

**Re: Reading the Postmodern
(a Canadian Literature Symposium)**

Friday, May 9th

- 9:00-11:00 Registration in English Lobby (3rd floor, Arts Building, 70 Laurier East)
- 11:00 Welcome by Frans de Bruyn, Department Chair
- 11:00-12:30 **Panel 1: Ideologies of Place / Place of Identity (Arts 509)**
Chair: Sara Jamieson (Carleton U.)
Erica Fischer (U. West Florida)
"The Fallacy of Canadian Postmodernism: The Absence of National Identity in the Works of Douglas Coupland"
Jason Wiens (U. Calgary)
"Bowering, Postmodernism, and Canadian Nationalism: *A Short Sad Book*"
Allison Mackey (McMaster U.)
"Canada's Postmodern Condition: Multiculturalism and Ethics/Politics of Identity"
- 12:30-1:15 **Light Lunch** (Glen Clever Room, 3rd floor Arts) --Registration Continues--
- 1:30-3:00 **Panel 2: Regions of Postmodernism (Simard 125)**
Chair: Jennifer Blair (Rutgers U.)
Lindy Ledohowski (U. Toronto)
"Kroetsch and Kupchenko: The Paradoxical Centrality of the Regional 'Ex-Centric'"
Alexander MacLeod (St. Mary's U.)
"Reconciling Regionalism: Environmental Determinism, Spatial Epistemology and the Canadian Postmodern"
Dennis Cooley (U. Manitoba)
"The Postmodern Writer Abroad"
- 3:15-4:45 **Panel 3: Postmodern Spaces (Simard 125)**
Chair: Anne Raine (U. Ottawa)
Cheryl Cowdy Crawford (York U.)
"Reading the Suburb as a (Canadian?) (Postmodern?) Space"
Ian Rae (McGill U.)
"Postmodern Architectures and Anne Carson's 'The Fall of Rome: A Traveller's Guide'"
Richard J. Lane (Vancouver Island University)
"Post-Theory Canadian Postmodern: An Architectonic of Canadian Literary and Visual Culture"
- 5:00-6:00 **Keynote Address (ARTS 257)**
Linda Hutcheon (U. Toronto)
"The Glories of Hindsight"
Introduced by Professor David Staines (University of Ottawa)
- 6:00-7:30 **Buffet Dinner** (Arts 509)
- 8:00-9:00 **Off-Campus Literary Reading** featuring **FRED WAH** @ Avant Garde Bar, 135 Besserer St.

**Saturday,
May 10th**

Unless otherwise noted panels will take place in Simard 125

- 9:00-10:30 **Panel 4: Re: Reading Hutcheon (Simard 125)**
Chair: Gerald Lynch (U. Ottawa)
Peter Thompson (Carleton U.)
"Eruptions of Canadian Ecocriticism: Linda Hutcheon's Postmodern Ecological Ethic"
Jennifer Blair (Rutgers U)
"'The Postmodern Impasse' and *The Englishman's Boy*"

- Adam Carter (U. Lethbridge)*
"Linda Hutcheon's Postmodern Irony"
- 10:45-12:15 **Panel 5: Instituting the Postmodern (Simard 125)**
Chair: Maude Lapierre
Christian Bök (U. Calgary)
"Getting Ready to Have Been Postmodern"
Karis Shearer (U. Western Ontario)
"Postmodern Cultural Workers and the Institutionalization of Canadian Literary Histories"
Nicholas Bradley (U. Victoria)
"Postpostmodernism's Prizes: Awards and Canadian Poetry in the Twenty-first Century"
- 12:15-1:45 **Lunch**, Jazzy Restobar, Jock Turcot University Centre
- 1:45-2:45 **Panel 6: Re: Reading Postmodern Poetry I (Simard 125)**
Chair: Zac Schnier (U. Ottawa)
Louis Cabri (U. Windsor)
"The Neomodern in Canadian Postmodern Poetry"
Gregory Betts (Brock U.)
"Postmodern Decadence: Canadian Concrete and Sound Poetry"
- 3:00-4:30 **Panel 7: Re: Reading Postmodern Poetry II (Simard 125)**
Chair: Janice Fiamengo (U. Ottawa)
Katherine McLeod (U. Toronto)
"Sounds Like Canada: Situating Postmodern Listening within Canadian Soundscapes"
Andy Weaver (York U.)
"Darren Wershler-Henry's *the tapeworm foundry* and the Problem of the Sublime"
Christine Stewart (U. Alberta)
"Participatory Discrepancies: a Spinozist Reading of Catriona Strang's *Low Fancy*"
- 4:45-5:45 **Keynote Address (ARTS 257)**
Susan Rudy (U. Calgary) and Pauline Butling (Alberta College of Art and Design):
"Why Postmodernism Now? Or What Recent Poetry is on About Instead"
Introduced by Robert Stacey (U. Ottawa)
- 6:30-10:00 **Dinner** The Atomic Rooster, 303 Bank St.
FIRST PAST THE POST: An Evening of Readings and Performances will feature Gregory Betts, Christian Bök, Louis Cabri, Stephen Cain, Wanda Campbell, Dennis Cooley, Frank Davey, Robert Kroetsch, Christine Stewart, The Max Middle Sound Project, and Andy Weaver. **This is a FREE PUBLIC EVENT.** Everyone is welcome.

