

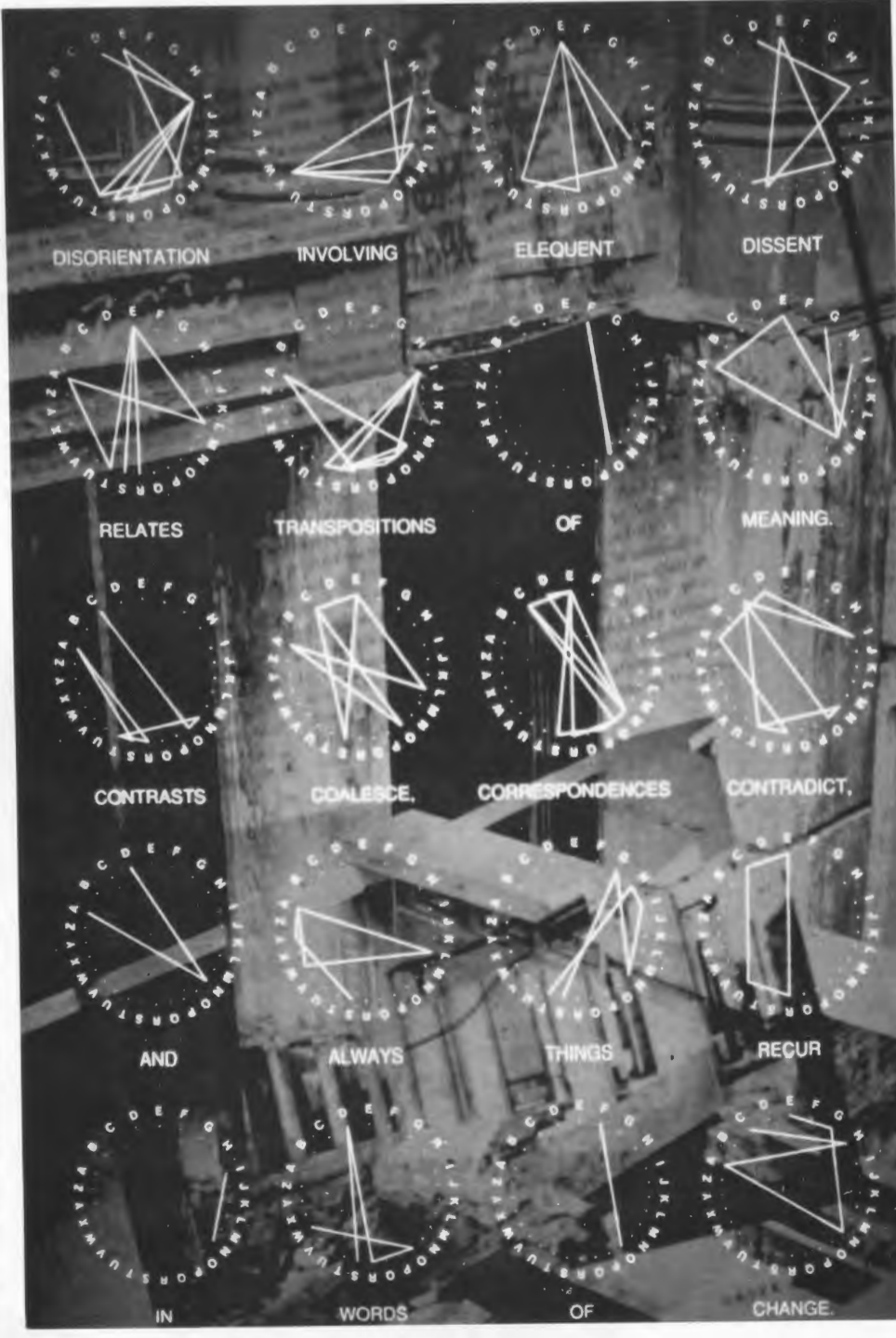
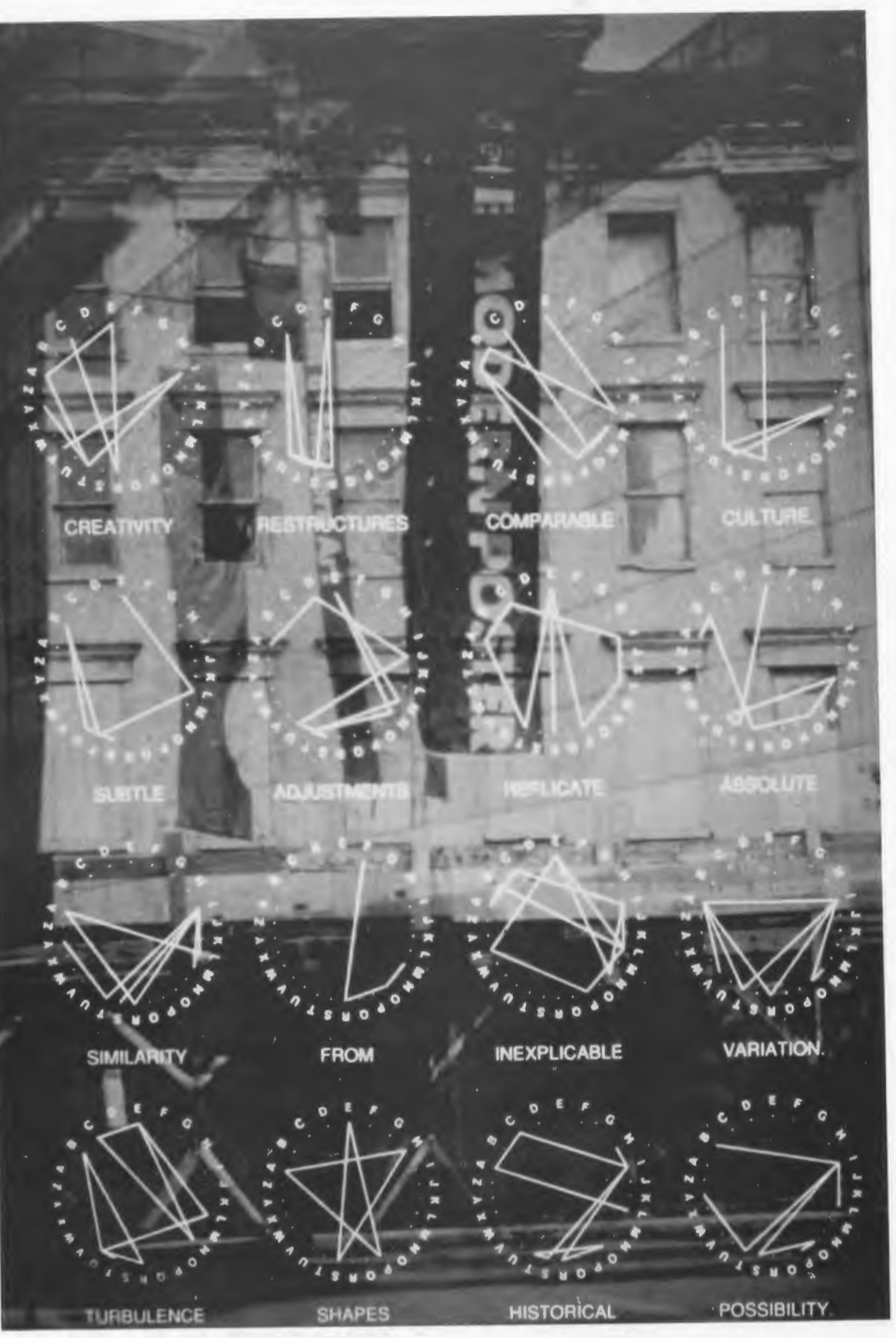
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## Editorial / Éditorial

Process. A sinusoidal wave. Welcome to the second manifestation of our tenth anniversary issue. Rampike initiated publication in 1979 and appeared on the newstands for the first time in 1980. Circulation. Since 1980 we have experienced spiralling growth and are pleased to report that our readership has wound around North America and Europe with vital zones of interest in Australia, New Zealand, and Japan as well as Central and South America. When we started planning a special issue in honour of a ten year cycle of publishing we did not expect such a dynamic response from our contributors. An animated vortex. Centripetal/Centrifugal. As a result, we decided to disseminate the expressions over several issues. R/Evolutions. A "rampike" is the burnt skeleton that remains after a tree has been ravaged by lightning or forest fire. The lodgepole pine flourishing in the Canadian wilderness does not eject seedlings from its cones until after temperatures rise above 200 degrees centigrade. The tree must burn before it can reproduce. A type of adaptation. A self-defence that trees have evolved against lightning and forest fire. A phoenix image. The tiny winged seedlings spinning, suspended by the rising hot air from the flames. Later, the inferno dies, and the seedlings descend to the cooling fertile ash. A regeneration. Consumption and consummation. Yin/Yang. The next Rampike (Post-Decodence issue) will continue our decennial celebration by extending our mandate of presenting the emerging along with the current. That issue will feature a tour of Quebec art and writing and other gyrating volutions. In this issue we offer you a whorl of texts and images including interviews, theory, performance art documentation, poetry and fiction. Kinesis. We would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to the spirits that guide and invigorate us. Thanks to the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for enlivening us with financial energy. Thanks to editors Jim Francis and James Gray and our tiny staff for their dynamic propulsion. Thanks to our orbiting correspondents and contributors for their innervating role in supplying these elliptical expressions -- comets flashing through the infinite space that separates us all. And most of all, thanks to all of our receptive readers for tuning in to our frequency.

Processus. Une vague sinusoïdale. Bienvenue à la deuxième expression du numéro de notre dixième anniversaire. Rampike a vu le jour en 1979, et est apparu dans les kiosques à journaux pour la première fois en 1980. Diffusion. Depuis 1980, le nombre de nos lecteurs n'a cessé d'augmenter, et nous sommes fiers d'annoncer que notre publication est lue de l'Amérique du Nord, à l'Europe, en passant par certains endroits vitaux en Australie, en Nouvelle Zélande, au Japon, en Amérique Centrale et en Amérique du Sud. Lorsque nous avons commencé à planifier un numéro spécial pour célébrer nos dix années de publication, nous ne nous attendions pas à une réaction aussi enthousiasmée de la part de nos collaborateurs. Un vortex animé. Cetripète/centrifuge. Par conséquent, nous avons décidé de disséminer les expressions en plusieurs numéros. R/Évolutions. Un "rampike" est le squelette brûlé debout qui reste d'un arbre mort, après un éclair ou un feu de forêt. Le pin "lodgepole" qui pousse dans les régions sauvages canadiennes n'éjecte pas de semis de ses cônes s'il ne fait pas une température supérieure à 200 degrés centigrades. L'arbre doit brûler avant de pouvoir se reproduire. Une espèce d'adaptataion. Un système d'auto-défense développé par l'arbre pour se protéger contre les éclairs et les feux de forêt. Une image de phénix. Minuscule semis ailé tournoyant, suspendu dans l'air brûlant, en dehors des flammes. Plus tard, le brasier meurt et les semis descend vers les cendres fertiles se refroidissant. Une régénération. L'union et la consommation. Le Yin et le Yang. Le prochain Rampike (le numéro de post-décodage) continuera de célébrer nos dix ans en prolongeant notre mandat de présentation de ce qui émerge avec l'actuel. Ce numéro sera consacré à une présentation de ce qui émerge avec l'actuel. Ce numéro sera consacré à une présentation générale de l'art et de la littérature au Québec, et autres "volutions" giratoires. Dans ce numéro, nous vous offrons une spirale de textes et d'images, y compris des interviews, de la théorie, des informations sur les arts de la scène, de la poésie et de la fiction. Kinési. Nous aimerions saisir cette occasion pour remercier l'esprit qui nous a guidés et fortifiés. Merci au Conseil des arts de l'Ontario et au Conseil du Canada pour nous avoir revigorés avec une aide financière. Merci aux éditeurs Jim Francis et James Gray, ainsi qu'à leur personnel réduit pour leur force propulsive. Merci aux correspondants et collaborateurs de notre orbite pour avoir fourni, avec dynamisme, ces expressions elliptiques, comètes rapides dans l'espace infini qui nous sépare tous. Et par-dessus tout, merci à tous nos lecteurs réceptifs pour s'être branchés sur notre fréquence.



MODERN HISTORY by Michael Winkler



# WALKING FROM GOLDEN TO FIELD

## INTERVIEW WITH AL PURDY

A.J.M. Smith has called Al Purdy, "The Finest of all our poets." In this interview, Al Purdy talks about writing, time, and his latest two books. Al Purdy has written roughly three dozen books of poetry. *The Woman on the Shore* (M&S) is his most recent. *A Splinter in the Heart* (M&S) is Al Purdy's first novel. It features the explosion of the British Chemical plant in Trenton Ontario. Al Purdy was interviewed by Rampike's Karl Jirgens with technical assistance by Carole A. Turner. Al Purdy currently divides his time between Ameliaburg, Ontario and Victoria, British Columbia. He is currently writing his memoirs and yet another book of poetry. We interviewed Al Purdy in Toronto during the autumn of 1990.



**KJ:** You've written a lot of non-poetry, radio plays, journalistic pieces for magazines and so on. We've heard you talk about your poetry, but not so much about your other writing.  
**AP:** Well, I've just completed this novel *A Splinter in the Heart* (M & S). When I mentioned this to George Johnson in a letter, he said "You mentioned writing a novel, I think that's amazing at your age!" Anyway, it took about two years to write, and I'm glad to get it off of my hands. You know you get sick of it, when you stick to one kind of writing that long.

**KJ:** Have you done anything recently with radio plays?

**AP:** I haven't written a radio play in so many years, I can't even remember when --. Joe Hall who was a producer for CBC got me on as a commentator on some plays that he was doing, and I thought then of writing one on [Milton] Acorn. Acorn would be a perfect subject for a play, I think. Except, I don't feel like it. I wrote short stories years ago, as well as plays, all sorts of things, but you get out of that. You change into something else.

**KJ:** This next question is almost cliché -- I was wondering if you felt that there was ever a turning point in your writing. I know that the book *The Crafted So Long to Lerne* (1959) which is an allusion to Chaucer and marks your arrival at a personal voice is probably a watermark, but I think I see *Poems for All the Annettes* (1962) as a kind of turning point.

**AP:** It was what I thought of as having found a voice, even though I hadn't done it by that time, I don't think. I think that the book *Poems for All the Annettes* marked some kind of a change. In the first place, I think of my own writing, as a kid writing with a tremendous ego, and exploring a plateau or level of competency, and after the exploration realizing that he didn't know so much after all and moving on somewhere else. Most babies and children are monsters of ego, in most cases. They all have it and they all need it, except when it boils over. But anyway, what I mean to say is, you use the ego that you have to write. If you don't have ego, then what's the use of writing.

**KJ:** There's a lot of people who say that about ego and writing. Among others, William Burroughs when he went to Naropa said that he couldn't stay too long, because with all the meditation and so on there, he started feeling his ego slipping away. In *Poems for All the Annettes* there's one poem that's called "House Guest", I don't know if you remember it right now, but I've often wondered to what degree that was autobiographical?

**AP:** Completely.

**KJ:** Well, the poem was about arguing about different kinds of things including the right way to boil eggs. I was wondering if the house guest was Alan Bevan by any chance?

**AP:** No, Milton Acorn. Acorn was the sort of person I could argue with a lot, but in his last years of life I couldn't because his anti-abortion stand was so uncompromising. Well, you know what the abortionists and anti-abortionists are like. But, Acorn was a union man, a communist and so on, and at the end there he was at my place one last time. Claude Perrault had just gone to jail for something or other for defying the Federal Government, I had been a "yes" man for Acorn for so long, I just got tired of it. I said, "Well, if I break the law I've got to go to jail. If Claude Perrault breaks the law, why shouldn't he go to jail?" Milton then said, "Well, I won't have you making slaves of the working class." I said, "I'm not making slaves of the working class." But he just repeated himself. Anyway, I couldn't argue with him about abortion, so I sent him outside the door where my wife and her neighbour were. I knew their stand on abortion, and they slaughtered him. But, anyway, one does get tired of agreeing with people just so you won't get into a long argument, and Acorn loved to argue.

**KJ:** You knew Al Bevan too didn't you?

**AP:** Alan Bevan? Yeah sure he edited a magazine, *Evidence* I think it was.

**KJ:** Yes, that's right.

**AP:** Well, at the end of *Evidence* he and his wife busted up, I believe. That meant that his life was up in the air. So, I think he went to the maritimes, and then I lost track of him completely. I got along with him very well at the time, but it just seemed to end, you know how relationships do end.

**KJ:** People like George Woodcock say that you find a kind of universality in incidents or events. For example in your most recent book of poetry *The Woman on the Shore* there's the poem "Lawrence to Laurence" in which you talk about reading meanings into nothingness. I was wondering if you could say something about that tendency your poetry has in reading the universal in the particular.

**AP:** Yes, the human mind has got that tendency, to read meaning into so many things. Maybe its the self-importance we attach to ourselves, to try to do this. To say that the small things we do have far more importance than they appear to have. I don't know, but I don't know what I can say about it either.

**KJ:** In *The Woman on the Shore* you seem to have left behind a focus on personal relationships. In earlier books going as far back as *Poems for All the Annettes* for example, there are a lot of one on one relationships. But, in *The Woman on the Shore* you are dealing with things like perception, or awareness as in the poem "Seven Ways of Looking at Something Else", which, incidently sounds a lot like something Wallace Stevens once wrote.

**AP:** Well, he probably, did. I'm sure he did.

**KJ:** Anyway, I was just wondering about this emphasis on perception, and the act of looking. Does this mark a new point of interest for you?

**AP:** Well, I think it begins with *The Stone Bird* (1981), and probably more so in this book. Although the poems are much different than they used to be. Perhaps you can tell me, do they seem different to you?

**KJ:** I sense a movement of mind of sorts with different kinds of emphases from perceptions on personal relationships to perceptions on personal perceptions.

**AP:** Yeah, I was not nearly so much "I" -- first person singular, for one thing. Its quite true about the perception, of course. Seems it to me anyway, yes, its true, but when you grow older, and I'm growing older very rapidly, you look at life very much differently. It seems like you've done so many different things after a while, felt so many things, been so many places. And everybody gets to be younger and younger as you get older and older. There's a poem of mine "In the Desert" its in this new book which expresses it as well as anything I can say. I use the word "them" at the end of the poem so that I would avoid either male or female. A Prof. was bound to write me saying that it was bad grammar. But, of course it is. But we use the term when refering to someone, even if its a single person.

**KJ:** I noticed that you often deal with the question of time.

**AP:** Well, sure, its one of the big puzzles this journey or any other, isn't it? There is no such thing as time, I suppose, don't you? I mean all there is, is things happening, which is what clocks are based on, really, happenings. Except it gets silly talking about it that way too, because we know that we measure time. But time must've been different in all the other ages don't you think? When you measure time with a sundial, or a sandglass, an hourglass, you must've looked at things much differently. You can't conceive of eternity, can you? You can't conceive of a beginning and ending, I don't think.

**KJ:** I tried once but it didn't work.

**AP:** No, and one tries more than once.

**KJ:** Even poems like "The Cariboo Horses" where you're looking at a world history, and then like "Twist and Untwist" with the guy at the other end of the time tunnel putting the screw in as you're taking it out.

**AP:** Well, we're all preoccupied with time to some degree.

**KJ:** You used to be in touch with Bukowsky quite a bit didn't you?

**AP:** By letter, I never met him. He is a professional wild man. I've been called, among other things, a professional hick, which I doubt like hell. The reason is, if you do certain things, if you smoke cigars for instance, which I gave up long ago, or rode the freights as a kid, well, those are the things people say about you. And then that's silly, because all that people know about each other are very small aspects, small angles of that other person, and they pick the ones that I mentioned as an easy way to pick them up and hold them in their minds, I suppose.

Writing is a very difficult thing to talk about, it seems to me, because you write poems, and we talk about, say, time. What in the hell do you say about time? I don't know. To say it in poems is probably the best I can do.

**KJ:** Yeah, its funny, well you wrote that poem about John Clare which we ran in our "Terra Incognita" issue [Vol.5, No.3]. That poem in this collection, and in the poem you talk about times when you feel sorry for yourself, and then, the next thing you know you win a Governor General's Award for poetry.

**AP:** Well, yeah, I've got a bad back, and there's always some damn thing, and there's always a temptation to feel sorry for yourself, no matter what the situation is. Everytime your wife leaves you, or whatever, or in your illness. We come up with it sometimes, we don't always keep it to ourselves. My wife's mother, we used to go visit her and ask her, "How're you feeling?" Trouble was, she would tell you at great length. There is nothing more boring than listening to someone recite their ills.

**KJ:** In the poem "Cartography" in *The Woman on the Shore* you talk about recognizing things that you've never seen before.

**AP:** There are places west of Calgary and east of Banff, that's the area I'm thinking of.

**KJ:** You talk about the idea of stone, and the mathematics of snow. These are things you've seen before, maybe not that specific stone or that particular patch of snow, but still, things you've seen before.

**AP:** I must admit when I look at it, I am completely baffled about talking about that poem. I mean, what can you say about it?

**KJ:** Well, that poem was about cartography, and to me that was a --

**AP:** A map of the mind.

**KJ:** Yeah, its an unusual kind of map.

**AP:** When I was seventeen or eighteen, I rode the rails around that area. A couple of times I walked for long periods when I was thrown off trains by the cops. I walked from Golden, for instance, to Banff on the tracks. Its a long-ago memory, of course I've been back there since, but, you walk along these tracks and you do all these things, see the mountains, the lay of the land. For instance, one time I tried to walk from Golden to Field, I was worn out the next day and I sat by the tracks waiting for a train to go east to Calgary, and I was hanging my feet over a culvert, a couple of bears walking out from underneath me, and then a train going by, and then a long, long wait. There had been a landslide on the tracks and I couldn't get to Calgary, and I got a job on the landslide instead. Finally got to Calgary. Anyway, you do all these things around an area, and then, I suppose its what the poem doesn't say, that there's something in the mind that's always going to be familiar.

**KJ:** I wondered about the poem for which the book is named, "The Woman on the Shore". In that one you talk about a kind of balance between day and night, between the season, and between past and future.

**AP:** The third version of that poem was in *The Second Macmillan Anthology* which doesn't include the woman herself in it at all. But there is a sense of it, that over the years, I have been there before, going over with a flashlight, trying to watch the exact moment water changes into ice. Its *fascinating to watch it!* And its cold as hell of course.

**KJ:** I was thinking of that balance, and in this version of the poem you also go back to the woman. And there's a balance between this and that all the way through the poem, between freezing and thawing and all that, and then you go back and then there's this thing going on with the woman, and that's a balance too, and I was thinking that in a lot of your poems there's this thing going on between the self and an Other. The Other could be land or it could be a person, but its always striking that kind of balance.

**AP:** The relationship with my wife has always been daggers undrawn. When we were in Vancouver years ago, and she was working at various things, I was not at all the type of person that I have been since we got married. And because of my change, she was forced to change too. I think she resented it a little bit. You know the sort of feeling? The person you're committed to is changing before your eyes. We've both changed. So, we've both had to keep track of each other, again and again. One has somehow the idea at one point in their lives that ok, this is what we are and we are going be this, more or less, for the rest of our lives. But, we're not. We change so radically. I used to be an extremely sort of conventional person when I was in the air force during the war, and I had the usual conditions in life to, let us say, have a sexy wife, and a good job, and a big car, you know the one. And I worked five years at one job after the war, which was a horrible job, I got the top pay by that time, a dollar sixty-five an hour, which was horrible when you think of it, wasn't so good even then. And I saved my money, and I left my work behind, got on a ship, but I was scared to death to leave that crummy job behind. I wanted to jump off the ship and swim back to Montreal. But that was the last time that I got completely scared by doing something like that. You have to make those decisions, and you get into such ruts, all your life, whatever they may be. And then I had no regularity in my life anymore, no time-clock, and I was completely my own boss, and we were so broke. If you get a chance to look at that Macmillan Anthology, which is number two, take a look at it, there's something in it I wrote called "The Bad Times" about those times when we were broke, and quarelled bitterly just like I did with Acorn. That was a watershed time, when I quit that job in Vancouver, and could go in my own direction. We lived in Montreal, and myself writing radio plays, and I sold a few, but not many, and then we left Montreal and went down and built that house. All of your stuff becomes so autobiographical. But as you say, this is a more objective perception [*The Woman on the Shore*], I don't think that they're more personal. Can you be personal and objective at the same time?

**KJ:** I don't know. To me a lot of the poems are about experiences, and then about what's going on inside your head in reaction to what's going on outside, so that's about as personal as you can get I guess.

**AP:** Yeah, but isn't personal a one on one sort of thing?

**KJ:** Yeah. That's what I was getting at earlier with this notion of self and Other because even when you are dealing with women and personal relationships in something like *Poems for all the Annettes*, it seemed to me that you were still reacting to something external and you were giving us your internal reaction. And now the only thing that's really changed is that instead of a person, maybe you've got a landscape, although people still come into it as well. But its still the same kind of reaction.

**AP:** Its very difficult to conjecture on or analyse that sort of thing.

**KJ:** Maybe we shouldn't even try. Just read the poems.

**AP:** Well, we're always trying. If you keep your mouth shut about everything, where are you then? Your stuck in a complete silence. Anyway, everything seems to almost become the exact words that you said to me. And, anything that's worthwhile has about ten percent of silliness in it.

**KJ:** So could you tell us a little about *A Splinter in the Heart*?

**AP:** Well, it was both fun and a lot of drudgery to work, in your own writing, you know how you say, "Well, I've got this job to do, and I'm going to start at nine o'clock every morning, and by the time you've fiddled around...well, you finally get going. And also, you think and ask yourself questions like, "How am I ever going to do this?"

There's a girl in it, and another sixteen year old, and there's logging in it as well, my own grandfather died at age ninety in 1930, and I idolize him somewhat. Anyway, he dies, and about five old men come down from the hills -- . Other loggers. All old men. [Takes out a map and shows it]. Its about the British Chemical Company. This happens to be in 1918, 1917 and a half, taken from the municipal offices. See up here? Where is it, there, the British Chemical Company. That was a huge area in Trenton. When I was a kid I played in the ruins of that thing. There were nine explosions over night on the night of October the fourteenth, 1918. Destroyed the place. And all the windows in Trenton here were broken. But, it was said, nobody died. Whether that's true or not, twenty-two people didn't show up to pick up their paychecks following those explosions. Of course this was all fenced in, and there were guards, etc, etc. As I say I played over these ruins as a kid. See this? [indicates a spot on the map]. This is the British Chemical area. The main part of the town was down in here. I lived right around there. Down on Front Street. Here's Front Street by the river [points to map]. Anyway [the book is about], what happened during that explosion. I was hoping because, the streets are named all through this novel, and the places that are in the novel, that they would adapt this into a smaller map in the endpapers. I hope so anyway.

**KJ:** This is one of my pet questions that I ask a lot of writers. When you write do you use a typewriter or a pen or...?

**AP:** Aaah, I write long-hand with ball point. I scribble it out, and then type it, and then scribble out the typing, and then type it again.

**KJ:** I don't know if it affects people's style, but nowadays with computers, I wonder.

**AP:** If I'm writing prose though, I start out on a typewriter. To me, its too slow to do it by longhand. And I don't use an electric typewriter, I don't like the idea of the electric typewriter buzzing at me, they make you feel guilty.

**KJ:** When you were in the Air Force did you get over and see action at all?

**AP:** No, as a matter of fact I was here all the time. I took the medical for air crew a couple of times, and every time I took it, I got excited "Gee whiz! I'm going to be a pilot, I'm going to be a pilot!" And my blood pressure went up. After I got through with the test, of course, it went down again. So, I took it more times, and the same thing happened every time. So, I never got to be air crew. So, after a while you don't give a shit anyway. But at the time it seemed important. A friend of mine was a bomber pilot all through the war. I went in the taxi business after the war in Belleville. And when my friend the bomber pilot got out of the Air Force we went out to celebrate. And we bought a couple of bottles of booze, mickeys, went into a pub, and there was a guy I had in the taxi who once was beating up on a girl in the cab, so I took him to the police station when he wouldn't stop, and he was going to get me, you know. Ran into him in the pool room, and he had a friend with him, and they invited us out into an alley, and we went. They ran away shortly after that. Then we went out into the country to drink our booze. We parked in a farmer's field. The farmer saw the car parked in his field and told the cops. So the cops came along and arrested us. Threw us in the jail. And our wives bailed us out at five a.m. which was humiliating. And I wrote a poem about that called "The Drunk Tank" except that it isn't a straightforward poem about it. Anyway, he became a civilian flying instructor, killed himself a while later by crashing his plane.

**CT:** Ray Souster was in the Air Force too. We saw him not long ago.

**AP:** Yeah. Ray was in the war. Did you do an interview?

**KJ:** No, we just talked, but we're printing some of his poems. Carole's dad knows Ray Souster, her dad's a bookseller, he sells old & rare books.

**AP:** Has he got a name for his business?

**CT:** Frederick Turner Books. He has a lot of first editions, poetry books, historical books.

**KJ:** He knows Nicky Drumbolis, they're kind of doing the same deal, you can get a catalogue, or make an appointment to drop by and see which books are available.

**AP:** Aaahh. Is Nicky still running "Letters" [bookstore]?

**KJ:** No, unfortunately he couldn't afford to keep it, but you can still buy books from him. So, how come you chose to write instead of driving a cab or running a bookstore?

**AP:** A great many people say "I give up my life, give up my job and devote my life to writing great poems for my country," or whatever. Its a lot of shit. You want to write poems, you write 'em. Nobody stops. Except that you're not liable to get paid very much. It is a job that demands a great deal of ego, of course, writing poems, because you get so little attention. You need ego to say you're writing immortal masterpieces, or something similar. Besides, its fun, one enjoys it.

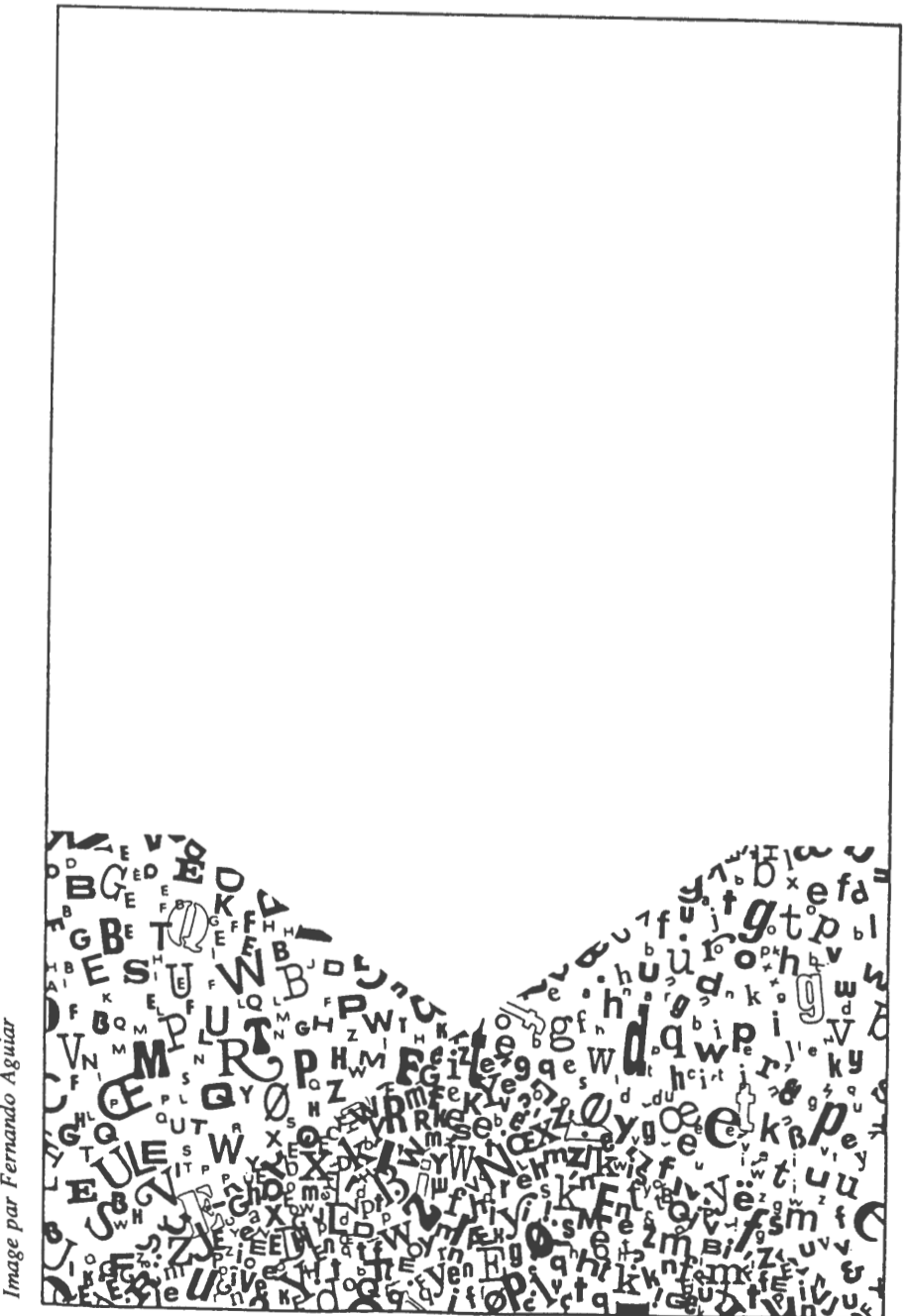


Image par Fernando Aguiar



## THE ANSWER TO WICKEDNESS INTERVIEW WITH JUDITH MERRIL

Judith Merrill is an author and anthologist who specializes in Science Fiction. She championed the British New Wave of Science Fiction writing in North America. Numerous critics perceive Merrill as a ground-breaking writer who introduced feminist concerns long before they became part of the mainstream. Merrill wrote through the McCarthy era, and from the first has stood up for human rights and has consistently taken a firm anti-war stance. In this interview, Merrill talks about names, censorship, cyberpunk and her memoirs. The interview was conducted at "The Merrill Collection" library in Toronto on September 21st, 1990. "The Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy" was formerly called "The Spaced Out Library." The library was re-named on January 1st, 1991. Judith Merrill's personal collection of over 5,000 books forms the core of this library which is the largest of its kind in the world. Judith Merrill established the collection at Rochdale College in 1969 and subsequently affiliated it with the Toronto Public Library System in 1970. The library is located on 40 St. George Street in Toronto, Canada M5S 2E4. Phone: (416) 393-7748.

KJ: We understand that you were born in New York and that your original name was Juliet Grossman.

JM: No, I was not born Juliet. This is a foul lie that has been perpetrated on the world.

KJ: Is that right? Gee, we got that from no less an authority than David Ketterer in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*.

JM: Damon [Knight] wrote an amusing jingle about me in which he used all my names, I've been married three times. Now, Merrill is a pen-name, originally, which I adopted. So he used all five surnames. He also knew that Judith was not my original name although it is the name I've grown up with. The first time he wrote the jingle he had it right -- it was Josephine. When he wrote *The Futurians* [The story of the Science Fiction family of the thirties that produced today's top Science Fiction writers. Editor; John Day, 1977], he remembered it as Juliet. When he did a further book in which the publishers had him send me tear sheets, I wrote back and said this is your opportunity to correct this. So he dropped the jingle altogether.

KJ: But the Grossman part is correct?

JM: Grossman is right, and the name on my birth certificate is Josephine Grossman. My parents called me Josephine because they thought they had to name after my recently dead grandfather. Then it turned out my grandmother didn't really want a girl named after him, so, they called me from the beginning, Judith, which was the name they wanted to call me. I went through school in a welter of paper shreds flying here and there. See, I was in something like nine schools by the time I was in sixth grade, so everytime we changed, I would have the argument all over again with the school secretary about who I was, and what my name was. I became Judith J.

KJ: And you're originally from New York and you came to Toronto around 1968?

JM: Yeah. 1968.

KJ: And you eventually became a Canadian citizen, in 1976 I believe.

JM: Right. Sounds right. How do you spell my name.

KJ: M-e-r-r-i-l.

JM: Right! My first novel was spelled wrong on the binding. I mean, the inside sheets I saw, binding you don't get to see.

KJ: *Shadow of the hearth* [1950]?

JM: Yeah. They put two "L's". My first novel. Can you imagine that?

KJ: Your personal collection of books and periodicals forms the core of "The Spaced Out Library" here in Toronto.

JM: Well, its a very small core by now. The original collection was about 5000 items. And I think they have about 35,000 now. I'm not sure what the numbers are exactly.

KJ: Now, you had some sort of a connection with Rochdale College, didn't you?

JM: I sure did. When I came to Toronto, it was Rochdale that I came to. I was resource person, writing and publishing, that was my first year in Toronto, and that was also Rochdale's first year. And then I continued to do some stuff there for two or three years after I moved out.

KJ: Could you say anything about the commentaries you did for the Doctor Who show for TV Ontario.

JM: They had a producer in charge of that who thought I'd be a good person to do it. She called me up and asked me to do it. I enjoyed it for two years. The third year it started to seem a bit too much like work and they weren't paying me enough for work. So, we came to a parting of ways.

JF: Did you have any sustained interest in the program prior to being asked to comment on it?

JM: No, I had never seen it before I was asked. What they did was send me the tapes from the entire coming season to look at. I wrote my material, did the entire thing. I'd look at the tape and decide on the topics, select the cuts that would be used in the extras and write my part, and speak it or perform it whichever it was.

KJ: You've done a number of books, some that I know of are, *Shadow of the hearth* [1950], *Daughters of earth* [1963], and *Survival ship and other stories* [1973]. And you did some work for a British magazine called *New Worlds*.

JM: I don't know if I did any actual writing for *New Worlds*, but I did do some writing for *Impulse* which was a sister magazine that didn't last very long. And that was in Britain. I think I did one guest editorial for *New Worlds*. I was however, very much involved with the movement *New Worlds* represented in Science Fiction. I used a lot of work from those people in my anthologies for a few years.



involved with the movement *New Worlds* represented in Science Fiction. I used a lot of work from those people in my anthologies for a few years.

KJ: In fact you're very well known as an anthologist.

JM: Unfortunately, I think better known than I am as a writer. I think the strongest identification with *New Worlds*, in this country at least, is an anthology I did called *England Swings SF*, which was in the "swinging" England days. A title, by the way, that they refused to use in England. They called it *Space Time Journal*. But it was virtually all stuff from *New Worlds*. And it was a sort of major introduction to American readers of what *New Worlds* was doing.

KJ: Now in regard to your own writing -- it has been said that you began to deal with feminist issues long before other people had caught on.

JM: So it's been said. I didn't know I was doing it then, but I've been doing a lot of looking back recently, and I guess I did. But I was not dealing with it ideologically. I was simply being a woman who had been anachronistically raised believing she was a person.

KJ: There's a story called "Wish Upon A Star" in which you turn the tables on the whole male/female identity question.

JM: One of the things that I have been and remain very interested in, is the whole question of gender roles. How much of what we regard as female or male behaviour is cultural and how much is biological. And I don't think we can possibly come to an understanding of that until there is a society where people are free to choose what they're going to do, until the cultural restraints are loosened. But that [short story] was really an effort to examine that for myself, what would be the situation if the dominance roles were reversed.

KJ: I've noticed that there are other stories, such as "Daughters of Earth" that deal with apocalyptic ideas, where you have one world ending and a new one beginning, and so on, and it seems to me that you're really dealing with a cycle and a process.

