

Gender, Affective Labour, and Community-Building Through Literary Audio Recordings

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Introduction

This article emerged from the “feminist close listening” methodology we devised together during a collaborative listening session in Montreal, December, 2017. We began the practice of listening to recordings together, in real time, as a way of attuning ourselves to the related inquiries that our archives of interest shared. For Karis, this archive is the [SoundBox Collection](#), housed in the [AMP Lab](#) at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus, where she serves as Director. For Deanna, this archive is the Roy Kiyooka Audio Archive, housed in the Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University. The archives share the same media formats (reel-to-reel and compact cassette tapes) as well as the common generic features of recording spontaneous, candid conversation, often voiced in contexts that are considered domestic, intimate, and private. Our listening sessions aimed to collaboratively outline questions, approaches, and best practices toward this unique subset of literary recordings. The article that follows is one concrete example of how those conversations unfolded.

Spoken, transcribed, and edited in the spring of 2018, this article was [originally published](#) in the feminist journal *No More Potlucks* in [a special issue on interviews](#) edited by Dayna McLeod. The issue included work by Lily Cho and Chun Hua Catherine Dong, Aisha Sasha John and Raquel A. Russell, Mikhel Proulx and Jess MacCormack, among many others. McLeod’s editorial approach to this issue was to “use the structure and setting of the interview to play with, capitalize on, extend, expose, tease, and otherwise interrogate the form.” For us, this offered the opportunity to formalize the ongoing work of listening and discussion that we had been engaging in for several years. This piece represents the first instance of our research collaboration in the form of a public text, however keeping the markers of orality and open-ended inquiry intact through McLeod’s experimental editorial vision. While *No More Potlucks* has run its course as an actively maintained digital journal, we wish to offer an Internet Archive breadcrumb trail back to its important work, while also acknowledging the politically salient feminist gesture of ending, refusal, and closure. Indeed, we wish to continue the work that [Gladys] Maria Hindmarch does in the 1969 recording that is at the heart of our discussion in this article, tracing citational networks of women’s contributions—recognizing their labour and re-membering histories with their names.

We are grateful that our article has the opportunity to appear in this new form, and with added context, on *SPOKENWEBLOG*, and wish to acknowledge the network of feminist scholars who have cited and otherwise articulated themselves to this text, including [Julia Polyck-O’Neill](#), [Megan Butchart](#), Sarah Cipes, and Mathieu Aubin.

This collaboratively written article, “Gender, Affective Labour, and Community-building through Literary Audio Artifacts” is an intersection of two conversations: the first between Canadian West Coast fiction writer [Gladys] Maria Hindmarch and UBC professor and poetry aficionado Warren Tallman, which took place in the fall of 1969, discussing the events that catalyzed the formation of the Vancouver poetry collective TISH; the second between Deanna Fong and Karis Shearer on the occasion of listening to and transcribing the tape in the spring of 2018—nearly five decades later. In the nexus of these two conversations, we

discover a different material map of the era's literary history, which, to date, has mostly relied upon first-person testimony in the form of memoirs, formal interviews, and critical studies. In turning to the conversation as the material base for this history, we discover a set of community-based practices and labours that are thickly social, tied to the development of communal spaces and relations. As Hindmarch and Tallman express in their 1969 conversation, this history is, in a sense, an "inner" rather than public one, tied to the intimacies of personal relationships. Fong and Shearer's conversation sounds out the ethical, critical, and political implications of turning to—perhaps recuperating—such a private history, asking what historical details come to light when we shift material bases, and what considerations need to be taken to respect privacy, confidentiality and different approaches to personal disclosure.

Gender, Affective Labour, and Community-Building Through Literary Audio Recordings (originally published in *No More Potlucks*, Volume 50, May-Aug 2018)

What kinds of labour are visible in historical accounts of literary communities? What kinds of labour are *audible*? In this article, we turn to an archival recording from the *SoundBox Collection*[1] held at the University of British Columbia (Okanagan campus) to interrogate how attending to the medium of sound recording can remap history by citing gendered affective labour as an important foundation to collectivity and community. A digitized reel-to-reel titled "100 Class DHL Tape" records a 1969 conversation between Warren Tallman and (Gladys) Maria Hindmarch. Tallman was an American-born professor of English at UBC who taught literature courses. Hindmarch is a Vancouver-based fiction writer, activist, feminist, and teacher who was a student in Tallman's class in the early 1960s, and member of the collective that produced the poetry newsletter TISH.[2] The tape was recorded when Tallman was commissioned by Michael Gnarowski to write a 150-page historical sketch of west coast poetry as it had emerged over the past decade: 1959 to 1969. Tallman employed the tape recorder as a compositional aid to help him organize his thoughts. However, he insists that "if you're alone with a tape machine you can't talk somehow" and so enlists the help of Hindmarch to act as an interlocutor who will work through the narrative with him and verify the historical details "as a kind of check thing." Hindmarch is invited for her expertise as community historian, as a participant who knows "the whole story." The contents of the tape were intended to be transcribed and edited into a single-author book that was to appear under Tallman's name. While the book commissioned by Gnarowski never came to fruition, it is almost certain that this tape forms the basis for Tallman's essay "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver during the 1960s," which first appeared in the Canadian poetics journal *boundary 2* in 1974.

