem's composition to an audience at a 1968 reading at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University): "I wrote it at Port Dover, in, on Lake Erie. It's one of those days when I was flaked out on the beach."[27] As Stephen Cain explained in his paper at the 2021 Modern Language Association convention, Nichol "wrote this poem lying on the beach at Port Dover while nearby loudspeakers played both Vera Lynn's WWII standard 'The White Cliffs of Dover' and Tom Jones's cheesy pop song 'What's New Pussycat?'"[28] Nichol wrote the poem in response to the absurd combination of these site-specific conditions, and it reveals his characteristic fascination with sound and play since most of the content of the poem pivots around a *puh* sound in a sequence of paratactic soundings and varying rhythms: "um pa pa . . . perch peach park . . . paper cup paper cup . . . pitter patter pitter patter pit pat pit pat . . . um pa . . . po dunk . . . part diver . . . port dover."[29] In this way Nichol lets sound form the pathway of his vocabulary with an emphasis on *p* sounds. In the recording, Nichol's voice is nearly overwhelmed by the throbbing bass of Jones's and Lynn's songs in the background of his recording. This version of the poem, as an early recorded example of Canadian sound poetry, suitably captures Nichol's interests in improvisation, spontaneity, and especially borderblur. From the vantage of the beach at Port Dover, Nichol overlooks the Lake Erie borderline that separates Canada and the United States, and, further, Nichol's poem fuses a variety of sources and experiences into a single poetic expression. This seemingly chance assemblage between poet, environment, and sonic nexus foregrounds one trajectory for sound poetry with its emphasis on process, action, feeling, and non-semantic language.

Two years later, in 1966, bissett "moves into word-mergings, soundings, [and] chantings." This was the same year that American poet Michael McClure visited Vancouver to read at the psychedelic Trips Festival, hosted at the Garden Auditorium of the Pacific National Exhibition and organized by Sam Perry, Ken Ryan, Al Hewitt, Mike Coutts, and Dallas Selman.[30] It was around this time that McClure had transitioned into his "beast language" poems, as featured in *Ghost Tantras* (1964), where he writes, "Grahhr!

Grahhhr! Grahhhrrr! Ghrahhr. Grahhrrr."[31] McClure and bissett performed on the same night, Sunday, July 31, in the company of the Grateful Dead and the Al Neil Jazz Trio and alongside showings of films by Charlie Chaplin, Andy Warhol, Sam Perry, and Gary Lee Nova. This meeting of media and personalities was typical of bissett's sound poetry. bissett was an avid solo performer who, like Nichol, played with language and sound, with the integration of rhythms and intonations with chant- and prayer-like inflections. bissett also brought these expressive forms into direct dialogue with music, notably with the Mandan Massacre (Roger Tentrey, Terry Beauchamp, Wayne Carr, Gregg Simpson, Ross Barrett, Harley McConnell, Ken Paterson, and Martina Clinton), who performed with bissett and are featured as part of his 1968 record/book *Awake in the Red Desert*. bissett's primal, aggressive raging with the Mandan Massacre can be recognized, somewhat reductively, as an extension of McClure's animalistic sound poetry. McClure's writing also proved to have a formative impact on Nichol, who recalls that "his work opened up new possibilities for me," though it is unclear if Nichol also attended the Trips Festival or had come to McClure by other means.[32] According to Frank Davey, Nichol left Vancouver for Toronto in 1964 so the latter option seems more likely. If he did see McClure on the West Coast, then his influence indicates that sound poetry, as part of the borderblur ethos, followed a pattern of proliferation similar to that of concrete poetry: it began in Vancouver and travelled eastward to Toronto with Nichol. If Nichol came to McClure by other means (and this theory is perhaps bolstered by the fact that Nichol's first published sound poem was recorded in 1964), this suggests that Ontario is a central locale for sound poetry's emergence in Canada during this time. In either scenario, Nichol played a significant role in introducing intermedial forms to poets in Central Canada.

As early as 1966, David UU was also evidently experimenting with chant forms in poetry, as indicated by his 1984 Underwhich Audiographics album *Very Sound* (discussed below), featuring fourteen sound poems written before 1970 and recorded in the 1970s and '80s. The cassette's A-side features UU's collaboration with the Avalettes (the Avalettes comprised Gregg Simpson, Phil Morgan, Ingrid Harris, Patricia Garrett, and Bob Coleman) while the B-side contains mostly solo works by UU. UU's work with the Avalettes is closely aligned with the sounds of Canadian free improv noise group Nihilist Spasm Band (founding members included Hugh McIntyre, John Clement, John Boyle, Bill Exley, Murray Favro, Archie Leitch, Art Pratten, and Greg

Curnoe), whose 1967 noise track "No Canada" satirizes the Canadian national anthem across six minutes and twenty-eight seconds of erratic kazoos, drums, strings, screams, hollers, horns, farts, moans, and invented instruments. The Avalettes are similar, too, to bissett's Mandan Massacre. In comparison, the pieces that UU composed in the 1960s and presented on *Very Sound*'s B-side offer us his single voice using chant-like rhythms, often delving into the sounds of words and short phrases. The thirty-one-second track "how can i touch you now," exemplifies this approach. Here, UU gently sings the title words, omitting a word with each repetition until arriving at "now now." He then builds the phrase back out, imitating through sound the act of moving toward and then away from a lover. These earlier sound poems, though less "noisy" than his work with the Avalettes, are undeniably like the equally playful, repetitive, and chant-like sound poetry of Nichol and bissett.

During this early period of borderblur sound poetry, Nichol, too, experimented with noise, which can be heard thanks to Jim Brown, who in 1968 undertook the curation and production of the short-lived "record magazine" *See/Hear*, an ambitious project that resulted in two recordings. Brown intended to produce a quarterly series

> of recordings of contemporary sound arts. Contemporary sound arts are usually discussed in terms of certain categories such as electronic music, experimental acoustic music, sound poetry, projective verse, chance music, improvised forms and so on, however what should probably be recognized is that sound arts are continually evolving and to create categories only restricts the way in which we think about sound. Mixed media, combinations of sound and visual arts, or combinations of different modes of sound art, are easily seen as results of our electric environment, and are as valid as the already accepted sound forms.[33]

Brown's description of *See/Hear* reflects an intermedia ethos given his emphasis on diverse "media" and "combinations" while also acknowledging, echoing McLuhan, his "electric environment." Though not exclusively dedicated to sound poetry, the first issue of this record magazine contains electroacoustic spoken word poetry. Lionel Kearns's permutational poem "The Woman Who" is perhaps typical in this regard, as it uses stereo panning to produce the effect of multiple voices in conversation. Nichol's electroacoustic

contribution is seemingly void of language and consists of squealing frequencies. The second issue of *See/Hear* consists entirely of contributions from Brown, Wayne Carr, and Ross Barrett (all of whom appeared on the first record installment). Despite its two-issue run, the record magazine anticipated some of the spoken and electroacoustic poetic experiments that would be more deeply explored in the following decades.

These formative but fringe moments of the 1960s led to the flourishing and vibrant network that emerged in the 1970s. Caroline Bayard hails 1970 as the official starting point for sound poetry in Canada since it also saw the aforementioned arrival of the Four Horsemen (active from 1970 to 1988). There are competing accounts of the group's formation; however, Butling and Rudy confirm that shortly after they met in 1969, Nichol and McCaffery performed as a duo, and during the following year were joined by Baretto-Rivera and Dutton, both of whom were involved with the Therafields psychotherapy community (where Nichol worked). They began workshopping and performing and released their first studio recording, *Canadada* (1972). They performed at Vancouver's the Western Front and Toronto's A Space and Music Gallery, in university auditoriums like York University's Curtis Lecture Hall, and at festivals like the 1982 Summer Solstice Festival in Damrosch Park, Lincoln Centre, New York, the Sound Poetry Festival at La Mamelle, San Francisco, in 1977, and at a festival in Amsterdam in 1981.

The Four Horsemen's work inspired other Canadian poets to take up sound poetry and thereby consolidate it as a significant part of borderblur, and as such a Canadian paratradition. Owen Sound—comprised of Michael Dean, David Penhale, Steven Ross Smith, and Richard Truhlar—began workshopping sound poetry in 1975 in a Toronto framing studio on Dupont Street operated by Brian Dedora.[34] The group drew influence from the Dadaists, composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass, and poets such as Nichol. They performed privately until 1976, when they held their first performance at Fat Albert's Coffee House on Bloor Street in Toronto. Owen Sound, like the Four Horsemen, became well-known as a sound poetry collective and performed in Montreal, Ottawa, Owen Sound, Toronto, Vancouver, and abroad in Amsterdam at the Stedelijk Museum and in London, England, at the Canada House and National Poetry Centre. The group stayed together until 1984.