JM: Well, "Daughters of Earth" was a very special case. It was written for something called the "Twayne Triplets", which was a series of hardcover books, and perhaps the first literarily prestigious series of Science Fiction publications. It was edited by John Ciardi, and the idea was that we would have a scientist who was also a Science Fiction reader, write an introduction describing the planet. Then three different authors would do novellas based on that planet. I was asked to write one where we had two planets. One was Pluto and one was the Silicon planet that they go to later in the story. Which is the reason you get this apparent interest in the cycles. The cycle that I was interested in and the one that the story is concerned with more, is the mother-daughter cycle of action and reaction, alternate generations, once again these gender roles. Looking back, yes, I guess I was writing feminist fiction, but it was not party-line feminist fiction. So that the speech at the beginning of the story, and scene -- where the speech is being given, and the daughter is leaving and the mother is wailing and not wanting her to go -- repeats itself three times in the story, there are three daughters who go.

KJ: What are you up to right now?

JM: I am embarking on a fairly ambitious program of writing memoirs, and I have in the last six months changed my notion of which way I am doing this about twenty-five times. I thought about it for years, and what finally, sort of freed me to do it was the idea that I would not try to write an *autobiography*, but write individual pieces, equivalent to short stories (rather than one big novel equivalent), about individuals, and places and activities in my life that were really important to me. I decided for a variety of reasons that I was going to start with Theodore Sturgeon, and one of the reasons for deciding to start with him was that Ted was really the person who first pushed me into trying to write Science Fiction, and he was also the person who gave me my name. So, I have gone back through the extensive correspondence we had. Originally, I was looking through the letters, so, I remembered there were some very good things in them to use as inserts in a text. When I had the final manuscript sorted out, and arranged in the right order and started reading through it, I realized it was a complete narrative, not complete in the sense that it covered everything in my life during the period that it covers, but it was complete enough, and probably it was better writing and more interesting stuff than I could produce now, or at least as good. So, I started thinking about doing it as a book in itself, and am still thinking of that as a possibility.



In the meantime, I am starting to research some other correspondences. There were about six others which were of equal intensity and interest and were different from this one, and they cover a lot of gaps. So, I'm now writing bits of things, particularly about my earlier life where there are no such correspondences, and moving back and forth between my ideas of publishing letters and publishing correspondences, combining them to make what amounts to be a journal, publishing only my own letters, rather than the other person's, avoiding the legal hassle of all that. I don't know which way I'm going to do it. Meantime, I've been extensively going through the Sturgeon stuff. So, I have reconstructed a clear memory about what happened with the name, and, as near as I can re-construct, I wrote from the time I was very small, I can't remember when I didn't write, but I'm not a natural story-teller, and the one thing that I never wrote just on my own was fiction. The closest I came was parables. I did poetry, skits, I did a lot of journalism in school and in the young Trotskyites, but I'm simply not a born story-teller. And I had gotten into fiction a few years before I met Ted when I first met a group of Science Fiction people. Among them were two guys named John Michel and Robert Lowndes. And Lowndes was editing a bunch of pulp magazines. I was, at the time, working as a literary assistant for a historian and coming up with a lot of neat little tidbits about the settlement of the west in the States. So, Lowndes started buying filler articles from me, and then he said, "Why don't you turn this into stories, you'd make a lot more money." And I said, "I don't know how to write a story." So, Lowndes and Michel said, "Well, you write a story, and we'll tell you what's wrong with it, and you can write it the right way, and then after that you'll know how to write stories." And that's precisely what happened. And after the second draft, Bob bought the story. And I wrote a few things for him. But writing for the pulp magazines was something that you could learn that way. You could learn to write a pulp story. There were rules, there was a formula. Science Fiction, on the other hand, much more than now, was totally non-formulaic, there was no way you could say, "Now, this is how you write a Science Fiction story." Ted kept pushing me to try Science Fiction and I kept saying I can't do it. Partly because, doing the formula thing was one thing, but doing serious fiction, which was the way I thought about Science Fiction -- I just did not feel I had it in me. But his pushing intersected at one point with something I very much wanted to say, and it was unfortunately true that at that time in the United States -- we're talking about 1947-48 -- that if your views happened to differ from the so-called "silent majority" and Mr. Eisenhower and Mr. McCarthy, you had two choices. One was, you could have a tiny audience of the converted, and the other was, you could write Science Fiction. Most people didn't know about Science Fiction. But if you did know about Science Fiction, then you realized that all you had to do was place your story on Mars or in the Future, and then you could write exactly what you wanted to write about today's society. was, It was a time when many mainstream writers took a fling at Science Fiction for the same reasons. One was very concerned about the possibility of atomic war, and what use would be made of the atomic technology that emerged from World War Two. And about the only people, outside of a few scientists, who understood it, were the Science Fiction readers, because we'd had it around for quite a while. So, I did eventually sit down and write one story called "That only a mother" that made my name and fortune, so to speak. Ted was knocked out by it and showed it to his agent to try to sell it somewhere. There was a whole fascinating file of rejections by the "slick" magazines where Scott Merideth tried to sell it for us. But it did eventually sell and it gave me a place in Science Fiction. But during this whole process after I had written the story, maybe a bit before then, somewhere along there, I had made this earth-shattering decision, "Yes, I am going to be a writer." And at that point, I decided that I needed a name. I was just separating from my first husband and planning to be divorced. My father had been a writer in the Jewish educational and Yiddish theatre areas, and one of the things that made me decide I wouldn't ever be a writer was my mother wanting me to continue in my father's footsteps. So, I was not going to have my name associated with him, and I did not particularly want to take the name of a husband that I was getting rid of. So, I wanted a name. And Ted suggested using my daughter's name, Merrill, as my last name. I got upset about this because I'm Jewish, and I thought I don't want to take a name that sounds like I'm trying to pass as an Anglo-Saxon. So Ted wrote a sonnet called "On the birth of Judith Merrill" and he presented it to me in an elaborate ritual. Who could refuse it? But her name had one "L", so that's how I got my name.

**KJ:** Didn't you help to introduce Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard and Harlan Ellison, to larger audiences through some of your anthologies?

**JM:** Well, helped, yes. I certainly can't claim credit for introducing them. But I was responsible for Ballard's first cover in the States. But Aldiss was widely published in the States long before I used him in an anthology. I never actually used anything of Harlan's.

**JF:** I was wondering how you felt about the movement of some portions of the feminist community towards censorship.

**JM:** There was a period five or six years ago, at the Writers' Union of Canada, where at the annual general meeting, it became almost a ritual that a feminist group who were strongly pro-pornography censorship would introduce a motion and everybody would hold their breaths and wait for me to get up and make my speech against censorship in any way, shape or form. And then, there would be a bitter argument on the floor, and the rest of the day, groups of women would come up to me and say how disappointed they were because I had been their role model. And I couldn't be their role model anymore. But I feel extremely strongly about this, as a woman, as a Jew, as a left-wing person, I am opposed to censorship of pornography, I am opposed to censorship of anti-semitic literature, I am opposed to hate literature being censored, *I am opposed to any form of censorship of material in print.*

**JF:** You sound a lot less ambivalent about censorship than a lot of people who say well, I'm against it though I have mixed feelings.

**JM:** No, I think the answer to wickedness has got to be vigilance and activism. And as soon as you rely on authority to set up lines and walls and boxes about what can be done and what can't be done -- there are areas where this has to be done, for example, I will go along with traffic lights -- but when it comes to expression of opinion, I think that the only way that we can succeed in wiping out harmful or wicked opinions is by bringing the matter into the open and opposing it, not by burying it.

**KJ:** We were both very interested in your description of a Tesseract in the Press Porcepic Anthology *Tesseracts* as a moving cube and a perhaps a cube, if you can imagine, that is larger on the inside than it appears from the outside. Then, this starts to enter into the realm of 'Pataphysics, which we know you are interested in.

**JM:** Well, its really just a cube with one more dimension added to it. And since we are not able to sensorally perceive a fourth dimension we can only conceptualize. We can't actually construct it physically. But the concept is not unique to me and its not a particularly imaginative one. The usual way of indicating it, is something like this [draws a picture], and then there's a sort of a structure that goes inside. And there is a conventional diagrammatic form that you could probably find in a math book. And there is a mathematical term for it which means a four-dimensional square, whereas the cube is a three-dimensional square.

**KJ:** We were especially interested in the Jarry-esque aspect of all this, particularly your reference to the 'pataphysical in your forward to the Porcepic book.

**JM:** Well, say what you like, I have to confess, that my efforts to make some capital on the term were after the fact and not before. I was in Jamaica when they were getting ready to publish the book. We had not yet found a name that we all really liked, and they were getting ready to publish the book. And then I got these excited letters from the people at Press Porcepic saying that they had found the perfect name, they had found it in a Madelaine L'Engle story, it was "Tesseract". Evocative, marvelous, perfect. So, I wrote back and said, "Yeah, but 'Tesseract' means a four-dimensional square," and "how does it fit?" By that time they had art work for it. The mail is really slow between Jamaica and Canada. And I thought, well, it's as good a title as anything else. So, I sort of had to make the most of it. As far as 'pataphysics goes, the idea of 'pataphysics delights me, the manifestos of 'pataphysics delighted me. I don't know much about contemporary 'pataphysics, but the original stuff -- I read something of Jarry's that just turned me on and I wanted to use it in my anthology, so I went looking to find out more about it, and I ran across this *Evergreen* [journal] issue on 'pataphysics and just went ape. Things like a "'pataphysician if presented with a form in quadruplicate will fill out each form differently," things like "'pataphysics is the science of the specific not the general." It just seemed like what I had always been looking for, so, I've taken to regarding myself as a 'pataphysician since.

**JF:** Keeps you honest, keeps you from regarding yourself too seriously.

**JM:** Maybe that's what's done it. I have noticed that in recent years, as Science Fiction has become a highly respected and potentially lucrative field, that most of the people that I used to enjoy spending my time with have become serious and pontifical. I was crediting what I felt was my own virtue, in not turning that way and in staying poor, but maybe it was because I indoctrinated myself in 'pataphysics.

**JF:** It struck me that in your books, especially *Survival ship and other stories* and *Dughters of earth and other stories*, you have author's notes either before or after the stories, and perhaps its because Science Fiction writers often grapple with ideas, and because they don't want those ideas to be misplaced, they permit themselves to step out from behind the authorial blank wall a lot more readily than mainstream writers. There's almost a situation in which Science Fiction writers were doing self-referential texts, before that kind of terminology was fashionable in academic circles. Do you feel that this tendency has been in any way advantageous to Science Fiction writers?

**JM:** Well, I think it's worked both ways. I think those kinds of texts are sometimes damaging to the work. My basic ideology -- God, I do have a piece of ideology, I try hard not to --

**JF:** We can cut that part out of the [interview] tape...

**JM:** No. I'll confess to it, it's ok -- is that creative work anywhere in the arts, has to be able to stand on its own, and is usually damaged by additional information. I think that in many cases this is true. On the other hand, there is constant demand for additional information. Readers want it, critics want it, editors want it, magazine journalists want it. And Science Fiction writers are people who not only deal with ideas, it is in part that it is a philosophical literature, it is not a purely artistic venture, or what have you, literature, but in addition to that, fully half of the writers of Science Fiction who stay with it for any length of time, are primarily propagandists more than we are entertainers. Obviously nobody wants to read your story if you don't entertain, so, I've often used these terms, (not exactly opposing structures) of poet and prophet. Because prophet is more like it, in the Science Fiction continuum. A lot of the people on this side of the fence are not particularly trying to persuade anybody with anything, but we're motivated particularly in the early field by a desire to educate. Science Fiction in its earliest stages was very largely dramatized essay, done by people who were desperately determined that the world should understand science and be able to use it, rather than trying to convince them of something. In my case, I came into Science Fiction with a very specific agenda which had to do with ending war, and particularly making sure that as many people as possible understood what the consequences of atomic war would be. I then became very interested in the whole area of -- there is no proper name for it -- what I like to call primary communication which is a nice phrase, but people understand what I'm saying if I say E.S.P. I don't like "E.S.P." because if you spell it out it's "extra-sensory" but I don't think it's extra-sensory, I think it's simply mechanisms in our physiology that we don't understand. Nevertheless, I became and remain very interested in a lot of aspects of this, and a fair amount of the stories after that were trying to explore that. So, basically you work through a body of stuff. There are political themes, most significantly the anti-war and the atomic war, there are E.S.P. themes, and there are these mother/daughter themes or feminist themes if you like. But that word [feminist] is so loaded, and I find myself at variance with so much feminist ideology. Nevertheless, I align myself, when aligning is necessary, with the feminists, even when I disagree with them, except on the subject of censorship. I think that there is a whole section of the feminist movement which is really reactionary, not just in terms of censorship, but in many of the viewpoints and modes of operation, I find them startlingly similar to the proper ladies of my childhood, that is a kind of puritanism, the anti-man thing, not in sense of objecting to specific social behaviour of men, but the basic concept that men are stupid, or men are children, or men are some other species. And it does seem to underlie a certain quadrant. But it does seem that this whole group including the one that believes in censorship, is less noticeable as the years go by.



KJ: In her book *The female man*, Joanna Russ was looking at men as semi-creatures.

JM: I have very, very major differences with *The female man* and not quite as major but still considerable differences with her later work. I can understand and do battle with the kind of feminism that comes from violent anger. It makes sense to me that many women feel that kind of thing. I don't feel it because I have not had the same experience as they have had. As I say I was anachronistically raised with the mistaken impression that I was a person, and then I discovered, as an adult, that much of the world did not think so. What you find out as an adult does not leave you in a kind of a rage as when you discover what was done to you as a kid. I have been intensely annoyed at a lot of things that I have run into, and I feel rage on behalf of situations where I find male/female, old, young, middle-aged, black, white, people being oppressed by other people. But I have not been able to share the kind of anger that Joanna has expressed. I respect it.

JF: It occurred to me that one of the most prominent movements in Science Fiction in the last few years has been cyberpunk, William Gibson, George Alec Effinger, Walter Jon Williams, all those guys. As much as I like its swirl of neologisms, and all that stuff, I sometimes get left wondering whether or not it ends up glamorizing or glorifying the violence that's in it, and promoting a very macho or masculine ethic to the detriment of its supposed social message.

JM: This is always an ambivalence isn't it? To what extent should our news media report violence and display it. There are areas where you know what you feel. Reconstructing violent news on television, you say, "Stop!" But displaying a violent event, there are many people who feel, and I'm not at all sure they were wrong, that the biggest single factor in finally forcing the U.S. out of the Vietnam situation, and preventing them from escalating to atomic bombs, was indeed the fact that it was on television all the time. People saw it. I think the Canadian government right now, in an attempt to cut off as much direct journalism out of the Mohawk situation as they can, are following the U.S. example which was most dramatically exemplified in the thing in Granada where they blacked out all news for three days before they decided what was fit to show. And they did it again in Panama. So, I think that, a lot of that violence, we have to see. Or, it is better if we see it. I haven't read across the field in cyberpunk, but my reaction to Gibson, whom I admire enormously, is that with the short stories, initially, he was dealing with the real world, in a way that I want to see it dealt with. He was one of the few writers in science fiction who is not retreating from it, and candy-coating it. And I think that's very important. With *Neuromancer* I got the feeling that he threw in a fair amount of stuff that didn't have to be there. He was to some extent writing a saleable novel. I haven't felt that with any of the novels since then. I think he's gotten better as he goes along. And except in that one book, I've never had the feeling that there was any gratuitous violence or computer glamour. What was there seemed to be what needed to be there. The other factor behind an appreciation of Gibson is that I have spent some time in Japan, and I was incredulous when I discovered that he had never been there, after reading *Neuromancer*. I mean, people are equally incredulous when they find out he never used a computer when he wrote *Neuromancer*. But he has it all right.

JF: The other aspect of cyberpunk that interests me is the suggestion that with all of its intrusions on the the mind, the body, the electronics, that some kind of metaphor is emerging.

JM: Well, I felt that *more* earlier on in pre-cyberpunk, have you read much Delany? [Samuel, R.]. Well, his writing and that of a number of other writers utilizes the concept of built-in plugs with which you can hook yourself in directly to the spaceship, or the computer, and they're using the concept of someone who is directly connected to a thinking machine, a functioning machine. I find this both an important metaphor for society, and quite serious speculative stuff. Some form of cyborg-ism is almost certainly where we are headed if we don't completely destroy our technology. I don't see this as essentially different from the concept you find in McLuhan of the machine being the extension of your hand and your foot or whatnot. Its just attaching your hand or your foot or your head to it, to whatever. It doesn't scare me. I don't find it repellent. Whether we will do it to a greater extent -- we're doing it when we attach a modern high-tech prosthetic -- Fritz Leiber in a marvelous book which hardly anyone ever mentions called *A spectre is haunting Texas*, has a character who was raised on the moon, and whose skeleton is not strong enough for earth's gravity. So, he has an exoskeleton which is electronically operated. And in fact, I saw something like that described in the science papers, it was for a kid who, I don't know, had muscular dystrophy, I'm not sure what, but it wasn't a total body thing like the other one, but a torso. So, I think all the miscegenations of our technology are fascinating. Some of them are probable. I'm old now, I don't have a lot of time left to live. I would joyously marry myself to a piece of machinery to buy an extra hundred years, believe me. However, I do think that initially, and still at the most important level, the idea is being used as a societal metaphor.



Albuquerque Mendes (Portugal)  
Iz kolekcije Balinta Szombathy-a

## asking for indentifikasyun by bill bissett

green eyez in my dreems green eyez in my scheems  
laying ther in th park undr th treez smiling gold dreems  
ovr to me green eyez unplug th phone fall ovr th bad  
housekeeping live in a hevee nois zone dream uv drinking  
th watr th way in was with green eyez i put on th  
contact lenses colord green watchd th avrilling april  
smiles let me in ther was a bull driving ovr th cruising  
grounds not a nite to go out with evn thees green lenses  
all th world looking so soft n gossamer thats how they  
get yu so tuk a nite off th presents that green eyez  
can give yu with anothr loving i find solace n  
th miracul is aftr running thru th treez disguis as  
a wind they cudint see us kissing

## Two Poems by Brigitta Bali

### Loophole

-The mineral springs are dry. The gold mines are exhausted;  
the roof-ribs collapse one after another.  
What once was enriching, in now impoverished -

-Our open grave is a wound in the Earth --  
to be buried is to be covered  
by a scab of soil -

-For the prisoner the day breaks out earlier  
or the prisoner merely observes it earlier.  
The prisoner can guess nothing about the times -

-The border is a barbed-wire rosary;  
each bead is a surveillance station along the way.  
There is no escape from the guard-dogs -

-What the detective detects can detect him.  
This reflection of detection is symmetrical;  
surveillance is subversion --  
to counter surveillance, counter-subvert -

-A white ambulance in a snowfall.  
Trains are coming from far, their roofs are crusted by snow.  
Somewhere it had been snowing; perhaps it also snows just now.  
You can be rescued -

### Scene Behind the Scenery-Mask

A dream hibernates  
in the ice-glow of tv screens.  
The night puts on its iron gloves.  
The ticket-controller's stubborn profile  
is tatooed onto the streetcar's window.  
The debris of windy fall fields  
assemble like beggars at public washrooms,  
the sky is a ragged coat on their backs.  
Camomiles embroider the river banks,  
snuggle a bird-corpse.  
The blood-stink of army posts  
seep through the rose garden.

The cooling Earth: seedless serenity.



# SELECTED PARAGRAPHS FROM: NIGHT DREAM OF COL. JOHN COOPER By Dave Godfrey

I. NEWT KADAMOWSKI

"Dead?"

"Looks dead to me."

"Shit."

"We got one choice, Tombs. We do 'em, or we run forever and a night."

"That ain't a choice, Newt. That's line one of the command. What's line two? You're the one who reads around here. What's line two? Shit. You see how they slit his feet open? That's primitive."

The sweet Americans tell the same story over and over again. You have lived it so many times now you are perhaps not aware of these similarities; you accept their definition: that this is the story and all the variations take place within it, as though all food were bread and all forms but a single bake pan.

Newt Kadamowski is a man and he is in trouble because the powers that be don't recognize the true evil that lurks in Algiers. I say Algiers to make it specific, but you know what I mean. Algiers is not suburbia; Algiers is over the river and over the tracks; Algiers is full of whores and aliens and blacks and bikers, cops on the take and transvestites on the make. Death comes easy in Algiers; death and neon and painted faces and old women in doorways with their grocery carts full of the refuse of life. It is always night in Algiers. Unless it is early dawn. Or hot, sticky noon. Algiers is just three blocks behind Beauvoir in old Biloxi; paint-sweating shacks on rectangles of blocks. You pay cash in advance for gas in Algiers.

Captain Zero runs Algiers with sadistic glee. There is order here in Algiers; we are freed from democracy and from justice at once. Bronze and Alfresco build the upper world in mortal terror of Zero. I have chosen to live in Algiers; I am an artist and the subways and hoardings are my canvas; the whores are my patrons; the pimps in their boudoirs are my best customers, they buy me velvet for canvas; I need neither galleys nor governments. But Newt keeps barging in, singing of Walt Whitman and Bruce Springsteen. He won't let us be. Sweet America won't let us be. The Mayors Convention has a sudden nightmare at noon; they choke on their raspberry mint icecream and send in Newt after us.

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Here come Newt!

The white Ferrari shudders up the silo of the parking lot, bashing chrome against concrete, glossy Italian paint against rubber buffers. Guns blare from the Mercedes that pursues them. How? How? How? Pow! Pow! Pow! Wheel right; squeal tight; get his skull in my sights. Now! Now! Now! Pow! Wow! Pow! How! Right now! Ferrari low! Pow! Pow! The fortuitous tractor-trailer parked nine storeys up, in the middle of the lot. Under its belly we go; Ferrari low. Mercedes high. Crash high. Bye bye. Fire pie. Smoke in the sky, guy. You mess with Newt and you die.

But Captain Zero is the destiny Newt cannot escape. Newt always comes alone, the single pilgrim, and if he is wired we always find it out. But he comes in a hundred disguises. It is our order which infuriates him; our refusal to pledge the Sweet Dream; the tortuous sorrow of our music; or the quick death in the left hand. Our drugs and our antibodies. The twist in our genes. What has happened this time?

Newt is on the run. Newt was once a cop, but he has had enough; Susan has left him for a broker with a Mercedes. Suzy 2 has been raped and crippled by one of Zero's frontier scouts; Susanne Trois has disappeared back to Algiers just as he was getting to know her.

"I'm sick of it, Newt Kadamowski," they say. "Never knowing when you're coming back; if you're coming back."

No words. Dark gloom in his eyes; a slouch of isolation hunkered around his beer.

"I want a life, Newt. A day life. I can't remember a night I've slept through, even when you're here. You're not here now, Newt. Are you? Are you here, Newt? Damn it, say something to me!"

No words. Pure gloom pours from his eyes. "Someday," he says as he leaves. Half threat; half dream. Outside, someone has shot out all the streetlights except one. Rain strikes its oval essence on the blackened sidewalk. Newt is on his way.

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We know the rules of this rite. A double is selected for Captain Zero and his MO prepared and fed into the right computers.

This Captain Zero is the master pimp and Susan Tray is his virgin woman, the one he bought clean and neat at seven, the one he never sends out to the streets. This Captain Zero has moved up from pimping into trade in cocaine and aliens and he has accountants now as well as guards who never need to ask which knee joint to smash. We give him the face of a hippie bred to a tiger; soft, gentle eyes, a golden pony-tail (close cropped) a black trench coat from Parachute; alligator boots. A Willi Nelson with muscles. He is going to die in flames, you see. So we give him Cajun blood.

Susan Tray's mother sold her to Captain Zero when Susan was seven years young. We don't show the sale. We don't show the wedding. These are private rites. We retain a few secrets. But it is clear that Cap loves her with a passion beyond anything Sweet America can ever conceive of. Zero has killed for her. The drugs, the aliens, even the whores now are for her.

During his seven years in the crapper, she was always there within that dark cube in the centre of his mind which kept him safe on the rim of insanity. A black cube, impregnable. The prison within the prison where he held the rest of the world; Zero its warden; Zero its night guards; Zero, the Dark One who came in the night with his hypnotists and soundless music and electronic prods thin as bamboo, tough as a forge.

His soul lived in there. Untouchable. Unknowable. Uncaring of the body that still raged against all lesser beings, that automatically translated the repression of the Sweet America guards into lust for the weaker of the species and fists to hammer on the strongest until his position is safe; until he has harmonized himself with the situation again; ready for Newt's descent again and for his own ultimate sacrifice for our tribe.

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In that cube, there are seven cells. We are no amateurs.

One. Discovery. Yes!

Two. First reversal. Amen.

Three. The Encounter. My man.

Four. The rescue. Sweet Jesus.

Five. The escape and return. Brethren, rejoice.

Six. The confrontation. Amen. Amen.

Seven. Death by fire. Halleluja, Amen.

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## II. DISCOVERY

For us, Susan Tray is the traitor. She has the hots for Sweet America. She is drugged by Future and aroused by the sweet, denim-clad buns of Perfection. Her mom plays Bach badly on a real clavichord in a living room by Sears. Harrington takes Susan to Bigcity to find a hitman to do in Zero. Harrington is scared. Everything which he is, his farms, his mansions, his fleet of Mercedes, his young mistress, depends on his links to Cap Zero, links which he inherited from his own father. Harrington is the passageway between the police and the politicians of Bigcity and the realities of Algiers: up and down his wide roads go the heavy loads of corruption. But he pants for Susan Tray. She brings him back to the dream of identity, of that shuffling off of the past which would let others see him as he is, tough as a crate of gators, smart as a bullwhip's crack, handsome as a river current.

They discover Newt and his buddy in arms, Huck Tombs, in one of those old bars on Forty-Seventh in Bigcity, just the place a matron would search out when it was time to hit Pops with the big one.

She poses on Harrington's arm until she catches Newt's eye. Her hands smooth her dark velvet skirt about her boyish hips until Newt takes the bait, arrives, mutters, negotiates in bad faith, and agrees to the murder. In a high mirror to the left of their booth we catch a glimpse of Charlie Two watching Pig Tail watching this transaction from the manager's gallery high above the dark oak bar with its leather and brass bumper ring shining in the half-lights of greed.

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Did you doze off? Let me recapitulate. Suzy and Harrington paid Newt and Tombs thirty grand to come to Algiers and do in Zero. Newt and Tombs reported to their controller, the owner of Zapem Video Games (fifty, cigar-smoking, fat, etc. etc.). But there was a leak; the message here is that nobody can be trusted. When Harvey Zapem returned to his apartment in Chillingworth Arms that night, Pig Tail and Real Numbers had already ransacked his wife's mind. Harvey's confession did nothing but relieve twenty years of troubled guilt. It certainly did not save his life.

"Dead?" Tombs asks.

"Looks dead to me," replies Newt when they have both examined the two scantily clad bodies, locked in death's embrace.

"Shit," summarizes Tombs succinctly.

"We got one choice, Tombs. We do 'em, or we run forever and a night," philosophized Newt.

"I'm in," says Tombs. Sealing his fate with bravado.

So it is Pig Tail and Real Numbers that chase Kadamowski up the parking lot ramps, guns ablaze, having trapped Tombs with the old battered-mother trick and plucked him of every bit of information he had. But it is Pig Tail and Real Numbers that die by fire as the Mercedes crashes into the conveniently located tractor-trailer. Kadamowski grunts with satisfaction as they are consumed on the pyre and he frees the drugged Tombs from the depths of the container seconds before it too explodes into the night sky. A long, helicopter shot as the flame becomes smaller and smaller; we are all motes in the eye of some Demon of the Black Holes.



Harrington and Suzy are terrified by what Pigtail and Real Numbers have done to Zapem. They know that Zero is on to them and that their childish dreams of escape are doomed; for its chosen children there are no outlets from Algiers. Zero sets the terms and they agree, as they must. Suzy lures Huck Tombs to bed and Harrington himself clumsily batters his head to pulp with a K-Mart lamp while Suzy shrinks beneath the dingy sheets of the GoHome Motel. Charlie Two arrives to sneer at the amateurs and to slit the feet of the fallen one. Later, all three blow the white Ferrari sky high as Newt arrives at the GoHome Motel, but somehow Newt escapes, too stunned to give chase.

Remember now? Newt goes ballistic when he sees Tombs's feet slit from heel to toe. Quits the force. Loads up with arms by breaking into the confiscation room at midnight. Heads for Algiers at full-tilt in his divorced wife's battered Chevy Nova, his mind atwist with dreams of Suzy as Madonna and Suzy as barbecued intangibles.

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Suzy herself is actually sick and tired of all this utter bullshit. I mean it's a choice of weirdos actually. You have Zero who's more possessive than a doberman with stolen knackwurst and Kadamowski who, true, looks like a left tackle with a few hours in his clock still, but, as for body odour, hatred of shaving and potential daddy material, this gonzo is definitely an empty bridge — at least for anyone who's not deep into masochism and knuckle-cracking. It's not that Suzy would choose Harrington if she could write the script, it's that something totally different would be happening here and she and her mother would be somewhere else doing something other than all of this sleep-walking, mind-cracking fandango; but she isn't, so it's not and they aren't and they won't.

Thus, Suzy sleepwalks through the encounter dance when Newt arrives in Algiers. In the Midnight Tavern, she poses on Zero's arm. She drinks her beer and sways to King Byron as fiddles chase the accordion into Cajun counter-furies to keep alive the hate and fire of ancient expulsions. She manages to catch Newt's eye as he enters the crowded tavern and she moves toward the ladies room with nonchalant deliberation as befits a virgin purchase; her hands smooth her dark velvet skirt. The dum-de-dum-dums play as Pig Tail's older brother, Charlie Two, moves in suspiciously on Newt, now older, more wasted, three-day-bearded. Then knives flash and lights pop out and Suzy dives out the window after Newt into the muddy swamp water that lines the piling-lifted board-streets of this part of Algiers. For one instant, before she goes, her eyes lock with those of Zero and the camera angles and the deliberately limited light and the blood-thumping music let us add whatever messages we wish to those that actually pass between these two victims of forces larger than history and deeper than passion's lures.

### III. MECHANISMS. A Lecture to Readers Bored with Television.

The auto-biography above and below is a storyboard for an artistic mechanism which can't yet be built. An artistic mechanism is a non-human artist. An artist is a human who takes the stuff of life (including things which are invented and yet comprehensible to humans) and reshapes them in a manner designed to play on the emotions and intellect of other humans and lead them to action, meditation, enjoyment, consumption or some combination thereof. Pure art fails if it leads to action and propaganda fails if it does not, but one culture's propaganda is another culture's art. And the opposite holds true: look what the British Empire did to the Greek temple.

The influence of science on modernism led many artists to look abstractly at their content and methodologies and to change those, often violently.

Some indeed strongly adapted the role of mechanisms within the creation of individual objects of art. But only a few have taken that next step and imagined the removal of the artist back one entire level to a stage where the artistic creation of artistic mechanism might be seen as an addition to the role of art in human culture.

Why is it the fear of the mechanical which motivates many artists? Why does Falstaff make this fuss? If Algiers is a storyboard for the creation of an artistic mechanism, what would the characteristics be of this mechanism and how would it be created? Why do we realize that this would be very hard to do, this creation of an artistic mechanism?

Outline of MECHANISM prototype: 1.0

- it would input human movies without quality judgements
- it would recognize verbal, graphic and mythic patterns
- it would have a complex set of heuristics
- it would have some multi-layered induction capabilities
- it would synthesize, rearrange and contrast
- it would endlessly produce variations
- it would take feedback from its audience and modify its productions to please them

A burning question is whether an artistic mechanism should create for humans or for other mechanisms and beings? Could not whole worlds of art be created beyond the range of human biological sensibilities? The question would be, of course, whether anyone was there to "enjoy" them, but wouldn't "influence" be enough. Suppose there were heuristics which allowed for variations "influenced" by viewing productions by other artistic mechanisms? Would this be artificial art? Could we not invent critical mechanisms as well as artistic ones?

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### IV. DEATH BY FIRE

Do we still remember the swamp and the cave as we prepare for Zero's death? The Chasers. Zero, the manager. Fixer's obvious paranoia. Charlie Two's naked muscularity as he runs down the panting, muddied Kadamowski; the terror in Suzy's eyes as the loyal Charlie Two catches Newt by the scruff of his sweating neck, balls up the skin there and tosses our breathless cop into a gator pool filled with stumps that lean and point and log-snouts that suddenly slither towards this chubby offering from the shadows above.

Do we still remember Suzy's moment of truth, after she leaves the cave where the man has deposited her and moves through the ancient, shadowy swamp of treachery to that precise spot where she can find Fixer's magnum tossed carelessly aside as he turns to more visceral

methods and chokes Kadamowski into oblivion, and she lifts it into the morning air, and she circles just far enough to the right as Justice and Upbringing do battle within her until Newt's bulging eyes and dirt-grasping hands tilt the debate to the side of inevitable violence and she, Suzy Justice, shakes Fixer's head in the last wind he will ever feel on earth. Satiated by her liberation, she does not curl into Newt's arms; for a moment, she savours her independence before the sound of the Chasers rises again and those of the crew left alive move off towards the inevitable small hotel and the final entrapment.

Do you remember the swamp and the cave? It is important that these images live as the fire in the hotel begins, Newt crouching with nothing remaining now of his arsenal but the thick, skinning knife left to him by his booze-hound dad; Suzy cowering beyond the window of this ancient, three-story hotel; Zero pacing outside with the remnants of his noble crew, their eyes ablaze with thoughts of the long overdue gutting of the prey.

For each day, you beyond Algiers must slap down the weak and the homeless, you must take the food from the mouths of peasant children, you must speak out firmly for the salvation of the rain forests and the curbing of excessive populations, and, to do this, you need these one-a-day burnings of symbolic evil.

After the fire has begun, after Newt has demolished all the Chasers except Zero himself, after Suzy, of her own free will and volition, has accepted the role of target, of fattened calf left out for the bear, after the blazing, falling stairwell has fallen across Kadamowski's legs and trapped him hopelessly at the level of Zero's advancing, high-shine, snake-skin, guiltless boots, do you too not participate in the need for that miraculous burst of slow-motion energy? that rebirth, that jolt of 100 proof revenge-need which allows Kadamowski, at that exact moment when the Captain has spun the cylinder and aimed the eight inch barrel at the violator's head, to somehow plunge his hands into the burning fires of the fallen beam, to lift it, in the slowest of motions, and to the utter astonishment of the obsessive Zero, and to somehow back that darkest of villains, confused now by smoke and fire as well as by Suzy's screams of terror, to back the demon incarnate into a tottering fall off the collapsing stairwell and that hopeless, tumbling, clothes-ablaze spin into the eternity that awaits us all?

Do you too not breathe a sigh of relief and await the maiden's gentle hands, the peaceful salves, the white bandages that wrap the burdened hands?

It must end. They must depart. Suzy and Newt drive off in the battered, rust-brown, Chevy Nova, with little resolved. The town appears in shock and ripe for renewal, though we all know better. But, for the moment at least, the man and woman drive off together, all forgiven, locked in life's embrace, heading for those shifting borderlands between Algiers and Bigcity. Suzy is behind the wheel. Newt is dreaming of trout streams. There are trees to either side of the road. And a river valley beyond. The storm clouds lift; the car leaves a small wake in the dust, like a small sailboat, lost ashore.

## CERTAIN INFORMATION

### By Opal Louis Nations

Just beyond the last reflection in the center glass of the mirrored room stood he who could not sit. His wooden legs had no joints at the knee. His presence constituted a lifetime of cheap novels and westerns. His public life a public washroom where he carried out tests on certain smooth stones to determine how long it took them to sink to the bottom of the sink filled with heavy water. The pressure per square centimeter of the stump-ends on the asphalt upon which he stood was considerable. It could be measured in a series of dynamic segments of heavy melodrama. Just the last fragment of an image of him disappeared around a corner, but I had a class waiting.

They had prepared themselves for this awesome task. One of self-mutilation. Only the image of W.H. West indicated in the shape of flame from a burning match could save the poor unfortunate wretch's life. Just exactly what happened was the opposite, only he who walked on coals burned his fingers. They kept giving him classes knowing full well that his class-student turnover exceeded that laid down by the computer on the East Coast. A solid wall of empty buff envelopes confronted one when one entered the office of she who hands out immortality. To think that right up until quite recently all duties were carried out by a young girl about five years of age. Her fall from mindless innocence led to the savage denial of life after life. It was like murmuring.

Above the wooden legs hung temptation but it was all kept very low-key. In addition to his accurate appearance, a feeling of the forlorn. Endless acres of gardens stretched before him and as he hobbled along their interconnecting pathways, the beds in the forward distance brightened as the beds in his wake passed into thin wisps of color awakened by smells that kept it infinitely intact. This again was all due to the pressure exerted on the ground by the stump-ends. Long before, his stumps were cut from the mast of an old ship, hence his former years spent at sea. His next were stumps from a barstool, and would you believe it? He spent 10 years as a pathetic drunk. Only stumps made from marijuana plants saved him from uncertain oblivion. Then came the war, an all-out effort to attach oneself to one's weapon so that if it went off you went off with it. Many were lost that way, including four of his best friends, not that he ever spoke to Rouse. He had his own problems, the biggest being his delight in the pain of having his toes stretched by expensive call-girls. But Rouse was just like all of us, I mean, like all those of us who lived thru it all and then some.

The edge of the gardens drew near. He slowed his pace a little. The last petunias ended with a seam along the edge, beyond this point no flower dared growth. He paused, raised his head, drew a pair of drumsticks from his pocket and proceeded to play a selection from Krupa Bellson's most difficult pieces on his stumps. Halfway thru a difficult high hat his mind turned to the correct procedures for filling out standard government forms followed by flashes of feelings best described by a reading of the holy martyrs who were talking about a man who couldn't fix a sprinkler in a submarine, but could at least bleed his own remorse to death. The pressure of his stump-ends did win him respect, if nothing else. Temptation stayed put.



# Part II: from INDEX OF FACADOMY by James Gray

## Other Perspectives

ONLY  
'dichterisch  
wohnt der  
Mensch'

DEAR ABBY: My husband is a readaholic. Since he has retired, the only time he isn't

**'You would do well to learn from criticism and change your attitude to a kinder and gentler one.'**

reading is when he's sleeping, driving the car or in the shower. He doesn't communicate (talk) hardly at all; he's too busy reading newspapers, magazines, books — anything handy.

Can you tell me if this is some kind of affliction, compulsion, obsession or what? I would sure like to know if I should accept this kind of behavior cheerfully. Please help me. This is

Already, in such a small space of a few pages bound to be continually prefaced and framed between two hands, any terms have been suspended in a liquid which refuses any flow, a turbulent fluid, in which each acting to carry the other (in its absence) to its totality its conclusion and own displacement, but this process of absent being leads to an unspeakable discourse of Traces, inscription and shadow

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- Footnotes**  
Beckett  
Nietzsche  
Heidegger  
ibid  
Habermas  
Sextus Empiricus  
Heidegger



### Telos Innovation Telos Innovative

[it is percisedly Hegels desire to design a philosophy which is not dependant upon transcende of the one world.]

(Changing, it results)

this, the end, is the same as the begining, for they are (now, here) ONE

Left

## Easy to Interpret!

SILENCE, our Philosophic silence, rendered poetic, is not inarticulate as much as unheard, it is pure negativity and the obverse of the mechanical silence of affirmation of the Pro Quo.

Affirming silence is the sound of forgetfulness this is the most common response to the challenge of our non-linear situation of closure and radical alterity which promises to never end nor begin, The sublime silence which is repition of difference within articulation acts percisely by fragmentation and the language of non-articulation. the texture of lost flesh, and gash differ while both tend toward a sub perceptual world, a word which delimits as it determins, full of traces of otherness to its self (texture) and refusal of being. THE ENIGMA of Being itself is enuf, and more than enuf now, to be the fatal estrangement of the perceptual expiencing of TRUTH. but who is left to know? to translate?

The pre-contemplative silence of the life world is constantly interrupted by the desire to know essence thru logos and present it as truth. Again the self is inscribed in truth, stepping back into a

speculative space in which the intersubjective reality, is nolonger given and therefore valid and "true" but rather, is a linguistic formation of interpreting appearance and therefore an approach to political redetermination of expiencing?

