

August
Kleinzahler/
Interview

Mark Cochrane/
Poetry

Larry Campbell
& Chris Haddock/
Script

It meant moving between the bench and the Moviola with the track in order to physically cut and paste the sound, and it was easy to lose synch completely if the machine ran on a few frames past where you wanted it to stop.

— Dick Bellamy

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Still from *The Bitter Ash*, 1963 Dick Bellamy

Mark Cochrane / VERY PARTICULAR NOISE: AN INTERVIEW WITH AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

The Capilano Review hosted Guggenheim Award-Winning San Francisco poet August Kleinzahler as its Writer-in-Residence from March 5 to 11, 2003. Kleinzahler consulted with local writers on their manuscripts, gave a public reading, and delivered his talk "The Wood-thrush in the Burning Cineplex" as part of the Koerner Lecture Series at Capilano College.

A native of Jersey City, U.S.A., Kleinzahler received his BA in English from the University of Victoria, where he studied with the British poet Basil Bunting in 1971-72. From 1971-79 Kleinzahler lived primarily in Victoria and Montreal, and his early books, including an anthology he edited entitled *News and Weather: Seven Canadian Poets* (Brick Books, 1982), were published in Canada.

Kleinzahler's poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, and *The London Review of Books*. His first collection, *A Calendar of Airs*, appeared in 1978. Since then, he has published six others, including *Green Sees Things in Waves* (1998) and *The Strange Hours Travelers Keep* (2003), which was recently named the International winner of the 2004 Griffin Poetry Prize.

The Griffin Judges' Citation describes Kleinzahler as "a poet who inhabits the energies of urban life more fully than anyone currently writing."

This interview (unusually provocative) is the first in a series of interviews by local writers of Capilano College writers-in-residence. Subsequent issues will feature interviews with Vancouver writer and publisher Peter Quartermain and South African poet Ingrid de Kok.

THEORY OF THE EARTH AND ITS HISTORY

The theory of the earth and its history is a branch of geology which deals with the origin and development of the earth and its various parts. It is a science which seeks to explain the processes which have shaped the earth and its features, and to determine the time and sequence of these processes.

The theory of the earth and its history is based on the study of the earth's rocks and fossils, and on the principles of geology. It is a science which is constantly developing, as new discoveries are made and new theories are proposed. The theory of the earth and its history is a branch of geology which deals with the origin and development of the earth and its various parts.

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MC: When Jenny Penberthy introduced you, she provided a brief narrative, beginning with your discovery of *Briggflatts* and admiration for Bunting then moving to the events that resulted in your presence in his classroom. I wonder if you wouldn't mind re-telling that story.

AK: In brief, in the spring of 1970 I was living in the Village with my brother, and I went to the 8th Street bookstore one day, and I found the Fulcrum edition of *Briggflatts*. I knew who Bunting was from the Pound anthology *Confucius to Cummings*, and I was reading it in the bookstore. And I grabbed it up and I read it and I read it and I read it and I read it and I read it. It was everything I . . .

MC: . . . wanted in poetry, you've said. Can you be more particular? What were the features of Bunting's work that produced that response in you, that sense of discovery?

AK: Well, certainly the rhythmical variety, its very vigorous dancelike measures, the concentration of particulars . . .

MC: Peter Quartermain talks about consonant clustering in his close readings of Bunting.

AK: Well, he's really one of the best commentators. I'm not alone in wishing he'd done more, and not just on Bunting. With Peter Makin he's the most intelligent commentator about Bunting. And Bunting was interested in different kinds of consonant patterning: the Anglo-Saxon for one, and the Welsh *cynghanedd* for another. Anyhow, I was living in the Village and I was much infatuated with Bunting, and circumstances propelled me back to university. I'd picked up an application at UVic the year before, when I'd passed through Victoria on my way to camp up on Miracle Beach near Campbell River, and I'd had a falling out with my parents and I was a kid and everything was a big mess, so I got up at five o'clock in the morning and grabbed my rucksack and hitchhiked from New Jersey to

BC, and when I got to Victoria the fellow teaching contemporary poetry told me there was a visiting English poet that I probably wouldn't know by the name of Basil Bunting, and it was just one these extraordinarily fortuitous and wonderful conjunctions.

MC: How old were you the year you actually enrolled, then?

AK: I was twenty-one. I would have turned twenty-two that December.

MC: So I don't suppose that a twenty-one-year-old undergraduate student can strike up much of collegial relationship with an older poet. Did you know him well, or was it more of a remote, classroom-based thing?

AK: It was classroom. No, I mean, he had no interest in anything I had to say — or the few others among us who didn't drop out of the class. But we adored him, those of us who didn't drop. He was living in a little bungalow down by the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and we moved the writing class down there because it was such a small class. The other class, the survey course in 20th-century poetry, met up at the school. It was called "Problems in Contemporary Poetry," which was probably the fashion in the 1970s. And then there was the creative writing class. So, no, we weren't buddies, but I thought he was the beginning and the end. And subsequently I went to visit him in England and stayed with him for a few days.

MC: These were not, I understand, in general terms, happy or satisfying years for him, the ones he spent in Vancouver and Victoria.

AK: No. Well, I think he liked Vancouver. I think he liked UBC quite a bit and made some friends. Quartermain and others. I think he did have a good time at UBC. But, no, he had a miserable time at the University of Victoria, and the faculty there helped make it miserable. Bunting was very much resented. These were provincial bigshots who had to deal with

the greatest living poet in the English language. Although Basil certainly didn't have that profile then, in retrospect, he was. He was man of great dignity and *gravitas* and stature, so you can imagine how these characters reacted to having him in their midst.

MC: He was overlooked to some extent in the UK as well.

AK: Yes, he was their greatest poet. Probably of the century. And he worked under very dire circumstances on his return from Persia after the Second World War. He had very menial, unpleasant jobs.

MC: Can you trace his impact? Can you think of particular lines, phrasings, poems, strategies that you know represent your participation in a Bunting tradition?

AK: Well, I come out of the Pound/Williams tradition and Bunting very much comes out of the Pound tradition, colored by many other traditions — earlier English traditions, Persian, French, Italian (Dante), and his vast reading. I could never sound like Basil, because that's a very particular noise he's making.

MC: Did he read for students at UVic from his own work, or did he play the teacher?

AK: He never read from his own work. His survey course consisted of him reading from the poets in the course. It began with Hopkins and Hardy and continued up to the Americans, moderns. I think the youngest poet at the end would have been Tom Pickard. But he just read. And that made everybody in the course very unhappy because they wanted to share their opinions about all these things. But he was reading almost the entirety of the *Cantos*, MacDiarmid's long poems, David Jones's two great long poems, *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathémata*; Zukofsky, Niedecker, Williams, Marianne Moore. Nothing of Stevens, who didn't interest him, or Crane, whom he detested. And he was a great reader. I was extraordinarily lucky. But this was deeply resented, this method of teaching, by both the English Department and . . . well, there wasn't a creative

writing department then, not exactly. They were trying to get one going. There was no excuse for one; there never is, really.

MC: Do you want to say more about that — your view with regard to creative writing as an institutional discipline?

AK: It's a joke. It's an international joke. It's a money-maker for universities.

MC: Your account of Bunting's method reminds me of another interview in which you describe your approach with young writers in mentorship or workshop situations. Rather than focussing on the juvenilia of students you give them reading assignments. "Let's look at this," rather than, "Let's look at your work." And I know that approach has been taken to a certain extent in the creative writing initiative at this institution and some students hate it, or at least they rebel against it.

AK: Well, they hate it when I do it. After three weeks there's always a delegation of older students chosen by their peers to approach me and express the displeasure of the group. *Why aren't we talking about . . . me?* And that's the reason Basil alienated You know, we had a class of some dozen people or more, and there were only four of us left at the end.

MC: I find your poetry very difficult to place, and I think that speaks well. You mention Don McKay and Bringham, and I can see some affinities there. But you're also in the Norton *Postmodern American Poetry* anthology. What's postmodern about your work? Why are you in this anthology? Because you are certainly not Charles Bernstein, though I recognize this is an eclectic compilation. . . . I know you're not responsible for this word "postmodern," but does it mean anything to you, and does it mean anything to you to be in this anthology?

AK: I'm very delighted to be in it, because I meet youngsters in America and sometimes this is all they know of me. They know me through Paul Hoover's anthology, so I'll be eternally

grateful to Paul, who worked very hard on it. In some ways his was a thankless task, because editors purchase no shortage of enemies by their inclusions and exclusions. And I'm much disapproved of by the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E people, because I can actually generate some pleasure through language. But no, "postmodern" means nothing to me. The people in this anthology represent certain strands of late Modernism: the Pound/Williams tradition, the Surreal tradition, the Dada tradition. Much of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry is just a humorless riff on Surreal and Dada automatic writing and discontinuities.