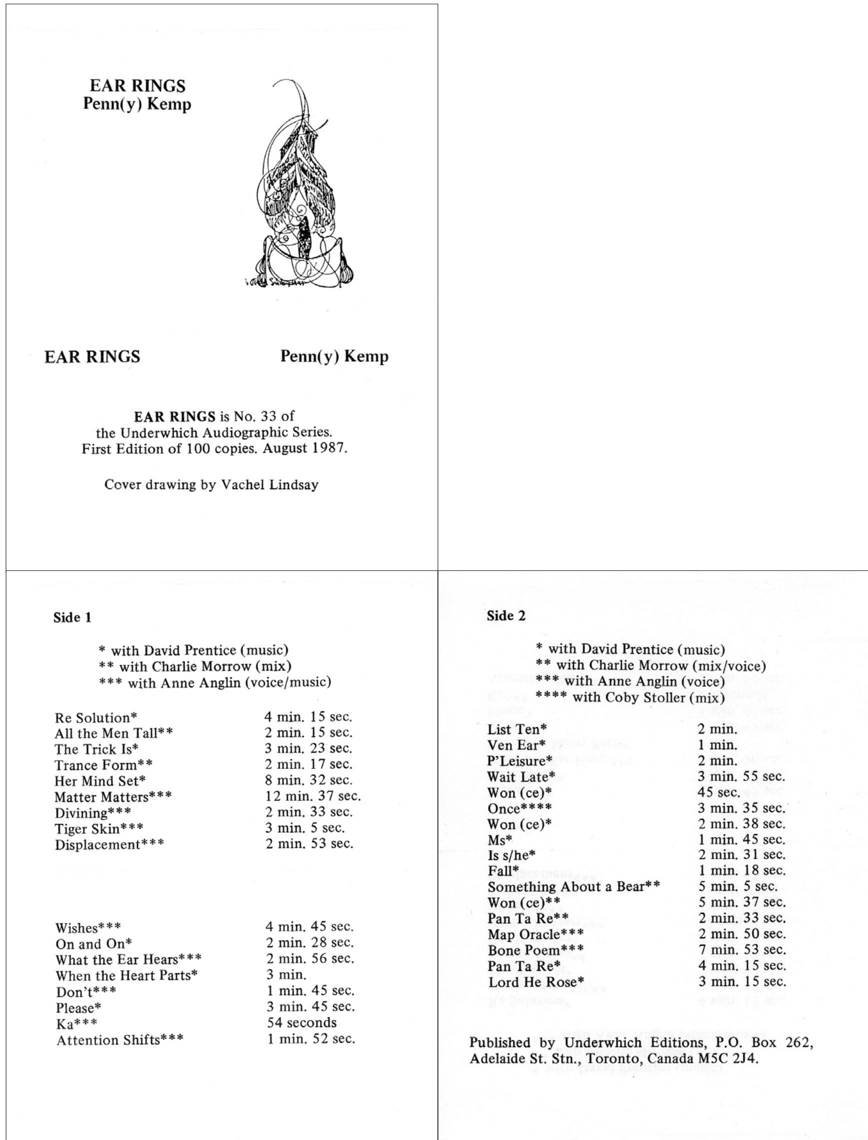
Like Owen Sound, another group of poets were inspired by the Four Horsemen: a duo comprising Stephen Scobie and Douglas Barbour, who

began collaborating in Edmonton, where they taught at the University of Alberta. "In the best Canadian tradition of The Four Horsemen (not to mention The Rolling Stones)," Barbour says, "we gave ourselves a group name—Re: Sounding."[35] Referred to in *Music Works* as "Canada's undocumented sound poetry group,"[36] they travelled the same pathways as Owen Sound and the Four Horsemen, performing "in Canada, the U.S., Austria, Denmark, Sweden, West Germany, Germany, and Australia & New Zealand, and at the 12th International Sound Poetry Festival in New York, 1980,"[37] and later, in 1999, Barbour and Scobie compiled *Carnivocal: A Celebration of Sound Poetry*, which also featured a newer generation of sound poets including Christian Bök, W. Mark Sutherland, Stephen Cain, and others. There are no available recordings of Re: Sounding.

The Four Horsemen, Owen Sound, and Re: Sounding are often given pride of place in narratives describing Canadian sound poetry; there are, however, numerous, less frequently acknowledged figures whose work is nonetheless worth considering. Toronto-based Sean O'Huigin,[38] for example, a Scottish-Canadian poet who co-organized the eleventh International Festival of Sound Poetry in Toronto, was a vital member of the community. Before the formation of Owen Sound, and just as the Four Horsemen were gaining critical notice, O'Huigin was experimenting with sound poetry, working with musicians like Ann Southam and artist Aiko Suzuki. With Southam, he released *Sky Sails* (1973), a record for which Nichol wrote a note for the back cover:

> there is no sense here of a poet reading with musical accompaniment there is only the piece itself that this is possible is only because of the years these two people have spent working with one another & their sensing of where the other is   that   this search this struggle towards community in a context of isolation should be (& i hesitate here to use this term) the theme of their album seems right.[39]

They documented their collaboration once more in 1978 with *Poe [Tree]*, a book which also included their work on the B-side of a split seven-inch, *Appendix*. Like O'Huigin, Gerry Shikatani was also an active member of the Toronto sound poetry community, but his work has received scant critical attention. The reason for this oversight, at least in the context of Shikatani's sound poetry, can partially be explained by the fact that many of his sound


EAR RINGS
Penn(y) Kemp

EAR RINGS Penn(y) Kemp

EAR RINGS is No. 33 of
the Underwhich Audiographic Series.
First Edition of 100 copies. August 1987.

Cover drawing by Vachel Lindsay

Side 1

* with David Prentice (music)
** with Charlie Morrow (mix)
*** with Anne Anglin (voice/music)

Re Solution*	4 min. 15 sec.
All the Men Tall**	2 min. 15 sec.
The Trick Is*	3 min. 23 sec.
Trance Form**	2 min. 17 sec.
Her Mind Set*	8 min. 32 sec.
Matter Matters***	12 min. 37 sec.
Divining***	2 min. 33 sec.
Tiger Skin***	3 min. 5 sec.
Displacement***	2 min. 53 sec.
Wishes***	4 min. 45 sec.
On and On*	2 min. 28 sec.
What the Ear Hears***	2 min. 56 sec.
When the Heart Parts*	3 min.
Don't***	1 min. 45 sec.
Please*	3 min. 45 sec.
Ka***	54 seconds
Attention Shifts***	1 min. 52 sec.

Side 2

* with David Prentice (music)
** with Charlie Morrow (mix/voice)
*** with Anne Anglin (voice)
**** with Coby Stoller (mix)

List Ten*	2 min.
Ven Ear*	1 min.
P'Leisure*	2 min.
Wait Late*	3 min. 55 sec.
Won (ce)*	45 sec.
Once****	3 min. 35 sec.
Won (ce)*	2 min. 38 sec.
Ms*	1 min. 45 sec.
Is s/he*	2 min. 31 sec.
Fall*	1 min. 18 sec.
Something About a Bear**	5 min. 5 sec.
Won (ce)**	5 min. 37 sec.
Pan Ta Re**	2 min. 33 sec.
Map Oracle***	2 min. 50 sec.
Bone Poem***	7 min. 53 sec.
Pan Ta Re*	4 min. 15 sec.
Lord He Rose*	3 min. 15 sec.

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Adelaide St. Stn., Toronto, Canada M5C 2J4.

Figure 3.1: Liner notes to Penn Kemp's *Ear Rings*, 1987.

works were not documented—a problem that Re: Sounding shares—even though he "ha[d] been performing sound poetry since the 1970s."[40] Shikatani's performance work is engaged more fulsomely in the next chapter.

Penn Kemp, Nichol's friend, is also deserving of a more forceful acknowledgement as a central protagonist within the development of sound poetry in Canada. She began publishing in 1972 with her book *Bearing Down*, which launched a generative life of work in poetry, including lyric, sound, and concrete poetry, performance, and prose. This first book, published by Coach House Press, places her work directly within the mesh of borderblur as Coach House was an avid publisher of intermedial and exploratory literary works. Kemp has rigorously pushed the boundaries of not only poetry but sound poetry itself, collaborating with musicians and theatre performers—evidence of her aesthetic and medial diversity. One of her earliest recordings is *In Spirit Trees* (1977), which contains "Feminist sound poems and chants."[41] Since then, she has published well over a dozen recordings, including 1987's *Ear Rings* (published by Underwhich), for which she collaborated with American violinist David Prentice and Canadian actor Anne Anglin, and which was mixed by American sound poet, artist, and musician Charlie Morrow.

There is at least one more overlooked sound poetry collective that must be noted here to clarify our sense of the network at the time: First Draft, which formed in 1980 and comprised core members Susan McMaster (who studied with Barbour in 1972), musician Andrew McClure, and poet Colin Morton. First Draft welcomed a revolving cast of collaborators, yet it seems that McMaster and Morton were anchors for the group. Their names are included on each of the group's published volumes of scores and poems (some of which were published by Underwhich). First Draft was a performance group that explored the sounds of poetry, and on various occasions it collaborated with visual artists, performers, and musicians. It was not until 1982, two years after they formed, that First Draft officially entered the Canadian borderblur network. That year, the seventh annual Great Canadian Writers' Weekend was held at the Cranberry Inn in Collingwood, Ontario. Many poets attended, including members of the Four Horsemen and First Draft.[42] In her autobiography, McMaster recalls meeting Nichol at the event: "I've just seen the Horsemen perform, and am still quivering from the excitement and energy of their presentation. . . . bpNichol is *it* in sound poetry in Canada."[43] Recognizing their shared interest in intermedial poetics, she feels compelled to introduce herself: "I can't stay away: the power of the performance, the

clearly visible warmth and kindness of the man, the fact above all that he is doing a version of what Andrew and I are working on in First Draft in our wordmusic—working with many voices together as sound as well as meaning—draw me towards him."[44] She soon initiated a friendship with Nichol, thereby bringing First Draft within the orbit of this network of affiliation. Nichol seemed to develop a close relationship with members of First Draft, whom he supported in a variety of ways; he helped them workshop their pieces, edited their two books of scores, and helped them build an audience. As McMaster says, Nichol went to Ottawa on his own expense "to be the 'big name' at the launch of First Draft's first wordmusic book."[45] First Draft was distinct from their predecessors and eschewed the masculine homo sociality of the other collectives who began performing in the 1970's. First Draft, in other words, was not a group of men exploring the limits of their sounding bodies; rather, their sound poems carefully developed a working relationship between the voices of all members regardless of gender. First Draft, as McMaster claims, is "a feminist, a humanist, adventure. . . . We are all collaborators on equal terms."[46] Kemp's and McMaster's works represent essential contributions to a poetic field that is otherwise dominated by masculine personalities (a point I come back to later in this chapter).

