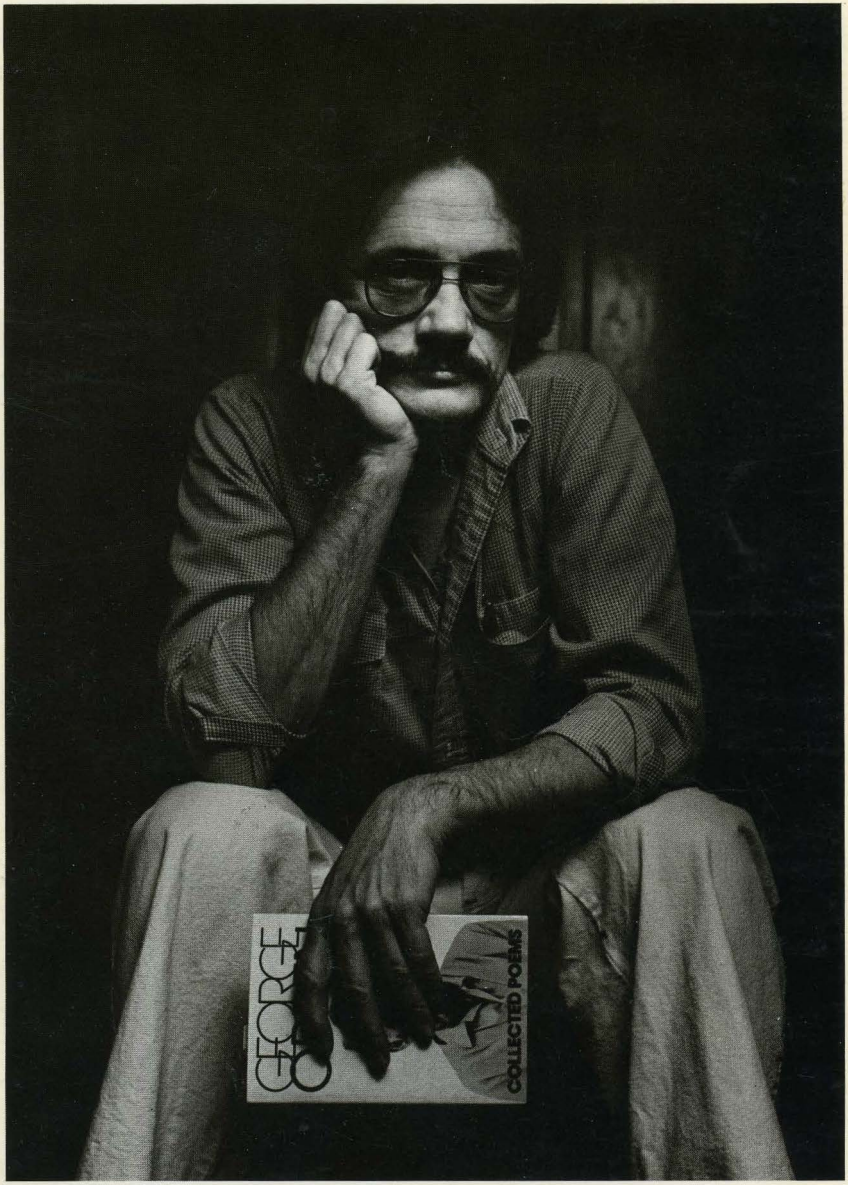
THE CAPILANO REVIEW



Now I say, why the christ should I go to a goddamn book to find a story about me? I mean, I've got a story. Why have a story *about* me instead of me?

— GEORGE BOWERING

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David McFadden / SIX POEMS

MALCOLM LOWRY

Been dead twenty-two years and still
you come around a tear-filled Vancouver street
and there you are face to face with his spirit,
the old Caroline Apartments on Nelson Street,
its canopy tattered and torn, the bricks darker,
everything darker. And that must be the YMCA,
he used to complain about the noise when it was
being built, and now look how old it looks.

What a gamble to allow feelings to become deep!
It doesn't matter what you feel as long as you
feel, and to be a writer and have to record
the details of this ultimate gamble, a small
ship on a stormy sea, to, as he put it,
value dread above all human feelings.

He gambled so much and his greatness
was all human, all spirit, non-literary —
Even if you are a man
you want to take this man to your breast
but you know eternity itself couldn't console him
and he was Jesus Christ himself I think
come to earth to tell us there is no consolation,
there is nothing but the individual human being
screaming with unrelenting loneliness for all eternity.

CROSSING SECOND NARROWS BRIDGE IN AN OLD BLUE MORRIS MINOR

The Japanese ship that was being loaded with lumber
all last week under the Second Narrows Bridge
has gone and is somewhere out in the Pacific now
and this is the same bridge that collapsed during construction
in 1959, the same year this old car was built,
and perhaps it came off the assembly line in England
on the same day twenty-three brave workers fell bravely
to their cursed deaths in the twisted metal of Burrard Inlet.
And now you can see the little frame houses
around the end of the bridge and you try
to hear that horrendous crash two decades ago
and to realize the sudden horrendous shock
of a huge bridge collapsing before your eyes
on a day otherwise much like any other.
And today driving over the bridge I pick my nose
and in the pick-up truck driving alongside
three guys stare at me.

Sometimes something you're making
collapses before you've finished;
other times everything goes right
and you know it'll hold up forever
and what you know will hold up forever
is often indistinguishable
from that which is about to collapse.
The difference is something deeply buried
like twenty-three embarrassing corpses
whose names are dutifully inscribed on an undated
brass plaque at the foot of the bridge.
It's all a matter of intent
like the Mexican railroad in Under the Volcano
— excessively curved because the builders
got paid by the mile. And it's often said
of a winding river it's being paid by the mile.
And the bogus bridge-builders are all around us.
It's no longer worthwhile to build a good bridge
unless you do it so furtively
no one will know what you're doing.

NEWS FROM THE NURSING HOME

1

She used to be a big wheel at the Bell Canada
Administrative Centre
but now she rolls around in pissy drawers
sticking her legs out through the bars of her crib
sticking her shitty hands in her mouth
and sticking her tongue out at everyone who goes by.

One of the nurses keeps threatening her by saying
she's going to dress her up and take her to
the Bell Canada Christmas party.

2

The old guy used to wake up screaming
"Get these horses out of my room"
and his nurse used to go in and say
"Come on, horses, get out of here"
then "Okay, Percy, they're all out,
you can go back to sleep now."

Sometimes the nurse used to dress him up
in his three-piece suit, starched shirt and tie
and take him out for Sunday afternoon walks.

After Percy died the nurse wore his suit
to a Halloween party.

3

It's strictly coincidence that both these news items
end with references to festive occasions.

PINNOCHIO

It seems strange now but when Joan and I were first married and I was going to medical school I used to bring home small cadavers to work on over the weekend. I must have been rather thoughtless in those days because I can remember walking down the street holding a dead baby, unwrapped, as if it were a doll, and some of the neighbours must have thought I was practising up to be a ventriloquist.

One night for instance I was bringing home the body of an infant with an unnaturally large nose. Such a long thin nose would have looked strange even on an adult. Just for a joke I dressed the dead kid up in a pair of lederhosen and the kind of blouse and cap you tend to associate with Pinnochio. As I walked along under the streetlamps I heard some kids saying, "Hey, look, he's got Pinnochio."

But Joan wasn't one for such jokes. It was about 10:30 at night and I was hoping she'd be upstairs reading but she was in the kitchen drinking tea. I knew she'd be upset if she saw the baby so I tossed it under the porch as I went in the house. I figured I'd wait till she was asleep and then retrieve it.

But when I went back out a few hours later it was gone. I never did find out what happened to it. Maybe some animals got it. Maybe it came back to life, like Pinnochio, and ran away.

RIDING IN A BUS THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

Now and then your toes curl
whether you want them to or not.

I don't mind dying but I'd hate
to be back here having a piss
when the bus falls off a mountain.

A POEM TO BE PLACED AT THE BEGINNING OF A BOOK TO BE CALLED A POEM TO BE PLACED AT THE BEGINNING OF A BOOK AND OTHER POEMS

The moon stopped flickering
The roses in the garden stopped flickering
On the surface of the lake the ripples disappeared
    except for the occasional falling leaf

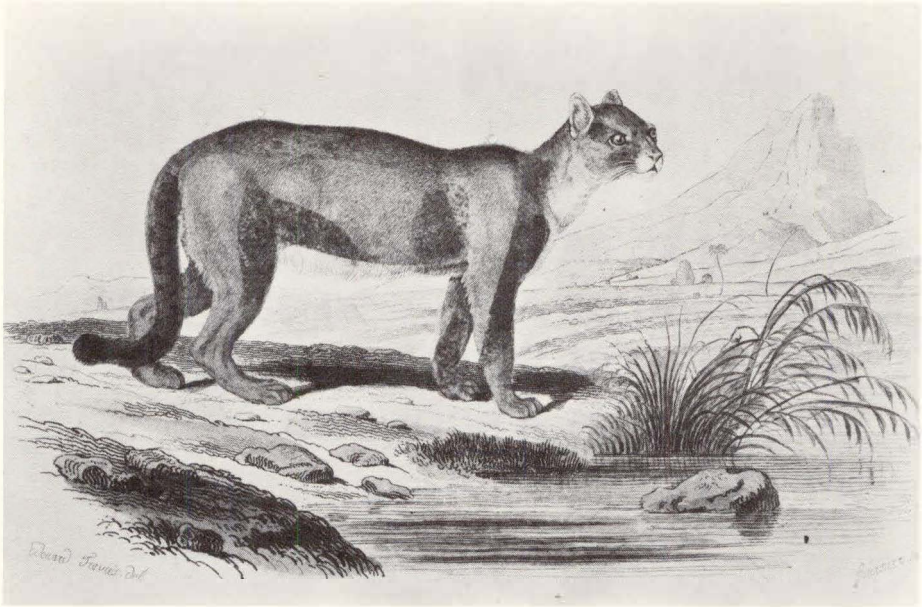
The guys in the pub
ordered another round of chocolate liqueurs
and another plate of fudge

Somewhere someone felt an inexpressible
    sadness because his sadness was inexpressible

Tom Snyder: "Thank you for being on our
    show, Mr. McLuhan. It was most. . . . Oh,
    what's the word I'm looking for?"
Marshall McLuhan: "Illuminating?"

And so I thought I would write this book
before I got any older / at least try to refrain
from preventing it from being written

nature being what it is, long-winded as hell
and gentler than a dozen Buddhas.



Colin Browne / THE COUGAR

What humour is it makes him flail
His tawny quarters with that tail?

Pratt's BOTTOM

I promised I would tell a story about Lucy Wellburn and the cougar. Rather, she has asked me to tell you a story about herself and a cougar. So it is not all her story, which means that parts are from other parts and parts are dreamed up.

Lucy is at fault herself, for only part of her never married and became an eccentric maiden aunt on Saturna Island, while another waited years before setting out in search of injustices to right. A large part of her can loll for hours at the piano improvising cougar music. Which, unhappily, rarely occurs, for she's usually too busy running back and forth between the other parts trying to decide which is less like her.

A story then is like a puzzle in which you have to figure out which parts are made up and which are not. What about that clean nurse and the brain surgeon suffering a crisis of confidence? You can do it, you can do it. What about that spoiled daughter (who deserved it) and her self-destructive artist? What about that puppy and its whip-crazy owner? What about that drunken novelist and his photoplay wife? Why not begin here?

A logger had once told me that if you set fire to your mittens and throw them at a mountain lion that would take effect, and I know that bears are often very susceptible to human laughter. I should add of course that cougars are not properly mountain lions (the latter being sub-species *missoulensis*, native to the Rockies and Selkirks), although generically both are *felixes concolor*, more recently referred to as *puma concolor* in order to distinguish them from African cats which they only carelessly resemble. This is the fiery red tiger seen prowling the beaches by Vespucci and Columbus, designated *cougar* by the fastidious Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon (*Histoire naturelle*. Paris, 1761 & 1776). de Buffon's interest, apart from unknotting the unaccustomed tongue, was in securing for the French people (this only scant years before they took action to secure it for themselves) a name of their own.

Buffon's synthesis was via Ray (*Synopsis methodica animalium quadrupedum et serpentini generis.* London, 1693) via Pison's adaptation of Marcgraf (*Historiae rerum naturalium Brasiliae.* Paris. 1648), the same Marcgraf, or Marcgrave, who led the ill-fated and hideous expedition of dwarfs into the Matto Grosso. Fearing that a posse might frighten away the game he had come to collect for specimens, he feathered specially chosen dwarf carriers as bright tropical birds, only to stand helplessly by while they were brutally savaged and eaten one after the other by demented yaguarundis shrilly drunk on the mouldy fruit of some locally fermenting berry. Marcgraf was fortunate to escape with his life. He lost an eye and his left arm never fully recovered its mobility after being crushed by a sleeping anaconda. According to his account, the serpent crept into his tent while he was sleeping one night and began crushing his arm while dreaming, for which reason he bore it no malice the remainder of his days.

Marcgraf did return however with our word cougar's root, kissed from the lips of the poetic Tupis deep in the Amazon basin. This word, *sussuarana*, he tempered, for unknown reasons, into *cuguacuara*, perhaps to strike a linguistic bargain between the Tupi and the Guarani. The transformation thus accomplished from fricative to stop, Buffon's sensible reduction of the Indian word into the European syllables *cougar* seems almost inevitable. In this way the wilderness was conquered. By 1865 no less an authority than Francis Parkman had blessed the name (in which book? The date should be a clue. Answer at end of story.), and those who travail in the woods and dwell on the scraped edges of our cities have been so successfully converted that red tiger, even though it proved a more vivid description, has gone the way of gee whiz.

In these parts the Indians often dried cougar paws and used them to drive away illness. The paws were hung over the patient's head while a shaman intoned words and names privy to himself and lost to us today. As usual, no evidence of their efficacy remains. Nor have any labcoats tested the ability of cougar gall to provoke resistance to continuing disease. Both prescriptions no doubt called upon the very real power of sympathetic magic and both, lest we take them lightly and forget, required a cougar. A perilous hunt demands faith.

To write, then, that Lucy Wellburn's great aunt Lucy Wellburn was a demented old woman can only be misleading. And wrong. One must be very careful what one selects to write about the departed, for almost anything looks true in paragraphs, particularly when the subject's sailed over the bar, as great aunt Lucy might herself have put it. I don't know of course if she read Lord Tennyson, but I can't imagine her not portaging a small book of something along the scaley beaches on her way to render a favourite arbutus. I would hazard a guess at Dante Rosetti:

But just when at that swallow's soar
Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall . . .

and, perhaps later, when she no longer stayed out all night save that once and he was still a novelty, Hopkins:

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come . . .

And out of the swing of the sea.

Who knows, even Henley, the much maligned inspiration for two of the greatest inventions of his and our age? (Another quiz: who? Rnsr at end, please.) Underestimate not the limpid democracy of the pocket edition! Uplifting sentiment the birthright of all! And that fertile, resonant note, the "West".

Let me be gathered to the quiet west,
The sundown splendid and serene,
Death.

So she was on the right part of the planet for growing old and weird. And as she did she began to drop little parts of what came before into the hands and imaginations of those who loved her, which were those who were not afraid of her, which were not many. One was Lucy herself, who was crazy about the old woman. When she was little, Lucy would fold up beside the bony old great aunt and make her tell her about the time the cougar, you know auntie? Now that Lucy has grown up herself and great aunt Lucy is gone, she has to tell the story to me, to prove that it really happened. Which is the main reason for this story.

This old aunt, the story goes then, was a water colour enthusiast, and often set off across the island at dawn without waking anyone, returning so late that everyone was asleep again. It's all written in a magazine somewhere, at least this part is, but I can't find it. All they say is that she was ahead of her time because she went out alone and came back alone. You wonder if she came back with sperm drooling down her leg. You wonder what she did out there.

Sleep, probably. Recover from the previous day's lack of sleep. And I have seen most of her paintings. They used to sell them at the church whenever there was a rummage sale, but Lucy made them stop. She finally had to tell them the paintings would be worth a fortune one day. So now we have them hanging around our house, and I like them. Lucy switches them endlessly and it's almost as if each painting in a year passes through daylight's cycle. Sunrise for two months, bright morning, then noon, golden afternoon, dusk, and late night moon. I wish I'd met old Lucy for this would be easier. I'm omitting a great deal of information which, though interesting, might be spurious. Which is not the point of a story.

The incident at hand relates the time great aunt Lucy strode up the bluff on a bright January morning after a heavy snowfall (the big one — do you remember the year?) and returned the next day with a cougar's two ears in her bag. Stayed out overnight in freezing weather. And when she came in just moved idly toward the fire and warmed her ten slim fingers before it, sans mot. William, her brother, just watched her, and his wife Kathleen almost exploded she was so frantic with questions. All this before they knew about the two ears. Which no one knew about until they began to smell.

So it finally came out. Uncle Bill brought the evidence to her in the kitchen one morning when they were all sitting around watching. As usual he'd been up first (I did meet him before he died, and he truly did rise first. In his later days the only function this seemed to serve was to wake everyone else in the house with furious clattering and banging in the sink and in the cupboards below it, none of which ever seemed to result in any food preparation.), and smelling something fishy as he called it several times, began to bang around in aunt Lucy's paintboxes and satchels. Which is how he came to present the two appendages that morning at breakfast. Lucy was livid. The strip ripped off sweet uncle Bill would have made a good bacon sandwich, aunt Kathleen later explained to me. Lucy's rage betrayed that she'd been found out, that she would now have to confess to her accusers her common but mysterious disappearances on the cliffs.

Aunt Kathleen poured everyone a fresh cup of coffee, turned off the Hitler news on the radio, and curled up on the window seat under the steamed-up panes of glass a thousand eyes had scratched. Uncle Bill pretended to be scouring milk pails that rattled like chains. Others were there. I cant remember all of them, but I know Grace was, and Willie. Lucy pretended she didnt want any coffee and aunt Kathleen had to get up again and pour it back into the pot. Between them, the two seemed to enjoy an agreement about personal real estate: Kathleen managed the kitchen & bathrooms, while Lucy stayed out of her way. I think this is how it formally worked. My Lucy has just told me that in fact great aunt Lucy often swept the upstairs bedrooms and took care of the garden. Or the roses anyway, for I know that Kathleen never let anyone touch her fuschias. Or mums.

The snow was thick and sweet. All about her on the road up into the far fields Lucy heard the heavy, magical whump as caps of snow slid melting off fir and cedar limbs. When she told this story to Lucy before she died, the great aunt paused, and recalled for the first time since that the Salish Indians used to bounce prayers up to heaven on the springy branches of cedar and fir. So it seemed to her that the forest was filled with praise that morning as she stepped up the hill. Such silence. The sea, far below like wrinkled slate, was noiseless, with not a slurp or bubble as it licked the dripping rinds of snow off beach rocks. Whump. Whump!

Whump. Manoeuvering the sunken tracks, she spied tiny hops of juncoes pressed into the snow, followed them criss-crossing her path, starred at junctions by the spit of chewn cones. The day warmed, and against the grey sky earth became luminous with snow. Snow began to melt from the nipples of every tree, and the forest became the noisiest water storm on earth, millions of thundering drips plunging into one hole each beneath a branch. Still she went on until she came to the farthest field. Whump!

Too dry to be useful, the field was hidden behind a long, tall brake of firs, and on the edge of it aunt Lucy had constructed a secret lean-to of cedar rails and boughs. In a minute she could be on the cliff's edge, summoned by the clatter of a great goat herd fussing along thin ledges below. Other times it would be a high V of geese or the munching and gulping of a tiny fawn nibbling leaves in the alders. I understand that while she was painting, if she liked what she was doing, she would loosen her wonderful hair and it would fall down her breast and catch sunlight in a rich and complex tangle. So her days passed, sublimely, napping, sipping clear water from leaves and from the noisy little rill at the far end of the point. Painting, painting.

What she thought of we can only guess. Reds, vermilions, blues, a suitable wash for the distant jut of Maxwell at eve. Perhaps she read poems. Maybe she hated poems. Maybe she wrote them. None remain if she did. Or none that we know of. She's the type to burn such things.

Hopkins wrote little of snow. Only in *Deutschland*, where it just happens to occur. None of those poets or painters wrote or painted snow. Snow is different here anyway, unlike any other snow I've known. Snow here is thick and wet and sexual. Snow here is a universe of falling and dripping and transformation. Snow here never stays the same for a minute. It enters rarely, falls all at once into the dark, swelling coniferous sea, and dares you to embrace it, only to flee. Whump. Whump!

Did she fall in love with snow? Is there not a term for this. It's the deep, holy silence. The billion drips dancing on command.

Drip. Drip. Imagine her dreaming under a winter moon in her tiny pine lean-to in the west. In a tree a big owl. And the stars!

Whump!

Eeeee! Eeeeeeiiieee! Eeeeiieeeeeeeee! Flap flap flap, flap flap.

Waking suddenly, and the twig snapping on the other side of the blankets. Straw. Lying very still makes it crackle.

It crackled. Whump!

According to Lucy aunt Lucy remained rigid for some time. She heard the animal passing by her wet boughs. Stars turned into drips and she heard a million pit-pat pits aiming chaotically at the snow. Three-inch paws began to rip the bark from her chopping stump, she heard tearing fibres and the catch of claws hooked in wood. Aunt Lucy was not afraid.

Or so she recalled. Lucy recalls. Which is the point that Lucy loved, for she fears cougars more than anyone alive. Not that she has ever seen one, or that she will, for as she was growing up the animals were being shot and trapped and pushed further and further into the hills behind the thin trailer towns fringing the highway. Her father's job was making cougar-proof buildings. In her father's arms or in his buildings she was safe. Nothing could enter. In the forest, however, nothing had to enter. It was already there. It was the people who entered.

In the woods people are guests. Lucy never feels quite welcome. Which is why she loved her great aunt Lucy so much. Which is why whenever she sleeps in a little orange tent on the edge of the forest she never does. Lying awake all night waiting to be eaten. Cougars manage to put away about 80 pounds of meat per meal. Lucy knows that no matter which eighty pounds of her are munched away she will be a goner. For fats it might be different, but Lucy is the type people think of as a bird.

At this point in the narrative uncle William piped up, dropping a bucket in the sink to punctuate. When Dad come out the woods was alive with the buggers, he said. He himself had once as a boy hunted cougars for the bounty, at that time $35 (it has gone as high as $50), in order to buy a camera. Dad had told him of a father and four sons only fourteen miles from Victoria in the early 80s who, in defence of their sheep, had killed over 300 cougars within a few years of arriving. The sheep actually belonged to the Puget Sound Agriculture Company, a scion of the Hudson's Bay Co., which at that time owned Vancouver's Island.

Before long the crackling began to sound like fire. Perhaps aunt Lucy really thought it was a fire. Tradition, hers, has it that she instantly thought of her shotgun. No one knew she had a shotgun. No one even knew she slept exiled in a little lean-to, so it should come as no surprise to discover that she kept other secrets. One of which is what she thought as she raised her shotgun from its manger. She says that she was afraid that the fire might cause it to explode. As she picked it up the flap of the lean-to, her cape, was drawn aside, gently, she reported, and the cougar's great rufous face appeared.

Now the *puma concolor vancouverensis* is darker than its colleagues, perhaps from living in the somber rainforest, and for some reason it has developed a steeply arched frontal profile, the result of which is that the animal's face appears more human than that of its mainland cousins. Expression seeks sympathy, which is what great aunt Lucy experienced. She fell in love.

His back was a cinnamon-rufous colour, and his throat and chin were a delicious creamy white. The front of his upper lip was white also, with black patches between lips & cheeks. His long whiskers were white, and the inside of his round, sweet ears. The ears did not pivot on a spikey tuft of hair as those of tabby cats like Miss Nancy lying here in the sun on the window seat. The outer edges of his ears were black, his nose was pink, she said, and unblinking yellow-green eyes "just looked at me, as if he understood everything!" The tip of his tail, very furry and heavy (for it was winter) was dark sienna. So he just gazed into her own green eyes. His feet were pinkish-buff.

Snow's attrition had driven him to the island, which he had hoped would be cluttered with stuck deer and, according to aunt Lucy, he had been disappointed. The year had not been kind to wild beasts, and very few of the little coastal deer were in evidence. Uncle William, always meticulous about his hunting, had been condemned to potting off a goat for Thanksgiving when the relatives came up from Seattle. On his wife's side. A photograph taken that year shows them at the table. Or the shapes of darkness indicating heads ranged in orbit about two tall leaking candles, the magnificent Georgian gravy boat a knobbly moon front & center on the very chunk of furniture I am

using to type these words. I havent checked what day American thanksgiving fell on that year, but it could have been no more than six weeks later that great aunt Lucy was gazing with rapture into the catamount's eyes, soothing words of welcome. Whump!

You're wondering how she got its ears in her bag. I dont know. She carried the secret below the yew in the little St Stephen's churchyard. Perhaps we should reconstruct the last part of the story for her.

Imagine great aunt Lucy imagining herself Maldonada, only girl with pluck enough to escape the Indian beseiged colonial town of Buenas Ayres in 1536. So persistent were the natives that of 2000 citizens 1800 are said to have died of starvation, and Maldonada, calculating the odds, decided that she had nothing to lose by leaping the walls to look for roots along the river. As she neared the lost field it began to snow, becoming so silent not even her footsteps informed her of the way. It grew dark, and she found shelter in a small, crude lean-to floored with straw. Exhausted, she lay down and immediately slept.

