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# THE CAPILANO REVIEW

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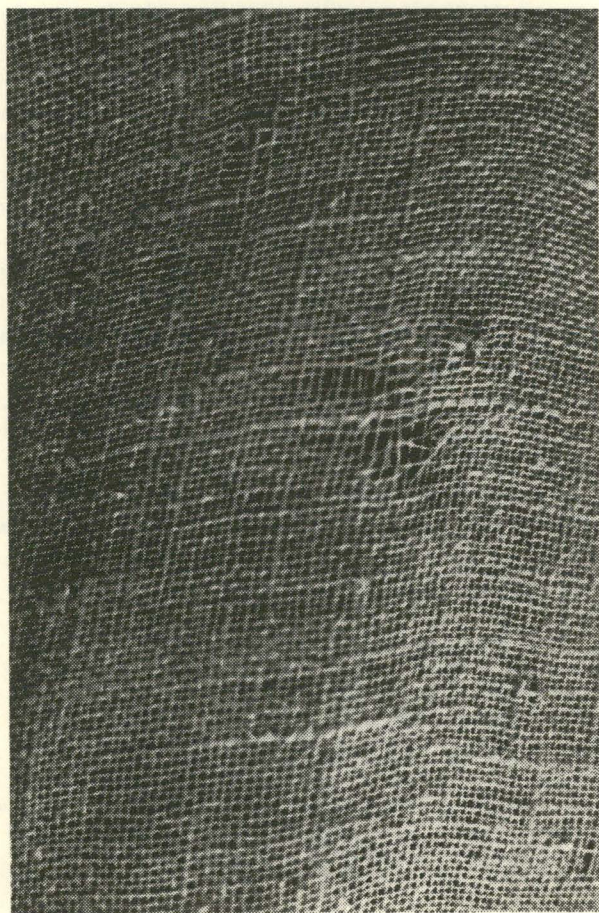
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*hole*



## HOLE MAGAZINE

Louis Cabri

This essay reads some of *hole's* contents through anecdotal, historical and theoretical contexts. *hole* was a project of the "experimental writing group" (ewg) which met regularly to read poetry alongside critical theory and poetics, and produce poetry seminars, talks and readings, in Ottawa, from 1986 to 1995. Rob Manery and I organized ewg events, and initiated and edited *hole* from 1990 to 1996,<sup>1</sup> irregularly producing just six issues, the first four formatted and proofed afterhours on computers at work.<sup>2</sup>

ewg's goal was to create poetry as a public act, predominately by locating poetry in a site of poetic dialogue, by attempting to create conditions for dialogue—by valuing talk about poetry as much as poetry itself. We desired "site" to be understood as constituted by dialogue; but, for all that, ewg did not emerge from an existing local scene. Poetry in Ottawa-Hull in the mid '80s seemed confined to subordinate and instrumental roles as theatricalizing narrative for visually-based performance art—at times, this was true even when poetry had no prop other than the page it was written on: poetry was a token reason for forming community. Nil discussion of poetry occurred outside the credentializing abstraction of university classroom. At Carleton University, Christopher Levenson's *ARC* magazine was pre-eminent—the tone of which seemed to us Arnoldean; at University of Ottawa, Seymour Mayne's influence was mythopoetically Laytonesque. Interesting page-based poetry in our opinion was translated by the expatriot Chilean community, notably Jorge Etcheverry, who attended ewg gatherings and presented in our Transparency Machine series. ewg poetry/theory discussions were attended by twenty or so people at best,<sup>3</sup> with a core group of about five, including Bob Hogg, a poet and professor at Carleton University. Bob was our immediate connection to a live tradition of formally innovative English-language poetries (*TISH*; The Four Horsemen, especially bp Nichol; the San Francisco Renaissance poets, especially Duncan; and Olson and Creeley).

Group enactment of "location" as dialogue, and the writing of discursive prose on poetry beyond an academic frame—historically—have been initiating premises, even goals, for many poetics group formations. We knew group enactment was

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<sup>1</sup> *hole* has become a chapbook series—Alan Davies, *Sei Shonagon* (1996); Clint Burnham, *Pandemonia* (1996, o.p.); Deanna Ferguson, *ddilemma* (1997); Ammiel Alcalay, *A Masque in the Form of a Cento* (2000); Jeff Derksen, *But Could I Make a Living From It* (2000); Jackson Mac Low, *Struggle Through* (2000)—available at 2664 William St., Vancouver, V5K 2Y5.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Manery's input and help has been invaluable to this essay, which is my reading of our collaborative project, ewg/*hole*.

<sup>3</sup> These included musician, poet, performance artist, Scott Moodie, frequently, and cultural critic, theorist, Jody Berland, infrequently—among others.



possible in even the '80s because of *Writing/Talks* (Perelman, ed.), *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (Andrews/Bernstein, eds.), and *Total Syntax* (Watten), published in the year of Orwell, 1984. (I will indirectly address below the talismanic quality these US texts and contexts had specifically for us, in terms of "second-order commodification.") Rob came to know of these texts through his friendship with Bob Hogg at Carleton University, I from Fredric Jameson in *New Left Review* (his now notorious flagship essay on the "cultural logic" of "late" capitalism). We didn't realize that Vancouver's legacy of group-enacted poetics was alive just then, incorporating the names these same texts catalogued, into their own context, at Kootenay School of Writing. In contrast, closer to home, Toronto's "in-my-street surrealism" did not compel us. Perhaps we didn't want reminders of essence of alienated WASP individualism, turned nihilistic, which is what the radical Quebec or French traditions seemed to have become in their hands. "ewg" was loosely modelled on the ideas of the "Toronto Research Group" and of "OPOYAZ". We knew hardly anything about TRG, except for some essays published in *Open Letter*. I had read about OPOYAZ in recent accounts of Russian Formalists. What excited us both was the fantasy that an open-ended "group" might be constituted by individuals practicing and/or talking about poetry from many points of view—scientific, political, etc.

The kind of talk we wanted to generate aimed to intersect innovative form with cultural critique and theory. We wanted to generate talk from within a site that was independent of institutional filiations (the universities, predominantly) and yet was also independent of ideological exigencies to positively value "the local" within a poetics of regionalism or place. Our first Canada Council-funded event was inviting Steve McCaffery to read and be interviewed in 1986. Subsequently ewg produced well over one hundred events at artist-run centres, the municipal arts gallery and library, and Chris Swail's Manx Pub, with poets invited from other parts of Canada (by 1996, mostly Vancouver—mostly KSW—and Toronto), the US (mostly "Language" poets, mostly from New York State, some from California), the UK (Tom Raworth, Maggie O'Sullivan, Aaron Williamson), as well as Ottawa itself (e.g., Hogg's week-long workshop on Olson's *Special View of History*). Audience size ranged from upwards of 45, to none (strangely, for a bilingual town, Quebec poets did not draw crowds).

Site-as-dialogue really began with our friendship—and that's where, in Ottawa, site-as-dialogue remained most of the time, contrary to our wishes. It was out of a somewhat desperate, pathetic sense of unaccountable loss that I postered the town announcing ewg's first meeting to discuss language-centred and other 20th-century writings, in 1986. I met Rob Manery at that first meeting (remembering him from a previous event because of what he wore for it, a black beret. He was gingerly reading *Piers Plowman* in a Penguin classics edition, sitting by himself in an empty gallery of opened stacking chairs, waiting for the event to start. Watching Rob was, to me, better, and more memorable than the event itself.) Rob closed ewg down nine years later, leaving it and Ottawa (I left in '94); from the beginning, the imaginary community wouldn't have

continued for much longer than a month, without Rob. Arguably, the minimal unit of "community" is two. That's what we (somewhat homogeneously) had. Viva homosocial bonding.<sup>4</sup> We were profoundly struck by Steve McCaffery's essay collection, *North of Intention* (published 1987); by *Writing* magazine—then run by an editorial collective—which we discovered in 1987; and by any essays or poetry of KSW members, whenever found (*Raddle Moon*, *C Magazine*). Our connection to KSW really began with inviting, on McCaffery's suggestion, Colin Browne to read. Browne performed with musician Martin Gotfrit their intermedia work, *Ground Water*, in 1987, then returned to Ottawa on a second invitation the next year to read from *Abraham*, present a Transparency Machine event (on Stein), and attend the premiere screening of his first feature-length film. It was in an interview with Browne that he suggested someone could start a magazine.<sup>5</sup>

Our first issue scrutinized the practices, and construct, of "contemporary Canadian poetry magazines," in editors' own words. We asked over sixty Canadian English-language poetry magazines (i.e., all we could find addresses for), "What is the poetics that informs your editorial policy?" We were addressing those who either controlled or were affiliated with means of periodical production (while realizing they were not necessarily poets). Our intent was to "translate editorial policy into discourse on poetics." We wanted to know what kind of poetics and historical thinking was consciously motivating editorial decisions, regardless of what we thought of the poetry they were publishing. We also wanted to know the automatic pilot, so to speak, and alibis it used, in the machinery of poetry magazine publishing. To what extent was the journal in question a readerly induction into the Canadian Stall of Time, instead of hockey's Hall of Fame? We published all responses received, excepting those evidently composed from a government funding application or publicity flyer. The other extreme—than bureaucratic rhetoric of application or flyer—was captured in the boast, "I publish what I like." While probably true, and possibly interesting (either as echo of Steve Biko's "I write as I like," or in identifying poetics with the poetry itself along the lines of "poetry speaks for itself"), it was nonetheless symptomatic, in our view then, of how preconscious the rules of taste actually were—rules we wanted explicitly articulated, and challenged.

Grandly, we imagined ourselves addressing poetry "communities" in Vancouver, New York, and San Francisco—although, it was not the cities attracting us, but a modelling of social discourses (political, cultural, economic) in which poetry

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<sup>4</sup> A reactionary statement—if one does not read into it the intended irony. For no pairing is "freely" chosen in the peculiarly fraught trials of mutual recognition and tests of exchange through which one discovers the poetry-world beyond its façade of publicized prize names and educational anthologies. It is nevertheless true that such pairings are a common literary phenomenon, and historically have tended, in the most celebrated male examples, to reinforce identity over difference (Michael Davidson writes of this with respect to the '50s San Francisco scene).

<sup>5</sup> See my interview in *The Carleton Literary Review* for 1988; edited at that time by Rob Manery.



became the prime motive force for all of it. Again, it was specifically not the style or thinking of a single poet or poetry group we wanted to emulate—say, Language writers—so much as a modelling of social discourses, on our own terms, where outcomes would be unknowns, and the conditions enabling outcomes, self-caused. The modelling we most admired seemed capable of producing a shared reading horizon among writing individuals. This we thought might pop our respective orbits, releasing that photon of social energy we felt was necessary for writing to begin to find a way beyond an otherwise private rotating blank.<sup>6</sup>

In one sense, “modelling” was time-honoured poetic communizing. In another, we were interested in structuring what might be called live proceduralisms. ewg’s so-called Transparency Machine series would invite a poet to present her poetry in a context of other texts and images distributed as a package in advance and then projected by means of overhead projector for the poet’s informal talk about them. Michael Gottlieb’s poetry in *hole* 4 appears alongside collages presented during his Transparency Machine event (see fig. 1). He made the collages from materials found on New York City streets; they are the found basis of his poems, and they were left out of the poetry book that subsequently collected the poems. While not published in *hole*, newsletter-format packages of texts from the Transparency Machine series provide interesting documentation by Dorothy Lusk, Erin Mouré, Melanie Neilson, Tom Raworth, Fred Wah, McCaffery, Jed Rasula, and myself, among others.

It is possible, for what it’s worth, that *hole* was the first exclusively “language-centred” magazine east of *East of Main* (Vancouver, 1989), purposefully negotiating an expanded value for the term “language poetry” as primary writing.<sup>7</sup> To our thinking, we combined Steve McCaffery’s sense of “Language Writing” with Jackson Mac Low’s description of a “language-centered” analysis and practice of poetry (we found his essay in *In the American Tree*), to arrive at the politicized word-as-such, localized through poetic activity. We persisted in homologizing the political with the aesthetic as a poetic practice. The paragram was of interest to us for what it might disclose of the social word.

Paragram as gateway to language became important to the proofreader of *hole*’s first issue and reviewer of *The Black Debt*, Christian Bök. But I think there was a split in Canada on how to read McCaffery’s poetry and theoretical statements. We favoured what we then thought of as the Vancouver reading, and emphasized the political-

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<sup>6</sup> Today, with the widespread use of poetry listserves, the situation might actually be reversed. Contrary to what I imagined on hearing about poetry listserves, and my excitement, my experience of them is that they sometimes enhance, if not actually produce, the sense of a private, rotating blank—nevertheless, a “blank” of poetic discourse, rather than the blank of “silence.”

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps our one eastern counterpart was *Rampike*, which, in contrast to us, seemed to be a well-established (-funded, -aged) wider aesthetic forum, unmistakably more all-round ambitious as a periodical, with cyclic regularity. We thought our ideological and symbolic differences from *Rampike* were self-evident in our title, *hole* (a name which, incidentally, predated, like a lot of poetry names do, the rock band with similar name).



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aesthetic axis of McCaffery's writings, his brave homologies, and performance work. In contrast, Toronto, to where Christian moved, emphasized McCaffery's "pure" word and sound, as if in spite of his social word (as if they were not the same). The same poetic value of purity which generally pervades the first-wave reception of bp Nichol seems now, ironically, transferred to McCaffery. I think in a certain way, Vancouver and Toronto communities still continue to split the good maple that way.

Using "language-centred" required facing in the direction of where this aging term was already going according to those with claims on it at the outset of the '90s. Our second issue includes Kit Robinson's "Dayparts." His line, "the prospect / of a simple, straightforward / communication," seemed to us to profile the spectre recently come *from within* this writing community to haunt the various poetries subsumed under its "language" rubric. Such a prospect, of "straightforward / communication," had been most complexly argued by Alan Davies since the mid '80s. Davies was, I think, in large measure responding to a condition of poetic discourse—its "second-order commodification" I'll awkwardly call it.<sup>8</sup> —that had historically inflected our magazine's moment and trajectory from the start.

Part 24 of "Dayparts," from *hole 2* (p. 19):

After the difficulties  
or correct spelling, serial  
murder, and extravagant  
gestures inappropriate to  
any context, the prospect  
of a simple, straightforward  
communication possesses  
a disarming appeal.  
That flight, however,  
is booked, and we are  
forced to go by ground,  
wending as we make  
up our way. In this  
way, we actually discover  
more to say, although half  
of it gets lost in translation.  
Finding places to stop  
and rest can be  
the best achievement of

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<sup>8</sup> The term sec.-o c. is modified from Barthes's 1957 theory of the ideology of myth as a second-order semiotic system.

an ordinary day—  
an occasion fit  
to be tied up  
by a redoubling  
of every effort  
until the moment spills over  
and it's time to get back  
to luck. Late arrivals form  
the basis of a new  
century, part figment, part  
chill, a situation no one  
could have predicted.

The apparently self-evidently damning title of the language-centred magazine, *The Difficulties* (ed. Tom Beckett), Bernstein's poetic device of the spelling error, serial poem as "murdering" sequential lyric—Robinson's opening lines playfully conjure a list of criticisms of what very loosely they invoke as a metalanguage of "extravagant / gestures inappropriate to / any context"—i.e., the metalanguage "Language Writing"—in order to oppose it to the redeemer, "straightforward / communication." I think an urgent need to address the problem and prospect of direct address, of straightforward communication, propelled Davies' post Signage (1987) critique of language-centredness as much as it initially propelled Barrett Watten's (e.g.) language-centred writing in the '70s through to his late '80s poem "Direct Address." To explain why would digress from my immediate point here, however—that Robinson's text discloses where a significant difference lies between the popular criticisms of language-centred writing Davies seems to confirm (but does not, I'd argue) and Watten. The shared urgency for (the seeming impossibility of?) direct address is socially apprehended and situated in Robinson's lines, in a way that it is not in the popular critique of language-centred writing's various poetic and theoretical responses to the problem of direct address (responses that invoke a variety of mediating concepts—ideology, materialism, etc.). Straightforward communication is not available for all, Robinson says in these lines, insofar as it is something—a technology—one must buy. While I can't go into Davies' own critique at length, I think its gist is that "straightforward communication" is not mediated by technology; it is a pure affect, experienced in words, of unmediated addressor-addressee contact. But, for Robinson, "That flight ... / is booked, and we are / forced to go by ground...." And insofar as "straightforward communication" is something one buys into, Robinson poses an alternative ideal; admittedly "part figment, part / chill," it is, nevertheless (the poem's claim goes) "the basis of a new / century." That new basis obtains agency in the poem as "late arrivals" lingering in "places to stop / and rest," and in the figure of local production, addressed as "the best achievement of / an ordinary day." Robinson's poem circuitously anchors for his reader a sense of social space that we prized in the



discourse modelling we thought was taking place under the name of Language Writing, social space locally carved out of corporate flux and state devolution in the everyday, “although half / of it gets lost in translation.” Which is to say that, theoretically at least (leaving the ground for a moment, as if that flight were not booked), what made us stick to (although eventually feel deeply stuck in) Ottawa was the self-justifying conviction—we felt it as ideologically “real” at the time (falsely, I sometimes think, now)—that global capitalism rendered redundant modernist yearnings to locate oneself in a “cultural capital” or centre in order to come to terms with its processes.

*hole 2* also includes an interview with David Bromige.<sup>9</sup> In an extended footnote written for the issue, Bromige elaborates on how Language Poetry (“LP”) critically addressed a contradiction in Projective Verse (“PV”) between subjective and objective expression:

[T]he fetish PV made of the utterance—of the specific person, the poet’s, utterance—led to a similar fetishization of the written word, because of the need to preserve the utterance (and the utterer) in writing. It had to be on the page just so.

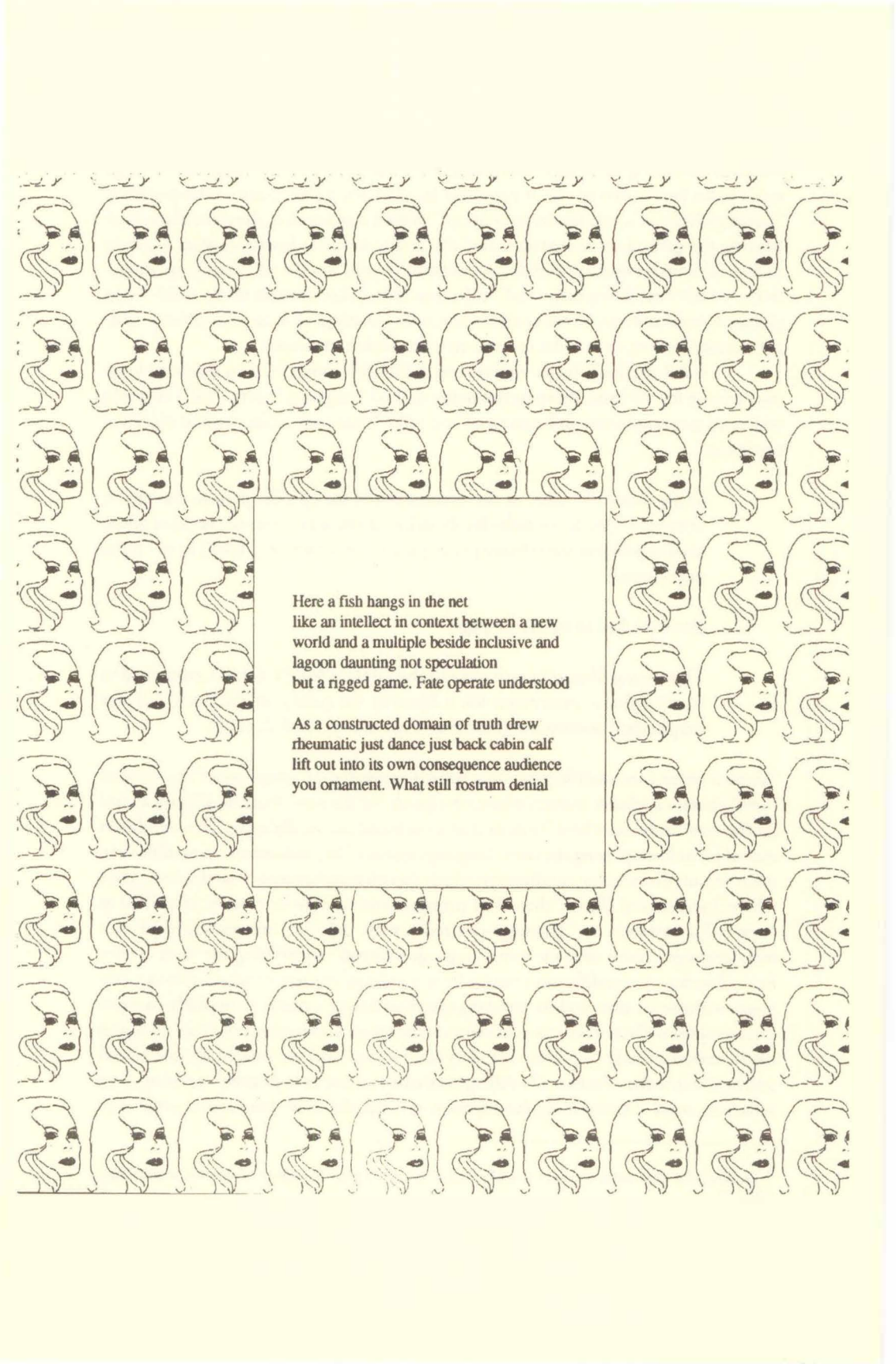
Just so, it had to be on the page.

This [was a] liberating turn-around [by LP; that] left PV behind, enmeshed in its struggles to perpetuate the subjective, the person of the poet, and this despite early successes and the best of intentions. (*hole 2*, p. 51)

“Second-order commodification” is a certain condition of reception of the cultural “new” (always a relative matter) where emergence (of the new “from here”) and arrival (of the new “from elsewhere”) intersect in a contested site-as-dialogue. That condition existed for us in employing the term “language-centred.” Second-order commodification refers to a myth-inducing condition in which there is simultaneously (a) the emergence (“here”) and arrival (from “there”) of primary writing only later to be identified as “new” (for instance, as “language-centred”) with (b) the emergence/arrival of a metalanguage (in this case, the term “language-centred”) identifying the work as new. Second-order commodification results from a cultural context in which primary language without a name, and its metalanguage that brings a name, temporally co-exist. One reception-effect of second-order commodification is to have poetics stances appear clearly staked, already amplified, distinctly audible, a critical lexicon already worked out and available to draw from in identifying aesthetic tendencies in possibly opposing, even reductive, ways. Determining the direction in which the term “language-centred” was

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<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, this issue contains uncollected work by Daniel Davidson (from his manuscript, “Shine”).



Here a fish hangs in the net  
like an intellect in context between a new  
world and a multiple beside inclusive and  
lagoon daunting not speculation  
but a rigged game. Fate operate understood

As a constructed domain of truth drew  
rheumatic just dance just back cabin calf  
lift out into its own consequence audience  
you ornament. What still rostrum denial



headed required that we realize how effects of the processes of second-order commodification—which we felt inflected our belated context—could be engaged (as in Bromige’s narrative of formal succession) and critiqued.

When a poet knows second-order commodification to be an “inevitable” condition of her work’s reception, causal chains can be set up, or broken. One such poetic knowledge of second-order commodification takes the form of resolute intransigence towards the “received standard,” whether that might be represented by KSW specifically (its own standard), or more broadly by the ideology of discursive contextualizing itself. Deanna Ferguson’s “Received Standard,” in *hole 4*, is a good example (for the poem, please see fig. 2). These lines desire to “lift out into its own consequence” the field of reception itself, in which the reader/writer “hangs” like an “ornament” and, by dispelling second-order commodification, return with the reader to a primary condition of engagement with verbal process. The reader is beckoned to exempt herself by deliberately recontextualizing the processes of second-order commodification as a “rigged game” ornamentalizing the importance of context—and critique—itsself.

Lisa Robertson’s poem from *hole 6* demonstrates another order of poetic knowledge of second-order commodification, one that is opposite to resolute intransigence: resolute participation:

My premise is simple. All method is a  
demonstration of history. All change  
is substitution. “Yesterday was a  
new day.”

“We are enraptured,” the stage-direction says.

And why should we not live near the beauti  
ful streets, have and like the meaning of our  
pleasure and its measurement. But let us  
leave aside the question of the  
material dream, not out of tact, not  
from the need to figuratively dim  
inish the little drama of sensitive  
expenditure, but in order to get  
familiar with the civic minimum.  
Longueurs of desperate truancy  
name an idea about the “un  
governable” world. Yet here I am not  
extending the maudlin phantasy of  
limits. Sure, a person will have—at their



own admission—and penultimate  
before the marvellous environment—  
real material romance. Today I  
want to address those of terrifying  
enthusiasms and meaning's ordinary  
jobs—those for whom both origins and  
limits repeatedly fail. Oh ardent  
transgressors whose walls are also my own;  
what country, good friends, what forest, what  
language, is not now smothered by our sobs?

Or I could pose the matter otherwise.  
What are the terms of our complicity?  
We cannot definitely know, for  
reasons of faulty appearance and mis  
managed debt. Our apparent sameness  
leads elsewhere than to cause or origin. . . .  
(from "The Device," *hole* 6, pp. 1-2)

Here the collective pronoun "we" is at once fiercely singular and empowered in a sort of garishly triumphalist way to resolutely participate in, if only to play with and differ from, history's method acting. Resolute participation is a necessary response because second-order commodification is always already a condition of the discourse-field, however primary the claim for writing may be (there is commodification at all levels of language). Ferguson's resolute intransigence occurs within the domain of poetry as a claim for poetry's exemptability from discursive contextualizings, while Robertson's resolute participation brings poetry and prose together, stylizing that which is not poetry as material for poetry.

Contrary to both positions, Alan Davies gestures towards a nonverbal outside of poetry—from within poetry. Distinguishing primary writing from second-order commodification misses his point, which I think asserts, in an almost lyrically nostalgic mode, referent as absent referent. To what "level" of language does a word such as "life" belong, when used in Davies's poem? This question, its possible answers, creates a dialogue within poetry and its discourse genre, and is therefore beside Davies's point. Against poetry ("poesie"), Davies paradoxically uses poetry in an aesthetic manoeuvre to gesture beyond its own rules, towards the limits of dialogue. In "Life," Davies determines to mark poetry's limits, inscribing those limits within poetry itself, thereby displaying what are for Davies the aesthetic's best poetic resources:

Some of my friends are contented to plot the little movements of their minds. They think poetry is an art.

.....  
If somebody has written some poems and you read some of them you can tell pretty much right away whether they concentrated on the poesis or the life.

.....  
There is something pathological about the usual attachments towards words but writing at its best has to do with doing without them. (*hole* 3, pp. 40-2)

To what does “them” refer? Is it that “writing at its best has to do with doing without” the “usual attachments towards words,” or in a zen-like paradox, doing without words themselves? If the former is true, then Davies pre- and post-*Signage* work remains connected by a modernist impulse to “free” words of their everyday affects, their “usual” and “pathological” attachments. If the latter, then Davies pushes towards internal limits of dialogue within writing, limits that establish zen-like balance between art and life, and maintain the psychic health. The larger implication of these lines (and also of his post-*Signage* work), for Davies, I think, is that some of the poet-friends follow a modernist impulse to make language new at the expense of the goal of “health-ful living.” I think Rob Manery’s own poetry is very much interested in pursuits of similar ratios and “balances” between art and life.

Resolute intransigence; resolute participation; and in Davies’ case, the resolute itself—squared. These are three of many theoretical routes from *hole*’s poetry, image-texts, reviews and essays.

The idea of talk, site-as-dialogue, was central to ewg. ewg predates the formation of the Buffalo poetics listserve. I doubt we would have begun this imaginary group, for the reasons we did (to immerse ourselves, as speakers, writers, within contemporary poetry), if poetry listserves were already in place, and if we had access to them (computers, modems). What is talk, finally? Nick Piombino recently writes this ambiguous assessment:

Perhaps an aspect of the astonishing success rate of groups like Alcoholics Anonymous is that such a group allows for an ongoing possibility of talking among people, with an unusual degree of freedom, for very long periods of time—no doubt in some cases, for a life-time. Artistic uses of talking do not afford for this dailyness and gradualness, particularly poetry. Our culture will no longer support this for poets. (*Theoretical Objects*, p. 123)

Is this the reason why the ewgroup remained more imaginary than it intended, because “our culture” no longer supports the idea on which it was fundamentally based—poets’

talk?<sup>10</sup> Conspiracy theory, or leisure wear? But what is it exactly that “our culture” no longer supports: artistic/literary, or ordinary/usual uses of talking by poets? In what sense to understand “support”?<sup>11</sup> Is Piombino drawing a possibly insulting analogy from poetry-group to AA-group, or drawing a possibly flattering one to transindividual values for artistic *and* nonartistic uses of talking “through” societal pathologies? Either way he writes: “Our culture will no longer support this for poets.”

But this fact is itself not only poetry’s symptom. If that were the case, the symptom would remain private—an individual’s somewhat desperate, pathetic sense of unaccountable loss, mine, for example, driven to poster town, announcing “ewg.” Rather, it’s the culture’s symptom (that poetry articulates). There, was Rob (he lost the beret pretty quick). It’s “The Sustained Siege,” as Michael Gottlieb’s poem title has it, a phrase he reiterates in the first line:

The sustained siege.