Sunday, May 11th

- 9:00-10:30 **Panel 8: Re: Reading Postmodern Fiction**
Chair: Cynthia Sugars (U. Ottawa)
Nora Foster Stovel (U. Alberta)
"Because She's a Woman!: Myth and Metafiction in Carol Shields's *Unless*"
Russell Morton Brown (U. Toronto, Scarborough)
"A Narrative of Kroetsch's Narratives; or, "Postmodern Man on His Last Legs"
Misao Dean (U. Victoria)
"George Bowering and Peonies"
- 10:45-12:15 **Panel 9: The Politics of Postmodern Reading**
Chair: Cheryl Cowdy Crawford
Sylvia Söderlind (Queen's U.)
"F*#&% the Ineffable!: The Allegorical Intention in Ghostmodernism"
Margaret Steffler (Trent U.)
"Moving Beyond the Postmodern Reader as Strategist and Performer: Gathering Together the

	Fragments" <i>Stephen Cain (York U.)</i> "Feeling Ugly About the Postmodern Condition: Two Novels by Lynn Crosbie and Daniel Jones"
12:15-1:15	Buffet Lunch (Glen Clever Room)
1:15-2:15	Panel 10: Visual Interpolations Chair: Kathleen Patchell (U Ottawa) <i>Deborah Bowen (Redeemer U. C.)</i> "Postmodern Realism and Photographic Subjectivity in <i>The Stone Diaries</i> " <i>Wanda Campbell (Acadia U.)</i> "Postmodern Ekphrasis in the Poetry of Anne Compton, Anne Carson, and Anne Simpson"
2:30-4:00	Panel 11: Postmodern Histories Chair: Lauren Gillingham (U. Ottawa) <i>Andrea Cabajsky (U. de Moncton)</i> "Beyond Postmodernism? The New Formalism and Recent Canadian Historical Fiction" <i>Jenn Stephenson (Queen's U.)</i> "Re-performing Microhistories: Postmodern Metatheatricality in Canadian Millennial Drama" <i>Herb Wylie (Acadia U.)</i> "A House Divided: Commodification, Postmodern Relativism, and Historical Fiction"
4:15-5:30	The Past, Present and Future of The Canadian Postmodern Chair and Moderator: Fred Wah (U. Calgary) <i>Robert Kroetsch (U. Manitoba)</i> "Boundary 2 and The Canadian Postmodern" <i>Frank Davey (U. Western Ontario)</i> "Misreadings & Non-readings of The Canadian Postmodern"
	<<To be followed by a moderated open discussion>>
5:30	Farewell

Students, faculty and staff of the Department of English are welcome to attend all panels and keynotes free of charge. Seating may be limited, however, and priority will be given to registered participants. Copies of the symposium program will be available at the registration desk on Friday morning.

ABSTRACTS OF KEYNOTE SPEAKERS and INVITED PRESENTERS

Why Postmodernism Now?

Or, What Recent Experimental Poetries Are On About Instead

Pauline Butling, Alberta College of Art and Design

Susan Rudy, University of Calgary

The Call for Papers for "Re: Reading the Postmodern" defines itself in terms of the following question: If, following Fredric Jameson, the postmodern may be understood to designate, not a set of discursive tropes or literary styles, but the dominant cultural logic of multinational capitalism in a borderless global market, to what extent have "Canadian" and "postmodern" always been fundamentally at odds? In other words, does the postmodern entail the erosion of "the national" as a category for thinking about "our" literature "here", and do "we" care?