A rubbing noise woke her. Outside she heard the crash of snow slithering off trees, and the ground shook with a thumping regularity. It stopped. She gathered her thin cape around her and looked up. Peering in through the door of the shelter was a puma. The cat stepped inside, followed by three cubs. Together they lay down beside Maldonada and began to lick themselves in the familiar way. Soon they were all asleep.

Great aunt Lucy thought instantly of a name for the baleful face gazing in at her. Ned. Ned stared and stared. Cougars are generally shy, and although they sometimes like to follow a human being along a trail until the lights of home, it's more out of curiosity than anything else. And although cougars have attacked children, it is almost always because the animal is sick or injured in some painful way. Of course Ned was not necessarily a healthy cougar, and when aunt Lucy was suddenly revealed more of him she thought him decidedly lean. Imagine her then with her shotgun shaking in her hand, a sensitive cougar face staring in through fragrant boughs, the flat whumping of snow piles outside . . .

. . . She couldnt have shot him in the face. First because we have the ears intact, and second because she had fallen in love. She wanted to pull him in beside her on the burning straw, to stroke and pull at his deep soft fur. If we can imagine as much for her, we can imagine as much for the weary cougar, wet from melting snow and his icy swim. Lucy moved first.

Took off her mittens. Held out her hand and rubbed the forefinger and thumb together at the cat, at the same time purring and coaxing in his direction. Whether she said Here, puss, puss, pussy . . . or Meow, meow, meow, brrrrrrrrrup . . . we wont ever know, but it's certain the panther was hypnotized by the great aunt's invitation. Stranger still, the beast seemed incapable of ignoring the great aunt's implorings, and against what can only be feline better judgement it actually began to sidle her way. With one finger firmly arched about the trigger of the shotgun in her lap, she secured a page in her little travelling sketchpad and with a nearby pencil began to sketch the panther's serene visage by light of kerosene. Her eyes travelled, and pencil followed, down his sleek frame, forepaw to ribbed belly to muscular rear haunches and, half in shadow, his downy penis, trembling.

All this in the dark beneath eons of stars.

Whump!

A group of citizens came to get Maldonada after a treaty was struck, and the governor of the little city tried her for treason and desertion. Found guilty, she was taken out to the forest and chained to a tree where, it was hoped, she would be eaten by wild animals. Two days later, when deputies arrived to pack the bones in a bag, they were confronted by a snarling female puma. In the distance, Maldonada stood unharmed. Two days the animal had protected Maldonada from certain, savage death. Since that time, Argentinians have called the puma *amigo del christiano*, for it proved, by its judicious watch, Maldonada's innocence.

What followed is indescribable. Aunt Lucy began to sing a little song. What immortal hand or eye, she sang back and forth to herself, like my grandmother used to sing Bird thou never wert day in day out. What immortal hand or eye, she sang, fixing Ned in the eye, what immortal hand or eye? Beneath her straw was crackling, hand or eye, hand or eye? Outside drip drip drip drip, a landscape of scratched records. A great whump of snow pitched onto the shed's roof, collapsing the branches around her. Aaiieeeeeee! she cried.

POWOOOOOOM! POWOOOOOOO!! the two barrels sounded.

* * *

Ned was beside her, licking her shoulder through prickly blasted needles. He looked up as he licked, slurp slurp slurp slowly up and down her arm, purring. She relaxed. Ned, she whispered. A cold shard of snow dropped from the tangle's peak down her back. Oooo! she wriggled. Ned backed away.

I'm sorry. He licked her outstretched hand. You're cold. He blinked his shaggy eyelids. She began to rub his arched shaggy forehead and scratch his neck, almost absentmindedly, searching his eyes. The animal crept forward, and as she scratched and rubbed, sometimes heartily which made him flinch, he began to lean against her. And slid to the ground.

He was not well. His purring broken, sometimes he seemed to cough and sneeze. Paws were badly cut and wet. Great aunt Lucy plucked her mittens from the burning straw and slipped them over his forepads. He made no motion to escape. She rubbed him down until her cape was sodden. Everything was cold and wet. The collapsed boughs with their blades of frozen snow, a damp wind curling out of the noisy sea, the great shivering body beside her in flickering kerosene, moaning. She cradled the animal in her arms and began to rock him gently.

O Ned, O Ned, she whispered, over and over, if only you could speak, if only you could tell me everything.

Hollowing a little nest in the boughs and piling a few rails against the storm, she crept around the animal and curled up between his legs. He was already asleep, his loose belly heaving. Rocked so, aunt Lucy too dozed off. The wet wind raged all night.

When she woke, shivering, his old body was stiff, his lips curled back over long yellow teeth. She gathered her skirts about her. Ned, Ned, she whispered. He was gone. Where she had slept, at the small of her back, it was still warm. She burrowed deeper, tucked her hands between her legs, and stared up through the whistling clouds.

He had saved her life. As his heat trickled away into the howling darkness, hers was sustained and thickened by their wet, hot love. She touched the last warm patch of fur, stroked it. Ned, Ned, she heard herself say. She hadnt even known.

Later that morning she used her knife before lifting him gently over the cliff with rocks tied to his legs. The bright barrel of the shotgun arced after him into the sea.

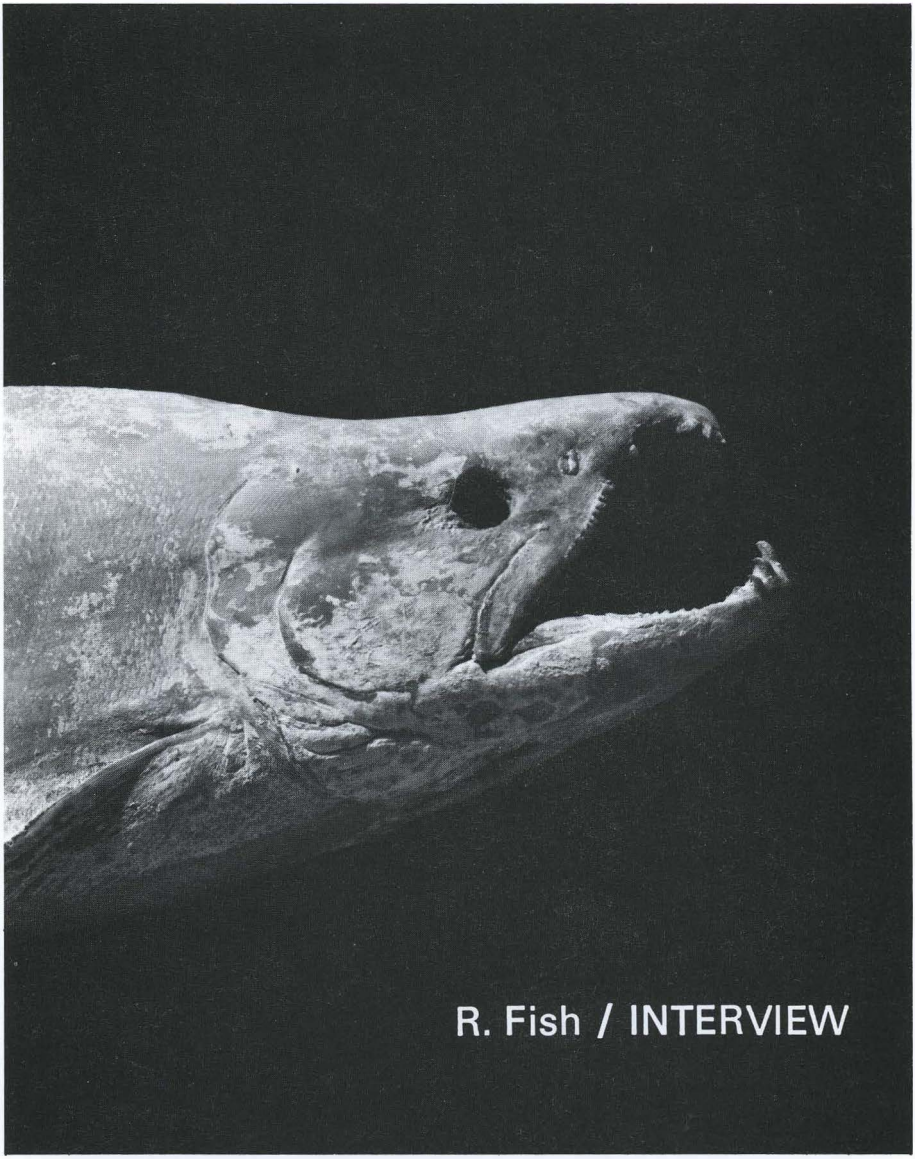
Whump. Whump! The aroused forest began to thaw again and drip.

ANSWERS

1. Parkman's book was *Champlain.*

2. Henley's single leg was responsible for his friend Robert Louis Stevenson's invention of Long John Silver in *Treasure Island.* His daughter, who died when she was five, inspired J. M. Barrie to fashion from her grace and charm the lovable Wendy of *Peter Pan.*

3. If you remembered that the Big Snow was 1916, then you are right. Actually, the incidents recalled in this story took place in 1932, the year when another incredible snowfall challenged the 1916 record, but melted before it really had a chance.



R. Fish / INTERVIEW

Robert Field (R. Fish) was interviewed by Lois Redman, August 16, 1979, on one of his visits from Malcolm Island, B.C. The Capilano Review *wished to publish information about Fish's recent show at the Vancouver Art Gallery, June 9 - July 16, 1978.*

LR Alvin Balkind uses the word "romantic" in connection with you.[1] How do you feel about that?

RF Oh, Alvin was waiting for that one. I took him out to the Harrison River one bitterly cold day. I don't think he's ever spent much time in the country, but I got him out there. He arrived in his old navy toque and, with all his extra clothes on, looked about forty pounds heavier than he normally does. I stuffed him inside a pair of chest-waders and we walked down the middle of the river channel while I towed my canoe, which held all my plaster and stuff, behind me. Salmon were bumping up against his legs and he felt the feeling of buoyancy — it was a completely new experience for him. Then we got down to the river mouth and I was making my moulds. I forget the question he asked, but I said something about my being just a pure romantic.

LR You enjoy taking people who are used to being governed by the structures of their cities and their lives — taking them out into something that has another structure.

RF Yes. It's a very dynamic structure, too — the whole life and death struggle laid out before me. Most of the things that happen in the city tend to be greyer. There isn't that intensity: you aren't that close to primeval forces. The excitement for me is being up at Malcolm Island where I can see things like seals hunting every day or watch whales moving.

LR So you prefer that natural structure to man's social structure?

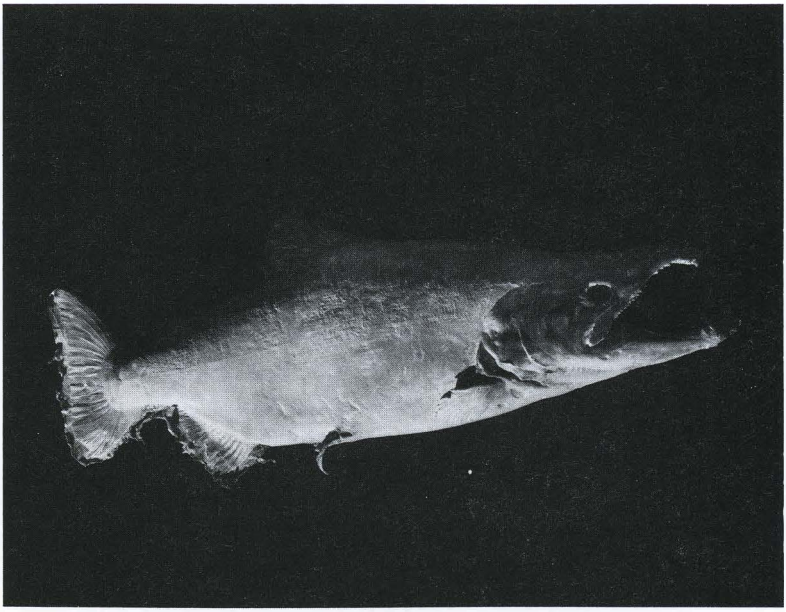
RF I feel it more deeply, although I don't feel that culture is a disease. Culture is definitely a part of me — my need to create and to see what other people create.

LR For someone who now lives away from the city and whose art comes from that natural source, you've had a very social background. What happened to make you go out there?

RF I've been going out there all my life. I've got a father who enjoyed the same sort of thing. Also, I'm very fortunate in that I was gifted with good eyesight. Combined with that gift was my interest in looking into things which was created by people I'd grown up with.

LR What about sight? I get the feeling that your sight means an identification and understanding — a sympathetic vision.

RF That tends to be true. I enjoy seeing things closely. I've often been accused of being morbid because a lot of the things that I work with are dead. Unfortunately, quite often you can't touch things and get to know them by looking at them closely unless they are dead. If I were driving down the highway and saw an animal at the side of the road, or, when walking through town, if I saw a sparrow lying in the gutter, I would pick it up and take it home because of the need to look at something and to understand it — to view it very, very closely.



LR In the pieces of your journal that are printed in the catalogue, you use the words "visual feast" and "symphony." It seems to be an appreciation of life and yet that this appreciation should be focused at the point of death in order to understand it seems a curious focus.

RF For me it's not such a curious focus because it's a beautiful culmination. The salmon, which are what I describe as being the visual feast, have gone through all of their cycle. When they get into the river they do the final maturing, the procreation, and then it's the winter, the dying of things. I don't think of it as being morbid and death as being a bad thing: in my mind it's a beautiful ending. However, I'm sure people would be able to find all sorts of incidents in nature where animals kill each other — even the fish do a lot of fighting amongst themselves.

LR But you don't portray any of this. It's kind of a memorial . . .

RF You think I idealize it? I don't know. Alvin was saying there's something classical and very clean about the pieces as well as romantic.

LR Are you interested in doing other aspects of the natural cycle?

RF Sure. Whatever is a part of my life. Now that I'm in the city I'm getting into people things more: humans and human bodies. Also, when I'm down here, I tend to be influenced by some of the art. I've always had an appreciation for somewhat savage human art, such as some of the things from New York. Maybe not "savage," but really strong images — the human element when it leaves its grey areas.

LR These "grey areas" are situations that economics has forced people into, or situations in which you feel people are being led away from being human?

RF My "grey areas" in the city are just times when people allow other people to make decisions for them. You're so reliant in the city on what other people can do for you rather than what you can do for yourself. I've become so independent in the last few years, for example, in being able to build a place from scratch . . .

LR What about people who don't have your experience of nature? You're taking these natural forms away from their context and putting them in an art gallery on the wall or floor. How do you expect or hope that viewers will relate to what you're presenting to them?

RF Well, on the west coast I think that they will realize that this experience isn't far removed from them: this is something that they could experience if they wanted to or if they had the initiative. West coast people tend to react more favourably, as they understand these things. Farther east, if the Toronto show was any sort of an example, the reaction was 50-50. There was no middle ground: it was either pure hate or pure love. The funniest thing was that I had a big fish carcass encased in glass, and it did smell a bit but I never thought about it. At one point, one of the guys who contributed a lot of money to the AGO walked through and said, "This show stinks!" I felt like walking over and levelling him. Then I realized, to tell you the truth, the show *did* stink!

LR I'm not familiar with the process of making plaster moulds and putting the latex in.

RF You make sure the fish or animal isn't going to get locked in — most animals are flexible enough. When I make the plaster mould I can usually just lift it up — you're lifting a lot of weight in fairly wet plaster — and then just shake and the carcass will gradually fall out. It's plaster moulds, rubber casts: the cast is your final product.

LR What is it about the rubber that you like?

RF Oh, it's tactile and it colours beautifully. The rubber tends to deteriorate, though. With the salmon it's beautiful because the fish have a life-cycle of four years and my rubber has a life-cycle, under normal use, of about four or five years. These objects double the life of one salmon — the cast of a particular salmon would last four years beyond the salmon's normal life and then that image of the salmon would die too.

LR How did you come to make moulds of salmon?

RF When I finished university, I went to the Vancouver School of Art for one year. It was around December of that year that there was a strike by the janitors and so there was no heat in the school. I decided that since the school was so cold I would take some plaster and go out onto a river. That's when I started making them. The year before that I had gone out on a river with a friend. The river had obviously been about four feet higher only days before — before it had frozen. I remember seeing a flat — what had been a big back-eddy — and, since the salmon run was finished, there were dead salmon, which had been covered with a fine layer of silt, lying in this area. Then it started to snow and all this was covered.

LR Did you see that as a sculpture?

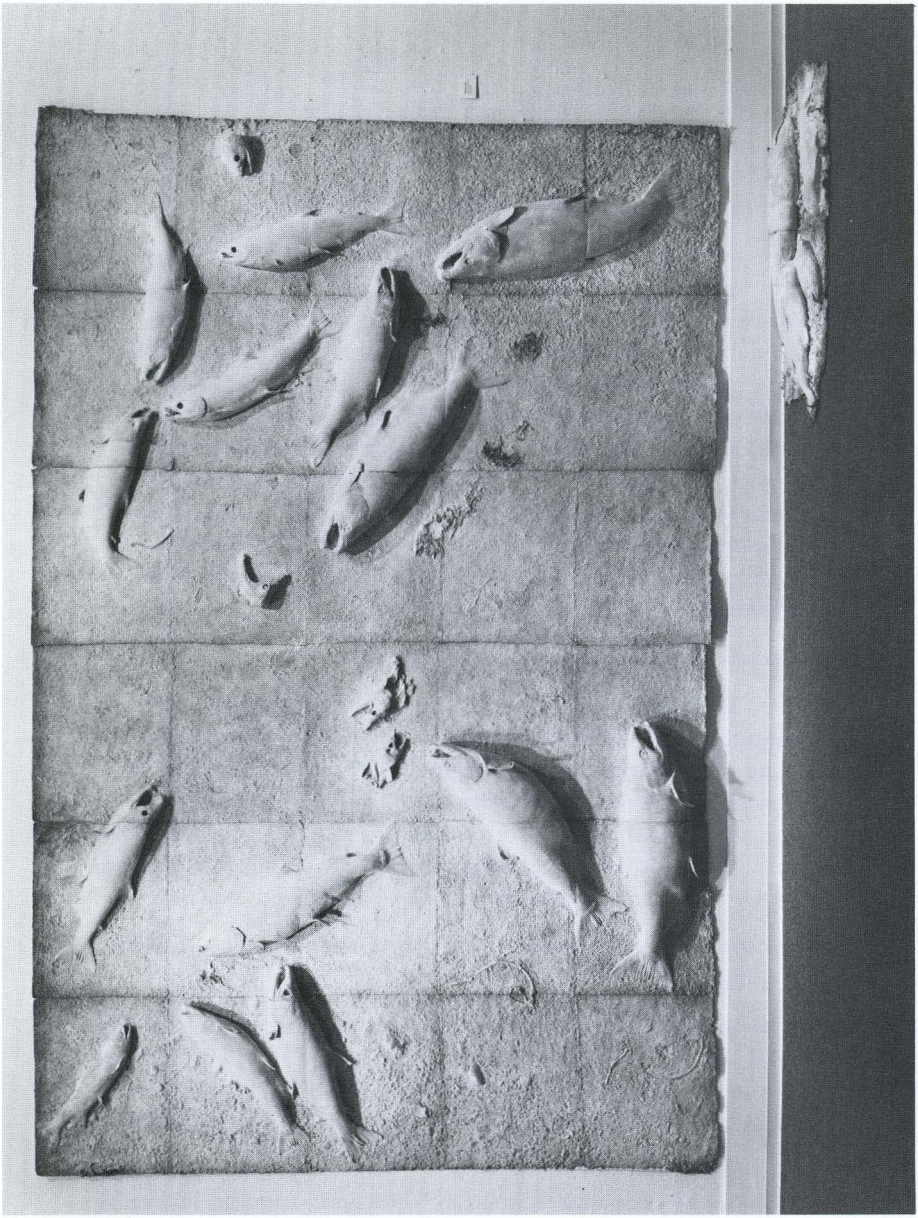
RF Yes. The salmon mat, which came out of that scene, was a monster to do. Each of those moulds when they were fresh must have weighed close to 150 pounds. I had taken 2,000 pounds of plaster and set up camp beside the Harrison River. I spent three-and-a-half days in torrential rains and then the water rose until it wiped out my working area. All my plaster moulds were under water, so I had to retreat. Eventually I did it again.

LR Do your shows always have your journal entries along with the fish pieces?

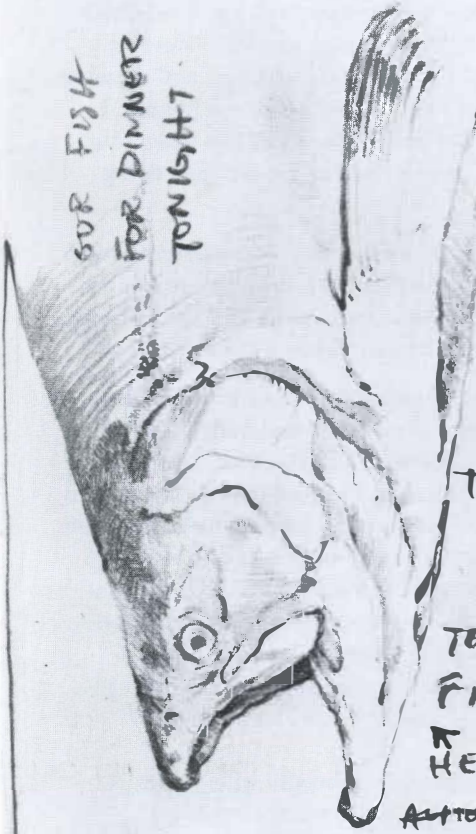
RF They have in the past. The show then operates on more than one level. I'm not trying to show just these animals but also the way I interact with them. Rather than just showing a sculpture or something, it's important that there are also words to reveal a little bit about how I experience things.

LR It's your life that enters into the gallery, not just objects. You're bringing the whole idea of going out there and . . .

RF confronting. I've been fortunate in being able to experience these things first-hand. Part of what I'm trying to do is also to show these beautiful things to people.



BIG WOOD WASP WITH YELLOW ANTENNAE. - YELLOW BYE + BLACK + YELLOW STRIPED LEGS - BLACK VELVET BODY.



MEL WENT OUT WITH MR LION TODAY + YESTERDAY - THEY CAUGHT THIS BIG PINK PLUS 17 OTHERS. TODAY I CANOED HIM OUT TO THE BOAT.

ITS A BIT WINDY TODAY. I'M FEELIN FINE PEELIN LOVS.

HE'S BIG + BRIGHT. ~~ALMOST~~ A SHAME THAT HE NEVER GOT TO REACH HIS RIVER. THERE'S A PATCH OF TURQUOISE BLUE ON HIS CHEEK WHAT A BEAUTIFUL COLOR - LIKE WATER.

LR What difference would it make if you showed in an aquarium?

RF It wouldn't make any difference at all. Actually, the Vancouver Aquarium asked me if I would fill their display case for the summer, but I was too busy with what I was doing. The elitist — or the whole idea of art being anything special — doesn't interest me. It's just the idea of making these things and showing them to people in almost any context that really excites me. I used to send them through the mail — that's not an art context, but it's lots of fun. I wasn't saying anything, I was just doing these things.

LR (reads) *In the late Sixties, inspired by the Vancouver version of the neo-dada school of correspondence art, he began to use the postal system as a medium for his creative acts, and has followed the example of some of its avatars in adopting a pseudonym.*[2]

RF That was in my fourth year of university, during the summer. A friend of mine had just written me a letter and addressed it to "R. Fish". I walked in to see Michael Morris at UBC and I knew he was into things — well, Mr. Peanut hadn't quite started at that time, but I think Michael was Marcel Dot then. I walked up to him and said, "Hi, I'm R. Fish." That was it. I also used to do a lot of corresponding through the mail and I found that if I signed my letters "R. Fish" — especially since they tended to have a lot of fish images inside — I got replies. It was also a good way of keeping my artistic life separate from my other life.

LR Why would you do that?

RF Well, partly because a lot of my art, especially when I was in high school, was really weird stuff and I tended to have a conservative side. So, I separated these two aspects of myself — the artistic aspect that was completely free and willing to do anything, and the other aspect of my life with which I tried to maintain an even keel. I take neither of them too seriously.

LR What does that say about identity, though, if you want your shows to say something about you? Just who is it . . .