MC: Are you summarizing the trajectories that flow through your work or through this anthology?

AK: Well, a little of both. There's not much of the extreme discontinuity of the Dada people in my writing, but certainly the New York writers, Schuyler and O'Hara, and the Pound/Williams tradition. And when I was young some of the Black Mountain writers were influential. I think in retrospect they're a lot less important than they seemed at the time, because they're very much out of Pound and Williams, and also filtered through the Objectivist tradition, which was given short shrift in the Donald Allen anthology. You know, poets like Oppen, Zukofsky, Rakosi, Niedecker.

MC: The Black Mountain influence on *Tish* and poets associated with UBC in the sixties — was that palpable at UVic in 1970-71?

AK: No. Not to me, anyhow . . . They struck me as not very interesting, a regional clique of derivative poets operating in something of a vacuum.

MC: Were you aware of Bowering or Wah or Marlatt when you were at UVic?

AK: Yeah, I knew the name Bowering, because he must have had seventy-eight books by then. I'm sure he has another seventy-eight. None of these people are at all interesting. They weren't

interesting then, to a twenty-one-year-old, and they're of no interest now, to a fifty-three-year-old. Nor should they be.

MC: George is now our poet laureate.

AK: I wouldn't feel badly about that. He's not more objectionable than, say, Billy Collins. He writes an accessible, not very threatening sort of poem, and seems to be able to churn them out at will.

MC: Where do you place yourself historically? In the ever-onward progression of Western verse, you're between whom and whom? And again, in Canadian terms, what about Don McKay? You mentioned his name on Sunday.

AK: I probably resemble Don McKay. I don't know what Don would think, or whatever the Canadians make of Don McKay's work. A kind of domestic surrealism, the extreme changeability in tone . . . I have a number of his books at home, and have turned a number of Americans onto him. And the other poet out here, when people ask me who's out there writing, I say Robert Bringhurst. And neither Don nor Bringhurst are hustlers. They don't get their stuff out there. You know, when they get up in the morning they're not scheming to amp up their careers.

MC: You know they were both shortlisted for the first Canadian Griffin Prize. But they lost to Anne Carson.

AK: I think Anne has written a lot of interesting, very original poetry. But for me, her real achievement is *Eros, the Bitter Sweet*, which I think is a classic of the genre, in any kind of writing. And I think that those three were nominated — who among them is the most deserving I'm not sure, and I'd probably keep that to myself — but you'd be very hard-pressed to get three more interesting, or more deserving, poets in Britain or the United States. And for a country of Canada's size, with its rotten incestuous literary world and its staggering cult of mediocrity, that three of these would surface I think is an indication of health at some level.

MC: Speaking of the Griffin Prize . . . at dinner we talked about Christian Bök's *Eunoia*, constraint-driven poetry, the OULIPO.

AK: I find that tradition mildly charming and extremely tedious.

MC: How would you distinguish it from L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, which you compared to magnetic fridge poetry?

AK: Oh, the OULIPO poetry involves far more skill and wit. My objection is that these are brilliant people devoting their resources — what's the line? — "in a waste of shame."

MC: That's a Shakespeare sonnet about . . . either cheap sex or masturbation, isn't it?

AK: Could well be! It is rather an onanistic aesthetic.

MC: Okay, if there is something missing in chance-driven or constraint-driven work, what is the alternative value of worldly observation and attentiveness to mood, feeling, the moment? What is it about the lyric that you consider more important than those demonstrations of —

AK: Evasiveness?

MC: No, of technical expertise. Bök, McCaffery — these works are *tours de force*, right?

AK: No, McCaffery's not. There's no technical or formal interest there whatsoever. Or in Bernstein either. I mean, there are puns and spoonerisms and fractured meanings. It's occasionally clever or amusing, but there's nothing of formal interest.

MC: When we attended Steve McCaffery's reading at the Kootenay School of Writing Friday evening, and he paused in the middle of a poem and apologized — he said, "I'm sorry, I read that out of sequence" — and he backed up and started again, you chuckled at that. You found it funny. Suggesting it would make no difference in what sequence his sentence units were delivered.

- AK: Yeah, I thought that was the best bit of the evening. Except when the band kicked in from upstairs with that heavy bass line. That also provided a little bit of counterpoint. I like accidental noise. I like the aleatory, but it has to be properly mixed.
- MC: In your talk, when you mentioned listening to background noise, in that cold library space I became aware of the buzz of the fluorescent lights, and I think that was contrary to your intentions. You were seeing that as a kind of bankrupt experiment, that kind of directioning, yet when you said it, I thought, "I can hear the lights."
- AK: No, I incorporate accident, particularly accidents of sound. In fact, in *Green Sees Things in Waves*, in the one called "Time Zones," I'm sitting in the tub and listening to something on the stereo and there are also sounds of birds and power tools. I love that. Cage — there's a lot of Cage, and some of it is formally very interesting, his *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano*, from the late forties, I believe — but this business of sitting in a room for six hours with the occasional tweetie bird: you know, it's a one-off deal. Be that as it may, that experiment has already been made. One can evaluate it as one likes, but to repeat that experiment is boring, which art is not allowed to be.
- MC: Implicit in that observation might be a claim that there is something in your work that has not been done to death. Something that is still vital. Can you characterize that?
- AK: I try to incorporate — well, not so much formal aleatory procedures, like throwing the *I Ching* . . . but it's certainly improvisational. This is the stuff McCaffery was talking about in his reading, and everybody thought this was really the cutting edge. But this is stuff that's nearly a hundred years old, this business of the resistance to closure and tying things up and development as one might encounter it in a mid-nineteenth-century sonata.

MC: Can you trace the influence of different musical forms — jazz particularly — on your work? Can you evidence that in your own reading of your work?

AK: I think I've just . . . *assimilated*. I've been listening to that music so long. There is a beat, but it's an irregular beat. I'll state the subject matter, the theme, at the top, and then there's a bridge, and then you do improvisational material on aspects of the theme — in jazz it would be on the chord structure — and then you return to the theme at the end. And all sorts of things happen in between.

MC: Of the many blasphemies I've heard you commit over the last few days, surely you know what you said about Leonard Cohen in the question period following your talk — well, you can be kicked out of the country for that. To suggest that Cohen's not our poet. Popular sentiment would hold that Cohen is our true laureate but he wouldn't take the job because he lives in L.A. You don't see Cohen as anything but a "folk singer"?

AK: He's a modestly good folk singer. "Famous Blue Raincoat" is his prize. It's very good. He's a shit poet. No one outside of Canada above the age of sixteen who's not mentally or culturally challenged reads the poetry of Leonard Cohen. No one. Or his novels. Perhaps in France.

MC: Okay then, what about ethnicity. How do you characterize your background?

AK: Well, I'm Jewish like Leonard Cohen.

MC: I think, in all I've read about you, there are very few explicit references to that fact. Do you see it as informing your work, your place in the world?

AK: Oh, very much. Everybody knows I'm Jewish. There's never any question. Whenever I read internationally, when they introduce me, they say, "He's Jewish." In Australia, New Zealand,

where it seems to be a larger issue. And they always want me to make a mother joke, because if you're Jewish you make jokes about your mother.

MC: But you're not a poet of identity, not in the nineties sense.

AK: I find it disgusting, those who merchandise their identity. I find it disgusting if they're Jewish, I find it disgusting if they're African-American, I find it disgusting without exception. And I think there's an awful lot of that out there. It's no longer fashionable to advertise one's Jewish ethnicity. It was in the fifties. Artists like Bernard Malamud. And it's been fashionable for Woody Allen to parade himself as the anti-Semitic caricature of the Jew. You know, he's made a fortune as the pathetic neurotic weasel cracking jokes — and some of the jokes are very funny. But Cohen I don't think has ever done that, whatever his virtues and liabilities. I don't think he's ever been a professional Jew. His name is Cohen. I mean, there are some people who think I'm the son of a Luftwaffe pilot, because my name is not obviously Jewish. They usually figure it out.

MC: I can think of poems by Cohen that allude to his Jewishness. But behind all this is a question I've been trying to reach. I wonder if your separateness from academia has allowed you to maintain your outspokenness, a willingness to make sweeping claims and pass judgment without overly decorous concern. You're making statements of a kind we're trained not to make. [AK laughs.] I notice as well that two poems included in the Hoover anthology seem to characterize academic personalities — "Autumnal Sketch" and "A Case in Point."