We want to rephrase the question as follows: how do the tensions between the national and the transnational torque contemporary poetics? And what other tensions inform this work, such as those between gender and citizenship in Erín Moure's *O Ciudadán?* (Anansi 2002); or between capitalist consumption and capitalist critique in Jeff Derksen's *Transnational Muscle Cars* (Talonbooks 2003); or

within the competing discourses of global exploitation and resistance in Rita Wong's *forage* (Nightwood 2007). We will argue that such tensions are a dynamic component of experimental poetry, whether in the postmodern forms of the 1970s and 1980s or in the contemporary (postmodern?) forms described above.

The Glories of Hindsight: What We Know Now

Linda Hutcheon, University of Toronto

As the saying goes, hindsight = 20/20 vision. Twenty or so years ago, when I published my books *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Canadian Postmodern* which attempted to theorize literary and aesthetic trends in what was then our contemporary culture, I, like other theorists engaged in the task of understanding a new literary concept and movement, could not foresee what would happen to the "postmodern" with time. Sometimes our lack of predictive (in)sight was the result of personal experiential limitations (e.g., never reading/studying children's literature); at other times it was because of new additions to the theoretical matrix (Queer theory, postcolonialism); at still other times, it was our inability to guess the appearance of new art forms (e.g., the rise of the graphic novel) or new media (interactive electronic technology). This paper explores what someone theorizing the postmodern today might want to consider, with the benefit of hindsight.

Misreadings and Non-readings of the Canadian Postmodern

Frank Davey, The University of Western Ontario

I plan to discuss how Canadian postmodern writing is misrepresented when it is conflated with American postmodernism, and how this conflation has led internationally to a lack of recognition that there is a second and unique kind of postmodernism in North America. With reference to early theorizations of the postmodern in Canada, including the work of Linda Hutcheon, I trace the critical reception of non-conforming texts and suggest that the omission of these texts from the history and criticism of the postmodern in Canada has led to a skewed and incomplete view of the postmodern tradition here.

The Journal Boundary 2 and Canadian Postmodernism

Robert Kroetsch, University of Manitoba

I propose to give a personal account of my experience as founder and co-editor, with William Spanos, of "Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature" while I was at the State University of New York at Binghamton in the early 1970s. I will explore the origins of my version of Canadian postmodernism, a concept and set of theoretical concerns which prompted our creation of the journal, and which I continued to develop in my subsequent work in literary criticism, poetry, and fiction.

ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTERS

Postmodern Decadence: Canadian Concrete and Sound Poetry

Gregory Betts, Brock University

Recent theories by Matei Calinescu and Charles Russell articulate a detemporalized "decadent" aesthetic that historically reacts and indeed subverts the progressivist agenda of the avant-garde. As many Canadian postmodern authors have wrestled with and often rejected the idea of the avant-garde, my paper will attempt to situate Canadian postmodernism within the tradition of an ideologically decadent and anti-progressivist writing that emanates from Baudelaire through the Symbolistes, the Dadaists, and, ultimately, postmodern practitioners. My paper will focus on examples of postmodern Canadian concrete and sound poetry by the likes of bpNichol, Judy Copithorne, Beth Janka, and bill bissett as examples of postmodern decadence.

"The Postmodern Impasse" and *The Englishman's Boy*

Jennifer Blair, Rutgers

This paper questions the extent to which Canadian criticism realizes the productive potential of the contradiction between textualized history and "real" historic events, a contradiction that Linda Hutcheon identified as a key feature of "historiographic metafiction." It argues that Vanderhaeghe's emphasis on

Henri Bergson's "intuition" in *The Englishman's Boy* can serve to revive the potential that Hutcheon envisioned. If postmodernism's "linguistic turn" defused the tension between text and reality (with its insistence that reality is linguistically constructed), then Bergson's materialism points us toward new critical avenues that should enable us to overcome this "postmodern impasse."

Getting Ready to Have Been Postmodern

Christian Bök, University of Calgary

"Postmodernism" may be two decades old in Canadian criticism but I suggest that the term has yet to refer to the very genre that it purports to identify. While Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodern literature occupies a marginal position at the periphery of culture, she fails to discuss such fiction on the grounds that it has only a minor status among the major voices in Canada. I believe that, since her study, critics have mobilized the term "postmodernism" in order to appear topical and engaged with the most contemporary vocabularies, while evading any sustained encounter at all with the truly scary cases of postmodern innovation, ignoring the rare cases of a more experimental genre in order to depict as progressive the many cases of a more conservative genre.