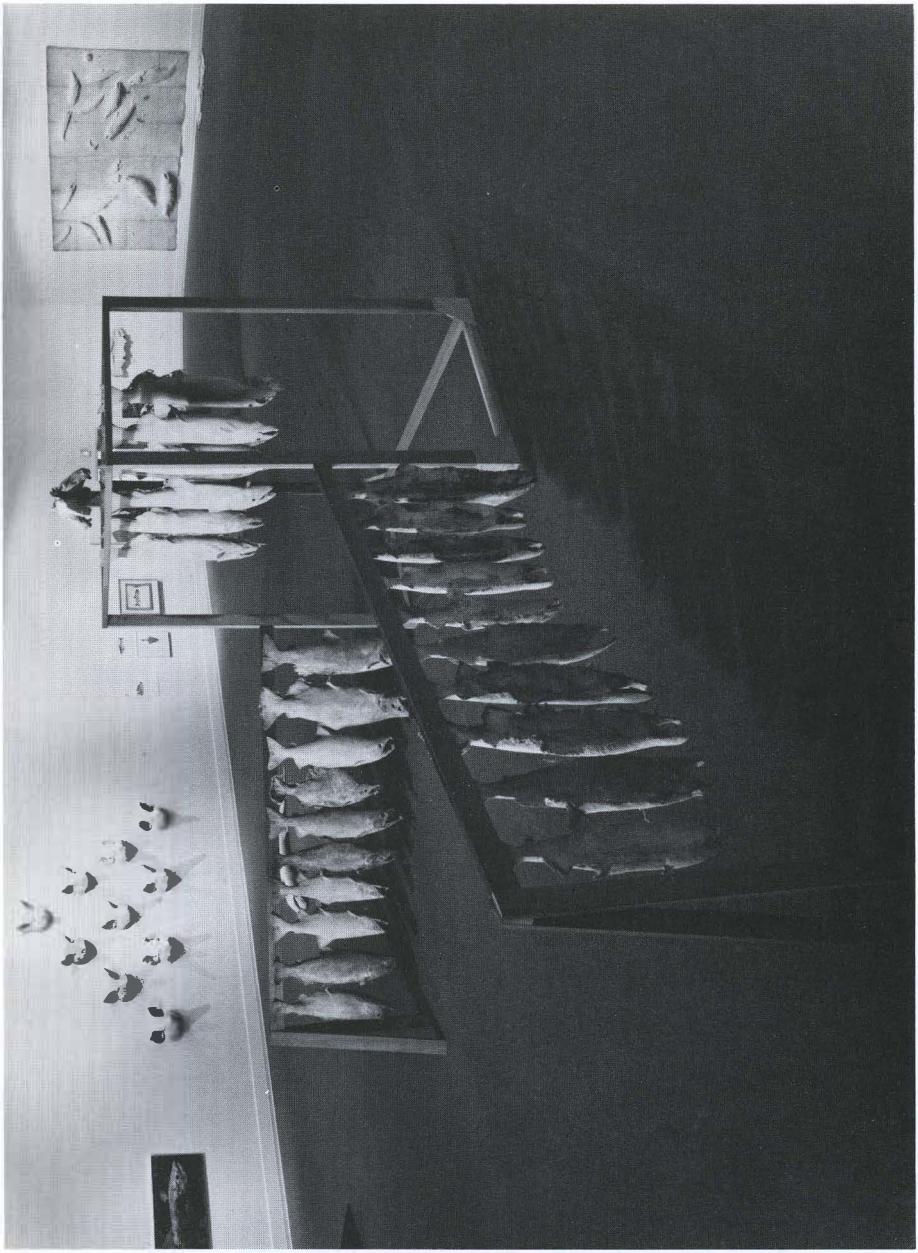
RF Well, the Toronto show was titled "R. Fish" because, three or four years ago, that was really my identity. We came to name it and I said, well, if we stick to "R. Fish", it means "rubber fish" and it means lots of different things, so just leave it at "R. Fish" and if people think it's me, that's fine, and if people think it's supposed to describe the rubber fish, then that's fine, too.

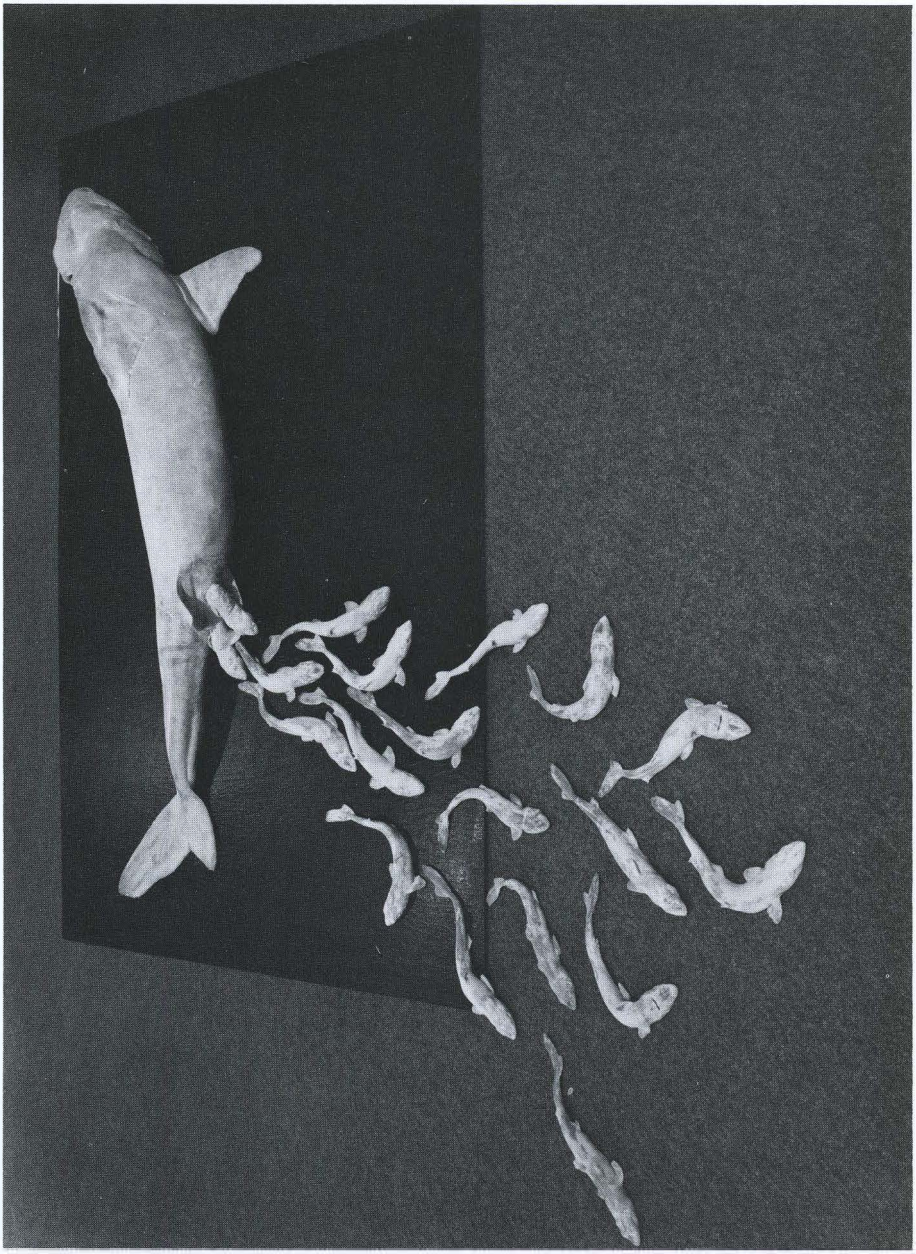
LR You seem to be very easy-going about how people respond to your work.

RF Most of the things are perfectly obvious. If you've got a shark sitting on the floor, you don't really need a tag telling you it's a shark.

LR The information they're getting is that this is a cast of a shark and here it is on the floor . . . and you're saying that your art is all about your environment and your interaction with that. You've been out there in those rivers and streams and you know what it's like, so these things may act as visual clues to you. . . . There's that difference between the gallery and — well, you can take people up to your island.

RF It's interesting — I'm realizing I'm creating a grey area. I'm saying that people don't experience all these things; they get things given to them by somebody else. I'm giving somebody something else that isn't quite vivid, it isn't quite real, it's sifted through. In this case it's sifted through me.





LR What is it that you've been learning about yourself throughout the process of your art — especially with the fish. Are there differences between your first pieces and where you're at now? Would you say they've changed?

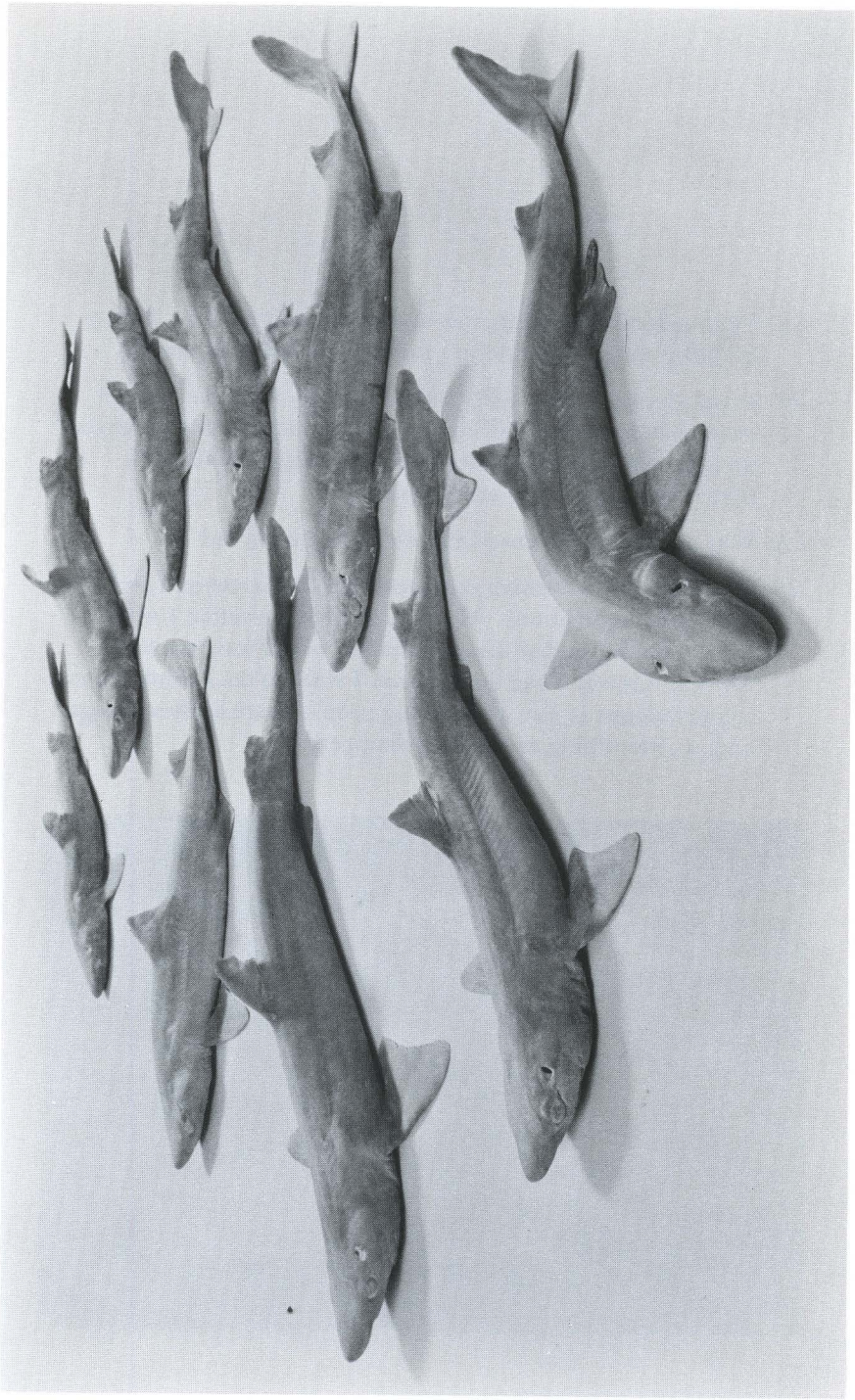
RF Things are changing. They tend to be more complex, yet I'm also becoming more relaxed; I'm looking at the ordinary things a lot more around me and finding that they're really quite exciting.

LR What do you mean by ordinary?

RF Things like getting a big dog-fish in the boat and having her give birth in the bottom of the boat. It's so commonplace that it didn't strike me as being a vivid image until I produced the piece on the floor of the gallery. Creating these things is causing me to look at everything much more closely than I ever did before. I suppose the really important thing that's happened isn't so much the creating of the pieces in themselves, but the knowledge that I've gained. That's probably why the thoughts recorded in the journal pieces can be so important.

LR This recording . . . your sculpture is an act of recording as well. Do you get out with an eye to fixing these things, making them permanent in some way?

RF Yeah, to a certain extent. Sometimes it's an instant — to record an incident such as the dog-fish piece. That piece had to go along with the description up on the wall of what happened the day my brother and I were out in a boat and came upon a school of herring being chewed apart by mud sharks. We looked down into the water and there were literally hundreds and hundreds of sharks all moving around very slowly and methodically as though they were in a sleep — as long as they kept their mouths open, sooner or later the fish would be caught. I wanted some bigger dog-fish to take home and make moulds from, so, as one passed under the boat, I reached down and grabbed it by the tail and flipped it into the boat. My brother thought that was great, so he got out his movie camera and asked me to do it again. I waited for a few more minutes until one came by just the right way and I was able to reach down and grab him by his tail and up he came into the boat too.



LR You use fish as materials, too, apart from appreciating them as beautiful things. How do you justify your taking of them?

RF I can't justify it very well. Usually I get my fish when they're dead anyway: either they're spawned-out, or maybe they've come up in a seine net and are dead. Given the opportunity, I'll release anything I can into the water.

LR Why are you not a conservationist — or, overtly so?

RF Okay, I'm not a member of Greenpeace, for instance. I feel I'm doing it in my own way. As a part of an organization I would have to do things that the organization would want me to do, whereas this way I can do whatever I want to do. I think I am a conservationist in that I'm making people aware of these things and, so, less willing to see them disappear.

LR You were saying that you objected to belonging to an organization which might limit your freedom. Do you regard yourself as a free person? as a free artist?

RF Yeah, up until now I have. I must admit in the project I'm doing right now I'm not very free. The federal government commissioned Roderick Haig-Brown, who was an author and a magistrate in Campbell River, to write a book on the sport fisheries of Canada. I've been reading his books ever since I was a little kid and so came to know his writings really well. Later on I corresponded with him, and, before he died, he mentioned that he was writing a book and that he would like me to do the illustrations for it. He died three years ago, about a week or two after the book was written. Then the whole project was held in limbo. Eventually they said that I could do the illustrations for it. They asked me how long and I said I'd like maybe a year and a half and they gave me eight months.

LR They're all pen and ink drawings?

RF About half of them are watercolours. They tend to be silhouettes or portraits of fish, such as Rainbow trout, Chinook salmon, Brook trout and some of the lesser species. The more important species are done in watercolours and the lesser species I've done in pen and ink — these are more fish in movement.

LR How do you do that?

RF Well, it hasn't been easy because one of the deals was that I was to be supplied with all my specimens. If anybody can find specimens, it should surely be Environment Canada and the Federal Fisheries — but they couldn't. They also let the contract in the beginning of winter, which is a great time to try and get specimens of fish in Canada if you want to do a lot of ice fishing. What they did was ask me to go to UBC and check around their pickled fish. I've been really disappointed because I would've liked to have done a tremendous job on the book. I intend to do a book of my own which will be the way I want it to be.

LR What would be the content of your book?

RF Well, obviously it's going to be fish, but even this is changing. It might not be just Canadian fish and possibly not just fish. Some aspects of the journals may be included, in which case, I could do fish and include them as a part of the whole natural world.

LR There are journal pieces in which you've related events and gone into descriptions of the island — it sounds as though it's very beautiful up there.

RF Oh, it is. It's difficult to make it seem otherwise, really.

LR What if nature were not so beautiful? You've felt the force of nature, the unpleasant side — does this ever come into your work?

RF No, it hasn't found a place yet, but I must say that I've never fully appreciated solitude such as I find in *The Old Man and the Sea* until we were running down from Rivers Inlet once, about one o'clock in the morning. There's a distance of open ocean from the inlet to the northern end of Vancouver Island and it was blowing up pretty good that night. We came upon a gillnetter way out there and saw its one light in all the solitude. I was in a 45-foot seine boat so the bad weather didn't make any difference to me, but this guy was in a gillnetter, and we could just barely make out his light. I thought, 'That is real solitude — that guy has got no recourse; if he gets into trouble, he's out there by himself'. That's when I started to appreciate the solitude that I think Hemingway was talking about when he wrote that book. It's something so difficult to get into writing — difficult to get into any art.

LR What's discovered in solitude?

RF I think you discover the limits of yourself really quickly. I guess living up on Malcolm Island is solitude, although I don't really think of it as such. Is that solitude when you've got all those living creatures around you? I think a lot of people from the city would think so because you can't relate, you can't talk to them, you can't socialize with them. I think I socialize in my own indirect way with them.

LR Your social is nature . . .

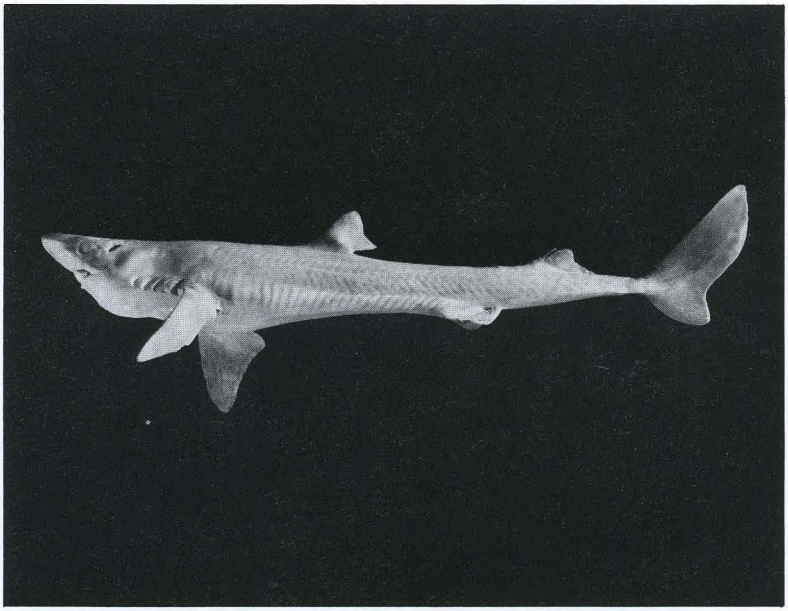
RF Well, I realize that we're all living things and that therefore I have something in common with them. So, there is a communion, I guess, with these creatures. I don't feel the solitude as long as there are creatures around. The only time I feel it is when it's absolutely pitch-black and really stormy. That's solitude: the absence of everything except yourself.

LR Is that solitude something you'd like to give people a sense of? Your art is coming into the city. How can you give city-dwellers your experience of solitude and what relevance does that have now to people's lives?

RF I don't know how relevant it is. I try and give people a certain amount of my experience and it's obvious to me that they don't get the whole thing; if I walk along the beach or walk along the river and see these fish, what I experience is much different than what people who walk into a gallery, who get the experience second-hand, feel. I think, though, that it helps if I make it as real and as vivid as possible. That's one of the reasons I like the medium, plaster and rubber: the detail is infinitely perfect. I think it's by making things that vivid, that clear, that it's a lot easier for people to grasp some of the experience.

LR Your exhibitions — how do you hope they will change the lives of those who see them — those people who may never otherwise enjoy your kind of life first-hand?

RF All I think I would want is for them to have some sort of sympathy for the animal that helped create the object because the object itself is not an animal — it's an object, it's a sculpture, it's whatever, it's a piece of rubber. But, if they can see behind that to the animal that helped to create it and have sympathy and understanding for it, then that's about all I could ask.



R.Fish / IMAGES

detail *Salmon Rack*, 1978, latex, life-size.

R. Fish (Robert Field).

detail *Salmon Rack*, 1978, latex, life-size.

spawned-out salmon.

Salmon Mat, 1978, latex and canvas, 274 x 426 cm.

detail, R. Fish's journal.

Installation at Vancouver Art Gallery, June-July, 1978.
(Foreground: *Salmon Rack.*)

Mother Dogfish and Babies, 1978, latex, life-size.

Dogfish (School of), 1978, latex and fibreglass, life-size.

latex salmon-cast.

R. Fish making cast on the banks of the Chehalis River.

detail, same site.

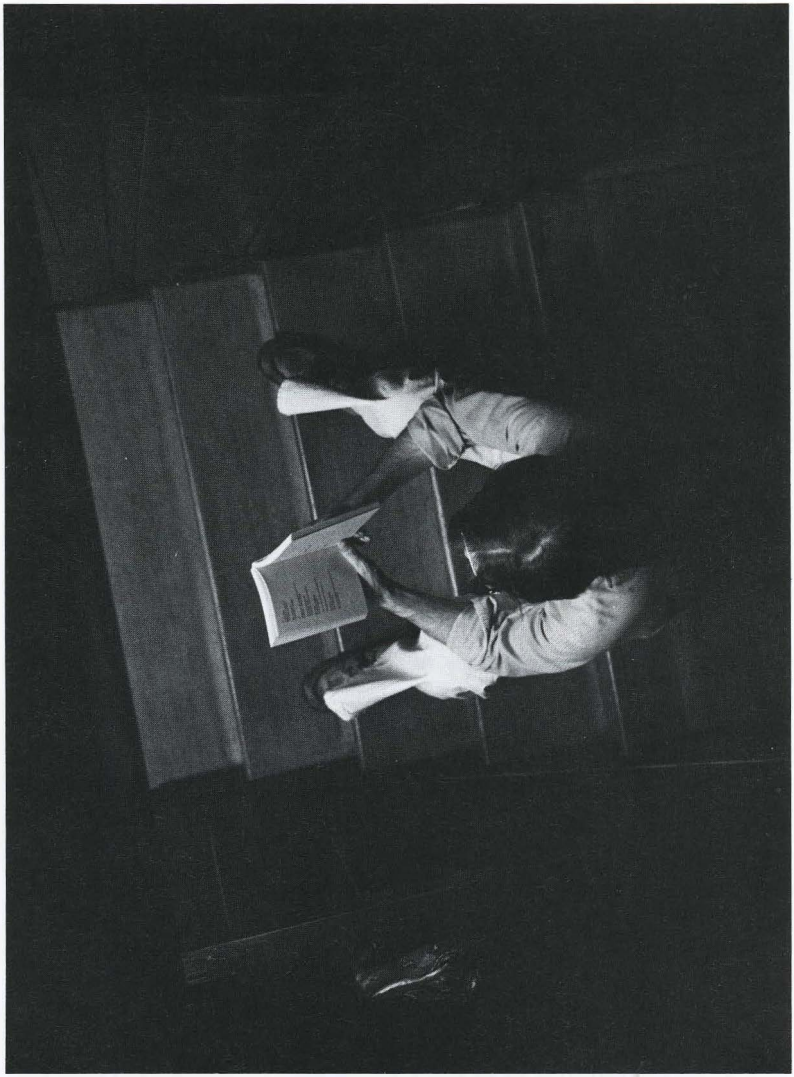
Hanging Shark, 1978, latex and fibreglass, life-size.

Photography: With thanks to Robert Keziere and Jim Gorman of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

NOTES:

[1]Alvin Balkind, "Introduction," in *R. Fish*: an exhibition catalogue (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1978), p. 8. Alvin Balkind was the curator of the R. Fish exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 10.



George Bowering / A SPECIAL SECTION

WEST WINDOW

grip down and begin to awaken

The tendril that grew last spring across my study window
is now a bare branch.

I dont recall being hugged
by either of my parents; I grew that way, food in my mouth
they gave me, frequent drinks of water,
exercise in the hills behind the house
& in the back yard. They made certain I had work to do there.

I dont remind myself of anyone in my family,
the greedy way I am always hugging my daughter,
smoothing her hair while she sleeps. I would rather watch her
than watch her grow,
but she does. & I put food in her mouth.

Now a bare branch. I have often told myself
to cut it down, it is a creeper like a weed, cut it down
& while you are at it, rake last summer's leaves
now frozen to the lawn. But I dont do it, day after day,

& after doing it just this once more,
dont make any more figures in which you compare
foliage & children.

OLD STANDARDS

Love, so easy once to speak of,
never got a chance to reply.

Maybe she wasnt interested, maybe
she brusht her hair more than necessary

while he went on enjoying his skill.
Maybe when he left she rusht to her telephone.

1.

Every time it rains it rains
on sidewalks he walkt on in the rain

back in West Point Grey again,
snapping-dry Interior forest put away again.

And there she was, whom he put off in Spring.
Jane. The second woman he ever entered
was seventeen. And older save in language
far than he who left his wallet God knows where
till he went back there & there
it was under her bed beneath the living room.

He loved her & it was without simplicity.
He loved her & her father's boat.
He loved her father's gold plates
upon which he ate his first truffles.
He loved her grandmother's box at the opera.
He loved appearing first night at the theatre
wearing a thirty-dollar charcoal suit on the society page.

He loved his mushroom earwig cellar room
where he wrote a book devoted to doom & filled with her.

He loved her perfect tennis body.
He loved his life in the early twenties
sitting in her basket chair reading a poem
& looking at the broad enclosed garden
where his fated Byron life fell relentlessly
like pennies on the green green lawn.

2.

Moonlight becomes you
after it's quietly taken place in the room

it slips off surfaces, walnut table, patterned carpet,
& gathers to reality,
a tall blonde woman
glowing with light he cant believe is borrowed.

He cannot believe he's seeing this in the past,
more months gone by than creases lie
under his collar.

You turned in the space before the window
just beneath the tree hardly further than his hand
could reach,
                away away, turning,

whom he saw seldom at night. You were moonlight
& he was alone.

                During the daylight he saw you
& was deeply impressed by your tan. He also realized

his life had no room for the way you acquired it.

3.

When an early autumn walks the land
you'll freeze your ass
in the wind off Lake Manitoba.