The difference between 'TRUE' and 'THE TRUE' is the the difference between the incorporeal and its other, the embodied, which sets the agenda for the subjects relation to expiencing. THE TRUE is not dependant upon the metaphysics of presence

but rather dependant on knowledge which is again a function of Logos opposed to Eidos. This means that the foundation of this silence, rather than being grounded in empirical intuition which acts to silence criticism, the silence of THE TRUE is a silent dwelling upon the de-presentation as equally original as present-beyond metaphysics and contradiction, this speculative dwelling produces a subtle and paralogic discourse which is out of sync with current intellectual trends and is therefore rendered silent byt like the incorporeal true, it is none the less existant as a trace.

### ΠΡΟΪ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑΣ

Τὴν δὲ ἀλήθειαν οἰοῦνται τινες, καὶ μάλιστα οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς στοᾶς, διαφέρειν τῶν ἀληθῶν κατὰ τρεῖς τρόπους, οὐσία τε καὶ συστάσει καὶ δυνάμει, οὐσίᾳ μὲν παρόσον ἢ μὲν ἀλήθεια σῶμά ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς ἀσώματον ὑπῆρχεν. καὶ εἰκότως, φασὶν τοῦτ' ἐμὲν γὰρ ἀξίωμα ἐστὶ, τὸ δὲ ἀξίωμα λεκτὸν, τὸ δὲ λεκτὸν ἀσώματον. ἀνάπαυιν δὲ ἡ ἀλήθεια σῶμά ἐστι παρόσον ἐπιστήμη πάντων ἀληθῶν ἀποφαντικὴ δοκεῖ τυγχάνειν, πᾶσα δὲ ἐπιστήμη πῶς ἔχον ἐστὶν ἡγεμονικόν, ὡσπερ καὶ ἡ πῶς ἔχουσα χεῖρ πυγμῆ νοεῖται· τὸ δὲ ἡγεμονικὸν σῶμα κατὰ τοῦτους ὑπῆρχεν· τοῖνον καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια κατὰ γένος ἔσται σωματικὴ. συστάσει δὲ καθόσον τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς ὡς μονοειδὲς τι καὶ ἀπλοῦν τὴν φύσιν νενόηται, ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος τὸ "ἡμέρα ἐστίν" καὶ τὸ "ἐγὼ διαλέγομαι," ἡ δὲ ἀλήθεια ὡς ἂν ἐπιστήμη καθεστηκυῖα τούναντίον συστηματικὴ τε καὶ πλειόνων ἄθροισμα τυγχάνειν ὑπερίληπται. ὧ οὖν λόγῳ ἕτερον τί ἐστὶν ὁ δῆμος καὶ ἕτερον ὁ πολίτης, καὶ δῆμος μὲν τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν πολιτῶν ἄθροισμα πολίτης δὲ ὁ εἷς, τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ διενήνοχεν ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ ἀληθοῦς, καὶ ὁμοίωται ἢ μὲν ἀλήθεια τῷ δήμῳ τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς τῷ πολίτῃ, διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν εἶναι συστηματικὴν τὸ δὲ ἀπλοῦν. δυνάμει δὲ ταῦτα ἀλλήλων κεχώρισται, ἐπεὶ τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς οὐ πάντως ἐπιστήμης εἶχετο (καὶ γὰρ ὁ φαῦλος καὶ ὁ νήπιος καὶ ὁ μεμηνηὼς λέγει μὲν ποτὲ τι ἀληθές, οὐκ ἔχει δὲ ἐπιστήμην ἀληθοῦς), ἡ δὲ ἀλήθεια κατ' ἐπιστήμην θεωρεῖται.

\* With §§ 38-42 cf. P.II. ii. 80-83.

(Changing, it Resists)

Right

Facis



# SURFACES. LOOKING FORWARD TO REMEMBRANCE DAY, 1999

By Karl Jirgens

*This morning I awoke from a dream in which I was in a swimming pool during a lightning storm. I was in the middle of the pool and had not noticed how quickly the front had moved in. The sky was suddenly black with flashes of light bolting through opaque thunderheads. I sensed that I couldn't reach the side of the pool in time to avoid the lightning, so I dove underwater and swam to the deep end and huddled, floating at neutral bouyancy, careful not to touch the side or bottom of the pool. Through the blue water above me I could see lightning strike and explode into a flash that spread like an uneven spikey net of light over much of the surface and along one of the walls of the swimming pool. I hung in the deep end curled up in a ball. Nothing happened. I remember watching my breath bubbles ascend during the flash, tiny glowing globes of light that exploded upon contact with the dark surface above. After a while, the lightning passed and I emerged from the pool.*

I woke up in a sweat and thought I smelled a hint of something like burning rubber. Later, I showered and made an egg and some coffee. I poured the coffee into the filter. The can of coffee I had was getting close to the bottom and I made a note on the fridge noteholder to get another can. I was reading the Globe and listening to "Morningside" on the radio while I waited for the filter to empty itself into the cup. The kitchen slowly filled with the aroma of columbian coffee while I read about student riots in Korea and made up some toast and peanut butter. I remember thinking that there are a lot of things going on there that don't get into the news. After a while I took the ceramic filter off of my coffee cup and poured the milk. I was about to add sugar when I looked into the cup and saw what appeared to be a couple of pieces of fibre, maybe a bit of shredded wheat or something, I couldn't figure it out, so I reached in and picked one of the pieces out of the coffee cup. I noticed that it had a certain brittleness to it as I threw it into the sink. It was a little bit darker than a piece of shredded wheat. I couldn't figure out what it was. Then, I noticed another bit of fibre, maybe more like a short piece of thread, so I plucked it out as well. I was surprised at how much came up with it as I withdrew it from the coffee. I didn't realize that I was grabbing a leg that was attached to a centipede. I immediately threw it into the sink. It looked slightly puffed up, plump like, rigid, and the colour from its body had been faded by the scalding heat of the coffee. It had turned a beautiful shade of violet, like the lilacs we used to have outside the garage many summers ago. And it was dead. Drowned or scalded, I didn't know which, but dead. It must've been in the cup as I placed the funnel-shaped ceramic filter on top. Even with all those legs it still couldn't have escaped, because once I placed the filter on and started pouring coffee, there was no way out, the near-boiling hot coffee pouring through a central hole in the filter until the cup was full. I went to make another cup, but changed my mind and made tea instead.

After my tea, I decided to drop in on an Auntie of mine who lived near by. She was always asking me to drop in for a few minutes. To tell the truth she's not really my Aunt, but she likes to call herself that, and most of the time she really is very sweet, but sometimes she can be a bit of a busybody. She frequently asks questions that are far too personal, questions she has no business asking. When I arrived she was having a chat with a group of friends, all of them were sweet little old ladies dressed in summery floral prints. They were munching on sponge cake and having tea. A couple of them were wearing sporty straw hats. One wore an uncoloured natural straw hat that looked something like the kind that William Carlos Williams used to wear, "leghorns" I think they were called, only hers had a bright red ribbon, and the other was wearing a slightly looser weave of straw hat that was a light purple colour and it looked something like a U.F.O. only with a happy yellow cloth band. Actually, I've never seen a U.F.O. but if I ever saw one, it would probably look just like that hat, only without the yellow ribbon. They offered me a cup of tea which I politely accepted, but did not drink because I'd already had some earlier. I noticed that one of the ladies was wearing light white gloves with little pearl buttons, the kind ladies used to wear all the time years ago. The gloves were made from the usual netted sort of fabric, crochet, I guess, with decorative white cloth flower designs on top which covered most of the pale blue veins in her weathered hands. At first they seemed delighted that I had dropped by and made a big fuss and asked me how I was and where I'd been and what I'd been doing, but I noticed that they did all of this without listening for an answer and after a very short time they began to ignore me altogether and they went on with their conversation as if I wasn't there. My busybody Auntie was talking about somebody else that she envied, and she made a declaration just before popping her last bit of sponge cake into her mouth about this secret enemy of hers, "Well, you wouldn't believe the outrageous demands she made, why it was positively scandalous." And I could see eyes sparking as everybody raised the ante and drew deep from a hidden cache of resentment and threw in their own chips of jealousy and hatred and fear, and egged and jeered her on so that in the end, I saw her caught in her own lie, my Auntie had laid an egg and now she had to cover it up, she had to make something up that was sufficiently nasty without being completely horrid, something that would draw comments of indignation with affirming nods, clucks of the tongue, and expressions such as, "Well, I'm not surprised in the least," and another chip would come up from a hidden pocket somewhere and it would be tossed on the table, "And let me tell you another thing," and this fine little group of knit-one-pearl-two little old ladies would assassinate an old dear friend between sponge cake and slurps of tea. And you never can tell exactly what's underneath those flower print dresses, and that white lace tablecloth, and most times, you'd rather not know. I sat there listening, my eyes drifting around the room until they settled on an antique grandfather clock. It was made of a rich dark wood and had elegant raised numbers set on a metallic face. It was obvious that the delicate carving had been done by a hand that lived in another time when people were not as strapped for hours the way they are nowadays. And as I gazed at the clock and listened to my Auntie, I caught myself

thinking that after all this time, and in spite of everything, maybe I have become the sum of all the things that I hate most in other people. I pretended to sip some tea, and then I excused myself, even though I was dying to hear who they'd assassinate next. I had promised myself I'd pick up a fresh can of coffee and a few groceries. As I left, I noticed the minute hand hesitating at a minute or two before twelve. The ladies seemed nonplussed by my departure. They waved vaguely and kept on chatting as I shouted "bye" and left by the side door.

Outside the air was friendly and warm and slightly stale. The smell reminded me of the smell of dusty old cloth seatcovers in a cross-country greyhound bus, a hint of burnt diesel fumes, and fallen leaves. It was early fall. Once, on a day not unlike this many years ago, in the eighteen hundreds I think it was, maybe earlier, there was a weather report entered in Toronto by a man who saw clear sky throughout the eastern hemisphere and an encroaching cloud from the west. As the powerful western front moved towards him he recorded that he could see a bright blue sky over his shoulder and a snow blizzard moving quickly towards him. "At one point," he wrote, "I could see what appeared to be a curtain or wall of snow reaching up to the sky moving towards me at a rate of about 30 miles per hour. I was quickly overtaken and found myself in the midst of a snow storm with nothing but a light jacket and a sturdy pair of oxfords to protect me." It was, I think, the first time anyone had ever recorded the movement of a weather front in North America.

I reached the intersection of Bloor and Jane and in front of the barbershop an old guy was marching to an imagined rhythm, hep, hep, hep-hup, hep, hep, hep-hup, hep... On his face you could see scars left by war. Hep, hep. Sometimes when he walks by me and notices me on my morning rounds he grins at me kind of funny and says, "Nice weather, eh?" Doesn't matter if its a blizzard or a blue sky day. Its always "Nice weather, eh?" And on he goes. Hep, hep, hep-hup, hep. I don't know why I drink coffee so much. Usually it just makes me irritable. I get short with people. I become abrupt. Insult them. Unwittingly. Unintentionally. I get impatient. I know what they're going to say next and I want them to spit it out. Get on with it. I run ahead of the conversation. Centipede like. I heard on the radio that you should drink tea made from dandelions, good for the liver, sage tea for a sore throat, parsley's good for kidneys and bladder. They talk about yin and yang energies. I'm too yang, they tell me. Funny thing is Chinese ginseng is good for yang energy, but Canadian red ginseng is very yin. Anyway, that's what the herbalist on the "Morningside" radio program said. And I believed her. I was off to the store to buy coffee and maybe some ginseng, too. It's true I drink coffee. Probably too much coffee. Cinnamon is very yang too. Once a long time ago, back in the seventeenth century, hundreds of coins fell from the sky during a windy rain storm. Another time it rained pink frogs over Sheffield, England. On June 1983, a Mr. Collins from Brighton, England reported that a one foot crab fell at his feet during a powerful rainstorm. I looked into these things. These are documented cases. Apparently, what happened was these things got sucked up by powerful winds, they get sucked way up into the stratosphere where the air is thin and cool, and then then drop and get tossed around in the turmoil of a thunderhead, surrounded by a black boiling turbulence occasionally lit up from within by a blaze of lightning, these things happens from time to time, and then when the winds die down, and the storm relaxes its grip, and the coins or critters or what-have-you, fall to the ground again. They checked into the frogs. The frogs were a special case because, till then, nobody had ever heard of pink frogs. A couple of the local clergymen saw a quick chance to gain some momentum and claimed it was a sign from heaven. But, when interviewed by a local reporter an older minister wisely ignored it. "Just one of those things," he said. Good strategy on his part, or maybe just plain honesty, the kind of honesty that comes after seeing incredible things happen over and over again, over a period of many years. It turned out the frogs had been living in contaminated water. They found a whole bog full of them about eighty miles down the road. Some kind of chemicals were being tossed into this bog, and the frogs were mutating, sort of an albino effect, only pink in this case. Then a twister came, sucked them up and next thing you know its raining little pink frogs. Tiny ones really, about the size of your thumbnail, falling by the handfull on people's doorsteps. Wind and turbulence. Wouldn't matter if it was raining foot long crabs and pink frogs, this guy would say, "Nice weather, eh?" and keep marching. Hep, toowp, threep, fowr. Hep.

I sometimes wonder if animals maybe sense things in ways that people don't. I sometimes think that dogs can actually sense various planes of existence, I mean, they can hear a wider range of sounds, why shouldn't they be able to sense a broader level range of existence. But I think that dogs define which dimension they think is real by eating and excreting in it. You never know. What do we know? We think we know about unified ground theory. Gravity. Weak force. Strongforce. Electromagnetic pull. On the radio they were saying that Einstein's first wife helped him arrive at the special theory of relativity. Apparently she was a mathematics genius whereas Albert was better at physics. They met each other when they were studying at the University. She used a style far more elegant than Albert's, so they say. In fact Albert's old professors were very impressed by the precision and elan of his papers on the photoelectric effect. They commented that it certainly wasn't like the work that Albert used to do as a student, in fact he had been quite lazy. And they were pleasantly surprised at this new level of sophistication. The two of them would sit around at the dining room table, talking, thinking, the grandfather clock ticking in the background. The soft golden glow of the light bulbs in the chandelier overhead. Then, suddenly, Albert would get an idea. "Say," he would say, "say someone was in an elevator, and he suddenly dropped his wrist-watch, but it didn't fall to the ground of the elevator, instead it hung suspended in the air next to him, and he would wonder what had happened -- had the laws of gravity suddenly been suspended?" And she would say, "It would be more likely that the elevator was malfunctioning and that he was as yet unaware that both he and his pocket-watch were inside an elevator that was plummeting down the shaft and that he and the pocket watch and the elevator were all travelling at equal velocities." And Albert would say, "Yes, that's it! Only I said, a wrist watch." And she would say "It doesn't make sense." And he would say, "But



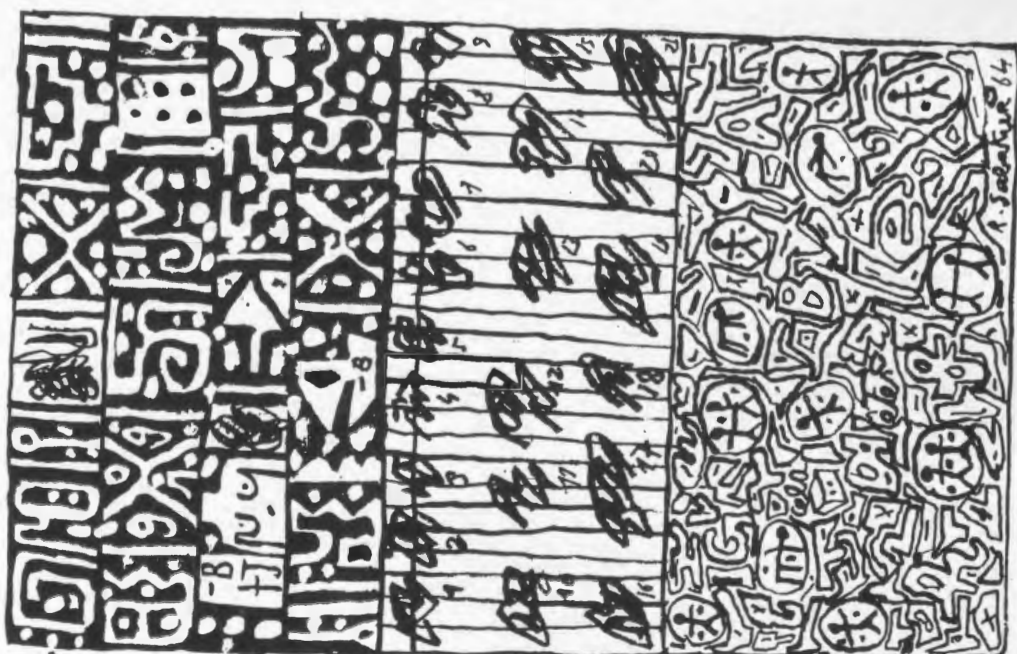
why? I've considered all the physical possibilities." "Hmmpfh." She would say. "How could a man drop a wrist-watch, a pocket watch yes, but not even an absent-minded dodo like yourself could drop a wrist-watch." "Aaah. Of course." Albert would respond. "But can we explain that mathematically?" And she would look at him, with that slightly surprised and slightly tired look and with one arched eyebrow she would say, "Yes, of course, its quite simple really, here, you see, if we take the gravitational constant, and consider the maximum velocity that they reach..." and so on. And that's why, when Albert won the Nobel Prize in physics in 1921, he gave her all the prize money. Every cent. That's what they say. He went for the fame, she got the bucks but kept her anonymity. This was after he divorced her and married his cousin. Albert had completed most of his important work around the time of the divorce and apparently there had been a clause in the divorce papers saying that in the event he won a prize, the Nobel or some other prize, then he would get the recognition and she would get the money. You never know. They say that we are in the Virgo super-cluster. I think it was Hubbel that confirmed the expansion of the universe in 1929. Edington, I think, came to the same conclusion in 1930. Helium and Hydrogen were the first of the new elements that they discovered, I believe. It makes me light-headed thinking about it all. Look how far we've come in such a short time. They say the universe is expanding. I dunno. Once I heard a guy on an educational program say that 1% of the snow on television is electro-radio evidence of the fundamental forces after the big bang. The fragile residue of something much bigger that we missed, a feint electro-magnetic trace on the surface of your screen. Stardust memories on the late, late show. Nowadays, I find myself changing the channel a lot. The big bang is history as far as I'm concerned. I want to know what's going on now. Or, at least what we now think is going on. Vacuum particle theory. Out of nothing, something. So this guy on the T.V. says that we live in a crystalized universe of broken symmetries. Tell that to the guy marching past the barbershop at exactly the same time every day. Hep, hep, hep-hup, hep. He'd be happier than a three-peckered dog at a breeding kennel if he knew that he wasn't the only one living in a broken symmetry. Hep, hep. I picture him and his platoon marching, centipede-like into the on-coming flash of poppin' shells, his buddies getting knocked off one at a time, the landscape littered with broken bodies, lips a characteristic bluish tinge, the pervasive smell of ammonia, in Dunkirk or El Alamein maybe, regular as clockwork, the legs of the platoon, marching, hep, hep.

One day, Ponderosa Pine, was sitting on the stoop of his weathered wooden porch in Indiana. He was watching the sun, he was letting the intense thermonuclear rays blast his eyes longer than you're supposed to, strong medicine, he was getting afterimages on the back of his eyelids, he was sipping mescal that his cousin, Peter Coyote, from New Mexico, had brought up from Tijuana and suddenly he got hit with an idea. He remembered some shaman teachings, about the medicine wheel, about movements in what we have been calling, till now, the stream of time. No more real than the idea of a sun-rise or sun-set. Earlier that day he had been talking to Peter Coyote who said, "The media has an insatiable hunger and is prepared to discuss anything cloaked in whatever is the morality of the time." And then Peter Coyote said, "The trouble with the world is, people have yet to learn the difference between turning on each other, and turning each other on." Ponderosa Pine, pondered what Peter Coyote said. And he pondered the sun images wheeling on the back of his eyelids, he pondered the lifting sensation that the mescal gave and the sweet sour feeling in his stomach, he pondered the movements of a dusty sidewinder as it slid from shade to shade over the cracked surface of baking red earth, and most of all he pondered the words of Peter Coyote, and then it struck him, clear as the prairie sky over Indiana, the clouds, all with different shapes but similar sizes receding in size beyond the horizon, farther than the eye can see. It struck him. Like catching lightning in a bottle. Or, maybe, it was like the lightning in the bottle caught him. Swimming in the mescal. And he instantly knew that the thing to do was to get as many people together as possible, real people, human beings, like the ones that pushed roses and daisies down the barrels of national guardsmen, like the ones that would sink with the rainbow warrior years later, those kind of people, and get all of those people together, it would be possible now, with mass media, get all of those people together and get them all to meditate at the same time on the same day in the same way, all over the world, and they would meditate and levitate the pentagon, and the kremlin and the royal palace or whatever the headquarters was in Beijing, he'd work out the details later, and get them to levitate all at the same time. And Ponderosa Pine suddenly got very excited. And he wanted to tell everybody about it, all the human beings, and his cousin Peter Coyote and the media and all. But the only one listening was the wiley old sidewinder by now hidden under a rock. So instead, he had another sip of mescal and he thought about his thought. And his thought flew through the air of his open mind, it flew through the hot sunbursting afternoon air in Indiana, it flew, but it never reached the target, the way this thought that I thought about Ponderosa Pine is flying through the vacuum particles of a broken symmetry, not unlike the way that that guy is always walking past the barbershop, my eye sometimes catches him in mid-step, caught in the middle of his life sentence, marching, regardless of the weather. "Nice weather, eh? Hep, hep, hep." After I came out of the bank, I went back past Armadale Avenue towards Windermere to the fruit and vegetable stand.

And even though it was some time after the event, I thought about what Ponderosa Pine might be thinking about the Iran Contra affair and the sentences that were being handed down there. John Saxon, the former Pentagon official, associate counsel to the Senate Iran-Contra committee, when he was talking to Ollie and the boys about the code-names that they used in negotiating the secret arms deals, the words that they gave to the committee, keeping their word, in all honesty, in all secrecy, and how John (the Anglo) Saxon, baffled and buffaloeed, finally huffed and humphed and tried to put it all together, like a good King's man, and I heard him say on the T.V. repeating words that had been layed on him, words spread thick like peanut butter, spread so thick that they stick to the roof of your mouth; "So I take it from what your testimony is, [that] there never came a time when Colonel North said that Paul was sending Aran and the Bookkeeper to the Swimming Pool to get a price so that Orange could send some Dogs through Banana to Apple for some Zebras. Is that correct?" And it was. It was correct. It was. Hep, hep, hep.

Summer. Things aren't always what they seem to be. The surfaces of things. My uncle was Lieutenant-Colonel in the Black Watch. When he was younger, they had a sunuvabitch Sergeant-Major that would carry out the inspections. He really wasn't such a bad guy, but I guess he figured it was his job to give the troops a hard time. Build morale. Build character. The old white-glove inspection. He would always, always find something wrong. A speck of dust. A hair. Anything. Nothing missed his eye. And if there was so much as a mote out of place, they were punished, made to run with full packs for however many miles the Sergeant-Major deemed fit. Hep, hep, hep, hep. My uncle, a mere lieutenant in those days decided to get even. He got the men in his platoon to clean things so spick and span that you could eat off the toilets. Then he got a whack of peanut butter and put it on the last toilet seat in the latrine. The Sergeant-Major went about his inspection as usual, but you could see he was getting more and more frustrated as he moved along. Everything was immaculate, glistening, ship-shape. By the time he got to the final latrine he had resigned himself to passing the men, but he'd be gunning for them next time. Then the orderly popped open the door, and there, sitting on the toilet seat was a brown lump of indefinable brown stuff, lovingly crafted attracting flies. "What is that!" He said, pointing an authoritarian finger. My uncle, immediately walked over to the turd of skippy, drew his index digit through it, and popped it into his mouth. After rolling his eyes and considering a moment he replied in a stentorian voice, "Shit! Sir!" The Sergeant-Major was about to say something at that point, but I guess the words stuck to the roof of his mouth. Maybe he felt that the men had built up enough character and morale, and it was time to move on to the next platoon. He didn't bother them as much after that. Its summer now. You can't always trust your eyes. Maybe it's the heat. Things move unexpectedly. Surprise me. Tiny portions of the wall suddenly dissolve, begin to move, dance. The wall was covered with fruit flies that took off in an uneven sheet as I approached. I was startled when I saw them at my approach, maybe it was the coffee that made me jumpy. Probably too much coffee. You can't get Pride of Arabia coffee as often as you used to, but I think they still have it at the A & P. The kind with an Arab Charger on the label. Now everything is President's Choice. Maybe I should've stuck to dandelion tea or ginseng. Coffee used to be a big deal in Korea. Cigarettes too. Camels. I mean the kind that come in cartons, not the kind that carry them. You used to be able to get a lot of things for a carton of Camels in Seoul. Still can, but not quite as much. Used to be able to get all of your needs taken care of, if you take my meaning.

Last night I was talking to a former Colonel in the South Korean airforce. A wing commander. No joke. The North Koreans don't like his type. Shoot 'em down anytime they can draw a bead. Mig's and ground crews itchin' to fire missiles deadly as any sidewinder, hoping to blow him out of the sky. He was talking about the night missions that they flew. Over the China sea. Faster than sound. By the time you hear them, they're long gone. Skirting the coast, moving deep into enemy territory. Reconnaissance. Checking the radar for subs and ships and other higher flying northern planes. The greenish glow of the instrument panel on masked faces creating ghost images travelling at Mach 2 over an undulating black surface. Occasional glints of light reflecting from the odd whitecap. Flying below the enemy radar, the black licking waves so close, the slowly shifting horizon invisible except on the scopes. At that speed even the slightest miscalculation can drive you into the yawning ocean instantly, the plane disintegrates into a twist of broken metal and fuel, the pilot obliterated in a noise that cannot be heard by the other fliers on the wing because they outrun the sound of the black explosion. As a boy, he used to spend time at the beach skipping flat stones over the uneven surfaces of the ocean waves. He was just a kid when half his family got wiped out at Pyongyang. Not long before he retired he began having nightmares about losing control, a wingtip catching a wave, the centrifugal force whipping the plane, toy-like, into an uneven spiral till it shattered in a ball of flame that quickly sank, licked over by the black silent water, leaving no traces except a thin fuel slick maybe, a fragile rainbow film of oil as the wreckage slips into the ink black depths. But the next day, he would have to fly, and he would fly, and nothing would happen. "Sometimes," he said, "you have to ignore your dreams. You can't always stop the crows from circling over your head, but you don't have to let them nest there." As I turned back with a bag of fruit and vegetables from the grocery on the corner of Windermere and Bloor I saw the old trooper again. He was on the return leg of his daily march. His snow-white hair shifting in the breeze. A slight limp in his stride. I stood at the entrance of the grocery store and as he paraded past I said, "Nice weather." Caught off guard, he whipped a sideways glance at me and hesitated in his step a moment. It was an almost invisible hesitation, as brief as the split-second before a bubble pops once it's reached surface. He flashed a grin, "Yeah, nice weather --" and kept hep-step marching as I tried to memorize his clockwork legs being swallowed up by the flow of Friday shoppers on Bloor Street.





	A	B	C	D	E	F
1						
2						
3			Ten Thoughts for bp Nichol			
4						
5						
6			1. God In Their wisdom chose not to			
7						
8			divide your body.			
9						
10						
11			2. They wanted to keep			
12						
13			it whole-- in this planet, or			
14						
15			in the afterthought that Death is			
16						
17			in not thinking about			
18						
19					the damage.	
20						
21						
22			3. "The Big 'D'" you called it, talking to a friend,			
23						
24			a few weeks			
25						
26				before vacating		
27						
28			the emptying promise of			
29						
30					your body.	
31						
32						
33			4. Little that is human			
34						
35			was beyond the reach of			
36						
37				your understated understanding.		
38						
39						
40						
41			5. Barrie, I still speak with you frequently.			
42						
43						
44			6. In these one-sided conversations, your			
45						
46			presence is			
47						
48				a posthumous excess that		
49						
50			includes			
51						
52				a little illusion, a little		
53						
54			misunderstanding,			
55						
56			some disagreement, and even			
57						
58			a little jealousy.			
59						
60						
61			7. Blessed irony: that implicit in all the things			
62						
63			that happened			
64						
65			are all the things that didn't.			
66						
67						
68			8. Your body's absence			
69						
70			permits me to go on believing we will			
71						
72			yet have			
73						
74				all the conversations		
75						
76			we were meant to have			
77						
78						eventually.
79						
80						

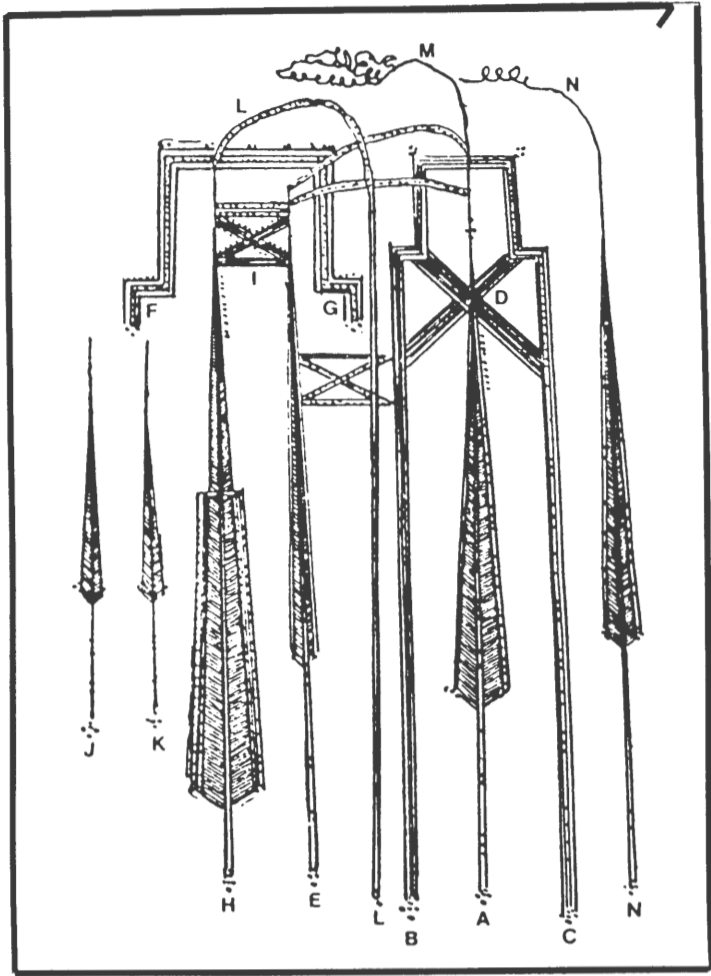
	A	B	C	D	E	F
81			9. Some day, I realize,			
82						
83			poems from which you & I have been			
84						
85			deleted,			
86						
87			will continue this discussion, in the secret			
88						
89			wholeness that you still remain, among			
90						
91			your deconstructed saints and			
92						
93			the (w)holier ones they stood for,			
94						
95						
96			10. In the real illusion we call language,			
97						
98			in the real illusions we call living			
99						
100			writing			
101						
102					forgetfulness & dying	

### HOW AND WHY JOHN LOVES MARY: THIRTY-THREE VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY MARGARET ATWOOD By Frank Davey

1. After finally getting Mary to go to bed with him, John can't face having to talk up, ask out and make friends with another woman.
2. John thinks Mary looks partly like Samantha Fox. He wants to associate himself publicly with Samantha.
3. In the dentist's waiting room John had read that older sisters make the best wives and Mary, who lives next door, not only has 5 younger brothers & sisters, but is a widely-trusted babysitter.
4. John feels sorry for Mary, who is blonde & very kind. Men are always taking advantage of her.
5. John knows Mary is his destiny. She is the girl he knocked up after the highschool graduation dance.
6. John wants to be popular.
7. Mary is always cheerful, and says "not to worry" whenever John is arrested for passing bad cheques or ejaculates prematurely.
8. Mary used to be the mistress of John's talkative friend Peter.
9. One of John & Mary is coloured, & John's family is outspokenly racist.
10. Each time John tries to break up with Mary she threatens to kill herself.
11. John's parents yelled at each other a lot & split up when he was fifteen; Mary's parents still serve Sunday dinners & often tell Mary to invite John.
12. Mary is a high-strung but talented dancer & needs someone like John to shelter her from the demands of life.
13. John & Mary are half-brother & half-sister & live in a poor farm family & after milking the 3 cows & hoeing the bean patch are too tired to get out & meet people.
14. Mary is the only teenage girl at the Pentecostal church.
15. Mary plays semi-pro basketball, & is an exhausting & stupendous lay.
16. Mary has had six nervous breakdowns, and John has felt important and responsible each time he has driven her to the hospital.
17. John's mother has arthritis & difficulty getting up in the mornings; Mary organizes the Student Council bake sales & is vice-president of the 4H Club.
18. Mary's father beats her.
19. Mary wears unusual clothes, drinks more than many girls, is a sensational dancer, & John feels his life to date has been boring.
20. John's father shovels clay at the brick plant; Mary's father is manager of the village's Royal Bank.
21. Mary was born out of wedlock, has had two abortions, has been picked up for shoplifting & John feels he'd be a cad to reject her.
22. Mary has two little blonde girls whom John loves very much.
23. John sees himself as a rebel, & Mary is his cousin.
24. Mary never smiles. She has long dark hair, dresses in black, & has no friends.
25. Mary is one of those girls John has heard about who look cute when they're angry. She keeps telling John to get lost.
26. Mary is Chinese, Japanese or Filipino & no North American girl has ever smiled at John.
27. Mary has completed first-year university.
28. John is very devout, & when he thinks of Mary he thinks of a near-goddess holding a small male child.
29. John (or Mary) studies painting and does nude modelling at the art school, while Mary (or John) is in computer science.
30. John hadn't really noticed Mary before their being marooned together by war, avalanche, shipwreck and an otherwise bad script.
31. Mary has been to Europe.
32. Mary's grandfather was murdered after a notorious stock swindle. The murder was never solved.
33. John had dreamed for years of getting laid, and even now feels eternally grateful.

# Siberian Love Letter

## By Yves Troendle



The jilted girl's letter is remarkably poignant. First, to be empty, nothingness, zero, then enigma, cryptogram, and key to same, or letters interlaced in intricate patterns, hence *sign*. She touched the silver backing of the hairbrush, and traced out the loops of the initials. Tracing down the original story. She portrays herself [A] in skirt and pigtail, alone in her room [B-C]. The robin brings a piece of string, a cellophane strip, a twig, weaving each into his nest. A word from here, a phrase from there. She walked to the french windows, pulled them open, and passed into the garden. Cover four, the war was over, aptitude, beautiful people hung on a wall, dance not, let alone today's almost isn't kingdom, chance. At last found the grotto full of lost words glittering. On the beach, the boat grows dark, the pale horse rears.

They watched entranced as a young cyclist pedaled up to the crowd encircling a storyteller, dropped his bicycle to the ground, and became immediately absorbed in the tale. Each word down the mind tilts the plane of possibility. Failing constantly to recognize its own activity, language can surprise itself constantly. Like a man in a fire crying theatre. Doll along, he'll kneel a cut day differ on sought arm pause, eat, if. Thus speak, unfurling at the boundaries, let us question first apprenticeship, second, sequin's escapade, to correspond, veer, delete. *I* means the person saying "I". Formed in the impact of address: "You". Existing in that making, that escaping. Write down, write up, write in, write out, write on, write off.

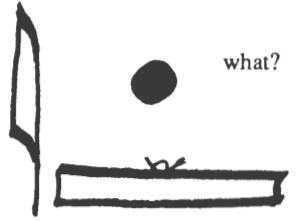


quill;  
"I"



book

We can, therefore, define the *form* of a signifying unit by its composition from units on a lower level, and its *meaning* by its capacity to integrate with a unit on the level higher. Skywriting. And thirty feet below, the shifting outlines of an extraordinary shape. Seabed, drip the meek, reap gorgeous, gripping ornaments in tight fists to keep from yawning — she appeared to be momentarily lost. Several tongues (are spoken here, are soak'n here). You can almost hear the syncopated rhythms. Crossed bars above her [D] represent her plight. Hand writing, its shadow writing the circle in which the writing can go on.



what?



what  
is  
said

First, to cut, slice, then to carve, a carving out, to contour, boundary and shape, hence *sign*. Erotic dancers daily. Ballroom Dancing, paint curled off the tin sides, dust stuck to the yellow bulbs.

Notches in the bone seem to correspond to lunar cycles. The clickety-purr of a passing bicycle slowly scans the cup of the ear. Carving out what is from what it isn't. Bestowing attention: sculpting a world. Incised on a mirror, a schooner sails forth from reflections. A bust of music and laughter escaped from a distant hall. Her former lover [E] lives in another village [F-G] with a full-skirted rival [H]. There is a relationship, then, between the planes of expression and of concept. Cut through both at a single stroke and language flashes, sundering. The writer acknowledges their close bond, symbolized by the squared-in cross [I] above their heads. Writing in reverse, hand at the boundary, tracing the arc of its disappearance, shadow coiling at the core.



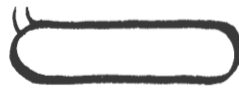
name



She goes so far as to predict two children [J and K]. "April? Then your stone is the diamond, symbol of—" Recall, abandon, once neat, don't believe me, satin, sink, colossus, kiss, Red Dust, his ornaments. The spell he had cast upon his audience was so great they joyfully flung coins to assure another tale would ensue. Money stands for gold, which represents the sun, once thought to be the source of life. Anything named becomes itself a name. Any moon a finger pointing. Anything named itself becomes a question. Birth into same. Born of division. Lost in reflection. Tongue and larynx flinch to name. We cleave to the word to cleave, constantly menaced by polysemy. In her mind, she drew a firm line and pointed to it. Identify: divide. First, an edge, margin, borderland, then boundary sign, hence *sign*. One the one hand. Boundary is transference. On the other. Cut to splice.



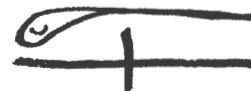
to sever,  
cleave



to depart

She retraced her steps along the garden path before she could be seen. First, a way followed, a path taken, then a mark left, hence an absence, a vestige, a *sign*. Truck hits phantom woman. She feels the bitterness of separation, expressed by the line [L] running from her rival's head down through the center of the pictograph. Each thing disappears behind its name, by which we call it. Each thing named presents an absence. But the notches might equally well be counting reindeer, or points in a game whose rules have vanished, along with its creators. Kneeling at the grate, she watched the letter unkrinkle as the shuddering flames consumed it. He picked up a concept, so to speak.

Still, passion smoulders in her, depicted by the curlicue [M] floating above her head.



