

"If she's not following me, I'm following her": in conversation with Maxine Gadd, Rhoda Rosenfeld, and Trudy Rubenfeld

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The following is an excerpt from a longer conversation with Maxine Gadd, Rhoda Rosenfeld, and Trudy Rubenfeld that took place on March 17, 2017. It is one in a series of interviews conducted in the spring of 2017 that discuss the affective and intellectual labour that is central to the activities of arts and literary communities. All three women have been and remain active participants, collaborators, and interlocutors in and alongside a broad array of cultural formations in Vancouver and beyond. By name, these include the interdisciplinary collective Intermedia, blewointment, the see site photographers' workshop, and the Kootenay School of Writing, as well as myriad other intertwiningsectionalities. For many years they engaged in an ongoing, collaborative music practice with Roy Kiyooka—they played instruments, and improvised melodies, lyrics, and sounds. They are longstanding cultivators of community through conversation, listening, and performance.

Overlapping discussion (Trudy talking with Maxine, Rhoda talking with Deanna):

I felt it when I woke up—Rhoda felt that way—That's why I'm wearing them—It's not a fashion statement?—I think it's Scorpio, you have Scorpio in your chart, don't you?—I made them. It's interesting because what I was doing when I made them was I was transcribing—I don't know anything other than what she told me—I should take it all down again, because I've learned—'cause I did a bit of that for awhile—I know, you used to know what you did with them—my eyes became so strained and tired, so I invented these—maybe you still know—they really help a lot—What?—You know, about the whole astrological—That'll be good to know when I'm doing the transcription. You're

like, “God, I haven’t blinked in two hours.”—You know how you are then—But there’s also a different focal point because there’s a screen—And you know how different bodies of information—I call them my digital glasses. I invented them—It leaves us. We have it for a while, and then a lot of it goes—That’s why we tried to keep our books—I gave away a lot—I’m going to fill up my wine ...

Rhoda Rosenfeld: So hit us with a question, Deanna.

Deanna Fong: Well, let’s start with an easy one.

Trudy Rubinfeld: Nothing will be easy. [laughs]

DF: There will be no easy questions. How did you all meet each other?

TR: Oh, my god.

RR: Where did we meet each other?

Maxine Gadd: Well, we’ll all have different stories.

DF: Yeah. Everyone has to weigh in.

RR: Well, we met each other, and then we met each other, so there are two stories here.

MG: Yeah, you guys met each other back east.

TR: Montreal. Came to Vancouver.

MG: And you came from New York.

TR: New York to Montreal.

MG: How did you two meet? Tell us! Tell us the story. I want to know. [laughs]

TR: What is the significance of telling this story?

RR: We’ll be here for years! We mentioned to you last time we were living on Bishop Street and Trudy was in Roy’s class.

TR: I wasn’t in Roy’s class when we—

RR: The first year.

TR: Oh, yeah, the first year was my last year.

MG: What university was that?

TR: Roy came in my last year.

RR: Sir George Williams.

MG: Oh, that was Sir George Williams. The place with the elevators?

TR: No.

RR: The new building, maybe.

TR: It was the old Sir George Williams University.

DF: It's the one that's just like a big box.

TR: It was the one on Drummond. Yes, it was a box.

DF: Oh, it was on Drummond?

RR: Yeah, it was an old—Even before that one. The big box is on Bishop.

TR: Part of it was the YMCA. It was created out of the YMCA, I think, and over the years it became a university. But it was a small place.

MG: Yeah, the time I saw it—

TR: But people came there.

RR: But Trudy was Roy's student and we lived across the street, so he would come over all the time and have coffee. And that's how we first started hanging out together.

TR: Come over to where?

RR: Where we lived across the street. Trudy and I lived on—

MG: You invited him over?

RR: No! He would just show up. He did that all the time.

TR: He was my professor in my fourth year in Fine Arts. It was a painting class, and he had a core group of a few students that were—

RR: Serious.

TR: Yeah, that he took seriously. So they would go to the Yacht Club with him to have a beer after certain occasions.

MG: Oh, the Yacht Club!

TR: Yeah, it was a bar.

RR: Montreal has bars. Taverns were only for men. I did the census one year, I was like 19, and I had to go into the tavern and there were no women. You had to walk through all these men and go up to the bar and ask the questions.