Walking a sparse avenue there he felt
as if he loved the first woman he ever entered,
& felt too he was at last grown up, an early autumn,
putting on his uniform the next morning,
patting his soiled wedge cap on the middle of his skull

She was as she must be, a year or so older
& a mother, how round, what escape from psychology.

Words
failed him. He took instead pictures, she lookt up at him
years later, a friendly trollop,
& he loved her then, who knew not where she fetcht up.

It was not the little death of winter he felt
but the onset of a long fall,
a series of imaginable tumbles, a door
over an abyss, & if that's not psychology
it's not the truth either.

Or rather it *was* not. No
it *is* not.

4.

Pennies in a stream, falling
thru the time she loved him, paid all accounts
owing to nature, *la belleza*, etc.

He withers, interestingly, as leaves drift
round his half-floating body as if they were
a disappearing bank account.

Those pennies came from heaven
& he always had the sense to come in
out of the rain. She never noticed the weather,
she was the weather.

And he used to act as if
you could get something, even sunshine
for nothing.

She became in the early times
moonlight in Vermeer, a valuable painting.

Pictures eventually
failed him.

He spied her bare bum in the dark of his room
as she, in the mirror,
felt around his feet
to see whether he was in bed.

5.

Somewhere there's music,
how fake the tune —

his ears stopt up years before hers,
the news of her passing
coming by folded ways till he learnt,
he had to learn, she was gone

whom he always thought he would see again.
enter for the first time fully, her,
earth.

Somewhere there's heaven, he believed
going with her mysterious non-faith
to her church with the twin towers.

He thought the late part of his age
would be the afterlife,
& so far logic would extend, they
would be together, for some part of it
at the least.

His best friend told him
he should have entered her
earlier, now she is gone, he is gone,
the only member of the party remaining
is himself.

The darkest night.
Some afterlife.

6.

Down among the sheltering palms
he questioned his heart
yearning to take the boy home with him

away from the grungy bar
in the Graham Greene town
where the fat woman with the parrot on her shoulder
& the Russian in the 1930's ice cream suit
spoke a culture that grew there
with the weeds up thru the restaurant floor.

Yes, he was in dirty rags & beautiful,
grey-black & his faced shaped with an expert knife
like Roberto Clemente.

He loved him without simplicity,
he said to himself he would like to adopt him,
he would never be able to forget him,

he was in the tavern at nine o'clock in the morning
& he was there at midnight.

Having probably several sisters & a father
& his own nationality
& a future
burning by that corner of a sea
few would abandon themselves to.

Oh honey, he thought, no,
dont wait for me.

7.

The sun is shining, oh happy day.
The sun is shining into the middle of his history
where she can see the scars of pleasure.

She lookt to find what she dreads & it was
not there. In a moment it was there, quote:
"She suckt his cock with the noise
of a beagle drinking soup." Unquote.

No more uncertainty & no skies of grey.
What she found was, quote:
"He has never entered her." Unquote.

She would not like to allow that *chic,*
poetry speaking of itself, the poems singing
for themselves, & she was right.

It was plain to herself, she loved him,
he should have been here to see this poem
she was making for them,

an end to the list of lovers, a confusion of clarity
& a sunny day.

8.

I'm singing in the rain —
like pennies on a green green lawn,
he said, in his croaking frog voice.

If the truth be told, he was inside a large house
filled with collaborations,
                his home like his poetry
composed as he went along.

                On the phone
she talks to the outside
world, where it's raining.

                How dry I am
sings the appliance in the basement.

                He has come
this moment to a domestic poem.

There's a smile on his face.
He cannot believe he's seeing this in the present.
He cant believe how delicious is her *ratatouille*.
He will never carry a machine gun in his life.
The whole human race
                is outside. He hopes for sunshine.

So he can get outside & lop the mushrooms off.

It is simplicity at last.
But what a complicated way of getting
happy again.

from *THE DEAD SAILORS*

CHAPTER 38

Menzies kept the carcass of that brown albatross around for weeks, & some of the officers made faces & some of the men were heard to mutter unpleasant words. But he was the scientist, & therefore up to something they didnt understand, so one had to put up with it.

Not that they were superstitious about the albatross. They didnt give two hoots about an albatross. Unless there was a literary person about. If there was a literary person about, they let on about how the great spread albatross over the quarterdeck was the source of supernatural calm, & the dead albatross was a source of supernatural dread. Once when there was a German poet stalking around the vessel while they were tied up at Capetown, a sailor named Delsing told him that he had once as a lad thrown a belaying pin at a perching albatross, killing the bird on the spot. The older sailors, he told the German poet, had seized him & compelled him to wear the albatross around his neck until it dropped off. But the sailors who overheard the telling of this tale doubled over with their sun-browned hands clapped over their mouths, the universal gesture executed by people who are trying not to laugh or throw up.

The truth of the matter was that you could never throw a belaying pin straight enough to hit an albatross, & if you did, you could never throw it hard enough to kill him. If you managed to get him the pin would bounce off him & fall onto the deck, & the albatross would look at it there, then look over at you, & then look away again & stand up on tip-toe, flap his long jointed wings, & jump away into the breeze.

That's why everyone was deeply impressed when the little botanist Menzies brought down the bird with a second shot from his flintlock pistol.

So it was not that they were superstitious. If they had been superstitious, & especially if there had been a literary person on board, they might have looked at the decaying bird & said things such as:

"I dont like it."

"It makes me uneasy."

"It's an unholy thing he is doing."

"No good can come of it."

"We shall be paying for his affront, mark my words."

"I fear him & his glittering eye."

But it wasnt superstition at all that fetched their disapprobation. It was a normal distaste for the ongoing apparition of a large dead & decaying bird on the premises. On board a ninety-nine-foot ship one cannot comfortably imagine the rotting body a great enough distance from the cook's supply of salt beef. The rumour that they were putting saltpetre in the mashed potatoes was bad enough. So what they were actually saying, historically but non-literarily, was more like this:

"Aw, shit. I dont see why we have to put up with this from a civilian."

"Christ, I left Birmingham to get away from odours like this."

"I feel like kicking that piece of shit over the side, & him after it."

"He's a Scot, & a Scot will eat a sheep's old stomach full of horse-food, so it bothers him not at all; but I am a tender boy from West Sussex, & my nature was not formed for an outrage the like of this."

"Ah, you've got goose-shit for brains!"

Thus were the minds of common British sailors unable for long to stay upon the same subject. But one memory was emblazoned now in their minds' eyes. That was the little fellow bringing down a bird near his own size, with a pistol more ornamental than dangerous in its appearance.

It was a device with a single flint & a small pan. Originally one of a pair, its mate was in the *Tøjhusmeet*, in Copenhagen. Menzies had been given this one as a present from Mr Banks, on the occasion of his appointment aboard the *Discovery*.

Its furniture was gilt brass, heavily applied & cast with designs of scroll-work & classical heads in relief. Its brass lock-plate was engraved with scroll-work. The long barrel was chiselled with strap-work & a classical figure, & bore the mark of Daniel Thiermay. Thus it may have been of French make, & if so the only object of French

manufacture aboard Captain Vancouver's ship. In any case the ornamental weapon was fashioned in about 1725, & was nearly seventy years later in excellent condition.

Actually there had been not only another pistol but also a gun, decorated *en suite*, all bearing the mark of Daniel Thiermay. The gun disappeared after its last discharge against the British at Gibraltar, & was probably lying beneath the deep waters of the Bay.

On some of Thiermay's pieces his name is followed by the phrase, *à Paris*. But the Thiermay family is known to have operated in Liège, where brass mounts of the type found on Menzies' flintlock were especially popular. Some authorities there conjecture that Daniel Thiermay worked in Liège but signed his work *à Paris* to render it more saleable. But in that nothing definite is known of his career, it is not untoward to believe that he worked for a while at least in the French capital. So Menzies' beautiful & fated pistol may have known a French birthplace after all. It is a small irony in a large ocean.

In any case, when Archibald Menzies stepped out & aimed his barrel at the hovering albatross, a lot of seamen stopped what they were doing & watched him. Vancouver himself watched with a faint smirk from way up at the forecastle. Menzies just continued what he was doing, as if no one were around to make him self-conscious. He was neither superstitious nor impatient.

There was a flash & a bang & some smoke, & then there was the botanist shaking more powder into his pan & there was the albatross, which hadnt so much as hinged a wing. Then there was a flash & a bang & some smoke, & the albatross hit the deck chin first with a clatter, & though the gathered sailors did not offer a clapping of hands, they did send up a murmuring that is universally recognized as applause.

Though George Vancouver did not offer Mr Menzies a congratulatory word on his marksmanship, he did remember the utter lack of expression on his surgeon's face as the dead creature slammed to his planks.

CHAPTER 39

He had noticed for a long time that while getting down to writing was unpleasant, writing was not so bad; & having written was sometimes so nice that he expressed his pleasure to a friend. In these ways the writing of a book may be compared with the passing of a voyage, but the comparison will not support a close nor an overlong scrutiny.

Two nights ago he'd told a student of literature that he thought that imagination implied a travelling, or a trip. He meant not to use the latter word, or intended its use not at all in the lightsome way teenagers spoke of drugs or new religions or simply recent interests. Such usage is a nuisance — it is a ritualizing of a mutiny.

He said that a passive leaning on a rail & seeing what the coast provides for one's gaze is linear, foppery & fancy. Going there & looking, turning over a rock or a clam — that is what is meant by the imagination. The ship is the vessel of metaphor, a carrying across as they say.

Full of theory & baffled, he felt his brain settle down on the soft end of its stem. The volcanic mountains inland but visible from the main, received their new names without protest. The rhythm of the sentences seemed to call for more.

The Catholics murdered them by the thousands, sacked their cities, defiled their holy places, erased their alphabets, melted down their gold, & brought half-breeds upon their women. But somehow the Catholics made greater inroads into the lives of the Indians than any Protestant, explorer, conqueror, or settler ever did. The Iroquois & the Aztecs became part of the global village that is the Catholic church at its rites, but one would look far & wide before coming upon a Redskin who professed to be a Non-Conformist, much less an Anglican.

At Nootka, the great native chief Maquinna was fond of the Spaniards, & fond of visiting them. For him the dinner table of Don Juan Quadra was the symbol of Mamathni behaviour. He was also proud, & as far as the whites were concerned, pride was a very important quality in the Indian. He was proud of the trust the strong & wise foreigners had in him. There was never any question of armament when he & his entourage visited the Spanish ships, nor when Quadra & his boatload of people disembarked at Maquinna's village. The West Coast, in this regard, was the image of peacefulness.

But Maquinna made the same mistake about the White Men Without Women as the latter often made about the various sorts of brown people — he thought they were all alike. So one day shortly after the British ships had anchored at Friendly Cove he caused himself to be transported to the *Discovery*, where he planned to greet the new visitors to the Coast.

"Hold it right there!" said the sentry on duty.

He didnt exactly aim his musket at the stout native standing among the paddlers in his dugout. But he wasnt exactly presenting arms, either.

"My name is Maquinna, chief of chiefs in these parts, & I come to make pleasantries with your chief," said Maquinna.

Unfortunately, he spoke only Nootka, with a smattering of Halkomelem & Spanish. The sentry was a twenty-one-year-old named Andrew Macready from Glasgow. He had trouble understanding what the English officers said, so it is no wonder that all he perceived was a sort of fat Indian saying something like "Euclatle muh Maquinna, kimscutla naw kimscutla, neah kyumkhwaltek Nootka skaw kimscutla koakoax."

In any event he wasnt having any of it.

"Get tha' goon, ye doorty savage!" he replied, perhaps brandishing the musket in the direction of the chief of chiefs.

"He just looked like a regular heathen. How was I supposed to know he was a chief?" the young Macready was later to enquire of the officer in charge of his flogging.

Whatever the truth, one may be sure that Maquinna wasted no time in going to vent his unhappy feelings before his good friend Juan Quadra.

"I am not accustomed to having my dignity mishandled so easily," he told the Spanish Commandant.

"Of course not," said the latter. "But we must both seem at least to be a bit more patient with the English. They are without gods, & therefore ignorant when it comes to conversing with those into whose heads the gods still speak."

"This poor Coastal chief finds it difficult to understand what is meant by a people without gods. Who is it, then, that instructs them during moments of great decision?"

"It is a phenomenon called human consciousness," said Quadra. "Their chief, Mr Vancouver, has a great deal of it."

"Yet they have sailed their wingéd canoes past many lands, you tell me. The world is becoming a different place too rapidly for this peaceful chief."

Quadra, as was his wont, told Maquinna as much as he could about the English, to explain to him why he had been treated as he had; then he told Vancouver what a mistake had been made aboard his ship. He told him further how to patch things up. So Vancouver had eight presents dispatched to the chief, along with a humble & importunate invitation to break fast aboard the *Discovery* upon the next morrow.

Breakfast went along fine for a while. Quadra complimented Vancouver upon the fish. Maquinna was so well-dressed that no one, from Glasgow or elsewhere, could mistake him for less than a great political personage.

But Peter Puget did not like him. He did not like the idea of a Red Savage sitting at the Captain's board & placing the Captain, as he saw it, on the defensive. To give some course to his resentment, he kept refilling Maquinna's glass with claret.

Meanwhile the sun had risen high over the island's mountains, & laid generous light over everything on the sea, the way it does in the morning at Trieste. Some of it came thru an opened shutter & pierced its way into Maquinna's red cut-glass goblet.

"No," he said, & was dutifully translated. "No, you English do not know how to conduct yourselves when you are in the presence of a people's leaders. These Spanish now, they are gentlemen. Their wine is also of superior quality."

"I'll cut off his badges of authority & feed them to the crows," said Puget in an aside. He worked on the assumption that asides were not translated.

Maquinna said that the greatest sadness in his life was about to come down because the Spanish were leaving. He said that he was afraid that the British would probably eventually hand him over, along with his lands & people, to the Yankees. He had hated the Yankees ever since the time when he was standing in front of Meares' skin store & a Yankee sailor had stuck a cigar in his mouth. He was a pipe-smoker for one thing, & the Yankee had laughed at him for another.

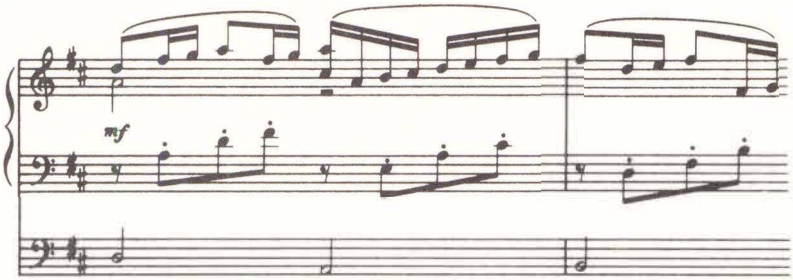
Here was an opportunity for Quadra, if he were so inclined, to drop the seeds of trouble between English & Nootka. Instead, he told Maquinna on his honour as a Spaniard that the chief could expect continuing decent treatment by the Europeans. Vancouver looked intently at the chief's face, & saw that he was thoroughly convinced. Then he looked at Quadra's face, & was chilled & excited by what he saw there.

That night the Peruvian was cruel & then he was more kind than he need be.

CARTER FELL

Above the clouds he had eaten baked lasagne out of a rectangular white dish, & fixt in his ears, the plastic knobs offered the Pittsburgh Philharmonic playing Pachelbel's Kanon in D. If he was going to die in another fiery crash, thank goodness for this, serendipity. It was the name of a bookstore in Berkeley, & as it turned out, he did indeed make it there, following an alarming zoom of the new subway beneath, somewhere, the bay.

It was his first stay in San Francisco after thirteen years, a return he had put off by way of a distorted principle. For six years he had stayed out of Babylon altogether, but a year ago he'd gone swimming a few meters across the line, & that broke his private pact. Now, San Francisco, that is, North Beach, was another matter. It was the city where he had learned that art was not something you do, it is something that chooses every fault & virtue, after you volunteer to pass thru its gate. The eye & the words are not tools as some had tried to teach him elsewhere, but a world you enter & mature in. Poetry here had killed its truest son.



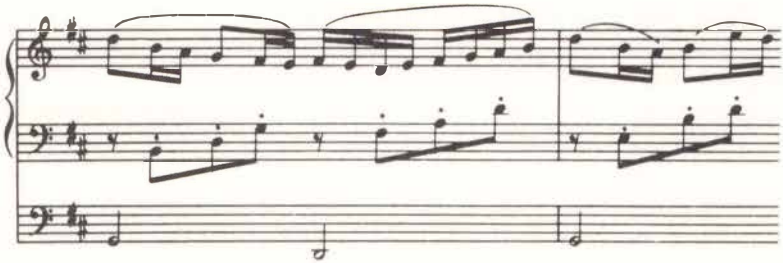
But they had gone their ways, diverging. Since his last visit, the city had been broken in two, not by the promised earthquake, but by the loud music & its victims the kids with matted hair from the prairies, & the magazine writers. San Francisco was no longer an artists' town but a journalists' temporary hot spot. Now they made police-car pictures for television here. For his part, he had gone east, to Ontario-Quebec, the country that had sporadically fed him its colonial dreams during his childhood. Now he lived in the western colony again, but this week he was returning north from his winter in Puerto Limón, & returning to the still-standing site of his own civilization.

He dropt his suitcase & gadget bag in the room full of holes at the Swiss-American, killer across the hall grinning at him as he pulled the rickety door shut on its rattling lock, & hiked up to the bar on Greene Street. Fifteen years ago he had been driven to the bar to sit & have a drink with their poet — not an illuminating evening, but solid in his memory. The poet was now dead twelve & a half years, but the bar was still there, & so was he now, Spanish phrases falling off him like dying insects. From the lovely cool swarm of San Francisco midnight air, he walkt into Franco's, & there he was, inside a ramshackle American gay bar, the Christmas decorations left up thru late January attesting to the other defiance. A gay bar, yes, but neither the one nor the other fabrication, not a swishy aluminum piano lounge & not a waterfront leather bar with tattoos flext under every globe of light. Franco's is the best bar in America. Grateful policemen drink there at seven in the morning after a boring night's duty at the precinct.

As soon as he walkt in he saw Carter's large being at the only table, facing him. Carter did not recognize him & so he had the joy of saying hello, Carter. San Francisco can be depended on from the moment you arrive, a hundred rolls of exposed film in your bag, a winter well spent. Pachelbel & Franco's. At moments like this your life seemed worth living.

He put on a casual happy grin & said hi yah, buddy, & Carter couldnt believe it. Then he bought Carter a Picon Punch & there they were, the first time together at Franco's, who both loved this place.

Three months later he remembered this moment, a pen in his hand now, & wisht that all one's nights could be so marvelous, & wisht he could, after all that had happened since, recall it all with more vividness, such as one could recall the things outside oneself & time.



Carter the sculptor had been the master poet's lover some years before he had died, age thirty-nine, attacht to hoses in a California hospital. Ted the poet, who had always seemed so large, was really so small beneath Carter the giant, a hale junkie then, it was all a story, & he knew it of the telling. Here now was Carter, dying so the story went in Vancouver, a precious new citizenship that can protect you against many threats but not against your past. How that counts the revolutions & adds year by year, organ by organ inside your body. Mine too, he thought, from time to time.

What are you doing here, askt Carter, sitting noticeably still as he always had.

Having a drink. I just dropt my stuff in Murder Hotel & ran right up, he said happily.

Carter just lookt at him out of the eyes of a large body with no time for impatience. So he continued.

A couple of hours ago I was standing in a line in Lost Angeles. Before that I was getting sunstroke in the bottom left corner of the Caribbean. Surprised to see me, arent you?

Carter broke into his lovely campy chirp.

You bet your life I'm surprised to see you. Arent you surprised to see me?

Yes, but happy, too. I think that if I can expect to find anyone I know in Ted's bar it should be you. It certainly shouldnt be anyone else I know in Vancouver. Did I ever tell you that I first met Ted in this bar? He was sitting right about where that stool is. How come you're in San Francisco?

Chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp.

Wonderful, he thought. What a pleasant way to bring another lonesome trip to an end.

So Pearl didnt even blink. She gave me the charge plate & drove me straight to the airport. She's a wonderful woman.

You dont deserve her, Carter, he said.

We'll all give you anything under the circumstances, he was thinking. Though we will try to be rough about it, so that you wont be called upon to acknowledge our extra care. When it gets complicated like this, talk a little louder & express your minor feelings with heart.

I love this place. It seems as if I havent left, I havent been away for fifteen years, he said, leaning back in his cane chair & looking at the titles on the juke box. Surprised, he put in a quarter & played a couple of Frank Sinatra songs.

Boy, he said, shaking his head, & he & Carter smiled at one another.

*

The next morning he moved to the Sam Wong Hotel, & there he wrote away on his article, & then he went out for lunch. The very streets of the city gave him life, the life he had dreamed away under the snow of Canada. He recalled every bar, every hotel, every store, the kumquats in fact that he had pulled off the trees along the boulevard in Berkeley. In the afternoon he walkt to the Haight-

Ashbury. The love-child heavy-metal drug scene, the rock rainbow had come & gone during the time since he's last been there. That was the reason he'd spent so long between visits. Who needs a San Francisco of teen-aged Rabelaises? Now the city had settled back into its former life of unseen gangsters & alcoholic poets.

That evening he went back to Franco's. Carter didnt show up, so he spent the night sitting at the bar, watching the basketball game on TV. As soon as it was over, some gay fingers turned off the set, & it was time to look, just drink the inexpensive old-fashions, & trade quips & information with the bartender, Aldo.

He had last seen Carter at his birthday gathering in the little house overlooking the end of Burrard Inlet. Carter hadnt mentioned that it was his birthday, just invited thru Pearl all the poets & artists & pub characters he knew, all the people who by description would "care for him." He had apparently spent the whole day cooking his marvelous un-Canadian food, aromatic fowls in large pots, salads made of large greens & raw nuts, abalone with white sauce in shells, bread he had baked that morning. He stood in the doorway between the little living room & the larger kitchen, obviously unable to eat or uninterested in eating, a towering figure in a black robe, his face grey & thinning, his hair straight back as always, a large wine glass filled with vodka & grapefruit juice in his huge hand.

The record player in the other room played the sound-track of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" over & over.

How many times have you turned it over, Carter?

This is the sixth time.

Are we going to hear anything else? How about some Pachelbel, for instance?

There is no other music. The rest is all just this world, just dirt, just ashes. It has all been burned to ashes. The power exhaust of their ships incinerated all of it. We are left with all the music we need.

How many times have you seen that movie, Carter?

Eight times. Once on the giant screen in Seattle.

Boy!

They are here, you know, he said confidentially, a satisfied smile on the largely immobile grey face.

As usual when he heard Carter speak this way, he was shy, he turned away a little with a joke.

*

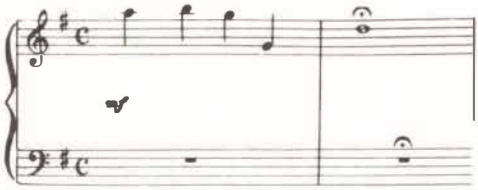
Once Carter was a savvy junky lying with Black horn players in Manhattan. He was a sculptor with a California kind of success. He knew the insider's view of the sex lives of the politicians. So when he said the UFO's were here & they were going to take us all to heaven you thought he was grasping at straws, his brain cells were undergoing chemical change.

Twenty-five people were invited to the gathering. Nine showed up. Carter stood like a statue in the kitchen, a "greyhound" in his hand, his lips purst. I'm forty-five years old today, he said, in his usual half-whisper.

I didnt know it was your birthday. Congrats.

He smiled, his head so high. He was six foot four. He was up there listening to the saucers. Everyone knew he was dying, so sixteen people stayed away. After all that slow practical work, there was too much food, & it was delicious. There were halves of partridges piled on the warm stove.

People, the little group, began to eat. While they were eating, Carter disappeared. He had gone to lie down. Everyone talkt, plates on their knees, as if they hadnt noticed. Soon they were ready to meet in other places, the beer parlour, the Arts Club bar.



Next night he went looking for Carter, who was staying with Dev, the poet who swept out Franco's. It took a while, the North Beach streets running into triangles, but he found the number. He couldnt find the door, though. After a quarter-hour of foreigner's indecision, he lookt up at the windows again, & there was Dev, visible thru the dirty glass. He threw six American pennies, one after another, & at last one cent hit the window. Dev lookt out & down at the dewy street, & waved, he would be right down.

They walkt to the bar together, talking about Carter.

What is he doing down here, he askt, thinking that Dev would know he meant to say is he saying goodbye to his old mean streets.

Dev was not in a hurry to get to the bar, but he was steady in his path toward it. Besides being a poet he was a painter, not a California success, but a good painter, when he had the time & eyes to be one.

He came to see Michael Cause off. Michael is shipping for Japan & Formosa.

He walkt a dozen steps.

Carter loves Michael, he continued.

So does Pearl. Michael spent six months at their place, I said. He couldnt keep his narrator in the third person any more, not thru all this emotion.

Everyone loves everyone, said Dev, & he knockt a long thin American cigarette into his mouth.

When I was last here everyone was very busy hating everyone. The poets & painters & boy longshoremen were all fucking each others' lovers & saying terrible things about each other at dinner parties.

Yes, that's true. Dont you understand us? askt Dev. Once in a while, last Fall in Vancouver, & now here, he made me realize I was about five years younger, & a Canadian.

I could never get them into group photographs, I said, lightening up.