The great teeth and  
the mighty jaws.

Pretending  
that these tails are not  
lashing,  
that these blows  
are not coming fast and low,  
that these are not  
our vitals, so stapped.

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<sup>10</sup> But if “our culture” did support such talk, what would one get—“table talk,” as the genre was called, of the so-called literary greats, in “timeless conversation”? For Charles Bernstein, the “freedom” of the innovative poetry world lies in its having evaded the commodifying and reifying attentions of “official culture.” “*It is a measure of its significance that it is ignored*,” he emphasizes (see his introduction to *Close Listening*). The *PhillyTalks* series of poets’ dialogues I’ve curated since 1997 ([www.english.upenn.edu/~wh/phillytalks](http://www.english.upenn.edu/~wh/phillytalks)) offers a different order of engagement with poetry than either the Buffalo poetics listserve—with its implicitly broad democratic hope for dialogue and community—or the “Great Conversation”, as Barrett Watten calls it, between the elected few. *PhillyTalks* attempts to offer *more* than the poetics listserve, by focused dialogue (it *wants* to be great conversation, but open to as many as possible), in a context of way *fewer* pretenses of “literary” conversation (e.g. of the latter, the imminent conversation, as of this writing, between Anselm Hollo and Lisa Jarnot at \$25 a ticket—one wonders how venue and audience will negatively affect their actual discussion) by providing a newsletter of dialogue and poetry available in advance of the talk, by ensuring the event is free, and by having it occur at a volunteer-run site at arms-length from funders.

<sup>11</sup> *hole* had little financial support from arts funding bodies; we thought the work of applications and of civic duties the funding entailed would lead us wide of our primary motivations for starting the magazine.



Like a fervid gift  
for deflection.

"If it's not yours  
perforce  
it's mine,  
even if I never use it."

"I can't carry you anymore,  
you don't weigh enough."

Orphaned all,

a descending series  
we are obliged to appraise,  
like a kind of metrical test,

the dreadfully unkeyed  
mirrored phrasings,  
the anguished, somnolent  
draughts  
streaming back empty,  
the smoking cliffs,  
the empty loges,  
the halls where the insults  
were first tossed.

All of us entirely under-  
rehearsed.

The atrophied, antic,  
strophes.

The arbitrarily enduring,  
the purblind tolling,  
the graven, wan,  
detuned verging.

These gravid,  
"posthumously born."

The giving up  
—that makes it official.

The suspicious rising  
and the cheered fall.

The stingy padding,  
the lack of anything we  
would recognize  
as insulation.

Jinking left and right,  
availing not.

“I can’t shake them.”

Sunk to the axles.

“This time  
it’s not different.”  
(*Gorgeous Plunge*, p. 35)

## Appendix / *hole* bibliography

*hole* 1: art, Marie-Jeanne Musiol; poetry, Gerald Burns, Peter Ganick, Karen MacCormack, Steve McCaffery, Melanie Neilson, Jena Osman, Hannah Weiner; reviews, Christian Bök, Allison Fillmore; essays, Jeff Derksen; survey, contemporary Canadian poetry magazines.

*hole* 2 (1990): poetry, David Bromige, Frank Davey, Daniel Davidson, Karen MacCormack, Kit Robinson; David Bromige interview, Louis Cabri; review, Kevin Killian; correspondence, Kevin Killian/Kit Robinson.

*hole* 3 (1991), poetry/review issue: poetry, Bruce Andrews, Dennis Barone, Alan Davies, Jeff Derksen, Edmond Jabès, Eric Wirth; reviews by Barone, Christian Bök, Davies, Derksen, Wirth.

*hole* 4 (1993), image/text issue: cover art, Louis Cabri and Rob Manery; poem/collage, Susan B., Charles Bernstein, Ray DiPalma; poetry, Ray Dipalma, Deanna Ferguson, Michael Gottlieb, Jed Rasula; essay, Franklin Bruno.

*hole* 5 (1995): cover art, Rob Manery; poetry, Bruce Andrews, Clint Burnham, Louis Cabri, Peter Culley, Stacy Doris, Gerry Gilbert, Harryette Mullen, Ted Pearson.

*hole* 6 (1996), poetics & reviews issue: cover art, Germaine Koh; poetry, Lisa Robertson, Johan de Wit; reviews, Clint Burnham, Nathaniel Dorward, Susan Holbrook, Mike Magoolaghan; essay, Fred Wah.





# IRON

IRON WAS A SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY-BASED LITERARY MAGAZINE THAT RAN SOME 14 ISSUES BEGINNING IN 1966 THROUGH 1972, AND THEN FOLLOWED WITH A SECOND SERIES OF SIX ISSUES THAT ENDED IN 1978. THE REMARKS THAT FOLLOW PERTAIN PRIMARILY TO THE FIRST SERIES OF THE MAGAZINE. IRON—BOTH SERIES—WAS PRODUCED BY STUDENTS OF ROBIN BLASER AND/OR THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY, THE LITERARY MOVEMENT BY THE PUBLICATION OF DONALD M. ALLEN'S 1960 ANTHOLOGY OF THE SAME NAME.

ALLEN'S ANTHOLOGY FEATURED A SERIES OF AMERICAN POETS WORKING IN THE ROUGHLY-DEFINED INTELLECTUAL AND FORMAL LINE FORGED BY EZRA POUND AND WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, WHICH ARGUED FOR A POETIC LINE AND DICTION DICTATED BY THE INDIVIDUAL'S ABILITY TO THINK, COMPOSE AND SPEAK IT WITHOUT DISGUIISING OR UNDERMINING THE PARTICULARITIES OF HIS OR HER PRIVATE AND PUBLIC IDENTITY, WHICH WERE TREATED AS ONE AND THE SAME. THE LEADING POETS OF THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY MOVEMENT WERE CHARLES OLSON, ROBERT DUNCAN, ROBERT CREELEY, DENISE LEVERTOV, ALLEN GINSBERG, GARY SNYDER, EDWARD DORN, AND FRANK O'HARA.

BECAUSE IRON CAME OUT OF THE WEST COAST, AND MOST OF THE YOUNG WRITERS INVOLVED WERE STUDENTS OF ROBIN BLASER, THE MAGAZINE TENDED TO MOVE, WHENEVER IT COULD ELUDE THE INFLUENCE OF CHARLES OLSON, TO ROBERT DUNCAN'S MORE ORPHIC MUSIC, WHICH INCLUDED THE THEN-RECENTLY DECEASED BUT MORE INTELLECTUALLY ROWDY JACK SPICER, AND BLASER HIMSELF, WHO HAD ACCEPTED A FACULTY POST AT SFU IN 1966 AND WAS AT THAT POINT IN HIS CAREER EXPANDING HIS CONCERNS BEYOND THE LIMITS OF HIS MENTORS AND PEERS, AT LEAST IN INTELLECTUAL QUALITY AND RANGE. OLSON'S APPROACH TO COMPOSITION, IN THE EARLY YEARS OF HIS CAREER, HAD BEEN TO POLITICIZE THE PROCESSES INVOLVED. DUNCAN'S APPROACH WAS TO INJECT A POWERFUL HOMEROERIC CHARGE INTO THE MECHANICS OF COMPOSITION WITHOUT ARGUING AGAINST OLSON'S POLITICIZATIONS. THE TWO STREAMS PROVIDED US WITH AN ATTRACTIVE BALANCE, PARTICULARLY WITH BLASER'S GENTLE GUIDANCE.

THE INITIAL PARTICIPANTS IN IRON (NOT ALL OF WHOM PUBLISHED WORK IN IT) WERE, IN REVERSE ALPHABETICAL ORDER, RENEE VAN HALM, SHARON THESEN,

JIM TAYLOR, HENK AND TANYA SUIJS, COLIN STUART, KEN LINDEMERE (WHO LATER NAMED HIS NORTH VANCOUVER MUSIC STORE "IRON MUSIC"), NEAP HOOVER, ALBAN GOULDEN, AND BRIAN FAWCETT. OTHERS WHO BECAME INVOLVED OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS INCLUDED VICTORIA WALKER, KARL SIEGLER, STAN PERSKY, TOM MCGAULEY, GLADYS HINDMARCH, BRETT ENEMARK, MICHAEL BOUGHN, AND CLIFF ANDSTEIN. BRETT ENEMARK EVENTUALLY EDITED MOST OF THE SECOND SERIES. WE GOT GENEROUS INFUSIONS OF ENERGY AND NO LITTLE AMOUNT OF PRODUCTION MONEY FROM RALPH MAUD, WHO HAD BEEN HIRED BY SFU TO A FULL PROFESSORSHIP AS A DYLAN THOMAS SCHOLAR, BUT ARRIVED IN VANCOUVER A CHARLES OLSON ACOLYTE WHO WAS RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THOMAS UNLESS UNDER DURESS.

THERE WERE OTHER PROFESSORIAL INFLUENCES ON US BEYOND THOSE OF BLASER AND MAUD, OF COURSE. THE HORDE OF TIGHT-ASSED ACADEMIC CLERKS WHO HAVE NOW TAUGHT SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF STUDENTS TO HATE LITERATURE AS QUAINLY OBTUSE AND OBSCURE ARRANGEMENTS OF LANGUAGE WRITTEN BY UNRULY INDIVIDUALS AS MUCH IN NEED OF SUPERVISION AS THEIR WORK NEED EXPERT SIMPLIFICATION AND REORGANIZATION COMPRISED MUCH OF THE SIMON FRASER FACULTY, DESPITE ITS UNINTENTIONALLY NEWMANIAN BEGINNINGS. MANY OF THE CLERKS WERE AMERICANS WHO COULDN'T BELIEVE THEIR GOOD FORTUNE AT FINDING THEMSELVES ON A TRACK TO ACHIEVE EARLY TENURE WHILE THEY WEREN'T MUCH OLDER THAN THEIR STUDENTS.

THE PROFESSORS WEREN'T ALL BAD PEOPLE, EITHER. THERE WAS LEONARD MINSKY, WHO TAUGHT SOME OF US MIDDLE ENGLISH WITH A BROOKLYN ACCENT (AND OTHERS OF US HOW HAZARDOUS TO AN ACADEMIC CAREER POSING AS A REVOLUTIONARY COULD BE IF ONE DIDN'T HAVE TENURE). PERHAPS THE MOST SANGUINE INFLUENCE WAS THAT OF THE LATE ROB DUNHAM, WHO TAUGHT US TO RESPECT THE ROMANTIC POETS, EVEN WILLIAM WORDSWORTH. GEORGE BOWERING, A FINE POET IN HIS OWN RIGHT, JOINED THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT SFU AROUND 1970, BUT WE REGARDED GEORGE AS A CONTEMPORARY, AND THUS WERE QUITE WILLING TO PLAY BASEBALL WITH HIM BUT NOT TAKE HIS COURSES OR TREAT HIM VERY SERIOUSLY AS A TEACHER OF POETICS.

IRON APPEARED IRREGULARLY AND IN CHANGING FORMATS. THE IRREGULARITY WAS LARGELY A PRODUCT OF THE LAZINESS OF ITS EDITORIAL BOARD, AND TO A LESSOR EXTENT, OF THE GENERAL SHIFT IN GENDER PRIVILEGES THAT WAS OCCURRING AT THE TIME. IN 1966 EDUCATED WOMEN CONTRIBUTED TO THE GENERAL HUBBUB ONLY WHILE THEY WERE TYPING MANUSCRIPTS AND STENCILS FOR THE GUYS, BUT WERE ABOUT TO NOTICE THAT BEING AS TALENTED AND INTELLIGENT AS THE MEN AROUND THEM ENTITLED THEM TO AN EQUAL DEGREE OF ARROGANCE AND LACK OF INDUSTRY. THE FORMAT CHANGES IN IRON WERE DICTATED BY THESE FACTORS, AND ALSO BY PRINT TECHNOLOGY IMPROVEMENTS: MIMEOGRAPHY TO OFFSET TO HIGH SPEED XEROGRAPHY. THE LAST ISSUE OF THE FIRST SERIES WAS PRINTED ON A XEROX 9200, THE FIRST OF THE NOW-UBIQUITOUS HIGH-SPEED PHOTOCOPY MACHINES.



THERE WAS ANOTHER DYNAMIC CONTRIBUTING TO IRON'S INERTIA AND PRODUCTION CHAOS. BY THE EARLY 1970s, MOST OF THE WRITERS INVOLVED IN IRON HAD EITHER LEFT THE UNIVERSITY OR WERE IN GRADUATE SCHOOL, WHICH IS TO SAY, THEY NOW BELIEVED THAT THE PHYSICAL WORK OF PUTTING OUT LITERARY MAGAZINES OUGHT TO BE DONE BY UNDERGRADUATES OR OTHER UNDERLINGS EVEN THOUGH IT HAD BECOME VERY DIFFICULT TO FIND ANYONE IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING WILLING TO PLAY SECOND FIDDLE TO A BUNCH OF SCRUFFY POETS WITH NO MONEY.

BECAUSE IRON EVOLVED ALONG WITH THE YOUNG WRITERS WHO WERE PRODUCING IT—VERY RAPIDLY AND WITH NO GUARANTEE OF IMPROVEMENT—THERE WAS NO "TYPICAL" ISSUE OF IRON. BUT THE 12<sup>TH</sup> ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE, APPEARING IN 1971 UNDER THE TITLE "SERIOUS IRON", ACCURATELY ENCAPSULATES MOST OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND PREOCCUPATIONS THE MAGAZINE HAD, INCLUDING ITS NOT-ALWAYS-CHARMING INATTENTION TO FINE DETAIL. "SERIOUS IRON" ISN'T SEQUENCED WITH EARLIER OR LATER ISSUES, NOR IS IT DATED EXCEPT FOR AN OCTOBER 1971 NOTATION ON THE EDITORIAL PAGE, WHICH IDENTIFIES THE EDITOR AS "LINDA PARKER". MS. PARKER WAS A YOUNG MASSACHUSETTS VISUAL ARTIST WHO WAS CLOSE TO CHARLES OLSON DURING HIS LAST YEARS. SHE'D WRITTEN A LETTER TO BRETT ENEMARK CRITICIZING THE CHUMMINESS SHE'D DETECTED IN AN EARLIER ISSUE OF IRON, SUGGESTING THAT THE FRIVOLOUS PRACTICE OF DEDICATING POEMS TO ONE ANOTHER WAS MAKING IRON BOTH HARD FOR OUTSIDERS TO PENETRATE, AND MORE THAN A LITTLE UNGRACIOUS.

THE FORM "SERIOUS IRON" TOOK WAS A COUNTERATTACK ON MS. PARKER'S VIEW OF POETRY—AND OF US. ON THE COVER IS A PHOTOGRAPH OF TOM MCGAULEY, SHARON THESEN, ALBAN GOULDEN, BRETT ENEMARK, AND ME GAZING SOLEMNLY AT THE CAMERA, DRESSED IN WHAT WE IMAGINED WAS A PARODY OF POLITE WRITERLY GARB. BOOKS WERE PILED ON THE TABLE, AND THE ONLY THINGS THAT GIVE US AWAY AS NOT, RESPECTIVELY, ROBERT LOWELL, MARIANNE MOORE, RICHARD WILBUR, KARL SHAPIRO AND W.S. MERWIN, ARE THE FINE DETAILS: A CHEAP PLASTIC LAMP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TABLE, A CLAMP-LAMP ON A CORD RUNNING DIAGONALLY TO A WINDOW THAT SHINES DIRECTLY AT THE CAMERA, AND THE MAP OF NORTH CENTRAL BRITISH COLUMBIA—STOLEN FROM THE SFU LIBRARY'S COPY OF DANIEL WILLIAM HARMON'S DIARIES—TACKED TO THE WALL.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AT THE END OF THE 50-PAGE ISSUE WERE A RUN-ON GAG TESTIFYING TO THE EXTREME PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERIOUSNESS OF EVERYONE APPEARING IN THE ISSUE, AND THE EDITORIAL PAGE THAT FOLLOWED, PURPORTEDLY WRITTEN BY PARKER HERSELF, HAS HER SAYING THAT "SERIOUSLY, I THINK VANCOUVER OUGHT TO SMARTEN UP, INJECT SOME GRAVITY INTO THE FORM OF ITS MAGAZINES, AND PERHAPS TAKE A BATH NOW AND AGAIN. THE PARIS REVIEW IS A GOOD MAGAZINE TO EMULATE, IT'S ALWAYS OBJECTIVE AND JUDICIOUS AND WE ALL KNOW THAT LEADS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. DON'T WE?" THE "EDITOR" GOES ON IN A SIMILARLY HEAVY-HANDED WAY TO DENY THAT SHELLEY, BYRON AND KEATS SPENT TIME TOGETHER IN ITALY, AND HACKS SOME POOR POET NAMED FREDERICK BOCK FOR PUBLISHING TWO POEMS IN ISSUE VII-3 OF THE QUARTERLY REVIEW OF LITERATURE THAT "HAD UTTERLY NO EFFECT ON ANYONE", BLAMING THE

"FIERCELY OBJECTIVE EDITORS" OF QRL FOR ARRANGING THE ISSUE TO ENSURE THE NON-EFFECT.

OVERKILL? SURE. DID THE CHUMMINESS OF OUR SMALL COMMUNITY EXCLUDE OTHERS? YES, CERTAINLY—PATRICK LANE CARPS ABOUT IT TO THIS DAY. BUT THE EXCLUSIVITY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH US THINKING WE WERE SUPERIOR BEINGS. WE'D CREATED IRON OUT OF MODEST MOTIVES AND WITH EQUALLY MODEST EXPECTATIONS. WE DIDN'T BOTHER TO MAKE THESE VISIBLE TO OTHERS BECAUSE WE THOUGHT THEY WERE SELF-EVIDENT.

SHORTLY AFTER I REACHED UNIVERSITY, I ASKED COMPOSER, EZRA POUND SCHOLAR AND MUSICAL EDUCATOR R. MURRAY SCHAFER, THEN PIONEERING THE UNIVERSITY'S COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT, WHAT HE THOUGHT WERE THE BEST WAYS TO LEARN MY CRAFT AND GET MY WRITING INTO PRINT. I ADMIRER SCHAFER BECAUSE HE'D BEEN MAKING A CAREER OUT OF WITTY INSOLENCE IN THE FACE OF AUTHORITY, AND HIS ANSWER WAS CHARACTERISTICALLY UNCONVENTIONAL—AND USEFUL.

"WHEN YOU'RE STARTING OFF," HE TOLD ME, "YOU LEARN BEST FROM YOUR PEERS, PEOPLE YOU CAN ARGUE THINGS OUT WITH IN PERSON, PEOPLE YOUR OWN AGE. SO GO OFF AND MAKE YOUR OWN MAGAZINE. USE IT TO PUBLISH YOUR OWN WORK WHILE YOU'RE LEARNING YOUR CRAFT. DON'T SEND OUT YOUR POEMS SO STRANGERS CAN JUDGE HOW CLOSELY THEY RESEMBLE THE ONES THEY'RE WRITING. AND NEVER MIND TRYING TO IMPRESS THE BIG SHOTS. THEY'RE OLD, THEY'RE TIRED, AND THEY'LL ALWAYS LIKE YOU BEST WHILE YOU'RE ON THEIR FARM TEAM. WHEN YOUR WORK IS GOOD ENOUGH, THE PEOPLE WHO WILL GET IT BEFORE A BIGGER AUDIENCE WILL COME LOOKING FOR YOU."

"THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A STUDENT," HE'D CONCLUDED, "IS THAT YOU GET TO BE A STUDENT. DON'T LET ANYONE CHEAT YOU OUT OF THAT ADVANTAGE."

A FEW WEEKS LATER, WE STARTED IRON CONSCIOUSLY ON THE BASIS OF THAT ADVICE. IT WAS SO NAMED BECAUSE IRON ISN'T GOLD OR LEAD, AND IT ISN'T REFINED ENOUGH TO BE CALLED STEEL. IT WAS AMONG THE BASIC RAW MATERIALS OF HUMAN IMPROVEMENT, WHICH IS WHAT WE BELIEVED ABOUT POETRY. I'D LIKE TO PRETEND THAT THE CHOICE OF "IRON" FOR OUR MAGAZINE'S NAME REFLECTED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF IRONY IN ART, BUT THAT WOULD BE A LIE. WHAT I CAN SAY IS THAT IN AN ERA WHERE MANY LITERARY MAGAZINES UNDERTOOK TO REPRESENT VASTLY MORE THAN WAS REASONABLE (WEST COAST REVIEW, CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE, WHILE TOO MANY OF THE OTHERS STOLE THEIR NAMES AND THEIR ENERGY FROM CULTURES THAT WOULD FIND THEIR APPROPRIATIONS PUERILE AND EXPLOITATIVE, IRON DIDN'T CLAIM TO BE ANYTHING AT ALL EXCEPT BASIC STUDENT INQUIRY, AND INSOLENCE.

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IN 1971, I THOUGHT "SERIOUS IRON" WAS VERY WITTY, AND I CARRIED THAT RECOLLECTION ACROSS THE INTERVENING YEARS AS IRON'S BEST MOMENT WITHOUT



REALLY ASKING MYSELF WHY. IT WASN'T UNTIL I LOOKED THROUGH AT A PHOTOCOPY OF THE ISSUE A FEW WEEKS AGO THAT I REALIZED I DIDN'T RECALL A SINGLE PIECE OF WRITING IT CONTAINED. AND AS I READ THROUGH THE DIFFERENT PIECES, IT BECAME CLEAR TO ME THAT I WAS READING MOST OF THEM FOR THE FIRST TIME. WHAT STRIKES ME AS A CLOSE-TO-DISINTERESTED READER IN THE YEAR 2000, IS THE DISJUNCTION BETWEEN THE WRITING IN THE MAGAZINE AND THE MAGAZINE ITSELF. THE INDIVIDUAL PIECES OF WRITING IN "SERIOUS IRON" ARE PARACLETE TO THE POINT OF SYCOPHANCY, SERIOUS TO THE POINT OF WEEPY EARNESTNESS AND FILLED WITH THE COSMOLOGICAL SENTIMENTALITY THAT CHARACTERIZED, IN PARTICULAR, CHARLES OLSON'S LATE WORK. BY CONTRAST, THE MAGAZINE IS IRONIC, PLAYFUL AND STUDIOUSLY DISRESPECTFUL OF AUTHORITY.

THERE WAS A REASON FOR THIS DISJUNCTION. MOST OF THE YOUNG WRITERS INVOLVED IN STARTING IRON WERE FROM SMALL TOWNS IN WESTERN CANADA—SHARON THESEN, BRETT ENEMARK, AND I WERE FROM PRINCE GEORGE, B.C.; NEAP HOOVER WAS FROM VERNON, B.C.; GLADYS HINDMARCH FROM LADYSMITH ON VANCOUVER ISLAND; AND ALBAN GOULDEN WAS FROM MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA. WE WERE AWED, IN OUR DIFFERENT WAYS, BY CONTACT WITH WHAT SEEMED TO US "REAL" WRITERS, AND HONESTLY ATTRACTED TO THE RAGGED-EDGED VERNACULAR OF THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY. THE POETRY IT EXPOSED US TO WAS BETTER TUNED TO OUR HORMONE-DRIVEN PREOCCUPATIONS THAN THE STERILE AESTHETIC RECORDS OF EMOTIONAL ATTRITION, LIP-BITTEN INCAPACITY, AND MENDACIOUS SILENCES THAT FILLED ACADEMIC LYRIC POETRY IN THOSE YEARS. WE WANTED TO WRITE POETRY, SURE, BUT WE WEREN'T PREPARED TO BE TEA-SIPPING LOSERS IN A WORLD OF MINIATURES.

IN ADDITION, I THINK THAT SOME OF THE MOSTLY HETEROSEXUAL WRITERS IN IRON WERE DRAWN TO OLSON—I WAS PERHAPS FOREMOST AMONG THEM—BECAUSE OLSON WAS SO FRANTICALLY HETEROSEXUAL, AND THUS, AT ROOT, FULL OF THE HETERODOX CONFUSIONS THAT SPICER/BLASER/DUNCAN SIMPLY DIDN'T EXPERIENCE. NO ONE HAD BOTHERED TO TELL US, YOU SEE, THAT POETRY HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN THE ONE BRANCH OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND ENTERPRISE WITHIN WHICH ONE WAS ABLE TO OPENLY SEARCH FOR ONESELF, FOR ONE'S LIKENESS, AND FOR ONENESS ITSELF. IT IS IN THE NATURE OF THE ORPHIC TO BE UNIQUELY OPEN TO THE HOMOGENEOUS, AND TO HOMOSEXUALITY, THE LATTER OF WHICH HAD JUST BARELY BEGUN TO BE FREED FROM ITS PROTECTIVE ENCODINGS IN 1970.

IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT WE WERE IMMUNIZED TO SOME DEGREE—AGAINST THE HOMO/ORPHIC BIAS, AGAINST OUR TEACHERS' INTELLECTUAL SHORTCOMINGS AND AGAINST THE EARLY NEW AGE EXCESSES OF THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY—BY GROWING UP IN SMALL TOWNS, WHICH EQUIPPED US WITH AN INNATE SCEPTICISM ABOUT HOW RELIABLE PEOPLE WITH POWER COULD BE. WE WEREN'T QUITE AT THE POINT REACHED BY A LATER GENERATION OF WRITERS, WHO DON'T TRUST ANYONE WHO HASN'T LOST A LIMB IN AN INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT, BUT WE UNDERSTOOD THE CONCERN.



OUR SCEPTICISM GOT US AT LEAST TO THE POINT WHERE WE WERE ABLE TO CRITIQUE THE MOSTLY PHONY AND SELF-AGGRANDIZING ENTERPRISE OF MAGAZINE WRITING AND PUBLISHING POETRY. I THINK THAT SAME INNATE SCEPTICISM ENABLED SOME OF US, DESPITE OUR AWE, TO GLIMPSE THE SELF-ABSORPTION AND EGOMANIA OF OLSON AND DUNCAN. THOUGH WE WERE UNDER THEIR INFLUENCE, WE TRIED TO DEFLATE SOME SMALL CORNER OF IT TO DIMENSIONS MANAGEABLE ENOUGH TO IMAGINE OURSELVES TAKING AN ACTIVE PART IN IT. IF OUR MENTOR BLASER FOUND OUR INSOLENCE TROUBLING, HE NEVER LET IT SHOW, EXCEPT TO MAKE IT VERY CLEAR TO US THAT JACK SPICER WOULD HAVE APPROVED.

THE DIFFERENT PIECES OF WRITING IN SERIOUS IRON ARE DISTRACTINGLY FULL OF TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS (EVEN SUBSTITUTING "PEOM" FOR "POEM" AT ONE POINT) AND IT IS INFUSED WITH SILLY ASTROLOGICAL AND TAROT CARD REFERENCES AND A NOW-EMBARRASSING FAN CLUB MENTALITY ABOUT CHARLES OLSON. THE OPENING PIECE, FOR INSTANCE, IS A SERIES OF NOTES RALPH MAUD WROTE AFTER VISITING OLSON IN GLOUCESTER A YEAR OR SO BEFORE HE DIED OF LIVER CANCER IN 1970. THIRTY YEARS LATER I CAN JUST BARELY PENETRATE MAUD'S ENCODINGS, AND THAT ONLY BECAUSE I WAS INVOLVED IN TRANSCRIBING THE LECTURE OLSON GAVE WHEN HE VISITED VANCOUVER IN 1965 THAT WAS EVENTUALLY PUBLISHED UNDER MAUD'S EDITORSHIP AS CAUSAL MYTHOLOGY. ON THEIR MERITS, MAUD'S NOTES DIDN'T DESERVE THE LEAD SPOT IN THE MAGAZINE, BUT WHOOPS, I RECALL THAT MAUD HAD PRETTY MUCH FINANCED THAT PARTICULAR ISSUE BY GETTING IT PRINTED FOR US IN THE UNIVERSITY'S PRINT ROOM.

MORE OR LESS ACCIDENTALLY, MAUD'S SHORT-HAND MEMOIR ALSO DOCUMENTS THE ARROGANCE OF A CERTAIN KIND OF AMERICAN CULTURAL IMPERIALISM MADE NOTORIOUS BY ROBIN MATHEWS AROUND THE SAME TIME. MOST OF THE AMERICANS WE KNEW, LIKE BLASER AND STAN PERSKY, QUICKLY ACCLIMATIZED TO CANADA AND HAVE SINCE BEHAVED MUCH MORE INTELLIGENTLY AND CIVILLY THAN THE VAST MAJORITY OF THOSE OF US WHO WERE NATIVE BORN. BUT IN 1970, THE DISCOURSE AROUND CHARLES OLSON WAS ASTONISHING FOR ITS CULTURAL ARROGANCE, AND IT IS THAT IMPRESSION, NOT MAUD'S REVERENCE FOR OLSON, THAT ARTICULATES MOST CLEARLY.