AK: Academia's just a reflection of the society, as are the politics of the poetry world. Everybody's very timid now; it's one of the marks of the time. I don't know what it's like in Canada, but in the States everybody's walking on eggshells. There's the sexual and ethnic politics bit, and the political correctness bit, and everybody's competing for these prizes and anxious about

who's going to be on the prize committees. One of the things I liked about some of the poets in the Donald Allen anthology was that they were subversive, and they were outside academia, and even those inside academia, like Kenneth Koch, who's not that interesting but was rather fun, you know, they were *making fun*. And everybody's humorless now and gutless. I think of someone like Jonathan Williams, who no one reads today. You know, he's funny, but when he talks about the institutionalized poetry world — and he's talking about it thirty years ago — it's just scathing and accurate and fun and smart. And nobody does this anymore. Everybody's afraid.

Incidentally, speaking of laureates, Jonathan Williams would be my choice for a lifetime appointment. We'd all be better off, and continually refreshed and amused. I would like it to be writ large that as a Diogenes crank character I cite Jonathan Williams as a precursor and model for truth-telling and, you know — saying the emperor has no clothes.

MC: In your introductory remarks to *Live from the Hong Kong Nile Club* you refer to the small-press world with "its ridiculous hierarchies, operators and social networks." Is that also the kind of exposé you're talking about?

AK: Yes, I'm equally disapproved of in the small-press world as I am in academia. Nobody says that about the small presses. The thing about the small-press world is, *Our nappies are cleaner*. It's an aesthetic. *We are not corrupted*. And I know these mother-fuckers. It's just an alternative universe.

MC: The hustling, the naked self-marketing, is even more naked in the poetry world, because there's less at stake. You see people who are just shamelessly self-promoting and there's not even any money in it. It's embarrassing.

AK: I tell you what else — and this'll sound like self-advertisement — but it's very discouraging for the young to see all these middle-aged whores and be encouraged to accept them as models. When I read in New York now, it's the young who are

there, not the people my age. I have that reputation. *You don't know what he's gonna say.* I'm a curiosity to them. A throwback of some kind to the pre-institutional world of poetry.

MC: Fashion depends on reversals, right? Your frankness now . . . what may have seemed backward becomes subversive. The shock value in some of the observations you make *depends* to a certain extent on that polite PC milieu.

AK: I will be utterly up front. If it were a different atmosphere, if there were dozens of other people doing it, I wouldn't bother. There is a lot that others do say. Everybody knows the creative writing world is a scandal and has been for forty years. The cesspool, the fraud. You can read these things in *Poetry Chicago*, you can read these things by people who've been heads of programs for thirty years. It's not to get rid of teaching writing, it's to get rid of the method and the institutional tooling that's at work now.

MC: Your work seems to have acquired a larger audience in the early nineties, but prior to that your publications were more obscure.

AK: Yes, I was part of that small-press world. I was signed up by FS&G and Faber in the mid-nineties.

MC: Do you think if you'd had more of a handle, if you were a gay poet or a L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet, you might have been marketable, might have attracted a certain kind of attention more quickly? Do you think that's why poets are drawn toward camps and categories — you know, brand name recognition — whereas when you write occasional poems that draw on diverse materials, you're harder to pin down and therefore not as moveable a product?

AK: I notice when I teach at places like Stanford or Iowa — the more highly established or flash the school, the more highly professionalized — the Asian students are marketing themselves as Asian and so forth. And you can imagine how

repulsive this is, you know, on a relatively sweet-faced twenty-five-year-old. A professional homosexual at twenty-five, a professional Chinese homosexual at twenty-five, a professional Latino. I've watched these kids get older and say, *This is how it is, I have to do it this way*. And I say, it is a good short-term career move, and everything's become very businesslike. That world's become very competitive. And let me say this: these young people are encouraged at these institutions to play that card. And encouraged in other corporate-like behaviors — aggressive if not vicious, certainly dishonest, morally suspect behaviors. In order to get ahead they are trained and encouraged by these adults. A vile practice.

MC: You said yesterday during your lecture that being in London Drugs struck you as somehow material for a poem. Then, this morning, the street scene outside your hotel struck you as worthy. So at the risk of reiterating a most ridiculous question, where do you get your ideas from? What makes your antennae quiver? And what of this notion of the poet as flâneur?

AK: Well, you caught me with my pants off this morning . . . with the Marine Club. I've had my eye on that. You know, architecturally it's interesting, a little place surrounded by vacant lots. It's rather mysterious. What is the Marine Club? I actually found out. Speaking to a Canadian friend the other day in New York, he told me it was a bar of sorts. But I thought it was maybe an old sailors' VFW. Do you call them VFW's? Veterans' halls? Where veterans go to drink and hang out and play Scrabble or whatever. But I thought it was that kind of place. And it was rather mysterious sitting there, and then the neighborhood's rather odd, because it's got these new commercial structures, and then these small domestic structures like the hotel. I have to look at something for a while to get a feel about it. And, you know, I like to see it in different kinds of weather, at different times of day — staggering home at twelve-thirty with a couple of drinks in me, or looking at it in the morning in the rain.

MC: You've spoken elsewhere about your father's collection of antiques, and this idea that to understand an aesthetic object, to appreciate it fully, one needs to see it many times, over a prolonged period of time, in different lights . . .

AK: Yes, different frames of mind. You know, when you're walking home from your girlfriend's, when you're in the dumps, when you're distracted.

MC: Is that what you want to produce in your own poems, verbal artifacts that are durable that way, that are worth coming at, and will look different somehow, next time?

AK: Sure, I aspire to that. I would imagine most artists do. And I think it's worth aspiring to. I like to think I'm not producing disposable art. Inevitably one does, on occasion.

MC: There's a kind of poem that strikes one as light, offhand, inconsequential. You think when you read the poem, okay, I don't need to read that again. But you might read it again a year later and take the same superficial pleasure from it. Is that not a value?

AK: It's a kind of poem. James Schuyler comes to mind. Some of his things seem very offhand. But when he's on — and by nature he's a poet of touch — he's got a perfect touch. There doesn't seem to be very much there, but I would maintain people will be reading that in two hundred years. And that has to do with the design and the depth of observation. It doesn't have to be built like a fortress, or have a lot of bells and whistles. It can be very light. But it has to be done properly, like a stroke you get in Chinese and Japanese painting, a calligraphic kind of stroke denoting a tree or this or that, and it's just right for all eternity. How did that person do that? Well, it wasn't luck.

But I want to go back to the Marine Club. So I'm walking back and forth, and I have my eye on the Marine Club. I don't want to go in there for a beer — it looks a little grim for a beer — but I've had my eye on that Marine Club. You know, the rain. I saw a sign yesterday: We're gonna be filming here, please

excuse the camera, etc. Forgot all about it. But when I walked out earlier this morning to get a cup of coffee, they had their 18,000K helium lights going. They had this drab little club in the pouring-down rain flooded with light. Lots going on in the street. There was the earthmover in the empty lot next door, there was a PG&E crew right in front of the hotel —

MC: What does that mean, “PG&E”? That’s Bay talk, isn’t it?

AK: It’s your Hydro. You had the Hydro people out there. And there was a bit of mystery in it. There were a couple people milling around the Marine Club, but there it was, with these very serious guys. You know how these people from the TV places are; they’re all big shots. And the light was extraordinary.

And I like walking into London Drugs off the rainy street. It’s very bright and full of stuff. And then walking back out into the drab Vancouver downtown. The Vancouver downtown is indescribably bleak. It is really a place in my imagination.

MC: You’re not a confessional poet. There’s a subjectivity to your work, but you’re usually in a world. Often in other people’s worlds. What is it about the cityscape?

AK: I’m very much interested in what William Corbett, the poet from Boston and a dear friend, calls “city-nature.” I use that term in a poem in my next book. But, you know, it’s what I’m talking about with the light, with the Marine Club — also with London Drugs. You have the natural light. You’re moving between kinds of light, between kinds of weather. Then you get a strange, surreal cameo of the Marine Club in TV light in the middle of the rain. So, almost invariably, there’s city-nature interacting with urban detail.

MC: Are you a nature poet of the urban?

AK: I don’t think that would be unfair. That would be the other way to look at it. I like to look into a pet store, from outside. One of the quotes about the flâneurs is — they call themselves “botanists of the asphalt.”

MC: I love your poem "Poetics": "I have loved the air outside Shop-Rite Liquor" I don't know if you stand by it as a statement of poetics. And this is not a recent poem.

AK: No, it's an oldie, but I stand by it. Corbett has a country place in Vermont which he writes about, and he lives in Boston's South End, and a lot of his poems are site-specific. But he talks about city-nature. You know, plant in the window: city-nature. The trees and the sky interacting with the architecture. Architecture interacting with snow or sky. For instance, taking the 239 to Capilano College in North Vancouver the other day, going up a relatively nondescript highway, with cherry trees in bloom, and signage and the other cars, and the domestic and commercial architecture. But it's snowing. It's snowing on the blossoms. Now this sort of subject matter, the snow on the blossoms, would not be uncommon in Japanese poetry. But if I were to take up the subject — and I hadn't spent enough time on that strip of highway; I hadn't been looking at it like I was looking at the Marine Club, which I may or may not write about — I would probably have the blossoms and the snow, but I'd also have the Safeway and the traffic lights. I like the traffic lights against the snow light. I enjoy layering all those kinds of things, and you can do that, in the city.