It is doubtful that the work of the sound poets described above would have flourished had it not been for the infrastructure developed in such forums as artist-run centres, poet-driven reading series, and small press publishing efforts. The artist-run centre, in principle, is an alternative space that provides artists a refuge from big galleries and corporately managed spaces. In a sense, these spaces might also be recognized in Bernstein's terms as "provisional institutions,"[47] since they share a commitment to local, peripheral, and exploratory art forms over the desire to maximize profits and audience numbers. In other words, they are meant for artists and writers who typically work outside of the mainstream. These kinds of spaces in Canada include the Western Front and the now defunct Intermedia, both in Vancouver, A Space and the Music Gallery in Toronto, and Véhicule Gallery (also defunct) in Montreal, as well as lesser-known spaces such as Vancouver's Mandan Ghetto (created by bissett, Joy Long, and Gregg Simpson) and the Sound Gallery (also founded by Simpson). There are few publicly available recordings of performances in these spaces, of which notable examples include the Four Horsemen's performances at the Western Front in 1974 and 1977 as well as bissett's 1978 reading in the same space. These were remarkable spaces that

did more than offer "a public venue and supportive environment for play and experimentation;"[48] they were also instrumental in the growth of borderblur as an avant-garde paratradition. Not only did they provide an environment for the development of artistic and literary paratraditions, but the artist-run centre brought together poetry and many other artistic modes and media.

It is important to recognize, however, that Canadian sound poetry was not performed solely in provisional spaces. In fact, Canadian sound poets embraced the possibilities of performance in a range of larger institutionalized spaces, from university classrooms and radio stations to larger art centres like the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto. Such a gesture may signal sound poetry's institutionalization or transition toward a more mainstream audience. Indeed, it may seem as though sound poetry did enjoy some degree of popularity (yet, if true, this enjoyment was fleeting). But despite this flirtation with established institutions, Canadian sound poetry remains outside of Canada's dominant literary tradition and is often perceived more as a novelty than a serious mode of poetic expression. On this note, I wonder why and how some Canadian sound poets were invited into these spaces. It seems likely that sound poetry, far from being wildly popular, was appreciated by a small few who also had access to institutional spaces and invited sound poets to perform there. Truhlar, for example, worked at the CJRT radio station, where he produced two programs: *The Art of Sound Poetry* and *Canadian Poetry in the 1980s*. In September 1979, CJRT's *Music and Literature* program featured the Four Horsemen. With that said, CJRT was by no means a conventional station, having been established in 1949 at Ryerson Polytechnic. As for university performances, some of these poets were university instructors. As noted above, Barbour taught at the University of Alberta. Both Nichol and McCaffery were connected to York University, where the Four Horsemen on occasion performed. McCaffery received his master's degree from York in 1970, and Nichol began teaching at the school in 1980.

Rather than see these forays into institutional settings as borderblur's invitation into Canada's dominant literary culture, we can see them as opportunities for poets to disrupt the conventions of these spaces where thought and feeling are often expressed in standardized language and where modes of communication are typically recognized as distinct. Take, for example, York University's Curtis Lecture Hall, where the Four Horsemen performed in January 1973. This is typically a place where speech is used as a passive container for thought, logic, and meaning.[49] A lecturer communicates thoughts

to the students in attendance; the students are in turn often expected to record those thoughts and sometimes respond in a meaningful way. A Four Horsemen performance was radically unlike the lecturer's delivery of content. The Four Horsemen revelled in nonsensical and non-semantic meaning—very much unlike most university lecturers. Instead, they, and other Canadian sound poets who were occasionally welcomed into institutionalized settings, took over these spaces, disrupting the flow of speech and logic to redefine and subvert their intended purposes.

Though the materialistic dimension of Canadian sound poetry has been diminished as an impure representation of the art, audio recordings are one of the few ways sound poetry continues to enjoy circulation within borderblur's affiliated network. As part of Underwhich's publishing program, several editors developed the Underwhich Audiographic Series, which focused on the production and dissemination of cassette tapes (and later compact discs). McCaffery initiated this series and was joined by Truhlar, Smith, and Nichol. Truhlar eventually maintained the series "thru his publication of numerous new music cassettes and his efforts to get the entire series better known in the alternative press."[50] Underwhich primarily relied on the audiocassette. Rising to prominence in its standard form in the mid-twentieth century, the audiocassette opened new possibilities for sound poetry because of its affordability and user-friendliness. Underwhich took advantage of this accessibility; their published cassettes were very much provisional affairs, sometimes dubbed using home stereos and store-bought tapes.

All the activities accounted for above provide a clear sense of the social and material processes that set the emergence and proliferation of Canadian sound poetry under borderblur into motion, and, in so doing, made Canadian sound poetry audible to an international network, which Nichol and McCaffery helped to foster. Most notably, *Sound Poetry*: *A Catalogue*, edited by Nichol and McCaffery, was published by Underwhich on the occasion of the eleventh International Sound Poetry Festival, hosted in Toronto and organized by McCaffery, O'Huigin, and Smith.[51] As Rudy and Butling have noted, "this is an annual event that began in Sweden in 1968 and was the first time the festival was held in North America." It was recognized for the prominent billing it gave to group and collective performances.[52] Poets from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Holland attended and participated, including the likes of Dick Higgins, Bob Cobbing, Paula Claire, Henri Chopin, Jackson MacLow, Jerome Rothenberg, and others.

The event was a high watermark for sound poetry in Canada. It was not only a crucial nexus at which an international array of practices and practitioners gathered, but it also foregrounded (like other festivals), the importance of community as a major component of sound poetry practice—both in the coming together to collaboratively compose and perform sound poetry, and in the persistence of collectivity among festival attendees (at this point, eleven iterations of the festival had already occurred). The eleventh International Sound Poetry Festival highlights the aesthetic diversity of sound poetry, including both acoustic (by the Four Horsemen and Owen Sound, for example) and electroacoustic performances (Jackson Mac Low and Henri Chopin), as well as collaborative and solo performances. More than anything else, the festival is clear evidence of Canadian borderblur's unique approach to sound poetry while also validating practitioners' connections to an international community.

The events, personalities, and materials that I highlight in this section in no way amount to a holistic portrait of sound poetry during the 1960s through to the late 1980s. Significant figures are missing due to a lack of accessible documentation—Basmajian, for example, is listed as a participant in the eleventh International Sound Poetry Festival, yet it seems that no recordings exist of his sound work. Similarly, few recordings by Shikatani—who places silence at the core of his performance—exist, and those that do have been minimally documented (I return to Shikatani's performances in the next chapter). With that said, an exhaustive depiction is not my purpose here; the goal, rather, is to highlight the many ephemeral cultural processes around which affiliated practitioners gathered to make sound poetry one face of Canadian borderblur. All of this work is what Bernstein would call "social work," in the sense that it sought to forge a paratradition outside of Canada's dominant literary community. With its emphasis on community and face-to-face encounters, we see how by sheer necessity affect was already at the centre of Canadian sound poetry.

Language and Sound in the Electronic Age

While Canadian sound poets in the 1960s through to the 1980s at times engaged the idea of Canadian identity or nationality—though they more often than not maintained a critical or ambivalent position vis-à-vis nationalist concerns—their work can be generatively situated as responses to two conditions related to the electronic age and the transnational rise of affective

labour: sonic media, on the one hand, and the increasing standardization of speech, on the other.

New technologies had an effect on sound production and sonic mediation in that they disrupted traditional processes of imagining community since new technologies allowed the voice to travel great distances and thereby exceed national borders. As with concrete poetry, McLuhan's writing articulates how electronic media ushered in new possibilities for understanding the relationship between community and oral/aural communications at the time. Critic Richard Cavell explains that McLuhan "was writing in a transitional moment, when a primarily literate culture was experiencing aspects of oral culture as they were being retrieved by electronic media."[53] Jamie Hilder echoes this point when he writes that "The drastically altered mediascape that arose at mid-century alongside electronic media is what led Marshall McLuhan to theorize the experience of space as acoustic rather than visual."[54] Like Dennis Lee, McLuhan was acutely aware of the power of sound and how it shapes one's sense of place. In *Understanding Media*, he recognizes that "in speech we tend to react to each situation that occurs, reacting in tone and gesture even to our own act of speaking,"[55] and further that "the power of the voice to shape air and space into verbal patterns may well have been preceded by a less specialized expression of cries, grunts, gestures, and commands, of song and dance."[56] For McLuhan, sound, and particularly the voice, rely on the intimacy of the spoken word—that is, the unaided voice's capacity to fill a space, to vibrate within it without travelling far beyond it. Unamplified speech typically requires an immediate audience, and thus has communal implications. Nevertheless, as McLuhan knew well, electronic audio technologies were transforming sound and lending it an itinerant quality, permitting the voice to move beyond its immediate environs. The voice could travel—across the airwaves or inscribed onto tapes and records—far from its source of origin, which also meant that sound had new capacities for shaping the communal imagination through the distant voice.