Postmodern Realism and Photographic Subjectivity in *The Stone Diaries*

Deborah Bowen, Redeemer University College

In Carol Shields's *The Stone Diaries* (1993), photographs play a silently subversive role in countering the verbal text. Shields's declared intention is to demonstrate the randomness and inadequacy of photographic traces; but in the event, the displaced and re-appropriated materiality of the photographic subjects speaks also of a lost particularity in production and of the ethical imperatives in the hermeneutical enterprise. Hutcheon has ascribed to postmodernism a rethinking of novelistic realism (Canadian Postmodern 21); the centerfold of *The Stone Diaries* suggests that, at its most extravagant, the photographic image may reinstate realism as the more subversive of the two categories.

Postpostmodernism's Prizes: Awards and Canadian Poetry in the Twenty-first Century

Nicholas Bradley, University of Victoria

This paper asks whether it is yet possible to identify a generation of Canadian poets who work in forms that diverge notably from Canadian postmodern poetics; and if so, whether their poetry evinces characteristic aesthetic, ethical, and ideological concerns. The paper examines, as a sample of recent poetic activity, the books shortlisted since 2001 for Canada's two major awards for poetry, the Governor-General's Award and the Griffin Prize. It seeks to investigate whether "postmodern" remains an illuminating way of describing contemporary poetry and how poems by younger writers cast the attitudes and aesthetics of older poets into relief.

Kroetsch's Career; or, "A Narrative of Kroetsch's Narratives; or, 'Postmodern Man on His Last Legs'"

Russell Morton Brown, University of Toronto

"My honors course: The Possibilities of the Novel. Should have been Postmodern Man on His Last Legs."
(Robert Kroetsch, *The Crow Journals* 26)

Kroetsch has said that *The Man from the Creeks* is his last novel, which invites his critics to find a shape in his career as a novelist, a narrative of his narratives, a metanarrative perhaps, that tells the story of a prominent novelist's progress through the last third-the postmodern third?-of Canada's twentieth century. Kroetsch was strongly identified with Canada's version of postmodernism long before he was dubbed "Mr. Canadian Postmodern" by Linda Hutcheon, but a reading of his fiction shows how his postmodernism existed in tension with and was disturbed by other attractions-to a kind of regional postcolonialism on the one hand, and to a desire to continue the very old tradition of the storyteller on the other.

Beyond Postmodernism? The New Formalism and Recent Canadian Historical Fiction

Andrea Cabajsky, Université de Moncton

This paper will address a move "beyond" postmodernism in recent criticism on Canadian historical fiction, towards a "New Formalism," or what Marjorie Levinson (2007) has described as a renewed critical interest in "old-fashioned" matters of plot, character, and setting as problems with important political ramifications. Recent articles by Venema, Ware, and Cabajsky and Grubisic suggest that skepticism towards master narratives and formal playfulness are no longer sufficient objects of celebration in historical fiction. My paper will argue that an awareness of traditional literary forms and conventions should be brought to bear with ethical rigour on recent "postmodern" texts whose appeal to traditional conventions, characters, and plots is not historically neutral.

The Neomodern in Canadian Postmodern Poetry

Louis Cabri, University of Windsor

My paper re-reads Canadian postmodern poetry in relation to cultural signs of the return of the neo-modern. Jameson distinguishes the "untheorized and nameless practice" of what are now called the modernists, from the "conventionally named and recognized productions" (198) of the neo-modernists. But Canadian poetry has had the identifying *name* of modernist shaping its practices from the start, thereby signalling not so much a return to modernist and away from postmodernist values, as a confirmation of existing postmodern practices and conditions under which its poetry has been written.

Feeling Ugly About the Postmodern Condition:

The novels of Lynn Crosbie and Daniel Jones

Stephen Cain, York University

This short paper proposes that Sianne Ngai's study of affect and aesthetics, *Ugly Feelings* (2005), might profitably be paired with Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) to critically illuminate the work of two 1990s Toronto novelists, Daniel Jones and Lynn Crosbie. These novels can be read as aesthetic responses to a lack of agency faced by subjects in the mid-1990s: Crosbie's novel articulates many conflicting and irresolvable issues surrounding the sexual, ethical, political, and journalistic elements of the Bernardo trial, while Jones's novel can be read as an reflection of the economic and emotional stagnation of the artistic community during the same time period. Yet, when viewed in light of Lyotard's insights into knowledge and power, an examination of these two novels, and the question of affect within them, will provide an example of the postmodern condition in Canada during what can now be regarded as crucial cultural period.