The only group pictures you see from those days are of the New York poets in town for a literary uprising, said Dev, holding his cigarette like a suicide pill, & we were at the bar.

*

A few months later Pearl told me that in New York he was always getting lost, & usually finding himself in a bar. Usually at a table near

the jukebox. Once they were all going to the beach, Pearl & Carter & the boys, deflated beach balls, plastic sand buckets, towels, all crammed into the hot subway, ready for a Sunday afternoon at Coney Island. She knew better long before they got there, but she gave up, & the family got out at 125th Street. Carter went for one at an African saloon, & the three blond-headed mortals went across the tracks for the long ride south. Carter came home next day, with sand in his shoes. A sort of cheeky magic.

*

That night I walkt Carter home from the bar. I was pleased for some reason that he was wearing his old San Francisco outfit, jeans & denim jacket, black shirt, work boots. Like Ted, but bigger. Carter was one of the few men I knew who was taller than I was, & heavier. And gay. He was, surprisingly, street drunk when we got outside, & I kept within a foot or two of him, prepared to steady him on the steep sidewalks.

When is he supposed to die? I was thinking. I had been told before going to Central America, but so much had happened to dismiss the winter.

Now it had been over a decade, but I thought I could find our way around these Italo streets to Dev's place all right. There was no one else on the sidewalks in front of the restaurants & whatever else was there at two in the morning. The St. Francis or somebody church stood in a California night across Washington Square.

I'm staying just across the square & up a block, said Carter, as we stood on the corner. A taxi prowled by, an advertising board on its rear. No you arent, I said. I was there several hours ago or at least last night, & it isnt across the square, it is in here a block & up a half a block, I think. I shouldnt have said I think. But I got him turned around. Now I'm straightened away, he said, it's up the top of this hill. I dont think so, I said, but I walkt up with him anyway. It wasnt there. We stopt for a while as his body fought for breath. His throat was wheezing & I felt a sudden responsibility here a thousand miles from his house in North Vancouver.

Then his great work boots slid across the night sidewalk & he fell to the concrete.

He was a heavy man. His devil had wasted away much of his flesh, but it was all I could do to lift his heavy skeleton to his feet. I had my arms around him & he had one arm around me, & I felt all of the human doom of his art then, art & its themes born out of the eternity we were so close to, I had a hold on love & death. In that silly collapse he had wet himself. I loved him, & felt more security than alarm. I felt as if I could now aim him for rest, & walk straight to Dev's place. I did, & I waited fifteen minutes while Carter climbed the stairs inside. I saw him in the unlit window & then I walkt straight back to my hotel.

*

I had agreed to fly back to Vancouver the next day with Carter. At eight-thirty I was out of the Sam Wong Hotel with my suitcase & gadget bag. The coast air was cold & the streets were shiny wet. A transvestite in silver high-heels snubbed me when I said good-morning. San Francisco is a comfy place in the early morning.

At Franco's there were several cops in nylon jackets & suntans, drinking brandy or whiskey to wind down from their shifts. I didnt risk saying good-morning, except to Carter & Dev. Dev was a mess — he had been there all night, washing the floor & catching an hour's sleep on the cot in the basement. Carter was wearing his lively red plaid woolen jacket, good for the earlier morning, & ready for the north. He was drinking a lot of Picon Punches for his last day in San Francisco. I bought a long cigar & read the paper. Franco's is a nice bar in the morning. Fielding Dawson would not feel out of place but he wouldnt altogether like it.

Going home today, Carter? said Angelo, who was wiping the bar.

He *is* home, I thought he would say, or I thought I would have him say that.

Yes, said Carter. Going home.

Will you be seeing that faggot poet?

I'll be seeing about twenty faggot poets, said Carter, in the high amused voice he used for banter & gossip. I loved him when he did his catty queen voice, which was one step along the way.

I mean the extraordinary one who publisht Ted's late great po-ems in his typical North Beach dear-me magazine.

You mean John the Arranger?

Yes, that's the one. Will you give him a message from me?

Sure.

Tell him to go fuck himself, said Angelo.

Now, I cant do that. We arent good friends any more.

I lookt up from the exciting basketball story in the *Examiner*. Vancouver is just the way San Francisco used to be, I said.

That's not true, not entirely true, said Dev. A lot of the people are dead. And the new blood that replaces them drink beer in loud barns filled with little round tables.

That made me nervous. I went back to my newspaper, & then I had a look at Carter. He was just ordering another.

We better go pretty soon, I said. I didnt want to have an uncontrollable event on the airplane.

*

Dont you understand us?

*

At the airport I paid the taxi driver, & then I did everything. Carter would have led us off to Zambian Airlines. The little bar was packt, & so once the bags were cleared away we went to the snack

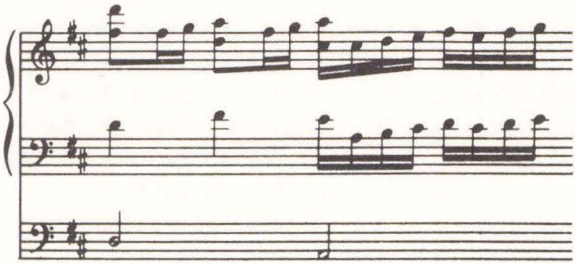
stand & I made Carter eat a cruller & drink some tea. His fingers on the dough did not shake, & they were not wasted. A sculptor's hands are twice as strong as any of his interior organs. Michelangelo's hands are still firm around a rosary in his tomb.

On the jet I ordered a bloody Mary & Carter had a lemonade with little ice cubes in a plastic vessel. I didnt say anything but I supposed that he was straightening up, assuming an order pertinent to him & Pearl & the physician. But at the last moment before we started our descent into grey-green Vancouver, he had a double vodka while I drank a cup of coffee.

God, it is a job I would not like, being him, I thought. I thought of taking out my camera & fixing him then, & now, but I only thought about it.

Helen pickt us up, & then we drove him to the university, where Pearl would be off work in an hour.

He was standing in the gateway of the Japanese garden as we turned to drive home. He was wearing a red plaid jacket & holding a small blue bag. It was the last time I saw him.



Two weeks later I was in Toronto, talking with some Toronto people who knew how to look at photographs & words & turn them into a book. They too were from the west but now they were in Toronto, & every word they said & every movement their bodies made said this is the way we do things in Toronto. They led one to believe

for a while that in Toronto they really did know how to do things we on the west coast are too innocent & too nice to have learned. So that a sculptor in Toronto, for instance, would not share his energy equally between shaping mud & speaking love to a poet in ill health. Everyone like me needs a little Toronto & quite a lot of time forgetting Toronto. If Carter had ever taken a plane to Toronto he would have vanisht like a drop of water on a hot pan.

In the evening in Toronto I ate part of a pot roast in the dining room of an old friend from the coast, & then I phoned Vancouver to find out how Helen was doing. She told me that Carter had died the day before. He had gone to bed in the middle of the afternoon & an hour later he had just died because he could not breathe.

Sometime last winter he was working on a series of small heads of his friends. I have seen the sketches he made for mine. It was as if he wanted to be sure we would all remain. I dont know why some things are important in a story.

*

Relationships very often go in this order: strangers, friends, distance, sickness, death, & funeral. Distance is very important. In a story readers look for distance.

I flew back in time for Carter's service, a week later. It was held on a cold afternoon in Pearl's back yard. We all sat on stools or blankets on the deep grass, poets & artists, homosexual friends, babies, some college professors, sons & daughters. Some were people I knew. Some were from New York or San Francisco, while others were the semi-permanent semi-strangers we often saw at Carter's parties. There were four times as many people here as there had been at Carter's birthday party. His scratchy-haired dog went from group to group, sitting at someone's feet for a while, then moving on.

I was cold, & that kept me from gathering all my feelings for the importance of the occasion. People were talking without the nervous conviviality of indoor funerals. Pearl & her sons handed around the blue mimeographt program. It was entitled "A Mass to Celebrate the Death & Resurrection of Carter McCammon."

*

Once, a year ago, Carter led me downstairs, into his basement. Past the usual pickle jars & washtubs, he led me to his damp place of solitude. He parted the curtain made of wooden beads, & I saw a wide bed on the invisible concrete floor; it was covered with a spread of cheap Indian design, & strewn with Oriental cushions. Around it were some red & brown drapes. Against the wall stood a rude wooden table covered with photographs & papers, strange objects, hollowed heron's eggs, carved African animals, something tubular that lookt as if it could have been old human skin, a lot of things I cant remember, a plastic bag of marijuana, sheet music, & so on. On the wall above the table was a large Canadian flag, not the Pearson maple leaf, but the Red Ensign from my childhood. I never did understand how I felt about that.

From the table Carter casually pickt a small green-covered child's notebook. He opened it to the middle pages & handed it to me.

Do you recognize this, he askt.

It was one of the finest of Ted's poems, inscribed by the awkward hand I had seen only once before, fifteen years ago, & in fountain pen ink. It was a poem we all loved. We knew that Ted was a great poet then, though his cult was only now making its effect known in the eastern parts of the continent. We loved him, & I do not know whether to say it is partly because he has been dead for thirteen years or because we simply do not think of him as dead.

Ted had died in San Francisco a week after I had left the city for Latin America.

He wrote that one afternoon while I lay on the couch across the room, listening to some strange music, said Carter.

I didnt know what to say. It was inconceivable, though I knew better, that the homely words written on this vulnerable little note-

book's paper, & read by this man in this dark chamber just last night are left by a person clear out of this world. Ted used to say that his poems were recited by voices from another star.

Carter was nicely preparing everyone, & it embarrast me.

*

Polymorphous as our group was, it was a real mass we celebrated. Among Carter's people was a poet whose brother is a young priest, & now they were both on the high back porch, both in black-rimmed eyeglasses & straight-legged blue jeans, Michael singing the Latin in a high beautiful voice, Matthew handing him things. The Protestants & pagans on the lawn sat with coats around their shoulders & sang along in response as Michael had instructed them. I gave up trying to feel a solemnity, & lookt at my friends up there, & now I knew what I was feeling was love, a human living with a great deal of confidence fallen away. Michael did for us all, & Carter, & Pearl especially, the grace that his bluejeans suggested, of carrying on an authentic west coast Catholic ceremony without condescension & without hipster sophistication. I had seldom felt more love for people in a group. Pearl sat up front with friends, no tears on her face. Helen beside me, who had no great patience for these people in the general course of things, was moved to a serene quietude, & I knew that she, who wore sweaters in May, felt more cold than I did.

In a rectangular pewter box, carved on all four sides & the top with Oriental equine figures, was Carter's residue.

The sky, framed by the bare apple trees & mountain ash of the sloping yard, descended from blue to a darker blue.

Four months later I am remembering that moment, a pen in my hand, & accustomed to the fact that not all evenings can be that marvellous, but wishing I could, accepting all that had happened since, redraw it all with vividness, such as one can a place, a house. I did not then have my cameras with me, & though it was suggested to me that I might photograph the afternoon & later the night in the crowded little house, I did not want to.

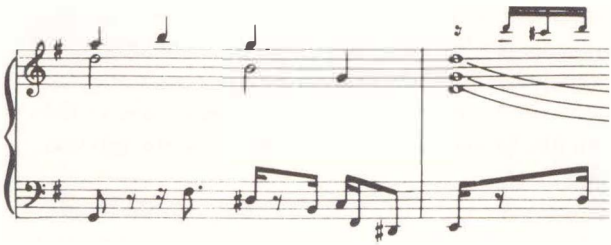
*

I'd wondered whether I should tell Pearl about Carter's falling down on the street corner in Little Italy. I decided not to, but how many times did he fall noisily in that little house? We never heard

about it. For the first time now I am seeing a picture of their tall sons grasping him under each arm & lifting him again to his feet. For a second then I also imagined him looking down at me writing this. At my father's funeral I held my sister's hand in one of mine & my mother's hand in the other, & wept. Then sitting there in the second pew behind the empty first pew, I heard my father's voice.

It's all right, he said.

Now I wonder whether Carter knows that those people from elsewhere came to contact us. Either he knows or he doesnt. For sure I dont know. Between the two of us he has at best one chance in four of knowing. Though from his point of view, if any, he might see it as a much greater chance than that. When he was talking about those people coming here, when he was using his high-picht gleeful voice about that, was he just preparing us some more? I was so embarrast by his sincerity I just made a little joke about it & changed the subject; it was too close to what I was thinking.



It was getting colder, but on the blue paper everyone could see that the service would soon be over & the wake inside would warm people up. Michael came down from the high wooden porch & passed among us, offering communion, & everyone there took it. The bread had been made by Pearl, from Carter's recipe, & the wine they had made together that winter. We have to use it all, said Matthew, & so we did, & I saw Pearl give some bread to Carter's frisky little dog.

After that, Carter's older son Brice played his Spanish guitar, & sang a song he had written during the previous year. The words were all about the spirit & the spirit's longing for illumination, very spacy. Brice pickt high notes from the strings for a long time between choruses. I did not like the words, so I lay back on the grass to ease my sore back, & listened all alone. It was not as cold as I'd expected, & I lay still so that Helen would not think I was being dramatic. I was looking up thru the bare branches of an apple tree, & as I listened to the clear music my eyes settled down too, & I lookt as I always wisht I would look, at no other possible angles. Some of the limbs were closer & some were higher. I let my eyes fall on the bottom branches, & then rise one by one to the certain smallest twig at the highest reach.

I knew it had a corniness to it. But that too was stript away, & I felt no embarrassment at all, for the first time in Carter's friendship & death. The sky beyond the tree was not yet black. It was a deep blue people mistake for black.

Once I lowered my eyes & lookt at Brice on the porch. He was holding his guitar high, on a perfect forty-five degree angle. There was only an inch or two of room, a few centimetres of room on either side of him, & then a candle burning near each arm. Also on the rail in front of him I remember seeing a pedestaled tray containing the host, & two flagons of deep red wine, & so I know I have told of the order of events wrongly. Draped against the wall below the rail was the large Red Ensign.

Then, sometime then, it was Pearl's turn, for the program listed "The Death Poems of Carter MacCammon." The poems were, then, made by the two of them over a period of a week & a half. Pearl wrote them, & Carter lived them thru, till the last. I have been planning to get draughts from Pearl & copy parts of them here, but now I dont want to. They will, in any case, be publisht on earth within the next year. They are very hard to endure & we were fortunate to be prepared that evening. She spoke them clearly, & loud enough to be heard by everyone in that cold yard. They bared her completely, her anger, her disgust, her patience, & her god-awful love.

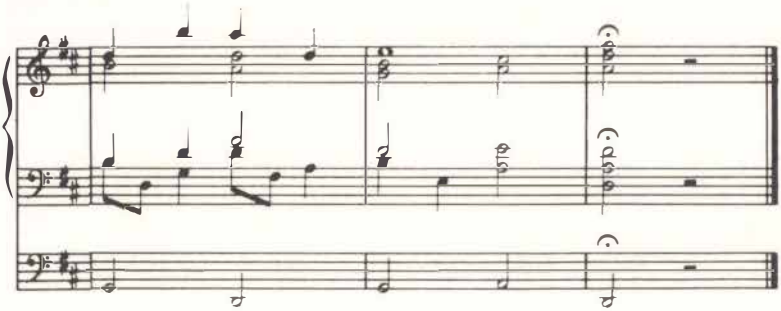
When she came to the words, I carry your few ounces home on my

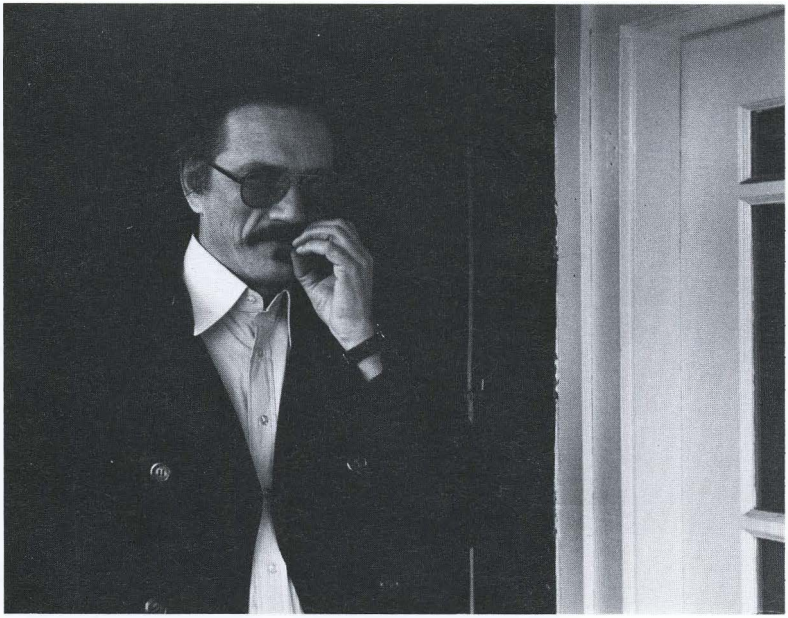
lap, & the lightness of your arm making stone of your life the last time, I lookt for no reason to my left & saw that all at once between two telephone lines a planet appeared, large white disc in a sky it made finally black.

The morning star.

Then we were praying all together. Michael & his brother spoke the final Latin, & we pickt up stools & folded blankets, & we all went up the stairs of the porch.

As usual in Carter's house there was plenty to drink, the food was excellent, & there was a lot of it.





14 PLUMS

George Bowering was interviewed on February 18, 1979 by Bill Schermbrucker, Sharon Thesen, David McFadden, and Paul de Barros, in Vancouver. These extracts were edited by Sharon Thesen.

"Kerouac said . . . that he sailed on the Pequod *for fifteen years and never saw one single whale, just a lot of flounders. And I really respect a guy that will do that and then write about them."*

1.

GB I've changed a lot of my ideas since *A Short Sad Book* came out in 1977, or, you know, fiddled with them a bit. And I've gone completely around on some.

Paul de Barros What have you turned around on?

GB I've refined some ideas from that book and I've become, in the last few years, a lot less nationalistic than I was four or five years ago, going back more to the position I was in ten years ago. Compared to the way I was feeling about poetry, say, ten or fifteen years ago, I'm much more oriented to the idea of writing as artifice, as visible page artifice, but not in the sense of concrete poetry. I think I've got it straightened around now that prose is a spatial experience. As I was saying the other day, poetry is basically a temporal art and despite the fact that I feel the same way about a lot of things, I feel there is a basic difference between the two of them, that poetry involves memory, for instance (when you're reading a poem) a lot more than prose does — with prose you're more engaged on the space that you're looking at and using it at your own speed and at your own entry. Whereas with poetry, you're in a more passive role; you're sitting there listening to it go by you, second by second, the way you do with a movie or a piece of music. You can't stop and say, wait, let's slow down here, let's go back to where we were and come back again, or let's change where I'm sitting.

2.

Bill Schermbrucker You seem to get a lot of energy out of vacillations or pendulum movements from one thing to another: from prose to poetry, from Vancouver to Toronto, from Canada to the States, from man to woman. Like, in the language of *A Short Sad Book* and in something else that I've read recently, every time a word comes up that fits in *this* context there's a comment on how it doesn't fit in *that* context.

GB In *A Short Sad Book* I was trying to clear the boards and make clear a lot of my opinions that had been working up over the years on various things and say them out. bp Nichol says at the end of *Journal*, I think, that what you're doing when you're writing a novel or writing a book is, you just look into the person's eyes and tell them how you feel. And he says that's the whole function of writing a novel — what it's all about. I just wanted everybody to know how I feel about everything. So there is a lot of measuring of those relationships. . . . I was trying to get the sense of spreading the whole thing out on one big flat surface and then you might see something in the top right-hand corner that connects with something down at the bottom left-hand corner ironically or simply in order to rhyme with it or whatever. I guess it's like a Leonardo da Vinci painting: every part of it is related to all the other parts in terms of the motion of the hand that you saw doing it. He hardly ever finished a painting, and there's supposed to be a sense of that in the book, too. That book just ends because one ran out of space or ran out of pages to do or whatever.

PdeB I can see a connection to Gertrude Stein, where you're spreading it all out and it's almost like each page, each composition . . .

GB It's a way of denying the subconscious, too. The subconscious suggests that we are enacting something on the time continuum. Either you connect it with your own childhood or you connect it with the childhood of the race or whatever.

PdeB Well, most poetry does, too. The whole modern novel is dealing with nothing but that.

GB That dumb path that Henry James put us down, and you'll notice that the whole problem for the modern novelist or fiction writer from James up to, say, 1950, the main problems have been time. The characters' psychological problems have been time, and you get all that, and then the technical problems have all been time, too, so you get all those great inventions like the flashback and the internal monologue and the cutting back and forth between the times of two different people and all that.

PdeB Are you suggesting that it is a betrayal of what prose can really do?

GB Not a betrayal. It's funny — just a 75-year experiment and something new for the novel to do, and a lot of people recognize that it was getting into the business that poetry had claimed before that. I mean, I don't think anybody makes that claim for the relationship between poetry and prose before that. We can see carry-overs between the modes of thought between an 18th-century prose piece, but the whole act of narrative in a Pope poem is quite different than an act of narrative in a Fielding novel. A Fielding novel doesn't gather up everything. If James had been writing *Tom Jones*, something that happened to Tom Jones in Chapter Two would reassert itself in Chapter 35 as causal, but for Fielding, the past is just another place he's been and you could probably put most of those chapters in different places. I mean, Tom does learn a little bit, but he's just as naive when the next chapter comes along; and I aspire to that kind of space for a novel.

3.

GB James says in *The Art of the Novel*, I think, that the novel is to history as painting (he's talking about realist painting) is to nature — an imitation. His assumption was that the rules we have of history are the rules that we're going to have when we get into fiction. We've come around and changed the rules of fiction and at the same time changed the rules of history. Maybe we changed the rules of history first. We look at history in a much different way now. We looked upon it then, in 1840, as a kind of a given: we were not the administrators of it, we were sort of the functionaries of history and it acted upon us. So, fiction was to do the same thing. There was to be an inevitability about fiction, and the author was to pretend he wasn't there, in other words, to disappear. And it's funny because I was just re-reading William H. Gass's *The Figures of Fiction* and he says that most people nowadays want fiction to act like history without having to take care of all those details, like, easy history without customs rates and stuff like that; they just want to sit back and let it happen to them, he says. Like sociology without statistics. And that's a preamble, in his terms, to getting rid of it. The way he's describing it is one of two things: either nurse novels or the most honoured Canadian fiction of the last ten or fifteen years.

4.

GB In poetry I like some kind of arbitrary structure that will then free you in your response to it, whereas in prose I like total control on the part of the author. I like the author to assert his independence of causality as much as possible in the prose, in the causality of the novel. I really used to feel very romantic about the image that novelists always made; they said, I created these characters and then after a little while they took off, right?

PdeB Yeah! They don't behave themselves — uncontrolled. (laughter)

GB I don't want to be the victim of my characters; I don't believe any more . . . I just said, that's all a game, you know, it's not true! it's a lie! They're lying when they say that. It's the same lie the realists use when they say that nobody in this novel resembles anybody in their life — you know that's a lie. And then they turn around and say, why do you keep treating this as autobiography instead of fiction? And they got characters in there that you can recognize — that you're *supposed* to recognize.

PdeB Well, is what you're talking about that you're disbanding fiction?

GB Yeah.

PdeB But you're not even disbanding it. It seems to me even back in those early books you never bought the idea of fiction.

GB Well, I did, but then I could not resist the desire to show off my power, but I did feel — like, I really was a sucker for the Ernest Hemingway thing, you know. That's what I wanted to do. The novelists I liked were all the big standard American realist novelists: Steinbeck and Hemingway and John Dos Passos and William Faulkner and, you know, all of them, I adored them all. I remember I'd look at old notebooks and see my responses to those novels and say, god, they saw right into my heart, you know? Even though they were about somewhere that I've never been in my life, the story is still about me. Now I say, why the christ should I go to a goddamn book to find a story about me? I mean, I've got a story. Why have a story *about* me instead of me?

5.

GB You notice how the realists — these Freudian modernist fiction guys — are all dead serious? And it's the comic writer and the comic movie makers who are dealing in other terms than realism. For instance, in the early 1950's you had all these super-serious James Dean stories about adolescents growing up and being wounded by the world and the obvious cataclysmic effects of those. And then you have *The Road to Morocco* with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, who keep letting you know that the camera's there, and they keep letting you know they were characters in another movie. As soon as you recognize a camera's there, you're out of realism — it's disappeared. Because realism depends on your setting the people up on three sides of the table in a movie, although there might be 17 people, they're taking up only three sides of the table because the other side has the camera on it, and they pretend the camera isn't there.*

PedeB It seems really important all the way through the poetry and the prose — that idea of verifying everything: verifying where you are, verifying what you're seeing, having some evidence. It seems that a lot of the poems are nothing but that, like, searching for an evidence.

GB Yeah, I see what you mean but I don't know quite how to connect it.

*"The Three-sided Room"

PdeB Well, my connection is that you're saying, if I can't believe in this system to apply to daily life or dream or experience, then how am I going to verify what's going on? How am I going to have any way of talking about it?

GB Well, for poetry, in the TISH days, the days when we were all learning to write poetry, that involved making use of the lessons of imagism because when you're an 18-year-old kid you're an automatic Georgian, right? And you start talking about things that must be very important. Teenage poets — untutored — always write about suicides and bodies cut open and blood and death and pain and loneliness — I mean that's what the Georgians were, a bunch of arrested adolescents, right? They would be out in a lake and the lake would just be a backdrop for their own loneliness. That's not what you find in our early poetry. You find an incredible number of proper nouns because proper nouns are the most concrete nouns there are because they verify the existence of something outside your own colorations of the landscape.