MC: Here's a quote for you: "[O]ne could almost say that parataxis is the technique most often used in innovative contemporary poetry. Poets such as August Kleinzahler and Lucie Brock-Broido have explored the use of parataxis in a manner that is often quite different from that employed by L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets or Surrealists."¹ Does the postmodern have something to do with jumpcutting? Moving between places without points of connection or logical transitions. How do you work to bring disparate elements together?

AK: Oh, they find their way to each other. It's improvisational.

MC: Do you think surprise is a primary value? I don't mean being shocked, I don't mean being scandalized. I mean word by word, line by line: *really didn't see that coming*.

AK: Can be. You know, it's not always good. Whitney Balliett calls jazz, among things, the sound of surprise. But if you're at a Mass for the Dead and a sixty-year-old lady runs in with an evergreen shrub sticking out of her behind, well, I wasn't expecting that one either. A surprise has to "work."

MC: What about your other writing in relation to your poetry? Are you a different person inside your head when you write your reviews and nonfiction?

AK: Yes, I'm in a different literary personality, and I'm accessing a different part of myself. Different, and in degree. With poetry I'm making the most demands.

MC: Do you worry about mutual contamination of voices? That the musicologist's voice, music reviewer's voice, critic's voice, will somehow get in the way of the other practice? You say that your work is fundamentally informed by your relationship to music, but many people find that a critical sensibility is sometimes hard to shake off.

AK: I think that's a good question. I separate it out. I tend to take two or three weeks to write ten or so reviews so I can get away from that head.

MC: And that covers you for a couple of months in your day job, then? You've got ten of them in the can.

AK: I've gotten as far ahead as almost a year. When I went to Berlin I didn't want to do any music columns. I certainly made notes. It's a very rich place for music, perhaps the richest in the world.

1. Guppy, Stephen. "Hypotaxis & Parataxis: Image-based and narrative-based poetry." 3 Feb. 2003 <<<http://web.mala.bc.ca/guppy/crew410/parataxis.htm>>>.

But I wanted my mind free to go where it wanted to go in an interesting place. Because if I'm doing the music thing I'm contextualizing things: "I can put that in a column, I can do that in column."

But I can turn it off. I did that the other day. They needed a few more pages for my book. And I was walking around with this poem in my head ["A History of Western Music: Chapter 13"]. I couldn't have done it from scratch if I didn't have it, but it was definitely a breach birth. But I had to shut every other system down. Here I was, and I faxed it to New York five minutes before the first student came in. And I was very pleased with myself. So I can do that, but as I say, I can't do it from scratch. The critical voice, the essay voice, is something again. They all have degrees of disposability. My music columns are quite disposable, chatty, funny.

MC: In a piece of prose meant for a wide readership, you're not going to get away with shifts in register and puns and fast-footed manoeuvres. There is an obligation in journalism to make it easy, step-by-step, so readers understand what the points of connection are, whereas your poetry depends on short-circuiting some of those connections. That seems to me a fundamentally different approach to organization.

AK: As a music writer I have a pretty stable personality. I'm unpredictable and a little bit naughty and funny. Having a stable personality or journalistic voice makes it easier; it also, ultimately, makes it less interesting, because much less is risked.

MC: It's a persona you adopt.

AK: The essays are much more demanding. I'm rather intimidated by where they will appear. I'm not intimidated about my poetry appearing anywhere, but I'm more self-conscious about my prose. It's a more newly developed skill.

MC: As is your role as a teacher, as writing "mentor"?

AK: When we were writing students with Bunting, we'd pass around mimeographed copies of our work. And he would just hold his head in his hands. He couldn't deal with it. He'd say, "You know, none of you is far enough along for me to say anything useful." And we thought, What do you mean *not far enough along*? We're grown-ups, we're twenty-some-odd years old. I mean, how far along does one need to be? But, in truth, quite a bit farther! I mean, that's how it is. These students, it's too early for them to be critiquing. They should be reading and writing indiscriminately.

MC: So what do you think of workshop-based creative writing programs that throw nineteen-year-olds together and have them examine one another's work and comment on it — the whole peer-driven method?

AK: No good. Peers don't know anything. And then they get into personal, competitive stuff. If anyone's at all interesting, they get strangled. The deal at that age is that you're supposed to take chances, you're supposed to try things out, you're supposed to fall on your ass. In any sort of peer-group interaction, people don't want to get caught out. No good. It's poison. It's absolute poison.

MC: Those of us who routinely teach first-year creative writing — you know, it's a job — might feel uncomfortable with not doing the hard labour of annotating student manuscripts, even if we secretly agree with you. It might be better for students and instructors to talk about what's out there, what's been done in the last hundred years.

AK: I haven't said anything about creative writing in print or our conversations that ninety-eight percent of people working in MFA departments would not agree to. It might take them three drinks or a degree of intimacy. But everybody knows it. If they don't know it, they're liars or fools.

MC: But to earn a paycheck and feel good about it, creative writing instructors may feel an obligation to provide detailed annotation far in excess of the value of the manuscript. Probably takes the instructor longer to write the comments than it took the student to dash off the poem, but that whole phony-baloney system requires that everyone go through the motions. Students want that kind of —

AK: *attention* —

MC: . . . attention, and parenting as well.

AK: Yes, well fuck 'em. Well, don't. I mean, that's against school policy. There are a number of problems now, and they're broadly educational problems. And I'm sure this doesn't exist in Canada, but this notion of the student as customer is destructive to everyone involved. The student cannot learn, the teacher cannot teach. It's a guarantee for nothing to happen. But listen, it's a gig. I've done it at all kinds of levels. I may well do it again. I'm doing it here, in a certain capacity.

MC: Are we all just being fraudulent and exploitative because the money's on offer, or is there a different way to do it?

AK: I think, insofar as one is asked to do it — pretty much compelled to do it in the current environment — one finds oneself working in a low, dishonest profession.

MC: This reminds me Some members of your audience on Sunday really wanted you to treat your art as, you know, the highest vocation and avocation available to the human spirit. But you seemed to describe poetry as both important and profoundly trivial as an activity.

AK: If I'm doing it right, I don't see why I should value my writing a poem any more than a potter making a pot, if we're both doing it in an interesting manner. Or any more enduring. You know, the pot, by nature, after it's fired, will last until someone drops it.

MC: It has utility.

AK: You can put pistachio nuts in it, yeah. But not always; there's ornamental pottery as well, and some of it's very beautiful. I mean, do I value poetry more than playing centerfield for the New York Yankees? I'd certainly rather have done the latter, if I had been blessed with those skills. But I would maintain that in both Canada and the U.S. good work is being done, some of which rises to the top, perhaps a greater proportion of it in Canada because it's a smaller country and you don't have the tens of thousands of hyper-ambitious creative writing students coming out of these vast Ponzi schemes with the phony awards and what not. But there are people out there, never many. And they tend by psychological make-up not to function in institutional frameworks. You know, they're painting houses and sweeping floors and teaching physics and driving buses. I'm not glamorizing the working classes; I've had enough labor jobs to know that you're useless at the end of the day. What a lot of people don't understand is that work is being done outside of the strange orbit of creative writing, and because creative writing controls everything in that world from top to bottom, the work of these people is not getting out there. Or they've given up trying to get it out there, because this system is offensive to them.

MC: Whitman is sometimes invoked as a basis of comparison for your work, and I remember a reference to the "democratic" nature of your writing. What could that mean?

AK: Most poetry now being written in the States dwells in a sort of rarified world. If you incorporate the world, the way novelists in English and French have been incorporating it since before 1900, you're considered a "street poet." I often get that rap. High and low, you know. You're just talking about the world. I'm not a creature of the street. I'm a nice middle-class boy.

MC: Your work sometimes shows how city-dwellers insulate themselves from the city, try to move through it without being touched by it, without really seeing it.

