

LAZER LEDERHENDLER

I first heard Lazer's work at a "showcase" reading by Concordia University creative writing profs and students; he read a poem for/about his father that stuck in my memory. Later, when Gail Scott was writer-in-residence at Concordia, she showed me a sheaf of his poems. What I saw was rough-edged but startlingly different from his earlier work — a venturing into another kind of territory, testing formal conventions while retaining overall cohesion (often lost in first formal experiment). I thought of him as a risk-taker, a difficult thing when most young writers tend to shore up the self, to grapple for authorial control over what is represented, and not let go, pare apart the notion of their own subjectivity and how it affects language, use, the use-value of any "saying". Still, though I liked the direction, the work tended too much toward abstraction; I remember cautioning: *It's not rooted enough in particulars*. But the economy of words and "muscle" of the phrase, the movement of the phrase, *worked*.

"The Inner City Exhibits" (selected here) was an outgrowth of the work Lazer showed Gail Scott. It was the "construct of masculinity" that interested him, but he found himself dissatisfied with the form of the poems that resulted, the lyric narrative form with the centred speaking self, and what this form was not allowing him to say, to grasp. He didn't want to just "confess" his relationship as a male person to (heterosexual, male) pornography, his growing up through that, he wanted to approach it differently. While reading Celan, Marlatt, and others, he started to test his own formal boundaries.

The choice between "being clear" and "being true" concerns and perplexes him still:

"... which is the greater risk: to write in "good" (intelligible) English, which means to risk being re-written by it, or to write in "broken" English, which means to risk being unintelligible? ... though I'm inclined now to think that the real question is: intelligible (or broken) for/by whom?"

It's a question I've asked, and something in me insists that the way we commonly learn to read glosses over too much. Somehow I think it's easier to ask from the margins (woman, lesbian) than from the more valorized (male, heterosexual), so it's intriguing to see Lazer take up these questions.

— Erin Mouré