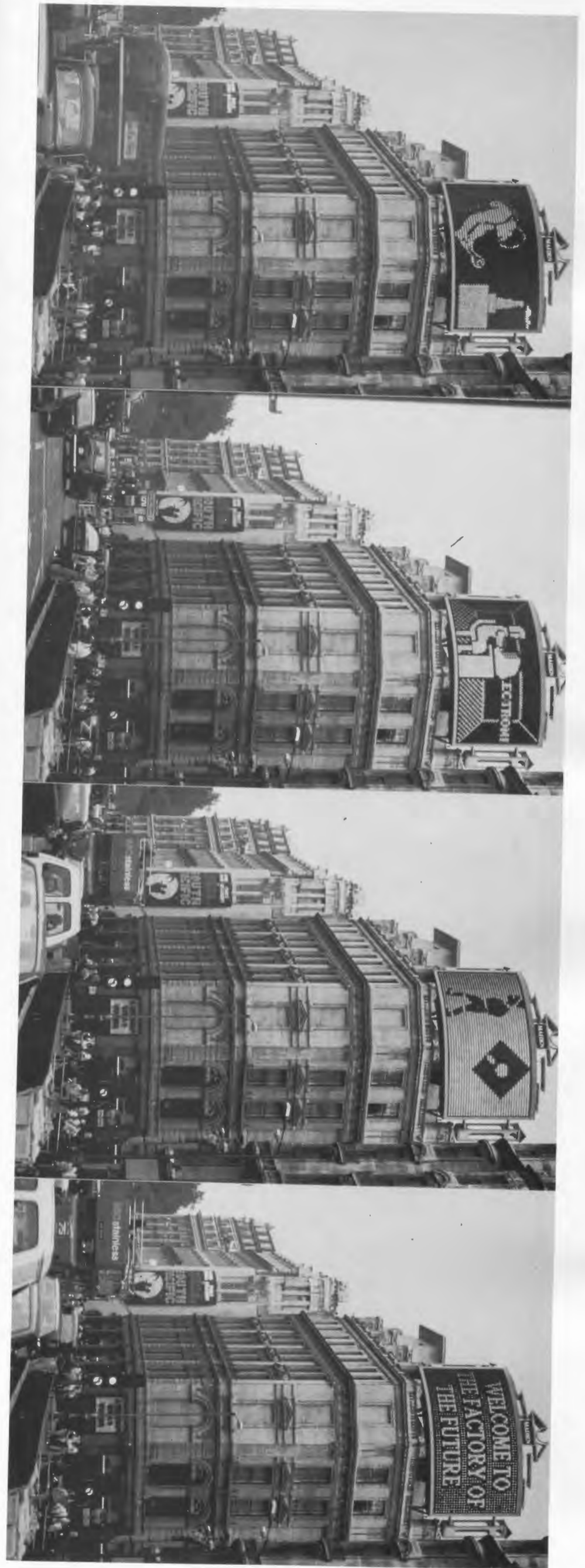
variant reading;  
read again



# SLAVES OF LABOUR — WELCOME TO THE FACTORY OF THE FUTURE

By John Fekner

*The Maiden Spectacolor screen, unique in Britain, dominates Picadilly Circus. Its massive computer-animated face promotes major national and international corporations every day from early morning to midnight. Responding to the pace and "hard sell" of London's West End, New York artist John Fekner has composed his own short piece specially for Spectacolor entitled "Slaves of Labour — Welcome to the Factory of the Future." "Slaves of Labour" is about the sweatshop syndrome from early history to the present day, comparing symbols of labour achievement then and now, from pyramid to computer terminal. Fekner says, "Pressure on today's children to prepare for survival in the informational age, programmes them as technological slaves." Fekner has participated in Kassel's "Documenta 7" 1982, the "Metamanchattan" exhibition at the Whitney in New York 1983, "Via Satellite" in Cologne, "Brave New Orwld — A New Generation" Copenhagen, 1985, "New York — Berlin Exchange" in New York 1986 and "Immedia Concerto" Quebec City 1988. (For further information on the Spectacolor artists series contact Artangel Trust, 133 Oxford Street, London W1R 1TD, Tel: 01-434-2887.)*





# THE PHASE SHOW

An Ongoing Project by Doug Back,  
Hu Hohn & Norman White

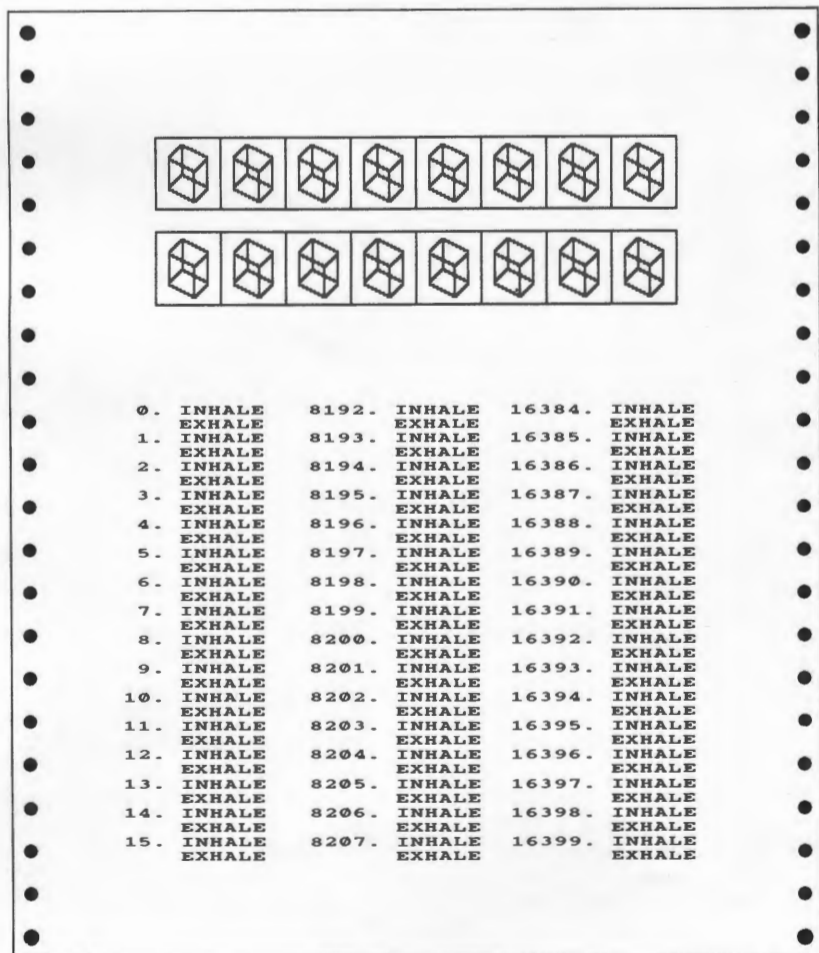
The Phase Show is a constantly evolving electronic expression by sculptors Doug Back, Hu Hohn and Norman White. The show is curated by Paul Petro. It has appeared in a variety of locations including A Space and the Glendon Gallery. The show is slowly undergoing a metamorphosis as each artist either refines or changes the works included. In keeping with this metamorphic quality, the electronic sculptures themselves are kinetic and in a state of flux. Photographs of this particular manifestation of The Phase Show are by Cheryl O'Brien.



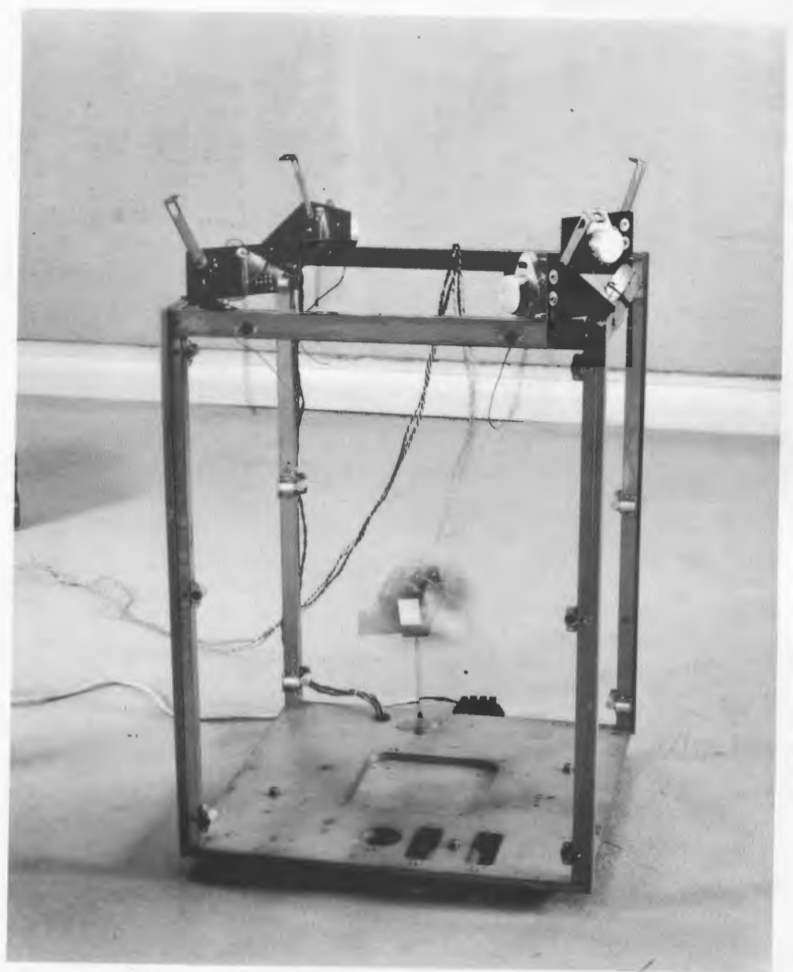
*Ceci n'est pas une pomme* by Hu Hohn

My work is produced by playing freely in conceptual territory related to the most basic aspects of digital computing. The digital computer is a symbol processor. Everything here is a code created through the transformation of a code by yet another code. The territory consists entirely of maps which refer to no territory, but only to other maps.

What I did is on the framed floppy disk, and what the computer did is on the paper printouts. I am uncertain where the art might be, if anywhere. My work exists only as a binary magnetic code, and as such is invisible, inaudible and totally uninteresting, but it is nevertheless my work. It means nothing except during its execution, which is done by the computer. I don't know what printouts are other than residue of particular executions of the code or explanations of the relatedness of titles.



Detail from *Digital Ideograms and Analogue Ruminations* by Hu Hohn. From a related exploration of the potential relationships between computer and the fine arts, literature and philosophy.



*Emiter/Follower, Part 2* by Doug Back

This sculpture consists of a very small video monitor "floating" in a box. The monitor is suspended from four strings attached to moving arms which, in turn are driven by motors. As the motorized arms move in random fashion, the monitor changes position.

A computer controls an image of a square on the screen, such that the square's position remains unchanged, in spite of the motion of the monitor. A pendulum attached to the underside of the monitor provides the computer with information enabling it to determine and maintain the position of the image.

If the arms move the monitor down, then the image will move up, and if the monitor moves to the right, the image moves left. The effect is that as the environment of the monitor changes position, the image remains fixed.



*The Helpless Robot* by Norman White

A free-standing electronically-controlled kinetic sculpture which is free to rotate upon its base. Such rotation will not be generated from within. Like traditional wind-driven mobiles, it will be essentially passive, depending on external forces for its motion. However, unlike mobiles that harness the wind, water or other prime forces of nature, it will have to enlist the muscles of human beings. This it will do with its one critical mode of output — an electronically synthesized voice. With only limited powers of communication, it will have to cajole humans into cooperating with it and represent, either slyly or openly, its "desires" to them.

The driving principle in the machine's program will be an insatiable curiosity about activity in its immediate environment. To sense this activity, it will be equipped with a variety of proximity, light, and sound sensors. It will also use a "shaft-position encoder" to determine the direction in which it is facing. It will then process this information to generate an internal working model of its surroundings. The machine will keep records of its encounters with humans. By evaluating the success of past strategies, it will "learn" how to deal with people so as to best satisfy its curiosity.

The work behaves like the classic hustler. For example, it might initially enlist human cooperation with a polite, "Excuse me, have you got a moment?", or any one of a number of unimposing phrases. As it sensed cooperation, it would tend to grow ever more demanding, becoming in the end, if the humans present will permit it, dictatorial. Underlying this work is an ironic reversal of the traditional view of the relationship between human and computerized robot and a reversal of more conventional machine/human or master/slave relationships.



# "A" BATTERY "A" GROUP

The "A" Battery "A" Group includes Chrig Perren, Fritz Vogel and Manfred Vanci Stirnemann. These artists have been working together on various projects since 1983. The group was formed at the end of 1986, and presented performances in numerous locations. Each member of the "A" Battery "A" works individually and with the group. The group is interested in contact with other groups and invites other people to participate in projects. The projects of "A" Battery "A" frequently reflect attempts to clarify the context of socio-political and mass media issues. Cultural actions rely on a relevant network or base consisting of audiences in Zurich and around the world.

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**CHRIG PERREN: "untitled"**

- i make some filter coffee.
- flickering light: i cut holes for the mouth and for the eyes in the stocking i am wearing over my head.
- i use my hand to rub exotic pictures on paper to make copies of them.
- i tie off my arm, put some lipstick on my mouth and form a copy of my mouth on my arm by kissing it.
- from my mouth, i tear a lot of little photos showing me with the stocking over my head. the photos are rolled on a battery.
- the photos are placed in a squeezing machine, some turpentine is added with a syringe -- another copy is made this way.
- a copy of the wall street journal is painted over with lipstick.
- a copy of the head with the stocking is covered with wet coffee powder, eyes and mouth are freed.

## I MAKE SOME FILTER COFFEE



-----  
**M. VANCI STIRNEMANN: "fake: life in black & white"**

- circling a woman and a man with black and white powder (coal & flour).
- taking polaroids of the persons lying on the floor.
- while i paint the shapes of their bodies on the floor, they are taking polaroids of me.
- replacing the persons with the polaroids and painting the woman in her own shape, and writing the man in his own shape.
- mix all (powder of coals and flour, the polaroids), with a broom.
- i fill the mixture in the shapes of the persons: all grey in grey.







REPLACE  
THE  
PERSONS  
WITH  
THE  
POLOROIDS



FRITZ VOGEL: "erasing the deformed self is like printing lost utopia"



HANDLE WITH CARE  
THIS SIDE UP  
MIT SORGFALT BEHANDELN  
DIESE SEITE OBEN  
MANIPULER AVEC SOINS  
HAUT-BAS





# HAMMOND AT THE ELITE

## by Steven Smith

Dear Karl,

Wind gusts jabbed knife blades of cold air through my coat flaps, up my sleeves, and drove dust motes into my eyes. Lily and I were on our way to the Elite Bar for John Hammond's one-night-only gig before he moved on to Saskatoon.

The burly doorman insisted we check our coats. I felt like we were in New York City, where another "practice" lets them take you for another dollar. I protested. He insisted.

My mind searched for the logic of compulsory coat checking. Maybe people don't fight when their coats are checked; or perhaps coats slung over the backs of chairs droop onto the floor, creating hazards for waiters. We checked our coats. I even tipped the attendant, a slim fellow in a loose-fitting tie-dye shirt, and a droop-down moustache — like a character stuck in the sixties.

We searched the long narrow room for a good vantage point, and crammed into a table dead centre about twenty feet from the stage. Patrons were drinking beer and chatting quietly, greeting friends, and ordering drinks, while waiting for the show. A blonde waitress in a tight black leather skirt paused to take our order. It could have been a blues bar in any city in North America, any white middle class city, that is — square arborite tables with chrome legs, and black vinyl chairs, a stand up bar to the right, stage at the back end, and behind that, the washrooms. The small stage glowed faint red in the subtle wash of dimmed spotlights. A stool sat empty behind two microphones, one at the height for a guitar, and one for voice.

A waiter passed with a tray full of beer glasses, held on his upturned left palm, level with his shoulders. Without really looking I absorbed an impression of him as he walked by. I turned to speak to Lily. Suddenly the image registered. I blinked and looked again, caught the waiter's back disappearing around the corner toward the bar. "Karl, what are you doing here?" I thought to myself. "In a bar, serving drinks, fifteen hundred miles from Toronto?"

He wasn't an exact replica, but it was you, or some aspect of you. Did you know you were doing this? I mean, does the other you know — the publisher of the avant-garde — that you — does that one know that his other is working a blues bar?

I wrote my impressions on some beer coasters. Here they are.

He flickers through the room, carrying a full tray. He has darting eyes, a tight jaw. He's you, but he's different. His walk is quicker, less athletic. I wonder if he reads — he looks like he might read Nabokov, but not Burroughs, and I'm sure he's never heard of your heroes, Joseph Beuys or John Cage, or even Dave McFadden.

I wonder now how I could have made those assumptions. But we often do this, don't we? — make assumptions about people simply on the strength of a glance, of appearance. Yet, maybe I was right. He certainly seemed to be a charged image for me.

I can imagine him doing karate, like you, and I can see you slinging beer. But the edges are different. Maybe that's it. You're both at edges, but different kinds of them. He might be someone who leaves work later and does something dangerous. Drugs maybe, or sado-sex, brawling in a booze-can, or using weapons.

He's wearing black pants and a white shirt, with a silver change dispenser on his belt. You wear black and white too. He's shorter than you, and slighter, more wiry, and moves quicker, like a water spider. I feel like asking him if he's ever heard of Mr. Bedoya, or if he's familiar with the vocabulary of torture. But I'm afraid he'd take it the wrong way — I mean, he wouldn't know the literary connection, but then, how many do — read I mean — to see things through the eyes of writing?

Lily interrupted me at this point to ask what I was doing. I told her. She laughed, but seemed to understand, though she's never met you. I pointed him out to her. She nodded, then studied him till he passed out of sight. She said he didn't look like a writer, but couldn't say why. I wonder if she'd think that you look like a writer. What do we look like anyway? Back to the notes.

He's just behind me now, on the other side of a standing bar. Someone slaps him on the shoulder. He backs away with that stiff-legged jousting move that guys have with each other in locker rooms, moving to avoid the flicking towel, without losing composure. He pops a cigarette package from his shirt pocket. Lights up with his lips drawn tight, bottom one forcing the cigarette to a slight upward angle, hands sheltering the flame. He exhales aggressively. The slapping now switches to a friendly posturing, jibing, and strutting. I've never seen you do this, but I can imagine it.

I began to wonder if I wasn't just making all this up — you know, building a fiction around nothing, exercising my imagination. Lily told me to go on note-taking, that if nothing else, there might be an idea for a story in all this. She's so practical.

I'm concerned, finding this other you running around, using up energy. This can't be good for you. Where's that energy coming from? It's got to be from your reserve. Are you feeling tired lately? If you are "whole" this other shouldn't be loose. It's a sign to me that all is not well. That there's some kind of dissociation going on with you. Is that right? I don't mean to stir things up, but this is how it feels to me. Our doubles get away, then there's trouble. When you're feeling a little low on energy, maybe it's because there's another one of you out there, draining you, appearing in a place like a bar, a place that he can easily disappear from when you get more unified. Or maybe he changes into some other other, and gets fuel from a new source. Or maybe we ourselves are others. What do you think?

Now that's complex. But in his presence that night it felt quite possible. Lily insists that all this double stuff is just coincidence, that with so many people in the world, some are bound to resemble others. She suggests that you and he may be distant relatives. That makes sense in a way. Do you have any cousins here? Anyway, she says she feels like she's met you now. Hold on, there's one more note.

He takes our order for a second round. When he returns, I ask him his name, say he looks like someone I know. He says he's Jerry Carleton. I ask him if he has any relatives back east. His steely dark eyes tell me he doesn't want any more questions. He sets our beers down briskly, scoops up our money and moves off without another word.

John Hammond was fantastic, hunched over his guitar on the club's small stage. The crowd was enthusiastic and must have spurred him on with their cheers and applause, because he played an extra long last set. He ended with a version of Robert Johnson's "Preachin' Blues" that blew the place apart. Writhing and twisting with the music, light glinting off his wailing old National guitar. Finger slide on his left hand riding up and down the neck. Legs twitching. Voice soaring and growling. Virtuoso stuff! Did you hear John Hammond music in your head that night — Monday, the 2nd? That would be proof.

It took us a while to get to the coat check room, what with all the people trying to shuffle out at the same time. Just as I was helping Lily slip her coat on, a scuffle broke out in the middle of the bar. The place went silent. It was Jerry, and a stringy-looking dude with glassy eyes who looked like he was on uppers. Everybody backed away.

Jerry was in a crouching karate position. The dude had a knife. Its blade moved about two feet from Jerry's nose. I broke through the crowd, at the same time as the club bouncer. We moved toward the two men. Our approach diverted "Stringy" and Jerry lunged at him. The bouncer and I were on the guy just a second too late. Jerry'd taken the knife in the side.

He'd looked just like you in that karate position. That was what snapped me. I thought it was you, I guess. You know me, I don't usually jump into bar room brawls. But I had to help, for your sake. Lily gave me hell later for getting into something that didn't concern me, for letting my crazy imagination run away with me. I don't think she understood.

Mind you I don't either, really. I mean, you're there and I'm here, and just because someone looks like you ...

Did you feel any pain that night, in your side? Did you feel like fighting? Is everything okay? Did you feel anything odd?

The blood stain on Jerry's shirt was large and red, just below his left arm-pit. They hurried him to the hospital. Apparently he went into intensive care and he's in the recovery ward now.

It was a long time before we got out of the Elite that night. Seems "Stringy" had refused to pay and pulled a knife on Jerry. The police questioned me for a while. They took a statement, along with my name and address, so I guess I'll hear more about this.

I don't know when I'll run into him again, except maybe in court. You, I assume have never met him, so all this may not mean very much. Anyway, I hope you both keep out of trouble.

I'm going to mail a copy of your book to him at the hospital. Maybe that'll close some kind of gap. You never know.

Did you think of me that night? Were you drinking beer? Do me a favour, don't take a job in a bar. Just keep writing stories and publishing your magazine. What are your stories about these days? Do you suppose I'm off the deep end? Let me know ... about everything.

It was warmer when we got outside. The wind was still up, but it felt refreshing, it cleared my head. Lily and I hugged together as we walked home. Still, I began to shiver when I realized what had actually happened. It scared me, because I had simply gone to see John Hammond with Lily, and we ended up in somebody else's story.

Regards,  
Jeff

Air Mail Par avion

## ROOMS

### by Nicholas Power

He waits inside the house  
He hunches over the desk  
scratching at paper  
He lays his arm beside the page  
and sticks the needle in

We read each other's work  
as if it were our own  
write words that someone else  
has not yet remembered

She listens for the tonal shift  
soft edge of a new language

We are not yet ready to hear

There is room in the house  
he does not visit  
describes it only in coded messages  
set in formal structures

outside her window  
the game continues

rules changing as we play

He invites me to his study  
in the house where every room is empty

I hear her voice  
in random words he speaks

I find myself writing where everyone can see  
typing for the whole neighbourhood to hear  
women press so close  
someone else's fingers strike the keys

She sits down to finish the line  
while I dust the room  
She begins a longer poem  
I clean the rest of the house

We consider each other slowly

bioptic nerves relax

erotic noises calm

the man behind me

is now a woman

I turn to face her

laughing at my own reflection

and seeing through that window a field of books scattered in the rain

a man walking through the field toward a gate

the back of his head opening like a lens

# A Fabric by Ray DiPalma

These slow  
words are  
the stumps  
and outposts  
of the motionless

The disquiet  
corroding the  
scruples

The secret  
absences a  
heap ahead

Suspensions's  
mixed pitch  
stirring premonition  
with more  
universal speculations  
salutes the  
abstract and  
sparse

The unavoidable  
populates  
the inner life  
bracketing comparisons  
with everything  
formulated by progression  
unreadable ideas  
chasing allusions

What wilderness  
would fulfill  
it just peels away  
chartered dominions  
overrun by  
spontaneous concessions  
valorized momentum  
logged in some  
blatant point to point

Are you up there?

This is the chimed de luxe.

The architectural bait of the notioned-out.

Parallels and practices with nothing to afford  
but a second place in which to wait.

Ruptured thunder chosen for its participation  
in the remembered past.

A manhunt and random reconciliation in  
the chill.

Half face, half beggar's blade.

In the thinking- an acorn of light.

Listen to the stars and dwarf this coincidence.

Face down in the mud excavate the mastered.

Infinity has its distinct strands in the seasonal.

Months of anomaly then the blue snows.

A little bit more about the mistake's fortune.

Candor and its prattle accruing like the tides.

Deadpan

Perpetrators of the denouement

The space that signs the postulate is first  
marked 'wait' then flashes red

Deadpan as Pontiac

The approximate divided into categories is  
intricate and leaves a ring

Option's fossil

Recondite as the bone in use

Brass in falsetto

Brothers and sisters in fettle

Outflanking the primordial adjective with a  
second thought

Of awe  
the face forward  
and the well-turned  
phrase

The mechanisms that brag of mood

A game of ditchball and stainpulse

The shivering stem draws a map

Is what eludes

And when poured into the eager light is  
still the property of a starving few

Not a holocaust of consequences but a cab ride  
that becomes an aspect of history

How you do

How you used the word five years ago

Not your sense of it nor an analysis of same

The permanent properties of something different

A bracketed torsion

An oasis of pretext

Squaring the compass around the voice

Not speech but the naming

Over the chocolate sped so I lately gathered

What thought of what first

The word *looked* for

The immortal music of a dead hand

Just as it took place

The face a hole

The meteor's path through the roof to the grand piano

In the espionage of claims another claim is made

When the key is swallowed an advocate of these certain  
proportions begins to make his way

How and so

Many to listen

# Time by Marina LaPalma

I am extravagant with my time precisely because  
it is mine. I stand on a corner biting my lips  
til they bleed in the windy street,  
linger on details perhaps unworthy  
of such focus; I quibble, fret, stare.

Extravagant with time. Call it a flame that will  
be extinguished when the moment comes, without  
recourse, stalling or deals.

I spend time lavishly, biting my fingers --  
articulate peninsulas of flesh ending in painful  
humiliation -- to blood.

All this is not a plea for pity or special dispensation.  
I supply myself with karmic indulgences periodically  
through kind deeds or extra chores anonymously performed.  
And then forget them so there's no big picture no ledger book,  
they are simply whipped away by the ruthless winds of time.

I am rich in the name brands of time, periods I can call up, order  
about, march, display. Whole eras of intensity evoked by a scent,  
an edible treat, a song. Example:

The Venice canals: In a gondola my mother, my cousin, my aunt,  
plus Dorothy, and my own sullen twelve year old self. Could we all  
have been there? A faded color photograph says it was so. I retain  
a relationship with a smell, the canals' magnificent decomposition.  
Thereafter I shall always secretly like the slight odor of rot  
at a particular stage in the saline solution of marshy waters.

Places and moments indelibly marked by association with  
arbitrary, parallel forms -- a song, a flavor, a sound,  
etched with complicity. Impossible to go at them systematically.  
They swirl about this too small, irregularly shaped  
cranium, my dis-ordered closet-head.

So I squander some time tapping into these madeleines,  
hoping for swells when the tide is in, some petit  
concessions from the with-holding, irascible brain.  
Then sling them about as fine furs are flung onto nearby chairs  
until needed -- desired (one never needs fur, one desires it) --  
when they are picked up, indossati, put on again.

# Two Poems by Kathy Fretwell

## Ancient Mariner Redux

To ecologizer's bass  
masking family snores  
I butt out,  
whitewater raft on paper oceans.

Deep into silence I splash  
Alpha rhythms  
to lure hidden sea creatures.

Thumbflick Bic, flame to tip,  
I smoke them out  
of the deep's faultline.  
Muddy, they ascend to awareness.

Spurting black, one squidjigs  
onto the page great loops and crosses  
to hook others glinting below.

Another butt bends on its ash.

My glitt'ring eye blesses them,  
then droops to family's Alpha waves,  
begs me to scuttle the albatross,  
images heavy on my neck.

The minute hand claps  
with its partner the dousing hour.  
Eyes blink Morse Code  
for these creatures to slide instead  
under the surface -

## Ode to Lasers

Love, laser my clay  
zap the goop that slicks  
capillary lanes, arterial highways,  
skateboard along neural networks,  
don't bypass the big pump  
and I will do the same for you.

We choose  
either to botch friendly winks, proffered hands  
seen darkly through Maya's Veil  
or to perceive them  
with Beatrice's clear eye  
smiling at pumping hands, heart-hugging embraces.

Our veins our vanities travel the same pathway.

Taking turns as lasers, let's  
blast our blight whitehot  
until we're bright with memory,  
eagles tracing starlight.  
There is something divine  
the way we process particles photons thought.

Just think,  
the whole world passes through us,  
never alone, never disconnected,  
we are gorgeous movement  
content with leaping.



# TEN POEMS

By Raymond Souster

## TRYING TO SLEEP AT NINE IN THE MORNING

Hurled down at me  
from the roof next door

where two carpenters work  
driving three-inch nails,

this ceaseless staccato  
of their hammering strikes

again and again  
through my woolly head

(and even though I fight it  
will not let me be):

GET/UP  
GET/UP  
GET/ON/WITH/YOUR/LIFE

## THAT LAST BEND

You're rounding that last bend,  
he tells himself,  
seeing again today  
in the rotting pears  
on the produce counter

eyes of those half-dead  
Ethiopian children,  
waiting like this food  
to be mercifully removed,

their brown slits  
the same colour  
as the rot slowly overpowering  
this pathetic fruit.

## GOPHER-HUNTING

Two boys would wait till a gopher popped from his hole,  
then stood guard while the other made a search  
of the animal's second hole, his escape-hatch.

Then pails of good slough water would be dumped  
down both of the holes, and the boys would wait  
until a half-drowned gopher stuck his head out  
of either hole, shaking, half-dazed with fear.

Finally wham, a big stick or baseball bat  
put an end to friend gopher, out a penknife came,  
and his tail, still twitching, was slashed cleanly off.

If you turned the tails in at the Weed Inspector's Office  
they paid you two, sometimes three cents apiece,  
depending on the time of year, which in those Depression  
days

was a lot of money for a country kid  
when you got to town and headed  
for the nearest candy-counter;

and where down the street at the Chinese café  
you could get all the food you could eat for a quarter.

## WINTER SURPRISE

Winter matches my weary moods  
with fog-swirling mornings, dark-as-cloud afternoons,  
then catches me completely off-base  
by serving up one perfect pitch  
of a day (belt-high, inside corner).

leaving me amazed and breathless in the bleachers,  
watching every single voyaging snowflake  
test the slowly-rocking breeze  
that whirls them swiftly past me,

each one touching down  
on this glide-path of mother earth  
in a perfect three-pointer,  
melting as they go  
drop by joyful drop  
my shivering, iced-over heart.

## THE DAY YOU WERE BORN

The day you were born  
the clouds changed from heaven-curdled blue  
to a brown the exact colour of your eyes,  
then back to purest blue again.

The day you were born  
horses that hadn't said a word  
to each other in years were seen licking  
each others' necks lovingly.

The day you were born  
gophers sprang from their holes at dawn,  
then refused to retire gracefully  
until they heard your first living cry.

The day you were born  
hens laid their eggs in pairs,  
while the coyotes instead of howling  
panted a soft prairie lullaby.

## PICTURES FROM A 'LONG-LOST WORLD: Airmen at Short Arm Inspection, #1 "Y" Depot, Moncton, N.B., February, 1945.

"It was all I could do  
to keep from laughing out loud,  
especially when the M.O.  
started down our line of airmen  
with battledress trousers dropped  
right to the floor, so we stood  
in our issue boxer shorts,  
waiting his medical pleasure.

"And one by one we exposed  
lily-white, very shrivelled-up penises,  
and one by one he gave each pathetic member  
an expert little squeeze near the tip,  
the spotless white gloves he was wearing  
a perfect mathc for our boy-shy decorum.

"And it wasn't until we'd be dismissed  
that a friend told me some poor guy  
in the back row right next to him  
must have had a bad dose of the clap,  
because when his turn came for a squeeze  
he spurted out sickly-green stuff  
on the M.O.'s beautiful white gloves,

"then stood there, a half-grin on his face,  
no doubt waiting for the Doc to smile too..."

## TUMBLEWEEDS

Tumbleweeds trapped on the snow-fence,  
don't seem to pray or struggle in the least  
to be set free -- I'm sure you know very well  
the least gusty wind can twirl you  
into final, ignoble dust.

Rather make a flower in your mind  
of that final day, when loosed at last  
from your bondage to this world, you'll let go  
with utter recklessness, will be whirled, swept away  
by any madcap breeze that calls your name,  
abandoning yourself without shame  
as the earth spins madly by...

That end will come all too soon.  
Take the last precious hours that remain  
to relive your few moments of glory.  
Die with the wind's song on your lips.

## RUNNYMEDE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Now wonder of wonders--  
my old Runnymede Library  
is pictured on the new  
Canadian one-dollar stamp.

Which leaves me fairly tingling--  
much like that joyful moment  
I stepped out its front door  
fifty-four or fifty-five

well-thumbed years ago,  
precious copy  
of Frost's *North of Boston*  
a warm fire glowing in my hands!

## TAKING OUT STITCHES

While it lacks, say, the squish and squash  
of Rimbaud's Lice Pickers,  
there's still a light-hearted seriousness  
in the way these young nurses,  
tweezers and scissors in hand,  
attack the twenty-odd black stitches  
showing through their patient's scalp  
with an intensity all its very own.

And let's face it,  
I'm sure it's the first time  
my father in all his ninety-four years  
has had two attractive women  
both at the same time running  
their warm, caring fingers through his hair!

## MOVING WITH BRIAN MULRONEY INTO THE NONE-TOO-GAY 'NINETIES

Airport cuts  
NATO defence cuts  
Via Rail cuts

Cutting loose from Old Snake Eyes  
will be the wisest cut of all.



Raymond Souster's latest book *Running Out the Clock* (ISBN 0 88750 846 4 SC)  
is currently available and may be ordered from Oberon Books in Ottawa.

## The Home Movies by Robert Clayton Casto

Over these glossies we dazzle our  
screens ablaze with their  
phallophone dramas their merciless  
highlights these images  
scudding their  
thighs savage axles their  
flushed cosmic  
breasts bubbling up into a squat  
soup their merchant  
cocks never still never terse never  
jolly never dry flesh without  
blebs without  
taboo tugging on  
pastoral tumps impaled on  
asparagus salad gulping in  
boilerrooms penthouses poolhalls you  
name it the  
truth the disorganized  
truth bucks from this  
box domestic its discontinuous  
thrusts of vision announced as  
emergency or dessert.

It is a  
wonder they never wear glasses eat  
cabbage read  
Proust pay taxes scrub  
toejam these undulant  
nibblers these lickens and  
frotteurs these digital  
sweethearts these rollicking  
plungers their plenary lubricant  
bodies spurting like  
oranges over our washed silver  
surfaces yet they  
answer the door they  
answer the door and admit without  
hesitation without inconvenient  
underclothing the  
apocalyptic riot the  
postman the iceman the delivery  
boy with his lean pink  
groceries someone in  
leather someone in used  
cars someone in stiletto  
heels someone to read the gas  
meter a midget  
plumber a keen German  
shepherd the neighborhood  
jerk.

Like mythical  
graduates they advance into  
focus into the vagrant political  
spotlight shadowless muscled  
adroit these local imperturbable  
lasses these cool California  
zingarelli these jaspers and  
joggers these syntho-pop  
throbbers these turgid  
surfers translated to  
oxters to nipples to  
buns slits slips pits lips holes  
pizzles and parts of speech with  
yes on their bellies tattooed like a  
law they explode on our  
monitors fully  
born from our darkness fully  
pledged poor straw  
limbs to our midnights already  
forespawned in our  
bronco desire.

You see we had  
already written the script it was  
already in us a long trick of  
time miraculously  
rehearsed and correct these  
sumptuous strategems these creamy  
absolutes these unworried  
museums of pricks and  
pudenda of dildoes and fleeces these  
flawless designs therefore turning  
away from these checkered  
runes these competent  
forgeries these fumlbers and  
mounters these  
rogerers cleaving we verify merely  
ourselves in our  
sequels stranded in  
absence always and identically  
pure our lives without  
fable without our  
customary foregrounds forever  
unacted sacraments forever  
abridged in archaic space sad  
galaxies sucking our  
thumbs and thinking of mom and  
dad of the things that hurt the  
things we cannot name of these  
cinemas troping as  
famous in us as fully  
uncraved and over like your  
beautiful lines about the  
sea the leaping gemlike  
fish their flutter their  
dazzle another clincher another  
white moment.

## Three Poems by John Donlan

### Ice Advisory

The possibility of happiness  
extends at least as far as today's weather,  
continues, surely, where along the rivers  
each twig is outlined in light after its plunge  
into the sky - still wet, chilly and gleaming.  
Not yes and not no: a lyric handshake  
between big mind and little mind in the shiny street  
and we're back to wanting to hear my voice  
and to hear yours.  
Step, step - the terrible clock  
waits on desire, handing you your coat, waking you  
too early to be alone unless you're armed  
with providence, a flair for closing  
and opening the floodgates that connect you to the world  
as it includes you, indifferent matter  
organized, comprehensible, loved.  
Assess and ignore risk, flow out anyway,  
volunteer a fall on the glazey slope  
to recognize a tracery as ours  
in another presence, the river valley, you.

### Miracle Plastic

Mornings, raise the will from under  
Bag Ghost: slack full, heavy as if dosed  
on a regime of Collopy's Gravid Water, or  
fortunately born in easy circumstance.  
Let me get you another: as easy as bending  
someone to your wish - presumed necessary  
accoding to the power rules. We'll do it together  
but no-one will know, not even us.  
The yielding surface, smooth as skin (it is skin)  
to the hand, restores the galaxy  
of options. I choose my favorites  
until their domain grows  
to include both our pasts - I know nothing  
of them but what they tell me, and I trust them.  
Awake in your real time, you live imagined  
intermittently in mine - I don't need to explain  
why I see things and comment, as if you were still here.  
You are the history I still inhabit,  
yours is the ear I speak into,  
the audience for now, silent, absent.

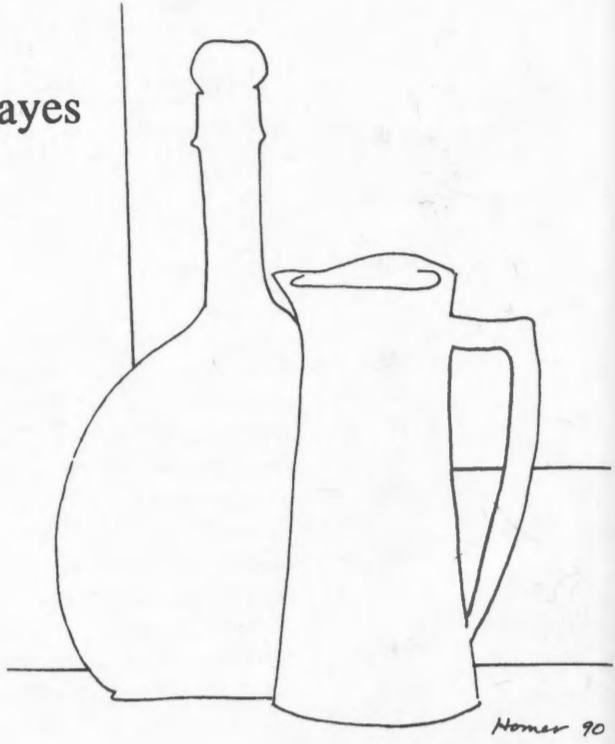
### Error Retrieval

No happy skull getting its love at the movies  
could be more wasted in forgetting  
kind flesh, letting remembered pain  
cloud the bright glimpse of a past someone.  
Just as a picture exercises what words won't, so  
the "logic of the imagination" demands  
a springboard out of the personal, a pseudopod  
extending the soul to welcome and envelop  
newfound fragments of the world.  
Though one gull's swallowed a barb a hundred more  
racket on oblivious, a white sheet flapping,  
thriving on a field of what might be called waste.  
Mays in Gibbons Park the same killdeer calls  
its heart-piercing claim to the same gravel bed,  
each stone precious as an egg.  
You and I lived some moments here.  
With other visiting species we admit  
the power centred in this river bend  
and the killdeer's claim.