AK: I was talking with one of the students the other day. She was a visual arts student from rural BC. And she was talking about the inanimate city, the architecture and so forth, as having an animate life which controls her passage through the city, as though there are force fields around the buildings and asphalt. It seemed like an interesting way to conceive. For her it was like walking through the woods; everything was alive and interacting. I don't know if I think in those terms, but visually, it's like being in a movie. But we have to be selective. I don't remember what it was like forty or fifty years ago, but the information saturation now I think has dulled the sensory palate, if that's not too much a mixed metaphor, of city dwellers. They're thinking on the screen, or they're walking down the street talking on a cell phone. They've got too much information, they've got too much going on. I do enjoy walking around town the way people enjoy walking in the woods. You were talking about Don McKay listening to the birds — he has these extraordinary metaphors and this degree of inventiveness — well, I like the visual textures and the auditory textures of walking around town. Vancouver, with all this foregrounding — grim architecture, and often rough weather — really still is a frontier town, a cow town. You're very much aware, as you are in a number of big Canadian cities, that when you get twenty miles outside of town there's nothing between you and the Arctic

MC: Can you talk about metrics, rhythm, internal rhyme, and say, This is how my work is analogous to, or plays off, or is informed by — Monk, say? Could you make it that particular?

AK: The key in all of them — as I was writing in a poem about Monk the other day — is where the accents drop and where not. If you follow the bouncing ball, that's a major part of what's going on. The movement. I like asymmetrical rhythms.

I think I rhyme as often as formal poets do, but I rhyme at irregular intervals. There's certainly a lot of cross-rhyme and half-rhyme. There's no shortage of rhyme and repetition of sounds. I mean, you can't write a highly musical free verse, which I aspire to, without a repetition of sound elements. You know, rhythm is repetition.

MC: Is that something you associate with Bunting?

AK: You cannot have a better model than that; if I got anything from Basil it was that. Varying the rhythms without the losing of the overall flow. There are sound patterns. I get a tune in my head; there are things going on with stresses, with vowels and consonants. But I think like a musician, and I'm working in an improvisational way. These are patterns that I've assimilated, and I'm recombining them, not unconsciously but half-consciously. I forget which jazzman said, "There's no such thing as purely improvised music." You've got some idea of where you're going, and you've got a number of alternatives. You can let things flatten out. You can tighten them up.

MC: Can you talk about your method in writing the poem "52 Pick-up"? [This poem consists of two columns, or lists, of words and phrases, twenty-six in each column.]

AK: This is shameful, but I had a bunch of words that interested me. I make a list of words that I forget or that interest me or get my attention. I like having this list over my desk. I like the words. This is rather odd, but it won't be odd to another poet. So my first gig away was at Brown in Providence, Rhode Island. And I wasn't writing anything, so I typed up the words one day, and I showed the list to a friend, and I said, "Maybe I'll make a poem like this." Now her tastes were toward a more indeterminate kind of poetry than mine, which I think she found rather conventional. She said, "Oh, that would be good." But choosing among them and then reordering them . . . maybe that would work. I'd never done anything like that. And they were all of interest to me. So that's how I put it together. I just

felt my way along. What would go after “Luminoso e dolce”? What would go after “A bit of rough”? And they did form something: “Dingleberry / Esculent / Wing nut / Sforzato.” I mean, that’s not an accident, that’s not arbitrary. I realize that L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E people can work in a similar way and produce eight hundred pages.

MC: I like the suggestion that you’re going to do this thing *once*. In terms of marketing and becoming known as a certain kind of poet, if you write a book-length piece in a consistent form you’re far more likely to win awards and get noticed than if you publish a collection of one-off experiments.

AK: I was taken to task for “52 Pick-up.” People who like my work said, “I love this book, but I must tell you I was deeply distressed” You know, this was very irresponsible on my part. I hope the book is successful and so forth, but it’s what I tell students, and nobody quite believes me — *You’ve* gotta be enjoying it. It’s gotta be fun, you’ve gotta have an appetite for these things. And people say, You can’t do that. Well, I can do whatever the fuck I want. Except it has to be interesting at some level.

MC: You’ll often find readers expressing frustration at “inconsistency” within a volume or even within an author’s oeuvre.

AK: I’ve had that all my life. A young English poet-critic, very concerned, said to me, “You know, we don’t know. You’re doing this and you’re doing that. You’re very hard to” As if there were a lack of seriousness on my part. But, you know, I think range is a virtue. It might not be for everybody.

MC: What recent poets are you glad of? You know, glad that they walk, or recently walked, the earth?

AK: Well, we’ve talked about Bunting and Williams and Pound. Among the Objectivist poets, one not known very well is Charles Reznikoff. And Niedecker: I value her work very much; it’s not been an influence, but important to me. When I was

young Marianne Moore was certainly an influence. Let me tell you some contemporaries. I think the most interesting of the Irish poets is one not well known, Thomas McCarthy, who's a librarian in Cork, and who I discovered through a friend when I was in Dublin. A poet of *this* region much neglected — and who I think is a great American poet but a very quiet poet; she's probably also in her nineties — is Mary Barnard from Vancouver, Washington. She's better known for a translation of Sappho. There's a very good poet, a couple of years younger than me, in the Bay area named Jim Powell (*It Was Fever That Made the World*). There's a wonderful poet in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who's a house painter, named Robert VanderMolen. I think the most interesting poet in New York is a guy named Michael O'Brien. Canadians would be unfamiliar with these names, but might be able to find books out there, not without difficulty. I think the most interesting American poets, almost without exception, are the not well-known ones, because they function outside the creative writing sphere.

MC: Are they poets whose themes are not political in direct ways? You were speaking on Sunday about the relative impossibility of good political poetry. Anthology-making in the last twenty-plus years has been driven by politicized categories.

AK: Culture politics or gender politics or identity politics — yeah, there's nothing of interest in that realm.

MC: Can you say a little bit more about two terms you used on Sunday, "hybridity" and "pleasure"?

AK: These are two very different concerns. They're not connected. I think in any of the arts' development, there's always a mixture. There is nothing new. It's always a matter of hybridization of different materials. In music, after all the experiment of the earlier twentieth-century, there was neo-classicism, which was really a fascination with the neo-Baroque and those sorts of structures and methods of development. Joyce, and many of his generation, was enamored of classical models, but also treating

you weren't worried about self-flattery, as if this were somebody else's poem and you were liking it and trying to explain to a student what to admire, what would you notice?

AK: It's a bit — what would be the word — not *antic*, but a little bit surreal, making the prosaic post-industrial landscape into something stranger. And the lavender, which the smoke was It would be late afternoon, and pollution actually has a marvelous effect on light. "Tufts" — again, this isn't necessarily a word one associates with the exhaust, waste products, from a chimney.

MC: Do you apply a pastoral attitude to urban grit?

AK: I think probably, but it's a surreal pastoral. Yes, I probably do treat the city as pastoral. Here I'm self-consciously gushing about it. I'm in a good mood because I'm with a girlfriend. And the nature of the clouds, the shape of the clouds, did remind me of the bubbles in the comics that contain the words of the characters. If they did not I would not have used the image. I would say that this poet cares very much about being accurate, no matter how bizarre he gets.

MC: Do you think Williams is "accurate"? Is Williams the model?

AK: He's not accurate like this, but he is accurate. Bunting is accurate. I like writers who are accurate, whom you can trust. If you trust a poet's art, you can be willing to travel quite a ways with that. Certainly Bunting would have insisted on getting it right, but Basil would never have made this kind of picture. Imaginatively and temperamentally he just wasn't put together that way.

MC: I was thinking of Williams's broken bottle glass behind the hospital. Somehow transcribing the visible stuff of the world. When you say you write partly out of a Williams tradition, what does that mean to you as inheritance?

AK: It has to do with the use of the vernacular, the fragmentation of the iambic line, the treatment of what's historically low subject

matter, the interest in mining the immediate world for things that interest and move one.

MC: How has your method changed since you were twenty-one?

AK: I do compose more in my head now. I walk around with a poem for a few weeks. When I was younger I'd go through dozens and dozens of drafts on the page.

MC: Is something lost now that we don't have to type and retype? I noticed that your lecture came out of a typewriter, not a printer.

AK: Yeah, I write in longhand and then on a manual typewriter. I don't have a computer, I don't have an electric typewriter, I have a manual typewriter.

MC: It's a real shift when you're dealing with a computer file. There's no obligation to keypunch those same damn words again. Whereas if you retype something, you have to reinvest in every word.

AK: I don't think word-processing has improved things. It would be very self-serving if I said that manual typewriter is the way to go. But I couldn't work on a computer. At some point I may need to, but I have to start by hand. If it's gonna happen, I have to move it over to the typewriter, see how it lines up.

MC: You say you faxed a handwritten draft — or rather, a completed poem — to your publisher to be included in your next book.

AK: And they typed it up on the word-processor and called me and checked the spelling and punctuation, and it'll go in the book like that.

MC: What other teaching gigs or residencies have you got on the horizon?

AK: This exact sort of situation is unusual. I've just encountered it this year, and I've encountered it twice in a month. I was in

Chicago three weeks ago, at Northwestern, doing the same sort of thing: a reading, a lecture, and meeting with students for a week. My next gig's at the University of Maryland outside of D.C. in early April [2003]. If one's allowed to fly into D.C. in early April! And then I've got a gig at Dia in New York, which is really the best series in the country, run by Brighde Mullins. That's the last Saturday in May. And again I'm hoping that we have no war, except on our current government. But I enjoy travel. I wish people had been inviting me when I had a younger body, with more resilience. It's very exciting. It's exciting to be here again. It's one of the landscapes dearest to me.