6.

David McFadden Do you ever get depressed with what you're writing?

GB No, not very often.

DMcF Do you ever find it scary or dangerous?

GB No.

BS Do you believe him, David?

D.McF Yeah, I think so. It's amazing but I do.

GB There have been times when I've gone back and read something and was surprised by it or felt that it was — it had more to it than I thought it had at the time, or felt as if I didn't remember having written that, and I've been moved by it emotionally, but I've never been scared by it.

Sharon Thesen I wonder if maybe David asked that question out of a similar sense that I have to some of the recent work, that there's an attempt to reclaim some innocence, either from the 18th century, in the romantic conversion of your own language in poems like "Which Poesy" and "Old Standards." It's quite different than, say, the "Touch" poems. But I found that in "In the Flesh" there began a shift, a kind of falling away from, or falling apart of a sense of love that is so much there in the earlier poems. And in the introduction to that book you yourself say something about having entered your thirties and becoming aware of your life as part of a larger drama. And it's around that time, too, that you write *Curious* and *Autobiology*, and of course that takes me back to a couple of things I wanted to talk about in terms of what you've been saying about memory and so on. But the last line of "In the Flesh" is "Reaching out to hold you, off."

GB To hold you — comma — off. I wanted both to be there because earlier in the poem it says to pay attention to my endings.

ST Yeah, but you never seem to have any trouble with that, you seem confident in that ability of language to hold the world.

GB Well, that's what love is — you write lyrics with love for the world, you want to name it and say: there, there, there. And what you're talking about in these other poems, the commonality that runs through these later poems, is that the language tends to be more about itself, and that has left what I take to be the lyric impulse — has left it behind, and it is not the dramatic but it is the parallel in writing to the feeling of drama in your own life, so that you're attesting more to the poem having an existence, whereas a lyric poem tends to — it allows — it gives itself to the occasional all the time and verifies that that out there is the real and therefore the beautiful, because, I mean, what you should love is the real, I think.

ST But there's definitely a "you should" loving in it, there's more of a presence of you.

GB Yeah, the more you say, look at that, look at that, look at that — the only motive to do that is to say it's beautiful or it's ugly and could be beautiful — one of the two. I guess when you get to be in your thirties you've done that so often that you begin to see that, and that's when you can make a choice, you can either get psychological, which I felt . . .

ST Well, no, but there is a recovering of the past that you're also doing in your thirties, which is not . . . well, I want to get back at some point to that denial of the subconscious in your work but there certainly is a particularized recovery of — I hate to say your past because it's not really personal history in that sense.

GB Yeah, I know the hesitation you're feeling if we're talking about *Autobiology*. That's why the form of *Autobiology* is so intent on making the present happen in the language. It's prose but it's not prose that's saying "this happened": it's a prose that's saying "I'm happening." I don't know if that's what you said but I think you're absolutely right in the sense that at that moment when it is one's past rather than one's present, it is involved in terms outside the poem. But maybe it's to get over what the realists or the confessional poets, who are sort of the poet version of realists, would do with that material. You throw all the attention on the page so that the reader is not then going to say, oh god, here goes another dreary story about how awful the mother [father, ed.] treated that kid.

PdeB Well, you're resisting that all the way.

ST Yeah, he is. It's that discomfort with the idea of causality that he talked about before, that he preferred to write a kind of Fielding novel. There's George the Picaro, exactly the same at the end of that road as he was at the beginning of it.

7.

DMcF This goes back to a very mundane level. What's happening to your sense of audience?

GB I don't know. I've never been clear about what it was except in some instances — there've been lots of times I've had that experience in Vancouver. I've had all kinds of people talk about this, the scariness or the meanness of it, where it was always traditional in Vancouver that if you read a poem that your co-poets in town didn't like, they wouldn't have a nice liberal attitude about it. They wouldn't say, we're just talking about the poem, George, we're not talking about you, you know. They wouldn't do that; they wanted you to go kill yourself! (laughter)

PdeB If you feel that way about it . . .

GB Yeah! And so that was one version of the story, but I still think that that's part of that business of Toronto and Vancouver. When I go to Toronto I say, that happens out in Vancouver and you wouldn't be able to get away with this shit there. And I've always thought there was more good to that than there was bad. I mean, I had my feelings hurt lots of times and I probably hurt other people's feelings lots of times, but I think that was more good than bad. When I think about audience that's the first thing I think about, and that audience is made up of other people in that circle of poets and so forth. It's like a bunch of Knights Templar on the West Coast.

8.

GB All my books start off with "why am I writing this book?" except in "The Dead Sailors" it's "he" — the guy who's writing it is called "he", and about every second chapter it gives you a page of the circumstances of the guy writing the Captain Vancouver book.

ST The circumstances while he's writing, or . . . ?

GB Yeah. It's like, it starts off I went to Trieste, right? So it starts off with a parody of the beginning of a realist novel, which goes something like, "he was residing in a hotel in blah-blah-blah" and the same thing with that book: I had to declare the circumstances of writing the book just to lay the cards on the table and say, I'm the author and you're the reader and this is the book. And that goes right back to what bp says at the end of *Journal*: he says you put the book down, look your reader in the eye, and say such-and-such. But "put your book down" — you know bp, he never says anything that doesn't have three meanings. You put your book down like this, you know, and you put (write) it all down. And through that action look at the guy in the eye. But it also means that you've been sitting there reading and he says, get out of reading and get into real life. So you put your book down and you look him in the eye, right? So, "He lifted his foot and kicked the kid" — it's the same function and that's to get rid of . . . I don't know. There are two things that happen: one is, some people got all snarled up in the end of the realist tradition and started trying to fight their way out of it, like Mailer, and tried to shoulder their way around it and call the novel a piece of non-fiction and vice-versa, and so then Barth came along and had the author going psychologically crazy because he has to handle this funny old material. Then you get the next batch of people that have to parody it, or — I like Hawkes' term "travesty" — make a travesty of the whole situation. That has to be done. Then you don't know what's going to happen after that. I think we're still in that space. There are all kinds of interesting things happening, but they're almost all of them done in terms of travesty: Ishmael Reed is just making a hash of history and by extension James' notion that novels are history in fiction.

9.

GB I wrote a Beckett paragraph today. It was like a long Beckett paragraph.

PdeB But that's art as problem-solving. Art as problem solving is the main modern idea.

GB Yeah. It is in painting, and it has not been acknowledged enough in poetry, as it has been in prose.

PdeB So that accounts for the move and interest in prose.

GB I think so, yeah. I think that it's more that in poetry I will always look into my heart and write but with prose not so much. And that gets you into the spatial thing: this is really a lot more important to me than time right now.

10.

DMcF There's a tradition in Canadian poetry for most dedicated poets to be — let me boil it down — to be dedicated to their own egos and reputations and things like that, and, what are you dedicated to?

GB The first thing I think of is that I wouldn't want to shame the language. That sounds very pretentious but it's true. Literally I don't want to bring shame down on the language and I feel the same way about other people's poetry. That involves abrogating its space, using language as a tool, and I suppose that that's why I automatically detest confessional poetry. It's why I just cannot read Sylvia Plath. She's one of the most beautiful stanza-makers in recent American poetry or English, whatever she is. She's a lovely stanza-maker but she, what she says is, if the world is shitty for me, the world is shitty, and she then finds various ways of saying that. But as a friend once said, why didn't someone just tell her to go stick her head in an oven.

11.

PdeB Would you mind answering here Brian Fawcett's attack on *A Short Sad Book* — his political attack on it?

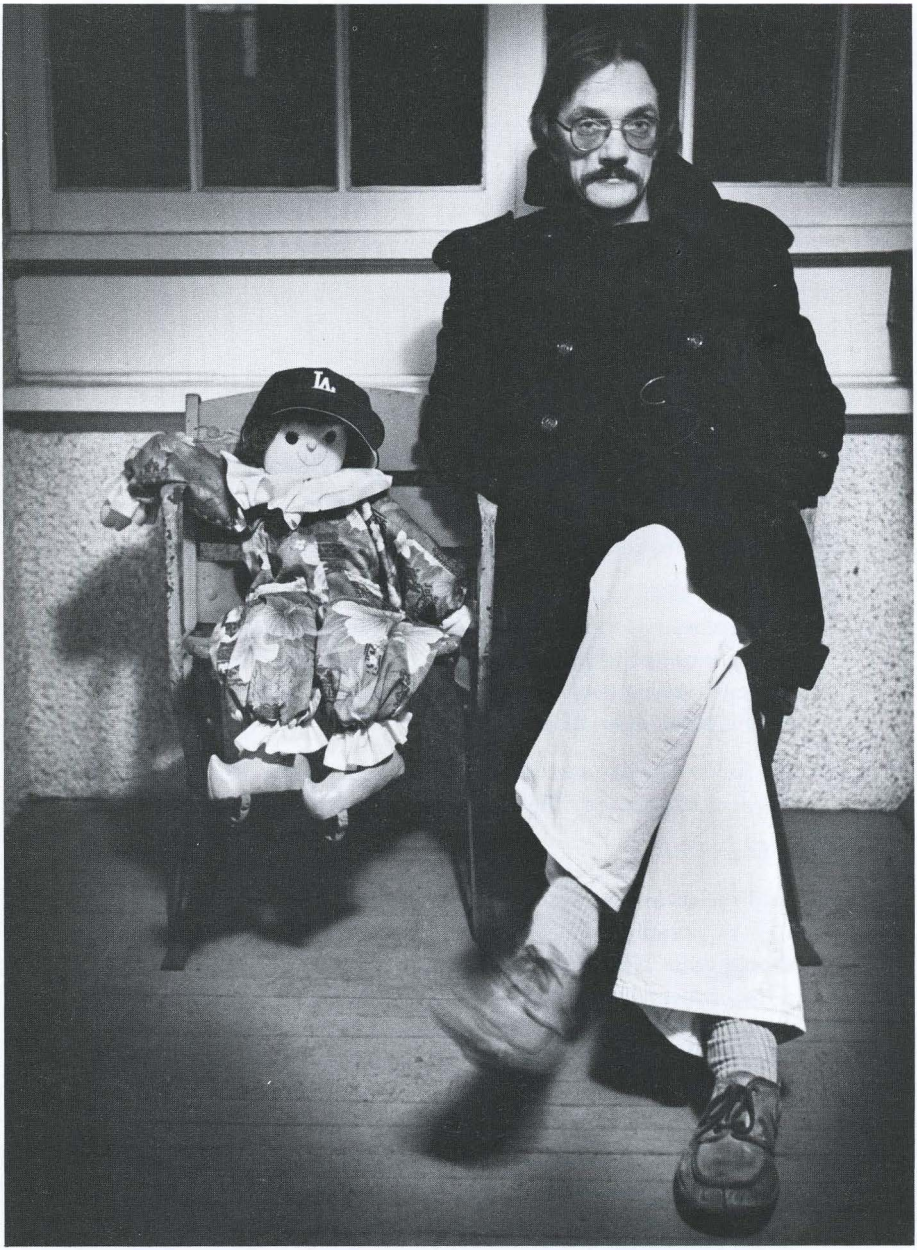
GB I thought he liked it.

PdeB Oh, he didn't dislike it, but he was attacking you for not taking into account (I can't remember his exact language) the social implications of who that speaker is in the book, like, how you come to write a book and what is a writer — that you don't take on the political at all as content.

GB It's funny, it's the one thing that only one person in reviewing it has ever mentioned. The literary politics are pretty clear.

PdeB Oh, yeah!

GB And the statement about literary nationalism and socialization — sociology-ization — of literature is pretty clear. The sexual one I thought was clear but is perhaps not quite — only one person in a review ever mentioned that *A Short Sad Book* is a title that takes from *A Long Gay Book* in which Gertrude Stein — and she didn't publish it, right? — was writing a book that involved her sexuality. But what that would suggest immediately was that whereas "gay" means homosexual, then "sad" must mean heterosexual. And I sort of half believe that and half don't. . . . In *A Short Sad Book* there are female characters and male characters, and male characters and male characters, and most of the relationships between men and women in it are political relationships. The main boy-girl relationship is between the Father of Confederation and the lady for whom there was no space in this country, and who gets shunted off to Louisiana.


LA

And he puts his arms around her when they get up to the top of the mountain and points out over Vancouver and says, "Some day this will all be yours," and she doesn't say it out loud, but she says something to him about how he can go fuck himself. What you've got there is a male-female relationship that involves power, so you have Scotch-English-Canadian versus French Canadian, man versus woman, powerful versus not so powerful, guy who's putting the train tracks here and bam! this is Canada and the lady gets stuck on the boat and sent off, either to drown or to get to Louisiana and so forth: so I thought that all the way through that was a pretty strong political statement.

ST Well, it's a political statement implicitly in that male-female relations are relations of power to some extent. It's one thing to have both male and female characters interacting and say aha! I've written a politically conscious book, but to consciously state the politics of that relationship is something else again. And I bet you joke about it too!

GB Oh sure!

PdeB That means your answer to Brian is that there *is* politics in the book.

GB Sure. It says, "In the mountains with the Acadian girl, John A. Macdonald felt all at once very romantic. He pickt some alpine flowers & offered them to her in his trembling fist. The flowers are nice, she said. But I would rather have the earth they grew in. But this land is promist to Macmillan-Bloedel, he said. Everything over a thousand feet to MacMillan-Bloedel, everything under a thousand feet to the CPR." — and if that's not political — "Who is Bloedel, she enquired. I wish you hadn't askt me that, he said, I don't know, but I can assure you that he is a part of the national policy. It sounds to me like a classic rip-off, was her reply. I'm afraid you will eventually end up in Louisiana, my dear. Come, let us go down now. I just have time to catch my train. You couldnt catch a cold, she thought to herself. Theirs was a love-hate relationship."I think that's the authentic real relationship between sexual politics, racial politics, and big business versus nature politics. Really, I thought I tied them all in brilliantly! If it's not clear where I'm coming from in terms of that, then, you know . . .

BS I'm interested to hear you talk about what you've displayed over the years as a great antagonism to American cultural colonization.

GB In "The Dead Sailors" I occasionally called them Americans and going through I've revised it and every time they're mentioned they're called Yankees. . . . In this new book the only time the Yankees ever appear is when they keep going up to the Indians and saying, pssst, wanna buy some rum? Got any waterfront property you wanna sell?

12.

DMcF How important has Greg Curnoe been to you?

GB He's vastly important to me. He and I are the same age, think a lot alike — we used to sit up till four or five in the morning drinking Italian coffee every night when I lived in London and he taught me a lot about painting and a lot about contemporary jazz, because I had let it go for about ten years. He made me more nationalistic than I was in certain areas, but we also have had and have a lot of arguments about the nationalist position.

DMcF What sort of differences do you feel you have?

GB He's from Ontario and I'm from B.C. and there is that basic difference that we had when I first moved to Ontario. He was interested in a term that was used there — regionalism. I was interested in a term we used here, *locus*. We used the noun, to borrow it from Pound or Olson. And regionalism is a curiously centralist attitude. It's a slavish centralist attitude because that's what Toronto says the rest of the country is. And so he says, okay, I will assume that and call it regionalism without questioning the idea. And I said that I couldn't believe that he would assume, without a sense of irony, without saying, okay, we are the niggers of the world, or something like that. I mean he wasn't — he was championing it without that kind of irony. So I guess that was the beginning of a basic difference. His regionalism is kind of — I admire it and love it and I also got that year with James Reaney and what he was doing with the regional. I found it reactive, and I never felt that the localism that we were practicing here was reactive. It later became reactive in certain statements in which we would belligerently say things to people back East. . . .

13.

GB I think that poetry has shot its bolt and is just going to lie down for awhile and then come back in one way or another. Who needs it, we got lots. The drama has been really happening a lot in Canada. I'm really discouraged by the fact that Canadians somehow or other think that you can make a national consciousness by going back into history, finding some character or some event, and writing a goddamn play about it and giving it a one-word title. That's *not* what James Reaney is doing, by the way.

DMcF Is that what's motivated the series of changes that's gone on in your writing — the notion of filling a void?

GB Maybe it's just that I'm coinciding with various other things. Or maybe it's because I pay attention to that more in other people because that's what I'm interested in myself. . . . When Kroetsch was at that conference of writers in the Canadian West and they asked him what was the relationship between history and the historical novels he's writing now, he said Fuck the past.

14.

GB Yeats said, toward the end of his life, speak to me of originality and I will turn on you in rage. And I believe that, too. Originality suggests mastery over the materials, the individual purchase on the stuff that rightfully belongs to everybody. That's where the responsibility towards wide audience comes from, that the language *does* belong to everybody.

BS Like the moon.

ST So does the subconscious —

GB There can't be a subconscious —

DMcF If there's no subconscious, who created us?

GB I did! I did out of . . . (laughter)

ST You atheist! But I know what you mean — the creation of the world taking place every moment, every day.

GB As long as you sit down and do the writing.

DMcF You don't get that as much in Ontario.

GB I used to hate the term creation — that's one of the big changes I've come to. I've now allowed it back in as long as you're talking about writing anti-realist writing, because the realists pretend that they're mimeticizing that which has been created and as soon as you pretend that, you suggest that creation is over with and you can now make a portrait of it, right?

ST Nevertheless, I think your disallowing of any such thing as the subconscious is bullshit.

Nathen Hohn / PHOTOGRAPHS '79 & INTERVIEW

Ann Rosenberg and Lois Redman interviewed Nathen Hohn at his house on West 10th in August '79. Capilano College owns the set of 45 black and white and colour photographs from which several were selected for reproduction in TCR.

NH Photography? I used it to learn how to see. I don't think that's made up or anything, I really have to say that photography is a great teacher. You can see what you thought you saw when you get the photograph back and you can see what you would have seen were you a camera. And you just compare the two and you test your perception. It works. It just *does it*.

When I was eight years old the photograph that taught me this was *woods in the snow*. When I got it back, I looked at it — and I was really wanting this photograph — and it didn't have anything at all in it that I *saw* in the scene. At that point I could easily have been converted to another medium, but instead I made the mistake of getting another roll of film and trying again, photographing my friends and relatives. . . . If there's a certain amount of disparity between what you see and what you get with landscapes, with people you see almost nothing that you get and get almost nothing that you see . . . the possible ways you can take the picture are infinite and the number of people you can photograph is infinite, so it's hard to control the infinite . . .

AR If it's so hard, why do you keep doing it?

NH Well, I thought everything else was too easy. Photography is difficult enough to be a challenge. I think any time you're trying to abstract, to put three dimensions into two, it's difficult, so it's interesting.

AR Do you think it might be easier to be a superb representational painter who knows the qualities he's after and gets to them, eliminating the accidental?

NH If you could eliminate the accidental, you wouldn't get *it* either. Photography can be done that way by the set up of the camera, the control of the lights . . . but there has to be a quality of accident in the control and in that regard photography is no more difficult nor easy than is painting. . . . Even if you were trying for total accident you would have to have had some preconception to know what the tools are, how to work on it. So, nothing is ever totally accidental or totally planned.

AR When did it happen that you could predict what you would get?

NH I'd say I could describe a shot and know what I was going to get since about three years ago. Then I began to wonder if I shouldn't move the other way because things began to look pretty blocked up to me. So I stopped getting what I had in mind, or rather I stopped having in mind absolutely everything. I think it's good to know both ends and work towards the middle. The main thing is that you hit the subject right in the middle.

AR In the series we're reproducing, I believe control was absolute.

NH Yes, that was just after I'd gained control. I'd been working on a commercial job where I'd learned to get just what I needed above black, below white. I had no disbelief in the method as long as it was applied to a suitable subject.

AR The technique holds the series together, but what is the idea?

NH Anthropology. Cultural anthropology. Well, one day at a meeting of a workshop I used to do, I was gazing at the table and on the table was a half a dozen random items and I tapped the guy next to me and said, "Hey, if you really took a picture that revealed everything about these items, you'd expose the whole

culture." So, I thought, we live in houses; we come in and plunk our stuff down and do what it is we do and we don't get to know our houses like a child does. And when you grow up you forget about how to know things as a child does. Something like a crack in the wall is really important: it dates the place; it somehow reveals you, the person who lives there whether you want it to or not. If you let your mind idle like a kid's and catch yourself staring at a crack in the wall, you'd be a different kind of Anthropologist than the sort who would come in to take Real Estate photos, and yet both would be objective. I am wondering what an Anthropologist from Alpha Centauri would find on earth worthwhile to document; but from what I know of Anthropology, I think his problem would be *classification*. What is important about the thing he finds; what would he use in order to determine how he would perceive the object?

AR In those photographs, then, are you discovering a series of relationships between cords and drawer pulls? Are you meaning to establish a visual order, as though you didn't know what you were looking at? But you're trying to make what you see *sensible*?

NH Yes, I think that's really clear.

AR It may be clear, but is it *right?*

NH Yes, it's right. And after all, if one doesn't take pictures of a house like that, after the generation is passed who knows those houses died out, no one would know it. It has to be described or it won't have existed.

LR Are you for or against the culture, as Anthropologist?

NH That's a tough question. For me to make a statement against my culture is in one sense impossible because I can't be outside my culture; but on the other hand, I can't make a statement for it because I can't *see* it. So let's say I'm just trying to relate to parts of it as well as I can.

LR If you're interested in a crack in the wall, what I think you're saying is that you're not concerned with what it displays of itself but of what it is in relationship to society or something else of an allusive nature.

NH There is an element of *that* in any representation, but I do try to get something of the spirit or feeling of an object, just as some other peoples have thought that the photograph takes the soul of the object away. Yes, for sure, because the photograph fragments, zooms in on one little section of material reality and puts it in a frame, and people look at that without the context. If one is photographing the relationship between objects, rather than each object discreetly, then that automatically makes the photograph metaphysical, with the stipulation that Metaphysics is not a *black art*.

AR In the series you push objects through transformations of themselves and in their relationships with others. How did you seize upon doorknobs and not spoons? What was the process of selection?

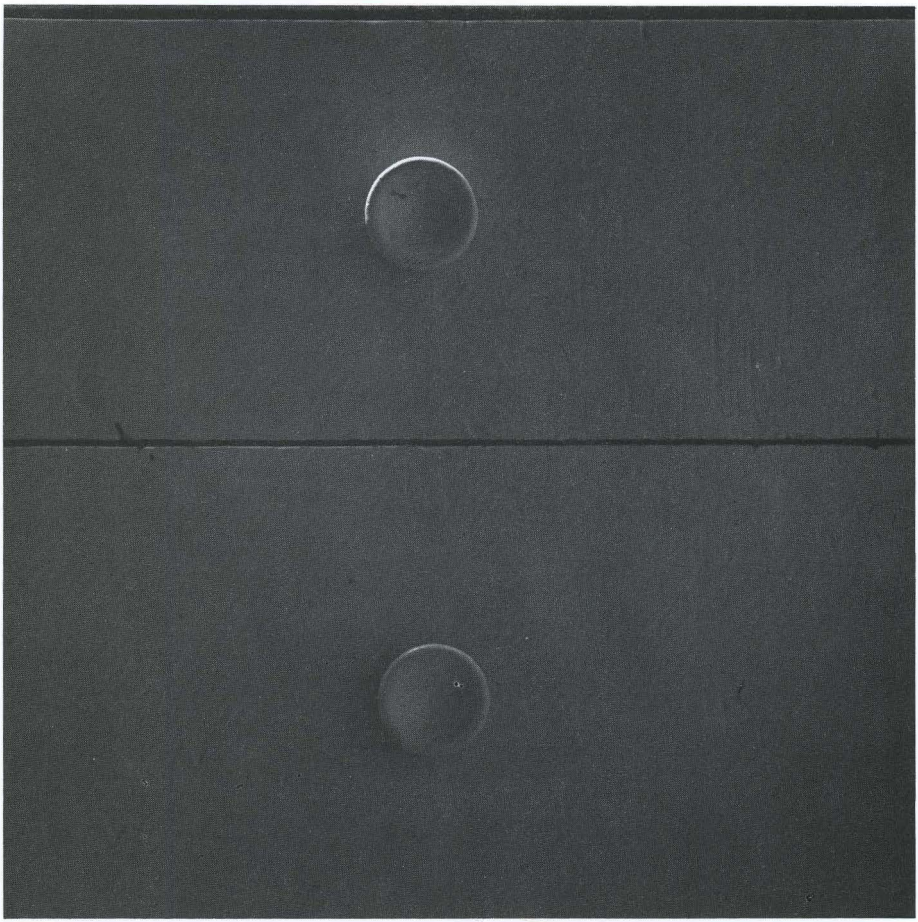
NH Maybe there is a core group, a crowd of things that the series is *about*. How do these objects that appear over and over again *function as strangers*?