Below are two transcribed excerpts from the tape (circa fall, 1969), followed by two transcribed excerpts from a conversation between Karis Shearer (Kelowna, BC) and Deanna Fong (Montreal, QC) that took place on March 28, 2018.

Part 1: The Social Fuel of the Writers Workshop



Warren Tallman: Now, the Duncan thing makes sense to bring that in. And I'm not too worried about that, because I will have to go back to those tapes and pull some quotes.

Maria Hindmarch: But previous to that time you've also have the Writers Workshop and it should have about a two-paragraph mention.

WT: Right, yeah. Because I wasn't conscious of that.

MH: Mainly as people getting together. When you think of the people who did get together, it's amazing how many of them are still writing. George Bowering was there, myself, Daphne Buckle, Bobby Hogg, David Cull, and Frank Davey at the main centre. [3] And there's Claudia Irving, and Diane Grant who's got a play on in Montreal. Mainly it was an occasion where people got together regularly to hear what other people had written. They also got high and drunk on sake regularly, too. People felt quite free. The teacher that they had, Tony Friedson, was not acting as the teacher. His capacity was to run the poems off on the machine. Even though there were times he tried very hard to be a teacher in that situation, he just didn't have the authority.

WT: But he had the social bubble.

MH: There were 8 or 10 people in the room that had authority. And he was very manic. And I think in “how does a city get a writing,” that maybe someone who was just sort of manic or totally scattered is just as important as someone who was totally focused, because they’re limited sometimes by that focus.

WT: I think that what Tony actually enjoyed was the social.

MH: Yeah, right, and that’s his realm anyway. You see, so it’s not a writing world. That made it so that people weren’t so lonely. Besides meeting in the caf and showing off all their poems and stories...

Deanna Fong: So, what is it you like so much about this recording?

Karis Shearer: I really love the way that it shows Maria actively shaping the writing of “The Wonder Merchants.” She’s playing this role of editor, of historian. I see her as more than just a collaborator: I would venture to say she appears here as a co-author of the text. Not only is she adding important content but she’s shaping the form when she says things like: “There need to be two paragraphs about this subject.” But we lose that sense of her co-authorship in “Wonder Merchants” when it’s printed as a text by Warren Tallman.

DF: Yeah. She pulls out all of these moments in that West Coast poetic avant-garde history that are important to her, that she sees leading up to the development of TISH, especially the Writers’ Workshop and its social dynamics. She asks questions of who has authority and how production came to be catalyzed in that group. This interview makes those social dynamics especially apparent.

KS: That’s a huge contribution in this conversation. And Tallman recognizes the importance of the social dynamics, but he’s ambivalent about the extent to which that can end up in the printed historical record. And yet behind-the-scenes synergies shape writing in these myriad diverse ways: the friendships, the competition, the sharing of writing, the conversations that emerged from reading, listening and responding to poetry. Also the meals cooked, the sake drunk together. All of those activities influenced the writing.

DF: Yes. And I love the way influence is discussed in this piece. The way that, for example, Tallman talks about Phyllis Webb having been influenced by Robert Duncan. And then Maria brings up Dorothy Livesay’s interventions and questions at Jack Spicer’s reading at UBC. I think there’s real attention to not only who’s reading who but the specific ways in which contact with other writers shapes the Vancouver scene, in a concrete and particular way.

KS: That reminds me of something else we see Maria doing regularly, not just on this tape, but in all the recordings: she is constantly narrating women writers back into the larger historical record, as she does with Livesay. She also brings up Claudia Irving and Diane Grant on this tape, for example, who don’t often get mentioned in connection with the TISH writing scene. One of the effects, then, of Maria’s narration is to establish a referential network of women writers and artists.

DF: It definitely constellates the scene differently. There’s a lot of discussion about the role of the Writers Workshop as having a dual function: one, as catalyst for writing activity, but then there’s the observation that “mainly it was an occasion where people got together regularly to hear what other people had written... People felt quite free.” And I think elsewhere she says it’s a way of feeling less alone. So the social function of that community is really at the forefront.