MG: So what were the Yacht Clubs, then?

RR: They were bars. They were just like two steps down and dark.

TR: Dark, small tables, you know.

RR: Are they still there, some of them?

DF: Where was it?

MG: Did you have to go downstairs into—

TR: This was just down the street.

MG: Montreal has a lot of places like that.

DF: There's that Ziggy's Bar. That's where Mordecai Richler used to always go hang out. That's on Crescent. That's been there for a long time.

TR: The Yacht Club was on Crescent. It was Crescent, McKay, Bishop.

RR: There was one across the street. We could see it from our place.

TR: There was one across, but the Yacht Club was straight down Bishop.

RR: So anyway, that's how we met Roy. Then in 1968 we came here.

MG: When did Roy come out here?

RR: In the summer.

TR: He had been out here already. He came to Sir George. He was at Sir George

for five years. So he came in 1965 and stayed five years, and then left and came back to Vancouver.

MG: So 1970.

TR: Yeah, I guess it was '70.

RR: He was there when the crisis happened. I think that was in 1970, when the riots happened. You remember that?

MG: I remember that, yeah.

RR: At Sir George and they threw the computers out the window.

TR: It was very heavy, yeah.

DF: And the sit-in in the library?

RR: Yeah.

MG: I just remember going to Montreal and getting off the bus and going deeper and deeper into this circle of cops—

TR: [overlaps] How long were you in Montreal?

DF: [overlaps] About ten years.

MG: —and went deeper and deeper into it and then there's other circles of cops inside that, and then finally inside there was this big plaza with bright lights and lots of cops and everybody had guns. [laughs]

MG: I guess it was the army.

TR: Did you go to Montreal to go to school?

DF: No, I was in love. And then I stayed there.

TR: Oh! That's why you go.

DF: Well, it didn't last. Then I fell in love with the city and that's a whole different story. But, yeah, it's a great city.

TR: So you followed someone that you loved there ...

DF: Yeah. And then broke up almost immediately.

RR: Who?

DF: We took the bus. We took the bus from Vancouver to Montreal. It took about three days.

RR: From here?

TR: That's a long trip.

MG: I've done that. It was hell.

DF: It is.

TR: I did it on the train, too. Hell.

DF: The worst part is when you get to Winnipeg and you're like, "Ugh, we're only halfway there." [laughs]

MG: You just have to relax and ooze into your seat. You just ooze into your seat. Everybody oozes.

TR: [overlaps] Oh, sure. There's no way! Relax with everybody around you. Oh, my god.

RR: But the landscape is so fantastic.

TR: You can only do that when you're young. You can't keep doing that.

DF: So how is it that—?

MG: Yes, you can.

TR: Go ahead. Keep going.

RR: Go ahead, Deanna. [laughs]

DF: How is it that Roy came to just come over to your place for coffee?

TR: Roy?

DF: Yeah.

TR: We clicked, you know, in that way. In those early years, you're talking about?

DF: Yeah.

RR: But he was like that.

TR: He had certain people that he would go and visit.

RR: All his life. He would knock on someone's door.

TR: People he was interested in.

RR: Nobody made appointments then. People just showed up.

MG: Yeah, we used to visit each other a lot. I used to visit you guys.

RR: You'd just knock on the door. Different era.

MG: Now you say, "Where? What do you want?"

RR: "What time is it?"

TR: So what happened was— Yes, I was his student. That lasted for a few years, a number of years. I just fed him.

MG: Food?

TR: No. [laughs]

TR: Lots of coffee.

MG: Trudy's great. She really makes good food. So does Rhoda. Between the two of them they make wonderful food.

RR: Okay, so you fed him.

TR: Yes. And he fed me.

RR: He fed you.

TR: There was a lot to exchange and I had a lot to learn. I had to learn. I had to fight him. That took a while because he had that aura about him.

MG: Dominating.

TR: He was very powerful in my life in that time, in that way, which I didn't like.

MG: The master. He was the master.

RR: But he was also twenty years older.

TR: Yeah.

MG: Maestro.

TR: More than twenty. People wanted to please him.

MG: Did you want to please him?

TR: Well, of course I did.

MG: But you're such a rebel.

