

BARRY MCKINNON / Prince George Core (Part 2: unfinished notes

For Sharon Thesen

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city, mind—body.

the mind disintegrates. the body now a shell

“everything must go” . so the shell is left—its last punch thru the wall—broken

windows

empty *for lease /*
for sale

the city
core /

Saturday Jan12: up 3rd, sense this: *not followed* but what's ahead / to the thrift store,
my fear: I cannot easily pass thru

/ crack heads /

desperate predation & no sense of *what*
they cld ever care

: the city as body—began, arked, disintegrated. garbage strewn, lumps of clothes /
single shoes / bags of needles / thrift store moved or bankrupt tho the goods they sold
were free

to my right, natives clumped, stoned and grinning, once dispossessed, to be
dispossessed again / not mingling, but *clumped* by the abandoned *Food Teller* door
way / wait for crack, booze and heroin

what it is, is. cruel that body and mind sense their own demise. the city is organ. it
sees itself. disintegrated. its body and mind its own demise

turning left, sense *nothings left*. “closed / staff shortage”

give shake of head,

fucked / without a voice.

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the heart did not break / became homeless: we stood boneless in a heap / stunned
then drunk, *not seen as the map*, the city, the larger world—emptied of resource. no
re-course to the map that once led / to the wilderness back to the path it once was. in
this heap, stolen bikes thru snow—the grinning homeless lad either in legitimacy says
hello sir, the friendly light of human greeting or as sardonic gesture: *fuck you*.

garbage, demise—butts, puke, sand & gravel, the snowy streets. slush to mud by the
Ramada / *everywhere*—the opera as backdrop, the screeching of a high human voice
to keep these humans away—bums on George. what wealth / squeezed, burned,
horded as the world went / everywhere else but here. so as I, city at last with out
illusion or dream or grandeur—or friendly face / sincerity—is it the care of David
Petrescu I miss who saw the pleasures and treasures of the dump, the beer as source
for possibility, the Cottonwood flood, a sign to move. there is no choice when of a
place it is the place you’ll be

metaphors of recognition / value of what is seen, exposed. the body, raw, open,
sexy in its arc, ugly in demise, aging to know body and soul are *one*. the mind
disintegrates / is the heap of clothes, dumped as the he / she walked out into snow &
cold, no light ahead on the dark road beyond

here. decay, cliché—in the shit of the city / of city fathers, I look for . . . *vision care*.
mind care. *heart care*. *body care*—all that's lost but cheery thot / foolish reminiscence
to ask / names of all gone, the toxicity is age itself not knowing how to turn. John
Harris wld ask for a vision, the alternate. I can't find the grammar machine—make
no proposal.

give thanks /

grumble in the arc and demise. sense it always here, *that* beginning illusion. I so lost
in whatever task sought—sense of work, to do good & in the face of a force sent out
to beat it, but *that* that gave resolve and strength—my endurance in the face of such
shallow delights they sought by removing what little delight we had. many will not
see:

the imported force, their source unknown, the conspiracy, piracy of those in charge

a world is made—of mud / become bone, sinewed road / a habitat of beauty, raw rivers
to meet. the confluent / myth / abundance—dance of possibility—imagined before
global demand became a line / or time, split & frayed by industrial demand no locals
cld fight or resist, driven to slick and simple rhetoric - that abundance as goal became
its own & pure objective goal. *the trees*. paradise ahead like history

swaths / rectangles / some messy cuts in the contours I saw in '69. sometimes sense,
much still left. the mind disintegrates, the body arches & all the more such strength to
require faith, some sense of decency in whatever mistake was made. I build a fire, I
see it—call it— / the aging body drawn by last wish, not to think: *what's deserved / not
deserved*. the fire burns. regret, all not done / what done gone

the old city / core

disintegrates—simultaneously evolves / to malls / outsourced plenitude—the
perpetual motion of returned goods—an isolation once sensed defines us being here
without

when I saw the dark—became pulp myself / in the glimmer of the dark winter snow

Joy says *let it go*—as if some other force must be known / defeat the past & open an opening brief to future light: *you decide*