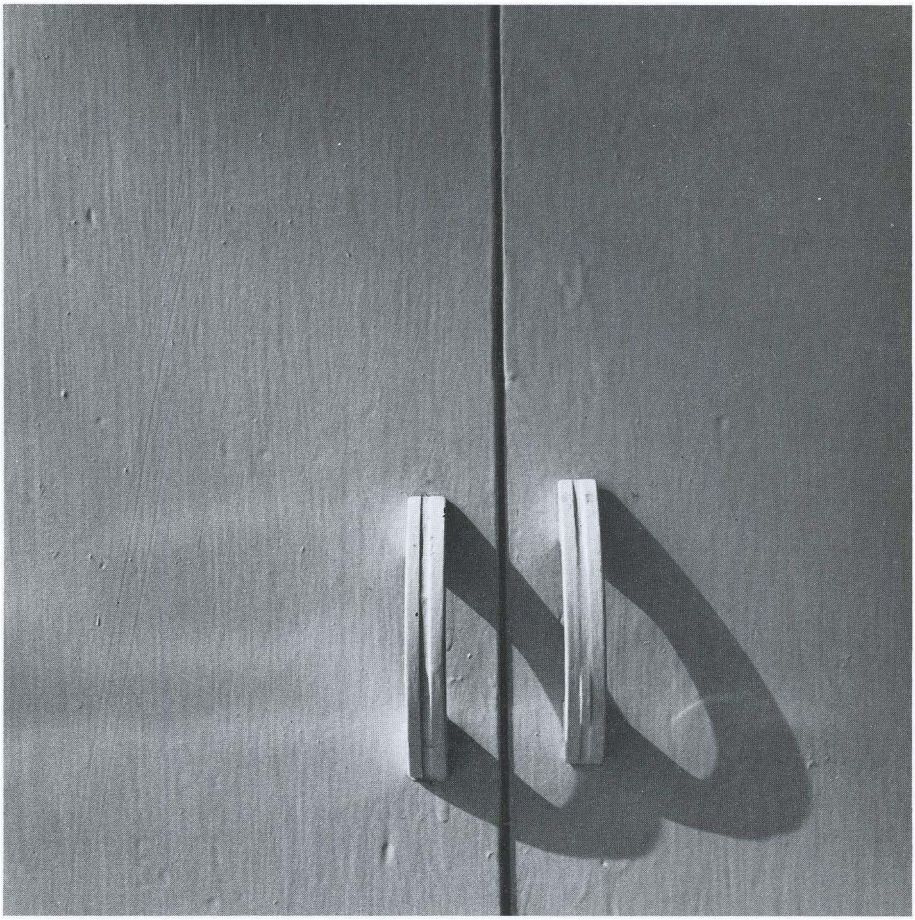
It wasn't really conscious manipulation that led to showing things in different lights, in different positions, related to different things. As a matter of fact every time I tried to hold myself back from introducing items that were outside the classification that I devised and redevised every time I took a picture. I'd say, "OK, now we have a chair, so we'll include furniture, OK, but *only* chairs. Then, next time, I'd be tempted by a table leg, so I'd put it in and think furniture is all right but no windows, then I'd do this window. . . . By all the redefinitions, I came up with a definition that allowed the thing to get finished, to get *into some form*.

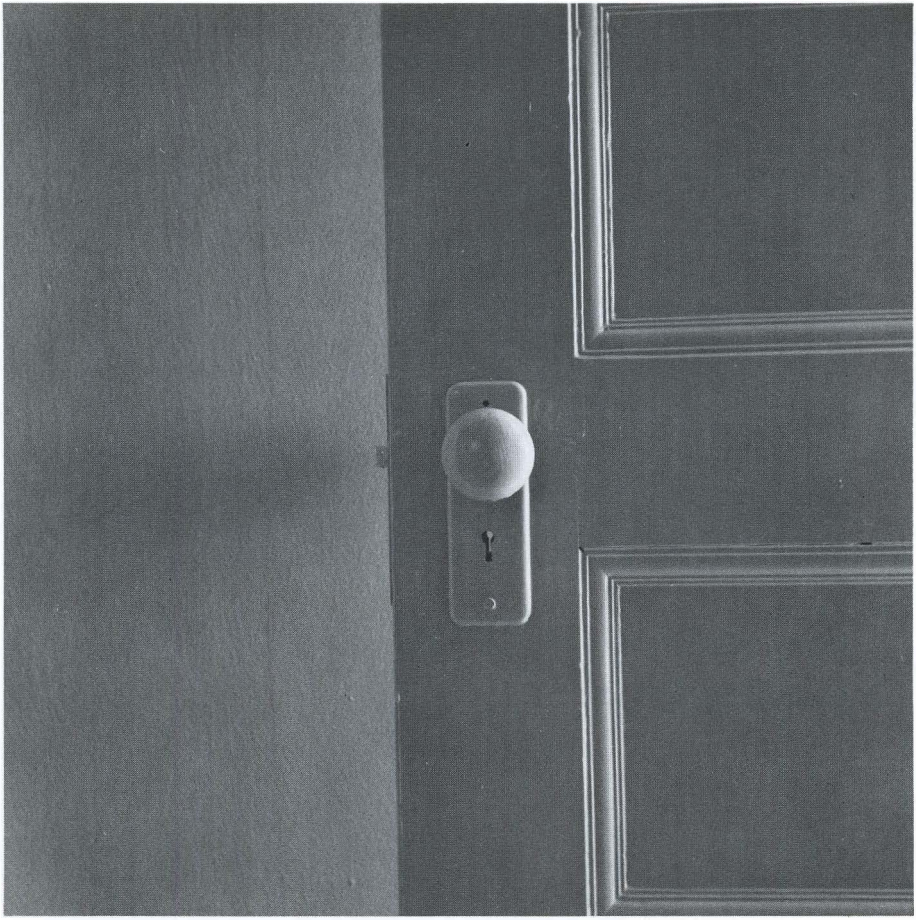
I've always taken pictures of everything but to say these are all the pictures of the inside of my house would be wrong; to say that I took other pictures for this series would be wrong, because the idea of the series *wasn't* until the series defined itself by being finished, and then I was just its darkroom slave.

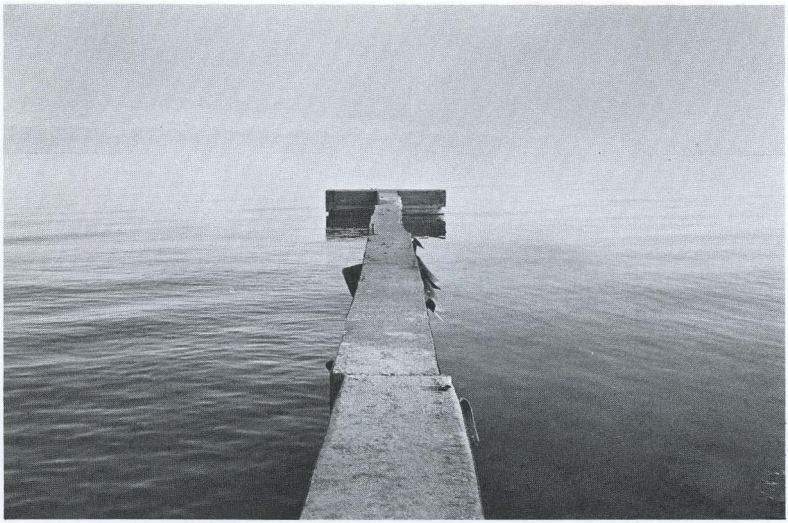
What happens when you include the moving hand of a clock? Is everything here, is this *whole thing stopped*? Including motion in the series? I couldn't sleep for days.


bulova









Ken Straiton / PHOTOGRAPHS '77-'78 & INTERVIEW

Ann Rosenberg and Lois Redman interviewed Ken Straiton at his Kitsilano home/studio in August '79.

AR Did you choose Photography or did Photography choose you?

KS It was not a conscious act of choice. My father gave me a Brownie when I was about five . . . but I guess I didn't embark upon Photography until six or so years ago. Looking back, however, I'm aware that I've always taken pictures for the sake of taking photographs and I came from an environment where my father was always taking photographs, making sculpture. At school, art was my best subject and at university I *pursued* Art, Art History and Film courses while studying Psychology; but I trained myself mainly through trial and error.

AR When you shoot a picture is the end product what you expected when you snapped the shutter?

KS Usually. Most of the time. The extent of the darkroom work is pretty much a craft sort of thing, getting a good print; there is very little of *making the image* in the dark room.

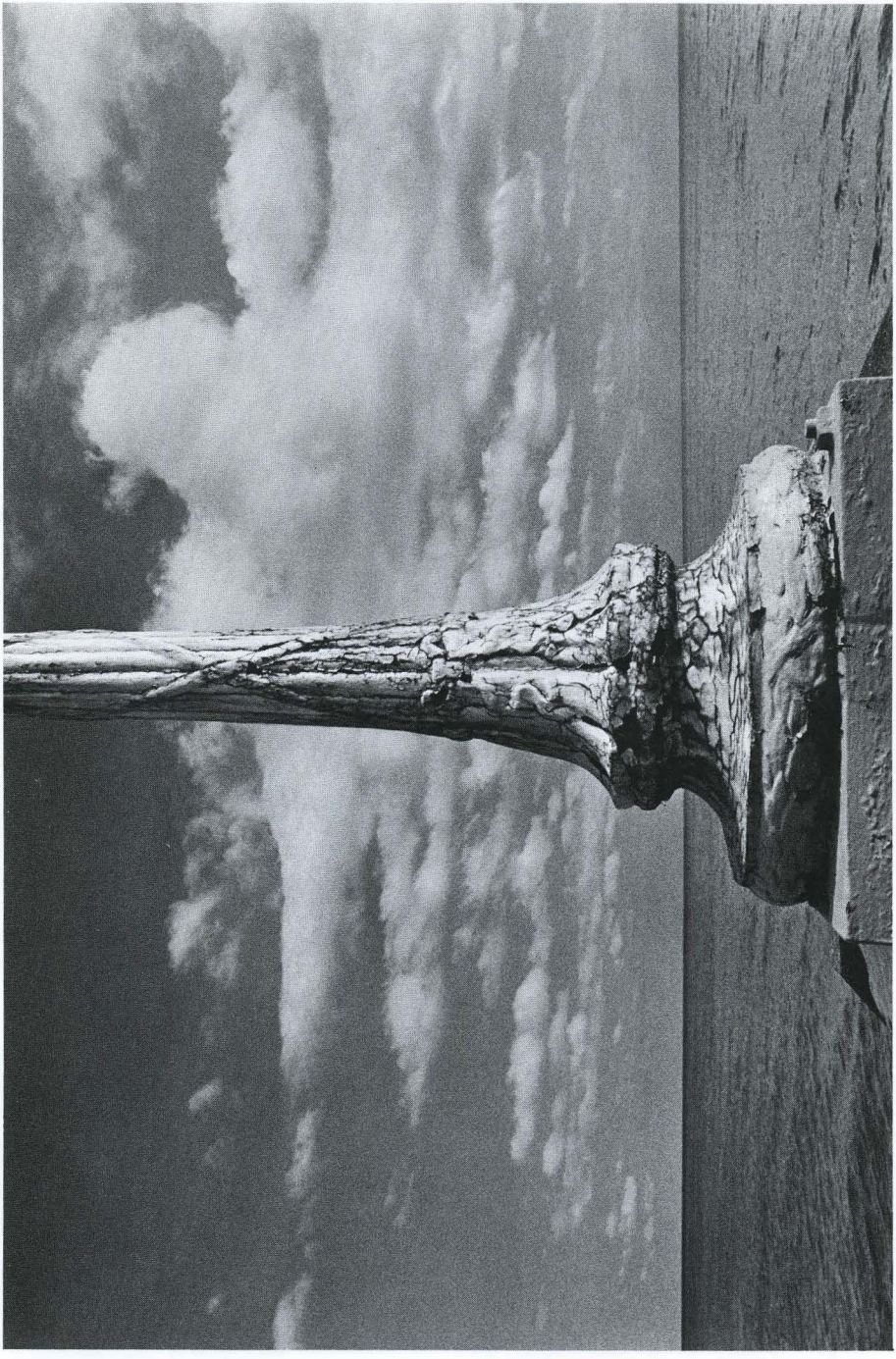
AR Do you pursue a particular direction in your current work?

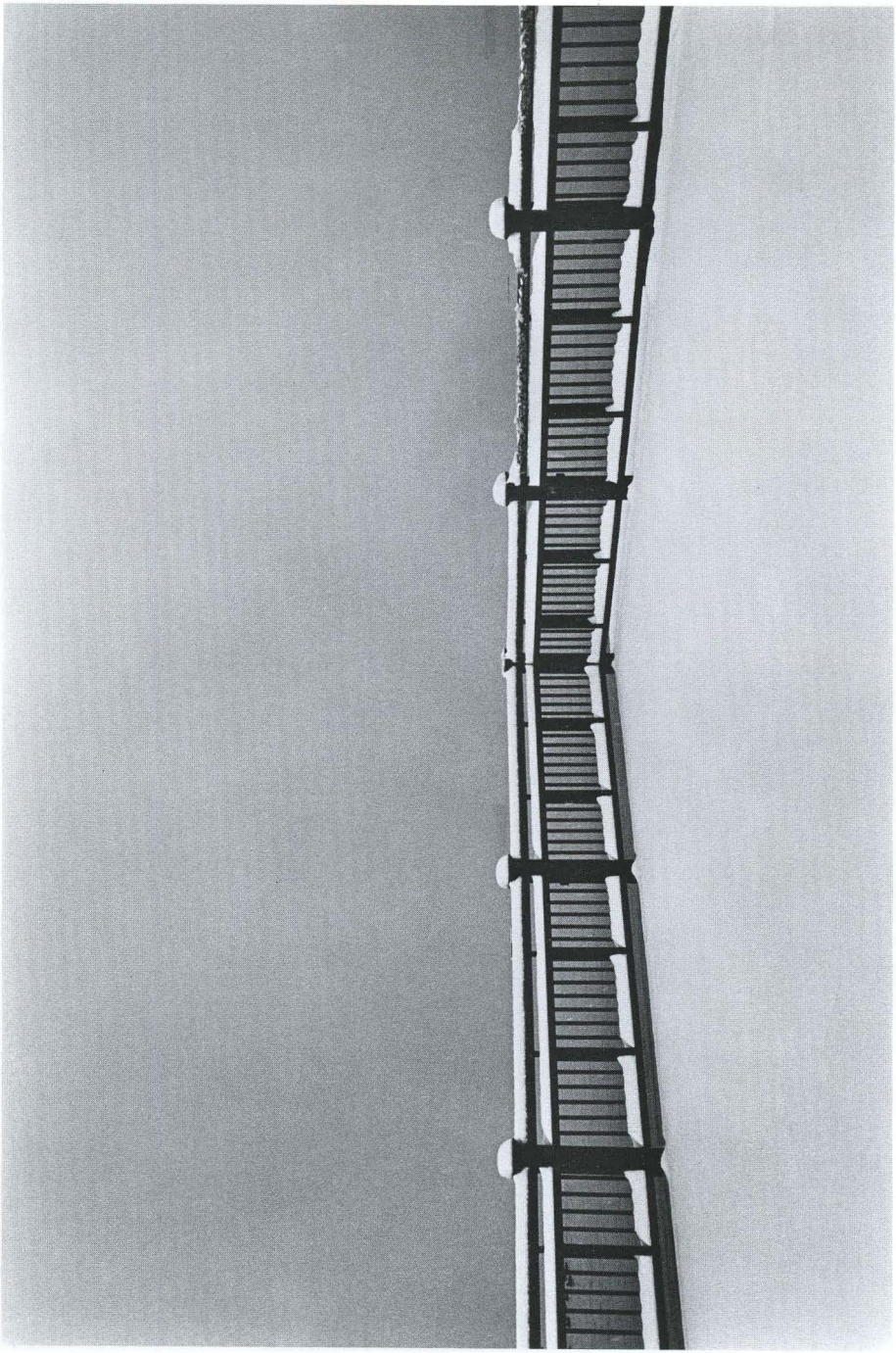
KS Well I do and I don't, in as much as I'm constantly questioning what I'm doing, thinking in circles and trying to find out other ways of seeing and expressing them. If I look at what satisfies me ultimately there seems to be a distinctive set of elements that make up the images that please me as, for example, one finds in the work reproduced here in *The Capilano Review*.

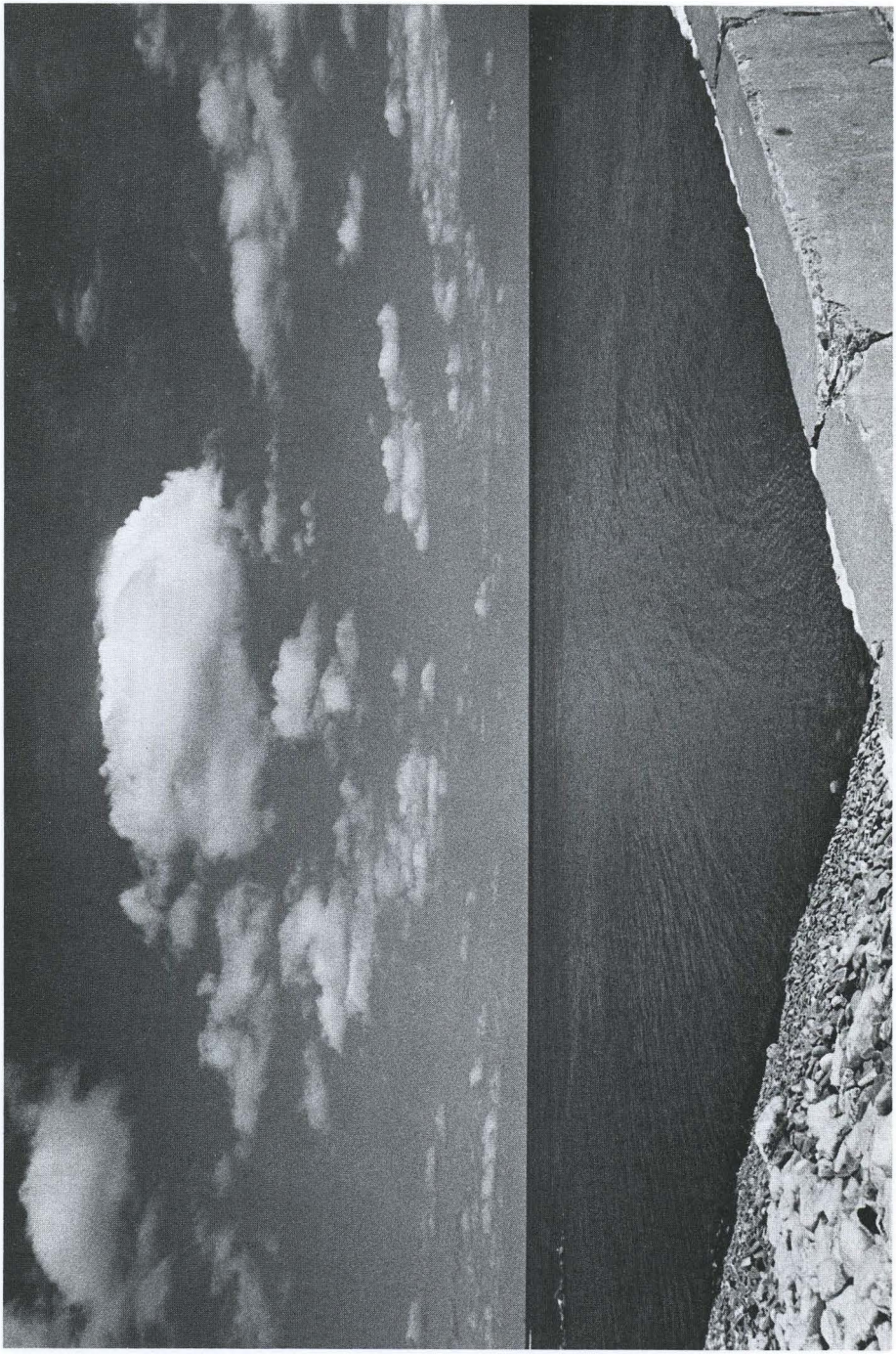
It's an almost primitive sense of formality that I sought there. The more I get away from the works you're publishing, the more I see *why* I like them. I love monumental things; for instance, I make a point of visiting Capitol buildings. Formal spaces intrigue me, but I still haven't figured out completely why they do. There is something fascinating about the fact that people like to create totally formal settings. Symmetry is significant and symmetry goes through a lot of things, cross-culturally and through time. All those images you are reproducing have a way of lying there in a comfortable, staid way; the constant reference of the horizon helps hold them together and offers a visual resting place. The mediative aspect of horizons and water also ties into the symbolism — all archetypal. What I'm doing now is more active, although compositionally still tight. I've gotten to the point in my work where doing more of the same would not be telling anyone anything more.

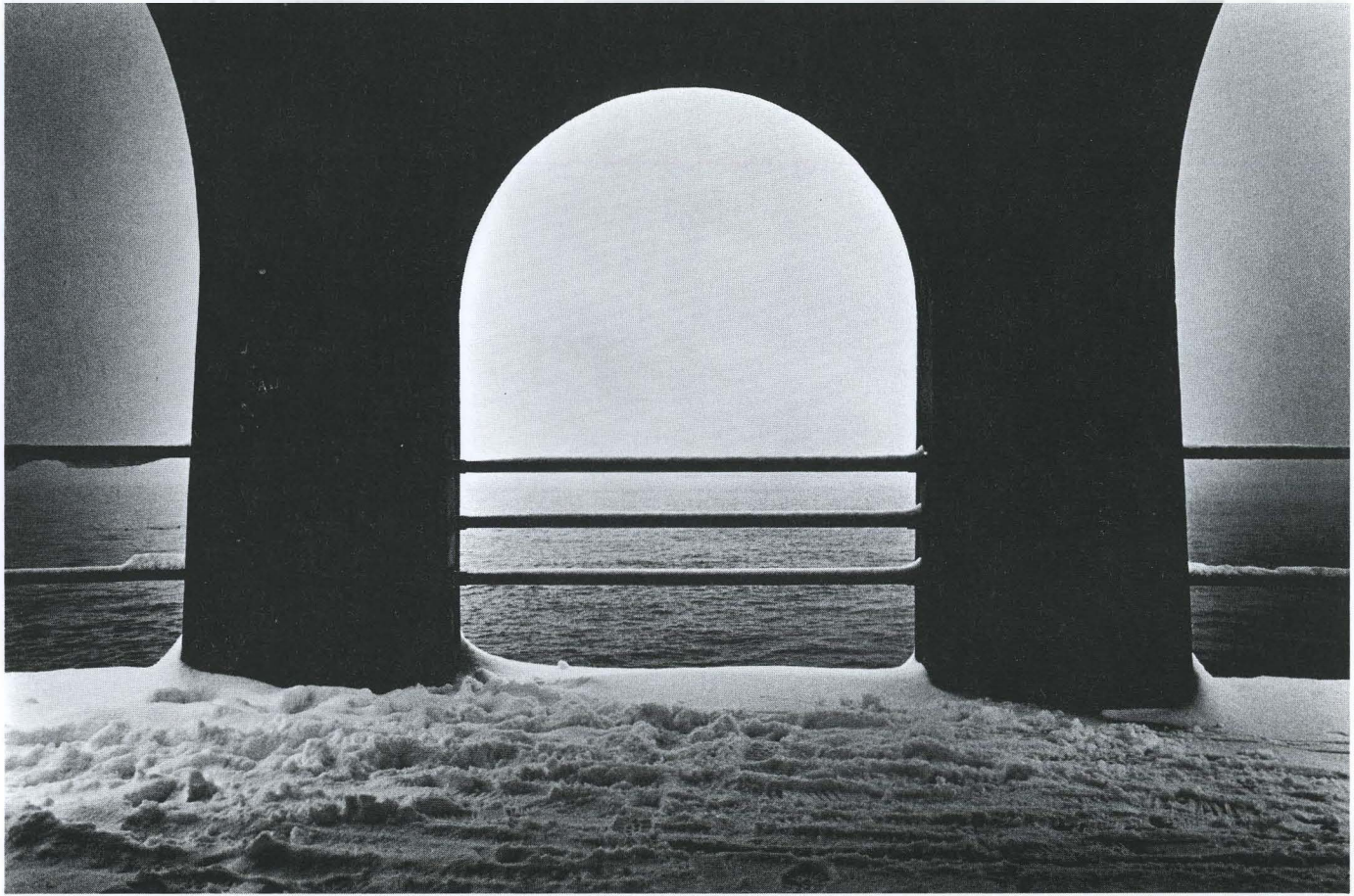
LR Formal architectural spaces control response. Are you interested in controlling the viewer's response?