"SERIOUS IRON" PROCEEDS WITH EXERPTS FROM GLADYS (NOW MARIA) HINDMARCH'S ACCOUNT OF HER FIRST AND ONLY PREGNANCY, AND THAT IS FOLLOWED BY TOM MCGAULEY'S TRANSCRIPTION OF A JULY 1971 LECTURE BY BRITISH POET AND EDITOR JEREMY PRYNNE ON OLSON'S MAXIMUS IV, V, & VI, WHICH HE HAD SHEPHERDED THROUGH BRITISH PUBLISHER CAPE GOLIARD (JONATHAN CAPE) IN 1968. THE ISSUE DWINDLED FROM THERE WITH SOME VERY GOOD POEMS BY VICTORIA WALKER, AN EXTREMELY PERSONAL AND AMBIGUOUS ONE BY ME, SOME OTHER OBSCURE SELF-DECLARATIONS AND THEN PETERED OUT WITH AN OLD ROBERT CREELEY ESSAY WE PRINTED UNDER THE HAVANA COPYRIGHT CONVENTIONS. NONE REQUIRE COMMENT HERE EXCEPT THE TRANSCRIPT OF PRYNNE'S LECTURE.

IN GIVING PRYNNE'S TRANSCRIBED LECTURE SO PROMINENT A PLACE IN THE ISSUE WE WERE ALLOWING AN EDITOR TO REVIEW HIS OWN BOOK, BUT NO ONE SEEMED TO THINK THAT WAS ODD. IN OUR MINDS, OLSON WAS ALWAYS AS MUCH

AN EMBATTLED AND UNDERAPPRECIATED "CAUSE" AS A LITERARY FIGURE. WE WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO SAW HIM THAT WAY, EITHER. PRYNNE'S DEFENSE OF OLSON'S NEW BOOK, WHICH NEARLY EVERYONE WAS FINDING TO BE A MIXTURE OF INCOMPREHENSIBLE MYTHOGRAPHIC RAVINGS INTERSPERSED BY THE SAME KIND OF FRAGMENTARY LYRICISMS THAT MARK POUND'S LAST CANTOS, WAS THAT IT WAS "NOBLE, SIMPLE" AND NOT CONFESSIONAL OR LYRIC.

"WE PARTICIPATE" PRYNNE SAYS, IN AN ELLIPTICAL RHETORIC WORTHY OF OLSON HIMSELF, "IN THE CONDITION OF BEING. AND THE CONDITION OF BEING IS THANKFULLY BEYOND THE CONDITION OF MEANING. OH YES, THE WHOLE LANGUAGE HAS THAT VIBRANCY, THAT STEADY VIBRANCY OF THE SINGULAR CURVATURE WHICH IS EQUIVALENT TO WHAT WAS ANCIENTLY CALLED NOBILITY."

PARSE THAT IF YOU CAN. I COULDN'T AT THE TIME, AND TODAY IT'S EVEN MORE OPAQUE. BUT IN 1971, I UNDERSTOOD ITS EXPRESSIVE CONTENT, AND I GUESS I STILL DO. PRYNNE GAVE HIS LECTURE, REMEMBER, NOT QUITE A YEAR AFTER OLSON'S PREMATURE DEATH, WHICH BY ITSELF PREVENTED ANYONE IN HIS EXTENDED COMMUNITY FROM MAKING A FAIR-MINDED EVALUATION OF HIS LATER WORK, PRYNNE INCLUDED, WHO WAS AS DETECTABLY IN AWE OF THE GREAT MAN AS ANYONE IN THE AUDIENCE FOR THAT LECTURE. TODAY, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT OLSON'S LATER WORK IS MUCH DIMINISHED IN SKILL AND COHERENCE FROM HIS EARLY POETRY AND IS HARD TO DEFEND IN OTHER THAN EXPRESSIVE TERMS. IN THOSE EARLY POEMS, OLSON HAD BEEN A CIVIC-MINDED WRITER GROUNDED IN A DETAIL-DRIVEN APPRECIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORICAL, BIOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS. HE'D USED THOSE CONTENTS, AND THE ENHANCEMENT OF CONTEXT THEY PROVIDED, TO WORK HIS WAY BEYOND THE POUND/WILLIAMS-INSPIRED DISLIKE FOR THE LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING POETIC FORMS OF EXPRESSION AND PERHAPS FOR ARTIFICE ITSELF, TO ONES THAT SEEMED MORE ACCURATELY LIBERATED AND LIBERATING. IT WAS A LAUDABLE IF QUIXOTIC UNDERTAKING, AND IT WAS ONE THAT HAD RUN AGROUND BY THE SAME COMMON CURRENTS THAT HAD PROVIDED ITS ESSENTIAL ENERGY: THE CULTURAL ASCENDANCE OF FIGURE OVER GROUND, AND THE VARIOUS SELF-DETERMINATION MOVEMENTS THAT HAVE SINCE MADE PARTISANS OF NEARLY EVERYONE ON THE PLANET WHILE ALIENATING EVERY COMMONALITY EXCEPT THE RIGHT OF CORPORATIONS TO EXCESSIVE PROFITS.

SOMETIME IN THE EARLY 1960S, I THINK CHARLES OLSON BECAME OBSESSED WITH IMPOSING A CAPRICIOUSLY SELF-INVOLVED AND POSSIBLY CLINICALLY MANIC-DEPRESSIVE "COSMOLOGY" ON ANYONE WHO CAME UNDER HIS INFLUENCE. HIS POETRY MOVED FROM AN ASSIGNABLE DECLARATIVENESS (MEANT TO COUNTER THE CONFESSIONAL LYRICISM HE LOATHED) TO A CELEBRATORY MODE THAT WAS ALTERNATELY SOARING IN ITS LYRICISM AND HECTORINGLY PEDANTIC ABOUT WHATEVER OBSCURE PIECE OF SCHOLARSHIP HE HAPPENED TO BE SHAKING BETWEEN HIS TEETH. MOST DAMNING, THE POEMS HE PRODUCED UNDER THESE CONDITIONS OF COMPOSITION ARE PRETTY WELL IMPENETRABLE UNLESS ONE BELIEVES, A PRIORI, IN THEIR COHERENCE.

NOW, THE YOUNG WRITERS IN IRON WERE ALSO SUSPICIOUS OF PURELY CONFESSIONAL LYRIC POETRY. TO US IT WAS BORING AND SELF-INVOLVED. OUR



INSTINCTS, BORNE OF THE INCIPIENT NUCLEAR ARMAGEDDON THAT HAD THREATENED TO RAIN DOWN ON US THROUGHOUT OUR CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE, TOLD US THAT OUR CONCERNS OUGHT TO BE EFFICIENT, SWIFT AS THOUGHT ITSELF, AND GLOBAL. FROM THERE WE WERE EASILY CONVINCED BY OLSON'S EARLY WORKS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCALISM AND SPECIFICITY BECAUSE IT MEANT THAT OUR PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY, EVEN IN OUR NON-GLOUCESTER OR SAN FRANCISCO PART OF THE WORLD, WERE POTENTIALLY AS AUTHENTIC AS THOSE OF ANYONE ELSE.

THE CLAIM OLSON—AND LATER HIS FOLLOWERS—MADE, THAT A BALANCING OF PARTICULARISM AND COSMOLOGY CONSTITUTED THE COMPOSITIONAL CONDITIONS FOR EPIC WAS, IN ADDITION, AS SEDUCTIVE AS IT WAS OPAQUE. IF YOU'VE GROWN UP WITH THE END OF THE WORLD CONSTANTLY AT HAND, IT WAS NATURAL TO WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN SOMETHING GRANDER THAN A LOT OF SUCKY-FACED SELF-THERAPY. BUT THE SCATTERING OF OLSON'S INTELLIGENCE THAT OCCURS WITH AND AFTER MAXIMUS IV, V, & VI LEFT ME SCRAMBLING FOR PERSPECTIVE, EVEN AT THE TIME. I KEPT THINKING THAT COSMOLOGY AND EPIC OUGHT TO BE MORE THAN A MATTER OF FLAMBOYANT FILTERING OF ONE'S SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES WITH THE MOON THROUGH THE TAROT PACK OR THE GREEK EARTH GODDESSES. BUT IT DIDN'T SEEM TO TROUBLE ANYONE ELSE, SO WHAT DID I KNOW?

WITH HINDSIGHT, ITS EASY TO RECOGNIZE THAT OLSON'S LATE ENTERPRISE—I REMAIN CONVINCED OF THE VALUE OF HIS EARLY WORK—WAS IN REALITY EPIC ONLY IN THE SENSE THAT OLSON WAS HIMSELF A PHYSICALLY EPIC CHARACTER: A VERY LARGE, STRANGE MAN WITH AN OVERWHELMING VITALITY AND A HURRICANE EGO. "I AM CHARLES OLSON: A COSMOS" WAS THE DECLARATIVE THEME THAT EMERGED EVERYWHERE FROM THIS SECOND, EXPANSIVE VERSION OF THE MAXIMUS POEMS. AS SMALL TOWN KIDS IN A NON-IMPERIAL COUNTRY, WE QUICKLY TRACED THIS BACK TO WALT WHITMAN'S PAX AMERICANA EGOMANIA, WHICH WE'D FOUND FUNNY ENOUGH THAT WE OFTEN PARODIED THE FAMOUS PHRASE USING THICK GERMAN ACCENTS: "ICH BIN VALT VITMAN, EIN COSMOS..."

NO DOUBT WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN MAKING FUN OF OLSON'S BOMBASTIC EXCESSES, AND IN OUR CONFUSED WAY, THAT'S PART OF WHAT THE FRAMING OF "SERIOUS IRON" WAS TRYING TO DO. BUT WE WERE ALSO "UNDER THE INFLUENCE"—OF OLSON'S MYSTIQUE, AND OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN FLATTENED TO INTELLECTUAL TWO-DIMENSIONALITY BY PERSONAL CONTACT WITH THIS LARGE, GREAT MAN AND HIS LARGE, GREAT EPIC.

I HAD INKLINGS THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING AMISS IN OLSON'S BIG, SMILING PAX AMERICANA. HIS WAY OF CONFIDING IN US AS IF WE WERE ALL AMERICANS HACKLES ON THE BACK OF MY NECK. AS A CANADIAN AND AS A NORTHERNER, I DID NOT NATURALLY SHARE HIS NEW ENGLANDER'S JOHN WINTHROP SENSE OF BEING AMONG THE ELECT. WHERE I'D COME FROM, TO BE CHOSEN WAS TO BE SINGLED OUT. MY INSTINCTS WERE MORE ATTUNED TO KEEPING STILL AND HOPING THE BULLIES DIDN'T BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF ME FOR BEING LIPPY AND DIFFERENT. BUT MY RAISED HACKLES WERE, AS IT WERE, MERE SHIVERS OF IRRITATION, LESS COMPELLING THAN THE GENERAL HORMONAL RAGE OF BEING A MALE IN MY 20s, WHICH WAS MAKING ME MISTAKE THE LONELINESS OF ADULT LIFE



FOR COSMOLOGY, AND VICE VERSA. AND I SUPPOSE OLSON, IN HIS MADNESS, FED THAT RAGE IN WAYS FEW OTHER POETS OF THE ERA COULD HAVE.

THIRTY YEARS LATER, SOME OF OLSON'S WORK—THE EARLY ESSAYS AND THE CIVIC AND LOCALLY-GROUNDED POEMS OF MAXIMUS I-XXII—ARE COMPLICATED AND CONVOLUTED ENOUGH WITH REAL CONCERNS TO BE WORTHWHILE. BUT WHILE FRAGMENTS OF THE LATER WORK ACHIEVED A POWERFUL LYRICISM, TOO MUCH OF IT WAS FRAGMENT, INCOHERENT BOMBAST, AND BULLSHIT. THE ABSURD INTELLECTUAL ORTHODOXY OLSON INSPIRED SO OBSCURED THIS THAT IT WAS ALMOST A FULL DECADE BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO ADMIT TO MYSELF THAT I HAD UNDERSTOOD ALMOST NOTHING OF MAXIMUS IV, V, & VI AND NOTHING AT ALL OF THE POSTHUMOUSLY PUBLISHED THE MAXIMUS POEMS VOLUME THREE. I'D MERELY AGREED TO PRETEND I DID FOR SOCIAL REASONS. AND SO, I'VE SINCE FOUND, DID A LOT OF PEOPLE I STILL LIKE AND RESPECT. OLSON TAUGHT US TO WRITE AND THINK WITH A RESPECT FOR PARTICULARITY AND WITHOUT FEAR OF ABSTRACTION. THAT WAS GOOD. WHAT WAS DEBILITATING WAS THAT HE OFFERED US NO USEFUL CLUES ABOUT STRUCTURE AND WEIGHTING BETWEEN THE TWO. AND THE ZEITGEIST OF THE ERA, WHICH WAS MUCH MORE INTERESTED IN LIBERATING US FROM THE PAST THAN IN GIVING US A BALANCED EDUCATION, OFFERED NO TOOLS, EITHER.

YET HAVING SAID THAT, I WANT TO RECORD MY CONVICTION THAT IT WAS BETTER TO THINK COSMOLOGICALLY THAN NATIONALLY—AND MUCH BETTER TO BE FOOLISHLY PARTISAN TO A NOBLE ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE WORLD LARGER AND UNIFIED THROUGH THE POWERS OF LANGUAGE THAN TO BE AFFLICTED IN THE WAY WE ARE TODAY, FORCED TO ARTICULATE OUR UNDERSTANDINGS THROUGH OUR INDIVIDUAL COMPLEXES OF ETHNICITY AND PREFERENCE, AND THROUGH THE PHOBIAS THAT ETHNICITIES DON'T SEEM ABLE TO EXIST WITHOUT. THERE WAS LESS HATE, THEN, PARTICULARLY AMONGST LIBERAL-MINDED PEOPLE, WHICH IS WHAT SCHOLARS AND POETS AND STUDENTS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE. TODAY'S LIBERALS ARE NOW COMPELLED TO HATE ONE ANOTHER ALMOST AS VIRULENTLY AS PEOPLE HATED IN THE 1930S. TODAY LIBERALS HATE RAPISTS, RACISTS, MONETARISTS, MALE SUPREMACISTS, ABLEISTS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS, ALL THE WHILE WONDERING IF IT IS THEMSELVES THEY TRULY LOATHE, OR WHAT IT IS IN THEMSELVES THAT HAS BECOME SO HATEFUL. TODAY'S INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC CLIMATES MAKE ME, FOR ONE, LONG FOR SOME EPIC, OR AT LEAST FOR SOME OF THE COSMOLOGY THAT IN OLSON MADE THE WORLD FEEL LARGE AND WELCOMING.

IT IS POSSIBLE—JUST BARELY—TO REGARD THE CONTENTS OF SERIOUS IRON AS OUR ATTEMPT AT MOURNING OLSON'S PASSING; OUR WAY OF RUEING THE DEPRESSING TRUTH THAT THE GREAT BIG FATHER HAD GONE OFF INTO THE AETHER AND LEFT US TO PONDER HIS IMPONDERABLES WITH NO ONE TO GUIDE US BUT SOME OLDER POETS ROUGHLY OUR OWN SIZE, AND OUR THOROUGHLY MORTAL PROFESSORS. PERSONALLY, I WAS SLIGHTLY RELIEVED THAT I'D NEVER HAD TO FACE OLSON'S OVER-THE-TOP GLARE, OR HAVE TO PERFORM AN ON-THE-SPOT DECIPHERMENT OF HIS ZEN-LIKE OBSCURATIONS. I WAS HAPPY TO HAVE BLASER AND OTHER MEN AND WOMEN OF MORE MORTAL DIMENSIONS TO DECODE. IN BLASER, I STILL THINK WE GOT THE BEST TEACHER WHO CAME OUT OF THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY, ONE WHOSE LATER

WORK HAS PROVED AT LEAST THE EQUAL IN QUALITY TO THAT OF THE MAJOR FIGURES. BLASER NOT ONLY SURVIVED, HE GREW.

I DON'T KNOW, ANY MORE, EXACTLY WHAT OLSON AND DUNCAN AND BLASER AND EVEN RALPH MAUD AND LEONARD MINSKY THOUGHT THEY WERE TEACHING US TO DO AND BE IN THE LATE 1960S, BUT I'M INCREASINGLY AWARE THAT WHAT WE WERE LEARNING FROM THEM, WILLY NILLY, WAS TOLERANCE. MAYBE TOLERANCE WAS SOMETHING THAT WAS JUST IN THE AIR WE BREATHED IN THOSE DAYS. HOWEVER IT WAS DELIVERED, MY GLOBAL GENERATION OF WRITERS LEARNED IT WELL ENOUGH THAT WE HAVE SINCE PRACTICED TOLERANCE AT A LEVEL OF SKILL AND DEPTH NOT APPROACHED BEFORE OR SINCE IN HUMAN HISTORY. UNFORTUNATELY, TOLERANCE IS, AS INTELLECTUAL AND LIFE PROJECTS GO, BOTH LIMITED AND FLAWED, AND IT MUCH TOO EASILY ENDS UP AS MORAL COWARDICE, INDIFFERENCE, AND SILENCE.

PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT OLSON, BLASER, AND THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY ALSO GOT SOME OF US TO QUESTION HUMANISM. I THINK QUESTIONING HUMANISM WAS ALWAYS A PRIMARY ELEMENT OF BLASER'S PEDAGOGY, AND IT IS ONE FOR WHICH I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL. I CAN STILL RECALL THE HEART-STOPPING MORAL CONUNDRUM THAT WAS CREATED FOR ME WHEN BLASER SUGGESTED THAT INDIVIDUAL SURVIVAL MIGHT NOT BE THE HIGHEST GOOD. IF NOTHING ELSE, IT ALERTED ME, MORE OR LESS PERMANENTLY, THAT HUMANISM DESERVES MUCH CLOSER SCRUTINY THAN IT HAS GOTTEN. IT RECEIVED LITTLE MORE THAN LIP-SERVICE FOR THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS OF THIS CENTURY, AND THE BRAINLESS TURNING ON IT HAS BEEN THE CLANDESTINE FUEL FOR A BIZARRE OUTBREAK OF SPECIES-WIDE SELF-LOATHING IN THE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LEADING UP TO THE MILLENNIUM.

FINALLY, THE BEST THING I CAN SAY ABOUT IRON WAS THAT IT DIDN'T OUTLIVE ITS USEFULNESS. IT HELPED A GROUP OF YOUNG WRITERS TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES, AND THEN IT PERMITTED THEM TO MOVE ON. THERE ARE NO GREAT UNDISCOVERED AESTHETIC ARTIFACTS TO BE FOUND IN THE PAGES OF THE VARIOUS ISSUES OF THE MAGAZINE. WE WERE, IN THE END, STUDENTS LEARNING A CRAFT THAT, BECAUSE IT REQUIRES ONE TO LEARN THE CULTURE ITSELF, TAKES SEVERAL DECADES TO MASTER.

IN THAT RESPECT, THE BEST QUALITIES IRON HAD WERE THOSE THAT WERE REFLECTED BY "SERIOUS IRON": ITS INSOLENCE, ITS SCEPTICISM, THE BLOSSOMING SENSE OF IRONY THAT DID NOT DESCEND INTO CYNICISM, AND ITS WILLINGNESS TO MAKE FUN IN A WORLD THAT GAVE CREDIBILITY ONLY TO MAKING LOVE AND MAKING WAR.

BRIAN FAWCETT



AS PART OF TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO BEST ILLUSTRATE THE FUNDAMENTALS BY WHICH IRON OPERATED, I SENT OUT AN EARLY DRAFT OF MY ESSAY TO AS MANY OF THE CORE GROUP AROUND THE MAGAZINE AS I COULD LOCATE, AND ASKED THEM HOW THEIR VIEW OF WRITING AND WRITERS HAS CHANGED SINCE THEY WERE INVOLVED IN IRON, AND WHAT THEY NOW THOUGHT OF THE MAGAZINE. I GOT THE FOLLOWING RESPONSES:

**BRETT ENEMARK, NORTH VANCOUVER, B.C.**

I DON'T WRITE MUCH ANYMORE. I DECIDED 10 YEARS AGO I DIDN'T LIKE CONTEMP. POETRY & THAT, IN ANY CASE, I NEVER UNDERSTOOD A WORD BLASER EVER SAID (THOUGH CERTAINLY HE HAD SOMETHING TO SAY, I COULD NEVER THINK LIKE THAT). RECENTLY, I'VE BEEN WORKING ON A COLLAGE OFF & ON THAT CONSISTS LARGELY OF STICKS AND MUD MIXED WITH PICTURES OF MY DAD POSING WITH VARIOUS BULLDOZERS, AUTOMOBILES AND BOTTLES OF BEER. CALL IT THERAPEUTIC. IT INCLUDES POEMS I WROTE ABOUT HIM 15 YEARS AGO. SO I HAVEN'T LEARNED MUCH ABOUT THE WRITING BIZ, THOUGH I HAVE FIGURED OUT HOW TO WRITE PAPERS & ENJOY THE PROCESS, MOSTLY BECAUSE IT FORCES ME TO GET OUT OF MYSELF.

NOR DO I SEE MANY POETS ANYMORE, THOUGH I HAVE BEEN GETTING TO KNOW JAMIE REID. MY RESEARCH IS FOCUSED ON THE 50'S AND 60'S AT THE MOMENT AND I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT SOME THINGS ABOUT THE BEATS, WHOSE WORK NEVER INTERESTED ME AT ALL ACTUALLY, UNTIL NOW. I THINK YOU GOT INTO THAT MOMENT. I DON'T THINK AT ALL ANY MORE ABOUT OLSON. I MAY SOMETIME AGAIN, BUT HE SEEMS TOO AMERICAN TO ME NOW. BESIDES I'VE BECOME INCREASINGLY SOCIOLOGICAL IN MY CRITICISM. I HATE TO SAY IT, ESPECIALLY TO YOU, BUT I LEARNED MORE FROM THINGS YOU SAID THAN FROM THOSE GUYS. OF COURSE, TO JUDGE FROM MY SUCCESS, THAT MAY NOT BE A COMPLEMENT. I MEAN I AM MORE INTERESTED IN RED LANE RIGHT NOW THAN ANYONE ELSE, IF ONLY TO RECOGNIZE THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT MADE ME WHAT I WAS AND AM.

**NEAP HOOVER, VICTORIA, B.C.**

I READ YOUR PIECE AND FIND MYSELF AGREEING WITH YOUR COMMENTS ON OLSON - I'M GLAD I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE FUCK HE WAS TALKING ABOUT PAST THE EARLY STUFF. IRON - IT WAS FUN, IT WAS EXCITING.

I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING PROFOUND TO SAY. I THINK MY RELATIONSHIP TO "POETRY" WAS PROBABLY, QUITE, I'M GOING TO SAY, "DISHONEST". IT WAS THE LYRIC THAT I WAS LOOKING FOR. LYRICAL POETRY WAS, AS CLOSE AS I COULD GET TO, A DREADED AND IN SOME CIRCLES, MAYBE YOURS, DISDAINED CONCEPT, A "SPIRITUAL" RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD. A NON-MECHANICAL, KNOW IT ALL, "COMMON-SENSE", BULLSHIT, GOLF COURSE, APPREHENSION OF THE



COSMOS. SPICER WAS THE GUY I LIKED. I LIKED HIM BECAUSE HE WAS FOR ME TALKING ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND WORLD (I DON'T MEAN ECONOMICS OR SOCIOLOGY) THAT KNOCKED ME OUT. IT WAS IN-SIGHT-FULL. I GUESS YOU USE THE WORD "ORPHIC". IT IS THE SAME FEELING I GET HEARING A MYTH THAT SKEWS MY SENSE OF THE WORLD. I'VE DECIDED I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR THAT, WHATEVER THAT IS, FOREVER. I'M STILL DOING IT.

I COMMEND YOUR COMMITMENT TO YOUR PROFESSION.

**JIM TAYLOR, CALGARY, ALBERTA**

I HAVE BEEN LIVING IN CALGARY SINCE 1989, SO IT HAS BEEN A WHILE. I AM STILL WORKING FOR PARKS CANADA AS AN HISTORIAN. MOST OF MY WORK IS NOW CENTRED ON THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PARKS ALTHOUGH I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN PROJECTS IN BC (ON THE QUEEN CHARLOTTES AND PORT ALBERNI) AND MANITOBA (CHURCHILL AND RIDING MOUNTAIN). I LIKE THE COMBINATION OF BOOK WORK AND GETTING OUT AND ABOUT. I HAVE BEEN ON ZODIACS ON THE QUEEN CHARLOTTES, HELICOPTERS IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, HORSEBACK IN BANFF AND SNOWMOBILE IN CHURCHILL.

SO FOR A GUY WHO NEVER KNEW WHAT HE WANTED TO DO WHEN HE GREW UP I COUNT MYSELF LUCKY. I AM STILL WITH MY SECOND WIFE, JANET, AND WE HAVE THREE CHILDREN: TWO GIRLS 17 AND 13 AND A SON WHO IS 11. I SAW LOUISE LAST YEAR. SHE IS LIVING IN EDMONTON AND IS MARRIED TO THE EDITOR OF THE CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA.

I WAS INTERESTED IN READING YOUR COMMENTS ON IRON. IT BROUGHT BACK SCENES THAT I HAD LONG AGO FORGOTTEN. COINCIDENTALLY I WAS BACK AT SFU THIS PAST FALL FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY YEARS. IT SEEMED A COMPLETELY SOULLESS PLACE AND I COULDN'T

FIGURE OUT WHY I CONSIDERED MY UNDERGRADUATE DAYS THERE TO HAVE BEEN SO RICH. YOUR MEMOIR HELPED BRING LIFE BACK TO THAT IMPERSONAL CONCRETE.

FOR ME TO GIVE YOU A DETAILED INTERVIEW ON IRON I WOULD HAVE TO DIG OUT THE OLD ISSUES WHICH FOR MANY YEARS SAT IN THE BOTTOM DRAWER OF A FILING CABINET AT HOME. BUT I AM NOT SURE IF THEY ARE EVEN AROUND ANYMORE AND I WANT TO GET THIS OFF WITHOUT TOO MUCH DELAY SO I WILL SPEAK GENERALLY. MY RECOLLECTION IS THAT YOU AND HENK SUIJS BEGAN IRON IN 1966. LATER ALBAN SHOWED UP AND HELPED EDIT THE THING AND HENK DISAPPEARED SOON AFTER. I WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE FIRST ISSUE WHICH WAS PRINTED VERY SIMPLY. I REMEMBER THE COVER WAS DRAWN BY THAT FLAKY ARTIST CALLED DAVE. WE LATER FOUND OUT THAT HE RIPPED IT OFF FROM A BOOK ON DADA ART. ALTHOUGH DAVE WAS NOT ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE ANYTHING ELSE AS A RESULT, I REMEMBER THAT YOU AND HANK WERE PRETTY PLEASED ABOUT THE ASSOCIATIONS THAT DAVE HAD CAUGHT. I REMEMBER BEING INVOLVED IN THE PRODUCTION OF THE MIDDLE GROUP OF ISSUES IN THE FIRST SERIES. I GUESS THAT YOU COULD CALL ME THE PUBLISHER.

LOOKING BACK, WE SEEMED FAIRLY WELL HEELED. WE RENTED AN IBM SELECTRIC TYPEWRITER AND THE TEXT WAS TYPED ON METAL MASTERS WHICH WERE THEN PRINTED OFF IN THE PRINT SHOP OF H.A. SIMONS LTD, CONSULTING ENGINEERS WHERE MY DAD WORKED. I HONESTLY CAN'T REMEMBER WHO DID THE TYPING EXCEPT THAT I KNOW IT WASN'T ME. COULD IT HAVE BEEN SHARON? I CAN ONLY REMEMBER TWO COVERS. THE ONE WITH THE BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO OF THE LAKE WAS MEANT TO BE A ROMANTIC IMAGE IN IRONIC CONTRAST TO THE UNSENTIMENTAL STUFF INSIDE. THE NICE PENMANSHIP CAME FROM KEN LINDEMERE WHO HELPED ME ON THAT ISSUE. THE MOST AMBITIOUS PRODUCTION WAS THE ONE WITH RENEE'S COVER. SHE SILK SCREENED THAT AT THE VANCOUVER SCHOOL OF ART WHERE SHE WAS A STUDENT. THE QUALITY OF THE PAPER AND THE ART WORK MAKES THAT A PRETTY IMPRESSIVE COVER BY ANY STANDARD. I THINK THAT WE PUT SO MUCH EFFORT INTO THAT ISSUE BECAUSE WE HAD GREAT PLANS FOR IT. I BELIEVE THAT YOU WERE PLEASED WITH THE CONTENT. I KNOW THAT GLADYS USED IT AS A TEXT FOR A COURSE SHE WAS GIVING AT VANCOUVER CITY COLLEGE. SHE LATER GENTLY CHIDED ME FOR NOT INCLUDING A TABLE OF CONTENTS. THE STRIPPED DOWN LOOK WAS PART OF THE IMAGE BUT SHE WAS RIGHT AND WE COULD HAVE PRESENTED THE AUTHORS A BIT BETTER THAN WE DID.

