

Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy interview members and volunteers of the Kootenay School of Writing

This interview was conducted by Butling and Rudy on March 29, 1992, in the KSW office at 306-152 West Hastings Street.

Transcribed by Donato Mancini in March - April 2009.

Catherine Bennett: I'm Catherine Bennett.

Nancy Shaw: Nancy Shaw.

Susan Clark: Susan Clark.

Judy Radul: Judy Radul.

Gerald Creede: Gerald Creede.

Lary Bremner: Larry Bremner

Maxine Gadd: Maxine Gadd

David Ayre: David Ayre.

Stephen Forth: Stephen Forth.

Lisa Robertson: Lisa Robertson.

Dan Farrell: Dan Farrell.

Pauline Butling: So let's forget about this stupid machine.

David Ayre: Maybe you could uh explain first a little bit about what you're doing.

Pauline Butling: Yeah, um....

Gerald Creede: We're not on trial here.

Pauline Butling: You're not what?

Gerald Creede: We're not on trial here.

Nancy Shaw: That's what I felt like.

Pauline Butling: Um, we're investigating writing uh poetry in Canada in the last 20 or so years but um. It's partly a historical thing, in the period that's been called postmodern, but it's also partly we wanted to look at what young writers are doing now. What people are doing now that doesn't necessarily - well it ties in with that period but there seems to be a kind of shift going on now, that people are moving in other directions than the main ones for the last while. So it's kind of multi-directional or at least two-directional in that there's a body of work that exists by writers who have been writing since the sixties, and who have anywhere from a half-dozen to two-dozen books who write poetry. And it's writing that hasn't been talked about much in the critical world. I mean Margaret Atwood has been talked about a lot but there's another whole stream of writing that hasn't been hasn't had much attention paid to it and that's part of what we're looking at. We're using the term 'postmodern' at the moment for lack of a better one, but we're not sure we'll end up with that one. And then there seems to be another thing happening that you people are certainly part of that's uh going somewhere else or doing some other things and that's been going on for the last while. So does that help? Maybe Susan wants to say something has something she wants to add to that.

Catherine Bennett: What are you going to do with your research?

Pauline Butling: Well, we're planning to write a series of articles um to put together into a book. We propose to produce a book, but we don't want it to be a book in the sense of a

single argument from beginning to end. So we're planning to do just some articles that go off you know in whatever direction. Perhaps, one idea we have, is that we might be able to interweave some of the interview material into the book so that it would never seem like a single voice or even a double voice book so there could be a whole range of material in the book. But that's just an idea, we don't know how it would work out. If the interview proves to be really useful we might write a book of interviews. At the moment the way we conceive of it, it would perhaps blend in with some of the interview material. Anything to interrupt the monologic critic's voice, which seems it would be good to interrupt. Part of the idea to include the interview material too was to place the writing in more of a context than just the critical essay usually gives it, to give some sense of a social and historical context, so. But that's all very tentative. We don't imagine doing any writing for another year, at least. We're just going around talking to people and reading like mad and tracking down people like Larry to get books and just trying to fill in all the gaps in our own reading.

Susan Rudy: I think part of the problem is even the stuff that's widely available and widely published, even the people who have been working since the 60s, there hasn't been anything written on those people at all either, and then there are people who have been widely published and who haven't had any attention at all and then there are people who are publishing a book or two. There's just nothing interesting written about it and we're both interested in finding out what people are thinking about when they're writing and that's why we want to interview writers too, not just read you know off in Calgary by ourselves.

Maxine Gadd: Awww.

[general laughter]

Susan Rudy: Fred.

Pauline Butling: Listen to Fred, yeah. Argue with Fred.

[general laughter]

Susan Rudy: And we really don't - there have been studies of postmodernism in terms of fiction by Linda Hutcheon - I don't know if any of you know her - but it's a really dry kind of um you know analysis that's so overreaching you know and it doesn't say much about anything an Pauline and I really don't want it to be that way. When we end up writing this book which might turn into a couple of books we really want to have time to talk about say this chapbook and what's going on in here in a really slow way um and I think that attending to individual writers in a way like this will make us do that. I mean I'm not going to be able to say oh *Believing in the World* does this, you know on to the next book. So I really don't want it to be that. I hope the interviews will help us to see what you're each doing in a much more particular kind of way.

David Ayre: So uh well I don't want to start this all over again, but I want to make sure this is being recorded, otherwise it's sort of a ... I've got a tape recorder though that you can actually play back and you can see if it's actually recording.

Maxine Gadd: The sound levels get quite bad in here, because you've got the traffic and you've got the...

[recording cuts off]

[recording resumes, after some time has passed]

Pauline Butling: So we tossed out some ideas here of things we might talk about but these were just some things we thought you might like to talk about so if you don't want

to talk about these things then tell us what you want to talk about. That would be fine. But it seemed as though these were some common issues - not to try and you know homogenise everybody into one group - but these just seem to be some things that were coming up as concerns.

Susan Rudy: And we haven't read all of your stuff, but we have read what we had available. And we didn't have working copies of everything either, so I'm sorry if we haven't read your particular stuff very closely.

Pauline Butling: But like the first question about communities. One of the things we're interested in finding out is how one book or books relates to other books. Thinking of a history of books rather than a history of writers, and so that's why our first question is about communities. When we say communities we're thinking in terms of who have you been reading and what books are important to you and how that sort of interconnection of books works.

Lisa Robertson: I think it's hard to sort of separate it out that way in this particular community because I think we primarily read each other's work in manuscript form as well as in published form. And also our um readings are really important in that way to form context for people to work in.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah and also like just our interaction with, say, the visual arts community or performance or whatever. That's I mean that's a real strong influence as well.

Pauline Butling: So there's a kind of oral kind of contemporary community.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Maxine Gadd: But you guys listen to Bernstein and all these characters that come in from San Francisco and New York and Chicago. It's been a real vortex, this place, for the past, I don't know how many years -

Nancy Shaw: Eight!

Maxine Gadd: - of very interesting American and Canadian writers, eh?

Susan Rudy: Which Canadian writers? Are those the American writers you're most interested in, people like Bernstein?

Stephen Forth: Not *really*.

Lisa Robertson: I think that everybody has their own different groups of writers.

Nancy Shaw: Different things.

Susan Rudy: So that's really multiple then.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah.

Stephen Forth: Well I think - I have a somewhat different situation, because I was of course I was living in Tokyo when I first heard about this, about KSW and *Writing* magazine. And it was actually through an American poet that lives in Paris.

Pauline Butling: Joey Seamus [?]?

Stephen Forth: Yeah through Joey that I first heard about KSW and Colin Browne. And I started corresponding with Colin Browne and to a lesser extent Jeff Derksen and Susan [Clark] after I saw some of their work in *Writing*. And that was one of the main reasons I decided to move to Vancouver from Tokyo, is because there seemed to be interesting writing and interesting magazines being published here. And um for me the local community here was always part of a larger community that included people in Paris, in San Francisco and New York. Mostly those.

Susan Rudy: But not necessarily the rest of Canada.

Stephen Forth: I had a lot of trouble finding things that interested me in the rest of Canada. I wrote, actually, I wrote to Colin Browne asking him to suggest magazines from other parts of Canada and the only one he actually came up with was Rampike, which um yeah needs a better typographer.

[general giggling]

Susan Rudy: Do you have thoughts on that, the rest of you?

Gerald Creede: On what?

Susan Clark: On Rampike's typography?

[general laughter]

Susan Rudy: No. On who your community is, and if you have a community in Canada and among yourselves.

Nancy Shaw: I think we certainly do have a community in Canada, obviously, like people like ourselves and you know Steve McCaffery, in Calgary and I mean you know I mean I think that's your experience that I have -

Stephen Forth: Chris Dewdney, too. He's not necessarily popular at this moment in time, but um.

Pauline Butling: It's interesting that you people came together from a variety of backgrounds, and you have some similar interests so -

Pauline Butling: And places.

Susan Clark: I'm from away too.

Pauline Butling: You're from where?

Susan Clark: I'm from away too.

Maxine Gadd: Here's Catriona.

Pauline Butling: Yeah.

Susan Rudy: Away where?

Susan Clark: Vancouver Island, and that's a very different writing community, so.

Pauline Butling: So and part of this question I guess is concerned with what you might have been reading before you even met ..

[noise of Catriona Strang coming into the room]

Maxine Gadd: We'd better stop for a minute otherwise you're going to be blotted out. This is Catriona Strang.

Pauline Butling: Catriona, do you just want to announce yourself so we have your voice on the tape here?

Catriona Strang: Hi, I'm Catriona.

Pauline Butling: I think you have to say it louder.

Catriona Strang: Hi! I'm *Catriona*.

Pauline Butling: Um what you were reading before you got together as a group, I mean I wonder how all that happens if there were certain things that you started reading as a writer that then lead you in certain directions that meant that you and Nancy might find something in common.

Susan Clark: Well what happened to me is that I came to do some classes at the Kootenay School so - with Jeff and with Kathryn MacLeod. So that's what happened, suddenly a whole new world opened up. And I was feeling pretty dissatisfied with what was going on the island.

Pauline Butling: Oh, you come out of UVic, then, sort of, a little bit.

Susan Clark: Not really, but. A little bit. And certainly that West Coast renaissance community.

Pauline Butling: Oh, you mean Michael Davidson and that?

Susan Clark: Yeah. Robin ...[names of poets]

Maxine Gadd: Did you do Raddle Moon, or no?

Susan Rudy: That's you isn't it.

Susan Clark: Um hum. Yeah that's me.

Maxine Gadd: And what other ones? Did you did you - who did Motel?

Catriona Strang: That was Kathryn and Doug and Julia.

Catriona Strang: Well, not Julia now.

Gerald Creede: Is there still Motel around?

Susan Clark: Yup. If more people would subscribe to Motel there'd be another Motel very soon.

Stephen Forth: You mean you have to subscribe more than once?

Susan Clark: A *little* short on funds. A self-supporting magazine.

Maxine Gadd: Eternally.

Susan Clark: Pardon me?

Stephen Forth: Do you have to subscribe more than once?

Susan Clark: *Yes!*

[general laughter]

Pauline Butling: Judy, I think it would be interesting to hear each person's sort of personal history.

Judy Radul: Oh yeah?

Pauline Butling: Do you want to say anything?

Judy Radul: Um well, I came out of a different background. I studied visual arts at SFU, I did a lot of performances and my performances had text in them, and I did a lot of readings at clubs and stuff like that. And then the Western Front asked me to do the poetry program there, to coordinate that for a little while, and I knew I didn't know what I was going to do so... Through mutual friends I just met up with Gerald Creede and um Jeff and people like that and then I did a few events at the Western Front and uh and then I started doing things here, doing workshops here, then the Kootenay School sort of supported me by asking me to read and that's how I got involved.

Pauline Butling: Yeah you work with a lot of image-text stuff don't you?

Judy Radul: Yeah, I do a lot of performance.

Maxine Gadd: Superb video.

Judy Radul: Oh, yeah.

Maxine Gadd: Amongst other things.

Susan Rudy: Should we do everybody Pauline? Yeah, let's do it.

Gerald Creede: Well uh in the early '80s I started reading this Language writing stuff because Kevin Davies subscribed to a lot of small press stuff. So he really found this stuff out. Our neighbourhood, we weren't - I think the school was starting up around this time but we didn't know them or weren't associated with them.

Pauline Butling: Are you from Vancouver?

Gerald Creede: Naw, I'm from Ontario. But I've lived here for 12 or uh 13 years now. And Peter Culley and Kevin Davies and I started reading uh Barrett Watten and Clark Coolidge and Lyn Hejinian - were the early ones, I think. And all American, and all from

San Francisco or New York. And then we met up with Jeff quite by accident, just when he and Colin or Colin were getting the school on Broadway started. And then Larry - it was about the same time we started our group that lead to Tsunami Books - was Larry. Me, Larry, Arnie Haraldson, and Peter Culley. We started meeting every Sunday for a while to talk about about the way the stuff we'd just started reading out of New York and San Francisco was influencing our writing. And it became a great influence right off. And in a way Kevin and I started - I changed immediately the way I sort of the prose stories I was trying to write. I started trying to write like Clark Coolidge and Barrett Watten. And uh and what's his name uh - Silliman, was one of the first guys we read at the beginning too. Well no I'm not like them but what I took to see their method, then I started using their method which was wide open compared to anything I'd read. And then people came, like the uh East side sort of Writing magazine guys. And none of us except Kevin until recently were ever connected with the school. I was - I was only - I never was invited to a meeting. I sat in on a meeting. The only group thing they sort of did was right from the early mid-'80s, '84, '85, they had these group shows. And so that was the one time the school said well these are our contributors and we want a piece of art from them now to sell for our art gallery. So we were exploited right from the start.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: You were grateful, too.

Gerald Creede: And then, my own thing, the genesis of the school of writing, like, like it's not anything like it was to me six years ago. It was Colin, and Jeff was a lot of fun in those days. My buddy Gary Whitehead was there. Now it's all, I don't know. I can barely get informed when there's a reading coming up. So things change you know.

[general laughter]

Gerald Creede: So anyway, that's how we started in the early '80s anyway. And that's how - and there was never a Canadian influence except McCaffery, but he was influenced by the guys that he met from New York. And he was doing work with Charles Bernstein - and who's that big collaboration, you remember that big book they put out in the early '80s? - that was McCaffery and Bernstein and a few other guys, a big collaborative text. I forget what it was called.

Maxine Gadd: Legend.

Gerald Creede: Legend, yeah. And well when there was that group - when there was that conference in 1985.

Pauline Butling: Did you go to that?

Gerald Creede: Yeah, yeah we were there every day.

Pauline Butling: I'm curious to know - just to interrupt for a minute - how many people were at New Poetics Colloquium. Is that what you're talking about?

Gerald Creede: Well, yeah. The New Po - that was 1985.

Maxine Gadd: I didn't get to the last day.

Stephen Forth: I was there for a couple, I was living in Japan at the time that that happened.

Pauline Butling: So you just dropped in!

Stephen Forth: Yeah uh I happened to be in Vancouver that particular week, so I was there for a few days.

Maxine Gadd: A lot of them were. Larry too.

Lary Bremner: Yeah I was. I mean, I think most of us were.

Gerald Creede: Yeah.

Nancy Shaw: No, no way.

Gerald Creede: You were, you were there.

Nancy Shaw: *I* was. I was involved yeah but I think a lot of people were not there. I think a lot of people came sort of after that.

Catriona Strang: I was.

David Ayre: You were, you were there.

Lisa Robertson: I made a point of not going, because at that time I was uh taking a course with Robin Blaser, and he announced in course in our class that Language poets were uh were - were evil.

[general laughter]

Pauline Butling: You know but he came, did you know that he came?

Nancy Shaw: Evil?

Lisa Robertson: *As his student*, well as his student that was good enough for me.

Maxine Gadd: He actually said? What did he say? Do you remember his statements?

Lisa Robertson: You look out they don't pay attention to the soul, he said.

Catriona Strang: He said - yeah I remember what he said! He said where they start to uh - I'm *with* them where they're fooling around with language, but when they start to deny the presence of the soul, that's where I part company with them.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: The presence of *soul*!

Pauline Butling: That's wonderful. That's vintage Blaser.

Lisa Robertson: So that's sort of what like the Canadian - older Canadian literature community sort of the effects that I think -

Pauline Butling: That's the way it came to you.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah.

Maxine Gadd: I wonder if they're on the Index.

Lisa Robertson: I think they still do function that way.

Nancy Shaw: They still do that, yeah. I mean, people who came for um Bill Berksen's reading and a lot of Cap College students came and they were just like you know Language writing kind of they were talking about it in school but they're sort of not sure about it and whether it's elitist and whether it's impenetrable and whether it's nihilistic and things like that. And so it's very interesting hearing that it's you know a continuing attitude.

Catriona Strang: I remember not really knowing what it was and not being able to find out but knowing that it was really bad.

[general laughter]

Susan Clark: Like sex.

Catriona Strang: It was kinda like sex.

Catherine Bennett: That's what makes it so attractive.

Maxine Gadd: Some forms of it.

Nancy Shaw: And there's also an attitude that this... it's like the monolithic, doctrinaire school of Language writing, and it's not at all. I mean I think that was an influence I think on a lot of us.

Catriona Strang: Yes, exactly.

Nancy Shaw: I think that Gerry said it's a real, it's a methodology, it's something that allows you to sort of look at writing and it's not mystified and things like that. I mean that's how I use it as sort of a generative thing but I wouldn't call myself a doctrinaire Language writer.

Catriona Strang: Oh no, Nancy?

Maxine Gadd: It's pretty interesting though. I'd like to hear you talk about that more.

Nancy Shaw: No it is. It's funny. We were just shocked. It's like "*What!?* You read us as an *issue?*"

Stephen Forth: I don't think anybody in 1992 -

Pauline Butling: I don't think of it as a doctrine.

Stephen Forth: Well I don't think anyone thinks of themselves as Language writers either. That's just something that happened.

