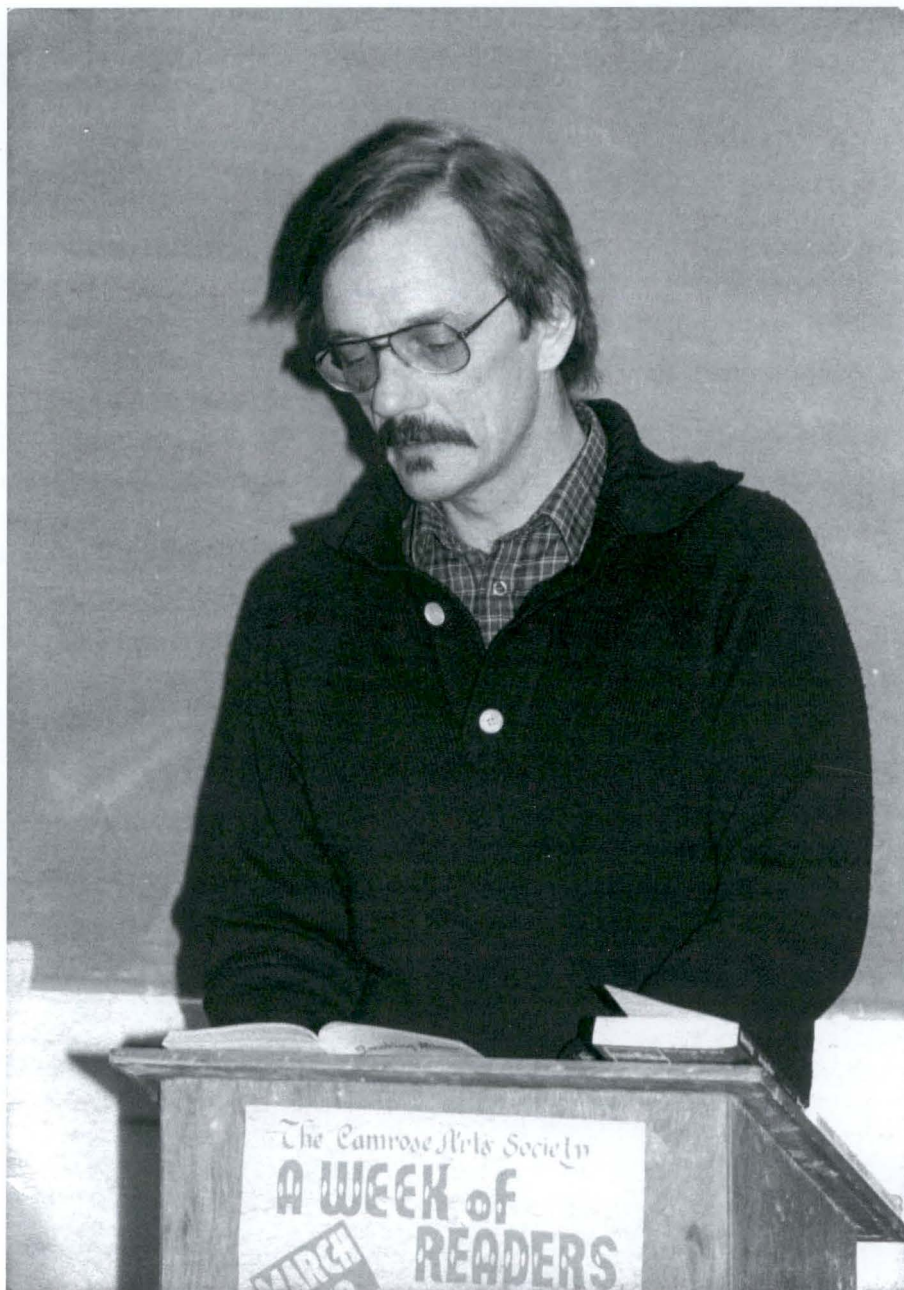


DEANNA FONG / George Bowering in Performance: Three Constellations

This summer, I spent several weeks hunting down, digitizing, transcribing, and annotating the audio and video recordings that document over fifty years of George Bowering's prolific work as performer. Archives and institutions across the country hold more than 100 unique performances, inscribed on reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes and mini-cassettes, Beta and ¾-inch U-matic videotapes. These recordings sound out the contemporary social space in which his work circulates—the contingent and shifting assemblies of author, community, and place.

The three textual “constellations” that follow are distilled from a set of ten recordings made between 1967 and 1988—among them, readings at Capilano College, Western Front, Vanier College, and Sir George Williams University. I limited my data set to solo performances in which Bowering read and commented extensively on his own writing. For each recording, I transcribed all extrapoetic speech: anything that wasn't a performed written work, such as introductions, interjections, and banter with the audience. The results were then analyzed according to three criteria: “words” is a curated list of the most frequent words that appear in Bowering's introductions to his own work, based on my collated transcriptions. I used Voyant, an online text analysis tool, to determine word frequency, omitting commonplace words such as articles and pronouns. The result is a lexical field of Bowering's recorded speech, revealing recurring themes and semantic clusters. This list appears in descending order from the highest to lowest frequency. “People” is a list of every person that Bowering mentions in his performances outside of the poems themselves. It intersects with printed texts like *Curious*, which focus on Bowering's relationships with different writers, but also speaks to longstanding and passing connections that, in aggregate, define a field of tradition, influence, and taste. “Places” lists all the locations that Bowering mentions in his introductions, whether specific, general, or ideational. This list is presented in chronological order as they occur in his readings, charting a spatial map of his written work, as well his memories and movements across time.