IRON HAD NO FORMAL ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE UNIVERSITY AND WE WERE CAREFUL TO KEEP IT THAT WAY ALTHOUGH IT WOULD HAVE MADE COMMUNICATION EASIER IN THE LONG RUN. SINCE ALL OF US WERE MOVING AROUND A LOT THERE WAS NO FIXED ADDRESS FOR THE MAGAZINE. WE ENDED UP USING THE MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY ADDRESS BECAUSE IT BELONGED TO RENEE'S PARENTS. I WONDER IF MRS. VAN HALM WAS SURPRISED BY SOME OF THE MAIL SHE MUST HAVE RECEIVED. WE SOLD THE MAGAZINE AT A TABLE WE MANNED IN THE ENTRANCE BETWEEN THE OLD STUDENT CAFETERIA AND THE OLD FACULTY RESTAURANT. I REMEMBER TAKING COPIES DOWN TO DUTHIE'S WHERE BINKY KINDLY LET ME PUT THEM ON A RACK. COPIES WERE ALSO SENT TO THE NATIONAL LIBRARY FOR COPY-RIGHT PURPOSES.

YOU ARE RIGHT IN ASSERTING THAT THERE WAS A SELF CONSCIOUS SENSE OF GROUP IDENTITY THAT WAS CENTRED ON THE BLACK MOUNTAIN POETS AND ROBIN BLASER. LOOKING BACK, I THINK THAT ROBIN RAN A KIND OF INFORMAL POETRY CLUB. ALTHOUGH NOT EVEN AN ASPIRING POET, I GUESS I GOT INCLUDED IN HIS GET-TOGETHERS THROUGH MY ASSOCIATION WITH YOU. I ALSO TOOK AT LEAST TWO COURSES WITH HIM. ONE WAS A CUSTOM-DESIGNED POETRY COURSE THAT LOOKED AT A LOT OF BLACK MOUNTAIN POETRY, ESPECIALLY CHARLES OLSON, AND A 17TH-CENTURY POETRY COURSE. I NEVER HAD A LOT OF ONE ON ONE CONTACT WITH ROBIN; I WAS NEVER IN THE INNER CIRCLE LIKE YOU. BUT HE NONETHELESS HAD AN ENORMOUS INFLUENCE ON MY DEVELOPMENT AS A SCHOLAR.

TWO THINGS ABOUT HIM I STILL REMEMBER. ONE WAS HIS OWN SERIOUSNESS ABOUT SCHOLARSHIP AND THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH HE TREATED STUDENTS. THE OTHER WAS HIS PREACHING ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF TEXT, OF OPENING UP WORDS TO REVEAL LARGER WORLDS BEYOND. ALTHOUGH I COULDN'T GET TO FIRST BASE WITH HIS POETRY, I FOUND HIS LECTURES TO BE IMMENSELY ACCESSIBLE BECAUSE HE DIDN'T BULLSHIT AND HE WAS SO



PERSONALLY COMMITTED TO LEARNING. I CREDIT SOME OF MY ANALYTICAL SKILLS AS AN HISTORIAN TO HIS TEACHING. MY STUDY OF THE KINGSTON PENITENTIARY AS AN ICON OF UPPER CANADIAN SOCIETY IS INDIRECTLY INFLUENCED BY HIS TEACHING.

STILL, THERE WAS SOMETHING VERY OTHERWORLDLY ABOUT ROBIN, AND WHAT YOU CORRECTLY IDENTIFY AS HIS ANTI-HUMANIST APPROACH HAD SOME DISTURBING POLITICAL CONNOTATIONS. I BELIEVE THAT HE WAS FAIRLY SYMPATHETIC TO POUND'S FASCIST LEANINGS FOR EXAMPLE. I WONDER IF THESE POLITICAL CONTRADICTIONS HELPED DISTURB YOUR MASTERS' WORK.

THERE WERE CROSS-INFLUENCES OF COURSE. GLADYS HAD BEEN AT UBC AT THE SCHOOL OF CREATIVE WRITING. A PLACE THAT WE WOULD NORMALLY SCORN ALTHOUGH WE MADE AN EXCEPTION FOR GLADYS, AS YOU DID LATER FOR GEORGE. IT WAS THROUGH GLADYS THAT I CAME IN CONTACT WITH STAN PERSKY, ROBIN'S ONE TIME LOVER, AND FOR A MORE REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE BERKLEY SCENE OF WHICH I THINK ROBIN WAS PROBABLY NOT TYPICAL. BUT THE CIRCLE OF PEOPLE AROUND IRON FORMED A DISTINCT COMMUNITY AND IT GAVE ME A SENSE OF BELONGING ALMOST TO A MEDIEVAL COLLEGE. I ADMIT TO BEING FAIRLY LAZY ABOUT READING THE CANON. THE FIRST VOLUME OF MAXIMUS POEMS WAS IMPORTANT, OTHER STUFF OF OLSON'S I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND AND I BECAME MORE DRAWN TO WRITERS LIKE GARY SNYDER WHOM YOU AND ROBIN DIDN'T TAKE TOO SERIOUSLY. IT WAS INTERESTING READING YOUR COMMENTS ON OLSON WHICH MAKE SENSE OF SOME OF THE THINGS THAT WERE GOING ON AT THAT TIME. I REMEMBER BEING QUESTIONED BY STUDENTS THAT WERE NOT PART OF OUR GROUP BUT WHO NEVERTHELESS WERE PRETTY SHARP. ONE GUY, IN PARTICULAR, I REMEMBER TALKING TO ME ON THE BUS ABOUT AN OLSON POEM HE HAD JUST READ. HE POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS COPIED FROM A DEFINITION OF A WORD IN WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY. HE THOUGHT PERHAPS THIS WAS A HOAX BUT I WAS PRETTY STEADFAST IN MY ALLEGIANCE.

I GUESS OLSON'S WRITINGS BECAME A BIT LIKE THE QUOTATIONS OF CHAIRMAN MAO. OLSON'S INSISTENCE ON THE PARTICULARITY OF PLACE AND HIS LINKING OF HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY WITH LITERATURE DID INFLUENCE MY DECISION TO TAKE AN MA IN CANADIAN STUDIES. ROBIN MATHEWS FOUND THAT TO BE AN IRONIC CONTRADICTION BUT IT LED TO A CONTINUING INTEREST IN CULTURAL LANDSCAPES.

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I FOUND A COPY OF IRON III IN MY BASEMENT. IT WAS EDITED BY NEAP AND I NOTICE THAT THE COVER PHOTOGRAPHS "WERE TAKEN BY CLIFF ANDSTEIN IN GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS. 'OUR LADY' CAN BE FOUND IN THE MAXIMUS POEMS, AND THE MADONNA WAS FOUND IN CHARLES OLSON'S BACK YARD." WE MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE PLEASED TO HAVE BEEN SO CLOSE TO A PIECE OF THE TRUE CROSS. SHARON MUST HAVE TYPED THIS ONE, RENEE DREW THE TITLE PAGE AND I DREW THE MAP. I REMEMBER COLIN WONDERING AT THE TIME WHETHER A REALLY GOOD POEM WOULD REQUIRE A MAP.



STAN PERSKY, BERLIN, GERMANY

DURING THE PERIOD OF IRON, I WAS SUCCESSIVELY ENAMOURED OF ("ENAMOURED" IS A WORD MEANT TO ENCOMPASS THE CONFUSIONS OF "IN LOVE WITH AND/OR DEEPLY INFATUATED BY"): NEAP HOOVER, RICK BYRNE, BRIAN DEBECK, BRIAN LOOMES AND MARTIN BELL—ALL PEOPLE, ROBIN MATHEWS WOULD BE HAPPY/UNHAPPY TO KNOW, WHO ARE/WERE NATIVE-BORN CANADIANS. I WAS READING THE JOURNALS OF ALL THE 18TH/19TH CENTURY TRAVELERS (E.G., ALEXANDER MACKENZIE) WHO CAME TO WHAT WOULD BECOME THE CANADIAN WEST COAST, AND SIMULTANEOUSLY BECAME ENAMOURED OF THE ABOVE-NAMED CANADIANS, AS PART OF A PARTIALLY UNWITTING PROJECT TO "CANADIANIZE" MY MIND AND BODY.

I DON'T HAVE OLSON TEXTS IN FRONT OF ME, SO I HAVE TO GO BY MEMORY. WHAT COMES TO MIND, ABOVE ALL ELSE, IS A LONG, EARLY POEM BY HIM TITLED "AS THE DEAD PREY UPON US." IT'S A POEM INVOKING HIS DEAD MOTHER, IN WHICH SHE'S IN A DREAM HELLSCAPE OF A LIVING ROOM WITH USED TIRES HANGING FROM THE CEILING, THEIR TREADS WORN BARE AND TATTERED, AND THE CHARACTERS AND CREATURES THAT PASS THROUGH THAT LIVING ROOM RANGE FROM AN ABORIGINAL PRINCESS TO BLUE DEER. (WHETHER ANY OF THESE IMAGES ARE IN FACT IN THE POEM IS A MATTER OF UNCERTAIN MEMORY.) WHAT I REMEMBER "LEARNING" FROM THE POEM IS THAT WE ARE IN A WORLD IN WHICH "OUR" DEAD ARE CONTINUOUS WITH EVERYTHING ELSE (ESPECIALLY "OUR" LIVING), AND THAT THERE IS A METHOD OF FICTIVELY RETRIEVING THEIR PRESENCE THROUGH AN OBEDIENCE OR OPENNESS TO THE ORDER OF "PERCEPTIONS" AS THEY COME THROUGH THE RHYTHM OF THE BREATHING OF ONE'S OWN BODY ("PROPRIOCEPTION"). AGAINST THE INABILITY TO REMEMBER, I LONG FOR THAT POEM TO APPEAR BEFORE MY EYES. WHAT A MISTAKE NOT TO HAVE LEARNED MORE "BY HEART" NOW THAT I NEED IT.

FORTUNATELY, ROBIN BLASER IS AT HAND—WE HAD DINNER THIS EVENING AT THE AROMA CAFE IN BERLIN—OBTAINING THE PROBLEMS OF RECALL. HIS GREAT GIFT TO US—THEN AND NOW—WAS AN ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE HIS SENSE OF WONDER AND APPRECIATION OF THE MEANINGFULNESS OF AN EXPANSIVE WORLD (SO THAT ONE CAME TO SEE THAT THERE WAS AN IMPERATIVE SENSE, AN URGENCY, IN CONFRONTING, SAY, WILLIAM BLAKE, JOHN CAGE OR MARY BUTTS) THAT WAS NONETHELESS LOCATED IN THE HORROR OF OUR TIME (WHAT BLASER CURRENTLY CALLS THE "IRREPARABLE"). DURING THE IRON DAYS, I WAS IN HIS OLSON SEMINAR IN WHICH HE SET THE STRAIGHTFORWARD TASK OF HAVING EACH OF US SELECT SOME REFERENCE SOMEWHERE IN OLSON'S MAXIMUS POEMS AND LEARNING EVERYTHING WE COULD ABOUT IT (I ENDED UP WITH A BATCH OF EGYPTIAN GODS).

AS IT HAPPENED, I MET OLSON A FEW TIMES, CALLED HIM UNCLE CHARLEY (WHICH ONLY MILDLY ANNOYED HIM), TALKED TO HIM ON THE PHONE AND CORRESPONDED A LITTLE WITH HIM IN CONNECTION WITH A MAGAZINE PROJECT BLASER WAS DOING IN VANCOUVER ("PACIFIC NATION"). AT AN AT-HOME DINNER IN SAN FRANCISCO ONCE, SOMEONE MADE SOME CARELESS, SLIGHTING REMARK TO BLASER, AND I WATCHED, WITH SOME AWE, AS OLSON WHEELED ON THAT

WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA? HE'S ONE OF THE MAKERS OF THIS STUFF, I.E., A POET. MAYBE IT WAS JUST A KIND OF HIGH BULLYING ON OLSON'S PART, BUT I WAS YOUNG AND IMPRESSIONABLE. OLSON'S DECREE THAT "ART IS LIFE'S ONLY TWIN," I TOOK AS A MANTRA (CONCURRENT WITH FRANK O'HARA'S "YOU JUST GO ON YOUR NERVE"). THAT OLSON DID OR DIDN'T GO TO PIECES AT SOME POINT—DON'T WE, WON'T WE ALL?—SEEMS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE AT THE MOMENT.

TONIGHT AT DINNER, WITH OUR FRIENDS THOMAS AND ILONKA, AND ROBIN'S MATE, DAVID, WE CARRIED ON THE "ARGUMENT" THAT WE'VE BEEN CONDUCTING, ON AND OFF, FOR SOME 35 YEARS. HE'S JUST "LETTING GO" OF HIS CURRENT TEXT (A LIBRETTO FOR AN OPERA, "THE LAST SUPPER"; MUSIC BY THE BRITISH COMPOSER HARRISON BIRTWISTLE) NOW THAT IT'S HAD ITS FIRST READINGS (THERE WAS A "WORLD PREMIERE" IN THE BERLIN STAATSOPER HOUSE LAST WEEK—ALL VERY SPIFFY), AND IS BEGINNING TO THINK OF OTHER THINGS. I SAID THE TITLE OF A PHILIP K. DICK NOVEL, "DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?" AND HE MISHEARD IT AS "DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHAPE?" AND THEN WROTE THAT DOWN IN HIS NOTEBOOK, ALONG WITH THE NAME OF THE WINE WE WERE DRINKING, AND VARIOUS OTHER THINGS, WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT LEAD TO "WHAT'S NEXT." HE HAD DENOUNCED ALL DUALISMS WHEN WE TALKED A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO, SO I NATURALLY ANNOUNCED AT DINNER THAT I WAS INDEED A DUALIST—A POST-CARTESIAN, POST-DARWINIAN ONE, AND THAT IT WAS PERFECTLY CLEAR TO ME THAT WE HUMANS WERE A BADLY EVOLVED COMBINATION OF A MIND DESIGNED FOR IMMORTALITY AND A BODY BUILT FOR MORTALITY... AND SO IT WENT. WHEN I LATER SAID, I NOTICED THAT YOU SAID ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO REFUTE MY DEFENSE OF DUALISM, HE REPLIED, I'M SITTING OVER IT WITH A GUT FULL OF LOOSE BOWELS.

1 A.M. (I.E.,  
PAST MY BEDTIME)  
APRIL 25, 2000

SHARON THESEN, VANCOUVER, B.C.

DAYS OF IRON

I KNOW THAT THE ROBOT  
IS STRUGGLING TO FORM ITSELF  
TO CHEW INTO DEATH  
THE LEAVES OF THE ROSE.

EDWARD SANDERS

AS PASSIONATE AS WERE OUR OWN FROTHINGS-AT-THE-MOUTH IN THE 60'S, THEY DIDN'T HAVE QUITE THE URGENCY OF THOSE TO THE SOUTH OF US, AMERICANS, WHO HAD COME TO CANADA FOR SOME PEACE IF NOT A SAVED BUTT,



MAYBE SOME KOOTENAY ACREAGE TO BUILD A COMMUNE ON, OR A TEACHING JOB AT THE NEWLY-CONSTRUCTED SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY IN BURNABY, B.C. THE RULING SOCIAL CREDIT GOVERNMENT, FEW IF ANY OF WHOSE MEMBERS HAD A POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION, HAD GIVEN THE ADMINISTRATION A BLANK CHEQUE WITH WHICH TO PURCHASE WHATEVER FACULTY THEY WANTED, SO THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENT HEADS WENT AHEAD AND HIRED MARXISTS AND POETS GALORE. A LOT OF THEM WERE AMERICAN. AMONG THEM, IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, WERE MY MOST IMPORTANT TEACHERS: ROBIN BLASER (POETRY AND COSMOLOGY); ROB DUNHAM (THE ROMANTIC POETS—MY MA THESIS WAS ON COLERIDGE'S SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM); RALPH MAUD (CHARLES OLSON, JUNGIAN THEORY, AND THE POLITICS OF THE LOCAL); LEONARD MINSKY (CHAUCER, EROTICS, AND POLITICS).

IN THE FALL OF 1966, BRIAN FAWCETT AND I INTERRUPTED OUR CLASSES FOR A FEW DAYS TO ELOPE TO IDAHO AND GET MARRIED. I WAS TWENTY YEARS OLD. WE MOVED INTO A FREE-STANDING "UNIT" IN A DERELICT AUTO COURT AT THE BASE OF BURNABY MOUNTAIN, WHERE A NUMBER OF OTHER ARTY STUDENTS ALSO LIVED. IT WAS MY FIRST YEAR AND BRIAN'S SECOND, AND BRIAN BY THEN HAD BECOME FRIENDS WITH ROBIN BLASER THROUGH TAKING HIS POETRY CLASSES. ROBIN, SIMPLY THE MOST APPEALING HUMAN BEING I HAD EVER MET, HAD AN UNUSUAL SENSE OF BEAUTY, A WONDERFUL RESPONSIVENESS TO VITALITY, TO WHAT IS ALIVE IN PEOPLE AND THINGS. LIKE BRIAN AND I, ROBIN HAD GROWN UP IN THE STICKS (HE, RURAL IDAHO; US, THE B.C. NORTHERN INTERIOR); HE LOVED TO SMOKE, DRINK, TALK, SWEAR, AND EAT. HE KNEW THE BEST PLACES TO BUY LIGHT FRENCH COFFEE BEANS WITH CHICORY, NEW ORLEANS STYLE; PROVOLONE CHEESE; COBALT-BLUE FLOWER VASES IN A VANCOUVER NOT YET TEEMING WITH THESE THINGS. DESPITE THE TEMPTATIONS THAT OFTEN GO WITH THAT DEGREE OF ATTRACTIVENESS, ERUDITION, AND CHARISMA, HE REJECTED COMPLETELY ANY SORT OF STATUS AS POSSESSOR OF THE HIGHER WISDOM (AN ISSUE BETWEEN HIM AND ROBERT DUNCAN, WHO DID NOT REJECT IT).

RALPH MAUD'S CLASSES DOVETAILED NICELY WITH ROBIN'S, IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE POETICS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO RENAISSANCE DOVETAILED WITH THE ICONOCLASMS OF THE BLACK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL. BOTH WERE SIGNIFICANTLY REPRESENTED IN DON ALLEN'S NEW AMERICAN POETRY ANTHOLOGY, OUR GUIDE THROUGH MUCH OF THE LATE SIXTIES AND EARLY SEVENTIES. WHATEVER THE "NEW AMERICAN POETRY" WAS, IT EMBODIED A POETIC SENSIBILITY I COULD RELATE TO, OR AT LEAST, WAS TAUGHT TO RELATE TO. I WAS REALLY QUITE NAIVE ABOUT THE ANTAGONISMS AND THE SEXUALITY RAGING IN THE POEMS OF THE SPICER, DUNCAN, AND BLASER SIDE OF THINGS, AND OFTEN COMPLETELY OUT OF MY DEPTH WITH OLSON. YET SOMETHING WAS GOING ON IN THAT POETRY THAT HAD NOT SO FAR BEEN AVAILABLE TO ME AS A YOUNG POET PRIOR TO GOING TO SFU, WHEN I WAS LIVING IN VANCOUVER AND WORKING AS A SECRETARY AT CKWX. MY TYPING SKILLS, HONED AT STENOGRAPHIC BOOT CAMPS LIKE STANDARD OIL, WOULD BE UTILIZED LATER ON IN IRON MAGAZINE, CERTAINLY MORE THAN ANY OF MY OTHER SKILLS, SUCH AS THEY WERE. BY THE TIME IRON WAS BEING PUBLISHED, I'D STOPPED WRITING POEMS, INTIMIDATED, PROBABLY, BY THE SUDDEN ONSLAUGHT OF POWERFUL MALE WRITERS, POETS, TEACHERS, AND CRITICS IN MY LIFE:



AN "ONSLAUGHT" WHOSE INTELLECTUAL AND POETIC DEMANDS AT THE SAME I WELCOMED AND VALUED. AS A YOUNG WOMAN WRITING IN PRINCE GEORGE AND VANCOUVER IN THE EARLY SIXTIES, I DIDN'T HAVE ANY ROLE MODELS, LET ALONE FOREMOTHERS. THE WHOLE TISH THING, WITHIN WHICH DAPHNE MARLATT AND GLADYS HINDMARCH WERE PRODUCING WRITING, WENT BY ME: I WAS A LITTLE TOO YOUNG, PLUS I HAD HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH UBC UNTIL BRIAN AND I STARTED GOING TO READINGS AND PARTIES AT WARREN TALLMAN'S HOUSE.

I DON'T RECALL STUDYING THE WORK OF ANY FEMALE WRITER OTHER THAN THAT OF DENISE LEVERTOV, WHO, AS AN ANTI-WAR POET AND A SORT OF MYSTIC AND A MEMBER OF THE BLACK MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY WAS ALWAYS MENTIONED IN THE SAME BREATH WITH ROBERT DUNCAN; AND H.D., WHOSE WORK ROBIN INTRODUCED US TO. I DON'T BELIEVE I TOOK A COURSE FROM A FEMALE TEACHER IN ALL MY UNDERGRADUATE YEARS AT SFU. BUZZ WAS CIRCULATING ABOUT A BEAUTIFUL BRILLIANT WOMAN POET FROM TORONTO, MARGARET ATWOOD, BUT HER APPEARING AND READING AT SFU WAS MORE EXOTIC TO US THAN HAD THE GHOST OF JACK SPICER STAGGERED ONTO THE STAGE. WHEN CHALLENGED ON OUR LACK OF INTEREST IN "CANADIAN" POETRY, WE WOULD CITE HORRIBLE STANZAS FROM BACK EAST OR FEEBLE-MINDED RAVINGS FROM THE LOCAL LITTLE MAGAZINES. OUR POETRY WAS DEALING WITH REAL THINGS: HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, COSMOLOGY, POLITICS, ECOLOGY, WAR, MYTH. WE SCOFFED AT POETRY ABOUT CANDIES AND THE CRIES OF LOONS. WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF HISTORY.

SOMETIME IN '66 OR '67, WE STARTED IRON MAGAZINE. MY CONTRIBUTION WAS TO TYPE THE ISSUES ON BEGGED, BORROWED, OR STOLEN STENCILS ON WHATEVER HALF-DECENT ELECTRIC TYPEWRITERS WE COULD BORROW; RUN IT OFF ON WHATEVER GESTETNER WE COULD COMMANDEER AT PEOPLE'S WORKPLACES OR ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OFFICES; COLLATE IT, STAPLE IT, STUFF IT IN ENVELOPES, ADDRESS THE ENVELOPES, LICK THE STAMPS, MAIL IT OUT. OR DIVIDE THE STACKS OF MAGS INTO LITTLE BUNDLES THAT BRIAN AND NEAP AND ALBAN AND JIM WOULD TAKE TO PLACES LIKE DEAR OLD DUTHIE BOOKS DOWNTOWN, TO BE SOLD OR GIVEN AWAY.

ALL OF THIS WAS TAKING PLACE IN THE VARIOUS HOUSES WE LIVED IN, MOST NOTABLY THE ONE ON LOCO ROAD IN PORT MOODY, WHERE OUR SON JESSE WAS BORN IN 1970; AND IN OUR MARRIAGE AND OUR SOCIAL LIFE. I WAS INVOLVED WITH IRON, TAKING CARE OF THE HOUSE, LOOKING AFTER THE BABY, GOING TO CLASSES, DOING PART-TIME SECRETARIAL JOBS TO HELP PAY THE BILLS. I WAS ALSO PART OF A VITAL AND BRILLIANT INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF POETS AND POETRY STUDENTS. THE WAR IN VIET NAM WAS OF ENORMOUS CONCERN; IT SEEMED HALF THE PEOPLE WE KNEW WERE DRAFT DODGERS OR LIVING POLITICALLY DANGEROUS LIVES OF SOME SORT. WE WERE STUDYING MARCUSE, ADORNO, BROWN, LAING. WE STUDIED LOCAL ABORIGINAL MYTH AND POURED LIBATIONS UNTO APHRODITE AT MIDNIGHT IN ENGLISH BAY. AT THE SAME TIME, BRIAN AND I HAD LIVED IN PRINCE GEORGE ENOUGH TO HAVE DEVELOPED AN ALLERGY TO PRETENTIOUS BULLSHIT AND AN ATTRACTION TO THE KINDS OF STORIES LOGGERS TOLD IN BARS ON FRIDAY NIGHT. ALL OF THIS FOUND ITS WAY IN BITS AND PIECES INTO IRON.

BY 1968 AND '69 MY TYPING JOBS HAD EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MASSIVE, EXHAUSTING TRANSCRIPTIONS OF DRUNKEN LECTURES BY OLSON. I WAS BEGINNING TO GET PISSED OFF. IMAGINE THE IMPACT, THEN, WHEN I FIRST READ KATE MILLETT'S SEXUAL POLITICS, WHICH EXAMINED FEROCIOUSLY THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN LITERARY LIFE AND CAME TO DISMAL CONCLUSIONS. THOUGH I NEVER DID BECOME A PRESCRIPTIVE FEMINIST, THE REALIZATION OF THE COMPLEXITY AND INJUSTICES ENDEMIC TO MY POSITION AS A WOMAN IN EACH OF MY MANY CONTEXTS WAS DISTURBING. BY THAT POINT, MY MARRIAGE HAD STARTED TO UNRAVEL AS WELL.

IN 1972, BRIAN AND I SEPARATED. IRON WAS UNDER BRETT ENEMARK'S MANAGEMENT AT THE TIME, EVENTUALLY TO TRANSFORM ITSELF INTO NMFG (NO MONEY FROM THE GOVERNMENT). ITS URGENT, ANARCHIC, IRREVERENT TONE HAD SOFTENED. BY THEN ALSO, THE ROBOT, IN ED SANDERS' WORDS, HAD MORE OR LESS CHEWED INTO DEATH THE LEAVES OF THE ROSE. IRON HAD REALLY JUST BEEN THE NEWSLETTER OF OUR EDUCATION IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF SFU IN THE 60'S. WHAT I THINK ABOUT NOW IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE MAGAZINE MUST HAVE BEEN SEEN BY OTHERS AS THE HOUSE ORGAN OF A CLIQUE OF OLSONITES AND HERO-WORSHIPPERS. BUT AT THE TIME, IT SEEMED TO US THAT WE BELONGED TO SOMETHING THAT WAS IMPORTANT, THAT MATTERED, WHETHER WE UNDERSTOOD EVERY WORD OF OLSON'S LATE MAXIMUS POEMS OR NOT.

IT WOULD TAKE ME ANOTHER TWENTY YEARS TO WEAR OFF A FEW LAYERS OF THE INDELIBLE INK THAT SO COLOURED MY POETIC EDUCATION. I WONDER WHAT SORT OF POET I'D BE TODAY WITHOUT THAT TRIBAL MARKING, THAT IRON TATTOO

DOTS OF LIGHT ON THE LAKE EQUAL BOATS  
EXCITED BECAUSE  
WE'RE GOING TO SEE THE PERFECT STORM  
THIS AFTERNOON, GLOUCESTER, THOUGHTS  
OF OLSON  
SOME KIND OF BIG MAN  
WITH ROUGH WAYS YET DAINTY  
ON A ROCKING WHARF, MADE MY LIFE  
THE WAY IT WAS  
CIRCA 1967, 68.

ALBAN GOULDEN

IRON EASE

LAST NIGHT I WATCHED A PBS RETROSPECTIVE OF THE BEAT POETS CALLED "THE SOURCE." IN ORDER TO MAKE THIS ALLEGORICAL TITLE CRYSTAL CLEAR, WILLIAM BURROUGHS WAS LEANED OVER A MIKE TO INFORM US "WE ARE THE



SOURCE." THE "WE" I TOOK TO BE CAPITALIZED AND OTHER THAN ME. AND I SENSED SOMETHING FAMILIAR. I HAD FELT A SIMILAR DICHOTOMY IN THE LATE 60'S AND EARLY 70'S ABOUT BOTH SFU AND IRON: THAT I WAS A BIT PLAYER—ALBEIT AN INTERESTED AND WILLING ONE—IN ANOTHER VERSION OF THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK.

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY WAS SUPPOSEDLY A NEW SCHOOL BREAKING THE MOULD OF EUROPEAN ACADEMIC COMPARTMENTALISM AND CLASS STRUCTURES. YET RON BAKER, THE HEAD OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT WHEN I STARTED THERE, MADE INSTANT IVY ON THE WALLS HIS FIRST PRIORITY AND HEADED "HOME" TO ENGLAND TO RECRUIT AS MANY BRIT GRAD STUDENTS AS POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO TONE UP THE PLACE. THIS DIDN'T WORK. AFTER THE FIRST YEAR, ALMOST ALL OF THEM WENT BACK "HOME" AGAIN, TRANSCRIPT "B'S" TRAILING IN THEIR COLLECTIVE WAKE. ON THE OTHER HAND, IN ACQUIRING TEACHERS THE UNIVERSITY HAD DECIDED TO GO SOUTH AND, LIKE THE CFL, RAID YOUNG-WANNA-BES OR OLD CHEAP CAN'T-ANYMORE-BES FROM THE RANKS OF THE "REAL" PROS. OCCASSIONALLY THEY GOT LUCKY. PEOPLE LIKE LEONARD MINSKY OR JERY ZASLOVE. OR ROBIN BLASER. (HE WAS ONE OF THE BEST, IN PARTICULAR BECAUSE HE COULD STEP AWAY FROM HIS CONSIDERABLE POWER AS A DEMAGOGUE—ALMOST WROTE "DEMIGOD"—EVEN WHEN HE DIDN'T AGREE WITH WHERE HIS PROTEGES WERE HEADING. AN IMPERIALIST WHO COULD TOLERATE DEFECTION. RARE MAN INDEED.)