Lisa Robertson: It's something that gets cast from somebody else -

Nancy Shaw: A perception from outside -

Stephen Forth: Or Language-centred writing or whatever -

Lisa Robertson: Older poets seeking to represent *us*, tend to use that term.

Pauline Butling: There was a term that somebody used in the introduction [to the New West Coast writing issue of West Coast Line] 'social poetics'. In that one there.

Susan Rudy: In West Coast Line?

Pauline Butling: The West Coast Line one.

Nancy Shaw: Or "socially-based" or -

Pauline Butling: Is that any good?

Nancy Shaw: I haven't read it for a long time.

Maxine Gadd: Well, there's definitely a strain of deconstruction. You can't deny that, can you?

Pauline Butling: But that's not exclusive to Language writing.

Maxine Gadd: No but it's it's, it almost is a doctrine. I uh, there's certain poems I wouldn't dare read here. Ha ha ha!

[general laughter]

Nancy Shaw: You should!

Catriona Strang: You should do it!

Maxine Gadd: I mean, I have a definite con - no, because I know exactly what Peter Culley will do and all the rest of you guys.

Catriona Strang: Well *fuck 'em*.

Maxine Gadd: No, but but but there's something in that.

Susan Clark: That's worth a few hours' discussion.

Susan Rudy: Yeah, really. What does that mean?

Maxine Gadd: There's something in that. The poems you don't dare utter.

Susan Rudy: What poems don't you dare utter? What are they like?

Maxine Gadd: Well, anything sentimental or -

Nancy Shaw: With soul!

Lisa Robertson: I don't know you know, again I think this is sort of like this kind of structure that is somewhat projected. I mean, people feel really uncomfortable I think. That this is you know like a group with an eight year history. And I don't know, there's always all these kind of debates of inclusion and exclusion and what not.

Maxine Gadd: I don't mind. I mean, I think discipline is really important - ha ha ha ha ha.

Stephen Forth: That discipline is decided by you?

Catriona Strang: So you won't read your really crappy poems here, is that what you're saying? So we're doing you a favour, is that what you're saying?

Maxine Gadd: That's right.

Stephen Forth: Do we dare ask you where you'd read the crappy poems?

Maxine Gadd: There's lots of places.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: And they'll like them better than the good ones. You know it. You know where those places are.

Pauline Butling: Well, we got to Larry. We want to sort of loosely - oh no, Larry -

Maxine Gadd: No, Larry hasn't said - Larry's got a lot to say.

Lary Bremner: There's not a good deal to say. Should I backtrack too?

Maxine Gadd: Talk about what you've published and everything.

Lary Bremner: Well I, I figure I've had two incarnations. One as a university student, who went to SFU and studied with Robin Blaser and George Bowering and Lionel Kearns and those people. And just an English major who didn't really know what was going on but was interested in Canadian writing. So I'd read McCaffery and bpNichol, Gerry Gilbert, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, Nicole Brossard - people like that. Names that are enormous now. And then I got completely bored and disillusioned with poetry generally, until these people - these people younger than myself - came along and until that conference happened. And then when the conference came, all of a sudden that was my introduction to a whole group of people who I couldn't figure out any - even though there was a moniker of the Language poets - there was no connection that I could draw between their methodologies and styles. So yeah and what Gerry's already told you, just beginning to meet and sort of - so my reading didn't come down from the top, it came from most of these people. And that opened up other areas that were sort of international, and I started reading more that way.

Pauline Butling: What did you see that was different in the Silliman and Bernstein and so on, because people like Daphne and McCaffery - did he participate? yeah - and some of those other writers you mentioned participated in the New Poetics Colloquium too, but you felt that there was something much more exciting in Silliman and?

Lary Bremner: No, they were the exceptions. Those are people who I would still continue to read, but that wasn't enough, or that wasn't enough motivation to write, or certainly not enough to publish or know anyone in Vancouver.

Pauline Butling: Well where's Maxine?

Maxine Gadd: I go back so far, it's kind of boring.

Pauline Butling: Oh no, you have a wonderful history Maxine.

Maxine Gadd: In 1964 in Kitsilano, and you know all the hippies and poetry readings at the Advanced Mattress Coffee House. Everybody was a poet, I mean there were literally thousands of poets, you think there's lots now and people went on and on and uh I don't - I guess it's hard to remember it all. But as far as I connected to the Kootenay School through um I guess Daphne Marlatt, who was editing Lost Language which was a book I put together in 1982. It got published, and she actually introduced me to the Kootenay School Writing magazine and then, I don't know how I even got to the Kootenay School.

That colloquium, I couldn't afford to go, but everybody was talking about it, so obviously I wanted to go, and I went to one or two of them, and they were terrific. And then I started to come to Kootenay School and I think you know it's just changed my life. It's motivated me quite highly to really look at my own work, and see connections to other people's work. It's just like Phyllis Webb says, poems people do here evoke something in me, you know.

Pauline Butling: Do you think that your interest here connects to - there's a political concern that a lot of people here have and that's part of your background in the '60s wasn't it?

Maxine Gadd: Not really. I mean, the '60s was really anti-political and if you mentioned -

Pauline Butling: Well, it was anti-establishment but wasn't it political?

Maxine Gadd: It was anti-political. It was extremely right-wing and a lot of people who - you know there are probably a lot of recognised right wing conservatives and rhinoceri who I consider right-wing conservatives, I mean absurdists, um who -

Pauline Butling: That you were associated with?

Maxine Gadd: Well, you know, you live in the neighbourhood, and go to the same places and you know you smoke dope together and uh -

Pauline Butling: But people like bissett have a politics.

Maxine Gadd: Yes but I think -

Pauline Butling: And Gerry Gilbert too, no?

Maxine Gadd: But that's so... It's *so* complicated.

Lary Bremner: There's sort of a naïve quality -

Nancy Shaw: Yeah but that's a counter-cultural lifestyle sort of thing but then as far as being sort of an activist, I don't think that -

Maxine Gadd: That didn't come into style until so many hippies got beaten up so many times by bikers and policemen, that they began to say hey, you know, what's happening here? And I guess the ecology parties have emerged from those people, who you know will be something to consider in the future and - because people are disillusioned with traditional left-wingers and as well as traditional right-wingers. So - it's too big, I can't see it all, but you know there's lots, it's history - ha ha ha.

Pauline Butling: Yeah, well I don't mean that - I mean I think the politics - the political right now are quite different.

Maxine Gadd: I mean you could connect to poststructuralism to the extent that the local is important, and if you look at Vancouver now it's really interesting how many citizens' groups there are, say, in the downtown eastside who are helping to control their environment against, say, crime by forming grassroots things. There's co-ops, there's like a garden there's like 5, 10 acres now in the downtown in Strathcona that are being used by a lot of people for gardening, and that's a political structure. It requires it, and you have to negotiate with city hall. It's very local. And I think there's a disillusionment with even the provincial - and I think the NDP are really going to finish that one for good ha ha ha - the local does seem meaningful to people. And people are more political and they have made efforts to be more responsible, quote, and look more responsible and to act more responsible. I mean people - in the sixties we were *really* self-indulgent and it was a lot of fun.

[general giggles]

Pauline Butling: But we thought we were political.

Maxine Gadd: No, I don't think so.

Pauline Butling: I'm sorry, I'm pushing that.

Maxine Gadd: I don't think so until - yeah yeah. I'll think about that.

Pauline Butling: Catriona?

Catriona Strang: Um, yeah. I don't exactly know what to say, really. I -

Pauline Butling: We were just asking -

Catriona Strang: I didn't hear the question -

Pauline Butling: We were just asking - you, did you? - you came in... ? - We were just asking people to talk about sort of what you come out of, what you were reading, what brought you to the particular -

Catriona Strang: Oh, I see. I came out of the English department at SFU. I studied with Robin and George and you know those guys. And um, let's see. I just started taking classes at KSW. How was it? I wanted to read Zukofsky and I couldn't get a class on Zukofsky at SFU because of Paul, because you wouldn't be able to publish your paper, therefore why even write one, you know, that thing. So and then Peter Quartermain was doing a course on Zukofsky at KSW, so I just took it. And just started taking classes and -

Pauline Butling: How did you get introduced to Zukofsky? Or did you just -

Catriona Strang: I don't exactly remember.

Maxine Gadd: Well that was very much around.

Catriona Strang: What, Dove?

Pauline Butling: In the air.

Catriona Strang: In the air!

Maxine Gadd: That's exactly what I was gonna say, he was in the air.

Catriona Strang: I don't remember but somehow at SFU. And then I think that what Gerry said about method is most illuminating to me, that rather than a particular ideology I just found *even the notion* of varying your method just so kind of enlightening, that I really got off on it and started following that.

Maxine Gadd: And did some of the most far-out stuff.

Susan Rudy: Dave?

David Ayre: I'm fairly new to the group. I know. I uh just came upon the Kootenay School last fall after I just saw an advertisement for a poetry or announcement for a poetry reading in the paper. Before that I was basically I was just in college and I was taking creative writing classes.

Pauline Butling: Which college?

David Ayre: Kwantlen college. And people I was reading were basically out of anthologies, which were the Tish group and Bowering and Wah and a couple of people back east, Don McKay and things like that. I started getting a feel for Canadian poetry, and then I came here - and I guess - who was reading? - I think Benjamin Friedlander I think he was here - and I came in here and I sat down at the back and I listened to it and I just left.

[general laughter]

I thought about it for a long time. I didn't understand really any of it, but I found it so new and exciting that I was sort of addicted because I'm addicted to things that are new and different from what I've - I'm sort of used to. Back at the - in '85 I was getting drunk and shoplifting and blowing up mailboxes. I wasn't -

[general laughter]

Pauline Butling: Big improvement. Blowing up poems.

Nancy Shaw: So you weren't at the poetics colloquium.

Catriona Strang: You can't say things like that on tape!

Maxine Gadd: They'll find you out.

David Ayre: So, I'm fairly new to - I've only been writing for 3 or 4 years. And just seriously within the last 2 after I've - after I got introduced to the Kootenay School things just *exploded*. And right now I've just been dealing with all the information, just reading different people like McCaffery. I think in the last - bpNichol is the one that just hooked me. He's my favourite writer right now and - just because he was so nuts and he just did everything - sound poetry, concrete poetry. An um, I don't know. I'm really reading a lot of him right now. I'm not too much into the American Language writers. I'm getting into it because I'm just slowly beginning to understand how to read it. I'm having difficulty with it. Um, right now I'm still just sort of very interested in the Kootenay School and in writing.

Pauline Butling: Amazing what a catalyst Kootenay School has been for people that - the people who are here I guess.

[general laughter]

Susan Clark: There's lots of people who aren't here too.

Pauline Butling: You mean that are part of your -

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, who couldn't come for some reason.

Maxine Gadd: Lots of people turn out to these readings.

Susan Rudy: And is that what the Kootenay School is, is it readings?

Nancy Shaw: These days. I mean it started as - when DTUC closed down - they actually had a full fare of courses, from journalism to type-setting to you know poetry, poetics, creative writing. And that went for about 2 or 3 years and then the collective started to slowly shift because certain people got jobs and had to do other things. And also the initial kind of enthusiasm um you know kind of levelled out, because that was a lot of work, and we weren't getting a lot of funding. And I think there was a real political decision to maybe try and set this up as you know an alternative post-secondary space and try to get money, but it didn't work.

Susan Clark: But there are still seminars. I mean in place of classes there will be a particular thing like Zukofsky or Stein or -

Pauline Butling: Series of lectures and things like that.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah.

Susan Clark: But seminar-*style* things or - so essentially they're classes, but -

Catriona Strang: We have talks as well as readings and panels.

Stephen Forth: That sort of faded out for a while right, classes sort of petered out?

Nancy Shaw: I think I think what happened was that rather than offering 12 courses, 3 semesters, which is amazing um - it went down to

Maxine Gadd: Impossible - ha ha ha.

Catriona Strang: No, really. For a handful of people to do that ...

Nancy Shaw: It was, it was absolutely amazing. And then um it got to be about - I think one year there wasn't any and then we started to try to slowly do it again, right? - and there'd be - back to 2 or 3 a year kinda thing, so. I think maybe one year we didn't

actually have any courses but we had a visiting writer-in-residence and all that kind of stuff, so we started shifting to more specific seminars geared to -

Stephen Forth: Probably the year to I came to Vancouver.

Pauline Butling: When there wasn't anything?

Stephen Forth: No there - no there was a lot of activity at KSW, but they weren't courses.

Nancy Shaw: It just wasn't courses.

Stephen Forth: But um - I think the uh panel discussions have been quite important and the new series of talks that we're starting this year.

Pauline Butling: Uh huh, that looks really interesting.

Stephen Forth: And we're going to do courses again this fall.

Pauline Butling: Are you?

Nancy Shaw: Well, the seminar things - workshop seminars.

Catriona Strang: We did two last fall.

Lisa Robertson: One -

Catriona Strang: Two -

Lisa Robertson: Three?

Catriona Strang: Two.

Stephen Forth: Two, I think.

Nancy Shaw: We were going to have three, but you know.

Pauline Butling: Well, Stephen?

Stephen Forth: Well I think I went through that already.

Pauline Butling: Well you told us came from - oh yeah. Joey Seamus [?]. Those were your connections.

Stephen Forth: That was my introduction to the Kootenay School of Writing. I guess I uh - I left Canada - I'm from Montreal - or I was - from Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec city.

Pauline Butling: Were you interested in writing before you went off?

Stephen Forth: In terms of poetry I was reading a lot of Margaret Avison and Robert Creeley, Charles Olson um - what's his name, Hogg?

Pauline Butling: Bob Hogg?

Stephen Forth: Yeah, Bob Hogg -

Pauline Butling: Robert Hogg.

Stephen Forth: I had a girlfriend who was studying with him.

Pauline Butling: Oh, at Carlton.

Stephen Forth: And um - so I was reading Ginsberg and Zukofsky. And who else was there before I left Canada? I don't come out of an English Department background at all, I come out of a Social Sciences - and actually a more mathematical model.

Pauline Butling: Probably lucky.

Stephen Forth: Well I certainly don't - I just took a first year English course in my first year in university and that was enough. But um, but um...

Maxine Gadd: Me too. I hated English departments.

Pauline Butling: Did you do an English major Max, or?

Maxine Gadd: No, but I had the same experience. I just sort of sat back in an English class in the back and sneered and left. I never went back to English except for some Creative Writing classes which was easy credits - ha ha ha.

Stephen Forth: Anyway - and I came out of an environment in which English was not a uh - was a problematical language. Speaking English was a good way to get yourself beaten up. And I was a friends with -

Maxine Gadd: Where was that?

Stephen Forth: St. Lambert in Longue. And I was friends with the poor kids and various odd items. And I was in Quebec city in '72 and there was a lot of language-related disturbances.

Nancy Shaw: Quite a way to put it.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: Well I got - I got actually *stabbed* [?] by some people for speaking English.

Catherine Bennett: That's what your poems are: Language-related disturbances.

Stephen Forth: No I was - I had - I was beaten up quite often - I was at a very poor French Polyvalent in French, and not speaking French very well either.

Pauline Butling: Do you speak French now?

Stephen Forth: I've sort of lost it.

Maxine Gadd: You had to learn French.

Stephen Forth: I spoke - I learned French in '71 and '76, but uh learning Japanese, I think I - it's really interfered with my ability to speak French. I can still read it reasonably well. And so I left Canada when I was 19, um expecting to be back reasonably soon, like after a year or 2 or 3 or whatever. And I actually did come back for a few months in 1980, I think, but I basically stayed in Europe or Asia, mostly Japan, from 19 - late '79 to Autumn of 1988. Came back once in '81 and once in '85. Think it was - might have been 1980. And I went through periods where I didn't speak - where I refused to speak English, uh for about a year and a half.

Pauline Butling: And are you still interested in some of the writers you were reading way back in the '70s?

Stephen Forth: Yeah, actually I'm starting to get interested in reading Creeley again. I've always liked Margaret Avison's writing. And I read a lot of Zukofsky for about 4 or 5 years, even during the period when I wasn't speaking English I was still reading a lot of Zukofsky. And I became a friend of Cid Corman while I was in Tokyo. And also a friend of mine called Eric Selland, who first introduced me to Joey Seamus [?] first introduced me to Sulfur magazine.

Pauline Butling: So you were getting that when you were in -

Stephen Forth: And I ordered your book, I ordered *Lost Languages* when I was there.

Maxine Gadd: Oh, really?

Stephen Forth: I got a Coach House catalogue, and I ordered quite a few books from Coach House. I only stopped ordering them when they started accusing me of not paying, because I had been sending them cash. And uh I also ordered a lot of books through Segue. And Tremblor started to publish while I was in Japan. I got *Raddle Moon* when I was in Japan. The *Raddle Moon* issues I got when I was in Tokyo are somewhat different.

Pauline Butling: Weren't you a contributing editor?