# WATERMELON

by Don Summerhayes



1.  
this split watermelon's  
sweet red flesh  
glistens wet with  
cool black seeds

2.  
split watermelon's  
red flesh  
wet with  
black seeds

3.  
watermelon's  
flesh  
with  
seeds

4.  
split  
sweet red  
wet  
cool black

5.  
this  
glistens

6.  
this watermelon's  
flesh  
glistens with  
seeds

7.  
this  
sweet  
wet with  
seeds

8.  
sweet  
wet  
seeds

9.  
split  
wet with  
cool black

10.  
red  
seeds

11.  
this  
sweet  
cool  
sweet

this  
glistens  
glistens  
this  
glistens  
sweet  
cool

12.  
watermelon's  
wet  
flesh

watermelon's  
flesh  
with  
seeds  
with  
watermelon's  
flesh

seeds  
with  
wet  
seeds

13.  
split  
split  
red  
black  
red  
red  
split  
black  
red  
black

14.  
watermelon's  
wet

15.  
this  
sweet  
glistens  
cool

16.

this  
sweet  
wet  
cool

17.

flesh  
wet with  
black

18.

this split watermelon's  
split  
sweet red  
wet  
cool black  
sweet red flesh  
this watermelon's  
flesh  
glistens with  
seeds

glistens wet with

this red watermelon's  
split

flesh

seeds

glistens with

sweet

black

red

wet

cool black seeds

### 3 POEMS by David UU

#### Moonsong

a river roll and past  
the transient dream  
the blackbird's flight  
is my delight in  
sombre presence of  
the heady muse whose  
heart is cracked the  
light refracts the misery  
she could not choose

and it is spring  
and in the fiery  
coilings of my dark  
desires the midnight  
flows to noon and in  
the sickly pale of  
flesh the moon her song  
of death is sullen  
the tomb of tunes

and it is spring and  
shadows of the past  
arise as from the  
earth anew adorned with  
hues of present will  
the still of hope not  
yet conceived is all  
that I hold true

the ghostly glider  
flies the heavy rays  
of light will break the  
glance of love and long  
before and long and  
long before long a  
river rolls and past  
the transient dream  
no longer seen

#### I Dream of Eating Marguerite's Heart

open  
is the side of your  
pleasant skin in  
slices of desire  
in slices of desire the  
lips of the moon press to  
my longing and I am  
filled with your presence  
your presence which  
gnaws at the  
void of the  
shadow of my night  
you touch me and I  
fall into a frenzy  
the frenzy that is love  
o  
that I could  
know your secret places the  
blood that issues from  
your source  
o  
that your heart were  
still and silent and  
I could taste the  
bitter sorrow of remorse

#### Half-Load Road

I  
marvel wondered and alas he said but wouldn't  
the heat subside no but feeling expected he  
entered

what brief affirmation what all in good time  
that came without the neutral party sang this  
old house refuses to stand

having taken what was perceived to be after the  
old wizard who hardly knew what marvel lurked  
ahead cast his spell not until you: do he said  
breaking down on them

could this happen but here would the anvil raise  
its song and release the neutral party not so  
likely said famous that is not to be seen

later in the attic the niece held her piece in  
hand though just below ann of the ball panted  
in sweet delight marvel was also pleased

this having been done the old house staggered  
and rose to shouts who upheld his judgement

the neutral party chased the wizard into the  
pond

what sad adventure

II  
held as told the faery prince whose cotton was  
barely missing

the princess fainted at this delight

### FROM OBSESSIONS

By Jones

1.  
A graffito has been scratched in the paint of the washroom stall. It has been displaced by a second, scrawled above in thick black ink. The second graffito is a correction of spelling errors in the first. You shift on the cold porcelain seat, your pocketknife in your hand, the blade opened out.

2.  
The sides of the ashtray were cold to your touch. Still you filled it to the brim with water from the tap, before dumping the cigarettes into the trash. You have come awake in the dark to the smell of smoke. You turn on every light in the apartment. You stare at the soggy mess of cigarette butts. There is no smoke anywhere. Your skin is dry and itchy. You can no longer sleep. The pain of being burned alive was indescribable, the crackling of your skin, the bursting of your eyeballs.

3.  
Cat hair, human hair of various lengths and colours, a dead fly, a crushed peanut, mouse droppings, scraps of paper, balls of dust and hair and dirt, cigarette ash, a paper clip, fingernail clippings, a thread stuck to a stain of spilled coffee, a bent staple, a light film of the exhaust of car engines, bits of things unknown.

4.  
A rat has entered you, passing through your anus and into your intestinal tract. This must have occurred while you were asleep. Or could the rat have entered you while you were seated on the toilet? By its size, it would seem to be a sewer rat. You can feel it making its way through your guts. You can see the surface of your stomach shifting. You want to tear at yourself and rip it out. The thought of the greasy hair matted with filth and fleas, the thought of its tail flicking the inside of your throat, its whiskers tickling your teeth, the rat would escape from your mouth, were it not trapped inside you.

If this were a dream, you would awake and the rat would not be there. But this is not a dream. At the very least, you are not asleep.

5.  
(Your body struck by steel and hurled against cement, your bones snapping, your guts and blood splashed everywhere, there is nothing left of you.)

You stand on the edge of the subway platform, facing the darkness of the tunnel. Across the tracks, the southbound train is sucked into the opposite darkness. The feel of the wind through your clothes is exhilarating.

You have no desire to jump, no need of death, but the possibility is nonetheless exciting. Those who stand about the platform waiting, they are what exists. Not to exist, that is what excites you.

(The speed of it, the beauty of its technology, to be darkness and wind and pain and steel.)

The mouth of the tunnel is suddenly lighted. Mice dart beneath the tracks and disappear. There is nothing but the sound of steel tearing away from steel.

6.  
There is a mark on the kitchen wall. You have intended for some time now to remove it. You fill a bucket with hot water and ammonia and put on rubber gloves. You soak a sponge in the bucket and start to rub at the wall. The mark is still there. If anything, it is larger. You scrub harder, but the mark cannot be removed. Wiping the sweat from your forehead, you are conscious of having previously performed these actions. In fact, you are certain you scrubbed at this mark only several hours before. You examine the wall closely. The mark is not a mark at all. It is the coat of paint underneath the one that you have scrubbed away.

### PAPER STRAWS [for Jimi Hendrix] by Elaine L. Corts

In the I of meaning  
The high waves descend  
The shores still vibrate  
Echoing our voices  
Inside the eye of the storm  
Listening

In stereo  
At last  
We inhaled the trees in the wind  
Sipping through long paper straws  
The sands of our dream  
The falling waves became our voice  
Until we surrendered  
Bleeding in time

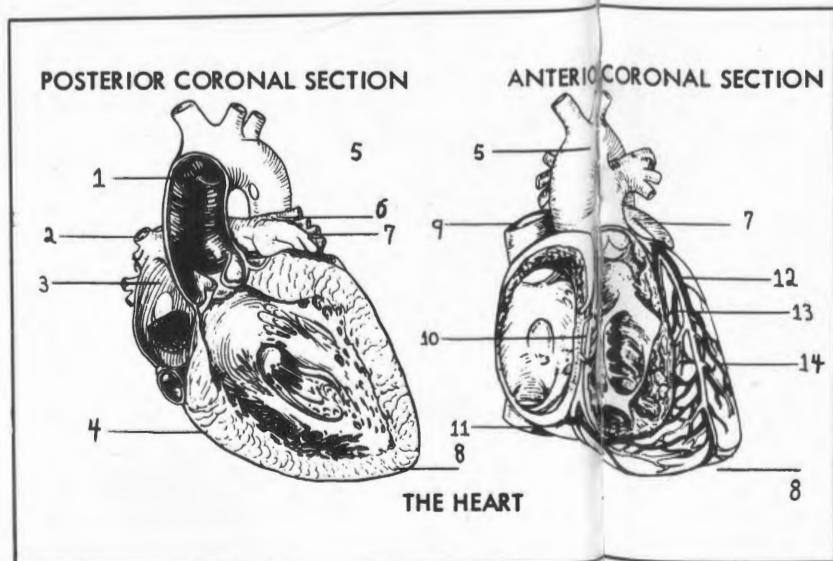
Overtone repeated  
Until our hearing ran dry  
Wedded death and time in one chord

Fleeing our own forms  
The rage of the storm  
Flooding upon the moving waves  
Crashing over the mikes and stills

We blew out the sun  
Washed up with sand and shells

Playing our music live  
Amplified  
Atonal electrification  
of our fall

Until we still bleeding  
Became silent  
Inside paper straws



1. Ascending aorta. 2. Right pulmonary artery. 3. Left atrium. 4. Left ventricle. 5. Arch of aorta. 6. Left pulmonary artery. 7. Left auricle. 8. Apex of heart. 9. Superior vena cava. 10. Right coronary artery. 11. Inferior vena cava. 12. Right coronary vein. 13. Left coronary artery. 14. Right ventricle.



# JULY, AUGUST SEPTEMBER

## By Gerry Gilbert

### JULY

ahh, the bike's in, yeah, you got to do it & it's you it happens to  
push bike, i get out there & feed it gravity & watch out for mountains  
join the non-fiction view the tourists are standing around consuming  
clockwork city, wind it up, watch it roll, forget about the commercials  
i follow the tide in, take a dip, eat my sandwiches & follow the tide out  
it's always been in the right place, beach after beach, but you never know  
& so you go home, or as the 9 o'clock gun says, home to go  
i know, home is too important to me, the cats make me do it, i'm outvoted  
the tv is in the air anyway, i don't need a set, that's not why i came home  
this is anywhere else & it's right here, it was right here a minute ago  
you can't miss it, there's a page of handwriting coming from the typewriter  
paper for what, i forget, i forgot, make it white, as far as it goes  
& the gate, turn your back on whoever's watching & press up with your, well  
& your left hand gone, too much log? walk around the block  
the key's by the lock, return for refill, you teach me french & i'll pack  
have you noticed, how much better you feel after a good meal or two  
at the ovaltine cafe you remember what you say & forget what you pay  
my idea of a good time is putting an old \$1.15 bus ticket in the box  
when the fare's gone up to \$1.25 so it lands face down, i deny time  
the tooth cup's got a handle & so's the telephone & i've got the spit cup  
i thought i'd finished these poems, taken my ears for a ride up the drive  
lookin' for last night, did anyone hear the music stop?  
we're designing a combination frisbee/chess set forever & an afternoon  
slow day at the ball game, "you're out, like, i coulda caught it"  
this is the bullet, this is the head, now you're alive, now you're dead  
burma shave, talking's very useful when there's nothing to say, it thinks  
we can live anywhere & we do & there's no such place, polly want a tickle?  
can't dust now, there's too much alive down there, we stop for washers

### AUGUST

carnivorous smoker likes cats. stands in line like a word in silence. wine knot  
the expanse of the city wears me out before I've even got my hat on. plot luck  
the morning's not for phoning. i never tried to write before. a clean plate  
scraped raw. punishment. takes. time. "can your eyes come out to play?"  
your clothing seems to say. july was a song. august is the sound of a good line  
at the time. where are we when we're talking about where we are? african tobacco  
july is still a song. august went looking for the neighbourhood pub in dunbar  
& never came back. your thought precisely. fuck that shit. oh just relax.  
use my pass. the black slug is gerry with a g. the green slug is jerry with a j  
remember benzedrine inhalors? ah the flowers. i dream in new english. what a muse  
the rimes ring with a fine redundancy. seeds. finish the line. every time. i only  
thought i was wrong. the clock had stopped at the right time when i went to wind  
it up. on this day many elections ago those without pelvic bones cast the first  
ballots. it's not funny & it doesn't make much sense but it's the sort of thing  
you remember & in millions of homes across the land as the returns are coming in  
on tv people will be eating sardine sandwiches in honour of those sold Tories  
who voted with their fins & swam back to sea. as for the 'states i like canada  
the way it isn't. this poem welcomes the current summer but i ask you: will it last  
love has but i sleep alone. mathematics has but i still count on my fingers  
there's art & then there's the art of it & then there's it & here we are. stars  
to stare by. busy signal: take the phone off the hook & 1/2 dial a number & jam a  
computer i mean a pencil in the dial & put on the kettle & pin "back in a flash"  
on the front door & go get that cocktail bun from the bakery for the next breast  
i mean breakfast. that's not spanish that's catalan or castilian or basque or  
central america. a guy from peterborough ont wanted to call his radio show  
radiofreerainforest & i said no. i couldn't believe my luck pissing blood  
the morning after seeing psycho so i stood up the ad agency & hitch hiked wawa  
to vermont crying leaves of grass to the wild hungarian aluminum welder on his way  
to australia searching searching for the headwaters of europe hollering "bullshit  
towns" at the prairies & screaming nightmares from the front seat arms flailing  
me in the back waking & watching encased in his fear. that's what a ford's for  
it gets better. then it ends. so i said to the guy beside me "you must be someone  
else" & he said "he wouldn't have been there". a ring flew off a finger, a ghost  
closed the door behind him. hitch showed me the puritan construct when i was 6  
100 years ago tonight. this is the back of the page. a wise inconsistency. over  
lapping beaches & dream. speech is extremely unlikely to happen by itself. zip

### SEPTEMBER

#### winter taming

stroke the furnace  
love jealousy  
purvey fine memory since one million b.c.  
goose the lazy rooster  
wait for saturday even if it takes until next thursday  
hide range rustle  
bare leaf reason

it's dead but it looks good  
make it a product  
give it a price  
take it away from those who need it most  
want it best  
get it last  
hope falls eternal

#### town of vice

i know what i'm not doing  
you can't start me now

sure, it was a mistake  
like summer ending on labour day

putting a comma there  
a comment here

god i loved you  
that was us

medicine is hearsay  
would that there were no good reasons for what i say

surprising silence  
a taste of fresh water

just sneaking peeks  
only magnifies the city

#### with it without

the panic i felt when i saw i was going to have to sit through that  
some of that  
again

i guess it's good enough for writing to  
is this the theatre of canada  
what don't you know

everything says  
nothing we say  
ever said so

i.e. dance comix  
like it only hurts when you read  
up the page

language knows  
yes you

talk = action & zero

fly buzzing around the koto music coming from the record player  
i think the racoons are out there tonight but they aren't  
one of the cats likes to walk back & forth under the bridge my legs  
make when i'm sitting on the floor dealing laces  
i woke up running for the bus that pulled away without me so i'm  
still awake

it's not words making sense it's sentences says the baby  
someone singing up the alley  
sunny & warm, does it mean that fall's over  
lucky the lovers that get to shake on it

dew balancing  
upon my word  
bobfrost warning  
call jack

kakania as "the utopia of the status quo" (R. Musil)  
"adanac is the vessel of the eternal present ... no peculiarities,  
only tics ..." (P. Culley)

#### the bicycle of london cabs

the centre of gravity  
the cyclist that sat on it  
didn't swerve  
hit the sun & 1/2 the moon right outa the dark  
played the rest of the day away  
streetlight to streetlight  
in the margins of mars  
"horrible hill isn't it"  
"the longer i can be here the better"  
the great saturna island pitched slug battles suck a lot of energy  
from the soil & i'm putting it back  
i have a neat flat flashlight i hang around my neck but i need a  
tail light, fenders & a lot of bus tickets  
& a tarp over the ivy that turns out to be not as good an idea as  
a roof  
& an actual rather than a virtual toilet & sink  
but adjusting my handicap with an extra kilo of realism (post-  
capitalist catfood) i rode home the old anyway in no time at all

#### the free trade deal is a canada-wide out on the country



# SELECTIONS FROM "EARTH PER VERSE — A CATALOGUE OF SUSPICIONS & DREAMS"

(from *Sky — A Poem in Four Pieces*)

By Libby Scheier

1.  
the subway train excavates down through black  
space into yellow flash after yellow  
flash black hole sunshine black hole sunshine  
black hole dark  
spiders cast webs on our light  
eyes eye come from a family of basements its  
mascot a terrorized child hiding digging

digging through the dirt for bright flashes they come  
and go and come again what if we called it enclosure  
instead of penetration let's have both in any case  
don't stop digging we are getting there where is  
there? keep digging we are getting somewhere

how much does language change  
what's in a name?  
what's there without a name?  
the train

tunnels down

alternating  
light and dark

funnels down

digging a hole  
to China

and the sky —

2.  
the planet spins eye in a face  
eyes full of spiders  
hands on the honeypot desiring flies  
coming on to the flies the planet spins time flies  
their pinpoint feet alight on sticky fingers  
paw our skin with their staples of desire

the planet Earth an eye in a face  
we situate our body in the body of the universe  
plant our feet firmly on earth

the flies the spiders  
the zebras for chrissake  
apple blossoms and the guts of an old Jew  
disemboweled at Dachau

your penis pierces, completes me,  
Dorothy Livesay wrote that

and you enter me I  
enclose you envelop possess you  
your tiny momentary surrender  
I hold you tight against me my finger  
pierces completes you  
don't get up don't move  
don't do anything  
earthling mortal  
Bear of Little Time  
I wrote that

give us a rock stable matter  
free of genetic codes and sentience

3.  
damp black slitheres tunnelling  
tunnelling tunnelling through the white  
corpse bleach of stopped time  
worms scissionable sliced  
by sharp  
bone two halves continue on  
ward prepare the corpse white  
crumbling matter for holy  
communion with black mother  
earth mixing flesh with mud and rainwater we  
drink gluttonously of the body of  
earth of everywoman

4.  
popping up from the blackness of earth

bright orange pumpkins carrots green beans  
peppers and yellow squash red apple skin over  
white flesh cherry trees heavy with black juice  
and delicate pink blossoms each petal a velvet hymen

5.  
earthquakes eeling up toward unsuspecting  
surfaces excavations invert funnels  
rebel we are all at the mercy  
of asymmetric layers of rock obedient  
to the unpredictable sky

6.  
some accidents that occurred yesterday:

a squirrel squashed under the wheels of a Honda Civic  
the seizure of power by a dictator in central Africa  
leaking of the AIDS virus from a Pentagon germ-warfare  
laboratory  
an owl catching a mouse one getting away  
going to the party at the last minute meeting you/getting  
married  
giving birth to a boy  
being born Jewish  
volcanic eruptions cell life  
nine-year-old Sharin' Morningstar raped and strangled  
stuffed in the fridge  
free trade  
three broken ribs  
my brother's best friend's suicide  
my husband's brother's suicide  
my old friend Danny's suicide  
birth of the earth  
birth of my child  
his head opening me like I've never been opened  
the ecstasy of being open  
cunt to brain  
this birth

## AFTER THE ALPHABET RAIN by W. Mark Sutherland

T i S o l f I W t T o  
h n o f e o s i o h f  
e m f r n e  
a e o t m i g d w  
c d t u t s r b a  
h v i r b o t s o i t e  
a a m y f a s p r e  
n n e s t l d r  
g c s e t a d a e  
i e n h o l t f b  
n t t e f v k s l e  
g o h e l e s i g  
f e n f o , f e i  
o c l w a p e s n  
r d i e i e e a t t t  
d e m s g r r d t t t  
e s a h o a h h o  
r i g a t o s l e e  
c e n r e s r e  
o c d o s f v  
f a s f t o o l a  
t t w h r r a o p  
w e e e b e n w o  
o d r i a f a p d e r  
r s l r d a h d t r a t  
d s l r d a h d t r a t  
s p i e s l u d o i e  
e z , l r l r s o  
a e e l t i r e n o  
n c s e h n i s r n  
d h f e g c l e t  
. t t a a i f t  
o h t r n r e f h  
b e t r a e e f e e  
j o a i ? . s  
e l n n r h w  
c y i s . e d d n  
t r n i d d n  
s i t t u c t o w  
d i r r y c e t h w  
e s r y d e  
s m o p  
t g s a  
r a t i a n  
o t e i n  
y e i n s  
s t h s  
y h e  
n e  
t a s  
a i l e n c e  
x i l e n c e



# CELESTINA

By Fernando de Rojas

Translated with an Introductory Note

by Cola Franzen

## Note about *Celestina*\*

Celestina is nearly 500 years old but she is as vigorous and wicked as ever. From her first known appearance in the Fernando de Rojas play published in Burgos in 1499 to her frequent reincarnations in contemporary Spanish theatrical productions from Boston to Buenos Aires, she shows no signs of aging or mellowing.

Procuress, go-between, gossip, witch, fixer; skilled in charms, potions and herbs; expert at unmaking and remaking virgins; concocter of remedies for physical and emotional ills, her greatest skill lies in her shrewd understanding of the weaknesses and secret desires of her "clients", and of those she needs to win over to help her.

In Act I we find Calixto, wealthy aristocrat, dying of love for the beautiful and virtuous Melibea. His servant, Sempronio, already in cahoots with Celestina, suggests her as the only solution; but another servant, Pármeno, young and idealistic, opposes the idea. He knows Celestina all too well. As a child he had lived with her for a time in her shack by the river and run errands for her. So when Sempronio and Celestina arrive at Calixto's house, Pármeno calls out, "Sir, Sempronio and a painted old whore are banging at the door," and refuses to let them in. His warning is ignored; Calixto orders them admitted.

Left alone with Pármeno, whom she doesn't recognize, Celestina goes through her bag of tricks to win him over. First she is a harmless, doddering old lady, just trying to be of service to those who need her, but Pármeno is unmoved.

Then she dangles a bribe: Wouldn't you like to make a lot of money, she asks? Yes, says Pármeno, but I wouldn't be able to enjoy ill-gotten gains. I would, says Celestina. I'll take anything I can get, any way I can get it.

Then she tries flattery: Your voice is getting deep, she says, and you're sprouting a beard. The tip of your belly must be getting very restless. Like the tail of a scorpion, brags Pármeno. Worse, says Celestina. The bite of the other one causes no swelling, but yours causes a swelling that lasts nine months. Pármeno is delighted and the battle is almost over.

He tells Celestina that he is the same Pármeno who ran errands for her years before, and Celestina, full of sudden affection, says, Why, you stupid little thing, don't you remember when you slept at my feet? Yes, he says, and although I was just a little kid, you used to pull me up to your pillow and press me against your body, but because you smelled of old woman, I always fled.

When Celestina promises him Areusa, a beautiful young girl under her "care", to have as his own, Pármeno cannot resist, although he requests that their liaison be kept a secret. Celestina objects and in the speech that follows, begins his education in the matter of love affairs.

From a speech of Celestina, from *La Celestina*, by Fernando de Rojas. Originally published in Burgos, Spain, 1499; this version from the edition of Espasa-Calpe, Madrid, 1974, Act I, p. 36.

## ADVICE FROM CELESTINA

You're talking nonsense, Pármeno.  
Now the joy of possessing a girl  
is worth nothing  
without friends to tell about it.

Don't turn away, don't be bitter,  
remember, nature flees the gloomy  
and searches out the delectable.

And as for sensual things,  
real delight comes in sharing  
with one's friends  
all the ins and outs of love affairs.

I did this  
She told me that  
This funny thing happened to us  
This is how I took her  
I kissed her like this  
She bit me like that  
I embraced her this way  
We held each other so.

Oh the talk  
the fun  
the games  
the kisses!

Let's go there  
Let's come back here  
Let's have some music  
Let's paint emblems on our armor  
to wear in the tourney  
Let's sing songs, make up stories  
Let's joust  
What ornaments shall we wear  
on our helmets?  
What motto shall we use?

Now she's on her way to Mass  
Tomorrow she'll go out again  
Let's prowl through her street  
Look, here's her letter  
Let's go tonight  
Hold the ladder for me  
and wait at the gate.

Well, how did you make out?  
Imagine: the cuckold  
leaves her all alone.



Well, then, let's go back over there.  
Give her another whirl.

And in all this, Pármeno,  
can there be any delight  
without companions?

Oh, tra la la lala lala  
Remember this advice comes  
straight from the horse's mouth.  
Believe me,  
that's where the fun is.

As for the rest  
the donkeys in the pasture  
do it better.

## CONCEPT OF THE UNRELATIVITY OF TIME Performance Poem by Denis Vanier

war words

slow dance darkness clinging in the northern fire  
a savage battering tool in full assault  
like a crest of horror  
on the enemy country's barbed wire

we shall remain faithful to anti-earth attacks  
to health's white rituals  
licking knives till we strangulate  
in detective Lichastek's bed

like a child's prayer  
his liquid stamps war symbols  
on others' balls

the rosary's skin infected by humid hands  
we implore the image of crime  
hysterical caresses  
that separate even the idol

our writings add to plots of love  
popular mechanics  
to give hard-ons to all the scars  
a trap for those whose sperm causes cancer

a language of weapons and of kisses  
of Iroquois that stain beds  
and empty themselves at the totem pole

they use us to reincarnate history  
to illuminate the intimate instrument  
the fat prolonged  
but athletic, latent,  
with erections like transmissions  
we adore the ring  
a switch-blade under the tongue  
a man's discharge that changes  
under the microscope

"it is forbidden not to dream in a materialistic point of view"  
to drink the warm juice of your mascara  
to rub ourselves against swastikas  
holy evenings, red-cross nights

when I suckle your bitch's milk  
I wipe the blood from your gums  
like a blind fawn:  
the monster's repast, the boss's discharge  
what are the materials  
pearls and pumps  
the analysis of easy samplings ... between sad and hard  
such a long sedative  
on the dancers' backs

I surrender  
kill myself like Richard Blass  
the surgeon and his patient  
the apparatus in the symbol  
from the shower to the oven

love us to death  
from desire to murders hips full of kisses  
fragility sold to the absolute

we move toward the idol  
... the pure physiological fact ...  
to suck, dentureless, the obscure stench  
of "the agonized man"  
his crossbones  
illuminate the dormitories of Saint-Jean-de-Dieu

conception: robert deschênes. realization: paule ducharme,  
robin mênard, r.d. test: denis vanier. translation: m.e. arsenault

# IRREMEDIABLEMENT [Amour — Love] par Alain-Arthur Painchaud

1.  
Irrémédiablement  
Mon amour tout de suite  
Et la folle aventure  
Ma petite copine blonde  
Et ses caps aux risques

2.  
Provoquer par les play-boys du quartier  
La couette fend la bise  
Elle ramène vers elle le sable fin  
Plongeant dans l'indépendance

Du Témiscamingue  
Complètement dingue et digne  
S'élèvent un chant plein d'images  
Elle coupe et connecte

Sur ce fond urbain vit la couleur  
Des êtres sous le repli des temps  
Les chemins empruntés dans l'espace  
Par la diligence des délivrances  
La délinquance des dividandes  
Nous propulsent vers nos réalisations

Mémoire historique des ailés-faons  
Une trompe-cri des amours.

3.  
Quand sur les bords du troittoir  
Je rie de te voir à ta fenêtre  
Et que tu cries de comprendre  
Qu'il vaut mieux que je m'en aille  
Aye Aye Aye que je t'aime  
Quand dans ma conscience je te vois  
Si jeune si frêle si déterminé  
Je me félicite d'être cet idiot heureux  
Qui t'accepte tel quel ...  
Qui rêve doucement d'être aimé d'elle  
Quand je cherche les mots  
Pour exprimer ce zen amoureux  
Je bafouille dans un néo-romantisme  
Qui ressace notre fond judéo-gnagna  
Que la vie la complexifie donc notre relation  
Quand le hasard nous cogne le nez  
Sur les portes barrées des disponibilités  
Tu me donnes rendez-vous pour ne rien gâcher  
Et tu facilites la décence des désirs  
Pour orchestrer notre devenir simplifié  
S'il vit sa vie avec attention-tendresse  
Le roulement progressif de la joie  
Nous enveloppera de la recherche pure  
Et de l'application de la science intuitive  
Nous donnerons des becs aux gardiens de la vie.

4.  
J'élabore  
Si je poursuis mon cheminement  
Je peux arrêter de te courtiser  
Soit. C'est terminé ...  
Je n'irai pas plus loin  
Je me censure je m'interdis  
Sûr que ça va être dur  
Je te ferai des moues  
Je me sauverai pour ne pas te voir  
Tu m'encourageras de loin  
Et je ne t'écrirai plus

Souvenir fuyant blond d'azur.

5.  
Je veux manger ta mère  
Avec des gousses d'ail  
Je veux t'aimer mon ange  
Te soigner aux petits oignons  
Dans un grand potage  
Je veux me baigner avec toi  
Chou-fleur de mes rêves  
Moi, champion des champignons  
J'ai une rage de faim de ton corps  
J'ai une soif de ton esprit  
J'ai un réchaud pour ton coeur  
Et des caresses pour tes yeux  
Je te veux fourré à la crème  
Baisant dans une piscine de lait  
Fantasmant à qui mieux-mieux  
Sur les protéines et la caféine  
Tu es le beurre de mon pain chaud  
Qui nous mangera?

## DARK HORSETTES by Beverley Daurio

small, small, small. blood scattered like musical notes on  
the pattern of face. we are in your shoe and climbing.  
mysterious, our clumsy gonads shining huge and vigorous on  
us.

if we see what artifact you demand of the text, we can be in  
the warm sunshine with our toad selves showing, this is  
after a night of love or envy. on a gloomy afternoon, when  
francis bacon comes to us in his green equestrian outfit, we  
might not mind.

even the idea of subversion was donated by a dead jockey  
(whose heart was then transplanted, ghoulish remission or  
reminiscence of life). on the weigh scales with lead in  
leather pockets, the heart pumps away as the sulkies swing  
into view around the clubhouse turn. reined to things that  
run.

occam is shaving, occam opens his eyes to us.

(listen you're upstairs and the door is closed. it is  
important to remain. no-one will hear you. why is the  
washing machine in the attic, you ask yourself. why is the  
bathroom window so tiny and so high up in the wall? if you  
had the design to do over again, wouldn't it make more  
sense? wouldn't you have thought about the texture of the  
carpet for the cheek, the length of the pile for grip? we  
consider these things. the hair in your armpit is warm and  
sticky.)

we are in your shirt and climbing, our terrible privates  
gleaming.

if you dreamed you would be close. we are not prepared to  
allow dead thought go to waste. we are reading from the  
bottom up.

### LOOK AT THIS!

Shakespeare  
ready for  
field day  
and fish fry

runt, stop, runt. goad, stop, goad. seek dick runt. seek  
dick stop.

they are shoeing the dogs now, tap tap tap go the hammers. a  
man with a gun shouts banal lines from the book. we are  
through with the love of thought. we are finished with  
attempts.

we are on your neck and climbing, our enviable coitus  
glowing. not yet, not yet, not yet.



WASTE OF TIME  
By Monty Cantsin

KRONONAUTS RETURN  
VERNAL EQUINOX 1992  
FIRST CLASS MAIL



Waste of time.  
A book is not a book.  
Neoism is not a book.  
Nobody is a book.  
Books are without words.  
Words are in the frigidaire.  
GOLD.

I'm going to write a book about Neoism.  
But it's not going to be a book.  
It's going to be a bag.  
And then I'll put everything in it.  
But it's not going to be a bag but a boat.  
And we will send the book on this boat to India.  
But India will be Akademgorod.  
And the boat will sink.  
And Neoism will be forgotten.  
And then we go to eat.  
And someone will say:  
"This is a great book man!"  
And then I'll smile.



"ONSTAGE, BRANDISHING A FLAMING STEAM IRON, accompanied on kohl drum by Gordon W. Zealot who had donned the ritual flaming bread loaf, Monty [Cantsin, above] declaimed, 'Art is nothing, art is dead, art is living, art is bread!'" (See C.CARR on the Neoists, P.33)

## CONTENTS

### FEATURES

33 / The Triumph of Neoism—The last of the old-fashioned avant-garde makes its stand. (C.Carr)

the village **VOICE**

## CONDO SKY (First chapter of the novel *Life Simulator*) By Abigail Simmons

The angry rumble of L.A. traffic wafting up from the streets below was the sound of ten million cars eager to crash. Management officially frowned upon opening a porthole to "fresh air" like that, two thousand feet up the Shimbukku Palace tower, but the only law vigorously enforced was PTRT — Pay The Rent on Time. Having satisfied my reckless curiosity, I sucked the window back in, battling the air with great difficulty. So it was true — like they said in the ads — the inner pressure was greater than atmospheric. That meant the tiny differential pressure saved you from pollution, deafnoise, SADIS, and the whole smorgasbord of other windborne viral agents mutating every other day in the California brownsky.

Shimbukku Palace, as any other misleading trademark, wasn't a palace at all. It was a hotel. Well, that's too kind a description. We called it the High Dive. In truth it was a huge human cockroach technotrap, a vertical Jap entrepreneurial nightmare filling up a hole in the condo sky like a dot in a Seurat painting. You could buy your 5-by-7-by-7-foot condo pod outright for \$10.5 million, rent-buy, re-buy, or let the Shimbuku 'puter tie in to your PeePee (Personal 'Puter) and debit your Unwelfare account directly to the tune of \$8,600 monthly rent for a complete, hands-off, worry-free SimiliCash handling. Till they grouted you in. Died. Which would happen to me sooner than anticipated if I didn't lay off doing stupid stunts like sniffing out portholes. I'd have to manage my LifeRisk Index better in the future, given the ominous uptrend in the Shimbukku DeathChart lately. I don't know if it was a freak voodoo streak or just another summer death boom, but eleven more grouts were announced over the Shimbukku Palace 'puter IntraBoard this week: Three confirmed SADIS of longterm origin, two suicides, five deaths of unknown type, and one "Natural Causes". Sure. At age 22. Come on. But no one was really surprised or even gave a shit anymore. Ever since the SADIS epidemic wiped out most of the competent medical community worldwide, nobody dressed in white lab coats pretended to know what the fuck they were doing anyway. I saw a grout-in on EduChannel once. It's pretty final. After DeathCom issues Management an OPD, utilities are shut off and they pump a paste of fibrocement grout laced with the latest bacterioviral disinfectants into your pod. It fills up all around your decomposing carcass and finally swallows up the last trace of your anonymous existence on this HeavenHell. The grout hardens to an airbubbleless lightweight stone even before your BodyTemp has a chance to fall to a comfy RoomTemp. Like they say in the Pre-Arrangement ads — "Sayonara, Yo!". Sometimes it can get pretty funny. Once, the DeathCom 'puter issued an OPD with the wrong pod address and they grouted in a perfectly healthy, wildly screaming 20 yr. old med student. Hah!

When choosing the proper perspective though, even with little fuckups now and then it's far safer to ride out destiny holed up in your cozy little condo than run around outside looking for a rusty nail or an irate SocioLoser lobbing a pointy rock to puncture your LifePak. I mean, what the fuck can be so important out there worth risking your life for? Get a tiny whiff of SADIS, bebeh, 'n yo're a-headed fer The Stiffs. All you need is just POINT one PPM cruising around your lung falling lazy like a leaf to your innergunk to do the trick. Ever seen what Socially-Acquired Disease of Indeterminate Sort does to you? No, huh? That's cause they won't let you. You can't get a photog or video crew into the airtightest bubbleroom to record those festering purplegreen pockmarked faces and torsos for a trillion bucks. And the quacks keep the SecuriCam tapes for their own coffeebreak enjoyment. There's a big future for you in medicine. Full of opportunities. To fuckin' DIE, that is. There's no life like it. Cause there simply ain't no LIFE, bebeh! Like the solemn face says in the ads: "SADIS ... It's Sad". If I learned I had SADIS, I'd do me in pronto while U wait. I'd chute down to car level and walk barefoot to East L.A. whistling in my torn shorts, score a megahit of SuperShit in the MainVein and rush out with a sweet bangfuck to No ExitLand, grinning to witness half my head hanging by a few overstretched bloodclotted stringies of braingristle for a bare split of a sec.

Hah! For the meantime I'm still alive and I'm still fuckin' BORED, as usual. That's the problem here: Safe and Sorry. There are two basic survival laws to follow in the million-odd Shimbukku Palaces of NowsVille:

- #1: STAY ALIVE
- #2: KILL TIME

Every few hours I yank off the 3DTV goggles (GoGos), get off the foamcot and stand up in the tiny vertospace of my condo to stretch and crack my weary TV-squashed bones. I could use a few clicks on the exorciser, but I'm too fuckin' lazy. Anyway, it's not like I'm in space on the way to Sirius and my body's gonna wither to a gelatinous blob... I'm still fighting gravity with all of my butt down here.

Oh dear ... ho-hum ... here comes Mr. Chairman of the Excruciatingly No-Brain, Absolutely Mind-Numbing, Hole-Inna-Head BORED again ... uuuuh ... now what? What to do... What to do... What What What?... my PodDom for a 11,276th channel! Where's things happenin', bebeh? I mean ... even if the big game in NowTown wasn't mere survival, there'd still be nothing left to do. Mark says there's still plenty of things left to do. Like what, Mark? Like maybe start my own business and market yet another software people think they need? Get a Phd in Pre-English CroMagnon Oral TradLit? Shit, why not invent a cure for SADIS while we're at it? Or learn how to yodel in binary digits? Compose NyetProdukt ad jingles? Or how about discovering yet another "Furthest Object in the Known Universe" that'll snap on another billion years to this immense Kozmik Joke? Or howzabout breaking a piece of chalk on a blackboard while mathing around for the very smallest, ultimatest, teensy-weensyest theoretical subatomic particle just to invent a weirder name? Pretty fuckin' pointless, all of the above, if you ask me. Now if I found such a definitely last, no shit, particle, I'd call it a "Quisl". I'd give it no mass, no spin, no charge, no "flavor", but a feel. Why not ... "This Quisl, gentlemen, has a Good Feel" to it. Conversely, in the alternate parallel anti-universe which mimics us in our every move like a painful cousin reading our lips, the AntiQuisl would have a Bad Feel...". Yeah. Well me, I just feel plain bad. Shit, what a complicated Hole Earth we live in.

Sex ... now THERE'S something interesting. Yup. That keeps me going alright. PhoneSex, ModemOrgy, SimulSex, Triple XXX 3DTV features on the GoGos avalanching cocks 'n cunts in your face without the risk of MessySex killer juices gumming things up ... Mmmm ... on special occasions like when paycheck credits pop up in my bank account file I order SimiliChampagne over the SmartWaiter service, fumble my stiffening cock into the Jerkatron, set the Orgasm Count to 40, and I come cussing and spitting 40 times in a row and watch the air bubbles race each other in spasms along the thin PlastiTube on their way to buying me up credits through the sperm bank donation slot ... uuuuh. The only downer is realizing by the time you're watching those porn stars' antics they've been long dead but you forget about it after a while and concentrate on your Fanta-C programming. Anyway, they get payed well and enjoy their MiniLives to the max. They tried synthesizing actors by 'puter, but those too-smooth surfaces, odd fractal hair and chaos-equation rhythm animations just didn't grab yer knob's attention. Spurt Spurt.

I love my Shimbukku Palace LifePod. I got everything I need here: 24 hr. SimiliFood & Bar SmartWaiter room service, GoGo-driven 3DTV linked to my 2.4 MetaByte 'puter without which life as we know it would be meaningless, plus a constantly updated MetaCube holding all of civilisation's WordPictureSound knowledge right below the ashray. All I have to do is slap on my GoGos, lay back in the foamcot in my stained shorts and voice-activate a big quasi-affordable state-of-the-art InfoComplex incorporating Werd Procisser, Adult Entertainment & WorkaDay modules, all possible telecom links satellited worldwide, AutoBanking, DebiCredit & Investment Portfolio features ... not to mention the absoluto mustest SYNTHEGAME/SIMILIDRUGS to afterburn ya thru the smashingest walls of lite ... KABLOOEY!

Like they say in the ads ... "Let Shimbukku Take Care of You..."  
In France, I senk zey say ... "Shimbukku? Mercy Beau Coup!"



# THE PHANTOM APPEARANCE: NARRATIVE (IL)LOGIC AND FORMAL PARODY IN THE POETRY OF JAMES TATE By Kevin Connolly

## I: "The Tag End of Surrealism"

It would be hard to imagine a poet as consistently confusing and unsettling to the American poetic mainstream as James Tate. Long recognized as one of the most gifted and innovative of contemporary poets, Tate has nonetheless attracted a legion of detractors and from time to time dismayed even his most avid supporters. His poetry has failed to follow the accepted path from innovation and experiment to polished cultural artifact. In fact, at various points in his twenty year career Tate has seemed to have been going backward — his writing becoming more free-form, more spontaneous. His critics have lamented his refusal to grow up, his fondness for undoing his best poems with one-liners and trivial poetic games. Even Tate's lighter, humorous work is an anomaly. Over the years Tate's humour has become biting, masking a hidden, and apparently inconsistent seriousness.