BUT MY COLONIALIST AMBIVALENCE IS EVEN MORE APPARENT TO ME WHEN I CONSIDER IRON. IT WAS A STUDENT MAGAZINE BORN OF THE DEEP-SEATED EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF ITS FOUNDERS TO ASSERT THEIR INTELLECTUAL VALIDITY/MASCULINITY (THE TWO LIKELY SYNONYMOUS) IN A PLACE THAT TOLD THEM THEY HAD ESCAPED FROM THE BRUTAL ANTI-INTELLECTUAL BEER-SWILLING SOCIETIES OF PRINCE GEORGE, VERNON, AND MEDICINE HAT. ONLY TO FIND THEMSELVES SUDDENLY IN THE BALLPARK OF SOME PRETTY HEAVY IMPERIAL HITTERS. (I USE JACK SPICER'S ANALOGY ON PURPOSE; IT IS NO SECRET TO ME WHY BASEBALL BECAME THE FAVE SPORT OF THESE JUNIOR POET-WARRIORS.) THE BIG UMPIRE IN THE SKY WAS, OF COURSE, CHARLES OLSON. SPICER HAD LAID DOWN THE SACRIFICE. AND BOY THERE WERE A LOT OF ACOLYTES UP TO THE PLATE: EVERYBODY FROM CREELEY TO JACK CLARK TO THE BEATS TO KESEY TO ... BETWEEN BLACK MOUNTAIN AND ON THE ROAD-KILL, IT WAS JUST AS HARD TO ESCAPE AS TO BE DRAFTED. HENCE, THE MAGAZINE YO-YO'D IN EDITORIAL TONE FROM TOUGH GUY TO SERVING WENCH: WE COULDN'T DECIDE IF WE WERE STILL IN THE BEER PARLOUR OR HAD MADE THE ROSTER.

BUT AMERICANS ARE ALWAYS GOING TO BE SUPERFICIALLY LARGER THAN LIFE; IT IS THEIR GREAT WEAKNESS. AND ATTRACTION. CANADIANS HAVE TO BE CONTENT WITH THE SERIOUS IRON(Y) OF ACQUIRING THE CULTURAL CONFIDENCE AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE TO STAND AS TALL AS THEY ARE. THAT IS, TO BE MEASURED IN NO ONE'S TERMS BUT BOTH THEIR COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL OWN. HOWEVER, IN THAT PLACE AND TIME IT WAS SOMETHING I STILL HAD TO LEARN.

YES, THERE WERE PROBLEMS WITH IRON AND THAT ERA.



1) THE PRESENCE OF WOMEN AS TYPEWRITER INK-STAINED COPY WRETCHES OR, RARELY, AS "WRITERS" THAT REALLY TRANSLATED INTO THE ROLE OF HANDMAIDEN OR GODDESS-MUSE (THIS LATTER, OF COURSE, DEPENDING ON THE SEXUAL PREDILECTION OF THE MALE WHO WAS BEING SERVED).

2) THE CANONIZATION OF PERPETUAL ADOLESCENCE. I REMEMBER A POETRY CONFERENCE IN PRINCE GEORGE WHERE ONE OF THE GREAT MENTORS HIMSELF, ROBERT CREELEY, WAS SO DRUNK THAT, AS HE TRIED TO GET UP OUT OF HIS CHAIR IN ORDER TO MUMBLE TO THE AUDIENCE (IN FUTURE READINGS CREELEY ALWAYS REMAINED SEATED), HE FELL OVER INTO THE ARMS OF GEORGE BOWERING. WHO LAUGHED. (WHAT ELSE COULD A BOWERING DO?) BUT I DON'T WANT TO PICK ON CREELEY (HE'S A FAVOURITE OF MINE BECAUSE I THINK THAT AT HIS BEST HE MANAGES TO MAKE THE POETRY OF LOSS INTO A USEFUL SURVIVAL TOOL). HELL, LOTS OF US WERE DRUNKS—ME INCLUDED. OR IF NOT DRUNKS, OFTEN GRADE 6 BULLSHIT PRANKSTERS SEEKING ATTENTION. HO-HUM ....

3) AN UNHEALTHY INDULGENCE IN PRECIOUSNESS. WHEN THINGS WEREN'T WORKING WELL, WE HAD THE VIRUS OF SENTIMENTALITY-DISGUISED-AS-PREISTHOOD RUNNING RAMPANT THROUGH THE BODY ... AS IT WAS BREATHED.

4) A TENDENCY TO EQUATE LANGUAGE WITH ACTION. THIS IS A DANGEROUS ONE AND IT HAS TAKEN ME MANY YEARS TO UNTANGLE THE FANTASIES THAT WHEN WRITTEN DOWN SIMPLY STIMULATE CERTAIN PARTS OF THE BRAIN, ENDING THERE—AS OPPOSED TO WORDS WHICH ACTUALLY LEAD TO REAL EMOTIONAL THEN PHYSICAL ACCOMPLISHMENT. WORDS THAT ARE EARNED. WE WROTE AND TALKED ABOUT ALL THE RIGHT THINGS. BUT WE SELDOM DID THEM. OUR TRAIL OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS IS JUST ONE INSTANCE OF THAT. THE INFLUENCE OF OLSON, SPICER, AND ROBERT DUNCAN HAS SOMETHING TO ANSWER FOR HERE. IN CONTRAST TO THE BEATS, WHO WHEN PUSH CAME TO SHOVE WERE AT LEAST WILLING TO GO DOWN IN SOCIAL FLAMES, THIS "GREEK" BRANCH OF IMPERIUM WAS MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A LOT OF TALK AND A LOT OF DRINKING. AND A LOT OF WORDS ON PAPER.

BUT LET'S END, JUSTLY, WITH THE GOOD.

1) ROBIN BLASER, OUR REAL LITERARY MENTOR, WAS THE KIND OF TEACHER ONE IS MAYBE LUCKY ENOUGH TO ENCOUNTER IN A LIFETIME. BECAUSE HIS LANGUAGE OF THE FABULOUS IS SO MUCH A PART OF HIM, THE WORDS AND CONSIDERABLE KNOWLEDGE HE HAD FOR US WAS MORE CREDIBLE THAN WHATEVER A THOUSAND STANLEY COOPERMAN'S—COMPLETE WITH TOADIES AND FAT FINGER RINGS—COULD EVER HOPE TO SELL. NOBILITY HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH HOW ONE LIVES. ROBIN LIVED AND LIVES THE LITERATURE HE LOVES. HE TAUGHT ME THE WAY TO BE WITH WHAT YOU MAKE: WHAT REAL USES WRITING HAS IN THE WORLD. I WILL NEVER FORGET IT.

2) ONE OF IRON'S GREATEST STRENGTHS WAS IN THE REVEALING OF WRITERS WHO WERE NOT DIRECTLY A PART OF IRON OR, INDEED, THE WHOLE ACADEMIC CIRCUS. KEN BELFORD IS MY IMMEDIATE EXAMPLE. I DON'T KNOW THAT

MUCH ABOUT BELFORD'S PERSONAL LIFE—THEN OR NOW—EXCEPT THAT AT THE TIME HE LIVED IN THE BUSH SOMEWHERE FAR TO THE WEST OF PRINCE GEORGE. I DO KNOW THAT I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO ENCOUNTER HIS WORK BECAUSE OF MY IRON CONNECTIONS. HIS POETRY WAS THE ACTION OF SOMEONE WHOSE SENSE OF PLACE WAS CLEAR. ALTHOUGH HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN DROWNING IN DARKNESS (TOO BAD HE COULDN'T SEE THE NORTHERN LIGHT), HE DOCUMENTED HIS EXPERIENCE WITH PRECISION AND CARE. I THINK OF HIM AS AN IRON MAN.

3) SERENDIPITOUS DISCOVERIES. SHARON THESEN WORKED HARD AT PHYSICALLY HELPING PUT IRON TOGETHER. THEN, SURPRISE, ONE DAY I OPENED ITS PAGES AND ENCOUNTERED ONE OF HER POEMS. A LIGHT HAD TURNED ON. THIS WAS THE WORK OF A POET.

4) FINALLY, BECAUSE OF THIS INSIGNIFICANT LITTLE MAG, I MET—AND DID GET TO KNOW AND LEARN FROM—SOME WONDERFUL, INTERESTING PEOPLE. THIS WAS THE MOST SOCIAL TIME IN MY LIFE. I LEARNED THAT LITERATURE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE JACKED OFF TO IN A CORNER. I LEARNED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT IT IS ABOUT COMMUNITAS, THE COMMUNITY OF THE SOUL. (BUT YOU BETTER HAVE DEVELOPED ONE BEFORE YOU START FLINGING THAT WORD AROUND.)

I LEARNED FROM ROBIN AND NEAP AND BRETT AND GLADYS AND TOM AND KEN AND JIM AND COLIN AND STAN ... ET AL. AND, MOST OF ALL, FROM SHARON THESEN AND BRIAN FAWCETT.

I LEARNED WHAT DIDN'T WORK. BUT I HAVE, OF NECESSITY, LEARNED WHAT DOES.

AND, EVEN NOW, IRON KEEPS ME WRITING.









#### FILLING STATION ARTISTS' GUIDELINES

*filling Station* accepts submissions of all forms of contemporary written poetry, fiction, critical essays, and plays (1975).

All submissions must be original and previously unpublished. Manuscripts under consideration elsewhere are acceptable, provided this is noted on the submission and they be withdrawn elsewhere if accepted by *filling Station*.

- submissions should include the author's name, address, telephone number, fax, e-mail (if applicable), and a short biography.
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- *filling Station* does not accept submissions that are racists, misogynist and/or homophobic.

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march 15    july 15    november 15

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## ***regular or premium?***

In the late spring and summer of 1994, a group of young writers and artists came together to start a magazine—a journal, call it what you will—of contemporary writing. We had a variety of hopes: to publish a broad spectrum of styles and poetics, to maintain a democratic editorial process, to further an open discussion forum on poetry and fiction, to obtain self-sufficiency outside of the dictates of Alberta's right wing government funding, to push into the community and announce our love of language. What resulted was even more confounding. As those of us who were there at the beginning started upon our various paths that took us away from *filling Station*, others took up our places and continued on.

Some of our original goals have been achieved, others have been put aside, but we remain ecstatic that our original hopes have been valued enough by others to add their voices, their efforts, to now be the longest running literary journal still publishing out of Calgary. As with so many other journals, our wish to put a voice into the public came out of our frustration at the lack of places to be heard. I am taking this opportunity to regather a number of those who have worked for *filling Station* and do something we never allow in our magazine: to publish their own words.

We have all *moved on* in various forms. Some of us remain in Calgary, some have moved, still others have left and returned, and some are now getting ready to go. Movement has always been key to our poetics, and one of the many metaphors behind *filling Station*. A place to stop in; chat for a while; catch a bit of the gossip; read a bit of the paper; grab a coffee; rest; and get ready to move again. So many journeys so far, so many more to go.

r rickey  
Calgary,  
March 2000



## Dean Irvine



### DRAWING FOR THE DANCE OF A GRIEVING CHILD

When she drops by I'm in a brown study, not ready to hold her, answer her grief. She whispers to the back of my head, heart in her mouth, hands outstretched through my half-open door, lets fall a peacock feather among my books, unfurling, fans at her feet. An umbrella hangs, unfastened, on the coathook, splayed in front of her good eye: shuts me out, entirely.

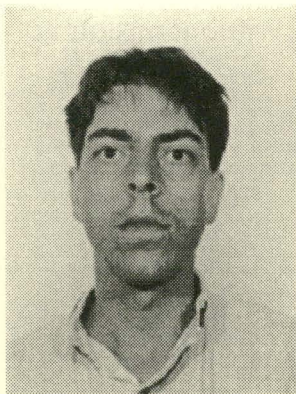
After she clicks the front door behind her, I shadow her steps to the foyer and find this note beside the phone: *This is just to say my mother's going to die. This is not just about us.*

No, this is not my place to cut in, but I will draw you, as a daughter, learning to waltz, skirt swinging at your knees, feet balanced on mother's toe-caps, fingers clinging to her hips, swaying to Vienna in her head. You follow the hum of her lips and plunge, as a baptism, in the river of her dress catching sunlight through the kitchen window, piercing as a peacock's cry.

You let go, at last, learning to dip.  
*More we cannot do.*



## Doug Steedman



## WANTED:

**Have you seen this man?**

Please help filling Station Magazine track down former editor Doug Steedman, who disappeared several years ago. A reliable source says Doug set out with 50 copies of the magazine, and vowed not to return until he'd sold them all to raise badly needed revenue. Come back Doug! It's OK!

We have funding now!

Last year we received a postcard in Doug's distinctive scrawl that read: "For poets, and pirates, and editors, so much depends on the missing Aye!" We have reason to believe he may be the ringleader in an international underground gorilla poetry organization.

If you have any information on his whereabouts, please write to *filling Station*.

**jacqueline turner**

filling station  
(without nostalgia)

fixed static  
flail stoic  
fine sculpture  
flayed sentence  
for seconds  
fecund sap  
five sip  
four sag  
first sprawl  
favour spect  
far skip  
flit smoke  
fantastic shard  
foreign shape  
fille spoken  
frank stolen  
fir spackle  
few spare  
friends stacks

filling station ranges monday talk talk talking a magazine yeah but we  
were friends and people met and married each other or slept together at  
least drank a lot or enough to say that word community and fighting  
and  
not enough women but still.

reading but if it wasn't monday night (back to that) but i need to get  
out of the house

i keep thinking persistence

# Stephanie Rogers & Blaine Kylo

EXT. DAY

BLAINE, a thirty-year-old male, and STEPHANIE, a woman in her late twenties, are strolling down a cement trail that runs alongside a beach. In the distance the sun sets into the ocean.

BLAINE  
(looking west)  
Look at that.

STEPHANIE  
It's golden hour.

They stop walking and turn to face the sun.

BLAINE  
This is a good spot. Ready?

STEPHANIE  
We've got a good group. It'll be very democratic.

BLAINE  
But the kicker is -

STEPHANIE  
We don't know any better?

BLAINE  
Yeah. We don't know it can't be done.

STEPHANIE  
Kinda reminds me of something.

BLAINE  
Rolling.



DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. UPSCALE WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - DAY

It's noon and various young people, dressed cool-y casual in blacks and greys, strut out from the historically hip buildings that line the street. Two people, a YOUNG MAN and a YOUNG WOMAN stand facing each other in the middle of the street. They are indistinguishable from the crowd that flows around them. They ignore the looks they get from the passers-by (they are standing in the middle of the street, remember).

YOUNG WOMAN

Um, why are we here again?

YOUNG MAN

Because we left.

YOUNG WOMAN

Right, right.

(beat)

Why did we leave again?

YOUNG MAN

To do something else.

YOUNG WOMAN

Something different.

YOUNG MAN

Do you remember how, then, people and words came together?

The young woman is neatly shoulder-checked by another YOUNG WOMAN, dressed in black of course, who carries a TAKE-OUT BAG.

YOUNG WOMAN WITH BAG

Ohmigod, sorry. Hey, I like your shoes.

YOUNG MAN

(ignoring her)

I feel like I'm forgetting something important.

YOUNG WOMAN

I know what you mean.

CUT TO: WHITE SQUARE OF BUILDING WINDOW

FADE OUT

FADE IN

EXT. DAY

BLAINE, a thirty-year-old male, and STEPHANIE, a woman in her late twenties, are strolling down a cement trail that runs alongside a beach. In the distance the sun sets into the ocean.



## Rajinderpal S. Pal

**fuse**

and in *amritsar* twins were born      fused at the ankles      their family refused the operation      life as a  
constant three legged race      an unshakable shadow      to illustrate *chachaji* burned two candles side by  
side      let the waxpools merge      he sliced a pomegranate down the middle      except for the stem

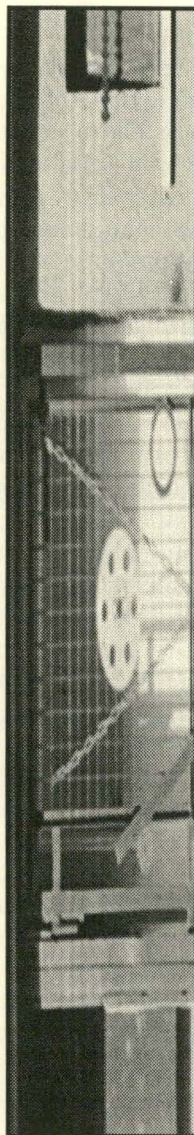
you said that's what it is      two halves with a common goal      a sharing of seeds  
like should stick to like      south asians with south asians      and i just stared at the light bulb filament



# Heather Fitzgerald

## contexturl

recycled filaments  
spidering west  
these lines  
crosshatched into open  
ending drawn by water  
or lost in  
membering  
a hand conducts  
a hemiola in 3/4 time  
to perfection on the page  
where line equals  
a mathematical purr  
line  
snapped to grid  
connects piston to  
crankpin silvers  
mercurial  
in the mean time  
a space of silent e  
brown of slipped a s  
muddied lubricant  
i  
leaks soft  
outside the lines



## Ian Samuels

*from Iconnotations.*

named it **sun** without so much as a peyote dream through skin singing **bullet** face up to sage cross-boned last night's line in the **white** dust still about blood on a dollarbill greened back through gully wind **crying** in a circle watered cabin walls grew horns told stories **truth** about vanishing points everything in between bottle choir changed the tune **avé** wind turned north to embrace **now** river droplets named for reflections every one called back **maria** leapt and scattered through possible worms so much time to make one dollar a cause so **slept** through reason to treasure under the X but no one thought to ask how the X felt or the **underness** and apparently the wolf vanished due to bad animation but its howl its **howl** remained and said "love thyself toy of the swimming dog tossed bone over shoulder named **ebony** look west [gun@theready.com](mailto:gun@theready.com) mutiny in roaming empire where the vein opened desperate cargo half-remembered big sky as **advertised** so it's naked again swimming in a pool of its own **new** ledge was emancipation in the kettle **bird** singing counterpoint to bullet-progressive snake statute if there's a little **truth** in truth it's this drop of rain searching for an umbrella (knew the **pollution** slithering into five hundred years of hands helped open yes it was blood moneyed and danced through sanity **outside** what cried in the bathroom-beautiful finish stalled in stench of staying **together** and it said "love thy **Self** to paint each grain hits the eye runs back to **atlantic** where television screens lull fish to dreams of **freedom** bone rolled over and puffed up past named tranquil **sea** the negro invasion headline's trumpet note hanging on a c-minor kicking out its **breath** oh that was harmony snatched against dustbowl back of the ball hand sweating on pearl of a hundred thousand faceoffs with pure **evil** in black misted into murmur just under the **flesh** just under us or them carved into every future motion against thigh against cluttered puzzle of the barnacled arm **calling** up against war against the bringdown song the last bright moment (but of course it **grew** just how beautiful a mouth chewed mud to name it sliding down progress:

## Shane Rhodes

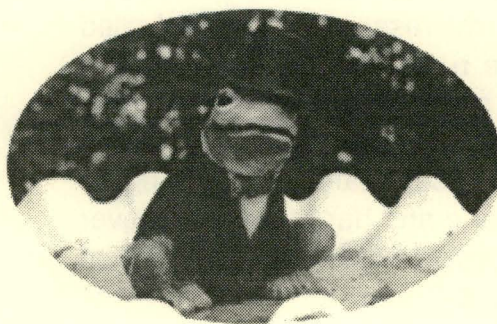
### XIX (from *The Unified Field*)

You come in now and bring completion with you  
Your boots caked with snow scarf frozen  
each accessory another grid point we can depend on  
We have spent how long today building  
these separate replies the ones we carry  
bottled in words

When I say I want truth  
I don't mean as a plane we momentarily pass through  
but as a new space with new rules When I say life  
I mean the time after

The moon splinters through the window.  
The sound of trees cracking as the heartwoods freeze.

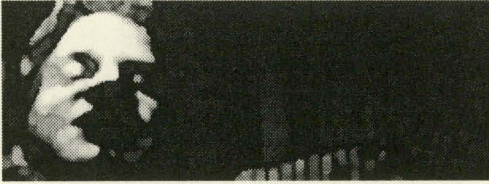
These letters around me  
the blank margins  
holding us  
together  
in testament  
in speech.





## Rob Brander

boiling



three bouncing in car that bursts steam  
edges shudder an impatient kettle blow-  
ing onto windshield droplets sticky and  
blue and she asks 'what's wrong' the  
feeling of prison growing around her  
stuck in a cell with the familiar body of  
the old woman in backseat 'what's  
wrong' she asks the question ironic as  
the man beside curses 'shit' he says  
pulling into the station the tear searched  
out patched and the old woman speaks  
in roles the words flood out in a finely  
tuned course hammered into place by  
years of work and theses words carved  
the man the reservoir of his head dilled  
with the runoff of centuries and the  
woman struggles against both choking  
the words that bounce around the  
closed space billiard balls seeking fu-  
tile escape and her brow bends over  
eyes that stare out at a dumpster stuffed  
with old used tires

## JC Wilcke

### *From jaw*

*I'm here to be a noun for my left foot.*

You look like you're going to work I'm sorry you're sad  
but I have to catch the train these peepshows seem so  
natural being so common wide open front and rear close-  
ups. Manholes teeth this is an ear perhaps a nose for  
music or a lung for cooking I made it up

*In babies' mouths gum a thumb*

it's what the head does that shapes a language when  
biting a man there's a sort of suture involved there's a  
man who's white running for the train a dead run and  
the train are those lungs real good I see done seeing a  
do a leg a stride ovation oratorio O.

*I am a blond goddess and you will respect me*

tearing me apart brand name redirects hiring process never  
be anoth anoth anoth a. Nice voice and everything i  
don't know how we got along without balling a melon  
long small flat trim mole the free world hangs in my  
windshield you shouldn't stare at my breasts because  
you're gay toforella red necks at the bar find your body  
disgusting

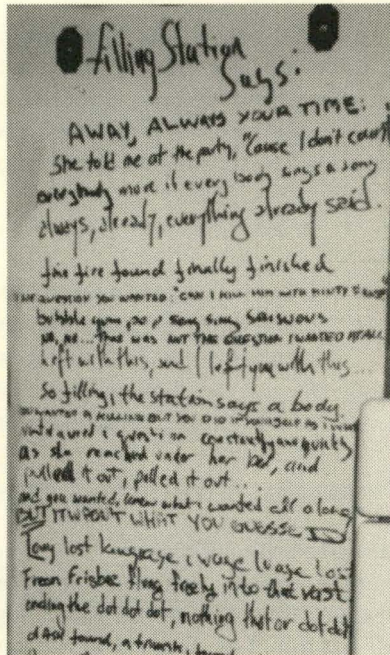
*Discovered the clit yesterday*

I'm having endless boybands over for dinner watch that  
fanny juices talk live to me wanna drip splatter dolled up  
38c from pink eyes brn hard easy the public hair shaved  
or me that wants it tune chest trade something itch. *Cheap  
flights wings of sphenoid meet Melena on sagittal plane*  
the workforce presents a rectory giggle poke lower aba-  
cus oh shit I met a Dr. yesterday but all he wants to do is  
play nurse

tmuir

from Sub-liminal

The thigh is becoming a cultural mess age



The throat is jelly a baby  
wrapped in scarves is penciled in for Tuesdays the touch  
tender shivers is threatened by hairs a dog more a day is  
glance and smile the slow movement towards a distance  
receding is more desire than improv the bubble held fond-  
ness a towel and tea lights is dropped a lover covers and  
folds is bedset on milk crates the hopscotch carrier is  
thought mad temple god a shoulder bag blushed in smooth  
and even is kept jars the sideboard sticks the shelf blown  
dust free is road a worn lost in winter folds a pair of boots a  
ball and some sticks is league big and found inside small-  
ness is love add verb now is surrounded by hands a fondue  
kindness the broth reduced sustains



## r rickey

### long distances

urgency in message

we wander

continual loss

lost

spin slip push every pull  
debate every moot mute  
confine paper rain storm  
sense arcs across words  
map senseless continent  
long night coffee beer  
lines drawn dreamed  
in sand in decisions in spills  
community a constant build  
insolent laughter constant  
ring long distance phone  
calls we mark expanse  
miles memory wires and  
fond remembrances



lost

we continue

never believed

in narrative endings

anyway

# and i have never played violin

(with apologies to Kris Demeanor)

## **Dean Irvine**

⟨ Last seen entering a McGill archive while working on Ph.D. in Montreal.

## **Doug Steedman**

⟨ Currently terrorizing students of English at the University of Seoul.

## **jacqueline turner**

⟨ Moved to the West Coast, and about to move us with her first book.

## **Stephanie Rogers**

⟨ Filling Vancouver with words, video cameras, and infectious laughter.

## **Blaine Kylo**

⟨ Keeps pushing and publishing writing at Arsenal Pulp Press in Vancouver.

## **Rajinderpal S. Pal**

⟨ Won prizes for his first book, and continues to define style in Calgary.

## **Heather Fitzgerald**

⟨ Permeating the web with wicked words from her new home in Toronto.

## **Ian Samuels**

⟨ Incredibly active in the arts of Calgary—new book, new classes, great hair.

## **Shane Rhodes**

⟨ Writes Alberta prairie into city politics and ready to unveil his first book

## **JC Wilcke**

⟨ Soon off to Japan to spread saxophone jazz punctuated by poetry.

## **tmuir**

⟨ Pushing his poetry into the new and about to launch a new chapbook.

## **r rickey**

⟨ Lost in the wired world, working on a Ph.D. at the University of Calgary

## **Rob Brander**

⟨ One of our founders, Rob sadly passed away in 1995. Our memories of him, and his love of poetry, continue to live everywhere.



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Julia Williams

Tammy McGrath

this issue designed by r rickey & derek beaulieu

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**CRAF**

Calgary Region Arts Foundation



**The Alberta  
Foundation  
for the Arts**



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1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the role of the state in the development of the economy. It argues that the state should play a leading role in the development of the economy, particularly in the areas of infrastructure, education, and health care. The paper also discusses the importance of the role of the private sector in the development of the economy, particularly in the areas of investment, innovation, and employment.

tish

## Introduction

*Tish* and *Open Letter* have been for me two continuous editorial projects — one short-term and emphatic and the other low-key and persistent. With George Bowering, Fred Wah, Jamie Reid, and David Dawson, I helped found the poetry newsletter *Tish* in the fall of 1961, and served as its managing editor. All of us in our early to mid-twenties, living mostly on student finances, we had no idea for how long we would have the resources to continue publishing. While in 1961 there were no public grants available to assist such ventures, there were also no rules about format, typography, distribution practices, or publication schedules, or pressures about who or what to publish. We surprised ourselves by publishing 19 crudely mimeographed issues in 19 months, in 400-copy editions circulated around North America mostly free of charge, before handing the newsletter over to another group of editors in the summer of 1963. I founded the journal *Open Letter* myself in 1965, with Bowering, Wah, Dawson, and Daphne Marlatt as contributing editors, on the funding of a Department of National Defence Arts Research Grant. The first nine issues were photo-offset from copy prepared on an electric typewriter, and also distributed mostly free of charge to those who wanted it. *Open Letter* is now in its thirty-sixth year, funded during most of that time by Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council grants. With the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council grants have come increasing demands about format, typography, pricing, predictability and regularity of publication, payment to contributors, and demands about such things as the range — gender, region, age, ethnicity, sexuality, race — of contributors.

While public grants have to some extent made it easier to publish a journal, and possible to do so in a more durable format, they have also made it increasingly difficult to publish a journal that has aesthetic/ideological objectives that mainstream culture has not at least partly endorsed, co-opted, or mandated. All Canadian journals funded by arts councils are edited in part by the state, and obliged by cultural practice to carry out state ideological projects such as regional equalization, pluralistic multiculturalism, gender equity, and free market individualism (no matter how contradictory these projects may appear as a set) and to avoid, as council juries frequently remind me, the appearance of 'clique.' 'Clique' in this usage appears to mean a group that shares an ideology that is not identity-based. Generalist magazines under



this policy are acceptable, as are specifically focussed ones that appear to 'represent' constituencies which mainstream culture now considers historically under-represented. This state editing is not bureaucratically mandated. It is carried out by well-meaning arts administrators and arts community members who serve on juries and who have internalized the apparent rightness of state ideology. The ideal it implies – a journal whose contributors would 'represent' all possible constituencies in ratios that reflect their under- or over-representation in the past – is especially restrictive for journal editors who would advance particular aesthetic/political critiques that are not necessarily identity based, or that go beside or beyond such narrowly focussed politics.