TR: Of course I wanted to. One wanted to give what one has.

MG: But I always got into fights with him. We always, the three of us, would get into fights with Roy.

TR: I wouldn't say fights.

MG: No, but there were struggles.

TR: Struggles. But Roy, his brilliance, his way in which he was able to bring in the world, and talk in interesting ways, and try to get you to speak, and say what you think... You wanted to be able to give him that. To be smart enough to be there. Smarter even. [laughs]

MG: Well, of course, you always want to outdo the master. You want to become a master yourself.

TR: So that was for a number of years and then I started to say— I couldn't go on being who I was with him. It was going to change. There's an actual— [sighs] There's a video in which we actually have that first fight.

MG: Really?

TR: It's not really a fight, let's say, but it's me saying, "That's it."

RR: It's a break.

TR: Not "That's it," but, "This is a limit." That was it. That was the beginning. I broke through and I was able to be an equal at that point. So it was and so it continues to be.

RR: It took 20 or 25 years.

MG: How long ago was that?

RR: That was the '90s, Trude.

TR: No, that was the '80s. When was the tape made?

RR: Still.

TR: When was the tape made?

RR: I don't know. I would have to look.

MG: What year were you at Sir George?

TR: I was at Sir George. Rhoda was at McGill.

MG: Oh, you were? And what years were they?

RR: '65 - '66. That's when we met Roy.

MG: That's much earlier. That's when it was all happening. That's when people were breaking out and accepting it.

TR: That's right.

RR: And things were way ahead in Vancouver because you all had those amazing scenes going on.

TR: The poetry scene.

MG: Where?

RR: The storefronts on 4th Avenue, all that stuff. Montreal was—

MG: They didn't have those in Montreal?

RR: It was very different.

MG: It must have been in French, though.

DF: Yeah. Les Nuits de la Poésie?

RR: I don't know. I don't even know. There were people doing things and amazing things happened, but Vancouver already had that community that you're talking about, where people were working in collaboration with each

other in the mid-'60s. That was maybe a little bit in Montreal.

MG: There was so much belief, and trust, and hope.

RR: We met Maxine—My memory was she was making a book on a machine called a Roneo at Intermedia.

TR: At Intermedia.

RR: You know about Intermedia?

DF: Yeah, yeah.

RR: Maxine was working in Kitsilano on 4th Avenue.

MG: And you were living not that far from me.

RR: That's where I first met you, and that's so vivid to me. There you were making a book! [laughs]

RR: It was so much fun. It was amazing. It was fantastic.

MG: It was a sort of double-barrelled thing and one barrel had this little—

RR: It was like a copying machine separated into copying and printing.

MG: Yeah. It had this little electronic eye or something that was like a laser.

RR: It scanned. It went back and forth.

MG: Yeah, it scanned and then it went into a brain somewhere, which I never did know where that was, and then it would print it out on the next one, which had very simple—

RR: Like mimeo.

MG: —like ink and paper, and that's what you'd do. You'd write your stuff onto that. You could type it on or you could draw it on, or else you could put in different magazines and stuff. You could pick up a certain amount of memes, which I guess are—I'm having a hard time with that word, meme.

DF: Yeah, it signifies differently now, doesn't it?

MG: But I think it's always slightly mystical, isn't it? I think it is involved

with image. And it picked those up. It could pick up colour, too, but I chose the colours when I did mine.

DF: What was it that drew you to each other as people that you wanted to be with?

MG: You know, they're so cute. [laughs]

TR: I think you knew immediately in those days. You could sense who you wanted to know.

MG: These wonderful, beautiful women.

RR: But it's also we were all struggling to become artists. We were just budding, looking for ways to—

TR: We were looking for ways to survive.

RR: And to express.

TR: Without having to enter—

MG: The office world. The commerce world. The commerce world was terrifying. It still is.

RR: It still is.

MG: It has won and is winning.

RR: Then Intermedia was happening here when we came.

MG: Yes! That was quite fun.

RR: Just amazing.

TR: But that also came through to Montreal. I think it was probably in ArtsCanada or something.

RR: We were hearing about it and reading about it.

TR: We read about it. It sounded amazing. Rhoda led the way to Vancouver, actually. I followed Rhoda. [laughs]

RR: If she's not following me, I'm following her.