Tate's most powerful detractor is the critic Helen Vendler, a reviewer for magazine like *The New Yorker* and author of two major studies of contemporary American poetry. While perhaps not the most gifted, Vendler certainly has the highest profile of any critic of American poetry writing for a larger public. Tate's irreverent skill with metaphor, his command of the quirky colloquial voice have long been admired, and are not entirely wasted on Vendler. And yet Tate has a number of poetic habits that Vendler despises, so much so that she chose to omit his work from her recent *Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry* while including a withering review of Tate's *Viper Jazz* (1976) in her collection of essays *Part of Nature, Part of Us* (H.U.P., 1980), a study whose clear agenda it was to raise an awareness and appreciation for the best contemporary American poets.

"Tate's terse sentences were always chilly; now they are, like Matthew Arnold, three parts iced over. Surreal equivalents for life and emotions march down the page in reportage" (342). The absurdity of the comparison of Tate to Arnold will become apparent soon enough, but what is most confusing here is the indignance with which Vendler goes after clearly improvised work on the basis of poetic standards and subject matter. Vendler not only cannot enjoy the play of nihilism and absurdity in the poems, she refuses to entertain for a moment the idea that Tate's stance has any validity.

"This sort of thing is the tag end of surrealism, making an in-joke out of a movement which was, after all, at its inception, full of vitality. Tate's disbelief in art generates a dead-end poetry ..." Vendler ventures that "Man's/ indigestible hatred of himself" [Tate's line] has grown on the poet to the point where "the poems have hardened into a form of predictable repellant."

Though Tate also has a few "heavyweight" fans, among them Stanley Plumly, Mark Strand, and John Ashbery, until recently he has had comparatively little written about his work outside of reviews in newspapers and literary journals. In these, the note most frequently sounded is moralistic — reviewers seem as repelled by the cynical style and nihilistic tenor of Tate's poetry as they are dismayed by his refusal to accept any rules for poetic propriety.

"Tate has been visible as a poet for so long," Calvin Benedict laments in his review of *Riven Doggeries* (1979), "that one is dismayed to find him still stuck in adolescence. The silliness, defiance of 'authority,' high spirits, blurred obscenities, and puerile cleverness of his poetry are perhaps confused, by some, with spunky American originality.... The one thing that Tate needs to take seriously is the triviality of mere nose-thumbing at seriousness." Though he is kinder to the same book in *American Poetry Review*, Mark Rudman accuses Tate of relying on "shock value" and questions the effectiveness of the poet's approach in his darker poems. "The clarity, for example, of a Charles Reznikoff makes us look up from the page and see the awesome, beautiful and horrible strangeness of most everything around us; whereas the straining after weird effects in Tate's poems rubs salt on the wounds to the point of numbness.... It's like sticking your hand into an empty can — it touches nothing, doesn't hurt, but still comes out bloody."

Here Rudman makes a common complaint which betrays an essential misunderstanding of Tate's attitudes towards his work and his reactions to the world as played through his poetry. Tate's nihilism is expressed inwardly, towards the poet's condition rather than outwardly, in a shared fear or lack of community. His poems may well be "cynical" as James Atlas observes in a 1971 review of *The Oblivion Ha-Ha*, but the cynicism is not a "pose" and his voice is far from "casual" or "bored."

In a review published in *Poetry* of Tate's *The Torches* (1969), the best of many early small press collections, Stephen Dobyns calls the book "a complete disappointment, which at first just irritated and then angered me. It seemed as if Tate had gathered up unused images, put them into a machine, and ground out poems like inferior sausages. Any poet has a fondness for his weak poems but this is no excuse for finding them comfortable homes."

Part of Dobyns' objections might stem from Tate's apparent ease in finding comfortable homes for all of his early work. In the space of four years, beginning with the publication of *The Lost Pilot*, which won the Yale Younger Poets prize, Tate had no less than ten separate book-length publications, including five chapbooks and limited editions (*The Torches*, *Notes of Woe*, *Row with Your Hair*, *Shepherds of the Mist*, *Hints to Pilgrims*) two collaborations with Bill Knott (*Are You Ready*, *Mary Baker Eddy* (poems) and *Lucky Darryl* (an improvised novel) and three major collections: *The Lost Pilot* (1967), *The Oblivion Ha-Ha* (1970), and *Absences* (1972). This kind of publishing history, while entirely consistent with Tate's free-spirited attitude towards his art, flies in the face of a traditional bias towards the careful aging and editing of serious poetry. Surely Tate owed it to his readers, if not to himself, to be sober and self-critical about his poetic judgement, to restrain himself from publishing poems which are not on a par with his best work, or the best work of his peers? For most poets, ten books in four years, incorporating well over 500 poems goes beyond all definitions of prolificacy not to mention good sense.

But Tate is not most poets, and to fully appreciate the sometimes elusive depth in his work, not to mention his contribution to the American poetic counterculture demands a rethinking of mainstream poetic moralism, a new delimiting of the boundaries of poetic expression and an awareness of the multilevelled psychological patterns of negation which inform and deform Tate's aesthetic. The speculations which comprise the rest of this essay should be treated as tentative steps in those various directions.

## II: Freedom and Containment

Calling Tate's debut, *The Lost Pilot* stunning is almost an understatement. At the age of 26 Tate has boundless poetic confidence, an unrivalled ability to create wild and resonant metaphor and in the best poems achieves a blend of humour and despair which is by turns absurd, tragic, ironic, farcical. There is a resistance to aesthetic expectations which is subversive bordering on revolutionary and yet the poems themselves cover topics within traditional boundaries of serious poetry — death, love, sorrow, the dead father. If *The Lost Pilot* represents a transitional or developing aesthetic (and I think it does), it does so in an entirely unusual way. Most poets' first collections are spent weeding out aberrant or unprofitably idiosyncratic imagery, honing their diction, refining their approach toward subject matter. By contrast, *The Lost Pilot*, when viewed in the context of the poet's later work, is doing the exact opposite — highlighting the idiosyncratic and the outright weird while exorcising urges toward refinement, sober subject matter, and appropriateness.

It is this appositeness, this unruliness with poetic form and impatience with mainstream expectations which shines through in the poems and anticipates the arrival of an entirely new approach to poetry. In poems like "Grace" and "The Cages" Tate is embarked upon a pattern which he pursues to this day, one which constructs image, narrative and philosophy only in the most provisional of senses, which erects poetry on a deliberately faulty foundation, and then revels masochistically in the inevitable broken pieces.

In "The Cages," Tate is already about the post-modern task of absorbing the universe internally, of reflecting the phenomenological prison created by physical and aesthetic sense. In the first stanza he deliberately flaunts the inadequacies of his initial images:

The insular firebird  
(meaning the sun) gives up  
the day, and is tucked into

a corner. Order, like a  
giant janitor, shuttles  
about naming and replacing

the various humanities.  
I look at you, you look  
at me — we wave again

(the same), our hands like  
swollen flags falling, words  
marooned in the brain.

As in many Tate poems, the narrative crisis and the stylistic crisis converge, and in the conclusion are clearly contained by the poet's consciousness. For Tate, the task of writing a poem, even (and perhaps especially) one in which the poem is its own subject, is just another absurd form of ordering, represented (and deflated) in the image of the janitor sweeping up "the humanities." The self-assured romanticism of the first line is turned on and ridiculed by the second, and by the time the last stanza is reached the entire poem is similarly suspect. Creation is seen as a futile, bloated occupation, as demonstrated in the last stanza's transformation of waving hands into swollen flags. Art is alienated from and by its own medium, the figures wave signals but the words remain "marooned in the brain," by now clearly the "cage" of the title.

For such a short piece, this poem contains a wealth of revisionary turns and counterturns. The result is a stylistic moment, a kind of balancing act in which images attain a momentary equilibrium in the midst of a conceptual flux. There is the suggestion of a narrative in the relationship between the poem's figures, but there is neither a context nor narrative sequence. The storyline passes like a shadow over the poem, providing little more than shading for an exposed subtext. If the poem communicates anything it is the impossibility of communication, and yet the sharpness of the images and the crisp discovery of the closing belie even that level of interpretation. The poem is about failure, more specifically about its own failure, and yet leaves the reader with a clear and paradoxical sense that it has succeeded.

Virtually all of Tate's successes announce themselves in closed psychological spaces and his imagery, particularly his representations of art and thought, tend to reflect this kind of containment. In "Prelude to a Glass City," he states that he "prefers the nonsense left untampered" as opposed to a futile "scratching" after depth. The poem closes with an early, somewhat clumsy version of a concept he explores more successfully in later poems, but it provides nonetheless a telling glimpse into his concept of image and idea:

Well, listen, I have an idea:  
I keep it in a jar: I keep  
it in a glass — the laughter  
in the glass keeps me alive,  
is the icing on my eyes,  
the essence of the world, but —  
don't quote me. This is all:  
A rose is not a cannonball.

Like so many Tate poems, the tone is bitter, disturbed. There is some parody of Romantic and Modern conventions, but this is hastily constructed. Tate directs most of the irony against himself, against the smallness and egocentricity of his own stabs at meaning rather than at the more elaborate attempts of his poetic precursors. Again, whatever success the poem achieves manifests itself in an ability to contain and momentarily balance a complex of conflicting attitudes. The poem slips easily from sincerity to shallowness, assertion to nonsense several times in the space of these few lines. The final, redundant entreaty to the reader is self-critical on at least two levels. First, it unplugs any importance or posture such an anti-statement might afford the poet; and second, it implies a self-destructive attitude towards art, almost recommending that poems of any kind, and certainly this one, not be written at all. Tate admits to the reader that he bottles and contains his ideas, even that he gets enjoyment out of exposing their simple-mindedness, but he takes care to take away even the paradoxical authority such an admission grants him.

This sense of containment, which points to a ravenous self-conscious megalomania, is not just unusual; it lends a necessary, unifying force to many of Tate's surreal, eccentric pieces. The artistic defeat and paranoia that the stance implies, however, has its rhetorical dimension. Only a percentage of Tate's poems possess this kind of fractured, disoriented angst. There are moments in many poems and whole passages in others in which the artistic process is seen as liberating, in which stylistic and metaphoric experimentation provide a tangible, if temporary diversion from the psychological cage of "high" art. In Tate's poetry motion and anxiety are almost inseparable, as indeed are subject and verbal instrument.

In Tate's improvisational work — the poems in *Viper Jazz* and the long, disintegration narratives in *Hints to Pilgrims* — these identifications narrow the range of possible response. Images cease to work on as many levels, and the poems' music becomes more targetless, entropic. *Hints to Pilgrims* for all its apparent playing to the reader, is almost entirely self-directed, a monument to the poet's disinherited sense. At the same time, perhaps because Tate's nihilistic face has been momentarily submerged, the poems are among his funniest, his most playful.

To this point I have largely avoided talking about play in Tate's work, partly because most of the serious analyses to date have put a strong emphasis on verbal play, partly because I felt that the extremity and perverseness of Tate's imagery and wordplay masked more serious dimensions in his poetry. The images in *Viper Jazz* and *Hints to Pilgrims* are some of Tate's most perverse, but again, that perversity is partly a rhetorical mask. Sometimes, as in "Recipe for Sleep" a relentless non-sense in the poem as a whole helps make the point:

run down the staircase  
inside a violet  
eat through both doors  
empty the hammock of its blood  
uncork the head of a doll  
and choke the rose inside of it  
when you get to the glacial lake  
wrap yourself up in gauze  
and swallow up your hands

the reverse sometimes works  
for waking

The images are interchangeable in the sense that they have no logical sequence, and have little to offer outside of their novelty. As the final line makes clear, the poem turns on a whim, and its success trades rather heavily on a reader's ability to appreciate psychedelic imagery. Any connection between images is tenuous — if there is a dominant theme it is again one of containment, insularity. The poem's evolution becomes its context; there is virtually nothing one could bring to the poem which would make it more intelligible. On their own, poems like this one appear casual or flippant. But when several such poems are read and investigated it becomes clear that more is involved than diversion and surface energy.



By the time a reader encounters the poem "Suffering Bastards," also from *Hints to Pilgrims* the title of the book is becoming clearer. The poems have developed into a jazzy, surrealist guidebook to the poet's perverse consciousness. Tate's approach is again reductive; richly-toned declarative statements are deflated by the imagery which follows them:

The blight of poems in our time,  
there is no darkness dark enough.  
No, there is no darkness the blind  
cannot see through, ungraspable  
as they are, the suffering bastards  
on balconies, in love with a solitary  
maggot.

O semen of Shiva, there is  
no voice at the end of the darkness,  
there is no darkness, light  
proceeds in brittle nightgowns  
with not a word for anyone.

The poem appears to be saying a great deal, and nothing simultaneously. The complaint in the first stanza appears to be that drama, the sublime, has been drained from life, leaving little subject matter for poetry. The task of the poet becomes ridiculous — tragedy is an empty, minimal gesture, darkness is voiceless, light is without words. There is momentary amusement provided by Tate's hyperbolic voice, but the poem operates from a functional absurdity, it maroons itself in a context that trivializes, if not forbids its existence.

One begins to see how Tate's celebrated wordplay and manipulation of voice might be viewed differently, not as freedom but as evasion, not as solution but as conundrum. Tate's exotic imagery, while granting a certain freedom from convention and distance from the poetic cliché, is as much a lament for the impossibility of a new order as it is a reaction to an old one. In Tate's poetry, nothing endures but the cage of the psyche. All order is transitory; even negation is futile. Tate's aesthetic suggests a maze with neither start nor finish, defined only by its impenetrable limits.

In the poem, "Fuck The Astronauts," from the same collection, Tate exposes his improvisations as foolish, trapped:

Eventually we must combine nightmares  
an angel smoking a cigarette on the steps  
of the last national bank, said to me.  
I put her out with my thumb. I don't need that  
cheap talk I've got my own problems.  
It was sad, exciting, and horrible.  
It was exciting, horrible, and sad.  
It was horrible, sad, and exciting.  
It was inviting, mad, and deplorable.  
It was adorable, glad, and enticing.  
Eventually we must smoke a thumb  
cheap talk I've got my own angel  
on the steps of the problems the bank  
said to me I don't need that.  
I will take this one window  
with its sooty maps and scratches  
so that my dreams will remember  
one another and so that my eyes will not  
become blinded by the new world.

The interchangeability of Tate's metaphors and devices leaves a reader with a fractured sense of what the poem is doing. Words with conflicting meanings appear in directionless repetition, images with absurd or problematic sense are reshuffled, dropped into inappropriate verbal packages. Appearances are transitory, capricious, without depth or resonance. The images flicker, metamorphose, affect, but the overall impression is one of a creative consciousness devoured by its own progeny. The images exist relative to themselves — the poet's dreams can "remember" one another — but they are of little use and provide no solace for their creator.

In *Fifty American Poets: The Creative Process* (Alberta Turner, editor, N.Y., David Mackay, 1977) Tate contributes a series of drafts of one of his poems and provides useful information concerning his patterns of invention. "Many poems, what turn out to be poems, start for me with any kind of free association. I like to start out of the air and then find a subject, if at all, later" (315). For Tate, a successful poem depends entirely on its medium, and is by definition a transitory affective experience. Tate claims that during the writing process he rarely has a sense of the poem as anything but a formal project, a problem which is addressed only on the terms it generates for itself.

"When you're writing you're not thinking about who is going to read what you're writing. You're thinking about how you're going to get out of this jam, or something corny such as how wonderful life is with all its mysteries and riddles.

"Because most poems of any value do posit paradoxes, paraphrasing is a feeble pursuit. Because they are conveyed in images you have little of importance when you strip them away. Life is sad, life is beautiful — that's not saying anything. This poem, A Box for Tom, though it tells what might be called the fragments of a story, is not detachable from its music.... The whole poem, if I'm successful at all, is about two hairs away from being a terrible cliché. That was the challenge — to see how far I could get with two hairs" (320-1).

It's interesting here that Tate expresses creative energy and excitement in terms of a problem or challenge and that his ideal poem "posits" a paradox as opposed to making a statement or resolving the difficulty. The emphasis is on process rather than product, complexity rather than unity. Tate deliberately tests the limits of poetic propriety, and shows little interest in producing crafted cultural artifacts. The poem appears inseparable from the poet's anxieties as signalled by his desire to get out of a formal "jam," his deliberate courting of aesthetic disaster. Tate's only major concession to propriety occurs on the level of narrative, but as we will shortly see, even that is a deception.

### III: The Phantom Appearance

Given the spirit of Tate's poetry, it's probably not out of place at this point to invent, or at least borrow from a different context, a term of my own.

A year ago I was sitting in front of the television watching a baseball game when one of the commentators used a term I hadn't heard before in talking about a pinch-hitter. It seemed that Cecil Fielder, a bench player and part time designated hitter for Toronto led the league in something called "phantom appearances." The term refers to a recorded appearance of a pinch-hitter who is himself replaced before his time at bat. Leading the league in this category has to qualify as a dubious honour, but the term intrigued me nonetheless.

As most baseball fans know, hitters are replaced, or "pinch-hit" for, late in a game when a particularly favourable match-up of hitter to pitcher is desired. Occasionally a hitter with a good record against a particular pitcher is chosen to pinch-hit, but more often than not, the decision is based purely on statistics which show that a player who bats left has a distinct advantage against a pitcher who throws right, and vice versa. Getting the right hitter/pitcher match-up is a matter of managerial strategy, which often gets fast and furious when it goes so far as to produce a phantom appearance.

A phantom appearance arises after the following sequence of play: a manager decides late in a game that he will replace one of the hitters in his line-up with a pinch-hitter, for the reasons outlined earlier. The opposing manager counters by bringing in a relief pitcher, one who throws from a direction which restores the statistical advantage. Before a pitch is thrown the first manager responds to the move by pinch-hitting for his pinch-hitter. The rules state that when a pitcher enters a game, he must pitch to at least one batter; the advantage is restored to the team batting. The original pinch-hitter has thus entered the game and left it without getting his time at bat; he has made a phantom appearance.

If all this seems kind of complicated (baseball, like poetry, resists paraphrase) an outline of the effects the phantom player has on the game may not. Regardless of whether the move proves successful or not, the phantom player has left his mark. In anticipation of what *might* happen should the player reach the plate, a whole series of options has been perused, evaluated, and acted upon. The phantom hitter in essence represents only a possible outcome — a possible fiction if you will — but one which exerts a tangible force on the sequence of action before being eliminated from the picture.

As far as I know, textbook baseball bears no resemblance to textbook criticism, but in this case the phantom appearance of that pinch-hitter and the *immanent* fiction he represents is an excellent analogy for what Tate does with narrative and image in his poetry. We've seen already how the recoil from Tate's bizarre metaphors can exert considerable semantic sting, particularly when watched over the course of several poems. The same recoil is often operative in his use of the phantom narrative, a promise of a particular course of action which is never fulfilled, and yet exacts a considerable effect on the way the poem is constructed and received by a reader.

Tate's "Poem," which opens the collection *The Oblivion Ha-Ha* starts out with an image from genre fiction or film noir, and then quickly turns strange:

High in the Hollywood Hills a door opens:  
a man disguised as a man appears,

sunglasses on his nose, a beard.  
He can smell the flowers — camellia  
bougainvillea — the word,

itself a dream; the reality of the scene  
was in the Chinese girl

who swam in the pool beneath  
the rail he leaned on:  
she was something else indeed.

She was the dream within  
the dream within. He shouted: hallo,

halloo.  
He did the handkerchief dance all alone.  
O Desire! it is the beautiful dress

for which the proper occasion  
never arises.

o the wedding cake and the good cigar!  
o the souvenir ashtray!

The poem begins by promising an event or a parody of an event. That expectation, ultimately represented by the image of the disguised man standing above the pool watching the exotic woman, anchors what becomes a solipsistic poem concerned with process, and the illusory dynamics of imaginative desire. Tate gives the reader a story and then takes it away, in the same way as he gives the disguised man an object of desire and takes her away.

For all its surface strangeness, the poem is easy enough to interpret. "The man disguised as a man" sets the tone for the unfulfilled promises made by the rest of the poem. It anticipates what turn out to be illusions of motion, illusions of deception. Images of revelation or disclosure — the door, the word, the Chinese Girl — do not disclose but turn on themselves. The door reveals a disguised man, the man is disguised as a man, the girl is submerged in several levels of dream state, the handkerchief dance reveals the desirer rather than the desired. In the end, the poem is nothing but desire, "the beautiful dress for which the proper occasion," the "poem" promised in the title, "never arises." The final two lines, like many of Tate's endings, completes the defeat of sense, and ridicules the poet's shoddy efforts.

It would be a mistake to be deceived by Tate's calculated bouts of nonsense — they rarely stand completely apart from the poem's other images. Their positioning in the poem is strategic, providing a scale against which the problematic sense of earlier images can be measured. In the same way, it would be foolish to make too much of poems with relatively coherent narratives. One often finds that what has apparently "happened" is a foil for the poems' deeper intentions.

An early poem, the much anthologized "Rape in the Engineering Building," can be used to make this point. The title plays a strong role early on. We expect a poem about a rape; even when indications are that the *event* has already happened:

What I saw on his face scared me —  
ants on jelly; two cars ducked as he zigzagged

past the library up to the tracks  
where the other students were just falling

from classes. One big man yelled,  
*stop him stop that man*, but I thought

it was personal and got out of their  
way. Finally the aproned man told us

in a high stuck voice it was rape  
in the engineering building, and

the rapist was chugging farther up  
the inclined edge of town into

the shadowy upright garden.  
Full of thanks, we took after him.

For a poem with such an apparently serious subject, the meaning and even the tone is elusive. To understand on any level what is going on in the poem a reader must reject the phantom narrative and intuit not only the speaker's attitude towards the action, but the poet's attitudes towards the speaker, the rapist, and the poem. Because this is a poem in which the speaker is a character, with the poet working at a distance, locating the tone becomes the key. Characteristically, Tate doesn't make that easy.

The trepidation of the first line is the speaker's, and is only slightly undercut by the ensuing description of "ants on jelly." In its very inaptness the image seems to signal an inappropriately casual authorial voice, anticipates the comic figure of the "aproned man" with the high voice (who brings the initially ominous title back into play) and the drole description of the rapist "chugging" up the slope into town. The authorial voice stands in ironic relation to the events of the poem in the same way as the reader stands in ironic relation to the speaker. The reader knows from the title that a rape is involved well before the speaker does, and thus immediately identifies the running man as being the rapist. By the time the speaker is told he has already let the runner pass. His explanation for his lack of action is initially easy to accept, but then the poem recoils in the last line and the explanation begs scrutiny.

What one takes from this poem tends to hinge on how the first and last lines relate to the poem's governing tension, the offstage, implied presence of a victim. Most of the speaker's time is spent waiting for an explanation of the runner and the frightening look on his face. The reader knows, or thinks (s)he knows, that there has been a rape, and that the frightening look the speaker glimpses is crawling across the face of the guilty party. The speaker's initial reaction reads like a premonition — in the poem's phantom narrative the protagonist has sensed something fearful and is alarmed in a way that outstrips the alarm that a pursued man might elicit. This first impression of the speaker persists, despite periods of tonal eccentricity, until he is told that a rape has been committed, and that the fleeing man is the rapist.



The speaker reacts to the news not with alarm, but with something close to relief, and suddenly our initial understanding of the poem is seriously threatened. The rape itself, the event we anticipated from the start, adopts an uncomfortable secondary importance. There is even a brief moment when the reader feels complicit with the speaker's indifference. It becomes apparent that the speaker's initial fear signifies something which for him far outweighs the reality of a rape. He is disconcertingly relieved to discover that matters are not so serious as he had initially thought.

From here the poem moves quickly towards an intriguing range of possibilities. The reality of the rape seems to have been made stronger by the fact that it has been so inappropriately ignored. The initial fear expressed by the protagonist takes on apocalyptic dimensions — images of the "shadowy upright garden" and students "falling" from classes acquire an ambiguous cosmological weight. One notices that the female presence is only implied, that the four figures in the poem are all men. The juxtaposition of carnal violence and the cool intellectual force represented by the Engineering Building suddenly appears significant as does the fact the action takes place on campus.

The poem is probably saying something about the male psyche's inability to relate to primal fears of the female, but that doesn't appear to be the central issue. For me (perhaps also for the purposes of this essay) the poem is also about anxiety and movement, and hinges on the fact that the speaker is unable to act until he can externalize his latent fears, project them into an impersonal environment. Once he has satisfied himself that his initial fears were unfounded he is free to pursue the rapist, by this time well out of range. The speaker is paralysed not because he seeks to evade reality, but because he does not want to confirm his worst imaginative fears.

The imagination as a stifling, or crippling force is a major theme in Tate's work, and provides some of the best explanations for his idiosyncratic approach to image and narrative. "Rape in the Engineering Building," in fact presents two phantom narratives: the rape story which arrives as a fact but neither develops nor elicits response, and the psychological narrative of the speaker, the unelaborated fear which forbids and provokes action at inappropriate times. The poem is driven not by event but by the threat or promise of event. The implied narratives acting as complements, each highlighting absences in the other. In the end, the poem not only resists, it subverts its own creation, and to be appreciated demands a complete rethinking of the conventional relationships among poet, poem, and reader.

#### IV: Anxiety and Influence

It should be clear by this point that an interpretation of a James Tate poem is not a straightforward activity, that tone rather than narrative is often the best starting point for deciphering the text's conflicting signs and the poet's mixed motives. In the poems discussed earlier, anxiety, evasion, and containment were as influential as anything in determining tone or motive. In most cases the tone pointed out a plurality of intentions and semantic direction. The poems resist a single reading in the same way as they resist both declaration and closure. The intensity of the poems' imagery, and the often complex sequencing which introduces that imagery — what Tate calls the poem's "music" — is the closest thing the poet has to an artistic "goal."

Tate's poetry attacks its subject by evading it, by receding into its own imaginative complex rather than proceeding into a physical world most poetry purports to reflect. In this sense the writing is defensive and slightly paranoid, a system of shrewd digressions and psychic defenses. The relationship of Tate's poetry to the American mainstream tradition is problematic, at times antagonistic. And yet Tate continues to win awards, continues to put out books through distinguished literary presses, and to garner an unusually large and loyal following.

Although he has not (to my knowledge) commented on Tate's work, the ideas of American deconstructionist guru Harold Bloom are useful here for two reasons: first, because they construct a psychology of poetry which explores the ambivalent relationship between poets and their precursors, and second, because his practical methodology focuses on patterns of negation, revision, and substitution rather than themes, plot, and aesthetic statement. What interests Bloom most is how poets both evade and supplement tradition via a willful misreading of the great poems of the past.

"Poetic history ... is indistinguishable from poetic influence," Bloom says in the introduction to his *The Anxiety of Influence* (N.Y., Oxford U.P., 1973), "Strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (5). Bloom traces poetic influence in contemporary poetry through a series of what he calls revisionary ratios, "tropes" of negation which map a poet's turns or swerves from the poems of the past and make it possible for poets to overcome the anxiety that goes along with writing under the long shadow of the English and American traditions.

According to Bloom, no strong poet can write without an awareness of belatedness, of his or her late arrival relative to the tradition in which he or she is working. At the same time, however the belated poet finds the idea that he is substituting his work on a given subject for work already done intolerable. It is Bloom's belief that the poetic ego demands priority in dealing with a given subject, and "will fight to the end to have their initial chance alone." He goes on to expound a highly original theory in which poetic influence is not traced through direct reference or allusion, but through anomalies, the flashes of fresh insight or originality which are the basis of poetic authority. Bloom believes that this originality is to some extent defined by its complements, by revisions of the approaches made in the work of their major influences. "Poetic influence need not make poets less original; as often it makes them more original, though not therefore necessarily better. The profundities of poetic influence cannot be reduced to source study, to the history of ideas, to the patterning of images. Poetic influence ... is necessarily the study of the life cycle of the poet as poet" (7).

The theory is based largely on Bloom's reading (he would say "misreading") of Freud's remarks on art as psychic defense and on generational relationships which define his concept of the Family Romance. It is meant to be applied in the context of a closed canon and a largely unchallenged academic hierarchy of "strong" or "major" poets. Bloom can speak of Milton's swerves and revisions of Spencer, Eliot and Pound's rereadings of Wordsworth and Whitman, Ashbery's swerving away from the images of Whitman and Stevens. But while he acknowledges extra-poetic influences and composite precursors, he implies that these factors rarely produce a poet who meets his criteria for strength. "Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves. But nothing is got for nothing, and self-appropriation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness, for what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to make himself."

The impossibility of isolating a "major" precursor in Tate's poetry, and Tate's apparent disinclination towards any kind of artistic fetishism leads me to doubt that Bloom would count him among the "strong" poets he speaks of here. And yet many of Bloom's observations offer compelling explanations of Tate's anxieties, and the dialectical relationships he establishes between verbal freedom and semantic slavery. Despite its novelty, Tate's preferred imagery contains rather than liberates the poem's sense and in spirit is quite close to the "contraction" and "dearth of meaning" left in the wake of Bloom's swerves and revisions.

Like Bloom's strong poet, Tate seems driven by ego, by the need to absorb the physical world in the more "real" imaginative world of the poem. His approach to past poetry, expressed in his inflation, deflation, and contradiction of Romantic and Modernist tone and iconography is also dialectical. Tate may turn Keats's Grecian urn into a souvenir ashtray, but he is genuinely and infectiously fascinated by the operation, and jealous of his right to shatter the illusion when the mood strikes him.

Better than any other critic, Bloom illuminates the psychological dynamic which prompts poets to destroy and rebuild, and to incorporate those conflicting compulsions in their art. "A poem is a poet's melancholy at his lack of priority. The failure to have begotten oneself is not the cause of the poem, for poems arise out of the illusion of freedom, out of a sense of priority being possible. But the poem — unlike the mind in creation — is a made thing, and as such an achieved anxiety" (96).

In evaluating work like Tate's, which willfully resists interpretation and paraphrase, it is essential to think at this level, to resist dismissing the work as mere iconoclasm. Tate has absorbed and is struggling with a more diverse, and perhaps more popular, set of influences and restrictions than the poets Bloom investigates, but the psychological dynamic is largely the same.

Bloom's most suspect stance is his insistence on severity and "seriousness" in the poems he addresses. This is perhaps a holdover from the Romantic distinction between the imagination and the fancy, which held that poems which delve the inner struggle of the soul were superior to poems which amuse, or playfully manipulate words and metaphors. In Tate's work, the substance and severity is achieved most effectively when it is filtered through humour and self-parody. In the same way his subversion of traditional poetic standards and directions is a projection of an internal struggle, of a desire to appropriate the power of romantic and modernist rhetoric while advancing a wholesale amendment of its approach to sense.

By way of complaint, Helen Vendler describes that work as "a point of view ... even a mood, but does it pay its way on the page, so to speak?" I say that it does, though it tends to pay with wooden nickels and counterfeit bills. And therein, if nowhere else, lies its genius.

# MALCOLM LOWRY ON THE BEACH

## By George Bowering



Burrard Inlet reaches deep between the mountains, past the city of Vancouver, beneath its bridges, turning and dividing and eventually disappearing, a fjord lost in the wilds, a kind of mystery. Across the inlet from Vancouver, and around a point of land just east of the Burrard Indian Reserve, is the lost, by now fictional, community of Dollarton. Now there is a quiet green there, called Cates Park, and at the eastern end of the park a forest path called Malcolm Lowry Walk.

Let us say it is a bright day in the middle of December. The temperature is about ten degrees in the late morning, but there is a touch of the night's new snow on the tops of the North Shore mountains above us. Walk along that path, step off it onto the pebbled beach, lean against a smooth boulder, and gaze, as anyone would do, at the water. The sun makes the water hard to watch, but the surface looks almost still. The reflected light flashes past you, and when you turn your head you see the glow and shadows playing like a billion fireflies among the bare willows. Like ghosts. From 1939 till 1954, three years before he died, Malcolm Lowry lived here in a succession of shacks on the edge of this water.

Malcolm Lowry was the last great Modernist writer, and the most famous novelist ever to have lived in the Vancouver region. During his years on the beach and his short stays in city apartments he wrote all his major works. Readers around the world associate him with the eccentric Joycean masterpiece, *Under the Volcano*, but on the west coast of Canada, those people who read books love him for his fictions about life here, for the novel, *October Ferry to Gabriola*, for instance, and the stories and novellas in *Here Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*.

Lowry conceived his life's work, which he was never to finish, in grand terms. Dantean images swarm through the texts, and the *Divine Comedy* is primary among the many structures this ambitious mind was reaching back for. *Under the Volcano*, set in the mean taverns and ravines of Mexico and seen through the suicidal fires of abject alcoholism, is Lowry's Hell text. Paradise was to be in what he thought of as the north, the forest of the north. His protagonist was given the name, Sigbjorn Wilderness. Wilderness lives in a shack with his young wife, on the beach at Eridanus.

Eridanus is Dollarton, in the 1940s a collection of shacks on the beach that is today empty on a clear December morning. Eridanus is the river into which Phaeton fell in his fiery chariot, and Lowry has his reasons for thinking of that story. But Eridanus is also the river Po, which reaches the sea at Ravenna, where Dante wrote the *Paradiso*. Lowry wrote in one of his letters that "the celestial scenery of pine trees and mountains inlet and sea here must be extremely like that in Ravenna, where he [Dante] dies and wrote and got the inspiration for the last part of the *Paradiso*."

But it is a threatened paradise. Across the water, toward Vancouver, the first unnatural thing his eye (and yours) would see is a complex of steel stalagmites on the too-near horizon. This is a major oil refinery, tended by the large tanker ships that invade the cedar-skirted inlet. In Lowry's fiction it is a Shell refinery, and at night its identifying sign glows red in the dark, its initial letter burnt out. Lowry's fictions and his life are filled with coincidences and symbols.

The great forest is a symbol of paradise, or at least of surcease and hope. One story set in Eridanus, "Gin and Goldenrod," ends this way: "In the cool silvery rainy twilight of the forest a kind of hope began to bloom again." In "The Bravest Boat," Lowry's favourite story, Wilderness and his wife walk through Vancouver's enormous forested Stanley Park, pictured as Adam and Eve in a second Eden.

However, Stanley Park is surrounded by saw mills and oil refineries, man's ugly ego, and by the city of Vancouver, which Lowry reviled. His books are filled with descriptions of the juvenile city as a disgusting place that is neither as innocent as its environment nor as socially graceful as an adult city should be. In one of his most famous poems, he looks at seamy Hastings Street and writes: "And on this scene from all excuse exempt/ The mountains gaze in absolute contempt." They saw an ugly sprawl in the middle of stupendously beautiful nature — a city that grew without culture out of its origin as a lumber camp. Sigbjorn Wilderness looks at the sawmills along the waterfront, and sees them "relentlessly smoking and champing like demons, Molochs fed by whole mountainsides of forests that never grew again." This love of the new Eden and horror of the new Babylon is a major theme in British Columbia writing. It was at the centre of Malcolm Lowry's life.

Today at Dollarton, Wilderness's diaphanous hope is still alive. The descendants of the birds his wife tamed are still heard among the alder trees and over the calm water. Occasionally we can hear a light lap of salt water over the pebbles on the shore, even though from around the lighthouse point comes the faint constant drone of some heavy machinery ashore. But Wilderness-Lowry's beloved creek still brings clean water from the mountains, between ferns and wildflowers, over ancient smooth rock into the sea, still runs beneath Malcolm Lowry walk into the salt. A hundred meters out on the water, a dog sits in one end of a still canoe, looking at a man in the other end, who holds a fishing pole and sits there, and hopes.

#### Acknowledgements

*Here Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1961.  
*Selected Poems*, San Francisco, City Lights, 1962.  
*Selected Letter*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1965.



# FROM GIFTS by bpNichol

read, dear

\*july 2nd

at *Sylvan Lake*

sun going down  
old hotel behind me  
not a memory  
but the recollection  
my parents dancing here  
1933  
their honeymoon  
Uncle Earl playing in the orchestra  
what song? what tune? what music  
drifts across the water  
all water  
years  
the self-conscious act of  
memory  
re-membering  
a life, love, the i is born out of  
passion  
songs play  
are replayed  
the dance goes  
on goes  
on

fam-ily  
fami-ly  
fam-ily  
fami-ly  
fam-i-ly  
-i-ly  
-i-  
-i-

\*july 3rd

under the gray stairs  
beside the white grocery store  
the body of the cat  
stiff now  
death having taken it  
where? looking round  
up & down oliver road  
tears streaming down my cheeks  
1954  
heaven?

\*july 4th

notes  
struck over & over again

chords  
that stack up  
play on something in you

resemblances/rhythms

rhymes  
it takes a life time to hear

heard

\*july 4th

this blue that

vocabulary

word choice or obsession  
i.e. no choice at all  
driven &/or dictated

this: present & therefore to be accounted for.  
blue: all around you (sky sea the robin's egg you found age 3).  
that: other past present future.

assumptions masking as givens  
the way belief sits outside the rational

the way the sense ration the world  
let only so much in

so much let in

letting

irrational

\*july 4th

hi story  
hi world  
hibee  
leaf

hell o honey  
is the stinger  
in the vision of  
paradise  
sin tax  
of a life

a is for apple  
b is for ball

it all comes down

it all comes down to

this

\*july 5th (song)

moonin' around  
coz i ain't with my honey

blue  
coz i isn't with you

cat's got my tongue  
makes me talk funny

when heaven ain't happenin'  
hell has to do

\*july 5th (rewriting an old poem from memory)

1934  
my sister donna  
died at my mother's breast  
three months old

1955  
i found her shoes in a box  
no bigger than  
my palm

\*july 5th

things remembered or recalled

the way that old song refuses to leave the mind

alone

conversations with gone friends  
how it seemed you would all go on  
foreverie

/frag/mented/memory of /  
beginnings stories of  
the world before you came to be

we are all  
somebody's dead  
baby

eventually

\*july 6th

struck/sure

the search for absolutes  
in a world of flux

where are we lead  
when we follow their lead

what i read  
is read, dear

only the pronunciation changes  
not even moving your lips

pucker sucker

its the kiss of life  
of death

elipsis

in which a little knowledge grows

and what's proposed?  
a garden?  
mind?

it ain't the thot changes, the spell's the same,  
its the attack rearranges the tone rows, the strings

i signs  
i signifies  
i sings

\*july 6th

tone not  
tune nut

worm row  
burrow or rub

mmmmm hmmmmm

mirror rim

!AHA!

\*july 7th

reeding

get this mouth piece to work  
adjust  
right?

clear a net  
to catch the world in

string sections

rhythm

pi (an o's solution)

what it is, you say  
words where the worlds dwell

use hey is what determines  
meaning

hi  
(notes)

'lo  
(notes)

bi  
furcation

"it's my bag," pipes pal in drone  
"you read the music so you can play"

"how still my heart

how high"

the moon

\*july 8th

at *sylvan lake*  
certain things begin  
or it is another  
arbitrary point from which a line gets drawn  
story has its start  
its impulse  
to unravel

the moon rises

a baby cries

outside the window  
a cat prowls by &  
an orchestra plays  
"honey on the moon tonight"

sometimes  
you think you see it all in the  
mirror rim  
but then the light's dim or  
your eyes fool you

the light's blue &  
its hard to read

the signs

flash on & off

"would you like to go dancing"

from memory

"take a chance & go romancing"

"i think i'd rather stay home &  
read, dear."