The first of these is the fact that the majority of the population is now living in urban areas. This has led to a concentration of people in a few large cities, which has in turn led to a number of problems. One of the most serious is the lack of adequate housing. In many of these cities, the population has grown so rapidly that there is no room for everyone. This has led to the development of slums, which are often very poor and unsanitary. Another problem is the lack of adequate infrastructure. In many of these cities, the roads are very poor and the public transport system is often unreliable. This makes it difficult for people to get to work or school. A third problem is the lack of adequate services. In many of these cities, there is a shortage of schools, hospitals, and other public services. This makes it difficult for people to get the care and education they need. These are just some of the problems that have arisen from the concentration of people in a few large cities. It is clear that there is a need for a more balanced distribution of the population.

The second of these is the fact that the majority of the population is now living in rural areas. This has led to a number of problems. One of the most serious is the lack of adequate infrastructure. In many of these areas, the roads are very poor and the public transport system is often unreliable. This makes it difficult for people to get to work or school. Another problem is the lack of adequate services. In many of these areas, there is a shortage of schools, hospitals, and other public services. This makes it difficult for people to get the care and education they need. These are just some of the problems that have arisen from the concentration of people in a few large cities. It is clear that there is a need for a more balanced distribution of the population.

The third of these is the fact that the majority of the population is now living in coastal areas. This has led to a number of problems. One of the most serious is the lack of adequate infrastructure. In many of these areas, the roads are very poor and the public transport system is often unreliable. This makes it difficult for people to get to work or school. Another problem is the lack of adequate services. In many of these areas, there is a shortage of schools, hospitals, and other public services. This makes it difficult for people to get the care and education they need. These are just some of the problems that have arisen from the concentration of people in a few large cities. It is clear that there is a need for a more balanced distribution of the population.

The fourth of these is the fact that the majority of the population is now living in mountainous areas. This has led to a number of problems. One of the most serious is the lack of adequate infrastructure. In many of these areas, the roads are very poor and the public transport system is often unreliable. This makes it difficult for people to get to work or school. Another problem is the lack of adequate services. In many of these areas, there is a shortage of schools, hospitals, and other public services. This makes it difficult for people to get the care and education they need. These are just some of the problems that have arisen from the concentration of people in a few large cities. It is clear that there is a need for a more balanced distribution of the population.

The fifth of these is the fact that the majority of the population is now living in desert areas. This has led to a number of problems. One of the most serious is the lack of adequate infrastructure. In many of these areas, the roads are very poor and the public transport system is often unreliable. This makes it difficult for people to get to work or school. Another problem is the lack of adequate services. In many of these areas, there is a shortage of schools, hospitals, and other public services. This makes it difficult for people to get the care and education they need. These are just some of the problems that have arisen from the concentration of people in a few large cities. It is clear that there is a need for a more balanced distribution of the population.

Mark Cochrane /

FRIVOLOUS PARASOL: A TEST CASE

She was a fine and handsome girl — not handsomer than
some others, possibly — but her mobile peony mouth and
large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape.

— Thomas Hardy

1.

(TESS'S EXPULSION — THE ONE WE WISHED FOR — BLEEDS THROUGH THE
CEILING PLASTER)

Like every still-young lawyer, he wishes he were a poet.
And he drafts this rap on billable time:

It's / fiduciary. It's / tubular flints. It's / statutory.

It's / methotrexate. It's / brawny. It's / radio.

It's / inter vivos. It's / performative. It's / bile.

It's / statutory. It's / calcite. It's / radio.

Even now his wife says, It's the worst thing that has ever happened to
me, or ever will happen. And he says, Then you are fortunate
Darling, blessed, veritably *basted* with privilege, & you have atrophied
our lives with a nostalgia for phantoms.

It's / brokered. It's / nodular chalk. It's / pork.

It's / high-speed. It's / fuchsia. It's / brokered.

It's / misoprostol. It's / deflowered. It's / polymorphous.

It's / voidable. It's / tortious. It's / pork.

His day at work sounds like this, all copulae
& stand-alone word poems.

But some mornings he adds / a line
to his book-length catalogue piece, "The But-For Test":

We used to have a kite but it got stuck in a tree.
We used to have a Mr. Coffee but the carafe broke.
We used to have a batting cage but the ball machine started to
smoke.
We used to have a system but there were cheaters.
We used to have equity but there was coercion.
We used to have bites & hair-pulling, but it ended in bites &
hair-pulling.
We used to have a pure burning singularity — but it dribbled
away as cool entropy.
We used to have a kite but it got stuck in a tree.

It's their marriage, reduced to writing. Scientist & businessman Will
Harvey, in his 1972 paperback *How to Find and Fascinate a Mistress*,
observes: "the most interesting young women I've known have come
from behind the typewriter, the sales counter and the airline uniform."
Women's Liberation, Mr. Harvey teaches, has made it incumbent
upon men to draw their mistresses from all ranks & stations.

It's / lexical. It's / busted. It's / live-to-tape.
It's / prosthetic. It's / busted. It's / Utah.
It's / accomplished. It's / surplus. It's / surfeit.
It's / surfing. It's / rescinded. It's / rank.

Our protagonist remembers reading somewhere that a man seeks
affairs out of repetition compulsion, a yearning for the romance he
once shared with his wife. Because *it's platitudinous*: honeymoons
end.

2.

(LAND OF)

The girl, *la femme skatepunk*, is a temporary legal secretary at his firm — what some, especially in America, erroneously call a *paralegal* — & one afternoon he asks her to attend a hockey game with him, that night.

They arrange to have cocktails at a place renowned for its upscale Asian tapas, but there's a line-up so they move to a place called Honey. When she closes her lips on the frosted glass rim, a red face-off circle of lichee & cranberry & not vodka but gin, oh so coolly does the litigator renounce his life. Indeed he thaws to a very clarity, & like an executioner kills the power on his cell when his wife's number flashes Sourpuss apple-green in the display.

He says, It's my wife. (He cannot imagine what she wants; they've not spoken in weeks.)

His eyeballs follow the temp's chatting tongue as a chameleon might radar a locust. When she crosses her legs her Capri pants hitch up & he sees that her shins are unshaven. Recalls she is a student of something at a downtown campus, the one with the revolving restaurant. Or perhaps she is an actual law student. Can't remember. In the old lexicon *criminal conversation* is a phrase for extra-marital sex. Perhaps she is aware of this. Lexical infidelity, word crime, just talking about it.

Last night I kissed one boy & two girls on the dancefloor at the Peaches show, she says. In e-mails she reports on her adventures as

the Kissing Bandit. He considers it odd, such revelations to a superior, a co-worker. Harvey breaks down the genus of the willing "Working Girl" into insect subheadings (Honeybee, Ladybug, Hornet, Grasshopper), but surely his findings do not cover this sort of candour. What world is this, with its dancefloor kissing, each to each? "I do not think that they will sing to me." Murmurs this too thickly for its banality to rise above *Stan's* backbeat throb. *What?*

They are sitting at the window, at a small table, near the gateway to Chinatown: Honey is adjacent to another place, called Milk: both fall under the aegis of the Lotus: an historied architecture widely known in queer circles, he's heard.

3.

(QUEER CIRCLES)

Last winter, two days before Christmas, he saw this girl on the street outside a fine & glittering South Granville curry restaurant renowned for its Baby Lamb Popsicles. She was twirling a frilled parasol & hailing a cab with raindrops on her cheeks, looking like Nastassja Kinski in *Tess*. She was the girl behind the keyboard, she was Maiden Quicklaw with sodden lace, & he was driving his Lexus, snapping up scented sundries for his wife: Shea Butter with Lavender Oil & Arnica Extract Foot Cream from L'Occitane en Provence. You know.

He circled the block, & when he passed the restaurant again she was gone. He parked on a crescent of mansions festooned with seasonal light (*It's / particoloured*) & pressed his forehead to the steering wheel, waiting for a convulsion of longing at his sternum to pass.

Later, telling a buddy about it, he would use this phrase: "like a javelin through the breastplate." At home that night, however, he riffled through Hardy to find a description of Tess, & folded corners to passages he has read & reread since.

Like every lawyer, he wishes he were a literary man — if only there were money in it. (*Made his pile*, say the old dogs, singing the successes of other old dogs.) But at the dark table in Honey he can only coo, though gravely, You know I wrote a poem about you, once.

4.