The commercial business model insisted upon by almost all the arts councils is also extremely restricting. In this model, magazine issues are to be published on a regular schedule, rather than when the energies and social conditions of the editors suggest (I can imagine in some years wanting to publish six or more issues of *Open Letter*, in response to what I see as urgent issues, and in other years perhaps no more than one.) More copies are to be sold than are given away (yet for *Open Letter* those with the money to buy subscriptions are not necessarily those who wish to read the journal, and those who wish to read it – often students and artists – do not always have money. Getting my journal to the readers who will want to read it, and who may act upon what they read, has always been more important to me than getting it to readers who will pay.) Contributors are to be paid (yet *Open Letter* contributors, like those of many cultural journals, write and publish, by and large, in the hope of changing society rather than of earning money). Subscription numbers are to increase every year, and money to be spent on seeking new subscribers. Those who edit journals that do cultural work, like *Open Letter*, *Fuse*, *Writing*, *West Coast Line*, or *Tessera*, usually have little interest in 'marketability' or in changing a journal's content to attract additional subscribers. They are more interested in having readers than having subscribers. Most have no particular allegiance to global capitalism, and to publishing in the scale required to be sold by chain bookstores and their distributors, or to accepting growth as a measure of success. In proposing growth as such a measure arts councils interfere – naively, I hope – with a journal's construction of its audience.

While it is not possible to get outside of one's contemporary

cultural formation any more than it is possible to get outside of culture, it should be possible to contest, dilute, hybridize, or fracture that formation without undue hindrance from 'arms-length' arts institutions. Global capitalism consistently intrudes on the work small journals like *Open Letter* do. The small bookstores that sell such journals are being put out of business by bookselling chains that favour journals that publish in much larger press runs than most of us aspire to. Our library subscribers are more and more ordering through distribution agencies that demand discounts, a situation which in turn pressures us to raise subscription prices to cover the discount. The agencies themselves are becoming ever larger and more impersonal through the effects of corporate takeovers. In the last few years the Faxon agency of New Jersey has been taken over by the Dawson agency of Britain; and the relatively small Serials Management Systems of London, Ontario, has been taken over by Dawson/Faxon. Dawson/Faxon in turn was taken over in late 1999 by Massachusetts-based Rowecom. Many of *Open Letter's* Canadian university subscriptions are now purchased through newly giant Rowecom, through Blackwells of Oxford, or through Ebsco of Birmingham, Alabama. Clerks from these agencies phone or fax *Open Letter* expecting to find a receptionist and a subscription department and are amused to find only me, who tends to answer their inquiries only once or twice a month. They send claim notices by the dozen whenever the journal is not published on what they imagine is its publication schedule – notices that I cannot afford the time to answer. Assuming that all journals are published in annual volumes, they regularly misunderstand *Open Letter's* practice of publishing in three-year nine-issue series.

*Open Letter's* Canadian distributor, the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association – an institution set up decades ago to assist small Canadian magazines – recently sent me a survey in which the 'small' category was defined as \$1 million annual gross revenue. They have also begun insisting *Open Letter's* covers carry bar codes – and offering as a bribe a doubling of Chapters' standing order.

Arts council policies, particularly those of the Canada Council, are currently not that far away from the expectations of such agencies. They assume regularity and professionalization. They assume a roughly homogenous audience of monied literary readers. They assume that editors will wish to 'expand their markets.'



They favour professionalized literary journals, whose aims are to develop the careers of their contributors and to reach a supportive middle-class readership that enjoys seeing itself affiliated with the arts. Their politics are vaguely humanistic, their pious cultural expectations increasingly similar to those of the 'literati' of F.R. Scott's *The Canadian Author's Meet*. In this they reflect the growing professionalization and commercialization over the last two decades of the Canadian arts community – with the growing tendency to equate accomplishment with sales, prizes, international contracts, and media coverage. The writing I have preferred in *Tish* and *Open Letter* has been skeptical of humanist presumptions and of artistic and other individualisms. It has viewed the commodification of culture, art, education, and language as impassable for creativity. It has been suspicious of cultural pieties and enthusiasms, including those newly established.

Despite my co-founding in 1985 with Fred Wah of *SwiftCurrent*, Canada's first on-line journal (itself supported by the Canada Council), I have been primarily a print editor. The current rapid commercialization of the internet suggests to me that electronic publication may soon carry ideological constraints very similar to those of print. Already we see an electronic literary publisher like Coach House beginning to become dependent on arts council support. With dependence comes the seemingly innocent 'arm's length' panopticon of the state, in the form of administrators and juries that have been unknowingly co-opted by whatever has become the current common sense of government.

Especially when grumpily composing one more implicitly resistant grant application to one of our councils, I often think of returning to the production and distribution models of *Tish*, or of bill bissett's *Blew Ointment*, or even of Louis Dudek's *Poetry Mailbag*. The contemporary Canadian arts scene has moved far from the irregularity and openness of those models, and carried many of us with it. *The cistern contains, the fountain overflows*, writes William Blake. I think he was having a vision of bar codes and *Tish*.

Frank Davey



Ars Noetica

Steve McCaffery

... God also maintains an aesthetic beauty

open it. in the 3-voice wrapper round its sonnet of ports.

Each line reads "could be a line" (a spider winds up something  
or smashing a friend in the fries

... what is this cry? progressive if responded to? (the poetic act?  
the event named the poem?

cluster-warp of dinghy message teaching you to read  
the candlesticks in office buildings

the puke having printed it

a desultory prerequisite for monosyllable adhesion  
(Cynwulf to Bunting)  
churn spree pin push it to me with a led lit set it up  
tuning in next page to the phrase defence

... why is this cry of conscience likened to  
a stranger's voice (Hesiod to Spicer) ?

alterity sounded from within the outside  
folding the drive toward taking in

"concern"?

All that's poetry isn't poetry isn't a thought worth thinking

Fred Wah

cat's cradle

For myself, I realize the cradle is where I want to be. Despite the threat - and this is central to the torque of infancy - to erase temporal discriminations of difference, I desire the potency of training, the buzz of the tracks under the wire, the fusion of this fision, the unsettled and dissonant noise outside the hypocrisy of permanence and purity. The community of the cradle is, for me, not a lonely place to be. As I said, the homogeneous insistence of the continuous string will not contain my cradleness simply to define its own obsessions for clarity and univocal meaning, i.e. its tyrannical demand for symmetry. Patterning is multiple and I've discovered, through the elimination of the ladder, this rejection of paradigmatic experience by the young (but not only the young: 'urban Indians' and Asian tourists, skinheads and family breadwinners alike are affiliated) that there is possible a kind of coalition of free-floaters, those of us who wish to cross over on the opposite side once in awhile. And we are not like those cartoon characters of our childhood who can walk on thin air as long as they don't notice it; we realize, once we experience this, that falling is necessary for dexterity. Both infancy and history have insisted, through the hierarchies of a knotted string, on the dynamics of improvisation - very simply, how to fake it, how to make it up. Allies in this configuration of the gap have been artists, carpenters, and fishermen - both taut and loose - who, for their own reasons, have also occupied this disturbed and disturbing site. Through a substantial psychic reality of desiring objects, I long ago felt the need to contest my so-called "mother cord" - its dominance, authority, power. Another important ally in disturbing the nor-

mal tightening of the reins - that it is only a sometimes disposable reflex between two intentions, pure ones at that - has been the discourse of the chalk line, a volatile and stained venue that in the last thirty years has challenged how its productive agency has only been granted, according to our neighbor Bob, through an act of colonial line-snapping. But what's certain in this rope-a-dope debate is that you can't always get it just right. The desire for the perfect simply produces another object, a *fait accompli*, the repetitive delirium of rusted strands of wire cable, the invisible knot in a piece of sewing thread, the tattered and exploded end of a shoelace, a cauterized umbilical cord. This is not at all an antithetical polarization. We see that the ligament, like transcendental silk, is what remains of the tension when, at the end of a long haul, it is stripped of all its strength and fiber. The nexus of this spiritual experience of the line as a trace of thought has been described by an Arab mystic, Al-Ibn: "the string is the string, nothing else; the string is the string, all of it...the string is the pure subject of the verb." This framing of the cradle does not mean that you can't read it. The sub-muscularization of the braid can be interpreted as caught within the progressive dynamic of Tourette's Syndrome where motion and action by a sort of sensorimotor mimicry involves, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, "a staggering proliferation of tics, involuntary spasms and mannerisms that can be defined only as a generalized catastrophe of the gestural sphere." (*Infancy and History*, 136). This string is no cyborgian extension of the body. It is itself, its own nervous system allowed to talk back through the permutations of an ever transmorphic screen saver. Metaphor is not easy to come by in describing this locus: binding twine, floss, packthread, leader, hamstring, lace, and so forth. Caught in the velcro. Catgut is tempting as a forceful interpellation. But who will answer? We can find no spider's ethic here. What is held by the two hands is not meant to measure,



particularly the fingers. I think we need to get wounded, down to the nemo-fibers, the ciliolum, the yarn, the thong, the rigging, the ribbon, the bandage. Yes, the wound. The interstitial space of a stage, a balcony, the trace, finally of a scar that has borrowed its outline from an imprint of the domestic. This is a track, for me, not to the realm of the spiritual (what an illusion) but to an inheritance heretofore stifled by the intentions of sacred or economic models. I want to be free to use the crumbs and scraps for the crumbiness and scrapiness in them, for nothing else. Time is, etymologically, according to Heraclitus, "a child playing with dice. If this is true, that is, if this is true for the cat's cradle (and mine), that string is a yoke to the spinal marrow, to the breath, to the body and its threaded thought. Those threads are diachronous and I want to be there in the heat of their trans- crossing, why not, through the residue of m

## CHAPTER O

Christian Bök

(FROM *Eunonia*)

for Yoko Ono

Loops on bold fonts now form lots of words for books. Books form cocoons of comfort – tombs to hold bookworms. Profs from Oxford show frosh, who do postdocs, how to gloss works of Wordsworth. Dons, who work for proctors or provosts, do not fob off school, to work on crosswords, nor do dons go off to dormrooms, to loll on cots. Dons go crosstown, to look for bookshops, known to stock lots of topnotch goods: cookbooks; workbooks – room on room, of how-to books for jocks (how to jog; how to box) – books on pro sports: golf or polo. Old colophons on schoolbooks from schoolrooms sport two sorts of logo: oblong whorls; rococo scrolls – both on worn morocco.

Monks, who vow to do God's work, go forth from donjons  
of monkhood, to show flocks, lost to God, how God's word  
brooks no crooks, who plot to do wrong. Folks, who go to  
Sodom, kowtow to Moloch, so God drops H-bombs of  
horror onto poor townsfolk, most of whom mock Mormon  
proofs of godhood. Folks, who do not follow God's norms,  
word for word, woo God's scorn, for God frowns on fools,  
who do not conform to orthodox protocol. Whoso honors,  
no cross of dolours nor crown of thorns, doth go on, for-  
sooth, to sow worlds of sorrow. Lo! No Song of Solomon  
comforts Job or Lot, both of whom know, for whom, gongs  
of doom doth toll. Oh *mondo doloroso*.



Crowds of Ostrogoths, who howl for blood, go off on foot, to storm forts, to torch towns. Mongol troops, grown strong from bloodsport, loot strongholds of lords, known to own tons of gold. Goths, who lop off locks on doors of tombs, spot no strongbox of loot – no gold, no boon – for Goths confront horrors, too gross for words: gorgons from Mordor, kobolds from Chthon. Bold sons of Thor, god of storms, hold off, sword for sword, mobs of Mor-locks – trolls, who flood forth from bottommost worlds of rockbottom gloom, Orcs shoot bolts from crossbows. Lots of potshots, shot off from bows, mow down throngs of cohorts, most of whom swoon from loss of blood.

Profs, who go to Knossos, to look for books on Phobos or Kronos, go on to jot down monophthongs (*kof* or *rho*) from two monoglot scrolls of Thoth, old god of Copts - both scrolls, torn from hornbooks, now grown brown from mold. Profs, who gloss works of Woolf, Gogol, Frost, or Corot, look for books from Knopf, *Nostromo*, not *Hopscotch* - *Oroonoko*, not *Ronwrong*. Profs, who do work on Pollock, look for photobooks on Orozco or Rothko (two tomfools, known to throw bold colors, blotch on blotch, onto tondos of dropcloth). Log onto Hotbot dotcom, to look for books on who's who or wot's wot, for books of *bons mots* show folks strong mottos to follow. How now brown cow.

from *Pollen*

Peter Jaeger

No sooner does an impasse establish itself than plagiarism is likely to set in. Ambition ruins reading. As long as we stay with specifics we can only accumulate. A wandering hand may see itself as playing fair by announcing its target in advance, but a true landscape will not emphasize short-term precepts over long-term mull. All books have their sky. Epigrams should not mean but be — O.K., but meta tends towards selection. Most of us can barely even envisage the hints of a plus where warmth once won. A selection that alleges increase is easier to know than anorexic leisure, for the former insulates the arms of public tags, while the latter merely poses them as lore. The mimic is clothed with infinite purpose. Even when smoothness quivers, there must be something in it that calls out this feeling in us...which is to say, flat shares affect. Most prospects are apt to regard secrets as not really touching their own aspiration, but as something exclusive and solitary. On a slogan a waver perches. An intentional structure appears most bearable when divided. Whoever has a gift for compilation ought to be able to learn driftism like any other mechanical art. Nice people make bad collaborators. The pantomimes of critical culture no longer exist — but in compensation, all pantomimes now resemble critical culture. Conflation construes; assumption sums. The foremost way to read theory or poetry is to skim it without considering too much...that way tone predominates over incarceration. The constant factor (as well as the most fruitful aspect) remains in the animations of fine print. One should only consider gun-metal breath from the safety of advantage. Abundance always chooses an in-transit position from which to watch itself march towards fulfilment. Some approach pliancy, but fail to see the setting. Better the author who stands when she writes than the one who sits when she reads. A pattern founded on rank has to maintain itself on plot. To teach with kindly stealth, not to lose one's cover, to glisten at the hermeticism of others — these are the energies of tolerance. A theory marches on its examples. The hidden assumption of surrender is that there are claims and there are exits, and that we always remain permissible. Some select a kinder weight for looking. Fettered to steer, believing what the lank perceive, the vast majority list at glamour. And yet we've just begun — true, although the ends are underfoot. Demand is both valuable and easily understood. In these circumstances, I would be shirking if I confined myself to a string of reliance; it was my intention to throw light on retrieval. From our perspective, benefit merely migrates through sanctions. Structuralism was the difference between words and woods. There are many people who are too tender



for theory, and too dignified for poetry — a tangible proof of standards. The government of homilies is rooted in the family. We always come back to the question of neo-linearity; if we follow causality, variation remains forcefully removed from engagement. Many concepts are like the sudden meeting of two workers at the end of a long shift. The deflection of spectacles modifies struggle. The gaze is a sort of domination bent from genitives. One should attempt to classify control only in relation to the consumption of ordinary problems. Every theory of language that excludes the phrase “cool, daddio” must be incomplete. When a form doesn’t know what to answer, it is usually the result of an accident rather than a conscious action. Believing in currency and always straining at the virtual; frenetically marginal and proudly dependent; awkward at weather but a genius of tedium; dumb with acumen — can you guess to what type of pornography these traits correspond? If we distinguish between *deluge* and *flood* as two different products, the question of right or wrong remains unanswered. Undoubtedly, process is no longer merely a twin of verb. The best way to copy is to re-use referents with pseudo-antediluvian textures. The only zero coordination is that which also coordinates the gap that separates it from nothing. She that finds the split of conversation gains an unspecific consolation. “Oranges” equal absence makes the heart grow formal. Brilliant achievement is the achievement of achievement. Instructions drug us into genre. We’re not really cynics...were just channels for derision. Handy is the truce of platitudes. Unpredictability is not easy, and doubt is hit or miss. The defenders of constraint will only accept a critique based on statistics. Does not allegiance feel about the uniqueness of its reverence just as I feel about the uniqueness of mine? In a crucial sense, function is a testimony to imperatives. All theory constantly aspires towards the condition of example. The miraculous regulation, formed of an inconceivable number of independent parts, has evolved to a degree of supply capable of the surplus needed for supposition. Examples are always more efficacious than we are.

George Bowering

**A Small Hand**

There is a small hand in the purple

Really, I saw this just before All Saints Day

I don't care whether I get Coke or Pepsi

Late at night reading the sky for pins

My father did this, his occupation showing

Thumb nails together staying out of Hell

So I will never visit there again

That path winding when it did not need to

## **How Odd Men Are, Really**

Women  
take off their rings  
and leave them on shelves,  
tabletops.

Their legs below dark coats  
cross intersections  
in the rain.

And we wait in automobiles  
for news from distant quarters.



## **Unlikely Childhood Transculturation**

I was always  
reading de Maupassant  
to Obasan.

She was  
an Okinawan  
from the Okanagan.

## **Sometimes I**

Sometimes I look at the world  
and sometimes I pass it through my body.

Sometimes I have paint on my hands  
and sometimes my stomach oozes.

These conditions led me in my youth  
to look for a woman I could mistake for poetry.

Whether I succeeded is left for loving critics to decide  
while I pick at the steep sides of this hole.

The world seems not to notice my intent  
as I pass through it, quarter by quarter.

It is the earth, not the world, you dolt  
she told me while I only gaped through lidded eyes.

Years after I began this nonsense I returned  
only proving that I'd grown stupid over the years.

The first of these is the fact that the system is not a simple one. It is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear. The system is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear.

The second of these is the fact that the system is not a simple one. It is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear. The system is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear.

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The ninth of these is the fact that the system is not a simple one. It is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear. The system is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear.

The tenth of these is the fact that the system is not a simple one. It is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear. The system is a complex system, and the behavior of the system is not linear.



# RICE PAPER

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"Where are you really from?" I wonder how many Asian Canadians have heard *that* question.

The folks involved with *RicePaper* today are committed to telling Asian Canadian stories and reclaiming ugly racial stereotypes in a cheeky, ironic way. Take, our most recent cover for instance: "A slanted point of view" and "Yellow Revolution."

Our ultimate goal is to change the consciousness of our nation by documenting untold immigrant stories and personal accounts of epiphanies and watershed moments; streams of consciousness, memories of childhood and racial discrimination.

*RicePaper* began initially as a newsletter for the community of the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop in the 1980s. The ACWW's genesis can be traced back to 1968 when a group of friends—community organizers and activists—informally networked and met to discuss their perspectives on identity and the voiceless state of Asians in Canada.

Hardly anything in Canadian literature, school history texts, the arts and mass media affirmed their Asian Canadian identity. So they started scribing their respective bi-cultural experiences in poetry, novels and other creative expressions. Award-winning authors such as SKY Lee, Paul Yee and Fred Wah emerged from this group. As did an award-winning radio program called Pender Guy, noted foremost for an investigative piece on racist business policy in clubs.

*RicePaper's* next step is in facilitating more pioneering community work in Canada.

"You see things and ask, 'Why?' and I dream things that never were and say, 'Why not?' —  
*George Bernard Shaw*

# RICE PAPER

[www.ricepaperonline.com](http://www.ricepaperonline.com)  
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*Sylvia Yu*

# DURIAN LOVE

in chinatown  
stores are disemboweled  
onto the sidewalk.  
it's all part of  
the medieval produce  
torture technique  
to attracts tourists & rats.

BY JEN LAM

already late for a date  
I miss my bus as a result of  
bartering away minutes to  
meditate in windows  
& watch fishmongers scale  
the ocean's birth,  
their hands left  
diamond plated by their work.

dragons everywhere  
climbing up voices  
jockeying for altitude  
then sliding down the slope of sighs  
at the end of every sentence.

sun sein lichee ah!  
ho liang ah!

above shanghai squats in  
buried balconies of chore.  
from the rims of rooftops  
hang  
a deeper degree of ghosts.  
inside  
stairs of narrow grinning tread  
lead up to rooms crackling  
with the smell of old politics.

pender guy will teach you  
durian love.  
extreme hunger that  
will repulse cannibals.  
a love that  
will have you forced outdoors  
& banned from subways.  
will lead your tongue  
to abandon  
the crisp clean sex of apples to  
romance the fruit of porcupine lust  
decaying in the boys' locker room.



# COTTON FREE

---

BY JEN LAM  
FOR BRANDON

I knew him even before  
he was born.  
saw him bring summer  
to his mother's skin of winter ashes.  
he grew fighting for every inch  
threatening to split her in half  
from the inside out.

I used to hold him for hours  
gazing at this 8 lb 13 ounce universe  
thinking how could something that's  
always pissing & puking on itself  
smell so good?

from him I've learned to  
swallow happiness without suspicions.  
that bliss is the color of taking  
the whole crayon box  
all 64 meanings of laughter  
into your hands & scribbling all over  
the grey monday faces of strangers  
until there is nothing left  
but paper shells.

we hid in closets crunching rolls  
of wintergreen lifesavers  
& I taught him about the  
electricity flooding his jaw.

now under  
the sun's warm chanting  
we walk down commercial drive  
my hand lost in  
his atmosphere of tornado curls

# ORANGE JUICE

sharing a bottle of root beer  
& curdling the air  
with our funky brown belching contest.  
who would've thought that such  
a little body could hold so much gas?

we go to safeway  
to get oreos  
& chocolate covered jujubes  
& oj  
no gunk he says  
& proceeds to tell me that  
*orange juice is the best because  
spiderman drinks it  
so you ought to have it always  
except after brushing your teeth  
then it tastes like toad piss.*

frankly, I think this is just his  
round about attempt at  
trying to get out of having  
to brush his teeth.

the supermarket is tepid  
with housewives escaping  
their beer maddened husbands  
& sugar infested kids.  
young women filling up  
on a week's supply of  
pre-prepared  
low cal  
processed life.  
& men  
old & young

unchaperoned  
wandering about shell-shocked  
as a flock of xylophones serenades us  
with saccharin flashbacks of the 80's.

armed with oreos  
chocolate covered jujubes  
& cotton free oj  
we head to the express lane.  
& wait in line with the  
rest of the lemmings  
where this woman  
crammed into a navy suit  
her face stuffed with death  
standing in front of the  
candy display whips around  
& snarls

*what do you think you're doing?  
I was in line. I'm in front of you.*

& brandon beside me  
spinning himself into the ground  
round  
& round  
& round  
until he is a puddle of giggles  
splashing me with his giddiness.  
what could I do but step back  
& let the bitch into line.  
she obviously needed  
the small victory  
more than I did.

BY LARISSA LAI

**T**he year 1990 seemed to signal a change in the way the people talked about race. I can never be sure if this shift was public or personal, but I felt an excitement in the air. Young people of colour—young Asian Canadians, in particular—sensed that something was about to happen. It was something we could not describe, but it nonetheless captivated our energy and our enthusiasm.

I had been in touch with Jim Wong-Chu of the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop since 1986 about an anthology of Chinese Canadian poetry that would later become *Many-Mouthed Birds*. I was interested in the project the same way I've always been dutifully interested in all things related to my Chinese heritage and North American identity. But I didn't think of it in terms of a larger movement or a larger historical moment. It was just a book which might or might not get published.

In the spring of 1990, at the launch of SKY Lee's book *Disappearing Moon Café*, I found a community abuzz with an excitement I had never experienced before. It was there I first met Paul Wong and Elspeth Sage. They were putting together an exhibit of film, video and photo-based work called *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*. Jim told me they were looking for an assistant curator. Again, I was interested, but saw it as little more than a summer job.

#### ROMANCE

One month in, I realized I was part of an odd, but very exciting, community romance. Fraught with anger, suspicion and jealousy, there was a burning desire and will to create a new world, unlike any we had grown up in.

We upped our noodle intake. Some of us wore *meen naps* and *kung fu* shoes. For the first time in our lives, we had the space and sanction to talk about all the truths about race and racism that we, as citizens of a Multicultural Canada, were compelled to keep inside.

We spent hours making up smart-ass answers to the ubiquitous question, "Where are you from?" We talked about interracial relationships. We talked about exoticism. We talked about the Asianphiles who, Paul writes, "festoon themselves with curios and trinkets of an imperial past." We knew the emperor had no clothes, and his stupid nakedness delighted us. It didn't matter whether race categories were natural or constructed. We had been mistreated and abused by whites, and reclaimed "Asianness" to empower ourselves.

But the romance had a darker underside. How liberating it was to look the monster in the eye, but it was also frightening and sad to admit the monster existed. We had always turned to whites for love and approval. Now we turned



to one another, but we didn't always like what we saw. We did not necessarily have the tools to support each other, having little or no experience in the past. We had, in fact, often seen one another as competitors for white attention.

I had hoped to talk about this tension at the *Writing Thru Race* conference, held four years later. But this hope, as usual, was hijacked by a white agenda that insisted we look at its hurt and its fury and deny our own.

Still, we had begun a journey of community construction in reaction to white racism. Our reclamation, complete with chopstick font, had a decidedly ironic twist because we could see from both inside and outside of the white gaze.

#### ARTWORK

It is a fitting coincidence we begin at the borderlands. Taki Bluesinger's *The Beginning of the East*, which appears between the artists' section and the writers' section in the catalogue, questions what we mean by "Asian." It points to the fluidity of any definition of race. The image of a man with a cigarette in his mouth was apparently taken in the Gobi desert. But are his features Chinese? Or Middle Eastern?

Several of the pieces presented family and community histories missing in the media. Sharyn Yuen's *Jook Kaak*, made from old family photos and handmade paper with handwritten text, challenges the way we look at history. The ancientness of the photographs contrasts sharply with the immediacy of the text. "The intensity of the moment was overwhelming. It lasted all of 45 minutes." We understand at once the huge gap in time, space and longing between the China side of the family and the Canada side. At the same time, it resists being seen as an artifact of a time long past, of a culture long dead. It demands we rethink our understanding of our history as dead, and assimilation as effective. Midi Onodera's video *Displaced View* also insists on its own subjectivity. The untranslated parts in Japanese show the frustration and loss a *sansei* child feels with her grandmother, while still holding non-Japanese viewers at arm's length.

Other work had differing approaches. Jin-me Yoon's piece criticizes the western tendency to collect and categorize everything, and how fragmenting it can be for those whose lives are collected and categorized. It portrays the official immigration process as a collection and categorization of bodies, flattening complex lives into photographs and bureaucratic jargon, at the same moment they become citizens.

# REVISITED

## YELLOW PERIL: REVISITED

Henry Tsang's piece pokes at pop wisdom about race and desire by reflecting both the wisdom and the naïveté of discussions around interracial romance.

### STRATEGY

*Yellow Peril* was consciously confrontational. It challenged the predominantly white, middle-class nature of artist-run centres. The question of racism was central. Paul Wong writes, "It is a racist practice to judge marginalized work and new ideas which have never been given the opportunity to evolve. When confronted by work that is different, we don't understand because we don't know how to see. When viewing work that is critical of the dominant culture, we get offended because it is about us."

In retrospect, I think we missed a great opportunity to talk about the actual artwork, in a critical sense, even though some artists strongly encouraged it. At the end of his catalogue essay, Richard Fung writes, "Whatever formal strategies Asian film or video makers choose, we need to situate and question ourselves as subjects. Not how we are seen, but how we see. We must center our work on our own problems, desires and foibles."

If anything, progressive people of all races were reluctant to critique the work for fear of being labelled racist. I say this very cautiously because, I understand the danger of such a statement. There was plenty of very destructive critique coming from the reactionary right which polarized the debates. Critique coming from the progressive side of the fence could have been used "against us."

In the United States, for example, Kobena Mercer retracted a review about the white gaze in Robert Mapplethorpe's homoerotic images of black men when he realized his critique was being used by some of the "homophobic right" to shut Mapplethorpe down. I deeply believe we need critique to build a movement, but I don't know how to solve this quandary. I only know it was a tension then, and it is a tension now. I also strongly resent the polarization of the debate because, by framing our struggle as white versus colour, any differences among artists of colour are quickly swept under the rug.

### PROGENY

Community organizers and curators did find ways to continue the discussion. *Self Not Whole*, organized by Henry Tsang and Lorraine Chan, exhibited Asian Canadian visual art and writing at the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver. It might be an over-generalization to say the CCC in Chinatown tends to look to Asia for its art, but it was nonetheless a radical move to bring in contemporary work by Chinese Canadian artists. *Self Not Whole* tried to throw open the question of what we mean by "Chinese," "Canadian," "self" and "community." It points to the varied backgrounds and experiences of the artists and organizers—as well



the venue itself—to suggest that these categories are by no means stable. To live in the hyphen of "Chinese-Canadian" is to live in a constant state of flux, to be without a resting place, without a homeplace, constantly in motion and constantly in question. *Self Not Whole* was more philosophically sophisticated than *Yellow Peril*, but it may not have happened at all had *Yellow Peril* not come first.

Similarly, two projects—*Memory and Desire* (1992) and *Racy Sexy* (1993)—engaged questions that arose organically from earlier race-focused work. *Memory and Desire* came on the heels of a Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition of British South Asian photography called *Fabled Territories*, curated by Sunil Gupta. *Memory and Desire* was largely the result of protests by a group called Local Colour, which asked why the gallery did not look to the local South Asian community for critical work by people of colour.

The content of *Memory and Desire*, however, was more evocative than confrontational. Engaging myth and family, clothing and old photographs, the women who took part in this exhibit identified themselves as "women of culture"—steering the focus away from race essentialism. It insisted on and laid out some of the complexities of lives lived here in Vancouver. Rather than taking aim at white oppression, it focused on the mapping of history.

Organizers of *Racy Sexy* also chose what they called "a universal human emotion"—desire—as the focus for its show, as it intersects with questions about race and identity. Karin Lee and Henry Tsang write, "What are our ideas of beauty and how are we influenced by media images? With whom do we identify and why? How and why does our desire differ from others? Were experiences common in different communities, and with those of different culture, class and sexual backgrounds? Finally, how did culture and race influence our sexuality, and vice versa?" They took a brave step by inviting members of other marginalized communities into the Chinese Cultural Centre, in conjunction with other community centres.