Anne Cubed: Postmodern Ekphrasis in the Poetry of

Anne Compton, Anne Carson, and Anne Simpson

Wanda Campbell, Acadia University

Postmodernism's use of "the visual" in the literary text can be explored through ekphrastic poetry (from the Greek for "telling in full"), defined by James Heffernan as "the verbal representation of visual representation." In postmodern ekphrasis, the triangle of conversation between the experience of artist, poet, and reader is extended to even more voices, a polyphony that challenges navigation. Through a close examination of ekphrastic poems by Anne Compton, Anne Carson and Anne Simpson and the images of Vermeer, Renoir, Hopper and Hawkins that inspired them, we will explore the permeable borders of postmodern poetics.

Linda Hutcheon's Postmodern Irony

Adam Carter, University of Lethbridge

This paper revisits Linda Hutcheon's theorization of a historically specific postmodern irony in her work preceding *Irony's Edge* and reads this theory within and against the theoretical explorations of irony provided by Friedrich Schlegel and Paul de Man. I will argue that Hutcheon's understanding of postmodern irony involved both a suppression of a potential affinity with what has come to be known as "romantic irony," but also the covering over of a more profoundly deconstructive and abyssal operation of irony. In *Irony's Edge* Hutcheon seems to recognize that her earlier attempts to historicize irony constituted "an utter red herring," yet she never, to my knowledge, reflects, as the latter part of my paper will endeavour to do, on how this realization might threaten the writing of literary history and of a "poetics of postmodernism."

The Canadian Postmodern Writer Goes Abroad

Dennis Cooley, St. John's College, University Of Manitoba

The texts that came out of Canadian modernism tended to construct travel as an occasion for sudden and illuminating connection (Earle Birney), or as an opportunity for intense aesthetic appreciation (P.K. Page). What we might call postmodern travel texts are less inclined to think of their narratives as offering life-altering or life-intensifying opportunities. Frank Davey's *Abbotsford Guide* to India names the traveller as suspect in his motives and subject to intense irony. Robert Kroetsch in "The Frankfurt Bahnhof" depicts a bewildered, disoriented, and almost fumbling figure who happens upon bizarre but inexplicable connections. In Eli Mandel's travel memoir, *Life Sentence*, the Mandel figure is often diffident, even hesitant, in his meanderings. My claim would be, then, that the postmodern traveller is marked by limited confidence and modest expectations. S/he certainly harbours no hopes of being brought into a transcendental moment.

Reading the Suburb as a (Canadian?) (Postmodern?) Space

Cheryl Cowdy Crawford, York University

Like the suburban communities hovering on the borders of the metropolis, the suburban literary landscape haunts the margins of our national literary canon-its presence and meaning essential to our understanding of our culture. Like the city, the wilderness and the small town, suburban space is a product of our society and culture, inevitably changing what space means in relation to assumptions about national identity. Frequently characterized as ambiguous and amorphous, my paper will argue that the suburb as it is represented in a variety of post-war Canadian texts works well as a spatial metaphor for a postmodern, postmillennial Canadian sensibility that is as vague and contradictory as the dream of suburbia itself.

George Bowering and Peonies

Misao Dean, University of Victoria

The narrator claims that *A Short Sad Book* is both "ghost-written" and "ghost-ridden," written by and ridden by the ghost of the novel. The book deconstructs each of the conventions of the realist novel in turn, including setting, description, dialogue, character and plot, not merely by calling attention to their construction but also by including the puzzled comments of friends who've read the draft. This rejection of the novel is only the first of what seems to be a total rejection of totalising systems of representation - including thematic theories of Canadian literature and the supposed dominance of Ontario-based scholars and scholarship in the discourse of nationality. However, this "refus global" is only seeming. Bowering naturalises something else in its place - the fragmentary post-modern novel-- as though, despite the theory he relies upon to attack the novel, there were still a "natural" kind of writing and a natural kind of reading. The central metaphor he uses to naturalise his own practice are the processes of growth, blossoming and decay (peonies are a central image), and the "normal" interpersonal relationships of writer and reader - while for the narrator descriptive language is not transparent, direct conversation with the reader is.