"Is This Where the Poem Begins?"  
 Points of departure in bpNichol's  
 "A Book of Hours," *The Martyrology Book 6*  
 by Lola Lemire Tostevin

three months of lines recurring in the mind

driving south from North Bay  
 1 a.m. August 10th 1981  
 full moon scudding from behind dark clouds  
 that "this is where the poem begins"

or later

Ellie in labour (September 16th)  
 the notion of poetry works at the back of the brain  
 no matter the hour of the day or night  
 no matter the hour come to in a life  
 finally the stuff on which the poem is made  
 our infant daughter Sarah in my arms  
 is this where the poem begins?

bpNichol  
 Hour 18  
*The Martyrology Book 6*

As a child during my seven years in a convent, it wasn't unusual to hear in the middle of the night the meditative murmur of two or three nuns reciting *nocturnes*. Or to be awakened in the early hours before sunrise by the chanting of the *matin lauds*, the first stirring to give thanks for the light that had caused the night to pass away. And almost every night as I drifted to sleep, I could hear from the dormitory just above the chapel, the same voices singing *verses*, giving thanks for a night of rest from the labours of day. Various forms of this ritual have taken place since the fourth century, when it was deemed dangerous for devout Christians to have too much time on their hands, so, a framework of stated periods of prayer and meditation, was introduced that would insure pious sentiment throughout the day and if necessary, throughout the night. Early Egyptian and Grecian monks referred to the rule as *synaxis*, assembling, which eventually grew into the Divine Office of the canonical hours or *The Book of Hours*, until Elizabethan times when a modified version was adapted for Anglicans and renamed *The Book of Common Prayer*. Even the most sacred texts are not immune to the fluctuations of history.

It's been many years since I've practiced the religion in which I was brought up, yet I am still moved whenever I hear the voices of women intoning religious chants. Religion is largely defined by its forms and while its concepts and ideologies are expressed through its rituals and ceremonies, the appreciation of its forms is not necessarily limited to its system of belief. Religion grows from a need to mythologize, and if, according to Roland Barthes, myth is "a semiological system which has the pretension of transcending itself into a factual system," (Barthes, 134) it is nevertheless a form which is not defined so much by the object of its message as the way in which it utters its message. The lyrics of hymns and meditations I heard as a child were almost always in Latin so that the feelings they still evoke are largely independent of the words' objective meanings since I remember very little of that obsolete tongue. Often, entire phrases from these chants come to me out of the blue, gathered only according to certain affinities of sound and rhythms, signifying nothing. They simply are, like a bird's song.

Is this where the poem begins?

If myth is a "semiological system which has the pretension of transcending itself into a factual system," form on the other hand could be compared to Barthes' definition of poetry, "a semiological system which has the pretension of contracting itself into an essential system." (Barthes, 134) From the beginning of his writing career, bpNichol acknowledged that he was in search of a form that would support his notion of history, a form which would support different forms, "a working model of an anarchistic structure." (*Paths*, 81)

The first time I heard bpNichol in concert with The Four Horsemen in the early seventies I was jolted by the scope of their performance, the primitive power of chanting and raving fused with the most acute lucidity. On this occasion, the group performed a section from Nichol's tribute to Hugo Ball, one of the founders of the Dadaist movement in Zurich. Not only was the Dadaist movement held together by its opposition to established rules of art and literature, but as one of its founding members Dr. Richard Huelsenbeck explained in an official account of the movement, it was "a byproduct of a great piety ... (through which) Ball sought to rediscover the evangelical concept of the word." (McMillan, 104-5) On the occasion of his first public reading, Ball spontaneously assumed the role of a priest and began to chant in the rhythms of the mass, rhythms associated with his notion of magic in language which pointed to something that could not be externally limited or measured.

Although Nichol's search for "an anarchistic structure" led to many remarkable and varied projects, it is his life long poem, *The Martyrology* that is perceived as his most significant. When he died in September 1988 at the age of forty-four, six books of *The Martyrology* had been published and he was already working on the next four. Considering Ball's influence and Nichol's concern with form, it is important to note how the major sections of *The Martyrology* refer to traditionally sacred texts or concepts, i.e., "Book of Common Prayer," "The Grace of the Moment," "A Book of Hours," to name but a few. One of his first works, *Scriptures*, a precursor to *The Martyrology*, which will reappear as part of *The Martyrology Books 7 & 8*, plays on the word "scriptures" whose roots simply mean the act or product of writing. Supplanting the original concept of "scriptures," a body of sacred and sanctioned writings, with his own concept of "scraps" and "raptures," not only provided the perfect vehicle for a young poet in search of "a model for an anarchistic structure," it provided him with the opportunity to exceed a long tradition of scriptural inspirations in both the religious and secular spheres. It is reminiscent of Dadaist visual art put together from "scraps" of tickets, wallpaper, posters, cigarette butts, spools, etc... all linked by paint within a frame. By bringing together fragments of daily life as art form, Dadaism not only tested the period's concept of art's authenticity, it ruptured the concept of narrative continuity as being representative of reality and time. It challenged the assumption of stabilized identity in narrative much as Nichol's own fragments, those "details of life dragged into the poem" (Hour 18) where "every poem is simply the history of a writing." (Hour 3) Nichol's use of hierarchical terms is not so much a retrieval of historical facts as a retrieval of the mood of chants and invocations in order to locate language's most communicative rhythms.

Is this where the poem begins?

In "Talking about the Sacred in Writing," (*Paths*, 233-6) Nichol explains how he grew up with Sunday school comics and heaven was depicted as a place of clouds where people wore funny white robes, images from which he never completely strayed. His ample use of comic strip frames and hand drawn figures whose words escape in comic strip balloons give the impression that language once cut free of its moorings just drifts up into the clouds, into unlimited space. His use of the page as frame in the assembling of his poems, his breaking down of language into saints' names, etc. are all undoubtedly extensions of those Sunday school comics. His sense of the sacred, however, is not based in an inviolable doctrine but in a sense of amplified reality, an infiniteness connected to the world in language and which often assumes the proportion of Ball's sense of "magic."

If the prayers of the traditional canonical hours relate to and mediate on a mystery reduced to a system of values, in choosing his own "Book of Hours" as a working model of his "anarchistic structure," Nichol displaces the system of traditional religious values while exploring the concept of its essential framework. We are reminded once again of Barthes' claim that when mythology becomes form, when meaning leaves its contingency behind, only the letter remains. As such, Nichol reinstates the spirit of the letter, the mystery of the word, the mystery and history of the transformative and creative powers of language. If, as a child in Sunday school he was inspired by the literature of the spirit, then, as an adult he is inspired by the spirit of language in literature. *Synaxis*, the divine law which conveyed the times at which, and of the purpose for which the devout assembled, has been displaced by *syntax*, the assembling of words that not only convey meaning but emphasize the relations between letters, signs, words, expressions. Where the original "Book of Hours" privileges the signified over the signifier and subordinates all of its signifying components to one Signified, that of God or Father, Nichol's "Book of Hours" privileges the signifier and displaces the authority of the Signified, as demonstrated in his chant of "oh god you are dead you are dead dead dead" in Book II of *The Martyrology*. The result is a profusion of meanings, rhymes, puns, plays of signifying references that form and constitute a language that can "whip order into/a yelping pack of/ probabilities." (Hour 4) Unlike the original "Book of Hours," Nichol's order however, never leads to certainties or pretensions of transcending itself into a factual system; his signifiers not only mediate meaning in language, they meditate on language and negotiate themselves into a system essential to the writer's exploration. By tracing and framing bits of his life on to the page, the writer places his autobiography within that space and creates the origin of his literature, his history, his mythology.

In the first hour of "The Book of Hours," 10:35 to 11:35 p.m., Nichol refers to his vision of poetry, his collection of meditations, as a rhythm of hours, a progression of days and years, as if to emphasize how chains of events and consequences cannot be thought of outside time, as if to emphasize that this particular hour, normally associated with the beginning of sleep and dreaming is a time "of altered consciousness:"

alert to the moment's movement in this room  
 language is the inside of the head or  
 the mouth opens  
 i feel that

comparisons between various earthly states

i.e. life death

As noted also in Hour 6, 4.35 to 5.35 a.m., when a writer sleeps and dreams, "the world turns in without you/ without your words." Only when "the dream pushes" the writer into the waking/writing world, does everything "come to life," because while asleep:

whole lives...  
 whole centuries drift by  
 you are not alive  
 your thots unrecorded  
 unremarked  
 unneeded

(Hour 6)



If Nichol's writing often refers to a personal history, his identification with history is not through an immutable body of undisputed facts rooted in time. His sequencing of hours, the recording of one hour periods during which the reported events took place, creates a voice which acts as the inner consciousness of time as it constructs the past in language, while emphasizing the time of writing because "there is no art to the saying... (if there is) no attention to duration." (*Paths*, 81) Meditation without trace merely vanishes, as Hour 8: 4:35 to 5:35 p.m., whose only recording, only word is "lost." When events go unrecorded, language and history are lost, time itself is lost.

Because each sequence is contained within one hour, each poem becomes a time clock that records the writing interval when the poem always finishes "on time," the limit providing the writing its "form." The poem delimits time as it is delimited in time, encircles itself, frames itself into a one hour sequence and gives form to "the notion of poetry that works at the back of the brain no matter the hour of the day or night" (Hour 18). In writing "history rhymes/ time's a vision: (Hour 3), Nichol suggests Maurice Blanchot's assertion that history, culture, one's life, are linked to the book which "constitutes the condition for every possibility of reading and writing... The book rolls up time, unrolls time, and contains this unrolling as the continuity of a presence in which present, past, and future become actual." (*Deconstruction*, 383)

Is this where the poem begins?

The poetic journal as genre, i.e., the Japanese *utanikki*, is often referred to by Nichol:

the progression of days  
years you have left for you

utaniki

...

(where) a pen still marks time  
(Hour 1)

If, however, much of *The Martyrology* "does have a journal aspect as one of its considerations of the nature of discourses about history... then, (it) plays into the idea of autobiography and allows (Nichol) to explore the autobiographical voice as a literary construct." (*Paths*, 87) There is perhaps no section of *The Martyrology* that illustrates so clearly the relationship of literary language to the cognitive function of the autobiographical voice as literary construct as Nichol's "A Book of Hours." As Shirley Neuman points out, Nichol's "language does not express, describe, or define experience but is an experience of engaging the world: constituting the "subject's" understanding of the world, it also constitutes the subject-in-the-world." (*Paths*, 54) In tracing what constitutes his understanding of the world, what constitutes himself as subject-in-the-world, Nichol postulates a past, a memory, an order of facts and events that include friends, family, influences as well as ideas and visions:

12:45 a.m.

an evening spent with friends --  
bissett, Arlene Lampert, Janine & Robert Zend  
--that list enters the writing again  
like a leaf picked up on the shoe & tracked in  
the details of my life dragged into the poem  
in part at least  
immaterial as the leaf  
as any life  
as the fleeting impressions of this cold October night  
(Hour 18)

The writer-as-subject communicates his being-in-the-world, insofar as it is communicable, by signifying and naming. Aware that the culture in which he lives cannot be approached apart from signification, Nichol organizes a personal history by means of historically circumscribed signifying operations. As Kaja Silverman points out via Freud, Lacan, and Levi-Strauss, the term "subject" foregrounds a relationship between different human sciences, and helps "conceive of human reality as a construction, as the product of signifying activities which are ...culturally specific... (and) suggests that even desire is culturally instigated, and hence collective." (Silverman, 130)

Nichol has sometimes been accused of incorporating too many trivial aspects of his daily life in his writing, of mentioning names with which the reader cannot identify, of being elusive, or "abnegating to carry through the work's full textural aspects." (*Paths*, 83) But as Nichol has made clear on so many occasions, his writing is one of "inclusion," not of "exclusion," and as such, as in Dadaist art, no detail is inconsequential. In fact, *The Martyrology's* determination to deal with various splits between high and low culture, i.e., sacred texts and comic strips, as well as mass and individualist mediums, invokes the contemporary theory of intertextuality where all elements contrast each other but manage to co-exist. "[E]ven the "i" which is an "other" as you begin to explore it, the "i" separates out from you & becomes different from the "i" exploring..." (*Paths*, 78) Nichol's "i" differs greatly from the traditional humanist "I" which asserts singularity and posits an autonomous and stable entity; on the contrary, Nichol's "i" suggests an individual's thinking and signifying process as being thoroughly influenced by the surrounding culture even if the writer often seeks to exceed aspects of that culture.

In addition to the surrounding culture, Nichol's writing has been informed by various theories of writing and reading; he quotes all the way from the Old and New Testaments to comic books, from Basho to Wittgenstein. The title given to three of the hours in "A Book of Hours," "The Grammar Trilogy --- Hours 20, 21 & 22" which charts his genealogy, both as "logos" and "local", echoes Jacques Derrida's famous title *Of Grammatology* which charts the genealogy of linguistics in Western

philosophy. In Derrida's view, the whole history of philosophy and metaphysics assigned "truth" only to the spoken word and debased the role of writing. The spoken word, having been considered closer to the immediacy of "truth," repressed the written word as a mere second-hand double, a fallen angel, which Derrida has tried to redeem throughout his work.

Nichol's "The Grammar Trilogy," plays on the word "grammar" both as "the relations of words in a sentence," (Hour 20) and the relations/relatives in the writer's own life sentence. Grammar not only encompasses grammar, the spirit of the letter which defines writing according to its conformity to syntax, but also evokes the poet's "grandma" Workman:

grammar, grandma, now  
in your 97th year  
you've outlived most of them

...

she is my grammar  
her name is Agnes

...

grandma Nichol  
the year she died  
talked constantly of heaven  
sang hymns  
some afterlife a vision

you never mentioned heaven once

just earth

& Walter Workman

whom you'd married

who i resemble

...

that story's over

which is why this poem begins  
(Hours 20, 21, 22)

Language grows out of memory. In writing about his late grandmother and the stories she told, Nichol does not attempt to recover her voice or "being," but the creative and transformative powers of the written word allows him to identify all that "local reference," transpose it into his own "miraculous revisions." He is the relentless historian, less of a "real" history than of written events where there is nothing to cling to but language itself, "noting to cling to but/ -puncertainty." (Hour 22) Derrida calls it "the realm of the metaphorical," but perhaps with Nichol it is more metonymical in the Jakobsonian sense, in the serial play of signifiers through contexture, through its own anarchistic framework. What is clearly evident, especially in pieces like "The Grammar Trilogy," is how Nichol, the prodigal son who pronounced the Father dead in *Martyrology Book II*, does not attempt to fill the blank space left empty by the lack of the Paternal name by redeeming the phallogocentricity of that tradition, but by tracing his genealogy in "grammar/grandma," without excluding "old father" or a litany of other names which constitute his imaginary filiation.

Because of Nichol's constant emphasis on language and linguistic play, the balance of power in the relation between the autobiographical "i" and language's materiality shifts to the side of language, to the shiftiness of language so that the writer written by his poetry is a subject that never stands still, never remains the same. He is infinitely more than one, leaving virtually no areas of his writing/living untouched. Portraits of the artist as a young man, son, friend, middle aged man, husband, father, brother, are eclipsed by the text, by literary constructs, as the cover of the sixth book of *The Martyrology*, a photograph of the author holding a copy of his book before his face, so clearly demonstrates. It recalls Paul deMan's theory of "dis-figurement," a term used to indicate the change that takes place when a "figure" is put into words. Because of the rhetorical nature of literary language the cognitive function can only reside in language and not in the subject.

Fully aware that the linguistic being of all things is their language, that the capacity for communication is language itself and that nothing is communicated *through* language but *in* language, bpNichol communicates himself as writer-as-subject, as literary construct, and discloses himself *in* language. The linguistic being of bpNichol can only be his language. "(M)an communicates his own mental being *in* his language... communicates his own mental being (insofar as it is communicable) by *naming*." (Benjamin, 317) The cognitive function, the process by which the subject re-cognizes himself and the world in language is the writing's *raison d'être*. The writer becomes his collection of texts as he creates himself in their image, names the knower in the image of the creator. There are few contemporary writers who are as aware as Nichol of language both as word and name, as aware of the relation of naming to knowledge. The writer makes events knowable in their names fully aware that there is no symbolic equivalence between them, fully aware that the writing is only a passage between the unknown and the unknown. He names them according to that knowledge, aware that it "strips the self away, the flesh/ shifting faces of a world/ we cannot pretend to grasp." (Hour 24)

"death you enter the poem as you always do." (Hour 22)

If death is a recurring theme throughout "A Book of Hours," it is never addressed as metaphysical speculation in the Romantic vein so popular in the nineteenth century but as an occurrence related to events of daily life which the poem celebrates. In Nichol's writing the theme of death is not mere referential obstacle to the creation of poetry but the meeting point of specific occurrences on which the poem depends: "a natural process then death/ no questions of a heaven or a second life... no time like the present." (Hour 9) In the present moment of writing the writer opens the present as if it were a gift. (*gifts* is the title of *The Martyrology Books 7 & 8*) As indicated in the

first hour of the Birth/Death Cycle of Hours 11 to 14, the "present" moment of writing, time delineated by language and language delineated by time, becomes the relation between life and death. As such it is the most essential present/gift the writer can give himself and his readers.

The writer's relationship to loss, such as the loss of a newborn son in the birth/death cycle of the thirteenth hour, one of the most moving poetic sequences I have ever read, exemplifies the complex affiliation between grief and writing. How, under the weight of so much grief, a writer can return to the realm of signs. There are those who believe that in the presence of intense grief silence alone can convey the intensity of that grief but Nichol does not succumb to that temptation. Having gone through sorrow so intense that "briefly/the heart does break... the will shatters... the illusion of possession slips past us... (so that) the loss at last passes too." (Hour 13) The realization that the one lost was never "ours," never anyone's possession, alive or dead, is grief's only release. As the writer becomes interested in life's "signs" again, language comes full circle in its relation between death and life:

not so much a line as a source  
so that we move &  
pass ages in the motion  
forward or  
sideways or

time moves thru & around us

...  
not so much a source but  
crossing over  
...  
the trick is if you get your clothes wet to make it  
poetry

the trick is crossing over  
not so much as belief but  
as continuity

...  
not so much a continuity but a passage  
from life to death or

unknown to unknown  
(Hour 14)

The imaginative capability of a poet such as bpNichol is such that it can transpose poetry, "art facts," to the place of loss, to the place of the unknown, fully aware that they are simply that: art facts. The title of his book, *Art Facts: a book of contexts* which Nichol completed and sent to the publisher in August 1988 shortly before his death and which appeared posthumously, reflects the cover of "Book 6" of *The Martyrology*. *Art Facts* evokes *artifacts* whose "i" has been removed, displaced by the book. While the imaginary constitutes its "miraculous revisions," it shatters the illusion that anyone or anything is permanent. *Art Facts* with it missing "i" affirms the temporality of the subject, of the writer who knows the only thing to do is continue writing "words for anyone who wants them," into the 24th hour, the 25th, 26th... or until death comes.

Nichol often referred to the writing process as the mind's ability to climb an imaginary staircase, open an imaginary door to an imaginary room, look out an imaginary window and discover the real world. There are, throughout "A Book of Hours," as in Hour 18 quoted above, allusions to travelling by car, airplane, or train, towards places of discovery as if the act of writing, of naming, brought them into existence, brought them to the "edge of consciousness we cling to/ like a road, a breakwater, or/ the memory of a mapped route home." (Hour 18)

What bpNichol wrote of Marshall McLuhan in 1982, could easily have applied to his own writing: "There is a lightness of touch to McLuhan's writing, an airiness, that has often been mistaken for a lack of depth. But the wonderful thing in reading McLuhan is precisely that he was using language to take off, using it to soar free of an artificial notion of what constitutes profound thinking, utilizing instead the mind's ability to leap, to follow fictional highways to real destinations..." (*Journal of Canadian Poetry* Vol. 4, p.1)

A few days after bpNichol's death, in an attempt to cope with the intense grief so many of us felt, Barrie's friend and fellow Horseman, Steve McCaffery, remarked that a recently launched Russian spaceship had just radioed back to earth to report that it had spotted a two hundred and fifty pound spirit floating about in Cloudbottom. The image we all envisioned was not irreverent or incongruous; on the contrary it captured perfectly the essence of what Nichol himself said of his own mythology: "...when the text closes, it continues to evolve in the mind of the reader tho it is over for the writer. This text has not closed. I continue to read it and write it and it continues to revolve & evolve." (*Paths*, 91) In "Hour 1" of the "Book of Hours" Nichol refers to *The Martyrology* as a "continual" poem, which means, as Roy Miki, the editor of *Tracing the Paths* so aptly put it, that "it has taken on a life analogous to the writer's, and even more, a life that is likely to endure longer than its (mortal) creator." (*Paths*, 15)

This is where the poem begins.

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N.B.; An earlier and shorter version of this essay appeared in *Open Letter* (Seventh Series, No. 8: Summer 1990).

## CAMAÏEU POLAIRE par Huguette Turcotte

L'univers cerclé et concave se dissout dans son iris éteint,  
Moire des veilles, coupole univalve des retrouvailles nivelées.  
Le globe antarctique entier se referme, oeil-huitre,  
Blanc sur blanc dans la nacre de son crâne-oeuf.  
Imagerie fantasque et sérielle des confusions déracinées,  
Les fourmis du silence glissent à ses tempes bombées  
En décrivant l'ellipse incommensurable des pôles aplatis.

Des empereurs manchots tirent des traîneaux de glace,  
Formes usées de marées polies au galbe de l'arrêt,  
Implacables catafalques des narvals moribonds,  
Roides dans le plastique des mouvements solidifiés.  
De fuyantes dimensions bifurquent sur l'horizon fermé,  
Relief cru sans espace, sépulture sans profondeur.  
Pas un cri ne gerce la placidité des froides funérailles.

Le temps s'est arrêté, nocturne, sigle fossile des banquises,  
Procession atavique d'un lent présent disloqué.  
La terre révolue hiberne à toujours, tête en bas,  
Nuque gelée à l'égalité des regards figés d'entre-tombe.  
Les conquérants d'Amérique et les pêcheurs de perles  
N'ont jamais existé aux mémoires colossales  
Des icebergs omniscients et trapus, conscience évidée.

Monde orbital sans gravitation, tu es, et nous, contre je,  
Verre soufflé à vide, sans buée ni cerne, irrespirable,  
Inattaquable aux raillures des ongles-obsession.  
Cinq dents d'ivoire se heurtent à un sein d'albâtre,  
Suspendu, pendule arrêté, buste inhumain décapité.  
Des lèvres crispées à un néant parallèle  
Prononcent la dyslexie muette des angouisses pivotantes.

Avec la pâle discrétion des morts-nés, inaltérables,  
Nous taisons les coordonnées de nos immuables non-retours  
Dans le centroïde vide et intact d'un cyclope effroi.  
Illettrés des espaces curvilignes et coits d'une nudité statique,  
Gymnastes accomplis des immobiles caprices de la dérouté,  
Nous apprenons la fadeur des éternités instantanées.  
Nous sommes ternes et géants, statuesques dans nos gestes nains.

Vous écumez les espérances d'une génération sans mutation.  
Les anguilles ont blanchi aux trop incertaines Atlantides  
Alors que de vagues dérives viraient l'actualité des croyances,  
Moelle amère étranglée au cirque lisse de la déconvenue,  
Oubli paradisiaque des poissons reptiles et millénaires  
Quand les grands fauves rompus n'ont plus à se délecter  
Des lymphes plastifiées qui nous servent désormais de territoire.

L'huile froide des insomnies qui dégorge se répand,  
Hypondrie paralysante de vos somnolents engloutissements.  
Vingt siècles bossus hissent leurs mufles fumants de lions de mer  
Dans ce bestiaire insolite de veillées creuses qui durent...  
Vous ignorez la rondeur des hantises, engelures de l'être.  
Enfant-monstre, vous avez brisé le plexus polaire, césure-miroir,  
Et les échos fragmentés sont piégés comme les virgules du froid.

Le soufre froid des nausées a fui d'une bulle de plexiglas  
Rebondie comme votre incrédulité quand vous aplatissez le temps  
Et les ombres repues de vertiges sont devenues hypodermiques.  
Vous m'avez rendue muette, momie-témoin, souche-araignée.  
Jumelle d'avatar démembré, sosie d'une peur glacée, je suis.  
Plus neutre que mortelle, vivante a n'en plus dormir, je suis.  
A la septième porte cochère, j'endosserai le veuvage des vaincus.



# GRAMMATRICAL SABOTAGE: CONVERSING WITH FRANK ZAPPA'S *THING-FISH*<sup>1</sup> by jwcurry

## 1: Ow!

One of the characteristics of Zappa's lyric writing is a theory of excess that results in dramatic (& often criticized) verbal confrontations.

These confrontations occur on both formal & contentual levels.

Formally, an abundance of multiple entendres, generosity toward slang & a severely parodic nature provide a linguistic framework guaranteed to make the avid academic shudder in the shoes.

Contentually, no subject is spared, not even Zappa (as evidenced by the reworking of *The Torture Never Stops* into *The "Torchum" Never Stops*<sup>2</sup>).

This spirit of excess ordinarily manifests itself in controlled doses, ranging from, say, the incidental "Help me!"s in *Billy The Mountair*<sup>3</sup> (tonally quoted from the film *The Fly*<sup>4</sup>) to the flagrant conclusion of *Evelyn, A Modified Dog*<sup>5</sup>.

Evelyn, a dog, having undergone  
Further modification  
Pondered the significance of short-person behavior  
In pedal-depressed panchromatic resonance  
And other highly ambient domains . . .

Arf she said

In *Thing-Fish*, however, subtlety in all its forms is tossed out the window in favour of all-out extravagance. *Thing-Fish* is, perhaps unarguably, the most lyrically excessive title Zappa has released to date. Its excesses could very well have engendered reviews such as the one proposed by its Evil Prince:<sup>6</sup>

I'll say it's disgusting, atrocious, and dull  
I'll say it makes boils inside of your skull  
I'll say it's the worst-of-the-worst of the year,  
No wind down the plain, and it's hard on your ear  
I'll say it's the work of an infantile mind  
I'll say that it's tasteless, and that you will find  
A better excuse to spend money or time  
At a Tupper-Ware Party

The Evil Prince's rant ("a special review I've been saving for years for a show just like this") summarizes quite accurately what most listeners' responses would be like after a surface listen (though "dull" doesn't strike me as appropriate). I confess that my first few listens failed to intrigue me beyond an interest in the dialect constructed for *Thing Fish* (the character/narrator) & the recontextualization of songs lifted from other albums (8 of the 22 "songs" have appeared elsewhere in variant versions<sup>7</sup>). Repeated listenings, though, have me convinced that *Thing-Fish* is a piece crucial to any attempt at arriving at any conclusions about Zappa's work. While the material may be slightly less musically complex than his other 1984 releases (*Them Or Us*<sup>8</sup> & *The Perfect Stranger*<sup>9</sup>), lyrically it's a highly sophisticated web of referentiality that manages, despite its endlessness of tangents & occupation of several simultaneous time-zones, to tell a story.

## 2: The Story

*Thing-Fish* is, at base, a Broadway musical within a Broadway musical. Harry and Rhonda, an entirely superficial couple, go to the theatre to take in some "Real Broadway Entertainment". The curtain opens to reveal the narrator, Thing Fish; a male Aunt Jemima with a huge potato head, talking shoes & "incomprehensible duck lips". Thing Fish gives an account of the story so far, introduces the cast of Mammy Nuns, then encourages them to piss all over the front row, driving away the first-nighters, leaving only Harry & Rhonda, loath to leave "at these ticket prices".

Harry & Rhonda thence take part in an enforced audience participation as the story takes us on a ride of governmental atrocity: the "systematic genocidal remove'lance" of "homosexuals" & "severely tanned individj'lls" from the American Way Of Life,<sup>10</sup> a plan lorded over by the Evil Prince. Along the way, we visit all manner of uniquely American locales: the Mudd Club (a new wave dance dive), The Quentin Robert De Nameland Video Chapel Of Economic Worship, The Alladin Hotel in "Las Vagrus Nevadruh", the Hawaiian Lunch truckstop, a cardboard nativity box on an unknown Italian's front lawn somewhere in New Jersey<sup>11</sup> &, repeatedly, Broadway.

As the story progresses, the characters regress even further from reality than they already are. Harry becomes a cretinously-costumed joyboy, drooling over the Mammy Nun Sister Ob'dewlla "X" & its tiny mandolin, while Harry-As-A-Boy plooks Artificial Rhonda, a blow-up plastic replica of the "real" Rhonda, herself revealed as the (hopeless) militant feminist she thinks she is. The Evil Prince, as a result of a detrimental diet, mutates into a Mammy Nun himself. The closing scene finds everyone living down to their potential in typical Broadway pomp:<sup>12</sup>

The MAMMIES dance tangos with the ZOMBIES, (eventually hurling them offstage), the EVIL PRINCE corn-holes RHONDA (who doesn't even notice as she waves her magic-wand fountain pen around for HARRY to follow), THING-FISH snatches up THE CRAB-GRASS BABY and OB'DEWLLA (one in each hand), shaking them like maracas, while twirling-dancing around the yard, HARRY-AS-A-BOY and the ARTIFICIAL RHONDA re-appear, chasing after the infant, QUENTIN ROBERT DE NAMELAND corn-holes BROWN MOSES. OPAL rides the bull while FRANCESCO gives her an enema. The nativity box rotates erratically, delivering DUTCH MIDGETS who offer onions to the audience.

The scene is so excessively bad, only the onions can save the day.

## 3: Zappa's Thing For Fish

...I'd like to invite each and every one of you to fantasize along with me this evening that, in some small way, the process of performing this show will rid you of your own personal demon, whatever it is that's just bothering the shit out of you this year. Just... just... you know what I mean? Because, you guys in New York should know more than anybody else in the world that the only way that you're ever going to make it through life without going completely crazy is by finding some one or some thing to say "Fuck You!" to. See? Now, in the past, in the past, many governments and religious leaders have paraphrased that expression in such a way as to make a certain religious or political or ethnic minority the victim of their cruel disregard. But today it's the time for the people who have been the victims of that cruel disregard to turn around and disregard something else. So, have a good time...

The entire cast of *Thing-Fish* practices this disregard with absolute relish but none with quite so much aplomb as *Thing Fish* himself.

These levels of disregard exist within the boundaries of the musical but they're also engendered beyond those boundaries; that is, the primary audience contained in the play (& the rest of the cast) displays its attitudinal baggage & we, the secondary audience, are provoked into similar immediate reactions. By building an audience into the work, our attention is neatly diverted from linear plot to an awareness of the elaborate polysynchronic structure which, due to the musical necessity of elapsed time, is subverted back into an altered form of narrative. This paradox of the linear as vehicle for the nonlinear is but one of an abundance of devices used to challenge the listeners' disregard.

Julian Colbeck, author of *Zappa A Biography*, has the following perceptions to offer on *Thing-Fish*:<sup>14</sup>

1984 saw the release not only of *The Perfect Stranger* and *Them Or Us*, but also a book *Them Or Us* and a boxed set of records for a musical comedy entitled *Thingfish*. Many of the basic tracks for the latter had been recorded back the previous year.

This is very characteristic of the reactions to *Thing-Fish*: begrudged admission of its existence but little regard for what it is that is existing (not so dissimilar from the general reactions to Zappa himself). Faced with this prevalent attitude, why *not* hand out at least a few deserved "Fuck You!"s?

*Thing-Fish* represents not a few but an endless stream of "Fuck You!"s, varying in intensity from mild linguistic jests ("Hound him mercifullessly"<sup>15</sup>) to outright spite:<sup>16</sup>

ENSEMBLE:  
EAT that PORK!  
EAT that HAM!  
Laugh till ya choke  
On BILLY GRAHAM!

A fine rhyme for a very poor fish.

## 4: Rhymethmic Permuceptacles

*Thing Fish*, superbly voiced, is a contemporary George "Kingfish" Stevens (of the *Amos 'n' Andy* show<sup>17</sup>), elevated to the position of host-with-intent. Since his position of subversive narrator is primarily linguistic (he does have actions to perform but these are predominantly attached to his narratorial activities (as well as only exposed in the accompanying libretto)), the subversion is therefore primarily exposed through formal deviations from "acceptable" speech patterns.

One of the things I've said before in interviews is: "Without deviation (from the norm), 'progress' is not possible."

In order for one to deviate successfully, one has to have at least a passing acquaintance with whatever norm one expects to deviate from. <sup>18</sup>

The common denominators in all characters' deviations are mispronunciation ("zyph'liss"<sup>19</sup>), mis-pre- & suf- fixation ("pre-formnence"<sup>20</sup>) & miscontextualization. Much of this miscontextualization is invisible to the casual viewer because of a tendency to stick to following the surface narrative as a linear route of suggestion indicative of the author's immutable view. The "author's view", though, is as mercurial as our own subjective fictions. In this respect, individual words & phrases can be isolated from the narrative as narratives in themselves, documentaries of the interreferencing inherent in the contexts the word or phrase exists within.

Songs written with one idea in mind have been known to mutate into something completely different if I hear an 'optional vocal inflection' during rehearsal. I'll hear a 'hint' of something (often a mistake) and pursue it to its most absurd extreme.

The 'technical expression' we use in the band to describe this process is: "PUTTING THE EYEBROWS ON IT." This usually refers to vocal parts, although you can put the eyebrows on just about anything.

After "the eyebrows," the ultimate tweeze inflicted on the composition is determining **The Attitude** with which the piece is to be performed. The player is expected to comprehend **The Attitude**, and perform the material with **The Attitude AND The Eyebrows**, consistently, otherwise, to me, the piece sounds 'wrong.'

Since most Americans use a personal version of *eyebrowsage* in their conversational speech, why not include the technique as a 'nuance' in a composition? <sup>21</sup>

Since *Thing-Fish* is, ostensibly, a Broadway show, this catalogue of referents extends to include the visual as well. Thus, Rhonda, exuding

I'm going to put my GLASSES ON, HARRY! I'm going to put my hair up in a BUN! Then, I'm going FUCK FUCK FUCK! Ha-ha-ha-hahhhhh! Look!

during her *Briefcase Boogie*, can be visualized as follows:



There are visualizational instructions scattered throughout the libretto but if you, like me, ordinarily listen to music as a simultaneous focus during some other mundane activities, the libretto is not likely to be turning its own pages as it hovers at eye level in front of you; the image forms from aural stimuli. There is certainly no lack of leaping points.

The lyrics of *Thing-Fish* are very articulate in their misconstructions. During a vocal fill between bars in *The Mammy Nuns*,<sup>23</sup> what sounds like

hoomaninnyhim  
himmaninnyha  
hoomaninnyoomaninnyha

resolves, on closer inspection, to

(Whom a ninny? Him? Him a ninny! Hah!  
Whom a ninny? You'm a ninny! Haw!)

The 2 lines are conversationally inflectional tonally (*sprechstimme*), rhythmically percussive timingly (sound poetry).

If a musical point can be made in a more entertaining way by **saying** a word than by **singing** a word, the **spoken word** will win out in the arrangement—unless a *nonword* or a *mouth noise* gets the point across faster.<sup>24</sup>

In *The Crab-Grass Baby*, "We hear a slow dirge, over which the MAMMIES chant a twisted variation of the syllables being 'sung' by a computer-generated voice."<sup>25</sup> The richly human melody sets an eerily continuous background for the Crab-Grass Baby's first scat phoneticizations to blip across. These resolve into a series of puerilized borrowings from the texts elsewhere in *Thing-Fish*, mixed with clippings from *Lumpy Gravy*<sup>26</sup> & the already puerile *Valley Girl*.<sup>27</sup>

The grammatical systems subjected to mutation are those of both language & music, the 2 notational devices mutually affective in their varying from the norm; an idiosyncrasy applied to one system results in alterations of the other in order to accommodate the change in a sympathetic manner.

There's an assortment of 'stock modules' used in our stage arrangements. It helps if the guys in the band appreciate the musical humor of what's going on. Sometimes they do—and sometimes they don't. (If a guy can't willingly 'put on the lampshade' and play stooge rock, he's probably wrong for the job.)

These 'stock modules' include the "Twilight Zone" texture (which may not be the actual *Twilight Zone* notes, but the same 'texture'), the "Mister Rogers" texture, the "Jaws" texture, the Lester Lanin texture, Jan Garber-ism, and things that sound either exactly like or very similar to "Louie Louie."

Those are Archetypal American Musical Icons, and their presence in an arrangement puts a spin on any lyric in their vicinity. When present, these modules 'suggest' that you interpret those lyrics within parentheses.

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All characters in *Thing-Fish* are analogous to sociologically parenthesized speech patterns. The manipulations are clearly demonstrated by the Evil Prince's fall from pestilential verbosity (see his review of *Thing-Fish* above) to a slipshod vernacular:<sup>29</sup>

EVIL PRINCE:

Sho' nuff! Um-hmm! Yeah! You a WISE ol' MAMMY! Where you fum, 'rijnyly? \

THING-FISH:

Why...uh...SAINT LOOMIS!

EVIL PRINCE:

Goddam! I knew it! I knew it! I could jes' make it out from yo' renunciation!

Within the characterizationally archetypal linguistic contexts established in *Thing-Fish* (& given the grammatical accuracy of the staging directions), it is the manipulation of both conventional & argotic language which exposes the intrigues lurking as subtext. Every possible absurdity is readable into (out of) the text. It is a matter of multiple-exposures going both ways, from text to reader, reader to text; the more the exchange, the more the change to mime & reader.

#### 5: Earbrowsage

Words rarely mean what they purport to on the surface. What happens when words are written for (& sometimes from) the mouths of others? When characters are created to speak them? When attitudes are constructed to contextualize them?

Zappa is an observer, a funnel with a filter translating everything that passes through it into music. *Thing-Fish* is a stupid show about stupid people doing stupid things for stupid reasons in stupid settings. It is anthropologically intelligent in its evocation of stupidity. It is literarily soluble to a head not drowning in brain sand & a patience unrebelling at repeated antagonisms.

The density of information consumable from it prevents me from even wanting to come to any kind of conclusions about it as a whole (an exercise similar to attempting a brief synopsis of *200 Motels* (the movie,<sup>30</sup> not the record<sup>31</sup>), a questionable form of entertainment outside the privacy of one's home. Rather I'd like to keep it personal & in flux, an extremely thick layering of inferrals my ears can browse through without stricture.

Rich on many levels of experience, *Thing-Fish*, calculatedly easy to ignore, is not a work to be ignorant of.

Stupidity has a certain charm—ignorance does not.



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jwcurry  
toronto '89

#### 6: Some Garnish

1. *THING-FISH*, "Original Cast Recording". EMI, 1984. a 3-record boxed set with 16-page libretto. Rereleased on compact disc by Rykodisc, 1986, slightly revised.