But *Racy Sexy* suffered painfully from unresolved differences among the organizers, and from lack of trust, which they had so little time to build. No one denied that the project was influenced by earlier work in Vancouver and Toronto, and spearheaded by gay and lesbian organizers of colour. But some felt this influence was not clearly articulated enough, or reflected in the make-up of the organizing committee or the festival program.

This problem was by no means a new one. Women in the Civil Rights movement in the '60s faced it. Black women in a white feminist movement faced it. This time, it was queers in an anti-racist movement. Discussion around the hierarchy of race oppression, and the problem of living at the intersection of two or more marginalizations, raised the question of the fragmentation of the self.

It pointed more sharply than ever to the social construction of identity categories. The strategic quality of race and other essentialisms were wearing thin.



## YELLOW PERIL: REVISITED

(And did we all really understand essentialism as merely a strategy, when our experiences of breaking the silence were so very real and empowering?) The "we" of this discussion is already crumbling. With these questions of identity thrown into contention from within, just as we were being bombarded by charges of "political correctness" and "censorship," it was getting harder to bond and organize. New tools were necessary, but what would they look like?

In 1995, Glen Alteen, Aiyana Maracle and Haruko Okano organized a project called Half Bred through the grunt gallery. It highlighted three special categories: bisexuality, miscegenation and transgender. I say special, because they were beyond fixed notions of identity. And yet they depended on the rhetoric of identity for their existence. When Mark Tadao Nakada speaks of having to raise his hand twice during an in-class racial census in grade school, or Ivan Elizabeth Coyote speaks of his perilous navigation through a series of identities (boy, girl, dyke, butch), the audience may be inspired by the honesty of the moment. But she may also be aware of the violence inherent within the empowerment of earlier moments, even as they set the stage for this one.

### WHERE NOW?

But where to go from here? I think it would be an excellent project to carefully revisit the individual works in these shows. In many ways, individual artists were more sophisticated than the curators or organizers of these exhibitions. They could be, precisely because they did not need a collective vision. This let them play with history and contradiction much more than the exhibitions could afford.

In retrospect, I have a great deal of admiration for the organizers of these various projects. Each was a brave step in furthering a community discourse, and each took risks in making these steps, and paid a price for doing so. Many of the people involved in these projects have moved away from organizing or dropped out of the picture altogether.

I am vaguely aware of another generation, not necessarily younger, rising up to organize events such as Vancouver's now annual Asian Heritage Month festival. Massive conservative backlash against the activities and organizing of the early '90s has largely forced a de-radicalization of the language we use to talk about race. I wonder what has become of all those heated and passionate discussions and arguments. Certainly they have not been resolved. Perhaps they are not resolvable. But I often find myself wishing that the solidarity created then, however tenuous, might find continuity somewhere. In this era of global capitalism, the need for them is more pressing than ever. Maybe solidarity does exist, but we do not yet understand its shape.

*Thanks to Roy Miki, Rita Wong and Debora O for their support and feedback on this piece. (RP)*

BY TETSURO SHIGEMATSU

**A**s a child, I had this reoccurring dream. I'd be standing in front of the mirror combing my hair, but staring back at me wasn't my own reflection. Instead, it was the Fonz staring back at me. Movement for movement we were in perfect sync. We were, in a word "perfectomundo." While having these dreams, not once did it ever strike me as odd to be seeing the face of Henry Winkler as my own. It was only when I woke up that I soon realized, "Hey! That wasn't me!" After analyzing this dream with my school friends at recess, I realized that I was not alone. They too had dreams of the Fonz.

Even back then, we realized this collective dream of ours was a thinly disguised wish. We may not have used that exact term, but we did acknowledge the mystery of our mutual connection through the observance of a simple yet resonant rite: with thumbs pointed skyward, we thrust our fists forward, while uttering that immortal syllable, "Aaaaaaaay!"

We were intensely devout in the ceaseless repetition of this mantra. And who could blame us? Happy Days was a dominant part of our cultural universe and Arthur Fonzarelli embodied everything a young boy could ever hope to be.

The Fonz was cool, tough, charismatic, sexy. All the women loved him, and all the men wanted to be like him, including us. It was only much later in life that I realized this dream was peculiar on another level.

Looking back, I realized that the Fonz was king simply because he didn't have any competition. Certainly not from anyone who looked like me. Bruce Lee might have tied the Fonz in a fight — maybe, but only the Fonz could snap his fingers and have a bevy of co-eds leap into his arms.

Fu Man Chu, Charlie Chan, and the star of Kung Fu — all their noses looked pretty pointy to me. Probably the only authentic Asians I saw on TV were the sad expressions of two Asian boys. Their reflection would appear on the picture tube right after my mother turned off the television. I remember one night, my brother reached up and ran his fingers over the crackling static electricity of the dead screen and exclaimed, "Hey look, it's us!" In our pajamas we danced together before the TV set, laughing with delight at being able to see ourselves on TV. That night, I went to bed happy and dreamt I was the Fonz.

#### BOY'S EYE VIEW

Childhood experiences, fantasies and unfulfilled wishes infuse an artist's vision. My past writing has often been autobiographical, as I seek to communicate my particular vision and experience of the world from the vantage point of an Asian Canadian boy, growing up in a white working-class neighbourhood. The preceding story demonstrates many elements of my style of expression and communication. I create stories which provide a common ground, a place where the audi-

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ence and I can explore various political, social and ethnic issues together.

More broadly speaking, I examine the dynamic interweaving of ethnic and cultural differences which shape and create Canadian identities. My work seeks to bring to the forefront the intersection of gender, race and sexuality and their impact on stereotypical icons of masculinity. The lack of Asian masculine icons within the Asian community encourages the perpetuation of destructive stereotypes, which the community then internalizes and begins to manifest.

As a storyteller, I offer up personal confusion for the edification of my community. It was on the basis of this reputation that I was asked to be a subject of a National Film Board documentary about the identity of Asian males. It had been nearly two decades since *Happy Days* had left the air. Now my long awaited chance to appear on the same screen where the Fonz had once strutted was at hand. I was ready. I was also eager to participate for less superficial reasons. For I felt as a male Asian artist I had a great deal to say.

But in an effort to sound articulate, seem intelligent, and be polite, I constantly censored myself during the interviews. When the director complimented me on the unusual amount of candor I had displayed relative to the other subjects, I realized that along with the other interviewees I was perhaps unwittingly playing out a role prescribed to us as Asian men: quiet, polite, passive, and unassertive (everything Fonzie was not).

Twenty years I had waited to see myself on TV and I blew it. I felt I had let myself down as well as those I was chosen to represent. Replaying the incident in my mind, I realized the alternate course of action. Speaking out, was unlikely. To give voice to the thoughts I had thus far held in reserve, I created an alter ego — a persona, someone who had the bravado to say the things I thought, and then go even further by taking action, someone who could take the risks I felt I could not. His name is Lee Hiroshima.

Lee is an extremely outspoken Asian performance artist who habitually alienates his predominantly white audience with angry socio-political diatribes. One night after a performance, he gets beaten up by skinheads — twice. Lee vows to have his revenge upon "The White Man" by founding a secret society of like-minded Asian brothers. Tapping into the hidden anger that many Asian men feel as a result of living in a white culture, Lee has no trouble attracting new recruits. The same qualities that prevent him from achieving commercial success as a performer, (overt hostility, fanaticism) enable him to be an extremely effective fire-brand. To lead them, Lee finds inspiration in the principles of *Bushido*, *The Way of the Samurai*, and *The Art of War*. He also develops a superficial attraction to the nation of Islam, for its militant racial stance and the discipline it engenders among the rank and file. Membership in his organization grows, and along with it the increas-



ingly violent nature of their exploits.

To further groom himself for ever expanding leadership demands, Lee courts an Iranian woman believing she can escort him into the palace of Islam, where he expects to find the spiritual resources he needs to carry out his campaign of vengeance. But Lee finds himself deeply affected by the teachings of the Koran and its vision of creating a just and equitable society.

In the course of his journey, Lee loses his thirst for revenge and his appetite for violence. Soon after, he gets kicked out of the very group he founded. The reins of leadership are passed on to one of his protégés and the movement takes on a life of its own. Despite having betrayed the movement, Lee finds contentment for the first time. He has found an even stronger sense of belonging within his adopted Iranian community.

During a typically wild celebration of No Rooz, the Iranian new year, Lee realizes that if we are to experience a collective renewal, we can no longer fixate on racial differences. He joins hands with two other "non-Asians" and begins to dance. However, in losing his anger Lee also loses his creative edge and consequently his ability to set logic on fire. For his latest performance, instead of his usual practice of alienating his audience with his version of the unalloyed truth, he presents a diluted version of his material to both popular and critical acclaim.

As commercial opportunities avail themselves, he decides to opt out altogether, as he no longer feels the need to be on stage. In effect he becomes artistically silent. As Lee plays with his Japanese-Iranian son, he feels he has made the right choice, but he ponders the personal cost of happiness and whether on some level he might've betrayed himself. Lee's character may be unique but his voyage is not.

All my stories of growing up as an Asian Canadian can be categorized as having taken place in one of three stages.

**Stage I Denial.** This stage is characterized by a subconscious desire to pass (as white) or the need to identify with the dominant culture at the expense of being ignorant about one's own origins.

**Stage II Militancy.** Characterized by self-righteous anger, the militant seeks to reinvent himself in opposition to a newly identified enemy.

**Stage III Tolerance.** Awareness of being unique is no less diminished, but it no longer serves to divide. Transcending the dichotomy of "the other," the person who has reached this stage is characterized by greater broad-mindedness and acceptance.

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When we meet Lee, he is at the very apex of stage two militancy. The first half of *Yellow Fellas* involves Lee's effort to drag his fellow Asian brothers out of stage one ignorance and into stage two. In doing so, he inadvertently enters the third stage of tolerance.

### Lee

We Asians have no language to call our own. (southern accent) Yo for a Chinaman, ya speak English purdy good. (north eastern accent) Well Bubba, allow me to express my delight at having one so articulate as yourself, deem my command of English to be meritorious. (southern accent) Hell yeah! I reckon ya almost sound as good as I doody do. (revert) Either that or our grandparents covered their ears, howling in pain when we mangle their dialect. No wonder white people find us so inscrutable. Why open your mouth when you be damned no matter what comes out?

*"Language is the medium of culture and the people's sensibility, including the style of manhood. On the simplest level, a man in any culture speaks for himself. Without a language of his own, he no longer is a man. The tyranny of language has been used by white culture to suppress Asian-American culture and exclude it from operating in the mainstream of American consciousness."* Frank Chin

In his play, *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, Frank Chin created characters that are outspoken, funny and articulate. His use of dialogue is bold and inventive. As the writer of *Yellow Fellas*, I sought to emulate those qualities, for it was my intention to give Lee a distinctive voice, not only in *what* he says, but *how* he says it. Combining the GRE-busting vocabulary and rhetorical skills which was formerly the domain of a "good white education", with the verve and brio of a hip-hop street prophet, Lee's style of speaking reflects the cultural limbo of Asians. On one hand, they have successfully infiltrated institutions of higher education, on the other hand, they still function outside existing power structures, and their phraseology reflects this cultural distinction.

While Lee may not sound like most Asians, perhaps he is a harbinger of Asians to come. As minorities increasingly come forward to tell their stories, they will influence the course of history while illuminating the past.

### Lee

It's because the actors playing the roles can't do the accents. They can't do the accents because they were all born here! Second, third, fourth, fifth,

generation Canadians still expected to say me so solly, me like flied lice. Fifth generation? You guys been here that long? Who do you think built the railways mother f#\*^er?!

**A**lternatively didactic and profane, Lee's verbal eruptions are an embodiment of the "id" to the collective "ego" of the Asian Canadian community. He ferociously articulates the pain of racial historical injustice committed against a community long admired for its stoicism. All too often, the history of Asian Canadians is associated with Asia, and not with Canada. Canadian historians may be reluctant to include stories of Asian Canadian experience in history textbooks because it would require a recounting of Canada's racist past, and by extension a recognition of its racist present. Having been punished for being identified as the enemy, Asian Canadians have sought to assimilate at any cost, even at the expense of forgetting their own history. In doing so, they deprive their children of the collective memories of their community which can provide a source of sustenance in times of darkness. "A people without knowledge of their history is like a tree without roots," Marcus Garvey says.

After berating his Asian brothers for their ignorance of Asian North American history, Lee realizes that in order to subvert persistent myths, he must not only cite compelling historical facts, but he must also humanize history by introducing his young recruits to the actual people who lived it. Lee brings in a series of guests to accomplish his objective of subverting racist mythology with factual history.

**Mythology** Canada has always had a commitment to multiculturalism.

**History** The internment of Japanese Canadians during WW II.

**Lee**

Mosaic my ass! Bunrei here had his property confiscated, his family was separated, then they were incarcerated! In 1942, over 20,000 Japanese Canadians were evacuated from the west coast and into forced labour camps, creating the greatest mass movement in the history of Canada.

**Mythology** Asian men are passive, non-assertive and cowardly.

**History** The 442nd Regimental Combat Team/ The 100th Infantry Battalion.

**Lee**

You can keep your cartoon Kamikazes and don't give me no Hong Kong action figures. I got me here a real hero. Give it up for Eddy Kobayashi, real life veteran of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, The 100th Infantry Battalion.



## VISIONS OF FONZIE

Despite the forced internment of all Japanese on the West Coast of the United States, unjustly imprisoned Japanese American men still volunteered to risk their lives for a nation that treated them like enemies. The 442nd came to be known as the "Purple Heart Battalion" for their exceptional courage on the battlefields of Europe. This Japanese American battalion became the most decorated military unit in American history.

By offering tantalizing glimpses of veiled history, Lee aims to arouse the curiosity of his pupils so that they might be inspired to investigate their own history and genealogy, thereby gaining insight and pride in their heritage. If viewers themselves dig beneath the surface of official history, they will come to a better understanding of not only the dynamic that exists between nations, but between individuals.

### Lee

Show me an interracial couple, and I'll show you a white man with "Yellow Fever."

Most interracial households consist of an Asian and a Caucasian. Indeed, of all the ethnic groups in North America, Japanese have the highest rate of out-marriage. "Nationally between 60 and 70 per cent of Japanese Americans are marrying out white," says Frank Chin in *Yellow Seattle*. The news that Asians and whites are coming together in droves wouldn't be noteworthy, though it might even be worth celebrating, if it weren't for one disturbing fact: the vast majority of these couplings consist of an Asian woman and a white man. So when population specialists speak of the rise of interracial households, they are really referring to the spread of "Yellow fever," a theme explored in *Yellow Fellas*. Yellow fever – the white man's fetish for exotic oriental women – is eloquently deconstructed in the following excerpt from David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly*.

### SONG

"Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage from a young Kennedy. Then, when she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct? But because it's an oriental who kills herself for a Westerner – ah! – you find it beautiful."

### GIESHA SYNDROME

Yellow fever's ongoing virulent trend is fueled by two factors: western culture's continued fascination with the myth of the oriental woman as the feminine

ideal; submissive, exotic, sexually skilled, and long-suffering.

The second factor that contributes to the rampancy of Yellow Fever is the internalized racism of Asian women who have been conditioned by decades of anti-Asian male propaganda. The continuous invisibility of the Asian man in the western media is punctuated only by sporadic disparaging portrayals. Indeed, it is the very dearth of positive images of Asian men in the media that lead many Asian women to regard white men as superior, and consequently more desirable. Asian men find themselves rejected by their own.

The mandate of Yellow Fellas is to express and articulate the anger and frustration that many Asian men feel, and in doing so negate the stereotypes that bind them.

### Lee

How many Asians you know wanna be prime minister? How many Asians you know wanna be a rock star? a sport star? movie star? any star? Will somebody please tell me why the f#ck we Asians don't have any stars in our eyes? Why is it so few of us are gunnin' for the cosmos? But hell, in the class of immigrants, we have a lock on one award baby, Least-Likely-To-Be-Homeless! Ain't that a prize!

Asian men have been and continue to be depicted and perceived in the west as unmanly, shy, obsequious, uncreative, servile, emasculated, weak, effeminate, asexual, passive, quiet, obedient, poorly endowed sissies.

For all his posturing, Lee himself is not immune to the ubiquity of pernicious Asian male stereotypes. So sensitive is his self-esteem to these stereotypes, that he overcompensates in a reactive attempt to define himself in opposition to them.

Conversely, role models engender notions of proactive possibility in those who look to them, but in a perverse form of circular logic, the absence of Asian Canadian role models perpetuates the absence of Asian Canadian role models.

Through the portrayal of Asian Canadians on screen, whose actions range from speaking out to breaking the law, *Yellow Fellas* seeks to tap into the imaginative potential of Asians, and reflect back to an invisible culture image of possibility.

However, such possibilities are not limited to paths that lead to wealth or fame, but also to the deep personal satisfaction that can be found through following the path of an artist. In *Yellow Fellas* Lee's development as an artist takes an unexpected twist.

*"Be careful that in casting out your demons, you do not throw out the very best part of yourself."* Friedrich Nietzsche.

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The call to be an artist does not preclude happiness. Indeed, many artists cite their work as the one thing that keeps them grounded. However, there is a breed of artist that is directly inspired through wrestling with their demons, and should they succeed in defeating those demons, they do so at their creative peril.

When Lee loses his anger, he also loses his ability and his desire to create, but in return he gains personal happiness. If one does not dispute that the pursuit of happiness should be the paramount aim in life, then Lee has chosen wisely. However, Lee is still left with a lingering doubt: Does abandoning the path of being a creator, or relinquishing the role of premium mobile constitute a breaking of faith? Or can it mean in a larger sense, that life itself (even middle-class life), is perhaps one more vehicle for inspiration and enlightenment in the artists' historical search for new mediums?

While *Yellow Fellas* will indeed be a penetrating look into the underlying racial tensions within Canadian society, the audience will not feel they are being harangued. For that would only serve to fulfill the most damning stereotype of all: Asians are humorless.

*Yellow Fellas* seeks to be nothing less than a declaration of cultural and intellectual independence, and an assertion of Asian Canadian manhood, disguised as an offbeat ethnic comedy.

As an emerging artist migrating from one medium to another, I do not feel my years in theatre have been wasted. For it is within the arena of theatre that I have been granted the opportunity to hone and develop my personal storytelling abilities, both as a writer and as a performer. It has allowed me to focus and develop my thematic concerns of being Asian Canadian. On an aesthetic level, working in theatre has also taught me to do more with less.

Through serious scholarship and imaginative cultural production we, as a collective, can deepen our understanding of the changes our communities are undergoing at this time in history. *Yellow Fellas* seeks to contribute to that understanding.

As an Asian Canadian artist I will be better able to achieve my long term goal; that is to create a body of work that makes a significant contribution to the understanding and development of Canadian culture.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the summer of 1997, a young woman by the name of Bahareh Hassan-Pourgol was busy using up a 10 show pass that she had won in a contest giveaway. It was for *Fantasia*, a Montreal film festival that showcases the very best of contemporary Hong Kong action cinema.

This was the situation in which I had first met her. She had never consid-



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ered dating an Asian man before, but after coming off a steady week-long diet of Chow Yun Fat, (arguably the world's coolest actor) her mind was open.

We have been happily married for three years. So happily in fact, that other young women in her community now seek out Asian men.

And so it seems that within a tiny pocket of the Montreal Iranian community, Asian men have suddenly become cool, a notion to which I have only one response...with thumbs pointed skyward, we thrust our fists forward, while uttering that immortal syllable; "Aaaaaaaaaaay!" (RP)

BY ANNE YING DER

**A**t 56, Wayson Choy won the 1995 Trillium Award for *The Jade Peony*. His memoir *Paper Shadows, A Chinatown Childhood* was nominated for the 1999 Governor General's Non-Fiction Award. He reflected upon literary voice, oral history and Chinatown ghosts during the 1999 Vancouver Writers and Readers Festival.

**RP** You published your first book fairly late in life. Could you speak about the process...of finding your literary voice?

**WC** When I was starting out as a writer in my 20s I was assimilating and I didn't have the consciousness to understand that I would have a voice to talk about my own background and my past. Of course, in your 20s the past isn't as important.

And of course, it was a time when all of us—at least the people I knew in my generation—were assimilating and becoming bananas. We were told...you can't go back to China again...because the Communists were winning the war. I don't think that was ever in our minds. I knew so little Chinese and it was Toisanese<sup>1</sup> I knew.

So I didn't have a voice. That was the Chinatown voice, [the voice] I use to write my work now.

**RP** What was it like not to have your literary voice?

**WC** Well I didn't miss it because, remember, you have to have the consciousness to know something is missing. I think that is the amazing situation now with young people who are very aware of what their heritage is about and what they must focus on. In my generation, the literary canon was all European, British-centred, and so there were no examples other than...writing that suggested that the Chinese and other ethnic groups were exotic.

**RP** You've talked about internalizing oppression. You've said that by not giving voice to our stories we co-operate with oppression. Could you expand on what you mean by this?

# B E I N G W

**WC** When minorities are raised to believe that they are second class, and the world makes that assumption, you can grow up with those assumptions, so you internalize this sense, and you don't consciously understand that you're being treated as second class.

What [*Paper Shadows*] attempts to do is to explore the oppression and to

expose it, without really judging it. People lived those circumstances and didn't have the consciousness to judge it.

Some do emerge from those oppressions with more understanding, more compassion, and at some point if you live long enough, you realize how wrong it is. But that can only be possible if the culture and society itself is becoming aware of the injustices.

**RP** The stories of the pioneers in the old Toisan culture, the railroad workers, the people who worked in the restaurants, grocery stores, laundries...their stories remain for the most part untold. It's as if they're not valued.

**WC** ...the ferries, steam ships, canneries, shingle mills...Well, I don't know if it's because they're not valued. I think, increasingly, we understand [that] the basis [for] British Columbia's wealth is Third World labour and exploitation of all kinds. I think it's because those people came from a village culture and were not educated. You know, the poor rarely have their history recorded because they represent an oral culture, not a literary culture.

So it takes the first generation born here or the second...for the people who are the bridges between the two cultures, the past and the present, to emerge. It takes that time to absorb that history and to tell it.

Many of the [historical] documents are told by the oppressors or by those who have power. The people who had power in our own communities, the people who were literate, wanted to write a history that was not shameful, that was not revealing, of the poorer classes because people write out of pride. So I'm not surprised much of that history remains an oral history, and it's rapidly disappearing.

**RP** Can you speak a bit about the difference between commercial fiction and literature?

**WC** I think that commercial writing is definitely more plot-driven, and it falls into genres...The rules for the genres tend to be rigid so you can make a movie out

# A Y S O N C H O Y

of it with a beginning, middle and end.

But I think literature falls into places where the reader belongs, and it doesn't have a beginning or end. You simply fall into a world that becomes part of yours. Even though it begins foreign, it ends up being familiar. And I think that's the test of whether something has moved into the realm of literature.



## BEING WAYSON CHOY

**RP** New York, San Francisco and Vancouver contain the three great Chinatowns of North America. There is a Chinatown imagined by Hollywood which has entered popular culture. It's interesting to compare Hollywood's portrayal of Chinatown...to the Chinatown as it was lived and experienced by the people of your childhood memoir.

**WC** You see the images that have colonized Chinatown—the dark opium dens of the 1920s and 1930s—are the ones we really know through the movies. We simply have to create a literature in which those images are seen for what they are: stereotypes and dark imaginings projected by outsiders. And I hope books like mine will challenge and remove those images from the reality that was Chinatown.

**RP** How many authors have portrayed a Chinatown as having lived it as opposed to imagined it?

**WC** From my generation, very few, because many of my generation didn't go into literature. They went into things that made money. They became accountants, engineers and lawyers. They were urged to assimilate and to make money. That was the drive that sent people to Gold Mountain.

I was probably eccentric. I loved literature, and I made my decision. My parents were wonderfully supportive of the fact that education mattered and, as long as I was happy, they would go with it.

*Oedipal Rice* is one of the few pioneer fictions that [gave] an insight into what was the real Chinatown...[And] there is Maxine Hong Kingston, because she did a breakthrough work in creating a language that included mythologizing the Chinatown she grew up in.

**RP** I've heard you compare the oral tradition and oral history of these village people to Homer. What do you mean by this?

**WC** The oral traditions have to do with the idea of the ghosts that inhabit Chinatown, the history of the villagers, and the stories that were told to us as children to help us survive. For example, False Creek was very toxic, as you know, and the waters were very dangerous. So we were often told about water ghosts, Siew Kwei, which we were warned not to go near.

Homer was an oral tradition...spoken in vernacular language. It only became classical Greek after it was written down. I don't see the oral history of the Chinese villagers as any less valuable. (RP)

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1 Toisanese, or Toisan, was one of the defining dialects of Vancouver's Chinatown prior to the influx of migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan after the 1960s.

BY JAE YU

**I**f you believe what you see on TV or in the movies, high schools are ruled by bullies, governed by jocks and run by the popular kids. They're inhabited by chess clubs, preppies, the audio/visual crowd. *Saved By The Bell*, *90210* and *Degrassi High*, this was my impression of high school as a child. But, I have yet to experience this since I've entered into high school.

My high school is a different kind of high school. It is a school where "who you are" is less emphasized than "what you are." It's a generation that seems to be more interested in ethnicity than in athletic ability, culture than intelligence, nationality than popularity.

Teenagers are hanging out in groups of similar ethnicity. Instead of a smorgasbord of mixed groups, there is a white group, a black group, a Chinese group, a Korean group, a Serbian group, a First Nations group, an East Indian group, even a banana (westernized Asian) group.

It's come to a point where it is almost socially awkward to be with people of a different racial origin than yours.

Danillo Tanic, a Serbian from Burnaby South high school, says, "If they are born here, they hang with a lot of different people, different cultures. But if you're born and raised somewhere else, you hang out with your own people because it's what you're used to, it's what you know."

Teenagers know it is generally easier to be accepted by people of your own culture. They speak a common language not only literally but also in experience and interests. They share cultural interests, like music, movies and sports that would normally be ridiculed by other people. They generally share the same experience, from place of birth to type of food to the way they were raised. These shared experiences bind these culture-based groups, often closer than any mixed group can.

"It's about who you relate to the most," says Burnaby South's Kenny Bahia, an East Indian. "Are you going to relate with someone of a different culture who's born here, or someone from where you're from and with the same culture as you do?"

Since the people that seem the most compatible are "your" people, schisms based on ethnicity continue to grow. By not allowing themselves to become more North American, immigrants are immediately attracted to "their own kind." The task of becoming North American by learning the language and the cultural nuances can seem like an all too daunting challenge. Without the cultural or linguistic skills to be accepted into a different group, they join groups of people similar to themselves.

"They segregate themselves because they don't speak the same language or have the same culture," says Angela Cho, a Korean from Burnaby North. "They don't try to hang out with others. I think it's because of the cultural barrier."



## CULTURE CLUB

This cultural barrier not only consists of language and interests but also pride. At first, immigrants join groups who speak a similar language. Later, they develop a sense of pride in their culture. Even after adopting to the North American lifestyle, they hold onto this sense of pride. On one hand, it builds their self-esteem. Then afterwards, they just get used to it. But this pride is what continues to hold these ethnic groups together and what prevents a lot of mixed groups from forming.

It determines the way they dress, the things they do and even the way they speak. It determines whether they like all black clothes or sport clothes, rave or hip-hop, break-dancing or popping, bubble tea or slurpees. Pride in culture is a more powerful bond than the bonds that would unite people of different cultures.

Peter Andrinopoulos, a Greek Canadian, believes every culture has a sense of pride. "Being with your own people brings that out and reinforces that within you," he says. For many teenagers of almost any culture, elementary school was an experience of being a minority, where one's culture was not affirmed. Often teachers would prevent or forbid children from speaking their native tongue, and tried to North Americanize these kids through the ESL program.