The Fallacy of Canadian Postmodernism:

The Absence of National Identity in the Works of Douglas Coupland

Erica Fischer, University of Western Florida

The postmodern dissolution of the metanarrative of national identity that is embraced by Frederic Jameson's borderless global market is epitomized in the works of Douglas Coupland, and as such, Coupland's work stands as evidence for the dissolution of national and cultural boundaries that results from the dominant late capitalist postmodern logic of the 21st century. Following Jameson's theory of postmodernity, the study of postmodernism in a Canadian context is a fallacy because Jameson's conception does not allow for a specific designation of any particular national form of postmodernism. If one were to try to define Canadian postmodern literature, the conception would then become a hyperreal manifestation of itself, very much like the constructed identities Coupland examines in his novels.

Post-Theory Canadian Postmodernism:

An Architectonic of Canadian Literary and Visual Culture

Richard J. Lane, Malaspina University College

Canadian postmodernism is a powerful theoretical mode of cultural questioning, analysis and interrogation, of landscape, of imposed colonial codes, of globalization, of identity-formation. I will argue, with reference

to Stan Douglas, Eden Robinson, and Moshe Safdie, that post-theory Canadian postmodernism is a spatial event or *Ereignis*. I will examine three virtual architectural or city spaces to show how literary and visual cultures are important components of the Ereignis of Canadian postmodernism: Stan Douglas's Vancouver in *Journey Into Fear*; Eden Robinson's Vancouver in her Haisla First Nations novels and short stories; and Canada's capital city as produced and oriented via Moshe Safdie's National Gallery of Canada.

Kroetsch and Kupchenko: The Paradoxical Centrality of the Regional "Ex-Centric"

Lindy A. Ledohowski, University of Toronto

How can a postmodern politics of resistance located in "the specific and the local" (Hutcheon 175) account for those who feel as though they only have one foot in "the specific and the local" and one foot elsewhere - even an imagined/remembered elsewhere? Can a postmodern prairie aesthetic (like that ascribed to Robert Kroetsch, "Mr. Canadian Postmodern" [160] for Hutcheon) account for those stuck between places/subjectivities/times as diasporic subjects so often are? My paper explores these questions through a specific case-study. I compare Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* that playfully explodes masculinist traditions and the mythology of the West to Yuri Kupchenko's *The Horseman of Shandro Crossing* that is set in the same Alberta locale and which focuses on a horse-breeder who is the antithesis of Hazard Lepage. Diasporic considerations (and the related postcolonial ones), emphasizing multiple and complicated subject-positions that have come to the fore in the past twenty years since Hutcheon's articulation of Canadian postmodernism may offer insights into our new post-postmodern moment.

Reconciling Regionalism: Environmental Determinism, Spatial Epistemology and the Canadian Postmodern

Alexander MacLeod, St. Mary's University

This paper looks at two novels that illustrate what Edward Soja would describe as the dominant "spatial epistemology" of Canadian Postmodernist fiction: Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* and Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma*. Although readings of geography and nationalized social space play central roles in both novels and though both texts can be studied as fictions that are simultaneously regionalist and postmodernist, *The Englishman's Boy* and *Girlfriend in a Coma* differ in dramatic ways. The paper argues that Vanderhaeghe's well-known, already canonical novel essentially confirms the environmentally deterministic spatial conventions of Canadian postmodernism, while Coupland's more flexible and explicitly "Americanized" reading of social space offers an alternative model.

Sounds Like Canada:

Situating Postmodern Listening within Canadian Soundscapes

Katherine McLeod, University of Toronto

In this paper, I ask what the possibilities are for theorizing postmodern listening. Moreover, what does this practice call for from its audience, particularly in the case of polyphonic poetry? Focusing on the cultural politics of polyphony, this paper examines Robert Bringhurst's *Ursa Major: A Polyphonic Masque for Speakers and Dancers* (2003) and George Elliott Clarke's *Québécois: A Jazz Fantasia in Three Cantos* (2003). In working towards a postmodern listening through polyphony, I pursue the implications of positing dissonance as a mediation of cultures. In other words, how does postmodern listening both inform and respond to the multivocality of Canadian soundscapes?

Canada's Postmodern Condition:

Multiculturalism and the Ethics / Politics of Identity

Allison Mackey, McMaster University

Popular and political debates over Canadian multiculturalism exhibit a sense of intense anxiety: on one hand, there is a fear of anarchy in the perceived lack of national identity - the proliferation of "ethnic enclaves" and lack of social cohesion - while on the other, there is a fear that "integration" in fact means assimilation. In the decades since its adoption as state policy in Canada, official multiculturalism has come under attack by numerous critics who have traced its historical development. However, these thinkers are strangely hesitant about condemning multiculturalism *tout court*, wanting to maintain that there is something worth rescuing in the ideal of multiculturalism. In this paper I briefly outline some of these criticisms, before imagining the possibility of reviving the ethical impetus behind multiculturalism as a

critical and self-reflexive project. Despite postmodern celebrations of "hybridity," I explore whether it is possible for multiculturalism to operate beyond the service of the neoliberal global economy, especially given the commodification of difference in (multi)cultural production in Canada.