in the body's arc / demise—

the mind as habitat. city gone, overtaken —divided: those who enter the bank / those who wait—beg spare change. slush & snow, the diesel air—sense of a shitkick to the soul. some *thing* battered in front of us. the body disintegrates. the mind some final habitat

the city hates itself

peeled back / no false surface, in the surfeit—wealth can falsely bring

3rd & George. no children on these streets, is true, yet so large this recognition / simple
eyes open to what is seen: *no children on these streets*

old days? maybe nothings changed—no sense of going on / to question the ebb and flow
of social energies that the biggest thing cannot be seen: the drivers in the growing economies / talking heads cough slogans / toxic cliché and denial. what was I going to say given this window of opportunity in the 24/7/365—this thinking a complex mask, or heard as specious airy thot?—no one expelled from paradise is irony

in the 30 below. I'm on the streets again—list the close-outs, pawn shops belly-up, tho cheer the mainstays—the tenacious: Morrisons, Prudentes, Moffats, McGinnis—the German bakers / the shops on 4th—outsourced to College Heights, Hgwy 16, box store clerks mumbling *have a nice day*

what is left. brooding, ravaged landscape. trees—in many places gone. logging. bugs.
stock piles—sense of world fast tracked for the last grab / *this is eco nomics*
sun, bright to my left, south rays intensified. 35 below. chill factor. the tenacious
north

what we become

/ this sense of home / the desire to leave

—time and life, a river (eddies, swirls / floods / the digital earth

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Notes:

The descriptions/images in this poem in progress, for the most part, are a result of walks from the Millar Addition to and thru the Prince George downtown city core—its centre at 3rd and George.

The Food Teller is an abandoned restaurant on the corner of 5th and George, across from the Ramada Hotel. It is a street of bars, a decaying cabaret, drop in centres, a thrift store, a second-hand book store, a cold beer and wine store, etc. Opera blasts daily from the Ramada, presumably as an aural abrasive to drive away lingerers, dope dealers, hookers, and transients, etc.

David Petrescu was a friend who died too young, but taught me the pleasures of the downtown in earlier days (buns and meatballs from the German bakery, beers at the old Astoria, and the Canada hotels)—and developed my eye for eccentric thrift store junk.

Cottonwood (Island) at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser rivers has been flooded many times over the years, and eventually forced the inhabitants of the Island Cache to move to higher ground in the 70s. Houses and shacks were abandoned and later bulldozed. The present ice jam/flood, the worst in fifty years, has backed up the Nechako 26 km and into the suburbs.

The Moffats, the Morrisons, the Prudentes, and the McGinnis family, among a few others, are longtime family store owners in the downtown core. They stay and survive despite the heavy competition from the box stores and malls that have killed much of their business.

John Harris is a friend, writer, and intellect of large proportions who inspires much of what I have come to see and believe about place, politics, and literature.

Joy, my wife—impatient/laconic who gives clear-headed advice in disturbing contexts.

the city hates itself—is a line from my friend and colleague Anna Djuric.

Prince George is *peeled back*—a line of observation from the poet Melissa Wolsak.

life is like a river is a line from Robert Creeley's poem "A Full Cup" in his last book *On Earth*.

This work is also for these north writers: Ken Belford, Greg Lainsbury, Rob Budde.

Postscript

I can't remember when I first met Sharon, but I do remember seeing an issue of *Iron* in the early 70s (edited by Brian Fawcett and other students at SFU)—with a cover photo of the *Iron* group. They looked posed—a pre-punk literary cadre that meant serious business with editorial warnings like this: “THIS IS GOING TO BE / A SERIOUS ISSUE / BY GOD.”

There was only one woman in the photo as I remember; she was thin, wearing granny glasses, her hair in a bun; she was very attractive & looked out of place and therefore a presence more obvious than anyone else in this clump of long-haired young men. It had to be Sharon Thesen. She was then married to Fawcett, worked on the magazine with mostly secretarial and production functions I think—but also writing poems that wouldn't be seen or published for some time. When they did surface—Wow! A strong, clear, no-nonsense voice sans literary device or pretense that tackled the truths of whatever situation prompted the poems' content: kids, marriage, relationships, work—the disappointments, hardships, and pleasures of a woman living fully in the complex of a modern/post-modern world.