Thanks to Special Collections at Simon Fraser University, the Concordia University Archives and the SpokenWeb Project, the CBC Archives, Library and Archives Canada, and the Western Front.



A reading in the late 1970s hosted by the Camrose Arts Society.
Photo credit unknown.

CALLED READ ABOUT BOOK POEM GOING
KNOW FIRST THEM READING RIGHT POETS
THINGS COUPLE PEOPLE VANCOUVER
YEARS LAST BACK NOW OTHER TIME
ALWAYS MORE SHE WAY WHERE MADE SEE
WRITING WROTE EVERYBODY POET STORY
WRITTEN BEFORE END GUESS LITTLE LONG
NEVER ONE PIECE BIG CANADA CHAPTER
PROBABLY WANT ANYWAY COMING
MAGAZINE WE CANADIAN GO CURIOUS HER
HOUSE MAYBE PERSON PUBLISHED SAYS
SHORT SKIP TODAY BEGINNING EAST LIFE
LIVED THOUGHT TOOK AMERICAN BODY DAY
DOING EXCEPT [WORDS] HAPPENS KIND
LOVE MINUTES OVER PLACE SECTION SONNET
TALKING TRUE RIGHT AUDIENCE AWAY
BEAUTIFUL COAST DAYS EVERYTHING
FINISHED FRIENDS GUY NEXT NOVEL PROSE
REMEMBER SMALL SOMEBODY SPANISH
BASEBALL BIRTH CAUSE CHANCE DECIDED
ERRATUM FAVORITE FINISH FLESH IMAGINE
LIST INTRODUCTION SAD SOUTH BOTTOM
CHANGED CORNER COWBOYS DIED DURING
FACT FATHER FEELING FIGURE FORTH
FOUND HAT HEARD HEART HELL LATE
LEAGUES LITERATURE LIVING MEMBER
MILES MOTHER MOUNTAIN NAME NEED
OFTEN OLD PAGES PROVE RIVER SENSE
SOUND TITLE WAR WATER WOMAN WORLD

ROBERT DUNCAN ROBERT CREELEY FRED WAH
YOSHIRO TSUBAKI JACK SPICER SUZUKI ROSHI
ROY KIYOOKA WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS
MARGARET ATWOOD BPNICHOL ED DORN
CHARLES OLSON WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
ALLEN GINSBERG VICTOR COLEMAN
RAYMOND SOUSTER HD BILL BISSETT
RICHARD NIXON JOHN COLTRANE AL PURDY
STEPHEN SPENDER JUDITH COPITHORNE
ARTIE GOLD DONALD HALL ROBIN BLASER
MARGARET RANDALL DWIGHT GARDINER
JAMIE REID LIONEL KEARNS STAN PERSKY
FRANK DAVEY LEW WELCH LEROI JONES
GERRY GILBERT [PEOPLE] DAVID MCFADDEN
BPNICHOL ALICE MUNRO WARREN TALLMAN
GEORGE STANLEY GLADYS HINDMARCH
GREG CURNOE ALDEN NOWLAN HUGH HOOD
GERTRUDE STEIN HERNANDO DE SOTO
ELI MANDEL KENNETH HARTMAN
DAPHNE MARLATT CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
JOHN MILTON ROY ROGERS ROBIN MATHEWS
AUDREY THOMAS TED BERRIGAN
TOM CLARKE TOM RAWORTH BRIAN FAWCETT
JAMES SCHUYLER GEORGE ECONOMOU
ANSELM HOLLO CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY
LOUIS ZUKOFSKY SAMUEL BECKETT
CHARLES REZNIKOFF HERMAN MELVILLE
ROBERT KROETSCH WALLACE STEVENS
ANGELA BOWERING JOHN NEWLOVE

WESTERN CANADA EASTERN CANADA
CALIFORNIA OREGON COAST VANCOUVER
MEXICO EDMONTON CALGARY ALBERTA
PRINCE GEORGE OKLAHOMA MEXICO CITY
TEXAS SAN JUAN DEL RÍO VERACRUZ CUBA
NEW YORK OLIVER PEACHLAND TUNNEL
MOUNTAIN MOUNT NORQUAY HIGH RIVER
COURTENAY MONTANA DETROIT SOUTH
SLOCAN DALLAS BUFFALO MINNESOTA
LONDON ONTARIO YORK STREET WESTMOUNT
KITSILANO QUEBEC MONTREAL CAMPBELL
RIVER ATHENS LINCOLN COUNTY NEW
COLD MOUNTAIN [PLACES] GENEVA DETROIT
MEXICO JAPAN HIROSHIMA SAN FRANCISCO
SAN DIEGO BUFFALO BEMIDJI MARSEILLES
WEST COAST OHIO ILLINOIS TORONTO
OKANAGAN ORANGEVILLE HAMILTON
HALIFAX INUVIK LAWRENCE PENTITION
OSOYOOS NEWFOUNDLAND MISSISSIPPI
KOOTENAYS OMAK SEATTLE WENATCHEE
WASHINGTON LOCARNO BEACH LOS
ANGELES FREDERICTON APPLE VALLEY
MANDALAY TULSA SASKATCHEWAN MISSOURI
SUMMERLAND COLLINGWOOD PORTUGAL
VICTORIA NANAIMO ST LOUIS HUDSON BAY