Working in consonance with McLuhan's writing, R. Murray Schafer, the Canadian composer and sound theorist, and a friend to many borderblur poets, lamented these mutations in the soundscape that were catalyzed by the rise of electronic audio technologies: "Modern man is beginning to inhabit a world with an acoustic environment radically different from any he has hitherto known," which has alerted researchers "to the dangers of an indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every

corner of man's life."[57] For Schafer, these shifts delivered two interrelated problems. First, was the impact of sonic technologies—like the telephone, radio, and phonograph—on human life. In particular, he focuses on the concept of "schizophonia," the separation of sound from its original context because of these technologies' capacities to record, store, and transport sounds around the world. In Schafer's words, schizophonia refers "to the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic reproduction" so that it "may be restated at other times and places."[58] He deems schizophonia unnatural and suggests that it leads to "the territorial expansion of post-industrial sounds [which] complemented the imperialistic ambitions of Western nations."[59] The possibilities offered by sonic technologies of the mid- to late twentieth century were implicated within the problematic conditions of this electronic age. Schafer's position is reactionary and now out of fashion, but he believed that new technologies dismantled the immediacy of the face-to-face meeting of vocalizing subject and listening audience.

The second problem with electroacoustic technologies, as far as Schafer was concerned, has to do with the blending lo-fi and hi-fi soundscapes. The lo-fi soundscape is overcrowded with signals that are obscured and lack sonic perspective (the acoustic foreground and background). In contrast, the hi-fi soundscape is less crowded, sonically sparse with a clearly defined acoustic perspective. These two problems, resulting from the proliferation of electroacoustic technologies, create another crucial problem for Schafer: "a synthetic soundscape in which natural sounds are becoming increasingly unnatural while machine-made substitutes are providing the operative signals directing modern life."[60] For Schafer, the changes imposed on the sonic environment have tremendous impacts on human life, altering our interaction with it. This "synthetic soundscape" casts some doubt on Lee's claims, detailed earlier, of having found an authentic cadence by listening to the soundscape immediately available to him. Implicit in Schafer's study is a fear that the new electronic soundscape will detrimentally alter the social work of listening since sonic technologies could now modify depth and distance. These concerns directly informed the work of the poets themselves.

For sound poets like McCaffery, schizophonia had significant implications for the body's expressionistic capacities. In 1978, he claimed that "the body is no longer the ultimate parameter, and voice becomes a point of departure rather than the point of arrival."[61] He further suggested that "technological time can be superadded to authentic body time to achieve either an

accelerated or decelerated experience of voice time. Both time and space are harnessed to become less the controlling and more the manipulable factors of audiophony."[62] McCaffery used Schafer's concept of schizophonia as a marker for categorizing sound poetry practices. As a collective, the Four Horsemen largely swerved from schizophonic sound poetry, preferring sound poetry unaided by acoustic technologies, presumably in an attempt to return to "authentic body time" and as a gesture of resistance against the problems posed by electronic media (according to Schafer).[63] Echoing McCaffery, Nichol characterized the Four Horsemen's work as a body-centred practice: "phonograph recordings and tapes . . . remove the living performers from the audience's presence, and freeze what should be an ongoing process."[64] Schafer's concept of schizophonia, then, captures the anxiety some poets felt about the separation of sound from its bodily source. This resistance to the recorded sound poem also gestures toward the Four Horsemen's resistance to the materialistic dimension of literature's conventional literary economy. While they circulated their concrete poems outside of the mainstream Canadian publishing industry, they rarely circulated recordings of their sound poetry performances, thus emphasizing the creation of a community through tangibility, presence, attachment—in the spirit of Swede's Scream-In.

While groups like Owen Sound and Re: Sounding largely shared some of the convictions of the Horsemen, it would be an over-generalization to frame the sound poetry of borderblur as a practice that was interested solely in this turn away from the schizophonic. It would be too exclusionary to definitively argue, as McCaffery did in 1978, that Canadian sound poetry is typified by a swerve away from electroacoustic technologies, as doing so excludes collaborative works by Nichol, bissett, Jim Brown, Lionel Kearns, Sean O'Huigin and Ann Southam, Richard Truhlar, Penn Kemp, and the musical groups that formed in the 1980s such as Tekst, Phenomenθnsemble, and CCMC—all of whom worked with technology, musical instruments, and tape to some degree. These poets and performers actively embraced these technologies as a way of augmenting, amplifying, distorting, and extending the human voice within a synthetic soundscape that resists homogenization. McCaffery himself would eventually experiment with tape, as heard in his 1981 collaboration with Truhlar, *Manicured Noise*. Schizophonia, however, as McCaffery and Schafer describe it, offers a concept around which we can understand the polarizing effects of sound technologies and their relationship to an emergent affective economy. By responding to schizophonia—either in the form

of a rejection of it, or by excitedly exploring its possibilities—sound poetry emerged as part of a dialogue with the pressures of the affective economy and the electronic age.

This brings me to the second aspect of the electronic age and the affective economy against which borderblur sound poets reacted: the standardization of speech. According to Hardt and Negri, "Language, as it communicates, produces commodities but moreover creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them."[65] Thus, language, as a basis for communication, in terms of both its methods and its purposes, takes on a particular dimension within the new, international, affective capitalist paradigm. McCaffery's writings on sound, capitalism, and language effectively triangulate these as points of crisis for some sound poets. In his manifesto "for a poetry of blood," he declares his utter faith in sound's liberating and transformative capacities: "EITHER YOU TRANSFORM OR YOU / DESTROY," he writes.[66] McCaffery's statement positions emotion and sound and its value over language and semantics. For McCaffery, poetry and sound share the same essential qualities, "rhythm & pulse," and it is through sound and its affect that one achieves "the successful assimilation of your own [biology] into another biology."[67] This creative undertaking was also reflected in Nichol's description of his poetic projects as seeking expression beyond standard semantic speech (or writing, for that matter): "language means communication and that communication does not just mean language."[68] Nichol's intermedial literary experiments seek to transcend the limitations of singular corporeality and linguistic homogenization, or as he puts it, to find "as many exits as possible from the self (language/communication exits) in order to form as many entrances as possible for the other."[69] Thus, I see these poets reaching toward the expansive possibilities of an intermedia poetic—for sound poetry brings together expressive modes such as language, sound, and gesture—that recognizes the complexities of communication in a postmodernizing era.

We should also recognize that these poets saw sound poetry as a tool for creatively unsettling linguistic convention. For McCaffery, linguistic expression is intricately bound up with capitalism and its problematic program of homogenizing and standardizing the subject's language since, as mentioned before, "capitalism begins when you / open the dictionary,"[70] and, in a separate context McCaffery, while referring to work by Ferrucio Rossi-Landi, suggests that "language . . . functions like money and speaks *through* us more than we actively produce *within* it."[71] McCaffery and some of his contemporaries

believed that language had been systematically regularized to the extent that any expression of the self was imitative of the power structures that alienate, suppress, or deny individual expression. This is the same crisis of control that McLuhan identified in his discussions of the electronic age, which are echoed in Hardt and Negri. The standardizing project, in this context, is a subtle means of modulating what language means and does. McCaffery illustrates these connections most clearly when he situates sound poetry in dialogue with theorist Georges Bataille's concept of the "general economy," wherein he figures sound poetry as a matter of total excess: "sound poetry is a poetry of complete expenditure in which nothing is recoverable as 'meaning,'" one that exceeds "semantic order" and "shatters meaning at a point where language commits its move to idealization," which consequently "puts the subject into process."[72] This process contests capitalistic formulations of the self as a total, effectuated being that is thereby serviceable to capitalist society—a crisis that borderblur sound poets sought to work through. Practitioners like Nichol, McCaffery, bissett, and others, then, confronted this crisis and formulated a mode of sonic poetic expression that reflected their awareness of language as a means of exchange, and they sought ways of expressing themselves outside of that system. In other words, taking McCaffery's point as a central tenet, sound poets sought to disrupt capitalism's linguistic standardization by re-imagining language and communication through sound.