KS: Yeah, I’m so intrigued by the way that she contrasts it with the more formal creative writing classes. She says, “That’s why the workshop was worth 8 creative writing courses put together.” So there’s this contrast between the more contrived or structured creative writing courses that had intent around the production of writing, versus the more organic, improvisational social structures that she saw as perhaps more fruitful.

Part 2: Inner History / Public History



MH: Yeah, you've got to realize that there were several fights in the TISH world, the main TISH poets at that time being Frank Davey, Fred Wah, Lionel Kearns, George Bowering, and Jamie Reid. And even David Dawson was not really in that TISH world. Their sensibilities were such that they could say something and all these other people, because of the social structure, would believe them. So this was why Bobby, and Dave, and Daphne might want to do something on their own is totally understandable. If Frank didn't like something, everybody knew it. He didn't go around blasting it, he just makes one critical remark and it was repeated five times within two hours. Even though the university had well over 10,000 students at the time, that news travelled. That was the news. It could be described as much more close than a fraternity.

WT: Oddly enough, that was probably part of what kept the scene hopping, that Frank would make these probably outrageous statements off the top of his head, but that people would believe them. That it would then produce a reaction and it would involve people writing the poetry. Whether they were true or not was a different issue.

[...]

WT: Now that whole Ellen[4] story. I still don't really know how I feel about Stan [Persky]'s proposition that it should be an inner history rather than a public history. There are public events like Duncan comes to town, and you can talk about them. There is an inner history that obviously involves you, involves Ellen, involves myself, involves the house, but I'm not entirely sure that it's possible to convey that because it would involve knowing the people.

MH: Is that really how you feel about it?

WT: Also that I don't know how— It would be easy to say that Frank, and George, and Lionel, and Fred, and Jamie were involved in a series of upsets with each other that they then would go off and talk to you about them.

MH: Separately. So they're secret.[5]

WT: Right. That undoubtedly was a part of the whole generation of poetry. A way that the poetry was getting written had to do with those. But, golly, I don't know.

MH: That seems in some sense egotistical, but in another sense it doesn't. Like when you say that about Ellen, I'd say it should be in, and when you say it about me and I'd say it shouldn't. I'm just wondering if there shouldn't just be a section of Paterson-type story, just little paragraphs—

WT: Well, you see, I don't see Ellen involved in the actual production of the poetry, just the coming in of it. You were much more involved, much more inside of the fact that the poetry was being written. In a personal way, you were much more inside that.

MH: Well, I'd say you and Ellen are very much so, because that's an audience. It's an older audience. What does Warren think, what does Ellen think? That's another side. That's absolutely essential.

DF: Warren is so conscious of the split between what he perceives to be the "inner" history of sociality and public history of the "literary proper." That's what he's driving at. It can be got at through the kinds of interchanges in the magazine TISH itself where Robert Duncan is writing these letters of encouragement and Creeley is writing these challenges. These are all things that are available for public discourse. But the kinds of things that Warren and Maria are talking about in this recording—for example, that the other writers would come to talk to her individually about their writing—both speakers acknowledge that that's an important force in shaping how the poetry gets written. But you can't really talk about it. Maria actually says that it's "secret" because each of those conversations were separate. So what do you do with that 50 years after the fact, when you're not part of that community?

KS: On the one hand, I think we're sensitive to the cues given by the members of the community themselves, the way they frame what they consider public and private. But we do have to be attuned to the different spaces in which these conversations take place, and the kinds of exclusions that those spaces are prone to. For example, when Warren brings up

their house as something that's a part of this inner history, he's differentiating domestic space from the more formal space of the university or public hall, for example. He sees the inner spaces and the contributions made there as important but he says, "I'm not entirely sure it's possible to say that because it would mean knowing the people," who are ostensibly not public enough figures.

DF: Well, is it a question of not knowing them or that there's a split between people who have a strong public presence versus people who don't?

KS: Yeah, that's right. But it raises all kinds of questions around how someone becomes "known" well enough to warrant being included in a public history.

DF: And I think there's an interesting comment here on how the facility of becoming a public figure is very much influenced by whiteness, maleness. Maria remarks that Frank, for example, had a very strong public presence in way that he talked about poetry. If he made comments, even if they were said offhand or without conviction, they would circulate with this kind of automatic authority.

KS: Over the years, there's been so much currency given to white male voices, while women's labour goes unrecognized because often it takes forms that are less traditionally valued or rewarded in the literary world.

DF: Definitely. It's as Maria says, "Their sensibilities were such that, because of the social structure, all these other people would believe them" –she's referring to Davey, Wah, Reid, and Bowering. I think here she's probably not talking about large-scale social structure, like the social structure of gender and class and race, but I think it has those implications as well.