(MILKMAID, WITH A SEAT IN THE REDS)

With the scalper she does all the talking, & he pays. The scalper, also enamoured of her face, cuts five bucks off her ticket (but not his) as a form of tribute. Inside the arena they stand in line for beer. The beer vendor, another gent with eyes, asks to see Tess's ID. The date of birth on her driver's license shows her to be twenty-four. These are surprising transactions. In the man's mind the vendor acquires the status of a witness to something.

At work she e-mails him photos of Canucks players. She says her favourites are B — , J — & L — , though she prefers photos of a younger L — in his first stint with the team. She has never dated a man older than thirty-seven, never eaten at Chartwell, never flown across the Atlantic.

From his office he can see the floating gas stations & seaplanes that pass like vespids. The SeaBus, squat as a Welsh badger, tough as a trilobite. Scar of The Cut, sharp as a ski's edge in sun. He thinks Neon White. On his desk a document reads, "Since the celebration of the marriage, the Defendant has committed adultery with S — E — C — on various and diverse occasions since in or about May 24, 20 — , and the Plaintiff verily believes..."

Verily. He e-mails her back (she is fifteen steps away, down a short hall): Do you have any nude shots — old ones of Pavel Bure, say? Or the famous one from the *Province*, with the fat callipers pinching nothing? (She is herself pudgless & muscly, like a snake.)

These are jokes. But when he calls CFUN, offering a false name, to complain that his would-be mistress will not take him seriously, & not only because she believes that he still lives with his wife, the on-air host scoffs at him for sending mixed messages.

It's / heteroglot. It's / ankle-length. It's / nippy.
It's / coccoliths. It's / taffeta. It's / curettage.
It's / indexed. It's / particoloured. It's / parapluie.
It's / nippy. It's / nanoliths. It's / contagion.

When they have found their seats, their shoulders touch. They drink beer from the same plastic cup. But when they park in the night-wet alley behind her apartment after the game he will watch her step out of the car & enter the building: safe. There will be no awkward pause in the front seat; he no longer knows how to make one, with a woman. Nine years have elapsed since he last crossed that particularly gendered membrane of air: two years prior to the *celebration*, seven years' fidelity of a sort (as the Court might *carve out exceptions*) thereafter. It will even be raining in the song on the radio.

Still, here in their prime seats, after every goal, every repelled rush that rouses the crowd to cheer, he turns & watches her mouth in the ice-white scoreboard celebrity light.

5.

(MIXED; OR, NOT A GIRL FROM BIRMINGHAM)

If he is tempted to call the *para*-frivolous, it is because he frustrates himself. Fucking men, however — that's cakewalk, that's absolution. Life with women he sees smeared with cash & contracts, patina of the mercantile. Murd'rous transaction, it cloy & terrifies, belongs to everyone else, gets on your fingers. But men together — hair sweat inadequacy all unsubject to the regime of commercial hygiene: these the law might deem *volunteers*. Outside market, outside shame. Law the site where such differences in degree become a difference in kind. Miasma crystallizes, diamond drill upon the flange of happening.

Everything he once learned he now sees as reversible, like a rectum. Sword & shield, crustacean & egg, van Gogh's shoes. A white glove that rises past the elbow. Like an embryo. A promise. Like time. Carved out, he & his wife split when he shaggy-dog-told how a certain dapper fellow had taken him home from the gym last Canada Day. As confessions go, it were a random sampling.

Girth

what kind of person keeps no lube, I'd said
the first time, so

the second time he was loaded
w/ hospitalities, two vintages of red

unbarged & breathing
on the patio table
for our viewing
the fireworks, &
prosciutto, grinning melon, a salad
of serrated
leaf & Magnums
in black wrappers, you're
kidding I said but later he

chuckled low & burgundy
when my edgy, unpracticed
teeth got in the way

& smiled again, nay
liquidly
& commando, when
maybe we both
really were too thick
to ever make it work

Later he tried to convince her the story was mere perversity, a fabrication: there was no meticulous short man, loved him two times, broad forehead, Japanese shuffle, subaltern (*Remember the production of M. Butterfly we saw that spring — before the honeymoon in England — well, obviously?*) As if she could forget. Or could now consider staying.

On their honeymoon her whole flesh had been cupped around the one candle of their daughter. They spent a month with her family in Kent, her mother pure *Ur*, pure carnal prototype — at seventy still

tall, horsy, robust, elegant — but her father a *bona fide* old man, red-faced, hunched, near-deaf, zipping his Peugeot along the narrow, sunken, hedged-in byways to Sussex (*This was once a Roman road*) with the little speakers blasting out BBC snippets of Wagner & Beethoven & twigs scratching along the glass of the side windows.

Look, there's Penshurst, where Sir Philip Sidney lived. Or the deer park at Knole, seat of Vita, storied in *Orlando*. And Monk's House & Sissinghurst: the whole fantastical Woolfian tour (*It's / picaresque*).

There are photos of this newly assembled quartet, two couples on the cliffs above the Channel at Beachy Head, the Seven Sisters, Birling Gap: his wife with her shoulders back, overbalanced by the belly bluff beneath her men's dress shirt, untucked white in the blaring of classical white sun white limestone white Anglo faces of puffy Aged P's & just there, in the Peugeot's boot, the ivory handle & lace trim of —

It's / ankle-length. It's / taffeta. It's / parapluie.

(On the radio, later, outside the paralegal's apartment: Dido, Queen of Carthage, lover of Aeneas: I want to thank you for giving me the best day of my life.)

His immersion in the real England of the books stunned him unto a sickness, & fallen blind into an afterdeath like Gloucester he spent days of fever in his in-laws' spare room, the one that used to belong to his wife's abusive older brother, rereading the leather-bound fictions (*It's / vermilion*) set in places he'd now seen. *And perhaps next week the West Country*. How he hated loving this family for what they had & were sharing, how they made him feel failed & powerless,

both spoilt & impoverished, by lavishing on him their silver graces & grape scissors (that engine of oppression), their sloe gin & cheese straws, their legs of mutton & fish pies, their Devon custard & *bon-bon dishes, scalloped*.

Incredibly, the opening paragraph of *Hinz v. Berry* — a judgment by Lord Denning, M.R., as he then was, *again* — contains the line, “It was bluebell time in Kent.” And indeed from his sickbed window that April, in his own state of nervous shock, he saw that every half-shaded bower on her parents’ grounds was carpeted in purplish-blue (*It’s / periwinkle*), & that the Green Belt otherwise shone with the white-yellow heads of daffodils swaying on their stalks like blown-glass vases.

When the fever broke, he applied to Law school.

I work in community broadcasting
just didn’t cut the mustard
in Sevenoaks.

Now, like every almost-young barrister or solicitor, he believes he is an aficionado of ironies. As in: the little affair he imagines would not be one, even if it were one. Lost in his own fact pattern. As in: he has worked up an anxiety over unveiling his marital break-up to the firm. Hence the paralegal maintains her scruples, & even denies, when the matter arises, that their date is a date.

(Her real lovers are anti-poverty activists, Seattle warriors, smartish skids with black hoodies & boards, cresting thirty. And Hastings for her is no seedy seaport, no flinty beach. It’s a street in her neighbourhood. Caste distinctions he can’t help making — embarrass him like reverse gear.

6.

(SHIFT)

In the weeks after the hockey game he will want to buy dresses for the paralegal, his paralegal *sous parapluie*, will want to shave her legs, slide her feet into pumps, & trophy her. He will recall dreamily everything he imbibed as an undergraduate in Women's Studies & none of it will dent the contours of impulse. He will want to shine her up like a new Krugerrand, lay down his platinum card for a little black shift, twenty bucks worth of fabric tailored to cost eight hundred, & see it slither limp as seaweed over her clavicles.

Every crush, he will muse, is about trying on someone else for size. Hardbodied & trash-femmy, sulky & dark around the eyes, she *could* wear a silky black shift. Is he troubled? When he holds her bony shoulder briefly, for show, beneath his broad palm as she bargains with the scalper, the *para-*, as specimen, reminds him of his seven-year-old daughter, the living one, the one whose room is now quiet, sepulchral, five nights per week.

His wife is full-figured, as they say, & sexy as all hell, he continues to believe.

It's / fungible. It's / romance. It's / capital.

It's / periwinkle. It's / uterine. It's / Dominion.

It's / severable. It's / endocrine. It's / seronegative.

It's / fungal. It's / articulate. It's / a loop.

7.

(PENTA)

Still, in the alley behind her apartment near Commercial we will find him sitting in his Lexus, kissing no one. Again we will find him parked, waiting for something, nothing, peering through the windshield in the rain. There is a loop below Beach Avenue where men sit with engines running, just like this, so he's heard.

(He contemplates here a walk in the Park
but still to kiss no one / no one / no one.
The wiper blades beat — five times in iambs —
& he drafts this rap on billable time:

It's / fetish. It's / contra. It's / fission.