Many of the sound poets operating at the locus of borderblur advanced their poetry under somewhat analogous conceptions of sound and social politics. In particular, they saw sound poetry as an affective practice with radical potentialities through which they might engage themselves and others in a process that exceeds conventional linguistic, intellectual, and affective experiences. In addition to McCaffery's "a poetry of blood" and Nichol's concept of "exits and entrances," there are numerous other statements of sound poetics that complement this conceptual constellation. For example, McCaffery's and Nichol's theorizations of sound poetry align with that of another member of the Four Horsemen, Dutton, who in his preface to *Right Hemisphere, Left Ear* (1979), included in *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue*, argues for more fluid forms of expression: "Poetry consists of language; and language consists of sound and sight, of idea and emotion, of intellect and body, of rationality and irrationality. It is my delight to explore all these elements of language and to incorporate them in my compositions. I am not in a camp." He adds, "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 words depart to make way for that which is most immediate."[73] Dutton's comments here connect with McCaffery's rejection of standardized modes of expression as denying and obfuscating expression, and especially, for Dutton, the expression of feeling.

Influenced by the Four Horsemen, members of Owen Sound described their practice in similar terms. Dean suggests that "in sound-poetry we give form to the unspoken communication between things."[74] Penhale, likewise, argues that "sound-poetry as we know it is based in **our** language experience, in our emotional experience," and later that "sound without ideation is emotion. The first registration our work has on an audience, beyond the initial shock, is emotional. We are speaking to them in a non-image work manner yet with a good deal of communication."[75] Most pointedly, Truhlar directly links sound, affect, and self-expression: "Sound must be encompassed into an organic process which is greater than the sound itself. . . . Emotion is the expression of a life deeply felt and experienced. One emotes thru sound. We then must make a conscious link for ourselves between our sounds & our lives."[76] Poets such as Kemp and McMaster took these premises a step further since their sound poetry is a mode for the formulation and expression of their subjectivity outside of capitalism and a male-dominated tradition. Patricia Keeney Smith highlights this affective dimension of Kemp's work: "Kemp is an accomplished sound poet, expressing emotion that goes beyond logic or syntax. Sound was first and sound is last, From breath and cry to keening, From gasp to gasp."[77] In the same article, Kemp tells Keeney that "All my books are about the many aspects of being a woman," a statement that can be extended to her sound work as well.[78] Similarly, McMaster identifies that from an early point in her career she conceived of poetry as being intimately linked with emotion, a consideration that she inherited from Barbour, one half of sound poetry duo Re: Sounding:

> At the time when I started coming out of the closet as a poet—which was [the] late sixties, early seventies—poetry as I understood it was very intense, lyrical, the *moment* captured. I had some excellent teachers at that time—W. O. Mitchell, for example, and Doug Barbour—who told me "Don't tell the story, don't

> tell the story, make it the pure emotion." And my poems got shorter, and shorter, and very formal, and non-narrative.[79]

It was through her study with the more senior poet Barbour that McMaster began to distinguish lyrical and intermedial literary traditions, in pursuit of an emotive practice. As part of her work with First Draft, this drive toward emotion also became a mode of feminist practice. Situating herself within the sound poetry scene, she writes,

> bp, like Colin and Alrick and Peter and Claude, is a friend simply, so that at one point I think, my life is full of men and I'm not sleeping with any of them. A change from the wild girl who was. In that way, First Draft is also a feminist, a humanist, adventure, in which I and other women involved are there not as ornaments or organizers and the men are there not as Cool Lukes or *artistes*. We are all collaborators on equal terms—people, in fact.[80]

These statements, from both Kemp and McMaster, highlight the affective as well as the avant-gardist dimensions of sound poetry as a means of accessing alternative modes of expression and subjectivation—the process of independently formulating identity, and, I note, an identity that is contingent not on external nationalist factors, but on the interiority of the voicing subject.

In the context of an emergent affective economy and a male-dominated network, the work of Kemp and McMaster is important since, as Hardt and Negri have noted, affective labour is typically *gendered labour*. As Dorothy Smith recognized in 1987, affective labour can also be effectively characterized as "woman's work," which is especially true for caregiving and secretarial work (typically done by women in the twentieth century).[81] So, not only do Kemp's and McMaster's sound poetries intervene into the male-dominated space of the community, but their work also reverberates strongly within the broader context of the emergent economy. Their work stages a resistance to the determined role of a woman's body within it. This is doubly significant considering that the 1980s was a crucial period in the development of feminist poetics, as evidenced by the theoretical and creative writings of Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Nicole Brossard, and others. Kemp's and McMaster's works aligned with this feminist literary zeitgeist not only for how they write the body but also for how they express the body in sound.

Affect and Extension: Listening to Canadian Sound Poetry

Listening to recordings produced and disseminated by and through the Canadian borderblur network reveals the way sound poetry ripples with affect, extends with audio technologies, and transcends the limits of linguistic expression. Before going further, though, I must acknowledge that sound poetry, under the umbrella of Canadian borderblur, poses numerous challenges for critics assessing such work. First, there is the problem of ephemerality since, in typical avant-garde fashion, many sound poetry recordings were produced and disseminated through the same provisional institutions that support this paratradition as a whole. At the time of writing, much of the sound poetry described in this section remains accessible thanks to databases and websites (such as the University of Pennsylvania's PennSound online archive and the website UbuWeb), rare book and record sellers, and archivists. This is also a testament to the ways that Canadian sound poetry has necessarily circulated outside of the mainstream Canadian literary tradition (though scholarly networks such as the SpokenWeb are working to change these conditions). Adding to these problems of access, some sound poets denigrated the authority of the audio recording and instead privileged the live performance as the most effective way of experiencing sound poetry. Speaking on behalf of the Four Horsemen, Nichol writes, "even phonograph recordings and tapes run this risk [of falsifying their group identity], as they remove the living performers from the audience's presence, and freeze what should be an ongoing process."[82] In this way, we can see that Nichol privileges a "sustained state of relation" between performer and audience and a specific means by which the "intensities" of the sound poem "pass body to body."[83] Thus, I acknowledge, and despite my having experienced many other live sound poetry performances, that listening to some records and cassettes, like the Four Horsemen's, is necessarily a limited engagement with their work since the actual, real-time performance is inaccessible to me. But while I appreciate Nichol's concerns, I must also acknowledge that his position is not true for all Canadian sound poets in the borderblur network. As evidenced by Underwhich's catalogue of sound poetry cassette tapes, recorded audio was an acceptable medium for many poets; thus, the available recordings can, in some cases, be considered satisfactory representations of the work. In this section, I am conscious of these complexities and know that my listening experience is also mediated

by my own material and technological context. Thus, in dealing with this poetry I am engaging, at times, with a quasi form of such work. Nevertheless, I proceed.

As the group that is said to have unleashed sound poetry in Canada and situated it as a recognizable aspect of borderblur poetics, I turn first to the collaborative, acoustic, and sometimes improvised work of the Four Horsemen, whose sound poetry resists and responds to the conditions of electronic mediation (as noted above) and the standardization of expression during the rise of postmodernization. Their resistance to so-called schizophonia and standardized communication is audible, for example, in their sound poem "Assassin" from 1977's *Live in the West*, an album that documents three live performances from February 1974, one at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, one at the Western Front in Vancouver, and one at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. "Assassin" opens with hissing sounds made by several members, accentuating the double *s* sound in the word "assassin." One member's voice emerges from these hisses with a buoyant, song-like voice, repeating "sin sin sin-a-sin sin sin," playing with the phonemes of the word until the group begins to ecstatically chant "AH-SA-SIN." The chant's tempo accelerates with each repetition until the synchronicity of voices dissolves, followed by sharp breathing sounds that are quickly silenced by another group member's cry. This sequence is then repeated. In this way, the Four Horsemen become assassins themselves, destroyers of standardized language. They deconstruct the title word "assassin," spilling its morphemes and phonemes—words such as "sin" and "ass" as well as related extralinguistic sounds (hisses, screams, shouts, panting, breathing). They charge through these sonic elements, stripping the word of its singular meaning while finding openings to explore. This is the kind of linguistic analysis critics often employ when discussing the Four Horsemen's sound poetry. They focus on the deconstruction of language and logic that results in a discourse of negation, aligning their work with early twentieth-century avant-gardes such as the Dadaists. This kind of analysis is apt, and "Assassin" is indeed a metaphorical killing of speech through the destabilization of the word. However, as theorist Adrianna Cavarero reminds us, "voice is sound, not speech," and, given the Four Horsemen's emphasis on sound and non-semantic language, we know that this is central to their work.[84] Their poems often present the creative process of revealing innate sonic elements that exist just outside of language—living in sound and gesture—but still have a communicative effect.

Thus, the sound poetry of the Four Horsemen signals more than a distrust of standardized language. It emphasizes the materiality and presence of the voice while offering an experiment in formulating connections and belonging through sound. Most strikingly, the Four Horsemen offered opportunities to rethink the conditions that forge a connection to their audience—not through the printed word but through a "sustained state of relation"[85] during a performance. We might listen to another recording from *Live in the West*, "Mischievous Eve," wherein relation and affect are strongly foregrounded. "Mischievous Eve" begins with seemingly maniacal laughter by one member, who is soon joined by the others. As the laughter reaches its peak, it sounds as though the audience has also joined in the revelry. Laughter, as it is used by the Four Horsemen within the first minute of this sound poem, highlights the passage of intensities between bodies. At times, one person may begin to laugh while another joins in, unable to control themselves. As I listen to this first minute, I find it hard not to laugh myself, and I expect the live audience might have felt similarly compelled. From this joviality, one group member's voice emerges singing, "Remember, remember the fifth of November," and the group soon enters into intense, chant-like rhythms anchored by the sustained repetition of "remember." Squeals, hums, trills, grunts, and other guttural sounds come from the rest of the group. This continues until McCaffery announces himself with the mock authority of a lecturer speaking on the "history of North American respiration." The clarity of McCaffery's speech in the recording wanes as two members repeat in airy voices, "one voice alone still cannot say what two voices together saying one thing can." They repeat this line, gradually increasing in speed and volume until they overwhelm McCaffery's voice, demonstrating the power of collective action as their two voices overpower the one voice that had previously assumed authority in the performance. McCaffery's voice becomes mostly inaudible; by the time it re-emerges, he has dropped the didactic tone and is instead chanting, "get them speaking your way," along with the other voices, until their collective chant dissolves into a variety of post-linguistic sounds, including hisses, squeaks, and grunts. McCaffery's vocal transformation and realignment with the group signifies the power of the collective voice and the transference of intensity between bodies.