Stephen Forth: Not at that time. Not at that moment. So um, I was also reading a lot of poetry in Japanese. And there were some interesting parallels between what was happening in Japanese poetry in the '70s and '80s and what was happening in North

America. And through Joey I was introduced to Anne-Marie Albiac's work and Claude Roy Argenou [?] And uh - those were the only two French writers that really meant a lot of me. There were a number of others that I read. And Nicole Brossard's work - I guess I started ordering that through the Coach House catalogues at the time. I ordered lots and lots of books and magazines through North America, everything - as much as I could afford, including Coach House. But the only Canadian magazine I found that really interested me was Writing, despite an effort. And I must have got at least one issue of 30 or 40 different Canadian magazines.

Pauline Butling: Well there hasn't been much for quite a while. A dry period, as they say.

Stephen Forth: This was the eighties.

Pauline Butling: Yeah, I mean what was there in the eighties?

Maxine Gadd: No money.

Stephen Forth: I didn't hear about that until I came back to Vancouver.

Catriona Strang: What, no money?

Stephen Forth: Yeah, no money.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah, like in the sixties and seventies they were just throwing it away. Things were published you wouldn't believe, you know.

Stephen Forth: Well, there was actually that magazine No Money From The Government by Brian Fawcett.

Maxine Gadd: That's part of the right-wing -

Stephen Forth: I didn't hear about that, that didn't make it to Tokyo. So that's uh -

Lary Bremner: And you also started a press.

Stephen Forth: Yeah, I also published. I published books by Joey Seamus [?], Joey's second book, I published a book by Cid Corman.

Pauline Butling: Is Cid still writing?

Stephen Forth: Cid uh - to put it mildly.

[general laughter]

Stephen Forth: Cid is uh nothing if not prolific. But he also has a wife that supports him.

Pauline Butling: Has he still got an ice cream parlour?

Stephen Forth: No, he doesn't do that anymore. No, his - it had great cake. I never actually had any of the ice cream but they did make the best pecan pie I've ever had. Um, so I published Cid and Joey, Eric Selland, a woman called Sea Tamakuchi [?], who has published an essay in Tremblor under a different name, but I can't remember it right now, published it under a male name. And Maseas Seito [?].

Maxine Gadd: And yourself?

Stephen Forth: Yeah, myself. I was trying to avoid that one, trying to forget that book. And then since coming back I've published books by Peter Ganick and a translation of Yoshi Okonimoru [?] and I'll be publishing another book of Joey's soon.

Pauline Butling: Do you have a publishing house name?

Stephen Forth: Yeah, Leech Books. Used to be Telus Press. But Telus Press was taken over by something that now calls itself Sadu Press in Tokyo. And I hope I'm going to be publishing something by Lisa - White Writing, yeah?

Lisa Robertson: Yeah.

Stephen Forth: And Benjamin Hollander in San Francisco. Peter Culley. Susan, if she ever - if she's writing it.

Pauline Butling: Energetic. *Lisa*.

Lisa Robertson: I'm from Ontario. I came out here 13 years ago when I was 18. I dropped out of high school and uh I was kind of your typical teenage confessional isolated poet who uh - I kind of read whatever I found in cabins I lived in.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: Mostly murder mysteries, no?

Lisa Robertson: No, no there was Ginsberg and Snyder. And you know then once I read that I would look for things in the library and stuff. I guess I read some Pound and some Levertov, but just - nothing really very seriously. I was really - I didn't know anybody else who wrote. I'd just kind of - I would just bring these books home and try to do what I could. And I went back to school in my mid-twenties - I went to SFU and uh managed to get a work study job in special collections. I got really turned on to reading various women modernists - Stein, Barnes, Butts [?].

Pauline Butling: They have a good collection up there, don't they?

Lisa Robertson: Yeah. So that formed my first strongest context of writers. And I met Catriona up there and sort of you know heard bits of things about KSW like I mentioned.

[general laughter]

Lisa Robertson: But Catriona and myself and Christine Stewart and Hillary Clark who doesn't live here anymore and Kathy Alexander and Donna Gilman all had a writing group that actually stemmed out of a course that Fred taught at KSW. And we met - I didn't take that course but I joined in with them later. And we met like every -

Catriona Strang: Once a month.

Lisa Robertson: - month and then it got a bit closer together for quite a few years. And I eventually found myself breaking in and taking a course with Lyn Hejinian, yeah cos I had found her work in the old Proprioception and liked it. And I've sort of been around since.

Maxine Gadd: You should mention Proprioception, though, what - cos she runs *the* bookstore, *the* poetics bookstore.

Stephen Forth: In North America.

Catriona Strang: We were also reading the objectivists.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, we were reading lots of Oppen and Niedecker.

Catriona Strang: Niedecker.

Pauline Butling: Does anyone teach a course in that at Simon Fraser or did you just onto that to on your own - get onto that?

Lisa Robertson: We, you know - again, you dig it up in Special Collections. I sort of had the run of the stacks in there so I would just find things. And then we would twist people's arms until they would do directed readings with us - me and Catriona.

Pauline Butling: Did you do a course with Bowering on that?

Lisa Robertson: Yeah. We did a bunch of - he was - turned out to be the only person who would do a directed reading.

Catriona Strang: He would do directed readings on whatever we wanted. So we just -

Lisa Robertson: So we just -

Pauline Butling: Well he also has read some of those people and most of those people there haven't. I would guess.

Catriona Strang: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah. It's true. It's hard to find people to read those people.

Dan Farrell: Uh, I guess in '85 or '86 I dropped out of university and I wasn't working so that's when I first took a creative writing course at KSW. I didn't know anybody but I guess it was cheap -

[recording cuts off]

[recording resumes after some time has passed]

Dan Farrell: - gave me this Bob Perelman book to read. So I read that.

Maxine Gadd: What did you read?

Dan Farrell: A Bob Perelman book, it was called *a.k.a.*. And that was the first so-called Language book I'd read and I really enjoyed it. It was funny, it was great. I didn't have any problem understanding it.

[general laughter]

Pauline Butling: Some of the people going to university did.

Dan Farrell: So I didn't know the context it was in. I didn't know who this guy was, I didn't - I guess this was after that colloquium. And so I think I knew Deanna Ferguson at that point too. And through them I just you know met friends and started reading the kinds of things that they were reading. And I liked it. I guess so - of course that made me look at my own writing differently, and made me look at other writers differently too. You know like Joyce and Stein and Beckett and all those people. So, you know.

Pauline Butling: You all seem pretty aware of what we call the Modernist writers, or most of you seem to be.

Dan Farrell: Well that's a - if you're reading, that's what you - that's what's out there, that's what's published, and that's what you find.

Pauline Butling: In the cabins.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: Read this or else.

Stephen Forth: Also that's what's readily available in bookstores is like uh Pound and Beckett and Stein. Zukofsky.

Lisa Robertson: And public libraries too. If you're just like wandering around the VPL.

Nancy Shaw: And there's you know such a tradition of adherence, you know such a developed tradition of that here, overriding any you know thing in the air. Through Robin.

Catriona Strang: And it's not hard to plug into that tradition.

Pauline Butling: You mean in Vancouver, that whole connection to the -

Maxine Gadd: You say you can find Language poets in the VPL?

Catriona Strang: No, no, no, no: the modernists.

Maxine Gadd: Oh, the modernists, right.

[general laughter]

Pauline Butling: How do they sneak in.

Maxine Gadd: Some secret code in that computer they've got.

Pauline Butling: Through people like Robin, Peter Quartermain, West Coast Line.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, yeah. And just like from the Tish poets on. You know and Warren Tallman and all that kind of stuff. I mean it really is a strong influence.

Gerald Creede: You heard about Joyce. You don't even need to have Irish in you. It's true. I heard about Joyce when I was 12 or 13 cos there was a lot of Irish in the community. And there was this obscene Irish writer.

Catriona Strang: So naturally you sought him out.

Gerald Creede: I didn't understand *Dubliners* then. I do now.

Pauline Butling: Were most of you aware of people like bpNichol? A lot of you mentioned McCaffery but that's partly his connection with the Language writers, but a couple of you mentioned bp.

Lisa Robertson: SFU students mostly found out because of Roy Miki.

Pauline Butling: Oh right. But Roy teaches the Modernists a lot too, doesn't he? Oh, he teaches -

Catriona Strang: And Canlit.

Lisa Robertson: Roy would bring bp out a lot.

Gerald Creede: Yeah he was here quite a bit.

Catriona Strang: We had ah - you know McCaffery came, bp came...

David Ayre: I was just going to say Warren Tallman -

Maxine Gadd: Warren Tallman, yeah.

David Ayre: I saw him at a bill bissett reading and I didn't know who he was and he asked me for a copy of the tape and I said I would come by and drop it by. And then someone told me who he was, and I knew him from the American anthology and - oh my god! So I asked if I could talk to him for awhile. So I went over there with my tape recorder and I talked to him and I - it was great - I was so nervous but I didn't have to really say anything and he just blah blah blah, he just chain smoked and just told me all his stories about Olson and uh Creeley and uh Pound and he just sort of really hit hard on bpNichol, like he gave me the *Martyrology Book 7* plus *Scriptures* and stuff in it, and he gave me an artifacts book. And I was just elated. I went home and I read them both and I just fell in love. And I - I taped the conversation but I discovered that my microphone wasn't working.

[general laughter]

David Ayre: So I asked him - he wasn't - I know he sort of - they called him the absent-minded professor - but I called back a couple of weeks later and I don't think he quite remembered quite who I was and that he talked to me. So I went back and basically got everything all again on tape, so.

[general laughter]

David Ayre: But I have to say he was the one who really turned me on to bpNichol and to the modernists and just to poetry in general.

Stephen Forth: So I had almost no sense of the hierarchical structure involved because I was just ordering books out of Coach House catalogues.

Maxine Gadd: Do you read Colleen Thibodeau? I have a soft spot for Colleen Thibodeau as one of the people that got sort of caught in the tide pool, um one of the older poets who I thought.

Susan Clark: Isn't that James Reaney's wife?

Maxine Gadd: James Reaney's wife, but she was known as James Reaney's "crazy wife" for many years, but so -

Pauline Butling: Did any of you people go to the - speaking of Colleen Thibodeau - to the - to Warren's Writers of Our Time series? I guess that was too early, that was in the

'70s

Maxine Gadd: Yeah, I did but of course they're all - they weren't born yet - ha ha ha ha.

Catriona Strang: Oh Maxine.

Stephen Forth: Metaphorically speaking.

Maxine Gadd: But I mean that quite speaks - we could talk about that later, you know just talk about what happens to women who are out of line. They get ignored - oo, don't talk about her.

Stephen Forth: One almost - that happened to Lorine Niedecker as well.

Maxine Gadd: Who?

Stephen Forth: Lorine Niedecker

Nancy Shaw: It happened to a lot of people, more than not.

Pauline Butling: Oh yeah. It happened with H.D. too in a sense, because it was just her early work that was acknowledged.

Maxine Gadd: Which is *totally insane*.

Pauline Butling: It happened to Maxine.

Maxine Gadd: Oh well.

Catriona Strang: But at least H.D. and Niedecker are names that we know, they've been semi-recuperated. You know it happened to a lot of women writers that are just *gone*.

Nancy Shaw: Or weren't encouraged in the first place, or whatever.

Catriona Strang: Or say someone like Mary Oppen had - you know could have done a lot and ended up basically for the most part just supporting George Oppen and so not producing, you know work just didn't even *get done*.

Stephen Forth: One even wonders about Celia Zukofsky in that sense.

Catriona Strang: Well, yeah.

Stephen Forth: The most defensive interview -

Pauline Butling: Do you think that's happening now, too?

Catriona Strang: Yeah, absolutely.

Nancy Shaw: Maybe in a different kind of form. And I mean there's a real - there's an articulation of the problem and that's good.

Catriona Strang: Yeah.

Lisa Robertson: Well most of the bigger publishing places are still run you know by older men with real patriarchal ideas. It seems that once you're no longer sexually circulating -

Catriona Strang: Or if you're not to begin with.

Lisa Robertson: - if you're a woman, that's that.

Nancy Shaw: Well the other thing too is because money stopped coming in in the early '80s there haven't been presses that you know have been developing after that period so that lot of presses are still really representative of the *guys* who were publishing *at that time*.

Pauline Butling: Even in the conversation we've had so far, except when we were talking about all those women modernists that you researched, it seems like the references have been at least 70% to men. 80%.

Catriona Strang: Oh yeah, sure.

Stephen Forth: Although of the Language writers, the people who have been most important well to me anyway and almost generally are Susan Howe and Lyn Hejinian.

Pauline Butling: Susan hasn't been mentioned yet. Lyn Hejinian's been mentioned -

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, and I've got a whole bunch - a whole list here.

Pauline Butling: I'm not saying they're not there, but I was just sort of -

Susan Clark: But still when people talk about Language writing it's like the three wise men, you get all - you get *boys*.

Stephen Forth: That's what really pissed me off about Brian Fawcett's -

Susan Clark: Pardon me?

Stephen Forth: That's what really pissed me off with that you know thing about Brian Fawcett. [Fawcett's piece in the first issue of the Vancouver Review "East Van Über Alles"] Because talks about the three wise men, but that's uh - you know I don't think that's how people who've been reading a lot of Language poetry read Language poetry.

Gerald Creede: Who are the three wise men?

Nancy Shaw: Silliman. Watten. [?] Bernstein.

Susan Clark: I was saying I think it's people who *haven't* been reading a lot of Language poetry, that those are the ones who stick out.

Stephen Forth: So I think that's something imposed from the outside.

Pauline Butling: Where's this thing by Brian Fawcett?

Nancy Shaw: Oh, you should get this.

Stephen Forth: In the uh first issue of the -
[general murmur of "Vancouver Review"]

Stephen Forth: It's in his book too.

Nancy Shaw: Vancouver Review. And Sharon Thesen wrote a real horr - quite an inflammatory thing as well. You saw that, yeah. I mean that kind of smarts a bit, because somebody gets paid to work here 4 hours a week and the rest of it's volunteer.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, and the only times I've ever heard Sharon Thesen read have been at readings where she's been invited to read here at KSW.

Maxine Gadd: *Bitterness!*

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, absolutely.

Catriona Strang: And rightly so.

Nancy Shaw: It was this thing a couple of years ago in the Vancouver Review when she basically said that KSW was like a kind of institution that's um -

Lisa Robertson: Academic.

Catriona Strang: Writing from her post at Cap College.

Stephen Forth: Yeah. But anyway. But um. And Fawcett actually in Vancouver Review 2 said you know that his review was actually much more friendly and it had been cut - edited badly - badly edited by the editors, but the title he gives it in um you know in his book is uh - what is it, "East Van Über Alles"?

Gerald Creede: Well yeah I don't know, I never looked at this.

Lary Bremner: East Van Über Alles.

Gerald Creede: Oh yeah?

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, and originally it was called "East Van Skinheads Rule."

Maxine Gadd: *Whoa* you guys! You're skinheads. That's great you guys.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah we're - he actually called us "skinhead formalists" in his review.

Catriona Strang: Skinhead formalists, that's right.

Nancy Shaw: That's too good.

Maxine Gadd: Skinheads! That's great, you guys - ah ha ha.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, so get these issues - there's a whole bunch of stuff in the Vancouver Review. It's really gross, you'll get sick when you read it.

Catriona Strang: East Van Über Alles.

Maxine Gadd: I've gotta find this.

Lisa Robertson: There's been this real problem of writers associated with KSW a) being labelled as Language poets b) nobody really reading individual writers particularly, and lumping us together, and c) the whole group en masse being characterised as elite academic and formalist, where you know most of us don't have BAs. None of us have MAs.

Catherine Bennett: Oh, wait a minute. One of us does.

Lisa Robertson: You have an MA? One of us has an MA.

Maxine Gadd: Are you allowed to give it up?

David Ayre: Oh my god!

Gerald Creede: You have an MA? You're *out*!

Catriona Strang: Can you renounce it?

Maxine Gadd: Yeah, renounce it!

Nancy Shaw: Abdicate.

Gerald Creede: Yeah.

Susan Clark: What's it in, English?

Catherine Bennett: Yeah.

Lisa Robertson: But it's been imposed, you know, by people mainly who are employed by academic institutions.

Pauline Butling: Do you think that's partly because you are a community, and so you're fairly easily targeted? People can say oh look, there's a group we can Oh, ho, look there's a group, we can -

Maxine Gadd: And they're serious, they're all serious.

Nancy Shaw: I mean the other thing too is we really organise things for other people. And they often will sit around waiting to be invited to do things. So they are individual poets you know, I think that makes a difference. Also I think when KSW started it started with quite a flurry - really stirred things up in Vancouver - and there hadn't been a lot of things going, and because people were taking strong positions on poetics and politics and stuff I think that sent sort of waves that was a proactive thing rather than waiting and so I think that historically that has given this really strong character that if people don't agree they can just say we're monolithic and dictatorial and all that kind of stuff, so.

Catriona Strang: Yeah, but it's to the point where I hear it from people who have never even been here.

Maxine Gadd: That's a legend, you know? A myth.

Gerald Creede: A legend.

Pauline Butling: You should try and change your rumour.

Lisa Robertson: It's really hard to though. It gets so - there's almost this economic thing. People say, well I've never seen any of your advertisements. What are you, a private club? Well, we've got like virtually no budget. We manage to place a few ads by selling beer illegally.