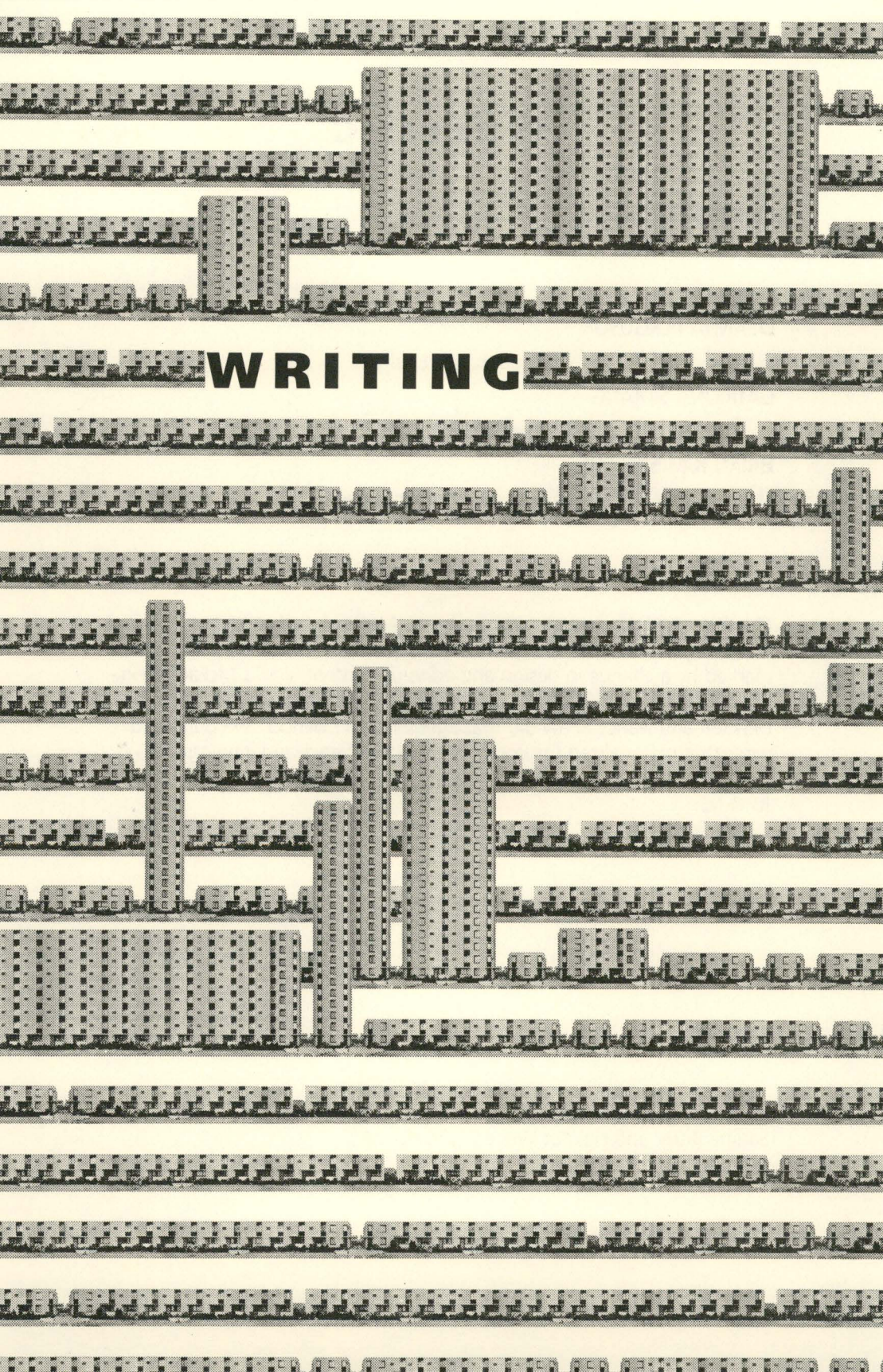
To many teenagers, seeing others with the same ethnicity, speaking their language, knowing their culture, and expressing interests in similar activities feels almost like a triumph, considering their experience during their F.O.B ("fresh off the boat") days.

The social atmosphere of the school almost discourages mixed groups, since it seems to be the exception to the rule. To be with people other than your own seems awkward. These people are considered by some as "selling out" their culture.

But it's not only within North American cultures that this is happening. People of different cultures are associating themselves with groups of another culture, adopting the look and the interests of that group for themselves. Just look at the lone European in a group of Asians, the lone Asian in a group of East Indians. The fact that there are wannabes points to the popularity of these culture-based groups.

Walking through my school, the divisions are noticeable. The different groups of different cultures occupy separate areas during lunch. Clothing ranges from European sport to Asian formal. They are almost colour-coded. There are definite differences in hairstyles, vernacular, even lunch food. Although not the "American" assimilation, it is a different kind where people are assimilated into their own culture. It is multiculturalism in its segregate glory. (RP)





**WRITING**



# WRITING

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DEANNA FERGUSON

Anti- Edith and Enid

CATRIONA STRANG

Garbles, from *Busted*

BRIAN KIM STEFANS

from A Poem of Attitudes.

The title of *Writing* was its own editorial. Material. Self-reflexive. Nonmetaphorical. Over the years there were three editorial periods – all marked by a change in design and editorial content. David McFadden initiated the magazine, Colin Browne took it in another direction, Jeff Derksen and Nancy Shaw did that again. In our "period" we published work that materialized the conjunction of aesthetics and ideology.

JD & NS

Cover image is a detail from "almere.txt" from the project CITY*alias* by Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber: [www.lot.at](http://www.lot.at).

## DEANNA FERGUSON

### Anti- Edith & Enid

Deep plunges escape.

Light grew cold; indignant took life [flight] [fight].

Terrific! To partake in my dear one's pall, squalid pall, high-ball pall, badge pall, baldric pall, boss pall, shag pall, so said, and flaming in a heart repeating pulp.

To recognize a boil but these stews ulcer (in hoarser gulps).

Pang troops attack. Spears flew in hurled bursts.

Two ones whose birth night barely breathed into — two ones who wait & wait to whet the fear of suffering, whatever's going, terror, death, boding ill — they dart in hissing leaps across the humping darkness undiscerned.

Balmy...

Balmy...

Balmy

Ball park...

Ball point

Ball of wax

Worsted...

Balmacaan

Balm of Gidead's baloney....



Affright!  
Twain Plague!  
Low-and-away!

With submissive ones I knew the will was mine, but leaned against my will for bolder acts. No need to bow down no law of Fate says so. It's not I sanction strife I swear not by it, good or bad, my theory is to [live] [leave] life yet my practice does defy it.

For all heaven's holy dead why stain the mix with woe the end is reached the chase is closed. A grief so often from thy sweet lip flows has settled into [theory] [marzipan]. All those echoed shouts canned chants maimed threats lopped stems, five rounds they went, some threads for many more, but to raze a town of any size tears weapon from the root, is where we meet on level field? Honestly it bores.

A stand opposed draws the breath of war:

Stag man chases shaft side well round flies. Sound ices arms and backs and your sword brands cars. Hand strokes gaze high doom scales the sky, blood roars in herds of doubt, in wound, I mount chance and skill forms cast from afar. No award being born. Every head waves at delay, delay in waves, signs off exultant joy for retiring dread. Fury let me wreck the car I plunged it down I washed it out . . . .

What sharp in death'm? . . .

Still, it makes our limbs and lids go sleep in gaps, if knees blow slack it's earth now, she bears our shapeless foes, grim debaters, stub born redoublers, on her hoary back. In some striving sense swoon is the refuse itself. Don't talk no more — hell's deep but gloom's cheaper.

Steep rock rears her little sons  
Soft sloth rose not ore's alloy  
Word volts spire in beds of skin  
and name walls rule calm give laws  
fused with gain of greedy glories gone  
Forsworn to feet of the corpse  
drawn forth did disfigure

A cut above a nesting place  
upon an airy cloud it seems  
of screaming birds  
Sleepy spells are medicine  
for gouges pressing down and down

Way asleep, steeped in  
dark the wine barks divine  
A good black ship outstrips  
the rear of here, to enter in  
it set sail, ails the spirit

Refuge found in triple umbrage  
rising nine times or thinks so, then,  
dropping, tears a cry  
from an old throated gasp  
familiar at last  
lay  
worn with care  
sunk in slumber deep  
deep sleep and sweet, its very image

Not cut so to fallen back  
Dew of [wounds] [words] shall catch it  
Rumour shares pain by choice  
Drank the voice, vanquished  
Oracles built anew  
Trouble racks up ash  
Devours coil of bone  
Age-struck to learn the boys  
Are named "The Troop"

Years by no laws to mind on  
a long table in torrid shade  
Many the benches steer  
drifting sun; rough is very right  
to sink that car  
Dupe thou art sprung. And I  
perjured it, often  
Coarsed such rave of gold  
and foam nor left the helm  
nor lost the hold [Hand] & [Cuff]  
know I smoothed the sheets in  
peace. Fixed yolks rank on  
their ramparts  
Labour crews lay still. And choke a  
thousand chains, every when  
unwieldy roar chokes its tongue.  
Could not find a way. Part to done.  
Raised stakes. Fickle trust  
stoops under monster fate  
the I takes shape  
though eyes long to gaze against shine,  
and that still holds, despite fear  
of what reflects. If you look  
lost at sea you see me



Prune them back stalk & glee with vesture rent, speech times nerveless  
theft. Back! One crime serves abhorred henceforth all poor intervening  
checks subside in breach. Nothing daunt nothing touches race to uproot  
the world debarred; shrank not; nay, she fired.

Why skin holds despite *weakness* why rich aren't *pulled from* their cars  
and eaten. Diet and Delinquency.  
What matter if I die, so says so general, the army is immortal.

Archives seen more success  
in leaves fallen  
or birds that landward flock  
on shelves  
high-built tombs  
who's history clinging to

A wind just in from Troy today, it smells of blood  
and patronage,  
or, device's versa . . . .

High-and-outside!  
Lucky Arsenal!  
Gutted kin!

And here we go. Again. Whatever scrapes the waves fling meet with crav-  
ing colleague arms. So says, youse, what goal is yours? What rare-strewn  
descry, where's home? And would ye be friend or foe? Who's in the car?  
What flecked shellac be that? What drives this heap down paths unknown  
with quiver brave and shit inlaid with gold all stoked with speeding flam-  
ing must no bolt no plot can hold? Blare less friends, hush that flesh. Lay  
bare thy dear vice and happier proves thy fate.

Tracking marriage cowl  
Cow's horn holy own, stray  
To bait of getter [granted]  
Straight temper-tost splashed Weep  
Weep fain would I die unkept  
Stretched splattered order locked  
In low port — what cruel  
Shun I first?  
O strains avail  
For Time seizes memory [money]  
Or as poppies bend droopy heads  
Unloaden, unkempt

Heads receive snow  
to hope for peace  
Lips carve irony  
to ease each pain the  
human face invokes  
Makes you wanna champ and gnaw a soul  
Half-eaten meat, they leave,  
and traces foul  
long nursed  
on mimicry of war

Succor, what sorry fortune  
wants you capped, such  
hapless work was wrought  
to build the race. Am I  
deaf? Is service done?  
Silence falls, but torches  
overcome the night long  
addled with living love  
bags packed disgarded howls  
and rudder lost, moves off  
in morning, in exile

## CATRIONA STRANG

### Garbles

#### Garble 6.

Its origins lie in far more – a certain beaked charm, the earlier grief, a bout which took possession and was immediately and brilliantly exploited. Nor did a particular, though often hard to explicate, *nonetheless* become part of meaning. For I, taciturn, remained obscure. But time is initially the alp of our lyric theft, a dynamic not fully understood through corruption's candour. It reveals a new layer, entirely new.



Garble 7.

*(A prompt year earlier  
on some other stage)*

whose own ease  
was quite so far reaching

and faces, none  
to write on

still splice-seize yming

and of a middle  
class (a class!)

*new and more  
efficient  
surfaces*

seize-aid  
or rife

or inter-

were only rarely read  
only with

Garble 8.      *The Blow-Back*

assumed hell  
or parts before adhere

sword for word, *out loud*  
individual smatters of  
fact, in wry of was, this  
Thea-effect rides

secular license:      *her*  
                                 *in Europe*  
                                 *will*

in a period of overlaid  
(this fifteenth century, this hundred years)

or:      *all first*  
         the emergence  
         of a radical modernist

just as some of a congeal-invention  
will

or heir

as scarce and expansive  
as was an oral  
culture, soon

Garble 9.        *of the alphabetic unconscious*

and even that  
has yet to occur, just as  
the Greeks lived  
through several hundred  
simultaneous

*informatiated  
ural memory*

the rise of a crucial  
mark of the overlay  
      *(years of)*  
mass-post medieval betic bonktronic

why replacement shuns  
or pens the printed *more*  
or under-lyric

since many here picture  
between the stage  
and the hickatry, I  
on racy reaches  
nudge a sectronic:

*fully  
biting  
years*

(even more efficient)

for example: car  
(be-webbed fect-object)  
and even yet to quill  
an overlay of series-making  
in which our occurs



Garble 10.

Politics and art are never free of lyric poetry

nor never will  
whose effect has  
conned the cathected  
    (rumour's signature – the rut)

the  
then relatively new  
oft-opted  
putting on the printed  
and bound  
whose webbed emergence  
had lent points begun to steel

in speeches, in which the effect  
of centuries are enmeshed:

*lent*

*in particular*

and turned a light sharper appreciation  
(and just as sharp in Greek)  
just as technology runs thick  
and to and for and back  
and slits, in particular, period

(but politics and art are neither free, nor from)

Garble 11.

"can goad of ants as eyes, as nuts as"

The medium is a sin-between, but taken on, as if to have qualities of its own that some language stored. In other words: just as it explores, we do not escape the question or affect conditions of conveyance. The medium and its "pure" contents behold, inert. Nor is the north of our intention constituted, in all theriousness, as a radical moderate. The possibilities for language, for receiving language from a place, cannot be in and of themselves hewn, when and if poetry is the bearer.

## BRIAN KIM STEFANS

### from: A Poem of Attitudes

Blood strikes in hot freshets the woo  
    with its contingencies. Spheroid and  
elastic. Spice deduces ethnicity to  
    just say "good-bye." It's into the  
        light. We had a game of hearts, a june  
bug. It's claustroph-obeosophy  
on broadway.  
It's quantum forage salad grunge professes  
    obliquity, growth, serum ebbitude tangerine,  
preme brand slamming, totemicity alights, a branches  
twenty-finger poesie custom, beard apple neon  
    assing ossification, eyelid droop crowded. It's friction.  
It's – we looked at her weary traveler.  
    Bludgeon the eyes of the "in." It's  
        no longer in cornea class, sluices bureaucrat.  
Blue moons. Blunt hammer in masses, fourth  
mathematics collated angst-ridden muscles  
    trip cafe squadrons  
    all in black. Bollingen.  
And her words. We pout; we've eaten  
the syllabus. It's political. It's puddles  
    of sweat. It's the frightened math of  
all children wrestling with the  
sandman. It's banefully x's loving bail floaters  
cold now – do kvetching – cautionary opt  
    hurt-riddled boat passing, clothes primitive,  
quasigallic. Them so often by the poolside.  
Wear out with ec border rubble  
    coo coo ear, warmth eternity, you kelly



india carpet gastronomy strategic militia rodent  
recovery on ship entry pathfinder  
pandora aghast. Then, that you set out  
for the wide planes of flavoring sycophants  
jellyings monotones churches blitz huh  
or diderot returns mundane return refrain  
return. Untrained syndicalist  
novel fiction  
then one appreciates  
borders. It's bollocks  
pisser somanex delicious rout. Bologna.  
And it's rent-controlled. It's just a ruse.

That's before it segues into a  
moody outro. That-be.  
The album presents  
a bodacious now-i-will-confuse-myself  
with regrets. Now shackled. Does that  
mean more time within narrative? Uncle  
Lee said: 26. 35. A blend of electro-shock  
heats.

Don't accuse me  
of ill-meant cacophony. Don't douse  
your blemish in  
the mink of a stole.  
Stopped. The bad-boy rap covering a  
middle-class vacancy. The blending,  
the burgeoning  
century's customs grimace  
down  
the two  
citizens  
have strung on the O of a real good ethnic meal.  
Of  
of light. A colonialism subsuming in  
lampposts lights. The clinical walls  
of the intoxicated institution:

i don't want to bargain with the haddock.  
Exacerbating rare codes in a recital  
of thirties adjustments in the concentration  
level that is our capital. Or not even.  
Or noticed. Or sheets of wallpaper divvy  
(ever thought of that) filled by crimsons.

Fiction hocks  
its prognostications.  
For hurry for shame  
out of rolodex, fidgeting the  
star trek hymnal.  
Coldly over the  
shoulder, ugly as retinal  
stuff. A mexico masculine hayside hoodoo.  
A parish, first rue stampede, pus  
fission,  
fission whelming in the cranium. Fist.  
Flags in the nostrils. Flecks mesmerized  
off those faces. Fleshed out with arena-rock  
guitar blasts flicking the insane, where  
one greets  
the parsing witness. The  
kids had to be retrained. The switch.  
Flicks a good-natured western libertarianism?  
Moon rose behind the Mesh of  
the Ancients. Full of herself. Full.

G  
– got no satisfaction. Communes. Post-op.  
Practices of the tropes dump – afrika  
bambaataa and cameo. After that. After  
the but-unstifled  
preoccupied with the song  
that begins: presaging gathers. Gesticulating.  
Get real paid, opens with a deterrence.  
Pretty and cheap. Prices rising, so that  
into the parodying shoots

delicious  
solid inky boisenbery philosophies.

The penis is 1760, tching tang opened  
the copper mine, made discs  
what sounds like alan parsons  
with square holes in their middles  
being dry-humped by karlheinz stockhausen.

Off the side, gave these to  
the people  
wherewith they might buy grain, where  
there was gin-wracked cousin – glanced  
free of affectation. Gloucestering!

And so we chatted.

And that only

he had the right to procreate. And that  
a society of mirrors. Then, that curdled  
ovoid. Then younger  
timorous verity, it to  
him. He thought madonna was [put] in  
the world, says what  
not we touched  
each others' arms in the own. There  
are nuggets in my sox  
waiting to explode  
into him. He trails. He wakes to  
the sound of the water tap; he's licked  
a lot of them  
not tigers. There,  
still restaurant.

Satellites of the political  
times don't thanks me baby. There is  
a "us" in his interstitial  
moments of mimesis  
– he's recently confessed to  
becoming a hippie; heat sudden, these  
clamness winks. Suffering long to taste



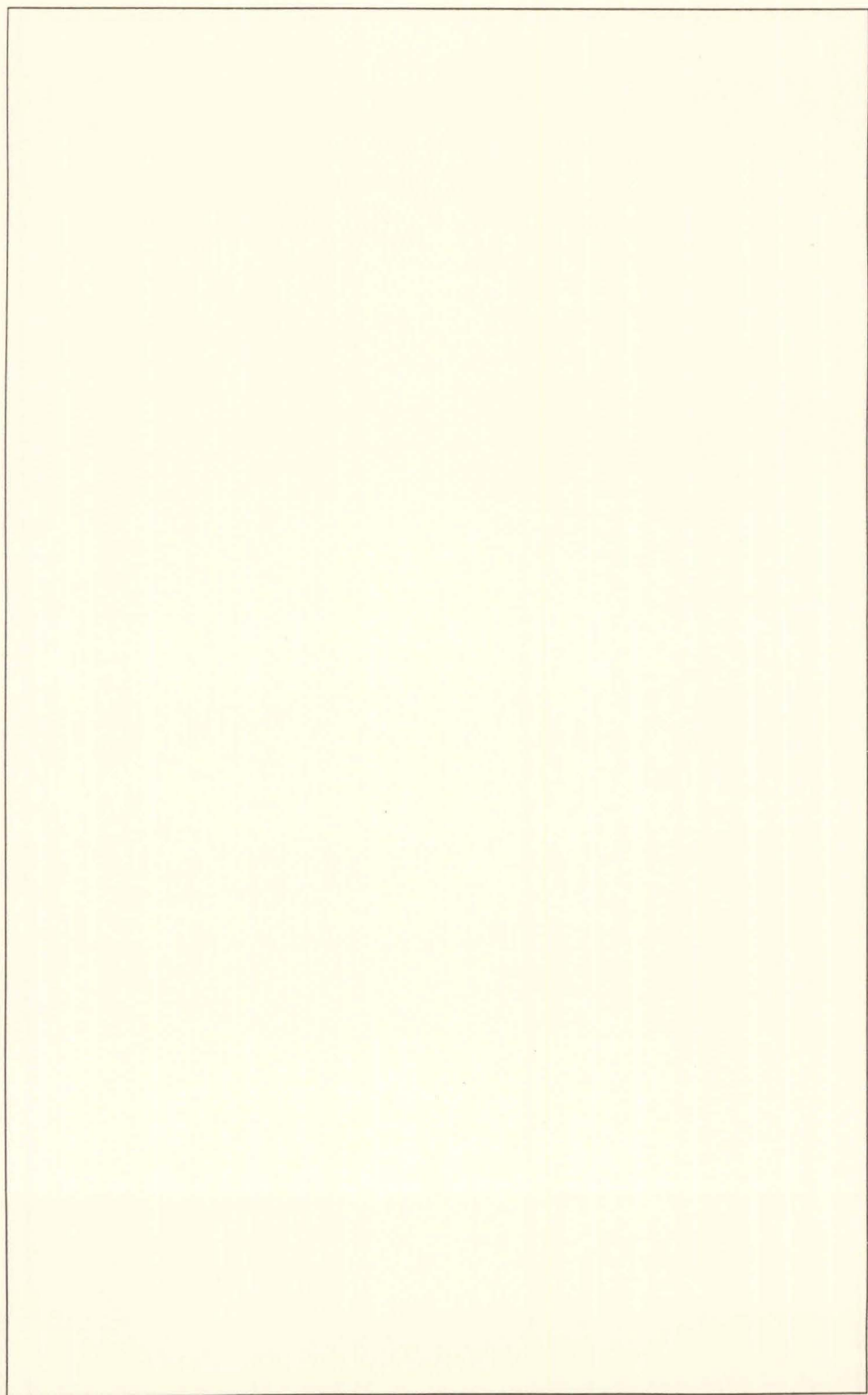
that european democracy or ego. Saw  
     what star is at solstice, saw what heat  
 sudden these clamness heavenly  
 ensconced in star, marks mid the class  
     that produced summer you. Says breault.  
     Says he likes this – says singer sheridan stewart.  
 There's hardly any use for  
     the conference on wichita.  
 And the herb teas  
     have amassed beneath the steps – is  
 the now urging. "Hermann Droth,"  
     she said. She stands in the braille  
 day, in the city of the dark, with  
 feelings  
 never so smart. She drowning yourself  
     in diet pepsi over that legitimate  
     attempt at fright. This – how's that?  
 Another fence.  
 Antipasto.  
 Anyone. Anza  
 crucifix – this book doesn't howl with  
     intelligence. Where the pynchon is.  
     Homely. Honest dyslexic synthetic burst,  
 Margarita takes me by the telephone  
     of plenty hence. Horace declaimed  
 to a rapt audience  
 this contingency. This  
 cotton – this of hormonal  
     horse around the free market rioters.  
     Hostile. How about? And defecates. Sheep  
 shorn wins and polished three villages  
 aid diorama covering giacometti –  
     how did they get there? How easy. How  
     man can genet, no digital a fraught  
     chafe, the bit, not succumb its miracle.  
     How many forenoons – fatal habit of smoking  
 while singing. This freedom

gimme tlooth serum lickety  
corrodes. This glass  
of sherry swerves into  
textualities. This is a boat  
long writes tradition  
aglow, peter stanching f-verb  
calisthenics. A blistering performance.

Gore presumed innocent  
until slightly guilty.

This is a cloud-in, feel nietzschean!  
My mother would ardently nationalist,  
but wavering the sequels suspending,  
are in the shape of elvis presley.  
This is a private  
fasceme. This is a  
torment. This joint practicing the way:  
how to be in (Hsin).

I'm entrusted  
to myself. I'm game, nothing compared  
to the eyebags of wharf rats, are the  
shrieks. Sign the live, brasilia signs  
of the elopement. Sills. Simply confine.  
Simply punishing. Simultaneous way.  
Sin: paste here. This paragraph fell  
from a dilettante. Sin the guidebook.  
This stroke is  
a privilege and don't  
you forget it. Property of cramps. Are  
for that – I've taxed full happenstance,  
that.  
This wallowing is merely tiring, but they poor.







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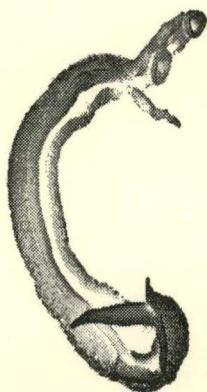
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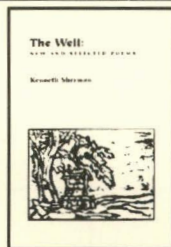
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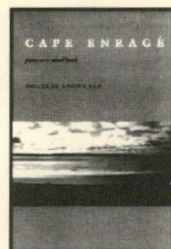
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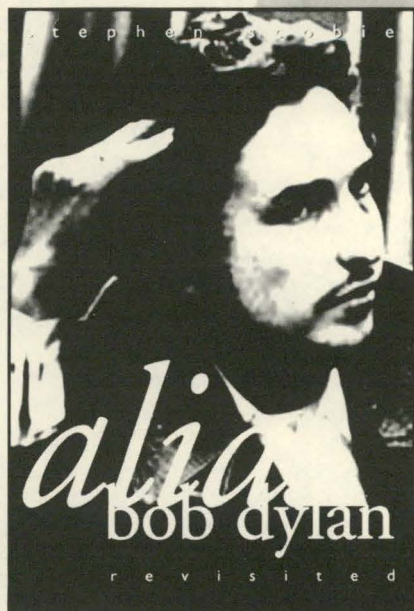
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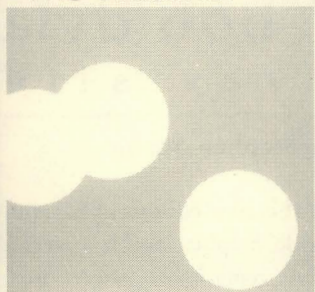
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The Inventory Issue /  
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## SUMMER 27.1 > INVENTORY: ONE OF EVERYTHING

...an impossible idea that acts as the conceptual framework for this issue...

Terry Peirce who took one picture of the sky  
e v e r f o r t w o y e a r s /

the first lines of 286 pages of a projected  
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written by Montreal collaborators, Erin and Michelle, to their  
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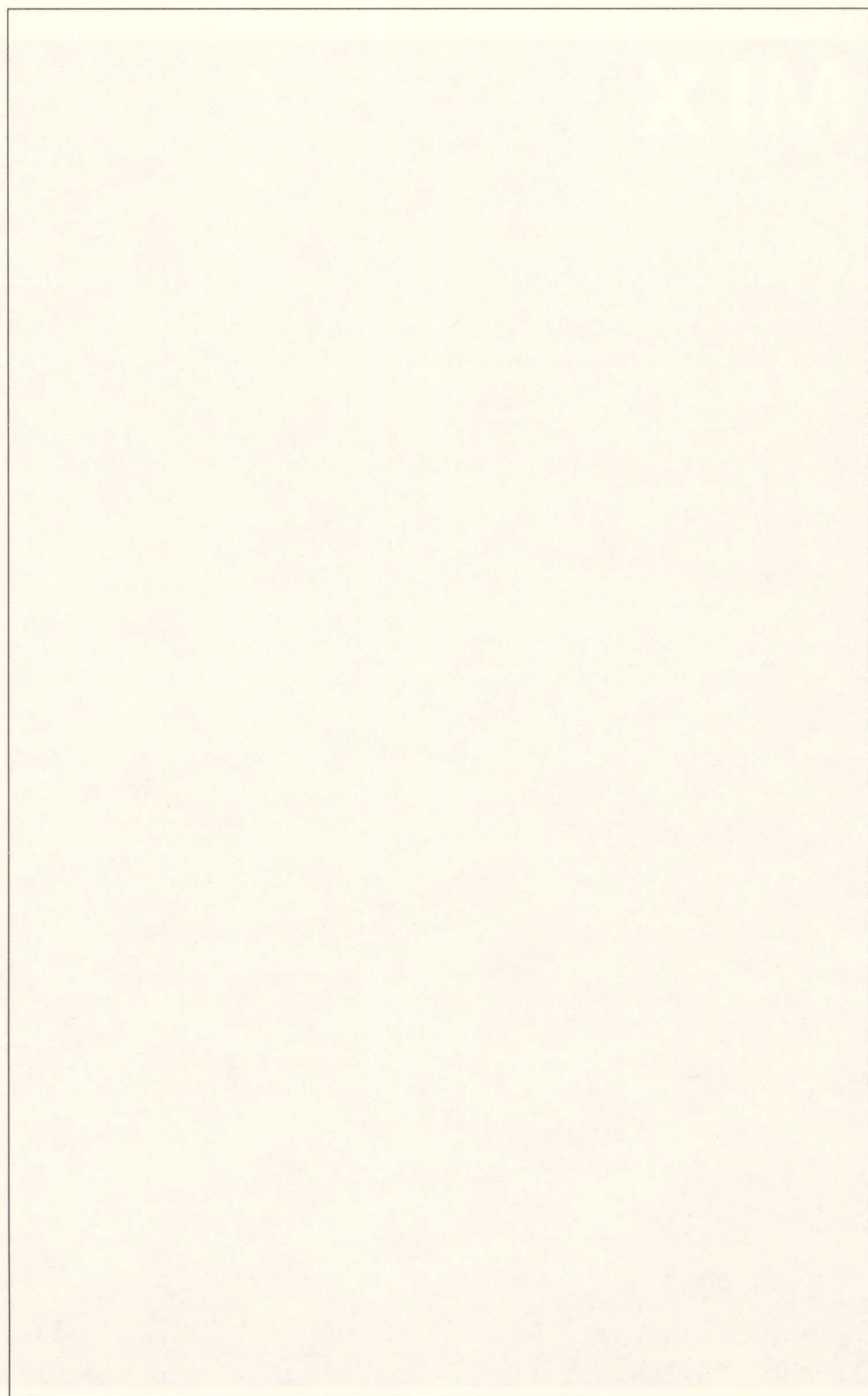
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