Considering the references to Guy Fawkes Day (5 November), a British holiday commemorating the radical plot to explode Parliament, and the biblical story of Eve—who transgresses the command of God—Stephen Voyce

argues that these allusions "collude in significant ways: both involve a transgression against property by figures whose traditional status as villains is challenged."[86] "Mischievous Eve," then, engages notions of transgression in unusual ways. In performance, it is the voice and its affect that transgresses the borders of the body (both the performers' and the audience members'). The group employs laughter at the beginning of the work as a cathectic mechanism, a means of unifying or tuning the audience into the piece, the performers, and each other. It is a transferable sonic thing that spreads throughout the audience, inciting pleasure and briefly drawing the audience into relation. We can also understand the sound of laughter in "Mischievous Eve" as a sonic extension of the self into a larger body of organisms (recall here McLuhan's notion of extension and McCaffery's remarks on biology and sound's transformative qualities). The power of sound is thematized by the exchange between McCaffery's didactic voice and the other members' chant. They do not chant persuasively at McCaffery's didactic voice to convince him to speak their way, but in so doing they nonetheless exemplify the power of their unified voice.

As implied by my brief discussion of laughter above, it was not uncommon for the Four Horsemen to encourage audience participation during their performances. As performers seizing upon the expansive capabilities of intermediality—using song, language, and performance—their work is immersive and relies on a feedback loop of energy transferred between themselves and the audience. The Four Horsemen, however, facilitated direct interactions with their audience, inviting them to be performers too.[87] Journalist Marq de Villiers described such a performance in the *Globe in Mail* in 1973:

> Waiting for a moment to begin. Then, quietly, a humming began in the front row of the audience, a nasal droning. It grew louder. The audience craned its neck to see; it was coming from a tall blonde man in a blue suede jacket. The humming broke into separate sounds, resolved itself: it was nichol [*sic*], and he had seemingly plucked the words from the minds of the crowd: he was chanting very softly . . . "We are waiting for the moment to begin to begin we are waiting for the moment to BEGIN TO BEGIN . . . " and by the end, when the beginning was done, The Four Horsemen had the audience uproariously chanting their own phone numbers while they themselves gibbered and danced up

> and down and neighed shrilly into the wind and gave off harsh baboon barkings. . . . Images glowed and faded and slid into each other, none staying long enough to be called, really, a poem.[88]

De Villiers captures the excitement and the infectiousness of a performance by the Four Horsemen: the audience, overcome by the performance, becomes part of it, thus highlighting the "intensities that pass body to body."[89] At the opening, it seems that the Four Horsemen utilize anticipation—the feeling that combines excitement, impatience, and suspense—as the audience might eagerly wait for the event to begin. In this case, the Four Horsemen push this feeling to the fore by chanting, "We are waiting for the moment to begin to begin we are waiting for the moment to BEGIN TO BEGIN."[90] De Villiers's comments also highlight the sound poem's status as a nexus of feeling: not only do the poets express themselves, but the audience finds themselves swept up—voluntarily or not—by their energy and express themselves in unconventional ways, in this case "by uproariously chanting their own phone numbers." While the presence of sound always establishes what Steve Goodman calls a "vibratory nexus"—where sound transcends the distinction between performer and audience to create a "mesh of relation in which discreet [*sic*] entities prehend each other's vibrations"[91]—these cases of audience participation most directly reveal the meshing of bodies through sound and immediacy. Within the space of the Four Horsemen's events, sound, gesture, and language (as abstract as it might be in some cases) provide a means of connection; it is here that the community vibrates outside of standard modes of expression.

Owen Sound followed in the wake of the Four Horsemen, exploring similar possibilities for sound poetry, employing chants, song, polyvocal arrangements, heteroglossia, and a range of guttural and bodily soundings. They thrived, too, as a performance group, touring similar circuits as the Four Horsemen in Canada and internationally. And like their predecessors, Owen Sound composed and performed sound poetry, believing that "performance . . . was the life of sound poetry, its only real existence."[92] A sound poem like "Kinderspielgesange," performed and recorded at the eleventh International Sound Poetry Festival, reveals some of the similarities between the groups and their shared interest in facilitating energetic exchanges between themselves and their audience. "Kinderspielgesange," from their cassette *Beyond the Range*: *Owen Sound 1976–1979* (1980), is a ten-minute sound

poem consisting of high-pitched squealing, gurgling, whistling, and animalistic sounds accompanied by harmonica, percussion, and deflating balloons. It is reminiscent of work by the Nihilist Spasm Band. The poem's title, "Kinderspielgesange," roughly translates from German to "children's game song," highlighting the work's focus on pre- and post-linguistic soundings, but also, since it uses a German title, perhaps acknowledging the beginnings of twentieth-century sound poetry with the German Dadaist Hugo Ball. The poem itself, with its strange, seemingly improvised soundscape, pushes the limits of what we consider voice, language, and sound. One such effect of this type of work, however, is not necessarily alienation or confusion but, much like the Four Horsemen's use of laughter in "Mischievous Eve," the production of pleasure and joy. Throughout the performance of "Kinderspielgesange," I hear audience members giggling and laughing intermittently, perhaps in the same way one may delight in the non-linguistic utterances of a young child.

Owen Sound's first released recording, *Meaford Tank Range* from 1977—named after a military training base and actual tank range near the city of Owen Sound, Ontario (thus invoking traditional militaristic notions of the avant-garde)—features, on its B-side, an acoustic sound poem entitled "Kesawagas." The title may reveal the group's familiarity with Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred* (Rothenberg also participated in the eleventh International Sound Poetry Festival in Toronto). The piece was composed and arranged by Truhlar and, according to the album's liner notes, is based on works by Hugo Ball and American composer John Cage. Those influences can be heard in the recording, both in the phonemic play (Ball) and in the references to silence and indeterminacy (Cage). In the multi-page score to the piece, which resembles a hand-drawn concrete poem, performers are instructed to improvise their way through certain parts by reading in unison, out of sync, choosing words at random, or from different texts altogether. In part, the piece embodies, as one performer says, its status as a "lecture on composition which is indeterminate."[93] While these features are notable, Owen Sound's appropriation of the *kesawaga* is also worthy of investigation. According to Rothenberg, a *kesawaga* is "a [dance] ceremony performed by four drums, the smallest of which 'plays the complex rhythms that serve as instructions to the dancers and that can be identified and repeated in speech patterns'" native to the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea.[94] Owen Sound's connection to this cultural ceremony is unclear, if indeed one exists at all. Rather, I understand this title to be a way of engaging the idea of ceremony itself,

as well as the relationship between percussion and voice. This heteroglossic poem employs four voices and uses complex rhythms and repeated speech patterns. The track begins with two voices in a canon-like sequence repeating the seemingly invented words “mâ mâ piaûpa mjâma,” which then fades into a vocal hum that gradually crescendos before breaking into frenetic, jazz-like vocal percussion. The loose invocation of the *kesawaga* connects the sound poem with notions of ritual, and a space for community that is guided by a specific ordering of actions and sounds in pursuit of a specific effect. “This is a lecture on composition,” multiple voices state, “it cannot be repeated,”[95] which speaks to the performance’s spontaneous and improvisatory elements and highlights the unique state of connection vis-à-vis the vibratory nexus that this poem seeks to offer. If Owen Sound’s “Kesawagas” is to be considered a ceremony at all, it might fittingly be described as a cleansing ceremony, a poem that cleanses the listener’s palette, effacing preconceived notions of what a poem can be and the ways that one can gather around the idea of poetry. It privileges spontaneity and the sense of immanence experienced by both performers and audience. With that said, this poem is another example of how an interest in global currents, and especially, non-Western cultures, led some white, anglophone poets of this generation to appropriate Indigenous traditions, a problem that requires more rigorous analysis and discussion.