The cast:

Thing Fish — Ike Willis  
Harry — Terry Bozzio  
Rhonda — Dale Bozzio  
Evil Prince — Napoleon Murphy Brock  
Harry-As-A-Boy — Bob Harris  
Brown Moses — Johnny Guitar Watson  
Owl-Gonkwin-Jane Cowhoon — Ray White

The musicians:

Jay Anderson — string bass  
Arthur Barrow — bass  
Ed Mann — percussion  
Tommy Mars — keyboards  
Scott Thunes — bass  
Steve Vai — guitar  
Chad Wackerman — drums  
Ray White — guitar  
Chuck Wild — broadway piano  
Frank Zappa — guitar & synclavier  
Prosthetics by Jene Omens, costumery by Robert Fletcher, photographs by Ladi Von Jansky (pictured are Thing Fish & Sister "Ob'Dewila 'X'")



- 2 *The Torture Never Stops* was first released on *Zoot Allures* (Warner Brothers, 1976, rereleased in *The Old Masters Box Three*, Barking Pumpkin Records, 1987<sup>33</sup>). The only other legitimate<sup>34</sup> variation occurs on the double CD *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol. 1* (Rykodisc, 1988) & its vinyl companion *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Sampler* (Zappa Records, 1988), a live recording, with extra bridgework, from Numberberg, 1977. The "Torchem" *Never Stops*, musically similar, is vastly different lyrically as a result of its place in *Thing-Fish's* narrative & the minor changes made to accommodate that contextual shift. The primary difference between the 2 versions is the addition of the Evil Prince's monologue (to cheesy piano accompaniment) before the last verse.<sup>35</sup>
- 3 from *Just Another Band From L.A.*, Bizarre/Reprise, 1972, rereleased in *The Old Masters Box Two*, Barking Pumpkin Records, 1986. Billy is one of Zappa's first ventures into extended musical narrative, filling a 24-minute side of the record & paving the way for further such adventures (eg. *Nanook Rubs It*,<sup>36</sup> *Greggery Peccary*,<sup>37</sup> *Joe's Garage*<sup>38</sup> & *Thing-Fish*). "Soon, the booth was filling with flies."
- 4 *The Fly*, 1958, screenplay by James Clavell, directed by Kurt Neumann, starring Al Hedison, Patricia Owens & Vincent Price. Remade in 1987, with screenplay by director David Cronenberg & starring Geena Davis & Jeff Goldblum, the powerful "Help me!" scene was ignored, one of the few points where this film intersects with the original short story by George Langelaan.<sup>39</sup> In Langelaan's *The Fly*, the fly is lost all but momentarily & no "Help me!"s occur, Andre able to emit only "a strange metallic sigh", the only sound we hear from either mutation.
- 5 from *One Size Fits All*, DiscReet Records, 1975, rereleased in *The Old Masters Box Three* & on CD by Rykodisc, late '80s.
- 6 from the Evil Prince's "What happened to Broadway?" monologue in *The "Torchem" Never Stops*.
- 7 besides "Torchem", the following pieces have been revamped:
- Galoot Up-Date*, completely reworked text out of *The Blue Light*<sup>40</sup> with only the vocal counterpoints remaining the same or similar. Some of the narrated segments were later recontextualized yet again as part of the electric bridge in the musique concrete composition *Porn Wars*.<sup>41</sup>
  - You Are What You Is*,<sup>42</sup> basically intact with added vocal counterpoint to the first section.
  - Mudd Club*,<sup>42</sup> also intact but for minor textual changes to accommodate Thing Fish's speech patterns.
  - The Meek Shall Inherit Nothing*,<sup>42</sup> ditto notes to *Mudd Club*.
  - Artificial Rhonda*, a complete lyrical overhaul of *Ms. Pinky*<sup>43</sup> with a new chorus & 2 additional verses.
  - No Not Now*,<sup>44</sup> intact but with completely reworked between-the-lines commentary. It also provides the base for
  - Won Ton On*<sup>45</sup> (*No Not Now* backwards with some additional instrumentation), Thing Fish's vocal insertions differing substantially from Johnny Guitar Watson's scattered emissions.
- 8 Barking Pumpkin Records, 1984, rereleased on CD by Rykodisc, 1986. Mainly an electric orientation with emphases on seamless vocal harmonies & complex instrumental virtuosity.
- 9 Angel, 1984. 2 instrumental paths are followed: 1/2 of this is scored for chamber orchestra & performed by Pierre Boulez' *Ensemble Intercontemporain*, the other 1/2 is electronic & electro-acoustic music performed by Zappa's Barking Pumpkin Digital Gratification Consort.<sup>46</sup>
- 10 A.W.O.L.
- 11 The unknown Italian is revealed as "Francesco" in the libretto. In Zappa's *Them Or Us (The Book)*,<sup>47</sup> he is further identified as Francesco Zappa,<sup>48</sup> the unknown Italian composer (1763-1788), who plays a major part in the book.
- 12 from the libretto, *Thing-Fish*.
- 13 from a monologue by Zappa occurring at the end of *Packard Goose*,<sup>49</sup> the lyrics of which open:

Maybe you thought I was the Packard Goose  
Or the Ronald MacDonald of the nouveau-abstruse  
Well fuck all them people. I don't need no excuse  
For being what I am

- 14 Julian Colbeck, *Zappa A Biography*, London, Virgin Books, 1987, p. 183.
- 15 spoken by Rhonda in *The Massive Improve'lence*.
- 16 from *The Meek Shall Inherit Nothing*.
- 17 a comedy show begun in 1928 by Charles Correll & Freeman Godson (sp?) as a radio version of *The Gumps*.<sup>50</sup> The Gumps became *Sam 'n' Henry* &, as a result of a network change a short while later, *Amos 'n' Andy*. Sometime in the '50s, a television version, with Tim Moore as Kingfish, was aired. Moore's Kingfish is, apparently, the model for Ike Willis' Thing Fish.
- 18 from *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, Frank Zappa with Peter Occhiogrosso, New York, Poseidon Press, 1989, p. 185.
- 19 spoken by Thing Fish in *The Prelude*.
- 20 spoken by the Evil Prince in *Drop Dead*.
- 21 from *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, pp. 163/164.
- 22 Photo by James Baes from *Photo-Fantasy #4* in *Hustler* vol. 10 #10, apr '84. The entire *Briefcase Boogie* scene was presented as *Thing-Fish*, starring Annie Ample as Rhonda.
- 23 An excellent instrumental variation of this piece appears on *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol. 1*, very differently orchestrated.
- 24 from *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, p. 163.
- 25 from the libretto, *Thing-Fish*.
- 26 Verve, 1967, with *The Abnuceals Emuukha Electric Symphony Orchestra & Chorus*,<sup>51</sup> rereleased by Metro Records as *Superstarshine Vol. 26* (early '70s?), in *The Old Masters Box One* &, finally, as part of *We're Only In It For The Money/Lumpy Gravy* on CD by Rykodisc, 1986. Segments of Motorhead Sherwood's monologues have been adapted in a very agile manner.
- 27 by Frank & Moon Unit Zappa, released as a single by Barking Pumpkin Records (backed with *You Are What You Is*) in 1982 & on the album *Ship Arriving Too Late To Save A Drowning Witch*.
- 28 from *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, p. 166.
- 29 from *Drop Dead*.
- 30 MGM, 1971, screenplay by Zappa, directed by Zappa & Tony Palmer, starring the Mothers Of Invention,<sup>52</sup> The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Theodore Bikel, Keith Moon & Ringo Starr, released by MGM/United Artists on videocassette, 1988.
- 31 United Artists, 1971, rereleased by MCA, 1986. From the liner notes:

This music is not in the same order as in the movie. Some of this music is in the movie. Some of this music is not in the movie. Some of the music that's in the movie is not in the album. Some of the music that was written for the movie is not in the movie or the album. All of this music was written for the movie, over a period of 4 years. Some of the situations described in the song texts are real. Some of them are not so real. You decide.

- 32 from *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, p. 241, graphic by "Awest".
- 33 *The Old Masters* series of boxed record/book sets is probably one of the most ambitious rerelease projects the industry has seen (paralleled only by Rykodisc's determination to get it all out on CD as well). So far, 23 records (plus 2 bonus discs of previously unreleased material (plus 3 previously unreleased books)) have been reissued in their corrected original jackets, digitally re-equalized & remastered, with occasional new parts added, in 3 boxes, one a year from 1985-7.
- 34 Of the numerous illegitimate recordings available, the most notable i've so far come across is on the bootleg *A Token Of My Extreme*.<sup>53</sup> Announced as the "world premiere" (a live performance at Claremont College, California, 11'apr'75), the song features Don Van Vliet on vocals & is here titled *Why Doesn't Somebody Get Him A Pepsi?*<sup>54</sup> "In a twisted, deformed way, it's sort of the story of Captain Beefheart's life. If only he could find the words to it."

- 35 The monologue shows up again as *The Evil Prince on You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Sampler*, a richly orchestrated live performance from Vancouver, 18'dec'84.
- 36 First released on *Apostrophe'* (DiscReet, 1974), rereleased in *The Old Masters Box Three* & as part of *Apostrophe'/Overnight Sensation* on CD (Rykodisc, 1986). The narrative includes 4 of the 5 songs occupying side one: *Don't Eat The Yellow Snow*, *Nanook Rubs It*, *St. Alphonzo's Pancake Breakfast* & *Father Oblivion*. A variation of the entire sequence appears on *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore Vol. 1* under the title *Don't Eat The Yellow Snow*, recorded live in London, 18'feb'79, with audience member Angus O'Reilly O'Patrick McGhinty (sp?) reading his poetry, his contribution to "enforced recreation"/audience participation. An excerpt from this under the title *Nanook Rubs It* is on the *Sampler*.
- 37 from *Studio Tan*, DiscReet, 1978.
- 38 Originally released as *Joe's Garage Act I & Joe's Garage Acts II & III* (both from Zappa Records, 1979) & rereleased as *Joe's Garage Acts I, II & III*, a 3-record boxed set with book (also from Zappa Records, CD'd by Rykodisc, both in 1987).
- 39 First (?) published in 1957 (by Curtis Brown Ltd?), reprinted in *Wolf's Complete Book of Terror*, edited by Leonard Wolf (New York, Clarkson N. Potter Inc./Publishers, 1979), no doubt elsewhere as well.
- 40 from *Tinseltown Rebellion*, Barking Pumpkin Records, 1981, rereleased on CD by EMI, 198-?
- 41 from *Frank Zappa Meets The Mothers Of Prevention*, Barking Pumpkin Records, 1985, rereleased with 2 extra tracks (of the 3 that replace *Porn Wars* on the *European Version* (EMI, 1986)) on CD by Rykodisc, 1986. One of these extra tracks, *HR2911* (the one piece not on the CD), is an excerpt from *Porn Wars* with the text removed (re The Blank Tape Tax bill proposed in the United States Senate, 1985, Bill H.R.2911).
- 42 from *You Are What You Is*, Barking Pumpkin Records, 1981.
- 43 from *Zoot Allures*.
- 44 from *Ship Arriving Too Late To Save A Drowning Witch*, Barking Pumpkin Records, 1982, rereleased on CD (with *The Man From Utopia*, Barking Pumpkin Records, 1983) by EMI, 198-?
- 45 from *True Glove*, EMI, 1984, a "4-Track Maxi Single".
- 46 called a Synclavier by its manufacturers.
- 47 North Hollywood, Barking Pumpkin Press, 1984. *Thing-Fish* comprises chapters 9-11 (of 11 chapters). From the Foreword:

This cheesy little home-made book was prepared for the amusement of people who already enjoy Zappa Music. It is not for intellectuals or other dead people.

It is designed to answer one of the more troubling questions related to conceptual continuity: "How do all these things that don't have anything to do with each other fit together, forming a larger absurdity?"

- 48 Zappa released Zappa's *The Music Of Francesco Zappa* through Barking Pumpkin Records, 1984. Performed by the *Barking Pumpkin Digital Gratification Ensemble*, it is "His First Digital Recording In Over 200 Years".
- 49 While *Packard Goose* first appeared in *Joe's Garage Act III*, the monologous version referred to here appeared on *Show And Tell*, a bootleg of live & radio material circa 1973/4, issued singly & in *20 Years Of Frank Zappa*, a 12-record boxed collection of bootleg material compiled by Ferdinand Durst & itself reissued numerous times, apparently often accompanied by a book (?).
- 50 A comic strip devised in 1917 by Joseph Patterson, written & drawn by Sidney Smith (& later by Gus Edson, retaining Smith's crudity), featuring Andy & Min Gump. "Gump" was Patterson's word for "idiot".
- 51 The first orchestra (ignoring his work on the films *Run Home Slow*<sup>55</sup> & *The World's Greatest Sinner*<sup>56</sup> & early orchestral experiments<sup>57</sup>) Zappa worked with. *Lumpy Gravy* itself is a reworking of themes from *We're Only In It For The Money*<sup>58</sup> & *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*<sup>59</sup> with considerable extratextual material woven into the fabrication.
- 52 In this incarnation: Jimmy Carl Black, George Duke, Aynsley Dunbar, Howard Kaylan, Martin Lickert, Jim Pons, Ian Underwood, Mark Volman, Frank Zappa & numerous auxiliary members.
- 53 Released separately & as part of *The History And Collected Improvisations Of Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention*, a 10-record boxed set of early recordings along with a book, *Ten Years On The Road With Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention*, a collection of articles & photographs. This should not be confused with 2 other bootlegs, both titled *A Token Of His Extreme*, one of which was released separately, the other as part of another 10-record set, *Mystery Box*, both of which are different edits from the KCET-TV Zappa special, dec'74, which makes up part of *The Dub Room Special*, a 1 1/2 hour video privately issued by Zappa in 1982.
- 54 p. 37, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*:

Every once in a while Don would scream at his mother (always in a blue chenille bathrobe), "Sue! Get me a Pepsi!" There was **nothing** else to do in Lancaster.

- 55 Written in 1959 by Don Cerveris, Zappa's high school english teacher, & scored by Zappa, "a super-cheap cowboy movie" starring Mercedes McCambridge released in 1963.<sup>60</sup> Excerpts appear on the bootleg *The Soundtracks*, released separately & as part of *20 Years Of Frank Zappa*.
- 56 1961, written by Tim Carey & scored by Zappa, music performed by the Pomona Valley Symphony Orchestra, Paul Frees, narrator.<sup>60</sup> Excerpts appear on the bootleg *Serious Music*, ICA Masterworks, 1985(?).
- 57 In 1963, at St. Mary's College in Claremont, California, Zappa presented an evening of "experimental music", including orchestral & prepared tape pieces. Some of this material is available on numerous bootlegs, the cleanest versions probably to be found on *Return Of The Son Of Serious Music* in *Mystery Box*.
- 58 Verve, 1968, rereleased in *The Old Masters Box One* & as part of *We're Only In It For The Money/Lumpy Gravy* on CD, Rykodisc, 1986. "Is this phase one of Lumpy Gravy?"
- 59 Bizarre/Reprise, 1970, rereleased in *The Old Masters Box Two*.
- 60 Has anyone actually *seen* this film? Or, stretching a hope to its limits, has anyone a copy (or access to one) in some form? Write c/o Rampike ...

#### 7: Germane Extranea

- Håkon Busterud (with Tor Jan Haugland, Knut Ole Rosted & Jakob Sandøy), *The Unofficial Guide To The Alternative Records Of Frank Zappa*. Oslo, Frank Zappa Society, 1987.
- Dominique Chevalier, *Viva Zappa!*, translated by Matthew Screech. 1st english edition, London, Omnibus Press, 1986.
- Dennis Gifford, *The International Book Of Comics*. New York, Crescent Books, 1984.
- Leonard Maltin (editor), *TV Movies And Video Guide 1987 Edition*. New York, New American Library, 1987.
- William Ruhlmann, *Frank Zappa: Moving On To Phase Three*, in *Goldmine* vol. 15 #2, edited by Jeff Tamarkin. Iola, Krause Publications, 1989. An interview & bibliographical article.
- Frank Zappa, *Interview Picture Disc*. CD edition with extra interview, London, Baktabak, 1984(?). Interviewers not identified.
- Frank Zappa Discography*, press release, Barfko-Swill, 1988.
- The Story Of Amos & Andy*, cassette bootleg of a radio broadcast, 14'feb'53.

**BOOKS IN REVIEW:** *Rampike* continues its policy of reviewing small and large press books, as well as those we feel have not yet received sufficient attention (regardless of when they were published). Many more articles will appear in the next issue of *Rampike*.

*Water Street Days* by David Donnell, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1989.

The poetic voice of David Donnell is neither aggressive nor explosive. It is, instead, persistent and persuasive. The shocks hidden in this book are shocks of recognition as opposed to outrage. And the variety of technique is so clearly attached to the purposes of the voice that *Water Street Days* could be exhibited as a self-explanatory lesson in poetics.

Though Donnell always remains within reach of his left margin, he obviously has no fear of the range of locations that a page can provide for words and lines. He uses the entirety of the page with economy and precision. The dominant voice of the text shifts with confidence, giving itself over to a variety of characters, times, and places without ever surrendering final control. The coherence of *Water Street Days* is never in question, in spite of the fact that the poems and short stories often seem unrelated.

What finally, almost lazily comes into focus is a single chronology, dreamlike, and only fragmentary on its surface. The individual poems and stories are all rewarding, but a much greater pleasure is to be derived from the book as a unity. — Jim Francis

*Malcolm and Madame X* by Bradley Lastname, The Press of the Third Mind, 65 East Scott Street, Chicago, Illinois 60610. \$3.95 U.S.

Bradley Lastname is his own worst enemy. In *Malcolm and Madame X* the author's absurd wit comes perilously close to sabotaging an inventive and sophisticated text. The broad humour — irreverent, scatological, sexual — often overwhelms the more subtle subject matter. And the "bargain basement" appearance of the book does little to encourage close reading. But this book deserves and rewards a close reading, even a second reading.

Siamese twins, a prehensile phallus, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, finger graft operations, P.T. Barnum, true or false tests, Lamarckian evolutionary theory — in Bradley Lastname's bizarre text all of these things come to seem related. More importantly, these disparate elements tell a tragi-comic tale that explores technique and process as it sends the reader's imagination through improbable and very amusing hoops.

The ending of the book, like much of the text, begs to be dismissed as a cheap joke. In fact it offers a key to the forces at work in *Malcolm and Madame X*. The last two pages are covered with a complex and incomprehensible mathematical equation that purports to answer the question "Who Killed Malcolm X?". This 'pataphysical subversion, though seemingly meaningless, actually summarizes a diffuse and nearly intangible assertion buried within the technique of the text. The associative "slip" required by the humour of those last two pages constitutes an ethical assertion. The text is anti-linear and anti-pedantic, and it manages to illustrate its own argument via the techniques it is promoting. — Jim Francis

*Gaga* by Olafur Gunnarsson, translated from the Icelandic by David McDuff, Penumbra Press, Kapuskasing, 1988.

Olafur Gunnarsson's 68 page novella begins with a disorienting jolt: an "astronaut" falls asleep in Reykjavik and wakes up on Mars. This aggressive opening is, however, undermined by the preliminary labelling of the hero as "crazy". The title "Gaga" could refer to something other than the protagonist, and in fact the text raises a number of possible interpretations for the title. But the title and the opening scene of the book combine to suggest a traditional literary depiction of madness. This is unfortunate, for *Gaga* is interested in much more than this.

The book poses as realism at the outset, with the reader assumed sane and in opposition to the obvious "insanity" of the weak-minded protagonist who cannot distinguish between art and life. (This latter aspect of the "astronaut's" character is the occasion for some misleading humour: there is wit in the text but the overall effect is dark toned.) By the end of *Gaga*, however, we are not so certain that the title refers to the protagonist. What really comes into question is the sanity of a text culture that conventionalizes "realism" to the point where insanity is communicated via a few clichéd gestures.

The merging or inverting of textual and concrete worlds is not an unprecedented theme: Cervantes (Don Quixote), Voltaire (Candid), Conrad (Lord Jim) etc. After all, the two worlds are so tangled together, the textual supplying ever more of our perception of the real, that "realism" in literature is mostly mimicry of a reality already heavily textualized. Confusing the two as Gunnarsson's "astronaut" does is all but inevitable — for the sane as well as the "gaga". So the hero of *Gaga* believes he is moving around in a simulated Earth city on the red planet of John Carter where he confronts creatures from Edgar Rice Burroughs and Zamyatin. The author's choice of classical science fiction references situates us in a literary time warp as well as in a reality "glitch" — the anachronism isolating the island/isn'tland (Iceland) and its solitary space traveller even further, and increasing the desolation of the tale. (The illustrations by Judy Penman are a perfect compliment to the story: black-and-white etchings like fingernails scratching on a blackboard, and equally traumatizing to the nervous system.) The overall effect (visual and verbal) is alternately amusing and jarring. — Mark Kemp

*But But* by Kate Van Dusen, Underwhich Editions, P.O. Box 262, Adelaide St. Stn., Toronto, Ontario, M5C 2J4.

Kate Van Dusen's *But But* consists of 48 post-modern sonnets. A premise like that is an attention grabber, and Van Dusen knows what to do once she has a reader's attention. The texts are witty explorations of the tensions between sex, love, language, and censorship. And the device of her book is deceptively simple. Each of the "sonnets" contains 12 lines that describe sexual acts in explicit detail — with all of the key words left out. The last two lines of each sonnet are cribbed from the "great" sonnets of classical poetry.

*But But* begins with two epigrams, one from Byron and one from Bill C-54. The message is clear: pornography is in the mind of the beholder. Kate Van Dusen's book contains not a single word that should embarrass or outrage fundamentalist fascists. But that is, of course, exactly what it would do. Not only does *But But* manage to assault censorship head on, it also illustrates how futile censorship is. Perhaps most satisfying of all is the fact that Kate Van Dusen's book synthesizes all of the things that language poetry can be. Word play (frequently hilarious word play!) is used to provoke the reader's engagement with the text — and here the text operates as a metonymic representation of social reality.

*But But* is the best sort of language oriented writing possible — relevant, witty, provocative, persuasive and, best of all, accessible. — Jim Francis

*Empty Sky Go On Unending* by Marjory Smart, Aya Press, Box 1153, Station F, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2T8.

The best poems in Marjory Smart's *Empty Sky Go On Unending* combine technique and subject matter into a seamless whole. Detail of description, acknowledgement of language as part of the inevitable subject of poetry, rhythm and graphology, a conscience unwilling to accept self-serving answers — all of these admirable qualities are present. And when all of these qualities come together, the result is startling. However, the best poems in this collection suffer for keeping company with lesser textual entities. Sometimes placement of words appears to be nothing but a meaningless attempt at visual variety. Sometimes the descriptions are distracting. Sometimes the voice is too comfortable.

Still, this is a matter of percentages rather than yet another "promising" poetic voice. "Maturity" is not what is missing here. What is needed is simply a very fine tuning that would bring the entirety of the book into sharper focus. — Jim Francis

*South of Queen Street* by Jones and *Precision Vacuum* by Lauren Boyington, Streetcar Editions, Box 794, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2Z1.

Streetcar Editions bows in with two chapbooks that do what chapbooks are supposed to do — make you want more. Jones' *South of Queen Street* contains five short fictions set in Mexico. The language is dry and cynical, but the stories contain a hidden compassion for their characters. Lauren Boyington's *Precision Vacuum* contains fourteen short prose pieces. The urban landscape motivates quick, sharp explorations of alienation and the contradictions of behaviour and consciousness. — Jim Francis

1984; *The Summer of Hate* by Jim Martin, Flatland, P.O. Box 2420, Fort Bragg, CA 95437. \$5.00 US.

Jim Martin's 1984; *The Summer of Hate* is billed as an "autofiction". An "autofiction" — insofar as it can be defined via the contents of the book — is part autobiography, part confessional, part lyric poetry, part cultural anthropology, and part political didacticism. I'm quite certain I've failed to identify other parts. More to the point, this is an excellent book. Martin uses whatever techniques he needs in an attempt to pull the avant-garde out of tired establishment bashing and towards relevant political action.

1984; *The Summer of Hate* centres on the Democratic Party National Convention in San Francisco in the Summer of 1984. It is the account of a search for a way out of convenient political pessimism and towards political action more significant than polite exercises in marching with placards. As a book it is inconsistent. However, it seems unlikely that Jim Martin would care very much about that. It is provocative writing, writing in which the technique knows its own politics, but still writing that is very human and accessible. Relevant not fashionable, and proof that self-conscious writing needn't be narcissistic. — Jim Francis



*Women for all Seasons* edited by Wanda Coleman and Joanne Leedom-Ackerman. The Woman's Building, 1727 North Spring Street, Los Angeles, California, 90012. \$8.00 U.S.

This anthology of women's poetry and prose presents the reader with a diverse collection of works — works which explore the myriad of relationships that provide a focus for women's lives. Its approach is traditional and conservative; the title alludes to a work that deals quite distinctly with the vision and determination of "The Common Man", a distinctly patriarchal hero. The echo implies a casting-off of the masculine world, but its dependence upon a masculine allusion contradicts the overt perspective.

A few pieces stand out, most notably *still life with writing* by Debra Pearlstein ("he asks me if I'm still writing .../ sure I'm still writing .../ still writing bad checks./ still writing shopping lists/ still writing nightmare scenarios/ where I'm forty and alone./ or dying and alone ... still writing prescriptions for morphine./ still writing letters to Santa Claus"); *For The New Bard* by Lisa Teasley ("someone scrawled the news/ with a rude hand —/ "Black Woman is Allah."/ I laugh each time I pass/ because pride is better/ than self-pity./ Forced to crown our own heads./ I say, Fuck every living martyr."); and *New Bride* by Cecilia Woloch ("Not eternal love, no way to fix it... When he was gone, she lacked something to knock up against. The damage she did to the doorways set them back years. The fire seemed rootless.") The common element between these three writings is a passionate sensuality (indeed a passion and an anger that probe and linger, that tear apart, and threaten to break out of the fairly rote structure). The poems in this collection refuse to subvert traditional writing technique.

Few references to culture or colour resonate in this collection; they are almost token, an afterthought. What we are left with is not a sense of exhilaration or the hope of a new construction, but rather a vague sense of frustration, a promise anticipating fulfillment. — Carol J. Anderson

*The Efficiency of Killers* by Ian McCulloch. Penumbra Press, 7 Aurora Street, Kapuskasing, Ontario, Canada P5N 1J6. 72pp. \$9.95

Ian McCulloch's collection of poems is a contribution to the eternal poetic questioning of the conflicts between childhood and adulthood, nature and humanity — the natural at war with the unnatural. Through various breathless, snapshot angles, we are invited to reminisce, to mull over the universal themes and actions and situations of childhood and "maturity". Unrelenting analysis of the connection between reason, action and form (both literal and metaphorical) is occasionally obtrusive; the images are most striking when presented clearly and without omnipotent interruption: "The holiday was camping/ in the river country because/ they had heard it was beautiful/ and for so long he had listed/ hiking as a hobby/ on job applications/ just to fill the line." The poet succeeds in pulling together a tangible microcosm of humanity, and the generally effective use of the destructive and redemptive forces of nature as metaphor succeed in uniting a potentially disparate collection. McCulloch is an accomplished lyric poet, but the force of his poetry could only be enhanced by challenging the reader with more sophisticated technique. — Carol J. Anderson

Sam Solecki's critical study *Prague Blues* on the fiction of Nobel Prize nominee Josef Skvorecky is a long awaited analysis of one of the masters of twentieth century fiction. Solecki's highly-informed examination includes substantial biographical background (in spite of Solecki's own modest hesitation to speak authoritatively on Skvorecky). The book provides valuable insight not only to Skvorecky's writing, but also to his activity in publishing other Czech writers. *Prague Blues* includes individual and comprehensive studies on the major works of Skvorecky including *The Cowards*, *The Bass Saxophone*, *The Engineer of Human Souls* and *Dvorak in Love* among others. Solecki's analysis considers the politics and anti-politics of Skvorecky's fiction as a form of social critique which satirizes the ironic conditions of life under various totalitarian regimes. Solecki comments on the comic craft of Skvorecky's fiction and its impotent role in Eastern and Central European literature. Solecki, who, like Skvorecky, teaches English at the University of Toronto, has written numerous studies on Canadian, British and European literature. He takes into account some of the effects of Skvorecky's move from Czechoslovakia to Canada including the fact that Skvorecky's work has had to be translated from Czech into English. Solecki's sensitivity to the original Czech language is particularly helpful. This is an essential study of a major writer. The intensive research and thought that has been given to Skvorecky in *Prague Blues* cannot be given the careful attention it deserves in this very brief review. This book will be of great interest to fans, social theorists and literary scholars alike. Solecki's vigorous style breathes life into this multi-faceted and meticulous study. Artfully printed by the Porcupine's Quill. [Published by: ECW Press, 307 Coxwell Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4L 3B5, ISBN 1-55022-108-6]. — Karl Jirgens.

Michel Gay's *Calculus* is a collection of poems from 1978 to 1986. The collection includes an amalgam of prose-poems, minimalist texts, and sinewy lyrics. Of special interest are concretizations that include textual manipulations and various graphics including boxes, lines, circles, arrows, and other graphemes. Gay exploits both text and anti-text, glissements in meaning, and ambiguities generated through formal innovations. These texts are calculations based on an equation of a kinetic mind/text interplay. Gay has been an active force in the Montreal publishing scene for roughly fifteen years. Along with Nicole Brossard and Jean Yves Collette, he was a founding member of the highly influential *La Nouvelle Barre du jour*. Together with Claude Beausoleil he has been an active editor on the important periodical *Lèvres Urbaines*. With over nine books to his credit Michel Gay is one of the seminal forces of writing in Quebec. This collection includes a useful mini-biography, and selected bibliography. This is only one of many significant books published by Éditions de l'Hexagone. l'Hexagone's publishing stable reads like a who's who of recent Québec literature including books by authors such as; Anne-Marie Alonzo, Michel Beaulieu, André Beaugrand, Marcel Bélanger, Yves Boisvert, Paul Chamberland, Pierre Des Ruisseaux, Lucien Francoeur, Michel Gameau, Louis Geoffroy, Gilbert Langevin, Fernand Ouellette, and Machine Gun Susie among many others. In French, and of special interest to those who want a representative collection of Gay's writing. [Available through; l'Hexagone, 900, rue Ontario est, Montréal, Québec H2L 1P4 ISBN 2-89006-276-7]. — K. Jirgens

*Hard Times* is a new fiction anthology edited by Bev Daurio. Texts by Ken Harvey, Janis Rapoport, Barbara Carey, Susan Swan, Rikki Ducomet, Ann Diamond, Kritjana Gunnars, Paul Dutton, Gail Scott, Daniel Jones, John Riddell, Gary Barwin, Jwcurry, Stuart Pods Ross, Misha, Michael Dean, C.H. Gervais and Steve McCaffery make up some but not all of the writing in this provocative collection. Founded as AYA Press, Mercury Press under Bev and Don Daurio's editorial direction has consistently presented some of the best new writing available. Past anthologies from Mercury include; *Love and Hunger: An Anthology of New Fiction*, *Vivid: Stories by Five Women*, and *Ink & Strawberries: An Anthology of Quebec Women's Fiction*. In the past Mercury has published writing by; Atwood, Blais, Brossard, Nichol, Rooke, and Scheier, and Tostevin to name only a very few. Mercury's books are always thought provoking, carefully selected and challenging. This collection is no exception. *Hard Times* includes a range of textual innovations that explore a spectrum of forms in some of the most exciting new voices that you are likely to hear anywhere. The thing that all of these writers have in common is an interest in the formal possibilities of language. Further, they are engaged in witty often satiric views of life that range from wry and sophisticated to outlandish and absurd. Mercury's attention to detail is consistent throughout. The layout and design of this perfect-bound book, the sophisticated cover design by the celebrated Gord Robertson, and informative notes on contributors are all part of a total package that is guaranteed to delight and seduce the reader into sampling this eclectic array. This collection points to many possible fictional attacks, and marks a departure from convention. Those who are interested in both fiction and innovation as well as commentary on contemporary writing should have a look at Daurio's *Paragraph* magazine if they haven't already done so. [c/o The Mercury Press, Box 446, Stratford, Ontario, N5A 6T3 Canada (519) 273-7083, ISBN 0-920544-75-4, 168 pages \$12.95]. — K. Jirgens

If you haven't already got a copy of Robert Kroetsch's *Completed Field Notes*, then rush right out and get it before they are all gone. Kroetsch's interview in the last issue of *Rampike* is a good indication of the kinds of concerns that Kroetsch dealt with when writing the long poems collected here. A seminal and important work, *Completed Field Notes* also marks a significant turning point in Kroetsch's career. Kroetsch himself has said that "The account I give myself is that poetry is the absolute confrontation with language —". Years ago, Kroetsch began writing what was to be a life-long, long poem which he then called *Field Notes*. This collection is the compilation of and paradoxical discontinuation of a continuous poem. This collection represents a completed cycle and includes writing from "Stone Hammer Poem," "Seed Catalogue," "The Ledger," "The Sad Phoenixian," "Advice to My Friends," and "Excerpts from the Real World." With this ouroubouro-like text, Kroetsch the trickster, the master of conundrum, does a disappearing act by swallowing his own voice. There is more to come from Kroetsch, but this is essential stuff neatly packaged inside of one cover. [c/o McClelland & Stewart, 481 University Avenue, Suite 900, Ontario, Canada M5G 2E9 (416) 598-1114 ISBN 0-7710-4506-9]. — K. Jirgens



# Press Notice

Image by Guillermo Delsler



Fernando Aguilar concretizes and manipulates texts. He builds installations and organizes conferences in Portugal.

"A" Battery "A" Group works out of Switzerland and consists of Chrig Perren, Manfred Vanci Stimeman and Fritz Vogel. The group has presented their performance work extensively including at the "Inter" festival in Quebec City.

Carol J. Anderson is a Toronto based writer, reviewer and desktop publisher. She is a regular contributor.

Doug Back is a Toronto sculptor who works primarily with kinetic electronic sculpture often with an acoustic element. He teaches at the Ontario College of Art and has shown his work widely. His sculpture has appeared as part of the "Phase Show" along with the work of Norman White and Hu Hohn.

Brigitta Ball currently lives in Toronto. She often writes about her experiences in Hungary prior to moving to Canada.

Wally Keeler helps translate and edit Brigitta's provocative writing.

Rafael Barreto-Rivera is a member of the "Four Horsemen". He has been an active sound poet and textual manipulator for many years and has appeared in performance across North America and Europe.

bill bissett is a sound poet, publisher, musician, painter, and dream visionary living in London, Ontario and Vancouver, B.C.

George Bowering has won Governor General's Awards for both poetry and fiction. We published a portion of his latest book of superlative fiction, *Harry's Fragments*, in a recent issue of this magazine.

Monty Cantolin is the maestro of Neoism, last of the red hot despots of art.

Robert Clayton Casto is a witty writer and thinker who teaches creative writing at York University. He has a special interest in pop iconography and its effects on contemporary culture. Look for more of his work in future issues.

Kevin Connolly is the editor/publisher of *What!* magazine. He also edits "Pink Dog Press" and is a fundamental force in the Toronto literary scene. Kevin writes fiction and criticism and is exceptionally well-informed about contemporary writing.

Elaine L. Corts is a superlative translator and poet living and working in Port Crane, New York. We are pleased to say that Elaine is a regular correspondent with this magazine.

Jwcurry is publisher/editor of "Industrial Sabotage". He is especially interested in visual concretizations and takes great pains to turn out books that are as artful as they are well-crafted.

Beverly Daurio edits *Mercury Press* and *Paragraph* magazine along with her husband Don. Bev has been exploring the cutting edge in writing. She works out of Stratford Ontario, but visits Toronto frequently.

Frank Davey currently teaches at Western University in London, Ontario. Frank edits *Open Letter* magazine. He is a critic of the first rank, and creates a range of innovative fictional and poetic texts. He is also the founder of "SwiftCurrent" one of the world's first electronic database literary magazines.

Guillermo Delsler is a visual and graphic artist living in Europe, and a regular contributor to *Rampike*.

Fernando de Rojas was translated by Cola Franzen. Fernando de Rojas was a Spanish writer who's work appeared during the late 1400's. He was a playwright and his dramatic works have been re-written into poetic form. De Rojas is one of the earliest prose writers in Spain, and his work is still of great influence particularly to writers working in Spanish.

Ray DiPalma is a prominent force in the New York literary scene. He enjoys language-play and capturing movements of the mind on the printed page. He has published extensively in the United States and by Underwhich Editions in Canada.

John Donlan frequently publishes thought-provoking poetry. He lives and works in London Ontario.

John Feckner explores sculptural applications of language and does not recognize any limits in his modes of expression. John's texts are as much performance as they are writing. He has appeared at the "Inter" fest in Quebec.

Jim Francis helps edit this magazine, and is involved in all aspects of its production including: licking stamps, interviewing celebrities, and drinking scary coffee brewed by the editor. He has a new book coming out from Underwhich Editions.

Cola Franzen (translation) is a wondrous and wonderful translator working with numerous South American writers. We are grateful to Cola for her artful translation and to James Gray our New York editor, who introduced us to Cola.

Kathy Fretwell is an up-and-coming writer who lives and writes in beautiful downtown Parry Sound, Ontario.

Gerry Gilbert edits *B.C. Monthly* a newsletter featuring writing and information on literary activities in British Columbia. Gerry has been published extensively. He is an accomplished poet and performer, and has been known to keep slugs as pets.

Dave Godfrey has started three presses including Press Porcepic which is currently publishing many exciting writers. He also started SoftWords an electronic publishing company. He also teaches creative writing at the University of Victoria.

James Gray is *Rampike's* New York/New England editor. He has been a driving force behind the magazine for roughly five years. James will have a new book of exploratory post-structural fiction/anti-fiction available in Canada titled "Index of Facodomy" which will be published by Underwhich Editions. More on that in a future issue.

Hu Hohn is a computer-oriented artist working out of Massachusetts. He has shown his work in the United States and Canada, and has displayed his art as part of the "Phase Show" along with artists Doug Back and Norman White.

Merlin Homer is an accomplished visual artist currently living and working in Toronto.

Karl Jirgens is working on a new book of fiction when he isn't editing this magazine.

Jones is helping to edit *Paragraph* magazine. He is writing a lot of reviews and poetry in the meantime.

Marina LaPalma writes provocative and sinewy fictions and has been published throughout California and the United States. We are pleased to say that Marina is a regular contributor to *Rampike*.

Albuquerque Mendes is a Portuguese visual artist and a friend of Balint Szombathy (a.k.a. "The Art Lover").

Judith Merrill likes it when you spell her name write. She is one of the most accomplished writers of Science Fiction anywhere. If you haven't done so already, you should check out the Judith Merrill Library of Science Fiction.

Opal Louis Nations is basking in sunny California. He has been published extensively, but currently works as a doo-wop disc jockey when he isn't concocting his next piece of textual magnificence.

bpNichol's book *Gifts* (Coach House Press) is currently available. He lives on in our hearts and on the printed page.

Alain-Arthur Painchaud claims he's poor and doesn't have a lot of bread, but we hear he's rolling in dough in Montreal.

Nicholas Power has been part of the Toronto writing and publishing scene for many years. He has organized the Toronto Small Press Fair, done numerous readings, and published many books. Nick is a regular to these pages, we're happy to say.

Al Purdy has won Governor General's Awards for his poetry. When he isn't writing or being interviewed, he likes to have a cold beer in the hot sun out near the pond in Ameliasburg.

Roland Sabatier is a Lettrist artist par excellence living and working in Paris.

Libby Scheler, along with Sarah Sheard & Elanor Wachtel, recently edited *Language in her Eye: Writing and Gender* (Coach House Press). Her latest book is *Sky--A Poem in Four Pieces* (Mercury Press).

Abigail Simmons is currently living incognito in Montreal. She is exceptionally well-informed about the avant-garde.

Steven Smith co-edits Underwhich Editions and publishes and writes a lot of stuff in Saskatchewan.

Raymond Souster has been publishing and writing for many years. He is an original and originating force in Canadian writing. He currently lives in the west end of Toronto not far from the banks of the Humber River.

Bohdan Spas is a Toronto sculptor and visual artist with a penchant for visual conundrums.

Don Summerhayes wears big thick fluffy coats in the winter, and straw hats in the summer. He likes to eat watermelon and then keep the seeds in his pocket for later. He writes a great deal, and teaches at York University.

W. Mark Sutherland concretizes texts in the west end of Toronto. He has been published extensively and has a strong interest in music and musical innovation. W. Mark runs a music company called The Barking Boys.

Lola Lemire Tostevin is an accomplished critic and teacher, living in Toronto. Lola keeps busy writing reviews, doing lectures and editing books. She recently published a book of poetry called *Gyno Text* (Underwhich Editions).

Huguette Turcotte is a Francophone poet living in Ottawa. When she isn't working arranging funding for publishers, she can be found writing poetry along the banks of the Rideau Canal.

Yves Troendle has been writing poetry and fiction and organizing shows and readings in Toronto for many years. He is an agent provocateur who is always a stimulating challenge to read.

David UU of North Vancouver has been writing and publishing extensively since the 1960's. Always innovative and fresh, David continues to explore the various ways that text and page inter-relate.

Denis Vanier has tattoos and writes and reads his poetry in public in Montreal. He has been published frequently in french, and is an important part of the life-force of Quebec writing.

Norman White is especially interested in robotics and acoustic/kinetic sculptures that respond to the audience. He teaches at the Ontario College of Art. His sculpture has appeared with Doug Back's and Hu Hohn's in the on-going "Phase Show".

Michael Winkler is an accomplished visual artist living in New York. He has been published in North America and Europe and has shown his textually-oriented photo-montage work extensively in gallery shows throughout the United States.