Catriona Strang: We do walk up and down and poster.

Pauline Butling: No I understand. And people who feel excluded because they haven't been invited yet they don't put out any effort.

Lisa Robertson: Or even attend readings. I mean, people who eventually get asked to give readings here are people who show an interest in the general sort of scene by you know showing up.

Maxine Gadd: Also, you're right downtown. You never know what you're going to run into. There's the most formidable set of stairs to climb to get up here.

[general laughter]

Susan Clark: It's an ageist institution. Put all those stairs there on purpose.

Pauline Butling: You haven't been accused of that yet.

Catriona Strang: How many stairs are there, has anybody counted them?

Catriona Strang: I've never counted them.

Susan Clark: Who knows?

Nancy Shaw: Try carrying beer -

Maxine Gadd: Even books eh.

Catriona Strang: I carry my bicycle up those stairs.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah so does Gerry Gilbert.

Catriona Strang: Yeah I know.

Pauline Butling: Catherine we haven't got to you. Did we start with Nancy?

Susan Rudy: Not we didn't have Nancy either yet.

Pauline Butling: But we started with Susan. Keep going, dear.

Catherine Bennett: Well, when I first heard about the Kootenay School I was living in Toronto where I had just fin-ish-ed m-y M-A. And I was being deluged by Tsunami chapbooks and copies of Writing magazine by Colin Smith, who's a friend of mine who's also a member of the collective he was living out here, started sending me this stuff. And that was my first encounter with the Kootenay School and Language writing and that kind of stuff. And frankly I really resisted it for a long time. It was like: what is this? Why are you sending me this stuff? But um I guess right about that point I was looking for a direction for my own writing to take, and some motivation. And it certainly served that purpose. And then when I moved out to Vancouver I started coming to the events and slowly getting involved that way.

Nancy Shaw: Who did you read? Besides the chapbooks, like what were you studying in school?

Catherine Bennett: Oh well, the usual Canadian canon of literature.

Stephen Forth: Which is?

Pauline Butling: Who's that?

[general giggles]

Nancy Shaw: Especially from Toronto.

Susan Rudy: Michael Ondaatje. Robert Kroetsch.

Maxine Gadd: Really?

Pauline Butling: Were you in Frank Davey's Canadian lit, or? -

Catherine Bennett: I did take a class with Frank Davey. I did take a poetry workshop with Clark Blaise, people like that.

Pauline Butling: Because *supposedly* you wouldn't get *quite* the establishment.

Susan Rudy: No, but there's another version of anti-establishment that you get from the people at York. Cos I know, cos I studied at York. And there's a lot of people you never hear about.

Pauline Butling: Predominantly male, also.

Susan Rudy: Yup.

Catherine Bennett: Mostly, yes.

Maxine Gadd: Did you read Djuna - then you got into Djuna Barnes and people like that?

Catherine Bennett: Uh, Djuna Barnes and I go way way back.

Nancy Shaw: It's not extra school.

Susan Clark: Extra curricular.

Catherine Bennett: Djuna Barnes I found out about her in 1979, actually, when I read Nightwood. And I had the same reaction when I picked it up what is this? But it was so interesting, it was so galvanising, I felt that I had live fire in my hands when I was reading that, so. But no that wasn't really through school that I found out about her.

Pauline Butling: Nancy?

Nancy Shaw: I guess *way back* when I was a sort of alienated, floundering English student who didn't understand -

Susan Rudy: Where?

Nancy Shaw: At SFU - I didn't really understand what was going on, but I went to classes and tried to and pretended I did. And I was also working at the student newspaper and I met Jeff going to this Canadian Federation of Students Conference and he was going because they were on this thing to try to lobby people to keep DTUC going, right. And he was one of the only exciting, and interesting people there, so I kinda hung around with him. And when he gave his speech as a rap thing at this conference I just thought I've gotta hang around this guy, he's wild.

Susan Clark: What did he do?

Maxine Gadd: What did he do?

Nancy Shaw: Well he was just going to tell them what's happening, right, and he did this like rap performance. But it wasn't rap, it was more reggae.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: Did anybody get that on tape?

Nancy Shaw: I don't know. He was like, up on the desk and stuff.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: O, Jeff Deksen!?

Pauline Butling: Quiet little Jeff...

Nancy Shaw: It was wild. It was wild. So I guess you know the Kootenay School was just starting that summer. So I wrote this thing in the student newspaper and then I was kind of a groupie for a year and then I joined the collective.

Lisa Robertson: Actually, I was writing letters to political people on DTUC's behalf.

Catriona Strang: Yeah, I did that too, yeah.

Lisa Robertson: This was before I went back to school, yeah.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah and I think that DTUC really had a politicising effect in a sense, say on the fine arts department at SFU and just like English students and stuff.

Lisa Robertson: Well, the year that DTUC was cut, the fine arts department at SFU was cut too.

Catriona Strang: By a third.

Lisa Robertson: That was my first semester in school and it was all politically just coming down on the arts.

Stephen Forth: It seems almost all of the people here that are from Vancouver are affiliated with Simon Fraser in some way?

Susan Rudy: Did anybody ever go to UBC?

Maxine Gadd: I went to UBC.-

Susan Rudy: It's even worse, isn't it?-

Maxine Gadd: I actually got my BA.-

Catriona Strang: In what?

Maxine Gadd: I don't remember. I think you were able to sort of do what you wanted in those days.

Catriona Strang: A vague BA?

Maxine Gadd: It was a vague BA. I took whatever interested me, you know, a bit of Spanish, some creative writing courses with Earle Birney and lots of anthropology, sociology. I got more interested in sociology. I thought that's where things were really interesting and worthwhile.

Pauline Butling: But I don't think there's anything happening at UBC that even - that would in any way promote interest in writing -

Lisa Robertson: Peter Quartermain -

Susan Clark: Isn't Christine Stewart there? And Hillary Clark was there, she did a doctorate. There's a Kootenay School person with a doctorate. Hillary. In English.

Catriona Strang: Christine Stewart struggles through.

Maxine Gadd: And Peter Quartermain he was around when I was there.

Pauline Butling: Oh yeah, Peter's been there, that's not fair.

Lisa Robertson: And there's a couple more now. Lorraine Weir teaches there.

Pauline Butling: And Aruna Srivastava.

Maxine Gadd: But we used to have big poetry readings down in the Student Union building.

Pauline Butling: Oh the UBC in the '60s was interesting, cos you and I were there.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah.

[general laughter]

Catriona Strang: Therefore!

Maxine Gadd: And Sean Harald, remember her, and Ken Lam and all those guys.

Pauline Butling: But now all of you who come - if you did go to school in Vancouver - have a strong connection with Simon Fraser.

Maxine Gadd: And there's a strong arts, like Nancy said, lots in the actual visual arts and galleries.

Nancy Shaw: I'd just like to say that really important people for me in my writing were, say, I did a directed studies with Robin Blaser on H.D. and Lyn Hejinian. Daphne Marlatt was a major influence and um Phyllis Webb was major and so was Nicole Brossard.

Pauline Butling: How did you get introduced to those writers? Cos they're the ones that get caught in this tide pool -

Nancy Shaw: I think um - yeah, I took a course with Kathy Mezei and so that's who we studied.

Susan Rudy: She would be important at Simon Fraser, wouldn't she as a presence?

Catriona Strang: Those texts were circulating though. We all read Brossard and Phyllis Webb.

Nancy Shaw: And it was sort of through here as well. I don't know if I always agreed with what she was saying, but that work was available, these people were in circulation so it really made a lot of sense. Russian Formalists were really important. I think after the Poetics Colloquium there were a lot of people talking about painting and off on these conversations on the side. And I got very curious because I didn't know much about art then started taking art in context and then took studio, which was kind of the same experience as coming to Kootenay School, cos you were actually physically working through these kinds of problems that were political and social. You could actually do something rather than just sort of passively read. And so and then I got really involved in visual arts too and critical writing and so.

Susan Rudy: Is that how you see this writing as political, that you actually have to do something, you can't just passively read?

Nancy Shaw: I mean I think that - it's like I was saying - it's these sort of these theoretical historical problems they are problematic, sort of trying to deal with social and political change. This is a space where you sort of can think about and work these problems out, historicise why there were certain failures, all this kind of thing through maybe artistic and social and political movements. There is that possibility, that space to maybe try and work on things. I mean the work doesn't change the world or anything but I think you you can physically think and work them out and stuff and by doing that you can see what works and doesn't.

Maxine Gadd: It changes part of the world.

Stephen Forth: It changes the person doing it anyway.

Susan Rudy: That's interesting, it changes the person doing it.

Catriona Strang: Yeah.

Nancy Shaw: Oh well certainly it changes behaviour.

Catriona Strang: Completely.

Susan Rudy: So you think of yourself as someone who's changing through their work as much as you are whoever it is that's reading you. Is that what you - I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, that's what I - is that what you're saying?

Stephen Forth: I think that's true.

Nancy Shaw: Oh yeah, it's purely trans - because for me it's always transforming, transforming, transforming.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah.

Susan Rudy: For yourself. Do you ever think about an audience? Do you think about who you would want to read you, or who does read you?

Catriona Strang: Sure, we all read each other's work.

Susan Rudy: People sitting around the table, that's who you're thinking about?

Nancy Shaw: And people are - there's links with visual arts people who should be here too, because I think there's been a real interaction. Performance people and maybe the general arts - general arts people - a lot of the the artist run centres, there's lots of interactions and stuff.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, they're all buying our books and coming to our readings. And they're like - I mean when I write I definitely think of an audience or a reader. I don't sort of try to - I don't try to make it specific or anything. But I think, ok, somebody's going to be reading or hearing this and so I have to make this as interesting as possible for that person.

Susan Rudy: So you think you want it to be interesting for them? I mean, do you think about what you want it to be for them? Do you want it to be unsettling? Do you want it to be completely chaotic?

Lisa Robertson: Well it depends on the piece. It depends on the piece.

Nancy Shaw: I mean I find myself I just write it and then read it and then find out what happens. I don't really physically think about it.

Lisa Robertson: Well, you're going through this process of rewriting too and every time, you're your own audience too.

Susan Rudy: That's one of the things I feel when I read your stuff. I said to Pauline once, I said I could never write this way because I wouldn't know when I was done, you know? Because I know how to write something that feels like it's done. Like an essay, because it feels like it's shaped in a way that's really -

Susan Clark: Does anybody here feel like their stuff *is* done? When it's printed? I mean you get a book, and what's that? That's a publisher's idea of done. -

Maxine Gadd: That's an important question. I remember Daphne Marlatt asking me that once too, you know.

Susan Rudy: I think that probably is an important question.

Nancy Shaw: The thing about when write essays I think that's the most *panic attack*, it's just like o my god there it is and I totally fucked up, right? It's *not done*.

Susan Rudy: I do too, once I think it's done then of course two weeks later I think it's totally fucked up.

Nancy Shaw: Everybody hates me, and there it is and they're going to pinning it to me for the rest of my life.

[general laughter]

Susan Rudy: But I mean at what point do you say, Ok, I'm going to show this to someone. Do you do that every time you write something, or what?

Susan Clark: Oh god, no. Probably when you get stuck, not when you're finished.

Susan Rudy: I know, ok it's when you're stuck. But I guess I'm just trying to get a sense of when you want to share it.

Catriona Strang: I find it much - I show stuff to, say, Lisa all the time in various stages.

Susan Clark: Yeah, there are different audiences, and different points for -

Stephen Forth: In my case it's more through letters. I do a lot of writing in letters, including everything from half - fractions of lines or things I'm thinking of to things more or less - I've gone on to work on something else, this is more or less completed. That's really what it is. When I've gone on to something else, so that's where a thing is left. And I might go back and change parts of it later if it becomes important.

Gerald Creede: Just write The End at the of it and then it's finished. It's true.

Lisa Robertson: I've been really influenced in my working methods by talking with visual artists who are coming out of like a conceptual art background. I seem to be using more and more a research-oriented approach to my writing. So I've got a sense of a kind of field of thought or whatever that I want to be dealing with then.

Susan Rudy: That you're like participating in at this moment but it's not finished. It's like a moment of -

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, but I have a sense of parameter to a project, too.

Susan Rudy: Ok.

Lisa Robertson: It's, you know. I mean, it's very much process-oriented when I'm doing it, but I sort of set a project.

Nancy Shaw: And it's not about process. Not at all.

Lisa Robertson: No, no. I'm dealing with this field of discourse that I've kind of mapped out for myself.

Catriona Strang: Yeah, you have some sense of what you're -

Lisa Robertson: For example right now, I'm really interested in doing writing that kind of works in and against the pastoral genre. And so I'm doing you know like academically floppy, but you know research that that interests me that feeds into this project. And you know I can get a sense of - I mean I'll know when I'm finished in a sense because it will have fulfilled the sh -

Susan Rudy: So it's not something that you want to say, it's a field of discourse that you're investigating.

Nancy Shaw: And my thing really is this really sort of feminist film theory and the cinematic narrative and trying to isolate that in writing and still photography, right. So it really is not about poetry in a way, like at all.

Susan Rudy: Do you mean like de Laurentis and people like that?

Nancy Shaw: Yes and Laura Mulvey really was sort of the biggest influence.

MG and Susan Clark: Who?

NS and Susan Rudy: Laura Mulvey. And her thing on narrative cinema, and what was it about the gaze and scopophilia. But then the interesting sort of formal thing, I think Stein's essays about spatial and temporal - it's trying to deal with the spatial and the temporal and the transpositions between those and dealing with narrative bits. Isolating the excess and the affective moments, and sort of unnoticed details that underlie maybe rational discourse and things like that.

Susan Rudy: Now you guys are saying you're not academics. I see that you're not, but you're all very intellectual. You're widely read, you understand difficult concepts like "field of discourse," I mean these are not generally available kinds of ways of talking about the world, will you agree with me on that?

Lisa Robertson: They're not in the newspapers, but within our community they're generally available.

Susan Rudy: Right - within your community.

Maxine Gadd: I think they're occurring in feminist literature now, and sociological feminist literature, serious sociological feminist literature.

Nancy Shaw: And even in the newspaper you know, you can see them like physically manifest, right, these discourses on difference and things like that, you know even if it's maybe a Liberal assimilation of it.

Stephen Forth: But I would say there are very active intellectual discourses completely outside of any academy.

Susan Rudy: Yeah I was trying to figure out - when people say they can't get into your group or whatever, maybe what they're feeling in an intellectual world that's not generally available anywhere.

Lary Bremner: I think it's a literate world. It's not - it doesn't have to - you don't have to be an academic.

Susan Rudy: No, I'm not saying that.

Lary Bremner: I know you're not saying that. I think it has to do with heightened literacy, reading a lot or being interested in beginning reading again, or -

Susan Rudy: Having read.

Nancy Shaw: And again having that physical context to actually talk to people, not passively consume.

[general murmur of consent]

Nancy Shaw: It means something to us, it actually means something to us.

Stephen Forth: I think In my case anyway it's because it's part of my day to day working life. I mean this is -

Susan Rudy: In what way?

Stephen Forth: I'm a translator. And the people I work with all the time are always talking about it. "Field of discourse" has been part of translation theory since I started translating in the '80s - the early '80s - and the people I've been working with over the last 8 years or so since I started translating. And these are people who are almost um - the freelance translators community in North America is rabidly anti-institutional. It's a group of incredibly strange people, many of whom are extremely technologically sophisticated. The characteristic one would be Donald [Fillipe?] who actually has ties with Jerome Rothenberg and ethnopoetics.

Susan Clark: I've never known anyone to write more like an academic. It's practically a caricature.

Stephen Forth: That's true. But he was an academic, right, in a sense, but um -

Maxine Gadd: Well, I mean the academy is just a place where you can get money for doing what you want to do, hopefully, no?

Pauline Butling: Yeah but it doesn't mean to say people don't do that. You just mentioned translation theory and that reminded me of another area that kinda we wanted to talk about, which was um - a lot of you in your work in the way you position yourself in the poem - in the text seem to be involved in a process that could be - it's not translation in the traditional sense - but it could be thought of a similar to what goes on in the translation process because you're within a field of discourse if you want to call it that, you're within a text, within a sentence and you're interfacing with material, whether it's - and often it's textual material that you've brought in through your research and you're interacting with that in certain ways that involve - how do I put it? - Susan and I have been talking about this - something like translation.

Nancy Shaw: Or transposition or something like transmutation.

Lary Bremner: Well I think we've been interested in homolinguistic translation.

Pauline Butling: Well yeah, homolinguistic translation. For me it came out of bp's notion of homolinguistic translation. But I mean it seems to me a useful model. I have no idea whether it makes any sense to you as a way of talking about your work, as opposed to the egotistical expressiveness of the subject, which is supposedly positioned outside the writing, and then out it flows, to one where you're positioned within the discourse. That seems to be more like a translation model.

Maxine Gadd: But it would be dead if it didn't have that subjectivity, that ego, that's what's charming.

Pauline Butling: I don't mean that there's not subjectivity there, but I mean in the way the subject interacts with the material.

Nancy Shaw: But you're not the heroic citizen or anything.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: You are, you are! You all know you are.