While “Kesawagas” demonstrates the group’s interest in heteroglossia, ceremony, non-semantic vocalization, and blurring the borders between writing and music, the influences of minimalist composers are noticeable on later releases, such as their 1987 Underwhich cassette *Sleepwalkers* and such tracks as “In the Cells,” with its rhythmic pattern reminiscent of Steve Reich and Philip Glass. These musical influences partly distinguish Owen Sound from the Four Horsemen, but the group further distanced themselves by incorporating electroacoustic instruments and effects. “A Spiral of Forgotten Intimacies,” composed by Steven Ross Smith and Richard Truhlar (performed and recorded at the Kontakte Writers in Performance series in Toronto on 23 February 1985), is an example of this kind of work. It consists of a single speaking voice accompanied by a low, constant, pulsing rhythm and an electroacoustic voice modulator producing a slight echo. “A Spiral of Forgotten Intimacies” is a nexus point that investigates the human acoustic voice within the context of the electronic age. The speaker meditates on feelings of alienation and confusion, and the limits of language: “What boat has brought me here / living within the walls of language / within a perplexity of cells / in an

atmosphere of contained apartments / the everyday cuts in, lurking / within false language."[96] The speaker laments the disintegrating world: "we are deaf among worn stones, some former image / muscle, bone, dissolving / as the senses fade" and the natural world becomes nothing more than "green memories."[97] Given the interaction between voice and electroacoustic effects, the poem engages schizophonia and the loss of the world's natural sounds and rhythms. The electroacoustic effect has a spectral presence, distorting the natural qualities of the voice by lurking behind it as though threatening to overtake it, much in the same way the conditions of the electric age threaten the autonomy of the individual subject. The speaker describes the natural world as "a location left behind" and "a spiral of forgotten intimacies."[98] The invocation of "intimacy" characterizes the human connection with the natural world not as a chance encounter, but one of deep feeling, sensation, and intensity. "A Spiral of Forgotten Intimacies" approximates a neo-Romantic outlook in its longing for the natural world, with its rhythms, vibrations, and acoustic order.

The members of First Draft, by contrast, swerved from the path laid down by their masculinist predecessors. Recall McMaster's claim in *The Gargoyle's Left Ear*: "First Draft is also a feminist, a humanist, adventure, in which I and other women involved are there not as ornaments or organizers and the men are there not as Cool Lukes or *artistes*."[99] Though their exploration of themes and ideas related to women's subjectivity was less explicit than Kemp's in her own sound poetry (discussed below), First Draft's feminist politics were to be found in the act of collaboration itself.[100] The writing and performance credits for cassettes such as *Wordmusic* indicate that each member shared in these tasks, and it appears as though McMaster in many cases would write a poem and then Andrew McClure would compose the "wordmusic"—the neologism they used to describe their intermedial blend of poetry, music, and performance. In turn, that work was performed by central members McMaster, McClure, and Colin Morton (often accompanied by others). Though one group member may write a piece, there did not appear to be an onus on a single member to produce compositions, and the men in the group did not appear to eclipse McMaster or the other women.

First Draft's ambition for open and equal collaboration among members is strongly foregrounded in their sound poems. Works like "Dream Song" and "Death of a Youngish Man" use multiple voices, often simultaneously. In both pieces, however, no voice dominates another. Instead, all remain at the

same volume, intonating with subtle inflections and stresses. The performers strive not for dissonance but for consonance: for example, two or more performers will speak the same lines in unison with a song-like harmony as though they are in thoughtful dialogue rather than striving for the contrived chaos we often hear in the work of the Four Horsemen or Owen Sound. First Draft strongly embodies the principles of intermedia, with multi-vocal sound poems, music, and hybrids of the two. In other cases, their recorded compositions sound more like spoken word or dramatic monologues, while others resemble the chant-based sound poetry of bissett or Nichol. Demonstrative of a borderblur poetic, First Draft's work corresponds to no single medium or genre.

Nichol edited their first book, *Pass This Way Again*, for Underwhich Editions, and they performed across Canada in libraries and universities. Surely, he would have been attracted to a poem like "ABCD" from their cassette *Wordmusic*, one of their most striking pieces, with its exploration of letters, words, and linguistic fragmentation and its dynamic shouting, whispering, and hissing. McMaster begins the poem speaking plainly: "And such divine nonsense."[101] Her words are immediately followed by the three performers, in turn, repeating, "A B C D A B C D A B C D" with varying vocal inflections. Following this sequence, they begin to repeat letter sounds as occasional words emerge from the sequence, like "abracadabra," followed by the varying repetition of "dada" until McMaster, McClure, and Morton collectively shout. As the poem nears its end, they chant "DNA" before closing with a play on the opening phrase, "such nonsense, divine." Like other sound poems produced by First Draft's contemporaries, this work, too, explores the sonic capacities of individual words and letters while carefully and precisely exploring how the sounds relate to one another. The section of the piece during which each member exaggeratedly enunciates multi-syllabic words that start with the letters *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*, such as "ambergris," "antinomy," "arsenic," "Beelzebub," "Circes," "cinnamon," and "demon," effectively foregrounds the texture embedded in the sound of each word. The poem is informed by the idea of "divine nonsense," with the group's seemingly disconnected but calculated babbling effectively demonstrating, and perhaps reflecting upon, the arbitrary relationship between word and object.

The principles that guided many collective performances of sound poems—presence, spontaneity, a resistance to standardized language, and an emphasis on affect and emotion—also guided the work of solo performers.

A B C D

Susan McMaster

Figure 3.2: Excerpts from score for “ABCD” by Susan McMaster for First Draft, 1987.

mf ă ă ă ă ă ă ă ă
mp bră kă dă bră kă dă bră kă dă bră kă dă
f a bra ca da bra

mf bŭ bŭ bŭ bŭ bŭ bŭ bŭ bŭ bŭ
mf abracadabra
f a bra ca da bra

mf kŭ kŭ kŭ kŭ kŭ kŭ kŭ kŭ kŭ
mp ă bră că ă bră că ă bră ca ă bră că
f a bra ca da bra

dŭ dŭ dŭ dŭ
mp dă kă bră dă kă bră dă kă bră dă kă bră
f a bra ca da bra

ff dă da dă da dă da dă da
fff ă
mp ambergris antimony arsenic algebra

ff dă da dă da dă da
fff ă

ff dă da dă da dă da
fff ă

ff dă dă dă da da da
fff ă

For Nichol, the sound poem was one of the fastest and most effective ways for him to access emotion. At the beginning of his poem "A Love Poem for Gertrude Stein," from the 1971 cassette *bp Nichol*, he states, "My name is bpNichol, and I'm going to approach this tape the way I would any poetry reading, and for me the best way, the thing that gets me the fastest into the poems, into the feeling, into my own breathing body, is to begin with some of my sound poems."[102] The breath, body, and feeling are what guide Nichol through his sound poems, not an imposed, formal logic or intellectual approach. Nichol's "The Incest Song," from his 1968 album *Motherlove*, illuminates his concern for sound, language, communication, and systems in the electric age. The stereo panning effect shifts Nichol's vocalizations from left to right and foregrounds Nichol's interest in the type of movement that rejects the stagnancy of systematization. "The Incest Song" is composed using parts of the word "system." He breaks the word into its phonemes, resulting in a hissing sound from "sys," which is repeated and prolonged variously throughout the poem, as well as "stem" and then the full word, "system." The poem opens with a prolonged "sysssssssss," followed by the same sound in repetition, imitating white noise as though the poem begins *in medias res* as part of a communication breakdown.[103] If the communication devices of the electric age have broken down, we are left with nothing more than sounds that exceed conventional linguistic communication: static and word fragments as the voice struggles through the electronic apparatus. Nichol's poem on communication technologies is trapped within the system he seeks to criticize: it relies on the panning mechanisms of the machine to mount the critique itself, thus expressing an implicit reliance on the system. Considering this reading of the poem, it should come as no surprise that Nichol's interest in electroacoustic sound poetics were mostly abandoned after this and other early experiments.

The systematization of language continues to trouble Nichol in a poem like "Son of Sonnet," from *bp Nichol* (1971).[104] Instead of engaging the conditions of the electric age, Nichol expands poetic convention as a way of expressing feeling, especially "love." The invocation of "son" in the title conjures a kind of Oedipal drama, a conflict between past and present and a struggle for power: the son (Nichol's poem) seeks to escape/overthrow the authority of the father (the tradition of the sonnet). The sonnet, of course, is a rule-governed form, traditionally associated with expressions of love, as typified in the works of Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. Nichol's

poem intersects with the tradition of the sonnet, as indicated by the title, yet it discards the sonnet's conventions entirely. Instead, it consists of largely extralinguistic sounds—shouts, chants, and trills—thereby rejecting conventional literary expressions of love and affection. Indeed, if this in fact a love poem, it offers a totally alternative way of voicing that feeling. In its rhythm, the sonnet is dominated by iambic pentameter—based on the false notion that this rhythm is most like the rhythm of the human heart. Nichol's poem rejects this notion of a natural bodily rhythm from the outset, and instead continually alters the rhythm of his vocalizations which are variously rapid and frantic, slow and elongated. Nichol's poem recognizes that the body has no "natural" rhythm, just as love exceeds conventional poetic expression.