KS: Yes! It's interesting that Maria does push back against that idea of the division between inner and public history though. She acknowledges that there's a divide and ambivalence around it. But she also wants Ellen's work to be recognized.

DF: But there is, too, a question about the different levels of what people are willing to publicly disclose. Later on in the interview, there's a discussion of how even conversations around poetry be really, very intimate and so in that sense there might be ethical impetus to keep those things private. And I think there's an interesting divide, too, when Warren says, "You [Maria] were more involved in the actual production of poetry, whereas Ellen was more responsible for the coming in of it." That is, facilitating circulation and exchange: hosting people, social events, parties and readings, as though those things were separate somehow.

KS: It also reminds me of — and you've mentioned this before in your writing — the focus on the DIY production of the physical TISH magazine is an area of production women weren't necessarily involved in. However, if you extend the thinking more broadly to include the production of writing and composition, one of the things this tape does is show how extensively women were involved in that.

DF: Part of that labour has to do with providing an audience for the work to be heard. Not only read, but heard. That is, there is an alternate space of literary circulation that happens off the page in face-to-face interpersonal encounters. The problem is that this space is difficult to register in a concrete way, and therefore difficult to cite. Sound recording makes that space audible, though.

KS: Yes, and listening itself is active work. And Maria and Warren, too, are open to this idea of expanding the scope of what we consider when we talk about production.



L to R: Deanna Fong, Karis Shearer, and Maria Hindmarch sit around the brunch table together, Vancouver.

*

Fong and Shearer would like to thank Maria Hindmarch and Karen Tallman for their permission to quote from the tapes, as well as Jodey Castricano for generously making the tapes available to the SoundBox Collection.

This article was originally published in the feminist journal *No More Potlucks* in a special issue on interviews edited by Dayna McLeod.

Endnotes

[1] In the first version of this piece, SoundBox Collection was referred to as the Poetry Okanagan Sound Archive (POSA).

[2] TISH was a monthly newsletter that took its inspiration in part from *The Floating Bear*, edited by Diane di Prima and Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka). TISH was founded by George Bowering, Frank Davey, David Dawson, Jamie Reid, and Fred Wah, but the community also included a larger group of Vancouver-based writers, among whom were Carol Bolt, Pauline Butling, Maria (Gladys) Hindmarch, Sam Perry, Lionel Kearns, Daphne Marlatt, Maxine Gadd, David Cull, and Robert Hogg. The first 1-19 issues were produced between 1961 and 1963.

[3] In a March 31, 2018 email, Maria Hindmarch expressed a strong recollection of Carol Bolt (née Johnson), Lionel Kearns, and David Dawson as having been central to the Writers Workshop as well.

[4] Ellen Tallman (1927-2008) was an American-born UBC professor of English and one of the (often uncredited) co-organizers of the 1963 Vancouver Poetry Conference. Her literary and artistic connections helped to bring Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, and Gary Snyder to read in Vancouver and she herself influenced a generation of writers including Bill Bissett, Daphne Marlatt, and George Bowering. With "the Ellen story," Warren Tallman refers to a recording made perhaps only days earlier, a significant portion of which is devoted to discussing Ellen's role in introducing major American writers to him and to the Vancouver scene. As he puts it on that tape: "the real clue has always been Ellen."

[5] In a 3 April, 2018 email, Maria Hindmarch suggests these "secret" talks may have involved her listening to a poem or two or to people's concerns and worries on a given day.



Deanna Fong is a Postdoctoral Fellow in English and History at Concordia University, where her work focuses on the ethics of listening in the context of literary audio. With Karis Shearer, she is the co-editor of *Wanting Everything: The Collected Works of Gladys Hindmarch* (Talonbooks, 2020). She directs the *fredwah.ca*, a digital bibliography and textual repository for Canadian poet Fred Wah. She is currently working on a new book that collects poetry, art, and oral histories with seven Vancouver avant-garde women, which is scheduled for release with Talonbooks in the fall of 2023.

Karis Shearer is Associate Professor of English and Principal's Research Chair at UBC's Okanagan campus. Her research focuses on literary audio, the literary event, the digital archive, Canadian cultural production, and women's labour within poetry communities. She has published on a range of cultural production, including Sina Queyras's feminist blog *Lemonhound*, George Bowering's little magazine *Imago*, and Michael Ondaatje's *The Long Poem Anthology*. At UBC Okanagan, she directs the AMP Lab and the SoundBox Collection, which houses a collection of recordings made by Warren Tallman, including the recording featured here.

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