**Postmodern Architectures and Anne Carson's
"The Fall of Rome: A Traveller's Guide"**

Ian Rae, McGill University

This presentation will draw comparisons between the narrative strategies and architectural motifs of Anne Carson's long poem "The Fall of Rome: A Traveller's Guide" and the theory and practice of postmodern architecture. The presentation will survey the two principal phases of postmodern architecture, beginning with early designs that emphasized historical pastiche, and moving toward architectures that refined the practice of pastiche by developing continuity around notions of torsion and flow. It will then compare these architectural trends to Carson's long poem, her use of pastiche, and her development of narrative continuities through architectural and painterly allusions.

**Postmodern Cultural Workers and the Institutionalization of
Canadian Literary Histories**

Karis Shearer, The University of Western Ontario

Postmodern poets Robert Kroetsch, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, Roy Miki, and George Bowering have all engaged in a variety of extra-poetic activities, thereby involving themselves in the production, distribution, dissemination, and theorization of their own work and the work of their fellow poets. These cultural efforts often serve to provide a context for the writers' own radical poetics and marginalized social/cultural concerns. This paper focuses primarily on critical responses to the postmodern cultural worker, drawing on such texts as Pierre Bourdieu's *Fields of Cultural Production* and Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* to examine the critical assumptions behind these responses. Ultimately, I argue that the poets' interventions self-consciously draw attention to themselves as interested interventions and in doing so highlight the material processes of canonization and deny the possibility of the disinterested critical ideal espoused by Arnold and his followers.

"F*#&% the Ineffable!: The Allegorical Intention in Ghostmodernism."

Sylvia Söderlind, Queen's University

This paper will address the identification of allegory as "the *topos* and trope of interlinkage between the modern and the postmodern" (Azade Seyah). Allegory depends on "the shape of the signifier" and I examine how modernism's striving to 'eff' the ineffable morphs into postmodernism's desire to 'F...' it. The struggle over interpretive control between authorial will (modernism's view of the author as the one who 'effs' the ineffable) and readerly *agency* (the reader's subjective pleasure as the locus of interpretation) in novels by Timothy Findley and Leonard Cohen is allegorized -- in a way presaging current political rhetoric--in fascism.

**Moving Beyond the Postmodern Reader as Strategist and Performer:
Gathering Together the Fragments**

Margaret Steffler, Trent University

The current political climate in Canada is calling for the Humanities to be accountable and relevant to audiences and readerships beyond itself. This paper proposes that until we are willing to move beyond the restrictive and self-reflexive performance of the strategic postmodern reader, we will be limited by the habits of postmodernism. We need to *respond* to postmodern discourse rather than imitate it. It is in our response that we will move beyond the postmodern insistence on prolonging exposure and subversion, and thereby manage to "link life and art" in order to have an impact on what is being exposed and subverted. The paper uses examples from texts by Rohinton Mistry, Carol Shields and Adele Wiseman in order to argue for the need to be open to the possibility of coherence as we re-read the postmodern.

Re-performing Microhistories: Postmodern Metatheatricity in Canadian Millennial Drama

Jenn Stephenson, Queen's University

The primary focus of this paper is to engage critically with "historiographic metafiction" (Linda Hutcheon) as a defining characteristic of postmodern poetics and to adapt the dual terms: "historiographic" and

"metafiction" to the context of millennial Canadian drama. In terms of historiography these plays, for the most part, look at history on an intimate scale invariably reflecting personal or local histories. This shift in magnitude is significant since it highlights not only the construction of one's life as history but also focuses attention on the construction of individual subjectivity in language. By treating metatheatricality, rather than metafiction, this study again will highlight basic processes of theatricality, that is, how we construct in perception fictional subjects and the fictional worlds they inhabit. Performative language is the link between character-playwrights who perform history in worlds-within and actual-world playwrights who also create worlds with words. This paper will examine the metatheatrical cross-world effects of performative acts at work in the world of the play as a real world event and the fictional world(s) resident within the play as they pertain to individual histories and the creation of a fictional subject.