bissett's sound poetry uniquely intersects with considerations of bodies, sound, and what constitutes the idea of the "natural." Though his sound poetry continues to evolve, even to this day, I will here look at two distinctive phases of his sound poetry. The first can be situated among McLuhanesque considerations of technology as an extension of humankind, while the second represents a return to nature through vocalization (akin to Owen Sound's previously mentioned lament for a lost world). Both phases, which overlap with each other, stage radically different responses to the conditions brought about by electronic communication. In the 1960s, bissett explored the intersection of technology and language. This was perhaps most evident in his concrete poetry and his explorations of the typewriter and mimeograph machines, but it can be heard in his sound poetry too. bissett's sound poetry exceeded the vocal chanting and word merging that Tallman noted. In his performances at places like the Sound Gallery in Vancouver, bissett was experimenting with sound and lights, and, in collaboration with Lance Farrell and Martina Clinton, with tape machines.[105] These experiments indicate that bissett did not reject sound technologies in the same way as Nichol had.[106]

bissett's book-record *Awake in the Red Desert* (1968) effectively represents the range of his sound poetry and the various ways it intersected with the conditions of the electric age. The audio portion of *Awake in the Red Desert*, a twelve-inch vinyl record, consists of fourteen recordings covering a range of sound-poetic practices: solo acoustic sound poems ("o a b a"), collaborative acoustic sound poems with accompaniment from string instruments and percussion ("2 awake in th red desert!!" and "my mouths on fire"), and electroacoustic sound poems ("heard ya tellin" and "she still and curling"). A poem like "she still and curling," for example, is driven by the repeated phrase

"supremely massage," which perhaps alludes to McLuhan's *The Medium Is the Massage*, published only a year earlier in collaboration with the graphic designer Quentin Fiore. The poem itself operates by simultaneously exploring several planes of sonic intensity. There is the lethargically repeated phrase "supremely massage," which is then looped backwards. This repetition is accompanied by a continually shifting synthesizer (I think) and the reading of an erotic text. These various sonic layers shift acoustic perspective as the volume of each layer is increased and decreased to accentuate the different elements of the sound poem. Kostelanetz regards most poems on this record as "widely uneven," and suggests that the instrumentation is "unnecessary, if not detrimental."[107] Presumably, Kostelanetz would find "she still and curling" to be guilty of such an offence. The poem, however, perfectly exemplifies the affective complexities of bissett's time. The poem consists of low- and high-pitched sounds, muffled and clear voices, a mixture of linguistic, post-linguistic, and pre-linguistic sound, natural and synthetic sounds, along with quickly and slowly enunciated phrases. These elements are accompanied by the literal subtext of eroticism, a key component of the poem. Indeed, considering these characteristics, the poem might indeed seem uneven, but so is the soundscape of the electric age, according to Schafer. bissett's "she still and curling" captures the confusion of sonic perspectives that prohibits the listener from situating oneself on one plane of intensity, thereby creating a sense of disorientation. As listeners, I suggest, we expect to be able to locate ourselves within a particular sonic intensity, which is why so much lyric poetry tends to follow sonic trajectories that do not thwart a listener's expectations. In other words, the affective potential of the lyric poem is at times limited by its sonic registers insofar as it fails to explore registers outside of the typical spoken voice.[108] bissett, by contrast, uses the sonic characteristics of the electric age to create a poem that embraces the possibilities of relocating and reconfiguring the self by using sound technologies to create a complex sonic environment that thwarts listeners' expectations of sonic coherence. In this way, bissett's poetry does not necessarily embrace the conditions of the electric age so much as employ the characteristics of that age to mobilize its heterogeneity of affects and create a zone within which listeners can explore and understand their own response to a complex arrangement of intensities, offering them a chance to determine their place within it and against it if they so choose.

bissett, though, is likely best known for his sound poems that explore chant and song structures using one acoustic voice. Indeed, Kostelanetz

prefers these solo acoustic pieces, such as "is yr car too soft for th roads," from *Awake in the Red Desert*. Poems like this one, or "o a b a" (from the same album), employ repetitive chant structures to explore the sonic dimensions of certain words, phrases, and letters. bissett's poetry, then, sees letters as more than mere things that orient an audience toward an object. bissett's chants largely focus on letters, single words, or sentence fragments, with the goal of pushing their communicative function away from representational imagery and semantics and into an affective field. bissett's chants are permutational, exploring the potential of letters, words, phrases, and their sounds beyond their expected function in order to mobilize an expanded experience of language's materials. Instead of looking through the letters and words toward a signified object, bissett rightly locates the possibility of affect in the materials of language itself. Letters, words, and fragments, for bissett, are abundant with affective potential or intensity; hence, even when bissett is reciting from a written work, he often improvises his way across the page, leaping from section to section, repeating parts either more or less often than the page dictates. In a poem like "o a b a," bissett's chanting draws attention to the aural similarity between words like "heart" and "artery," which are also, of course, physiologically connected by the body's circulatory system. But more significantly, bissett's chanting opens a sonic field wherein the sounds of the ghostly, the animalistic, the alien, the machinic, and the human commingle in song, whispers, stutters, shouts, and speech, all of which pivots around the sounds of the three letters in the title. Using the *ahh* sound of the *a* as a refrain, bissett chants his way through letters, words, syllables, and word fragments, continually returning to the repeated sound of *ahh*. In a way that's similar to his "she still and curling" and its opening of a sonic zone, bissett's "o a b a" opens up the potential for experiences—perhaps *deeper* experiences—of feeling in linguistic art.

Liberation and transformation were also important elements of sound poetry for Kemp, who pursued a more focused project: sounding a woman's body. Kemp's cassette *Ear Rings* (1987), released as part of the Underwhich Audiographic Series, is demonstrative of these ambitions.[109] With its very title, the cassette establishes a relationship between the body (ears), listening (or hearing), and gender (with the allusion to earrings, read here as a symbol of femininity). Kemp delights in this kind of language play, using repetition, puns, fragments, and a whole range of linguistic, pre-linguistic, and extralinguistic sounds in the service of her feminist project. The opening track, "Re

Solution," which consists of an acoustic voice and accompanying violin, suggests this outright. Kemp incrementally repeats and builds morphemes into a complete sentence: "we're going to begin writing some time when electric light descends from fingertip onto computer keyboard and sets us freeeeeeee . . . may–– be––."[110] The sound poem acknowledges its socio-historical location amid a period characterized by the proliferation of electric technologies, and also indicates a belief (though hesitant) that writing can be a liberating exercise. So while *Ear Rings* meditates on several subjects, it seems, importantly, to be one of the few sound poetry albums emerging from this network to focus expressly on issues of women's sexuality, motherhood, family, and birth.

Kemp's concern for liberation is seemingly much more focused than many of her contemporaries. While others produced work that unleash free-flowing acoustic sounds, Kemp's sound poetry seeks to release her womanly body and affects. The second sound poem from *Ear Rings*, "All the Men Tall," demonstrates this, as Kemp works through a series of puns on the title phrase, moving from "All the Men Tall" and "Ele Men Tal" to "In Cre Men Tall" until finally landing on "All Men" and "A men, Amen," "ahh, ahhh ahhhh."[111] As Kemp approaches the final enunciation of "ahh ahhh ahhhh," her voice takes on a tone that seems to convey a greater sense of pleasure, perhaps an expression of orgasmic gratification through sexual intimacy with a man. In this way, Kemp rejects prudish taboos preventing women from expressing bodily pleasure in public. This type of work continues in other poems on the album. In a work like "Her Mind Set," she refers at the beginning of the sound poem to a "feminist creation myth,"[112] and a poem like "Matter Matters" continues to delight in puns to foreground issues of motherhood as the poem's title phrase is gradually transformed into "Mater Matters" and "Mother Matters."[113] These are public expressions of a woman's agency, sexuality, and desire—and an act of resistance to the patriarchal oppression felt by women displaced and alienated in a literary community dominated by masculine personalities. Kemp uses her sound poetry to oppose these conditions and instead expresses her emotions, affects, and desires in her recorded sound poetry.

The sound poetry I hear on Kemp's *Ear Rings* points me back to the conditions of the electric age, its post-modernizing economy, the emergence of affective labour, and especially the gendered characterization of such labour as "woman's work."[114] Kemp's poetry, deserving of further critical exploration, reminds me of the imagined emancipatory prospects that imbue avant-gardist practice as it has been explored in this book so far. Sound poetry, with

its intermedial combination of music, poetry, and performance, is a potent means for exploring gendered and bodily autonomy, especially given the male-dominated field of sound poetry in Canada during the period under study. Like many of her peers, Kemp sought not only to find ways to bring together what are often considered disparate disciplines and thereby expand literary traditions in Canada, but she did so in the service of a greater, liberatory feminist project. Kemp was exploring these issues in the mid- to late twentieth century, and more specifically in this case the late 1980s, a time when an increasing number of voices were calling for a substantial reckoning with the problems of gender inequality. These calls, while they came from within the feminist literary movement in Canada, nonetheless transcended national borders and geographical contexts. Kemp was approaching her work with an explicit focus on gender, but to some extent, all of the sound poets explored in this chapter tried to find other, alternative means, outside of the conditions of an oppressive capitalist regime, for expressing the self, for communicating, and for developing community.

In addition to accounting for the persons and means that comprise sound poetry in Canada, the project of this chapter (and, really, of this book more generally) is to build on the existing scholarship and more forcefully place these practitioners alongside each other in order to recognize that they have all in their inimitable ways contributed to the formation of borderblur as a networked, literary paratradition in Canada. One of my hopes is that by finding common ground between better-known (among avant-garde networks at least) sound poetry groups like the Four Horsemen and Owen Sound and lesser-discussed practitioners such as Kemp or First Draft, we can begin to expand the narratives around avant-garde and intermedial literary practices in Canada. In doing so, I hope to find common ground between poets and artists across a series of projects that exceed the nationalist context and engage with the greater implications of a rapidly changing world.