Pauline Butling: You're not inventing the meaning, that's what I guess I mean to say. You're working with meanings that are - I guess that's what I'm trying to say - you're working with meanings that are given to a certain extent, you're working with them and you're playing around with them.

Stephen Forth: It also means that it's failed.

Pauline Butling: Things that are veiled, yeah.

Stephen Forth: No, *failed*.

Pauline Butling: Oh, failed.

Stephen Forth: There's a really good piece by Norma Cole in Raddle Moon called "Destitution". Um which is -

Pauline Butling: Oh you've got your translation issue out, I haven't seen that.

Susan Clark: There's one more, probably on the road from Winnipeg right now. That's part 1.

Stephen Forth: Yes, this has been out for a while. But there's a really good talk that did at Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco that says a lot of things that I've been thinking about. And I'm not sure if I've been thinking about them in part because I talked to Norma, but the um if you read the first part -

Susan Clark: The translation thing, that was in this issue.

Stephen Forth: No, I'm talking about "Destitution", the one in this issue.

Pauline Butling: But I don't want to impose something. I mean, is that a useful way of talking about your sense of what you're doing?

Susan Clark: Translation to me has that aura of - something's the original and something's the, you know -

Pauline Butling: It still has that aura?

Susan Clark: Well, yeah, I mean it certainly wouldn't reading Norma, but if you use translation in most contexts people think of an original and then a maybe -

Maxine Gadd: No no because like with a language - I mean we're all aware of the different structures of different languages and how funny it makes your head when you try to think of them, and how interesting. Like that's the charm of learning another language, right? So you're not really taking -

Susan Clark: Right. But that's what Norma would say. When she was trying to do her translation panel we went out to coffee one day and she just - we just broke up because she said there's nothing to say about translation, it's just *not the same*. So this used to be this sort of little motto, that there's no such thing as translation, it just *wasn't the same*, you just had another thing and it was in a different language and they weren't *the same*. And I think that's what I would think. So when you say translation there's a sort of residual sense that somehow there's an original, real...

Pauline Butling: Let's drop it, I think, it's not useful.

Susan Clark: No but there's something about translation that's certainly - I *feel* something about translation.

Pauline Butling: I'm not talking about translation from one language to another.

Susan Clark: But I just wouldn't want it to sort of, turn up somewhere.

Pauline Butling: We should probably find another way of talking about it.

Maxine Gadd: But there is that element, when you find somebody's work utterly fascinating and never thought of writing that way before you know. And then you start to do it, or try to do it.

Pauline Butling: But I'm thinking of something different. I'm thinking of when you read the kinds of texts you people produce - and I don't mean to make them all the same but - there's a sense that there's a writer here who operates within you know a field of signs that are familiar to you and yet are also attached to a larger discursive field that you may or may not totally connect to. And one of the things that goes on in the writing process is deconstructing a lot of that material that is presented to you and reconfiguring it in ways that make meaning differently from the context that it initially occurred in. That's the way I'm thinking of translation. So I think probably it's the wrong word, and we should just talk about what your sense is of how your work on a poem, and forget about translation. Because that's the other thing, we wanted to talk about the macro level of where everybody's coming from, and also talk in particular.

Judy Radul: Well I feel that sometimes in that sense I might like hear some kind of example of speech that happens on a tv or radio or socially and [jist] some vocabulary or some pattern from that I might include and that could be a translation.

Pauline Butling: Well, like a lot of the work of deconstruction could be talked of as translation. No nevermind, let's just drop translation. Let's talk about -

Maxine Gadd: I want to talk about deconstruction, I want to hear more about it -

Susan Rudy: What about meaning? I really want to hear what you think about meaning.

Pauline Butling: No, stop! I want to talk about process first.

Susan Rudy: Same thing. I think it's connected. I mean does that have anything to do with what any of you are trying to do?

David Ayre: Meaning?

Susan Rudy: What does meaning mean?

Susan Clark: We're all working on *meaningless* stuff.

Susan Rudy: No, this is something Fred and I are arguing about like for hours.

Pauline Butling: Let's not get into meaning.

Susan Rudy: I *want to*.

David Ayre: Ok I'm going to talk about meaning. Go ahead. When I was at Simon Fraser, I was going to major in cognitive science. And I sort of bypassed that and I don't know what it means. But anyway, I was doing that. I was really heavily into that for many years. Just thinking about -

Susan Clark: Can you describe what "cognitive science" is? Is that in the psychology department?

David Ayre: At Simon Fraser, it's linguistics, philosophy, computer science and psychology sort of intergrained and entwined. And you can concentrate on linguistics or computer science or whatever one, but you get all these different fields you can relate to. And thinking - I don't know if this has anything to do with what we're talking about - thinking about meaning, I started to think about what sentences mean, and then what words mean and then I finally got down to units and letters which had to do with bp and then I got down to this thing where you've got these symbols and it just totally exploded everything and it just broke everything down. And in the last few months I've had this problem with writing because when I try and form words and put words together I can't help but look at what's in the word, and what the words do together, and it's a very slow

process, even trying to write sentences right now. It's a really weird experience to go down that deep and then sort of come back up.

Susan Clark: But I think that's part of why people say that what we're doing is so hard to understand, because people are - the whole process of socialisation and learning to speak involves *ignoring* all those other things that are gonna happen. Like McCaffery says about paragrams and things - you're trained to *ignore* all the other things that are happening in the language. So once you change your focus, you let yourself see it, then it's just - it's just chaos.

Susan Rudy: But you're learning to see another meaning too right, the meaning's becoming more.

Susan Clark: Lot's more meaning, not *another* meaning.

Catherine Bennett: Multiplicity. It's multiplicity.

Susan Rudy: That's what I thought. How much more is available than what you're actually taught to see.

Catriona Strang: That's why to ask if our work has anything to do with meaning is just utterly ridiculous. To me that's absolutely what we're all working with.

Gerald Creede: Excuse me you folks, I have to go.

Catriona Strang: Bye Gerry.

Nancy Shaw: Bye Gerry. It's all *about* meaning.

Gerald Creede: Oh yeah.

Susan Rudy: But you're obviously thinking about meaning in a different way than um -

Nancy Shaw: We're not transparent meaning, no.

Susan Rudy: Exactly, so that's why I wanted to know how you're thinking about it.

Lisa Robertson: I think, well for me, and for most of us maybe, it's not so much a prior thing. It's not like we're sit setting down to express a meaning we have already conceived.

Nancy Shaw: Did you say "sacking"? I thought you said "sacking down".

Lisa Robertson: Setting down.

Susan Rudy: So how does it arise then?

Lisa Robertson: Well, to me it's a - I mean I try to set up methodologies or processes of writing so that all these meanings are coming out of my writing that I could not have imagined beforehand. Which makes it interesting to do. I mean, I hate writing essays, because it's just -

Susan Rudy: But you could write this in essays too, though.

Lisa Robertson: I realise that they're not completely rigid - but you know there's a different concept of clearly expressing a prior meaning. Even if it's only an illusion of that. And it's so pleasurable to -

Maxine Gadd: That's one of the mean things to say about Language poets, though, is that there is such a difference between their poetry and the things they write about while they're writing. And when you read what they're writing, it's usually fairly transparent versus their -

Stephen Forth: That's not - that's almost only true of - that's not true of someone like Susan Howe, though. That's more like a - that seems to me almost a description of Ron Silliman. Ron Silliman is really like that.

Nancy Shaw: But method [?] serves different purposes too, right?

Maxine Gadd: It is a relief though, it gets you off the hook for awhile.

Catriona Strang: And it's just a genre, you take it on as a genre.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, it's a genre.

Stephen Forth: But um - I don't know that - also in my own writing and in my own reading, in my own day to day work, I encounter places where language fails to mean, um where different languages can't mean in the same way others do, and that the writing fails in a variety of different ways.

Susan Clark: That's somewhere that translation comes in.

Catriona Strang: I have a real problem with this notion of failure, I really do.

Pauline Butling: Failure of meaning?

Catriona Strang: Or the notion - I mean, we sort of talked about this before - don't want to get into this right now.

Susan Rudy: What do you mean?

Catriona Strang: Just the notion that the language can fail is just to make all kinds of assumptions about what you want it to do.

Susan Clark: But I've noticed with people I know who speak several different languages, especially, like you, very different language groups, they'll start to say something then realise that you can't say it in English. And then you have to kind of hedge your way around it. That's why I like the breakup of obvious meaning in work because it almost treats - I mean I've learned two other languages and it does the same kind of thing to teach your brain to somehow get to places that English doesn't normally or hasn't been allowed to get to.

Lisa Robertson: I don't see it as a breakup of meaning, though.

Susan Clark: No breakup of that obvious fixed meaning.

Catriona Strang: Yeah, I see it that way too.

Lisa Robertson: I see it as a proliferation of meaning. That's where the word 'deconstruction' is a problem to me - you're starting with something and pulling it apart.

Stephen Forth: No, I don't see it that way and I don't experience it that way.

Catriona Strang: No, I know you don't, we've talked about that before.

Pauline Butling: I would be interested in - Lisa talked about setting up methodologies or processes that get - that open things up for you.

Susan Clark: Ok, so we should talk about *syntax* rather than meaning because deconstruction has to do with syntactical -

Maxine Gadd: Well the only other thing I can say about meaning is that it is an emotional word. I mean my first nervous breakdown, where I actually turned up in the hospital at the age of 24 came after writing a psychology test in a language which was fed to us in some sort of way, I don't know how. I wrote the exam and I left half way through. I cracked up and went to the hospital - I had other reasons too, I was trying to raise a kid by myself - when I went back to see the professor he said you had a perfect mark. I had learned this language without understanding *a word* of what it was.

Susan Rudy: That's really interesting.

Maxine Gadd: And that was a big - and so there's an element of thereapy, of um -

Nancy Shaw: Well that's when it sort of like began sort of being a - all of us are sort of saying - a lot of us are saying when we're in school you're going through the motions of this but as far as actually physically meaning something to you or having some sort of resonance, right - I mean you can memorise and mimick you can -

Maxine Gadd: But I didn't memorise it - I didn't have time to memorise it, I was just - it just sunk in. I was operating in it and I felt totally freaked out by that fact, but then since then, one learns to enjoy that - ha ha ha.

Susan Rudy: But doesn't that happen in every use of language until you become aware of it?

Maxine Gadd: To some extent, yeah.

Susan Rudy: That's part of what this poetry exposes, that the most ordinary expressions we all use are languages we learn without having understood a word.

Stephen Forth: But um at the same time isn't that one of the ways that uh - for example, *fiberflub* [?] you know is a word of the current forestry industry. It's a way of referring to something without having to think about what it means.

Susan Rudy: Oh, exactly, that's what you're saying yeah.

Susan Clark: You mean euphemisms. "Articulate conversation in the ambient air!"

Nancy Shaw: A lot of language acts as euphemism.

Stephen Forth: Yeah.

Maxine Gadd: Supposedly this language was asking questions in its own context, it's own syntax, its own vocabulary, and I was responding - I had learned to respond to it in a way that was meaningful to that professor and not to me, that's what's kind of weird. But that's what happens in poetry all the time.

Stephen Forth: But um not just in poetry, I think that's a large part of how we're indoctrinated socially is that when we learn -

Maxine Gadd: We don't even realise -

Susan Rudy: Language serves someone else, like that professor.

Maxine Gadd: We think that because we have some sort of emotional level going on that we're on that we actually know what's going on, because we feel we're emotionally attached to those words.

Stephen Forth: But even more seriously I think is when we don't feel emotionally attached to it, and we think we're taking part in the discourse, but we're actually not.

Susan Rudy: Well both are interesting cases.

Maxine Gadd: Ha ha ha ha, who knows.

Stephen Forth: Because that's what happened to me when I worked in a securities company in Tokyo. And I uh knew the words, but they had absolutely no emotional connotation to me. I was totally alienated, and that's one of rea - one of the many reasons I went freelance, was because I was working in an environment in learned vocabularies in English and Japanese. And I knew the vocabularies and *syntax*, because I had to map one onto the other, but it didn't mean anything to me - at all. And I prob - and I don't think I knew what it meant. You know words like uh - this company's going to uh, I can't remember the words - "rationalise its organisation" means it's going to -

Maxine Gadd: Means people are going to get fired.

Stephen Forth: Yeah, it's gonna fire people. And there's all - and I think a lot of the time we're dealing in discourses that we don't connect emotion to the words that almost should be there.

Dan Farrell: Do you think there is a language that you feel closer to, that you can draw a line and say - all the rest of it?

Stephen Forth: I don't think there is, but in writing that's what I'm trying to work towards.

Dan Farrell: I would - I would say that I've been trying to work away from that.

Catriona Strang: Yeah.

Dan Farrell: That somehow there's this language that you can identify with that sort of positions you, and that then there's this outside, and they're always in conflict.

Nancy Shaw: Does anybody want a beer?

Susan Rudy: I'm not through with the word meaning at all, I think that's an interesting -

Pauline Butling: I still want to get back to strategies.

Susan Rudy: Yeah, what do you do when you write?

Dan Farrell: I don't know - it seems like all - like every bit of language is more like a contest between different sort of between different meanings.

Susan Rudy: Maybe we could do a round table thing about method, you know, how you generate text, or whatever kind of language you use to talk about it.

Catriona Strang: I just want to hear what Dan has to say.

Pauline Butling: So you work with that contested -

Dan Farrell: Yeah.

Pauline Butling: I think people probably work in very different ways.

Lisa Robertson: Well you have - the way you work with time, there's this kind of doubling of like contested meanings and you use it as a method too -

Dan Farrell: Um.... yeah. And the thing - well I don't do that much anymore - the thing with a pun is that it's just all sort of there, it's all available if you get it. And if you don't get it - well it's obvious. And so you -

Pauline Butling: Judy and Larry have been really quiet. Do you want to say anything?

Lary Bremner: We are.

Judy Radul: Uh, method? I write for events. I write for - if I have a reading coming up I write. If I don't have a reading I generally don't write. I mean, I do enough things that I get a fair amount done but I generally write for events. One of the things I almost always do and I do more and more and almost is I include something about that event, that situation, into my work. So sometimes it doesn't actually even make sense outside of that evening or something. And I -

Pauline Butling: As you're actually writing - Lisa mentioned that she looks for strategies that open things up for her as she's writing. Do you have any sense of particular strategies that you might use to get things going?

Judy Radul: Well I'm trying to give myself more sort of ideas of sort of formal - well I mean before I was really really free-form - well I started out I'd have a project or a topic or a loose idea of something and then just write and then um - a sense of sound and rhythm actually was one of my earliest controlling you know, what I would make my decisions around. And I also used to use typing errors really really a lot to generate new words and

[mp3 no.1 ends]

[mp3 no.2 starts, little time has passed]

Judy Radul: So um I don't have any exact - I use different kinds of methods to write. Right now the sort of thing I'm working with is - my last performance had a lot of descriptions of the actions I was doing in it and actions - it was like I was describing it as I was doing it but I was also setting up things that didn't happen. My writing's in some

ways including more description of what - sort of like bending time, like what could be happening at that moment, but is almost isn't happening cos in that case I'm reading and doing some kind of action, there's some kind of set up, so.

Pauline Butling: When you use typos to discover a new meaning is that a -

Judy Radul: Well I haven't really - I don't do it much anymore. I used to just type really just insanely fast.

Maxine Gadd: I do it too, Judith. I do it lots.

Pauline Butling: Well it's pretty fun I think.

Judy Radul: Yeah and I just - it would make other words. One of the things I just we're sort of already talking about is this really simple thing. One of the first things I did here was I took Lyn Hejinian's workshop, and she just talked about almost in a scientific way that you would come and - it's the opposite of the kind of creative process where you have something you want to get out, or you know what you want to get out or see or express - is you take the words and you put them together in some process - whatever it is, cut-ups, just taking things out of the newspaper, taking things out of a dictionary or just taking things out of your head - um and you invent something you make some meaning that couldn't exist without you putting those two words together. And I saw that as kind of almost like a scientific thing.

Lisa Robertson: That was the first workshop I took too, and her discussions of method really were great. She would talk - you know about you know sort of the general idea of editing is is like to stuff away until you're down to that - the precise essence, you know? And she would - she was the first person I ever heard from well you know "keep on adding," just keep adding until it's, you know, until it's a thing. It's just like just that simple idea just blew apart my whole idea of method.

Judy Radul: That really appeals to me too. I've always been into really excessive strategies.

Maxine Gadd: Excess. *Accessive*.

Lisa Robertson: Well not just excess, in an emotional way but it's almost like Judy was saying scientific or at least very physical, you know like just -

Pauline Butling: Well *depersonalised* - is that what you mean by saying you think of it as scientific? I think of scientific as something that's -

Judy Radul: Well I guess method in a way that's just to me a bit like scientific.

Lisa Robertson: It's material.

Stephen Forth: It reminds me of Jackson MacLow's -

Susan Rudy: Well it changes the place of meaning from your head to the words on the page, doesn't it?

Judy Radul: Well and I like to think of it as like you know - I don't really mind - well I like the word 'creativity' but I like to think of it as a different kind of creativity where you're not you know doing something kind of banal, like personal. What was that?