Participatory Discrepancies: Reading Spinoza in Strang

Christine Stewart, University of Alberta

This paper investigates how Baruch Spinoza's theory of immanence as applied in Louis Zukofsky's poetics manifests in Canadian poet Catriona Strang's *Low Fancy* (1993). Strang's homolingusitic translation of the medieval Carmina Burana locates the inherent state of democracy of the Spinozist metaphysics in the physical form of poetic language. By reading Strang through the work of Spinoza and present-day Spinozists, Antonio Negri, Gabriel Albiac, Louis Althusser, Luce Irigaray and Gilles Deleuze, who read Spinoza in order to address injurious contemporary hierarchies: linguistic, social and political, I argue that *Low Fancy* facilitates democratic systems and subjects in language. That is, at the intersection of reader and text, *Low Fancy* disrupts established subject configurations and articulates alternate modes of being: new subjects-necessary, relational, in process, local and temporary.

"'Because She's a Woman': Myth and Metafiction in Carol Shields's Most Feminist Novel, *Unless*"

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In *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988), Linda Hutcheon observes the inherent conflicts between postmodernism and feminism, but Carol Shields succeeds in combining feminism and meta-fictionality. *Unless* (2002), Shields's last novel, is her most explicitly feminist and metafictional text. To convey her feminist vision, Shields revises that most female of myths, the ancient Greek tale of fertility goddess Demeter's search for her lost daughter Persephone in a postmodernist revision of that ancient archetype, the Elusian mysteries. Shields also employs metafictionality as an antidote to tragedy, as her narrator, Reta Winters, uses her parodic fiction to understand her daughter Norah's going "underground," like Persephone, in response to female disempowerment.

Eruptions of Canadian Ecocriticism: Linda Hutcheon's Postmodern Ecological Ethic

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Linda Hutcheon's essay, "Eruptions of Postmodernity, the Postcolonial and the Ecological," brings together two potentially antagonistic critical methods, postmodernism and ecocriticism. Although she argues that postmodernism offers a means of responding to the harmful consequences of modern events, ecocritical theory in Canada has, for the most part, shied away from postmodernism. As Hutcheon argues, literary criticism needs to move past its dominant paradigm for reconciling nature and culture, Northrop Frye's romantic description of the process of taming the land and making it productive (153). This paper will attempt to illuminate Hutcheon's definition of the postmodern ecological ethic by reading her essay against post-structuralist writers like William Cronon, Donna Haraway and Karla Armbruster, who argue the need to question the rigid way in which conventional environmental thought defines concepts like wilderness and look instead to evaluate nature as a discursive construct.

Darren Wershler-Henry's *the tapeworm foundry* and the Problem of the Sublime

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Darren Wershler-Henry's 2000 experimental poem *the tapeworm foundry* evokes a strong feeling of the sublime in the reader, a feeling of pleasure mixed with pain. In my paper, I will briefly explain how the tapeworm foundry provokes (at least in me) the sublime emotion. I will then proceed to argue that the

sublime emotion as defined by Kant and refined by Lyotard lies at the heart of a critical powerplay over experimental postmodern texts. Specifically, I will focus on how, when a reader declares that a text provokes in him or her the sublime emotion, such a statement is as much a play for power (a play in which the reader that attempts to display his or her cultural agency and affirm an individual subjectivity) as it is a desire to praise the text.

Bowering, Postmodernism and Canadian Nationalism: A Short Sad Book

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The relationship between postmodernism and Canadian cultural nationalism is a complex and paradoxical one. On the one hand, most of the writing which has come to be categorized as 'postmodern' first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, parallel with the growth of anglo-Canadian nationalism. Yet if we follow Fredric Jameson's argument that postmodernism is the "cultural logic of late capitalism," then postmodernism and Canadian cultural nationalism would seem to be at odds. My paper considers this paradox through a discussion of George Bowering's 1977 text *A Short Sad Book*, a text I argue represents a watershed in Bowering's relationship to Canadian nationalism and an increasingly sophisticated embrace of postmodernism in his writing.

A House Divided:

Commodification, Postmodern Relativism, and Historical Fiction

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One of the central debates postmodernism concerns its political valences, an issue which resonates within the genre of historical fiction. The linguistic turn in historical studies has been paralleled in historical fiction that foregrounds the process of constructing history, and the interest in social history is mirrored by fiction writers writing anti-authoritarian, revisionist versions of traditional history. However, historical fiction also involves an aestheticizing of historical material that underscores its affinities and potential complicity with consumer culture. This paper examines the legacy of postmodernism for our understanding of history by exploring its reverberations in Canadian historical fiction.