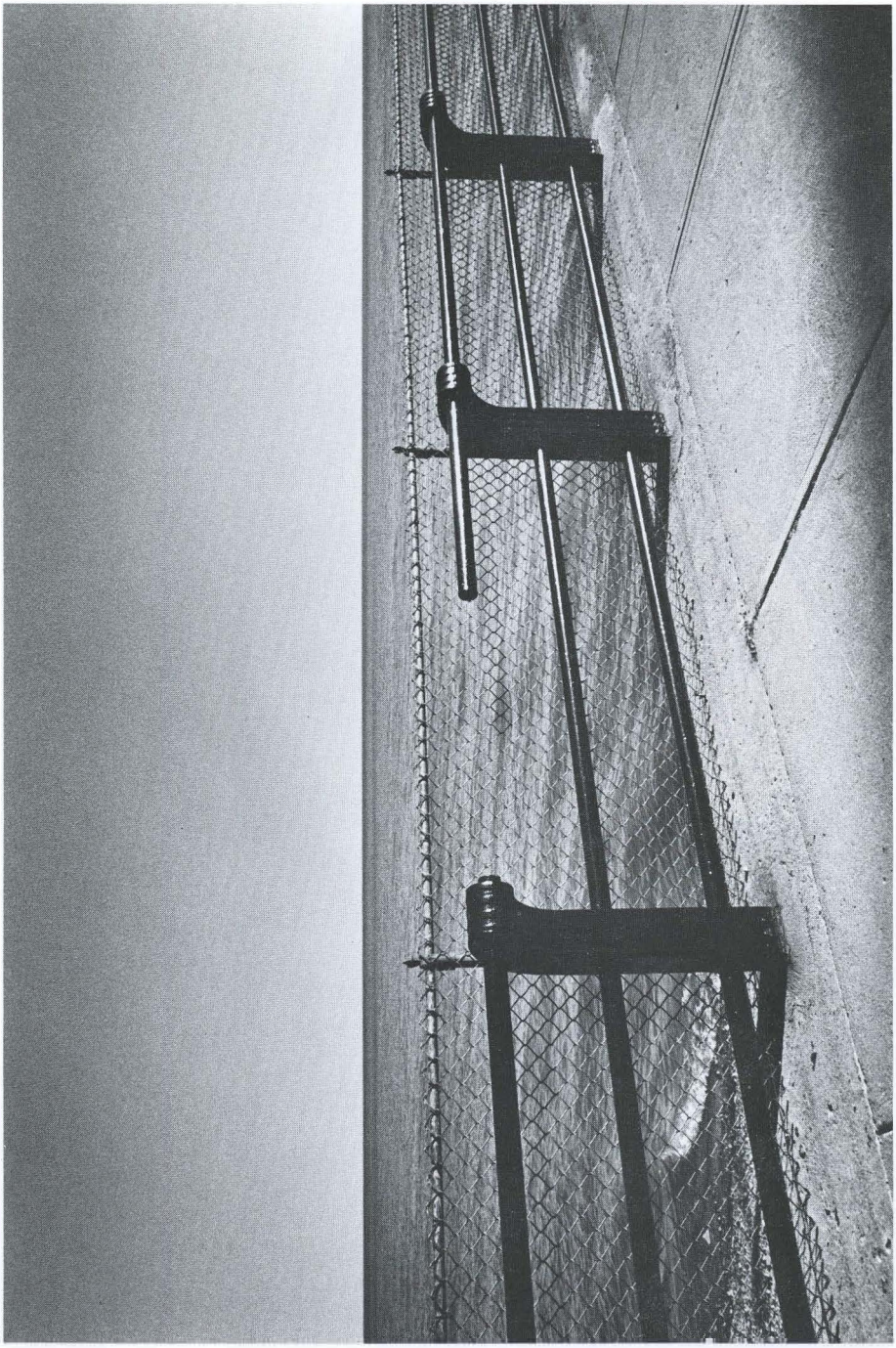
KS I'm more interested in producing something that the viewer will respond to than in having power over him. And I suppose that I'm finding the urban environment, especially the most recent urban environment mind-blowingly austere, and the expressway which figures prominently in my recent work is the *ultimate*. If you're driving on it at 60 miles per hour it's one thing; if you're walking there it's a wasteland. And the austerity lends itself to certain visually arresting images that I select out. I have a difficult time, however, resisting the impulse to make aesthetic, ascetic images. Some people think I make cold, awful photographs — those people are getting the message but they are not seeing the point; the more intellectual types say, "*Boy!* That's *beautiful*."

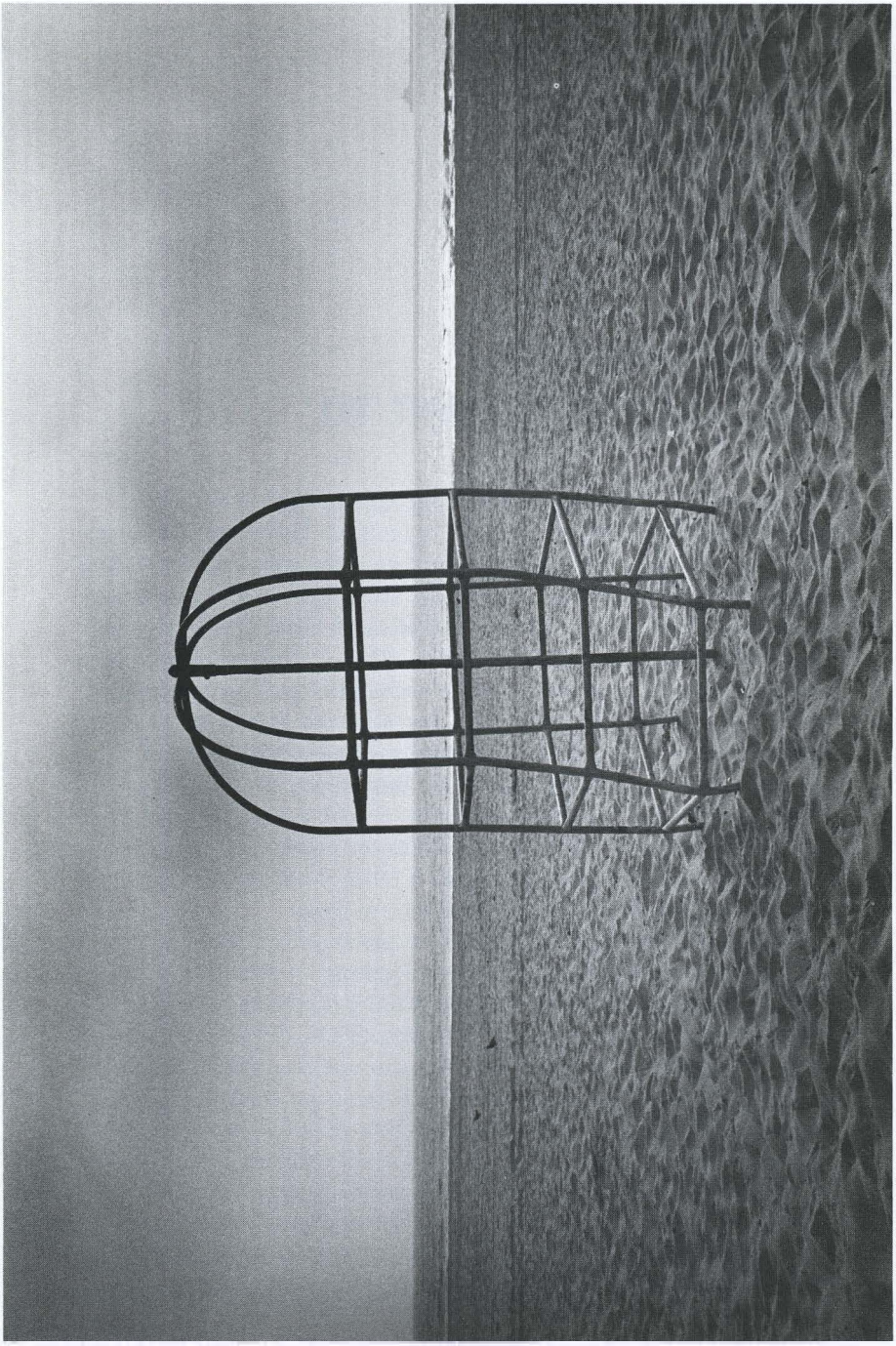












Gladys Hindmarch /
YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO

Where are we? I ask Coco as I wipe the bottom shelf of the mess cooler. Tahsis Inlet, she answers as I try to lift a blob of dried orange juice up, we're heading home. We are? we arent going to the whaling station for sure? Dont think so, she says as she lights a Craven A, not this time. Too bad, I say, I really wanted to go there. *Once*, she says, once in Coal Harbour's enough for me. Why? It stinks so much, she says, you think you can wash whale stench out? I pull my head out of the little wooden frig to look at her. It's tacky, she says as she twists a curl near her ear, it sticks in everything, every single hair even. I want to see it, I say, I dont want to see them dead, but I do, do you know what I mean? Sure, she says, what a sight though: tons and tons of flesh, miles of inners wider than sewer pipes, slabs of blubber thicker than full sides of beef, *the size is really something*. You probably will see them, Jan, if you come out again.

What are my chances? I ask as I start placing clean jars onto the wooden shelves, what are my chances of getting on this one again? Good, she says, good *for sure* if you're willing to stick around the hall and take whatever you can get. I would be, I say, if I decide to not go back to school. I'd go back if I were you, she says. Why? This is good money, she says, but you wouldnt want to get stuck doing it all your life. It'd be just a while, I say, maybe a year, two at the most. I've heard 'just a while' before, she says as she exhales, well, far be it from me to tell you what to do. She takes a long drag in. If you want to keep sailing, you might not get on here for a month, but when Puppi or I take off, or, who knows, *if* something happens to Betty, well, you'd have a good chance cause most women dont want to be here.

Why is that? I ask. You dont know. No. You didnt hear *anything* around the hall? No . . . I havent been there much, yet. It's not just *the coast*, she says, though that's gotta be part of it in winter (she stubs her cigarette grittily), it's our reputation, the *fun* ship, you sure you didnt hear? I just look at her (it certainly has been no fun ship as far as I can see) and nod no. You're a ruined woman, she says as she starts to laugh, your reputation's ruined for life. We both laugh. I finish putting the juices back in the cooler: loose women, no credit, parties all the time: and I'm about to sit down with her to find out what really happened, but she's finished mugup so she's about to get up so I stay standing. It *was* different with Kurt, she says as she stands, we worked hard and played hard but it was *fun*, and some people dont like others having too much fun at work, you know what I mean? Sure, I say as she leaves the mess; but I'm not really sure, is what I think as I follow her to the galley with my pail of dirty water.

Coco starts to sharpen her knife to cut the round steak as I empty my pail into the sink for the umpteenth time this morning: dont do that there, Lefty told me, but when I remember it's too late. When I finish cleaning the sink and pail, I have nothing to do except set the table for lunch but it's too early (things might slide off) so I go over to the edge of Coco's counter and watch. Kurt knew how to handle the men, Coco says, he was one of them so to speak. And Ray? I ask, what do *you* think about him? She wont commit herself. Supposed to be good, she says after she stops sharpening for a moment, cant tell yet, it's too soon, guess we'll find out *if* he lasts.

She wipes the knife off on a clean damp rag then cuts one enormous round steak in half. Her forehead, which is usually unwrinkled, squinches up. One stupid action, she says, by one stupid person who didnt know what she was doing sure changed things fast. Imagine, she says as she slices the large red pieces into smaller pieces, imagine Betty being so out of it that she crawled along the upper deck naked in port, and, as if that wasnt enough, you'd think she'd have enough sense to stay there after the guys packed her to her bunk, as if that wasnt enough, she did it again, right in front of company office windows in broad daylight: what, just what, was she thinking?

It's one of those questions that has no answer other than that I'm listening, I hear you, cause there really is nothing to say about someone I dont know who might not have known what she was doing: god knows, I say. Naked, she says, smack in the middle of Vancouver Harbour, so he's suspended and she's off now. Coco, I say, why did they do that to him and not her? That's their way, she says as she slams beef into the pan, he's responsible.

Open those, eh? she says referring to two large cans of tomatoes sitting by the can opener. She chops onions as she talks while I try to get the can into the right position so when I slam down the big wooden handle I wont hit the can-rim but get the triangular metal stabber just inside it. I tell you, Jan, I'd much rather sail with Kurt than Ray, as much as I've seen Kurt drunk, I *know* he's safe. I huddle the can towards my waist and hold it in, brace it, lift the heavy handle again. He took chances, she says, we all know that, but he *knew* the coast, every current. (I got it. I got the stupid metal punch in.) I just dont know about this one, she says, guess we'll find out *if* he lasts till winter, he's experienced mind you. (Coco has chopped five onions in the time it has taken me to open one can.) I dont know, she continues, I wish they had chosen the mate instead — Don doesnt take risks but at least he knows these waters. Why didnt they? I ask as I start on my second can. Not tough enough, she says and she laughs, besides that he was here already. She keeps laughing. You think *they'd* let him be skipper knowing he couldnt stop the way we were? He's respected, mind you, it's certainly not that, they just saw a chance to change us and took it.

So they stuck Ray on here to do dirty work? I ask as I (finally) turn the can. Yeah, she says as she dumps the tomatoes onto the meat, you see? you see how one stupid action can spoil it for everyone? Sure, I say. He's going to be watching her like a hawk, one wrong move and that's it, game over for her. She sprinkles chopped onion and green pepper on top of the tomatoes. You might get a steady job sooner than you think, she says, just hang around the hall. She salts and peppers the sauce and I step over to open the oven for her so she wont have to put the full pan down in order to do it.

I just have it open when the horn blasts. I jump. Coco almost trips forward. It blasts again. Right above us. The sauce sloshes over the meat and some spills on the deck. It blasts again. Boat drill, she shouts. It blasts again. The pan seems to pull her as she slides it into the oven. It blasts again. Wet me a rag, she shouts. The horn lets go a steady, high-pitched blare. I dampen a rag for her and wring it out while she turns the pan in the oven around to wipe it. Boat-drill, like the CPR?, he inspects the cabins? Damn man, she shouts, you think he'd tell *us*. The horn blares/pierces almost: it does not stop at all. I throw her a clean rag and she throws me the dirty one, and she bends down to wipe the deck while I rinse the rag. Leave that till later, she shouts, you get up there, I'll be right behind you.

I run through the mess. Turn the siren *off*, you bugger, we know, we're coming, turn it off. My right foot almost trips on the goddamn sill; then my left foot starts to slip on water on oil on deck next to the engine room entrance; but my arm glides out and grabs the bulkhead and I manage, somehow, to maintain balance. Slow down, I say to me, slow down. A firehall, the siren running, worse: I wont have any ears left. Turn it off. I stop at my cabin to hide underthings in case he'll be in here seeing them. When I step out, I cant get the stupid door hooked open the way it usually is; the hook simply will not slide into the brass eye, and that's what I'm fiddling with when Coco comes out. C'mon, she says, we're supposed to be there. I slam the damn thing shut and follow her past her cabin and the men's washspace to the poop deck.

Boat-drill, screeches Puppi who is at the bottom of the ladder waiting for Jock to move up farther. She looks mad. Her arms are

filthy. This is interrupting *her* work. She sticks out her jaw to indicate to Coco to follow Jock. But Coco touches Puppi's shoulder (all knobby) to tell her that she's next. Hairy legs. Purple ballet slippers. Sheitz fool, Puppi mutters. Red-nylon undies. Stupid man. Puppi glares back at Coco who starts up, and I look up into the faces of several curious passengers who are looking down at us.

When I get to the upper deck, almost everyone is there: Jock, Buck, Hal, Lefty, Marty, Beebo, Don, The Chief, and Ray. Lefty is beside the crank which is used to lower the port lifeboat down, and Hal is behind him, and Ray's beside him with a watch. Get outta the way, Puppi mutters at the passengers who then scrunch up towards the starboard side to let us through. Ray glowers at his watch. And Coco and I both plug our ears as we step towards him. He waits till we can almost touch everyone till he gives the signal to Don who is next to the wheelhouse to signal whoever's inside to turn it off, which he (finally) does, thank god. I glance at Ray staring at his round watch then look away. I'm so relieved that the sound has stopped that I dont feel anything else yet. I know he's upset, but I dont feel anything.

I look at Beebo: we are slow, *very slow*. He gives me a smile, we are, everyone else is, waiting for Ray to say or do something. I look at others: everyone seems to be seeing Ray although no one seems to be looking at him. He pulls out a yellow pencil and marks the time down in a black, wire-coil book. HUUUUMPH, he sounds. Ray takes a step towards us and then says in a voice which conveys almost no tone, no feeling: stand back, let the women do it. What goes through my head is: we'll show you, I've lowered one before and it was much bigger than that. Puppi and I step over towards the handle as Lefty and Hal move back and Ken emerges from the wheelhouse. Ray glowers at me and notes the time.

I feel myself fluster. I grab the handle. He's not going to make fools of us. Puppi is as mad as he can be: he, this man, *he* is telling *her* to do *this* on *her* boat. She grabs the handle from the other side. We brace our legs and glance at each other. She pulls and I pull. No Poops, I say, *this* way. Her eyebrows scrunch but something in the way I say it makes her realize she should listen and she lets go. I keep pulling but nothing happens. I can just hear what they'll say around the hall about this: two crazy dames trying to lower a boat by pulling against each other.

I move around to her side: push, I mutter. Everyone seems to be standing back. I swear they'd be laughing their heads off if it werent for Ray. The thought makes me put even more force into the push. But we are not together. Puppi springs onto the handle. It doesnt move. We stop. One, two, three, push, she mutters: we push and it wont budge . . . we try again: it wont move at all. Coco steps over to help us. She gets on the side I was on and prepares to pull. We bend our legs and push and pull: it wont budge. It wont budge at all. The three of us look at each other and try once more. Puppi isnt with us. We cant do it. I'm pissed off. I use all my body on the next push. I even spring onto it and so does Puppi. It wont move.

I feel them all looking. Fools. Fools. Are they laughing? I cant tell. I know my skirt is almost up. I can feel the air. I can see Ray's bottom jaw. We're going to try once more. Just one more try and we're *going* to do it. We try. All our force. It gives a bit? Not at all. I stand back. Hurt. Humiliated. Puppi and Coco are both red in the face. They try this time without me. I see white and muscle: Puppi's spider-musclely arm. I want to laugh. What kind of a joke is this?

That's enough, says Ray. I am really mad. I stand back and see the men. They are smiling. I stand next to Beebo who whispers: *no sweat, kid*. I could almost kill him. The men will do it. We'll see. Lefty grabs the handle and starts. No sweat alright. I glance at the passengers who seem to be peeking around the captain's cabin and pretending not to notice what's happening. Lefty cant get it. Well,

big boy, I think, having trouble? I hate to be shown up. I hate to be weak. I know I'm not as strong as a man, but I just hate to be shown as physically weaker. Jock steps up to join Lefty who's still smiling. Smile away, I think. They try. More force this time. Good, I think. it doesnt move. They try again. I'm about to giggle. The other men are *not* smiling. Neither is Jock nor Lefty. I look at Coco who is like a serious mother warning me not to laugh when she really wants to laugh herself. The men cant. I'm glad they cant.

They try once more: it doesnt work. The goddamn thing doesnt work at all. Ray steps close. He must be mad. He's still not going to show it. How long has that been like that? he asks Lefty. I dont know, sir, Lefty says in a more polite and subdued tone than I've heard him utter a word all trip: it must be jammed, sir. Ray shakes his head. I start to think, what would *have* happened *if* we had needed it? We would have sunk by now. It's been at least fifteen minutes. Ray mutters something to Don who isnt responding. Get over and lower the other one, Ray says to Lefty and Beebo and in a way, Don. We get the message: it *better* work.

We women follow the crew around to the starboard boat. The passengers scatter forward and aft and to where we were. I stand against the captain's cabin near Coco and Puppi who are shivering. I got *my* work to do, Puppi says. Wait, says Coco, it wont be long now. What if *it doesnt work*? I whisper. It Jesus well better, Coco says, or someone is going to fry and it's not us.

Some of the men looked pissed off, some amused. Beebo, who is closest to it, grabs the handle. He smiles. We all wait. He rolls the lifeboat out in three turns easy and then it starts to go down towards the water. That's enough, says Ray, that's far enough. He notes the time in his little black book. Then we all leave to go back to what we were doing before this Sunday boat-drill began.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID McFADDEN, a well-known Ontario poet, is currently teaching in David Thompson University's writing programme in Nelson, B.C. He spent the spring of '79 in Vancouver, where some of these poems were written. We were delighted that he helped us to interview George Bowering, and so was he, and everyone was delighted with each other, and so are we, to present some of his work in this issue.

COLIN BROWNE moved here from Vancouver Island about a year ago, and has been in grad studies at SFU with Robin Blaser. He's finishing up a film on Captain Cook for the CBC. Issue #17 will contain a feature on his NFB film *Stratheyre* (1979). (Edouard Travies' print *Le Couguar Inconnu*, engraved by Fournier and printed by de Laurent in Paris, c. 1830, is from *Oeuvres de Buffon*, vol. III. Thanks to Wendy Carter of Canadian Native Prints Ltd., 775 Homer St., Vancouver.)

R. FISH was born Robert Field, 1948 in Kelowna. He studied at the Vancouver School of Art for one year; he graduated in Education from UBC in 1972. Drawing and art activities began at five or six years of age. Angling and nature studies are consuming interests.

Anyone interested in writing should enjoy GEORGE BOWERING's *A Short Sad Book* (Talonbooks). McClelland & Stewart are just bringing out *Another Mouth*, which is very fine. George has published sixteen books in the past sixteen years, and teaches at SFU to earn a living. (Photos: p. 86 Bill Schermbrucker, pp. 51, 102 Nathen Hohn.)

NATHEN HOHN was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1948. He avoided the obvious Engineer's career; he avoided further service to the US Army by moving to Canada 11 years ago. Currently pursuing a multi major BA at UBC, he gives workshops in Photography.

Born in Oakville, 1949, KEN STRAITON graduated from the University of Waterloo with an Honours BA in Psychology and an informal minor in Fine Arts. In 1973, he began independently to study Photography and in the same year attended a film production course at UBC — a study that led to *Windows* and other film ventures. Since 1976, his photographs have been seen in group and one person shows. Recent work will be shown at the Oakville Centennial Art Gallery in February '80.

This is the twentieth of GLADYS HINDMARCH's boat stories.

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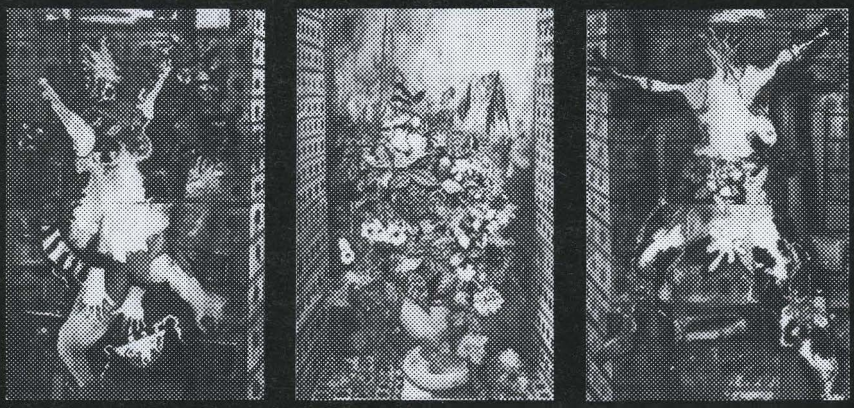

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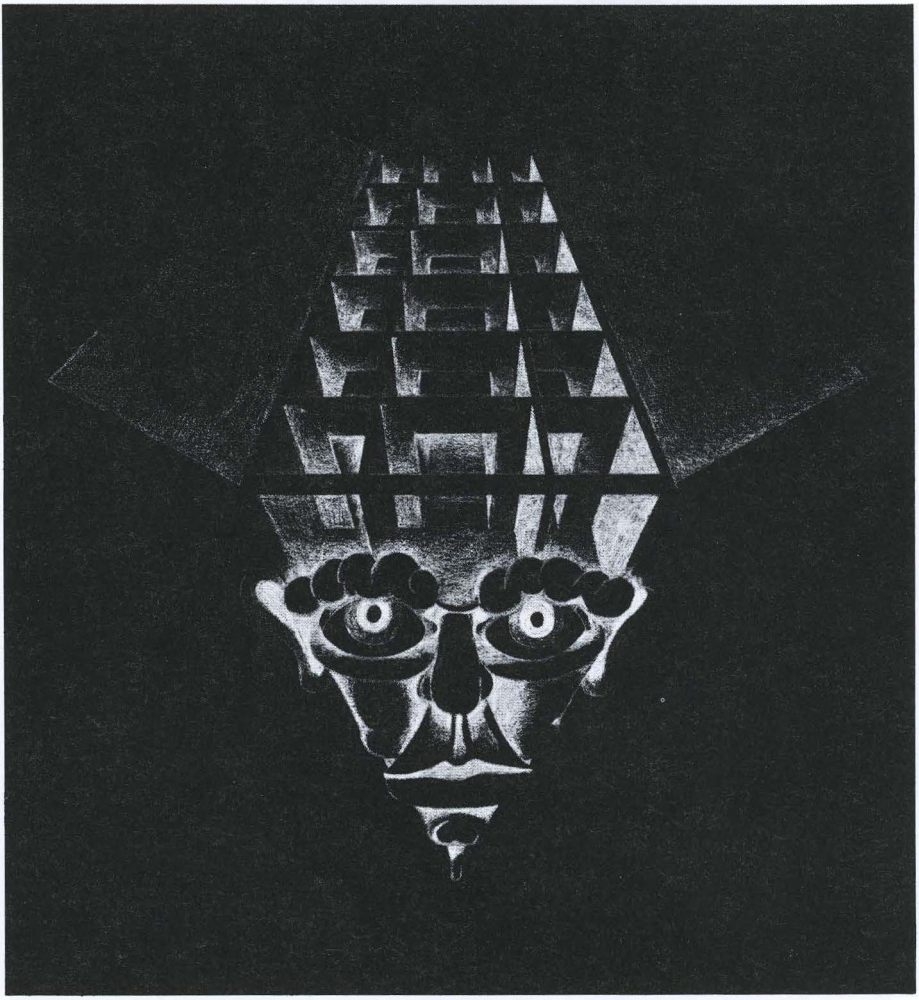

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