Nancy Shaw: Progenitor.

Judy Radul: Progenitor!

Pauline Butling: But there's quite a - is there - is *randomness* important in this, you know just putting things together in random ways?

Maxine Gadd: It's hard to do, I think.

Judy Radul: I don't think there is random ways to - I think it's impossible for me. How can I be random? I'm a structure, in a way.

Maxine Gadd: Well I mean you might try it, but that would be freedom, wouldn't it, if you could.

Susan Clark: Well I think somebody random - you wouldn't like him.

David Ayre: To the I-Ching.

Maxine Gadd: But that's not random.

Stephen Forth: It's one of the least random things there is. You access it randomly, but it itself is not random at all.

Pauline Butling: But when you choose what you're going to bring together, what's the basis for that choice?

Judy Radul: I guess, what's the basis of the choice is - there's a few different bases either, to make some kind of meaning. Some kind of meaning. It's not - I don't think it's random, I mean -

Pauline Butling: Well of course I don't mean it is but I wonder if you might set up something that seems random at first in order to open up -

Judy Radul: It might seem - yeah it might *seem* random. I don't think the word is random.

Stephen Forth: Certainly Jackson MacLow actually does that right, and Steve McCaffery's done that, and a lot of people have done that.

Pauline Butling: Programmed randomness, which is still *programmed*.

Judy Radul: Right, yeah.

Maxine Gadd: And eventually you see the pattern.

Stephen Forth: It takes it one remove back, and how a number table's generated in the first place.

Pauline Butling: Well a lot of the performance work of the '60s and the visual art cross-over era - John Cage and Alan Kaprow and those people - were talking about programming uncertainty but they still acknowledged that they were setting it up.

Judy Radul: Yeah, yeah. But I don't think it's exactly the same as that cos it's about -

Pauline Butling: No, it's not exactly the same.

Nancy Shaw: That's almost become cliché, actually, just as at the time it was I mean a specific -

Judy Radul: I think it's more about excess than randomness, it's completely about -

Maxine Gadd: Well randomness frees us, that's the joy of it is when - it is, to me.

Judy Radul: It is, but then I just have this thing about - it's *not random*.

Maxine Gadd: But I mean it's impossible to be random, because we are so set, we are so programmed. I mean if I could find a way to be random I would. I'm always looking for it.

Lisa Robertson: You're always teasing a vocabulary to work from.

Susan Clark: That's why I think John Cage's thing is so interesting, his piece where there's complete silence for four minutes and forty four seconds so that everything comes from the outside, there's nothing from - the performer just sits there, but all you hear is the trucks and people chattering -

Catriona Strang: But also in that Cage performance he's chosen where to sit. It's completely staged.

Susan Clark: Yes, I know.

Nancy Shaw: It's an orchestration.

Susan Clark: But it makes a mockery of performance.

Catriona Strang: Sure, but that's a different thing.

Susan Clark: I know, it's just *one more* thing.

Maxine Gadd: But I mean I wouldn't just denigrate randomness, because randomness is probably the hardest thing to do. I think that's what -

Judy Radul: Oh it is, but I wouldn't want to impose it on something where it doesn't exist cos I have things like people will always come up and say Did you just make that up?

[general laughter]

Judy Radul: And that's why I stopped memo -

Maxine Gadd: Yeah, you were wonderful like that.

Judy Radul: I used to memorise my work but I just don't do it because I can't - it really - I would rather not think that somebody thinks I'm just standing there making it up.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: But there used to be a poet around here who just gave it up entirely and went into publishing like trade books or something like that, but he was terrific and he used to be able to get on the stage and just make up a poem. And it was interesting, it was not boring.

Pauline Butling: I like your notion of *excess*, that seems like a useful term to talk about. Or not talk about necessarily but -

Judy Radul: Yeah, I think that might link into this. Yeah I mean I always sort of - when I went to school in visual arts I mean there was - without anybody talking about an aesthetic and everybody being really down on the idea of an aesthetic - there was still this sort of "less is more" aesthetic and my whole presentation was always really excessive - I couldn't, I couldn't -

Nancy Shaw: And excess being uncontainable and stuff.

Maxine Gadd: And unexpected -

Judy Radul: And gross and un - just like bad ways of thinking and

Susan Rudy: Intellectual sloppiness.

[general laughter]

Judy Radul: Thank you, yes!

Maxine Gadd: Sheer energy, yeah.

Pauline Butling: Out of control.

Judy Radul: Just the idea that you could say what you wanted to say if you just got it right. And my idea was that you probably can't say what you want to say exactly, you don't even know what you want to say and you just -- you just go for it. And for me - I mean I'm still quite focused on the idea of an event and a thing happening and I sort of don't publish that much and haven't really figured out that aspect of my writing.

Pauline Butling: You see it more occurring in time, in time and place.

Judy Radul: Yeah, in *place* almost more than whatever in time - but just in an event and a really specific situation -

Pauline Butling: Do you document it then? Do you? As a video?

Judy Radul: Yeah, as a video. Sometimes. But ah - so my process just seems to have a lot to do with - whatever situation I'm entering almost kind of determines my process and also whatever medium I'm dealing with. If I'm writing for a performance I'm trying to include what I know about contemporary writing and the history of writing and also what I know performance and what I know about whatever I'm doing. Ways to upset people.

[general giggles]

Pauline Butling: Do you want to say anything Larry?

Lary Bremner: No uh my only approach to method is that if you have to - that it's just some way to generate something and that's all you could begin with.

Pauline Butling: What are some of the ways though?

Lary Bremner: Well, I don't think it much *matters*.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah.

Judy Radul: Yeah.

Lary Bremner: I mean, there's something about programmed randomness, or imposing a grid to begin with that reminds me of the sort of authority of the author thing again. And I think what you can do is start with something like that and then - and then move off, move off completely from that. You don't have to stay with that, because it implies something that you already know or that you're expecting, and I think the whole thrill of writing is discovery.

Judy Radul: So could it even be a method that you say to yourself well I'm going to - in this piece whatever it is I'm going to do the thing that is most - I'm going to - everything I do has to be totally embarrassing to me, or everything - I mean Abigail [Child] sort of used that example of one thing she did that was going to be totally - yeah something that was more over the t - just something she didn't think she should do - that is a method.

Pauline Butling: Like reading your bad poems at KSW.

[general laughter]

Pauline Butling: Anybody else want to talk about this or anything you guys want to talk about?

Judy Radul: I think we should talk about alcohol and humour, actually. For me seriously, because for me those are two of the big ones - two of the things that actually make me interested in the Kootenay School.

[general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: You can get beer here!

Susan Rudy: Do you always drink for free? Is this always happening - drink for free, all of you?

Judy Radul: No no, it's usually expensive. No but I think that there's this social life for some people beyond the thing, and it does interconnect with the visual arts world and it is actually for me a lot to do with - I think there's an incredible sense of humour in a lot of the writing that comes out of here which makes it really accessible, and - well 'accessible', I don't know about that word, but -

Catriona Strang: And what is your preferred drink, Judy?

[general giggles]

Judy Radul: Anything but red wine right now. I don't even drink that much but I do think that - somehow it seems important to me.

Nancy Shaw: And we'll go and sit for hours in a bar you know and we have to talk about something so - and if you talk about yourself that gets boring so you talk about work.

Judy Radul: That's where it really happens. You're saying I talk about myself too much?

Maxine Gadd: Nobody does dope anymore, eh?

Catriona Strang: Not in a bar.

Pauline Butling: So it's this world of talk that's really important to all of you?

[general murmur of assent]

Maxine Gadd: Well that's always been true I mean of any group.

Judy Radul: That's always true I guess of every group but that's the part that's not a sort of dry academic thing. I don't know, I do think it's important.

Lary Bremner: I sort of want to dispense with this notion that this is even possibly elitist, the stuff that we do, you know. I think it's the widest possible - language is one of the widest possible realms and it's inclusive of so much. It's not you know - Gertrude Stein wrote in between the wars, she's hardly - is she accessible? Is she still avant-garde? Where's her place in all this?

Pauline Butling: Well that avant-garde notion sort of stinks, doesn't it? Cos it sets up a hierarchy.

Maxine Gadd: The elitist thing more relates to who comes here, and they all do tend to be white and of a certain class you know you don't see native people or a lot of Chinese or -

Nancy Shaw: And art has been always been any aesthetic production has been like that in a way too, so.

Maxine Gadd: And that's unconscious, that's something that's actually not controllable because once you try to be - to get people from outside of the discerned group then you're patronising, or you're - so that is a perennial problem, but I don't know how you could cope with it.

Lisa Robertson: The class thing is a bit of a misdenomer though, because I think everybody sitting around this table right now comes from very *different* backgrounds. It's not like we're all sort of upper middle class you know and that's it period, you know.

Susan Clark: How many military backgrounds?

Maxine Gadd: But I'm just saying that you can't do anything about it, I mean what can you do about it?

Judy Radul: It's very hard not to have a strategy that's very artificial. I mean racially it is really -

Maxine Gadd: Art is artificial.

Judy Radul: *Art is artificial*, yeah.

Pauline Butling: Does that mean it wouldn't be worth doing?

Judy Radul: No, I think it's worth doing and we're trying to make it happen. The way it will happen, I think, is through conversation and um - like it's not going to happen by recruitment you know it's going to happen by people being interested. And I actually think - and in another way our culture is elitist in that it - there's something that says "you can't understand that" and "don't go there". And I don't want to buy into that, I'm not gonna write - I mean I've performed in all sorts of places where nobody had any problem with my writing at all. In bars, and with bands, and you know.

Pauline Butling: Well I think one of the propositions from KSW from the start was because it's all volunteers - it could be criticised for this but - since it's all volunteers that we were going to do things that we're interested in doing and if you try to do things that you think someone else is interested in you doing it doesn't work in any way. And if you're going to put in all this effort you're going to get something out of it for god's sakes.

Maxine Gadd: That was part of the old LPP the Labour Progressive Party, which was the communist party in the '40s, was "you're supposed to be accessible to people and write people's poetry" and only the most abominable hack work issued from that. It was so deadening.

Lisa Robertson: That's really condescending, just in concept.

Stephen Forth: That's pretty patronising.

Judy Radul: And what is - and I'd also like to examine what is the force that is out there? I've heard about other organisations, even like say the Western Front, when I went to school it was like this thing -

Nancy Shaw: Creeps.

Judy Radul: - "oh we can't go there, you can't go there, that's closed shop, they'll never talk to you" and they've been my biggest supporter.

Susan Rudy: What did you say, Lisa?

Lisa Robertson: It just has a lot to do with general kind of what's in the air, how people talk about something, which more often than not has nothing to do with it.

Stephen Forth: But Dave was saying some interesting things at a meeting a while ago about the perception of KSW among younger people at Simon Fraser.

Susan Rudy: What was that?

David Ayre: Well, a lot of younger writers - well I was sort of talking to people I sort of hang around - even though they've never been here they've got this notion that - well some people are scared of it like *literally scared*, they don't want to come here because it's just a fear of - I don't know *what* it is. When I first came here I didn't know anything about it and I came here and I was attracted to it immediately but I guess it's - I don't know how it's gotten this sort of reputation of being this sort of - this is how I feel about how it's just sort of viewed out there it's sort of this closed group and uh -

Susan Clark: But then all of us around this table no matter how long we've been here all discovered we were really scared in the beginning too.

David Ayre: Yeah, I know.

Susan Clark: And part of that is you know *wanting*. If you really like somebody you get scared that you're not going to be accepted -

David Ayre: And there's a big labelling of everybody here as being Language poets and that's what I thought too.

Catherine Bennett: What is a "Language poet"?

David Ayre: I don't know. Language-oriented, or whatever.

Catherine Bennett: This is the thing that always gets me, when we try to lump it all under Language poetry.

Maxine Gadd: But I think there's a separation between sort of seeing a school of writing an aesthetic and the simple dynamics of coming in and thinking - it's just general psychology, I mean you come in and you don't know anybody and nobody looks at you and talks to you and you think "oh, they all hate me". That's just 8-year old socialisation. [general laughter]

Lisa Robertson: Well yeah, you hear this and then for those of us who work here you feel like some kind of hostess committee, you know. What do you have to do, kinda go up and "Oh whoa, it's so great you're here. Have a beer!" Does everybody need to be -

Maxine Gadd: Well, it is nice - it's nice when somebody does that.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah but it's kind of exhausting to just sort of always be putting this out.

Susan Clark: Professional hostess.

Lary Bremner: Who's going to do the initiations?

Nancy Shaw: Initiations! It's a cult! [?]

Lisa Robertson: Can't people sort of look after themselves? It's sort of sickening. People aren't children, you know.

Maxine Gadd: We all *are*, we all are.

Pauline Butling: I think it has to do with the fact that maybe it's easier for people to have access when they see specific courses or workshops that have a defined form and a safer place.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, yeah and a way to participate.

Susan Clark: And you can assign yourself the label of student, so you don't have to know everything.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah, that's a very nice stage of permission.

Susan Clark: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Lary Bremner: Or away from that I think one of the problems is that it's called Kootenay *school* and that's the institution, and it's very organised, and it has a place. So that's -

Nancy Shaw: And it's been around for - now it has been around for a long time.

Lary Bremner: So it creates this idea of a single, tight entity that's sort of exclusive.

Maxine Gadd: We should have more rooms in them with different things in them when you come in.

Pauline Butling: Or change the name.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, yeah.

Catriona Strang: But I think also part of that fear thing is also just what Nancy was talking about, like that it arrived with a big kind of boom -

Nancy Shaw: And it did stir things up, totally.

Catriona Strang: - and it did stir things up so that it's preceded by this reputation.

Pauline Butling: But these young writers at Simon Fraser wouldn't have any sense of that.

Catriona Strang: But that's probably where they get that idea from, that it's talked about sort of around you. And it's preceded by this weird reputation.

Nancy Shaw: Insidiously, through what's transmitted.

David Ayre: You don't hear a lot of it, really except from very obscure places, and it's -

Judy Radul: But I think actually that might be something that's instilled in students in some way too. Well, it's this fear of the outside world because it's - the academy you're in has to keep control of you in some way.

David Ayre: Cos you don't really hear about it from anybody at the university except from - the only person - people I can think of are Bowering and Miriam and um somebody else -

Pauline Butling: Roy

David Ayre: Roy and maybe two other people in Special Collections, Charles Watts and - I mean you don't hear a lot about it when you hear that people here are Language poets and when you get some American Language poetry and you're reading that I mean some of it is difficult to read you have to read it in a new way and it's - sometimes it's intimidating.

Pauline Butling: It's so interesting to see it's come to this since it started as an institution.

Nancy Shaw: Oh yeah, that's the funniest thing. It's still - and this is the other point - is that it's the most *underfunded* artist-run centre in the city because it's not really - it's a writer-run centre um it really relies the most on volunteer labour and you know we don't

have these huge overhead costs and stuff like that so it's sort of the most agile, non-institution of these kinds of groups, right? But then maybe does so much, and is very organised and has had a real effect on you know *writers*.

Stephen Forth: And it's provided a place for people from out of Vancouver to come to Vancouver and read.

Maxine Gadd: Like Pauline, do you feel like you're the mother? In a sense you are, eh, from way back when, eh?

Pauline Butling: I wonder how many people know there's a Kootenay School of Writing still in Nelson too?

Maxine Gadd: Oh I know I made a *big gaffe* about that -

Nancy Shaw: This is interesting because um we got a brochure the other day and the um writing section is joined up with the Kootenay School of the Arts and they are offering the writing courses and the arts courses and it looks like they might try to get accreditation again. So again it's this beginning idea again, which is a non-mainstream -

Pauline Butling: Well that's with - the change in government they'll quickly be disillusioned, I suspect.

Maxine Gadd: Well do you think there might be - I mean you hear about these lawsuits, they might sue you guys.

Catriona Strang: No, no.

Lisa Robertson: No. Well, we're not buddy-buddy but their budget goes through our budget.

Maxine Gadd: Cos I was talking to Polestar like when they were up there - I think they've moved down into the mainland now, but Polestar you know the publishing company - and I was sort of mentioning that I was sort of hanging out down here at the Kootenay School and she was very thin-nostrilled about that. She said well *we're* the Kootenay School they're not.

Lisa Robertson: Oh that's ridiculous.

Maxine Gadd: I know but I thought oh -

Pauline Butling: No, no. That's pretty peripheral. It might be one or two people but -

Catriona Strang: No.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah but there's that perception -

Nancy Shaw: Well we have a tax number so -

Pauline Butling: Oh no you don't!

Nancy Shaw: Oh we don't? Yeah but we have it here. We do all this stuff, so they're going to have a hard time.

Maxine Gadd: I mean it hardly is the Kootenays, you know.

Pauline Butling: Well it's neither the Kootenays, nor a school nor does it have exclusively to do with writing which is what I kind of like about it.

Maxine Gadd: Maybe we could get a grant from Kokanee um, Kokanee brewery.