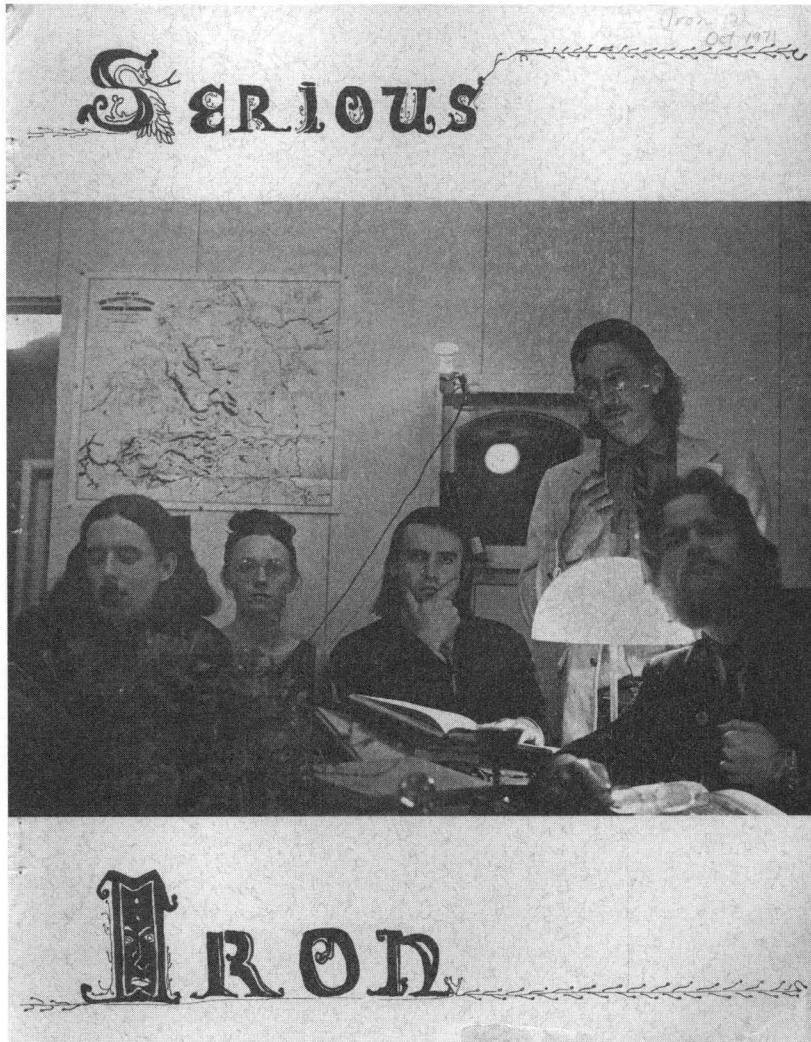
My sense is, as I wrote in a review of her book *Aurora*¹:

She writes so that each poem is only “successful” if it dismantles itself, (as self dismantles self)—until the tattered truth about her attitude to life at that moment is fully revealed. She leaves herself no time to turn back. No time to invent googaws and ornament. No time for fear *or* courage. The poems triumph because they no longer feel like “poems”; they become ways of thinking about living that an attentive reader can immediately share and recognize. My theory is that Thesen's sensibility is partly a result of growing up in the industrial detritus of Prince George, a context and backdrop that gave her the necessary tools for perception early on. It was here that Thesen, the high school Queen Aurora, I've been told, probably with a little metaphorical mud on her size 7½ shoes, learned to see the various dimensions and ironies of whatever context she might later find herself in. In Prince George, there is no possibility of not knowing

¹ “Car and Driver,” *The Vancouver Review* (Fall/Winter 1995): 20-21.

where you are; this is a good thing for a writer, and a good place from which to start the writer's journey).

And all good for the poem's long road ahead and for us that Sharon is on it.



Photographer: Ron Verzuh. Vancouver seriousness from left to right: Tom McGauley ("Robert Lowell"), Sharon Thesen ("Marianne Moore"), Brett Enemark ("Richard Wilbur"), Brian Fawcett ("Karl Shapiro"), Karl Siegler ("W. S. Merwin").

Thesen Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University