Nancy Shaw: We tried, we tried. Yeah, but they wouldn't do it because we were too small. We tried that, we tried everything: Kootenay, Kokanee, all the beer companies. [general laughter]

Maxine Gadd: We could get that guy who plays that sasquatch, he's got a sense of humour what's his name, that actor?

David Ayre: Bill Rieder.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah maybe we could get him to come around and drink beer and become a patron. Patrons are the answer.

Judy Radul: Yeah, the need for patrons.

Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy: [22:35 - 28:38 Butling and Rudy talk about their own backgrounds, and a bit about the Kootenay School of Writing in Nelson.]

Pauline Butling: But that's a bit off-topic. Is there anything other people want to talk about? Catherine, you've been very quiet.

Catherine Bennett: Uh...

Susan Clark: She's been shamed for having an MA.

[general giggles]

Maxine Gadd: Tainted.

Catherine Bennett: Well I figure after that anything I could say is gonna be like child's play. Give me a place to start?

Susan Clark: Method. We were -

Pauline Butling: We were talking about method.

Catherine Bennett: When we were talking about method I was thinking that if - I always have to think when somebody asks me a question about method, because it's kind of like theory and practice. The theory comes after the practice. Usually for me long long long after the practice. Um I guess when I'm writing I start off with an idea or a concept that attracts me. And I'm exploring that through writing. And uh it's almost like the idea or the concept sort of generates on itself. It kind of rolls over and rolls over and how I know that I've finished a piece is once I've explored it to a point where it feels like I can't take it any farther then that piece seems to be finished for me. So that's kind of the way that I work.

Pauline Butling: An investigation.

Catherine Bennett: Very much an investigation, actually.

Pauline Butling: Yeah, exploration - that seems to be something other people have talked about a bit too.

Susan Clark: You're the only person using the novel form -

Catherine Bennett: Pardon me?

Susan Clark: You're the only person using the novel form - I think that's -

Catherine Bennett: That's true, but it's a strange kind of novel form I mean when that thing is finished it's part novel, part art catalogue, part literary criticism, it's sort of all over the map.

Pauline Butling: Susan, you said earlier that we should talk about syntax.

Susan Clark: No, I said instead of talking about *meaning*, because Lisa - actually I realised what I was saying, I meant to be talking about syntax and not meaning. Like deconstruction actually doesn't take part in meaning so much as it takes apart syntax, which is a *thing* that can be deconstructed - so that's all I was saying. We could talk about syntax, I think it's great.

Susan Rudy: Yeah, I'd like to hear you guys talk about syntax.

Pauline Butling: Try to take apart syntax.

Susan Clark: Where would I start, talking about syntax?

Pauline Butling: I mean I know you do - I love the way you do it but...

Susan Clark: I think a lot of what I do, although I may not be conscious of it at the time, comes out of archaic syntax and the syntax of other languages. It's something I noticed years after I started to do it that actually I was kind of fascinated by translated and - I

know I have another friend in Paris who's a translator, talking about *bad translation* we have this whole catalogue of bad trans - I mean which is sometimes it says things much better than a polished one.

Pauline Butling: Have you read much in linguistics? I mean, do you know much about the sort of technical stuff about the structure of syntax?

Susan Clark: They're real mathematical, kind of.

Pauline Butling: Oh no, not really mathematical stuff but like the

[mp3 no.2 cuts off]

[mp3 no.3 recording resumes after a short time has passed]

Susan Clark: - ornstein, and either have diffuse attention or -

Maxine Gadd: Could somebody recommend to me something like Saussure what one should read to start off with in linguistics?

Susan Rudy: Course in General Linguistics.

Pauline Butling: Course in General Linguistics!

Maxine Gadd: Ok, Saussure...

Pauline Butling: Actually I'd read Terrence Hawkes [?]. Short cut.

Nancy Shaw: Or any Roland Barthes too. Mythologies.

Maxine Gadd: Who?

Pauline Butling: Roland Barthes.

Lisa Robertson: Introduction to Mythologies.

Maxine Gadd: Introductions to Myths....

Catriona Strang: No, it's just called Mythologies. You just need to read the introduction.

Maxine Gadd: Ah right like in Das Capital, all you have to read is the first chapter.

Susan Clark: And Jacobsen's things on mental illness, wherever they are. Where are they?

Stephen Forth: And Nim Chimpsky. Gives you something to work against.

Lary Bremner: Who?

Stephen Forth: Nim Chimpsky.

[general murmur of "Chomsky"]

Susan Clark: Chimpsky!

Maxine Gadd: Oh yeah Chomsky. Yeah he's been around for a long time.

Stephen Forth: Chimpsky was the name of a chimpanzee someone...

Nancy Shaw: And then the Russian formalists. Viktor Shlovsky is really important.

Susan Clark: Shlovsky is great, and that was in Poetics Journal. S-C-H-L-O-V-S-K-Y.

Nancy Shaw: Yes, it was called what was it Four Lectures? And that's really important.

Maxine Gadd: S-C-H-?

Catriona Strang: -L-O-V-S-K-Y. Schlovsky. K-Y.

Lisa Robertson: I'm actually personally I'm - feel that I work less with syntax than I do with forms of grammar.

Susan Clark: Ok, well *distinguish them* then.

Stephen Forth: Would you care, ha ha ha, would you care to uh expand that now?

Lisa Robertson: I mean, I mean - well, uh pretty consistently whatever I write I sort of insist that it's like ruthlessly correct grammar, ha ha. Maybe this is sort of a perverse thing.

Susan Clark: Yeah, I know what you mean. That's what I meant about archaic.

Lisa Robertson: But I mean this is the whole field of structures with um that are almost have this - to me almost work as metrics. Like the grammar of the sentence I mean I'm referring to specifically. And um that um suggest this interior metrical structure. And I mean I've been really influenced by like archaic sentence forms, like Susan referred to, syntactically like 18th century and before. And so really complex sentences and how um how that um - well I mean our sentence is sort of really straightforward subject-object relation kind of you know has this direct teleological thrust to it and produces a meaning per se. But I find working with these - within these more archaic grammatical structures that um -

Susan Rudy: Did you go away and read 16th century prose to figure that out?

Lisa Robertson: Oh yeah I read that too, Greek prose in translation. Greek novels.

Susan Rudy: So something happens in the translation too already.

Lisa Robertson: Although I tend to - when I read Greek lately it's in Elizabethan translation

Susan Rudy: Right, so something really weird's going on.

Lisa Robertson: But I'm really interested in those really indeterminate and really complex grammatical structures and how those can work sort of against and within meaning.

Stephen Forth: You should read Japanese.

Maxine Gadd: Wasn't there a kind of acme of complexity like you read sort of Dr Johnson and those long long long periods.

Lisa Robertson: Well yeah the 18th century and then it just kind of went down from there. I don't know.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah, yeah what happened then? That's always fascinating.

Susan Rudy: But it's funny if you read Donne, like the sermons or something like that, that's such *gorgeous* language, like it's incredible. It's *poetry*, you know!

Lisa Robertson: Oh the prose just thrills me it's like yeah I just get such pleasure from that really dense, convoluted prose.

Susan Clark: Or Shakespeare.

Pauline Butling: Lisa, do you work a lot with sentence frag - so-called fragments?

Susan Rudy: Not if she's working with strict grammatical forms.

Pauline Butling: No no I know but when you say you're working with uh "correct grammatical structures" I just wondered if that -

Lisa Robertson: No, it starts with a capital letter, ends with a period and it can be parsed.

Susan Rudy: Has a subject and a verb.

Pauline Butling: Right. So you don't use what we would call a fragment?

Lisa Robertson: I have, but it interests me less and less.

Pauline Butling: But you do [Susan] a lot. I know you say you don't think about it but there's certainly -

Susan Clark: But now you're looking at stuff that's six years old.

Susan Rudy: This is - Believing in the World is six years old?

Susan Clark: No it's not six years but some of it's six years old. I used to be accused of Jamesian sentences, which I love best of all.

Nancy Shaw: Jamesian sentences.

Maxine Gadd: That whole question of the period, the actual dot, is something that is really problematic for me because I grew up with that haiku - that tendency to get rid of

capital letters and get rid of periods and now the stuff I'm reading it all has it again and it's always a dilemma like in the process.

Susan Rudy: Have you seen what Roy Kiyooka does with the period? It's like the period occupies the space of any other letter so that like um -

Maxine Gadd: Yeah you have to sort of play around with it.

Susan Rudy: - it would be like I don't know the end of a word like W-O-R-K-period-next-sentence right? It just occupies the same space so it's like the period doesn't stop, the period could push you back or forward. It works in a really neat way, cos it doesn't - it's not linear, it's - gives you choices.

Maxine Gadd: I use those slashes now too when I can't deal with you know that sort of business there because I think uh the Koots certainly - that's one of the things it seems to me I saw a lot of in the Koots is that: using the whole page and not using space, not doing that kind of spacing which sort of like - Lola Tostevin, who we haven't mentioned, the early stuff anyhow that she was doing was quite interesting - was very interesting.

Susan Rudy: Colour of Her Speech?

Maxine Gadd: Yeah. It was very minimal and uh getting out of *syntax* and -.

Susan Rudy: So once we start talking about this it sounds like you all do completely different things.

Stephen Forth: I think the whole thing with KSW is almost everybody sort of does do - do completely different things.

[general murmur of assent]

Stephen Forth: And uh - it's not - and but also - um you know it's change - the people change.

Susan Rudy: - themselves are changing - of course.

Nancy Shaw: I'm the only one who's really been around the longest but I wasn't here to begin with. And Jeff Derksen who I think just recently left the collective cos he's going away to school and things like that - he was - he's been here the whole time but I'd say maybe about ah '86 most of the sort of beginning members had moved on to other things, right?

Susan Rudy: What about Kathryn MacLeod?

Nancy Shaw: She sort of came in later, uh about maybe uh eighty - she came with Susan, right, when you guys took that course?

Susan Clark: We both took a course with Jeff. '86.

Nancy Shaw: And then she sort of joined the collective after that and then she left about 2 years ago or something like that.

Susan Clark: She's out of town, otherwise she'd have been here too. And Doug Stettar.

Stephen Forth: Another thing yeah - if you look around this table. When it was it was you know - what was the word you used? - a boy's club.

Pauline Butling: Oh yeah, definitely.

Susan Rudy: *This* was? Look at, there's at least half women here.

Pauline Butling: Oh yeah, KSW Vancouver was all-male, KSW Nelson was all-female, except for Fred.

Nancy Shaw: Well there was a few people that um would come - came in and out like Angela Herniak [?], and then Allison somebody who was a newspaper writer she was around for awhile and then -

Pauline Butling: Yeah and Kathy Alexander, she was involved with Writing magazine.

Nancy Shaw: Kathy Alexander a little bit. And then I sort of came in in the second year and then Deanna Ferguson was around for a while. But it was really a core of these 5 men who really did a lot of the work, so.

Pauline Butling: Calvin, Colin, Jeff.

Susan Rudy: But you've got lots of women now.

Maxine Gadd: I guess by the time I came in here it seemed very balanced, you know, really balanced.

Nancy Shaw: For the first few years it wasn't.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah it's kinda - number-wise it's pretty balanced but we're just sort of getting to the point recently where like um Feminist politics have become a point of consistent discussion. It sort of followed the demographics.

Susan Rudy: Right.

Nancy Shaw: And I think something that's really come up, though and that we're just gonna try and address is that um I mean that I mean we are all pretty well white and sometimes we have people who aren't white. And then but you know how do you address that if you're not - you don't want to be tokenistic and you don't you know - we do have our position and there's certain kinds of poetics we are dealing with and and so it - I think that that's kind of an interesting issue or maybe an interesting omission - I think it's something we're gonna try and address.

Pauline Butling: In what way do Feminist politics become a - I mean what are some of the issues that you address?

Lisa Robertson: Well, it comes up more like within um talks, the talks and panel discussions that we've had in the past couple of years. And in - also the whole issue of canonicity is really you know interesting.

Nancy Shaw: And subject-position and things like that.

Lisa Robertson: Probably canonicity gets sort of talked about the most just within the context of meetings and stuff, cos it's the most obvious thing when you're planning a programme.

Nancy Shaw: And then in people's work I think it really plays out in many subtle ways.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah in lots, in lots of works.

Susan Rudy: In Dorothy Lusk's I really felt it, you know some kind of Feminist impulse.

Nancy Shaw: Again I think it's in all our work but it's not that we would overtly call ourselves feminist or not um -

Lisa Robertson: I don't think that's a problem, I think anybody -

Nancy Shaw: No I didn't mean that's not the point but it's not um that - yeah sorry, I just...

Maxine Gadd: Well Feminism I'd say is a part of post-structuralism and you know a huge field of discourse.

Susan Rudy: A lot of Feminists are *really* offended by that though, by post-structuralist discourse has really left them out.

Maxine Gadd: Yeah but it hasn't - post-structuralism in its nature includes it - has to, has to, has to include. You know it has to - there's a tension there that draws it in.

Susan Rudy: Well, *potentially* but it *hasn't* included a lot of women.

Pauline Butling: Do you find the Bernstein, Silliman etc, the gang of three or whatever they're called - problematic?

Lisa Robertson: Well again it gets defined like that from the outside, right?

Pauline Butling: No I don't mean I - a lot of their work bothers me because of the really - I don't know if it's fair to call it sexist but a lot of their critique is of certain forms that are oppressive to women but in critiquing those forms they tend to re-inscribe them. I mean not - not intentionally but they're always putting them out there in a way that bothers me. I don't know whether that -

Lisa Robertson: Well except for like a couple of particular arguments that have cropped up. I don't know I don't really engage in their thought all that much. I'm way more interested in - I mean I read Harryman, Heijinian, Howe, you know Pat Reed [?]. I just don't pay that much - you know - we've got our own canon.

Susan Clark: I think you're right in saying it's the outside perception that those are the three wise men. Most of us came to this as women. I think.

Pauline Butling: I think everybody mentioned Bernstein and Silliman -

Susan Rudy: Not everybody, and very particularly. It's not for Lisa, you know.

Susan Clark: Not everybody!

Maxine Gadd: You don't have to read 'em, they're in the air. You know we're always gravitating [?] to these ghosts.

Lisa Robertson: Well, we have read it. I - actually I love Bernstein's work. I think it's great.

Susan Rudy: But you've got other stuff you can read too.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah.

Pauline Butling: I find it so aggressive and um just -

Nancy Shaw: Again this is interesting, because they did position themselves so overtly within this kind of modernist American poetry and they're really insisting on certain things being paid attention and questioning certain institutions but they're doing it in a very, very I think sort of overt and - the canon is -

Stephen Forth: Are you talking about very patriarchal uh [way of thought]? Charles Bernstein and also Joey for that matter, Joey Seamus [?]. It's not so much - it's not just work it's also a way of aligning yourself with other writers and a way of creating hierarchies of writers that um -

Maxine Gadd: But you don't have to like people to read them.

Stephen Forth: No. But I think there are other though - there are other in -

Pauline Butling: No, no but I'm just wondering if you've been concerned about what you call that patriarchal form of thought, the aggressiveness of it and so on, if that comes up within what you're saying -

Susan Clark: Certainly Bruce Andrews came and there was a big discussion and a big blowup.

Stephen Forth: With who, Bruce Andrews?

Lisa Robertson: I think that was almost more a personality thing with him. Well, not to deny that he's not uh very misogynist in a very interiorised way.

Susan Clark: Well, it turns out after the fact -

Catriona Strang: Yeah but there was ideology with Bruce Andrews too, I mean he was launching a specific attack on the methods of certain women writers, and that attack was just complete bogus on a lot of levels. Or, say, for lack of a better word, was a very patriarchal one.

Nancy Shaw: If you're interested in narrative - and he told us we were crazy.

Maxine Gadd: What would you recommend we read about that?

Pauline Butling: Don't! Nothing. Skip it. Skip Bruce Andrews. No, that's not fair.

Maxine Gadd: Well I just love a good fight.

Lisa Robertson: Well it was a very strange thing.

Nancy Shaw: But it was a fight that happened here.

Lisa Robertson: It had this huge proportion at the time but you know everybody thinks Bruce Andrews is a bit of a whacko in those accounts. It's almost like a pointless argument. Although I think at the time - that was like 2 or 2 years ago? - it sort of - for me anyways it really helped sort of help me clarify arguments and um gave me something to react against.

Stephen Forth: Do you guys recall that Gerry Gilbert had sort of positioned himself in a rather odd way - and I can't remember that far back anymore but uh -

Maxine Gadd: I don't know I think you can threaten to hit him with a beer bottle when he gets out of hand.

Stephen Forth: - Gerry Gilbert had - I can remember that talk when reading with Reenee, Reenee and Gerry - there was an interesting sort of dynamic happening.

Pauline Butling: Well no, I was just curious that you mentioned Feminist politics as something that is a concern, whether that has entered into the - or raised consciousness about the authoritarian nature and hierarchical structure and so on of some of those people whose work you admire for other reasons but you know how is -

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, sure. Well it does and more particularly within CanLit. I mean I find that a way more hierarchical and condescending structure.

Nancy Shaw: Way, way ...

Pauline Butling: Who are the authority figures in CanLit, then?

Maxine Gadd: Ha ha ha, good question - a hit-list!

Catriona Strang: Well who are they then?

Nancy Shaw: Um we just got this letter from - we got a submission from Frank Davey who is writing things about like womens' underwear and things like that.

Susan Clark: Who just had a reading by Clayton Eshleman, who's not Canadian.

Pauline Butling: But who do we think about as being hierarchical or authoritarian. I'm not saying there aren't people I'm just curious to know who you all

Lary Bremner: Brian Fawcett.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, Brian Fawcett.

Lisa Robertson: To me it's not an issue of individuals, it's the way that this has kind of developed as a community.

Pauline Butling: Vancouver?

Lisa Robertson: No, CanLit.

Catriona Strang: CanLit.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah.

Pauline Butling: I find the CanLit field sort of never manages to establish a clear centre. There's always shifting centres, shifting authority, so it never seems to me to be that authoritarian.

Susan Clark: But maybe because you're in the middle of it. Like *this*. But from the outside it looks like, you know. But I was always told by people that - by Americans, actually - that in Canadian literature all the main people are women. That's how it *seems* from the outside. I was thinking about how it seems from the outside cos there's - [general murmur of "Margaret Atwood"]

Nancy Shaw: Margaret Atwood, yeah the real central Canadian uh ...

Pauline Butling: But who are the real central Canadian -

Lisa Robertson: Look at who got tenure, look at the people who got tenure.

Catriona Strang: Yeah, at SFU we got taught Tish, and then it's you know Fred, George...

Susan Rudy: That's cos George was there.

Catriona Strang: George was teaching it.

Susan Clark: But that's SFU. At U of T it's like Clark Blaise [?] and like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Lawrence...

Lisa Robertson: It's like bpNichol, Fred, uh George.

Catriona Strang: Lionel Kearns.

Lisa Robertson: Kroetsch, Lionel Kearns, McCaffery, um you know.

Nancy Shaw: Unless you took Cathy Menzies [?], she taught all the women.

Catriona Strang: Right - so we get a - Daphne is just like *really* - oh well, she came from England and didn't really count.

Susan Rudy: *What!?! Ooouuooh!!!*

Nancy Shaw: But she was really - she was dealt with in Cathy [Menzies'] course though, as in Tish and all that kind of stuff.

Catriona Strang: Ok, so we got a different version.

Pauline Butling: What about uh who else?

Lisa Robertson: Well you know Roy taught Lola - Lola's work.

Pauline Butling: Well, for contemporary writers it's Lola.

Susan Clark: But I bet you SFU really is an anomaly I mean coming from - I went - I did an undergraduate degree at U of T and *it's not the same thing*.

Susan Rudy: Oh, that would be *deadly*.

Pauline Butling: You didn't get any contemporary writing I would think.

Susan Rudy: I bet you didn't.

Susan Clark: Well, I did a CanLit class with Sam Solecki and we did Tremblay [?] and I can't remember who else. James Reaney.

Susan Rudy: He would have taught people like Ondaatje probably too, wouldn't he?

Lisa Robertson: Oh yeah Ondaatje's in those courses.

Susan Rudy: He wrote a - he edited a book on Ondaatje. He didn't do that?

Susan Clark: That would have been pre-Ondaatje, that was a long time ago.

Lisa Robertson: But to me it's like the problem with CanLit in like, in Feminist - from the perspective of being a Feminist poet is that it seems that certain voices have been okayed as - it's okay to be a woman poet if you are you know extremely subjective you know there's certain - I mean essentialism is all the vogue, you know.

Susan Clark: That's my complaint about French writers. It's a *real problem* in France.

Maxine Gadd: Confessional.

Pauline Butling: If you can be categorised as a 'woman writer'.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, yeah. It's a real problem you know. If you go around talking about your body experience in fragmented sentences - you know appealing to that sort of quote unquote subjective, feminine -

Susan Rudy: Loose.

Lisa Robertson: - loose... It's - and to me it's like I don't want to participate in that but I mean, you know I'm a Feminist poet. So that's what in CanLit seems oppressive to me.

Susan Rudy: But you wouldn't describe say Daphne Marlatt as doing that, would you?

Lisa Robertson: Partially, yeah.

Maxine Gadd: Well you ought to be loose if you want to be, I mean you ought to be. But I mean Feminism's a pretty big subject actually.

Lisa Robertson: Oh yeah, yeah, oh yeah. But I'm not saying anything about Daphne Marlatt in particular.

Susan Rudy: Cos she's doing that but she's sure doing a lot of other things.

Lisa Robertson: Oh yeah for sure, but if you look at it as a structure and who gets - who slips in through the cracks.

Susan Rudy: How do you - do you have a sense of who's in through the cracks? I mean cos I don't have that sense, I don't even know who's *in* the cracks and who's not, you know.

Lisa Robertson: Who has *books*?

Pauline Butling: But what Lisa's saying is that the definition of Feminism right now doesn't allow a space for Lisa.

Susan Rudy: What definition of Feminism?

Pauline Butling: The one she's just described.

Maxine Gadd: I'd like to know what that is.

Susan Rudy: I know but - but where's that exist?

Nancy Shaw: Who gets published? Who gets books? Who gets money?

Lisa Robertson: Who gets books?

Judy Radul: See you later.

Catriona Strang: Bye Judy.

Nancy Shaw: Bye Judy.

Pauline Butling: Judy, thanks for coming. Oh Judy, listen - can we ask everybody to put their addresses down on a piece of paper too?

Susan Rudy: That'd be great. I know, I know, I'm just really wondering where that's coming from for you Lisa. Is there some place where you found that located? Like in trying to get something published somewhere or heard somewhere, or -

Lisa Robertson: I guess it's more sort of a point for me if I haven't found any Canadian women poets whose work I'm aware of through you know books or whatever that I feel I'm *vitaly interested in* and want to follow everything they do. No, but that's not true because there is, I mean there is Maxine -

Susan Rudy: What about Erin Mouré, have you read her?

Lisa Robertson: Bits, but for me Maxine, Maxine, Judith Copithorne, and Rhoda Rosenfeld have been you know systematically excluded. Pauline opened up by saying you know all the poets from the '60s and so on who have 6 to a dozen books published by now and then Maxine you know.

Susan Rudy: I know! I just read Maxine this year.

Lisa Robertson: So that's like - it seems to me the people who aren't fitting within this certain paradigm - sure, men they get cut off, they're living on welfare, they're not getting published, they're -

Maxine Gadd: It's a *function*, it's a very sociological function though, I mean for instance it's a function of energy and how you fit into a really truly social structure. I mean, like for instance - I mean with Daphne. She had a *lot* of energy. I mean you wouldn't believe the energy that woman has.

Susan Rudy: She sure does.

Maxine Gadd: Like I used to stay at their house sometimes when she was helping me edit *Lost Language* eh, and I mean every day the door would *disgorge* this immense *mountain* of correspondence.

Lisa Robertson: Yeah but, Maxine I don't think you guys have less energy. It's maybe not quite so network-oriented or something, you know. I mean there's enormous energy in this book you know I mean it's -

Maxine Gadd: Yeah but I've sort of experienced clinical depression for most of my life but ha ha ha - which is a function of you know sort of socially the kind of feedback that you get from friends and lovers. I mean you know you never talk about those things when we're talking about methodology or any of these aesthetics. And I mean, those are almost things you can't talk about.

Pauline Butling: Is this a concern for people here too that Lisa's expressed about - feeling oppressed by the -

Lisa Robertson: Well I don't personally feel oppressed because I don't choose to enter that structure, you know.

Pauline Butling: I know - but that there isn't anything there for you?

Susan Clark: In Canada?

Maxine Gadd: The canon, yeah.

Susan Clark: Well at different times there certainly always has been.

Lisa Robertson: Well to me it's like you know if they would be interested in what we're doing well that's great, but I'm not going to go beating down doors to be accepted into some sort of structure who I see has systematically ousted some of the most interesting women poets.

Susan Rudy: I don't know if it's necessarily the women who have done that, Lisa, I really don't. Like the women like Daphne don't have any power in the academy at all.

Stephen Forth: I don't think Lisa said that.

Catriona Strang: She's not accusing *them* of doing this.

Susan Rudy: I'm just trying to figure out though where it's happening, you know, where the exclusion is felt.

Maxine Gadd: It's just the old boys club and it's unsaid, it's unstated. In fact if you talk about it you're in for embarrassment. Because um it begets down to personalities and personal things.

Pauline Butling: And all the boys went into universities and took the professors' jobs and all the women -

Lisa Robertson: Got tenure and the women -

Pauline Butling: Well the women - to be fair - the women didn't necessarily try, but they aren't there so it hasn't -

Susan Rudy: The women who are - the senior women who are poets aren't in the academy, like Phyllis and Daphne.

Stephen Forth: But see this is not 'experiencing Canadian literature'. I was a very sort of nationalist Canadian when I left Canada but I had very little knowledge of CanLit as such apart from Atwood and Margaret Lawrence and the type of things that you would sort of read any - that come up automatically. And - as you know - ordering books from outside of Canada and having no sort of feedback on who I was supposed to be reading. It was - in fact Maxine's book was one of the books I found most interesting, you know *Lost*

Language. And um also Daphne Marlatt I heard about from Cid Corman and I had a very different sense.

Susan Clark: No Coach House has certainly functioned to get some books into the mainstream.

Stephen Forth: Well I think if you're living in Canada there's probably a hierarchy within those Coach House catalogues but it was a hierarchy that I wasn't aware of.

Susan Clark: No, no I just mean the fact that they were there, and they sent you free copies. I mean they sent me review copies *for years* because I used to review books.

Maxine Gadd: Well Coach House was a real hippie kind of organisation it was just like -

Susan Clark: Yeah, did themselves in, I think.

Maxine Gadd: - they were really loose. They're not that way anymore.

Susan Rudy: Now they're being distributed by McLellan & Stewart in Canada.

Maxine Gadd: Oh and they got really serious about survival.

Susan Clark: Really crappy publicity.

Maxine Gadd: If we're going to talk about the function of women in a literary scene, there's this other kind of woman who has a stake in doing all the shit work and does it, you know. And she is sometimes the most ruthless of them all. I mean she's so totally identified with the uh master that uh...

Stephen Forth: One American publisher that strikes me as had a really negative influence on writing is almost uh New Directions seems to have had a conscious policy of excluding - it's published a lot of HD but ah -

Nancy Shaw: But I mean yeah that's this whole that *long term thing* of unspoken and -

Stephen Forth: You know but there's - New Directions seems -

Catriona Strang: And HD is ok because Pound says.

[general murmur of "yeah"]

Maxine Gadd: Yeah she slept with D.H. Lawrence or whatever.

Stephen Forth: Try to think of another woman writer that New Directions has published.

Nancy Shaw: Djuna Barnes.

Stephen Forth: And Denise Levertov. It has published others.

Catriona Strang: T.S. Eliot said Djuna Barnes was ok, and they only published Nightwood.

Stephen Forth: But um they have published others, but the sort of aura around the place is that it hasn't included women writers even though it has published them.

Susan Clark: Yeah, that's true.

Stephen Forth: And I think *maybe* for people in Canada Coach House has the same type of feeling. I don't know if that's true or not.

Nancy Shaw: In my sense I would think why - those are institutions that have developed historically and certainly like we have a parallel space where we can do our own work and you know things like Larry's press and that magazines and stuff so - sometimes I think like you know *why bother*. The same issue comes up about the Vancouver Art Gallery, like why struggle over those spaces that are very determined.

Maxine Gadd: Really, because the taxpayers are usually paying for it so why shouldn't we get some of that too?

Nancy Shaw: Well I mean in the sense of you know getting jobs and getting your work out there, that is obviously very problematic but in another way um they are so kind of loaded and imbued it's -

Stephen Forth: They don't have a lot of relev - most institutions don't seem to me to have a lot of relevance to me personally as a writer, to the writing that I'm doing but maybe that's because I'm you know dependent at all on them. I'm not dependent on any of these, not the Canada Council, not any of these people.

Pauline Butling: But one of the curious things that happens when you look at the history of the women's movement is in every generation there's a lot of really interesting women writers and artists and politicians and everything. I mean you go way back and it's happening, and they all disappear.

Susan Rudy: They're always there. They all said the same thing and nobody remembers them.

Pauline Butling: It's never carried forward. And so one of my concerns in terms of Feminist politics is how you break that pattern so it is carried forward. And I've often that maybe one of the things one should be doing is lobbying, literally lobbying or having some kind of presentation that's ongoing.

Susan Clark: Lobbying who though?

Pauline Butling: Well, the university, the academy, so people who teach Canadian Lit and so on - and calling attention to imbalances in the courses and that kind of thing. You know you have to just keep hammering at -

Susan Clark: I think Nancy's right it goes *way back*. I mean I think Jeff and you would agree that Writing magazine, like Raddle Moon, gets *mostly stuff from men*.

Nancy Shaw: It's so ingrained, psychically ingrainedd.

Susan Clark: You know it's just - women don't send their work out so it's kind of hard to publish them. It goes *way back*, into kindergarten or something.

Nancy Shaw: And historical, economic - all these things together.

Pauline Butling: It's a structural problem. And how do you change it.

Nancy Shaw: But you have to change it, you have to change it.

Susan Clark: Yeah it's a societal problem that shows up in publishing.

Susan Rudy: And it shows up in the canon.

Maxine Gadd: Well yeah it's so psychological. Self-esteem. How you get feedback.

Pauline Butling: How do you change a structural problem.

Susan Clark: Well you can do like Big Alice and just say you won't publish men.

Maxine Gadd: It's you know partly sexual.

Pauline Butling: Oh yes of course it is.

Maxine Gadd: If men support you, if your men support you emotionally and um - or your woman, or your lover or whatever supports you then you - you know after puberty that's what you need. I mean that's the tragedy of being human is you need some support from somewhere on a very very intimate and unspeakable way. And what happens in - we all know about the psycho-sexual politics of parties and you know it's just - I guess that's what the story's about, really isn't it.

Pauline Butling: Well then maybe you guys do plenty anyway.

Maxine Gadd: Well we're just lucky to be alive, but it's an ongoing problem alright, the whole question of you know -

Pauline Butling: I guess it's our job, those of us who are - well I'm only in a sort of small institution but -

Nancy Shaw: No, I know I know, but I mean just like obviously everybody is doing stuff here and I think there is a bit of - there are spaces for our work to be published at least. Maybe not by Coach House and Talon, you know.

Stephen Forth: But they're spaces that we've all created.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah, yeah so that's maybe more [?]

Maxine Gadd: But Coach House was created by people I mean like - that was really weird one time it was uh Caroline Zinayla [?] gave me a ride home from something or other years and years ago and she was raving about bill bissett and blewointment and you know how she couldn't get into that how he had this stranglehold on publishing. And I said well you know bill you know I mean - of course I remember bill he just got a gestetner and just ran these things off and then he'd run around and knock on your door and you know give it to you and then he sort of built it up that way - uh like he did it and yet once he was seen as - he became an icon and that's the same with Kootenay School : it became an icon.

Nancy Shaw: Yeah well canonised as an alternative canon.

[general murmur of assent]

Maxine Gadd: And then other people are jealous of you you know because you know in your own history you've just struggled - I mean that's probably true of Coach House and Coach House was just people that got together to - yeah, yeah, you just have to keep going.

Nancy Shaw: And that's the other thing, it's so pathetic. The stakes are so pathetic in a way like so pathetic. Totally pathetic.

Pauline Butling: One more question I wanted to ask was - when you guys are planning your program of talks or whatever how do you uh choose that. I mean does it have to - I mean how do you choose that - do you have issues that you think you want to talk about or does it just have to do with who happens to be around and available or...?

Nancy Shaw: Yeah it's lots to do with people who have kind of ideas about things they're interested in or somebody's mentioned that they want to do something here and come and approach us as well.

Susan Clark: Yeah, often people come *to* us.

Nancy Shaw: So it is fairly eclectic but again it's not a random thing.

Lisa Robertson: No, like for example in our Spring reading series it's like in each spring reading series we try to have a large proportion of people who have never read at the school before you know so that it's consciously opening things up.

Pauline Butling: You mean local people?

Lisa Robertson: Yeah, yeah.

Pauline Butling: And in choosing writers to bring in - do you still do the foreign artists and that sort of stuff?

Lisa Robertson: We're not this year, but um -

Nancy Shaw: We have every year but we're going to have a colloquium next year instead I think again of - I don't know the term *younger writers* is so kind of amorphous but you know us and uh ha ha.

Susan Clark: And our friends.

Stephen Forth: Plus I think at this point in this sort of very fluid situation it seems to be it seems to be about the context that writing comes out of, including community and um

talk about that lead to talk of canonisation directly. But this colloquium is you know very up in the air - is that the right? - you know I think it's still in a very fluid situation.

Pauline Butling: Have you got a general topic?

Nancy Shaw: Contexts of production, and gonna have like panels.

Stephen Forth: And the idea it would be for you know younger writers.

Maxine Gadd: I've observed that this institution has changed a lot.

[tape cuts off]