It's / cannular. It's / writedown. It's / vermilion.

It's / hearsay. It's / pulchritude. It's / tangy.

It's / picaresque. It's / kaput. It's / fusion.

8.

(CHICKEN OR LAMB OR MONKEY OR PRAWN)

Aeons from Hever Castle, the autumn their daughter entered pre-school — also marked the incarnation of the Nons. Unpregnancy, “twinning quotes,” ghost citations. *Prawns* his wife called them, sea monkeys, the But-Fors whose septic memory voided their little Empire down. It seemed easy at the time (especially for him), a validation of the life they’d already made, from constitutional argument to narrative’s blood bacchanal, from *issue*, *heirs of their bodies*, to scalped exceptions: flares to snuff separate & solitary like comets like the gametes he’d showered upon her diaphragm, jellied swimcap, perforate umbrella, poxy latex, circles within hot circles.

The oblong white ceiling, with this scarlet blot in the midst,
had the appearance of a gigantic ace of hearts.

It was liberation — like being stabbed is a liberation — so clean the cutless incision. In the clinic he’d observed tatters, those meat metaphors, no larger than morsels he might pick from his teeth, as they billowed in mucus strands & saline slosh on the glass dish. And the high-pitched burnt albumen smell, blood/water/steel: a mnemonic jumpcut to Biology 11, that experiment with the incubator chicks, he & W.J.M., best friend from childhood now long dead, peeling apart one warm shell each day for three weeks. It had been a project, for marks, to chart the development from single red spot to pulsing web of arteries to fuzzy dinosaur fetus tearing its gossamer sac & limping its inches by wing-stump (*clinging to the last*) across a puddled desktop.

That woodgrain, he remembered, had been ballpoint-inscribed with the cursive hearts & plus-signs of some juvenile love.

9.

(FRUIT LOOP: A FLASHBACK)

The voice of Will Harvey chides the almost-young lawyer for his cowardice & lower intestinal cramping, his nervousness before this office girl, this surrogate daughter, this test case. He must, with his poem, communicate to her a command of his own fate, as Harvey advises. Yet should not superior station & the mid-Atlantic accent he acquired by osmosis — across the placenta of a decade's conversation — be sufficient? (Sometimes, when he thinks, it's in the plummy nasals of the in-laws. And whenever he dares ask a woman a question:

Are you ready to go, then?

There, that posh lilt. And the martini glasses are empty, & the game begins at *half seven*, three blocks distant.

When Alec d'Urberville holds a strawberry by the stem to Tess's mouth, she reaches to take the fruit in her own hand. But he insists, & parts her lips with the red glans. This gesture is repeated forever in the hell of straight sexual love, he will think, later, in the inebriate reemergence of his undergraduate self, every word in every tongue seeming for an instant to drip the lethal boring vomit of sociology. And yet —

He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face. This rape scene Hardy writes is unaccountably lovely & oblique, he will think, yes he will think this also, drinking brandy alone back at the house: But with whom do our sympathies lie? And what boldness in that dispatch from Polanski, freshly in exile, immortal here on video, vital & fearless in the masculine seventies!

Here is my poem, he says, when they are still in Honey. This is the poem I have written for you. Please forgive me, but it's in the third person, & rather slight, after Williams.

Convulsion of Longing at the Sternum

A late husband
circles the darkened market for
scented sundries to give his wife

Girl from the office
manifests on the corner
with rain on her cheek &
a frilled parasol
spins like a carousel's
canopy at her shoulder — She
is waving for taxis
after a dinner of fine
Indian with friends

as he parks on a spangled cul-de-sac of
row houses
festooned with light, impresses
his forehead to the wheel

: & waits it out.

10.

(BOTANICALS)

She ponders the poem for a moment. Then she says, Yes . . . slight,
& splashes Bombay Sapphire laughter into the air, mocking the man
in her way, it pops a self-hating spring in his diaphragm & wafts him
for a micro-second to a place near Ease, Ease which is glacial, which
is etched, which is blue.

LEMON PEEL

From Spain

LIQUORICE

From China

JUNIPER BERRIES

From Italy

The waiter smiles at them from the bar, & even now our counselor
(the pate, the thinning hair) yearns, could yearn, to see something
like a future — future frivolous — with this *woman*. He holds up two
fingers & the waiter nods, scooping ice into a silver shaker.

Lemon : melon. Peony lichee sloe.

Strawberries Cranberries Peaches.

Grasshopper. Sourpuss.

Milk Honey Lotus.

Plummy Baby

Lamb Popsicles:

GRAINS OF PARADISE

Incredibly, his wife's birthday, like that of Elizabeth II, falls on April the twenty-first. But then a date is just a date, a principled coincidence. *It was bluebell time in Kent.* (As he then was.) For *Glawr*.

It's / Blackacre. It's / Domesday. It's / easement.

It's / shovels. It's / rescinded. It's / rank.

It's / void. It's / voidable. It's / prostaglandin.

It's / ultra vires. It's / a local. It's / mine.

Back home, in the den of the empty house, the one he is keeping for himself, he will discover that the strawberries selected by d'Urberville belong to the variety British Queen. Someday, given the chance, he will fill his temp's little basket with them. He will heap upon her his worldliness, his prodigal bounty. Her bosom & hatbrim will hang heavy with roses, for a while. Hers, & then perhaps another's. Others.

Ace.

They throw back second crantinis; they spit out plump bitter berries. Coast Salish used these for something, no doubt, who knows, it was a town of emancipated Blacks. They emerge onto a street named Abbott, saltmarsh all tinsel & Kowloon now, his Ngland a cocktail that is also a salad, gingivitis mint, ragged clots, a rearguard action, a dead grey beach.

When he reads Hardy's phrase blue narcotic haze, he will use his new grape scissors to snip the tip from a fat Havana. He will light it, then stare into its blood-red burning, the spectrum of its ash, circles

within hot circles. (Cacophony, battle noise in his ears, also an experiment in colour: he watches each face-off in the aqua of her irises, her pink-rimmed whites, & the word Kiss gnaws on him with a lab rat's rusty teeth.)

The *para*-, she follows the action. Synaesthetic, said Dr. Whosit. Nicotine: for hypotaxis. Last Christmas, he received a whole box of these from the firm's most suspect client. Gentleman by the name of Sandbourne, Stan.

11.

(JUSTICE)

It's / lexical. It's / fiduciary. It's / joystick.
It's / livery. It's / suction. It's / sanguine.
It's / colourable. It's / therapeutic. It's / calcite.
It's / homicide. It's / haute cuisine. It's / estopped.

It's / capital. It's / blastular. It's / lip gloss.
It's / bailment. It's / proportional. It's / shift.
It's / void. It's / spirits. It's / rack & pinion.
It's / chattel. It's / unfettered. It's / rank.

It's / confusio. It's / intestate. It's / Enfalac.
It's / aspiration. It's / telephony. It's / pith.
It's / rapacious. It's / sampled. It's / booty call.
It's / Domesday. It's / Whiteacre. It's mine.

12.

(MINT TRIM: A MIDSUMMER EPILOGUE)

Julep's rank economy gets
bushed in the conjugal garden.

She returns to unbraid her trained her trellised climbers.

A patio table
stand-off. A Cinzano sun-shade. *Don't come in.*

Parataxis, or caffeine's somatic. Weedless
Man-maiden. This is my home now, this my
stale sprig. (But to younger guests of
serial acquaintance he gives Jack
welcome or mojitos
insofar as sour mash is the new
rum as rum
was the new gin, according
to *Van mag.*)

His daughter likewise visits according to terms of agreement.

In legal parlance you nega-
tive me. Call it non-
sequiturian
this catechism this live feed as
trimming-the-mint enjambs
with histamine serration. Makers
mark mark.

Swell then: hive me. (False cornice
the mint border
mint paper trim the mint cornice around me
then swell.

Every substance in the cosmos is laced with
not tarragon nor columbines not pinks pansies limes nor thyme but
traces of nuts, *trait d'union*: Hoffa. In the alternative, my
motherboard

has crabs; 'tis notwithstanding made so
Crabby so
concupiscent just so. (It mint nothing.)

O come off it: Have you forgotten
your corporeal vocabulary of scorn?
: either gonch or gotch
is an acceptable response.

Pants.
Bourbon labour. The rack
of tumblers we let
for that gazebo party: epochal. Till this I

never kissed Karen
Karen kissed Karen
kissed Karen kissed.

"Bachelors."

Speaks her blue-blood
taxonomy of "weeds" (his chicks). She
is digging up the garden, she is amputating
roots. Calls this work
Psyche, says he is no
Angel, his nature's name
superfluity.

(No, rather a voracious wound, dark
star of need, vampiric
maw:

M.J. — .

+

J.M. — .

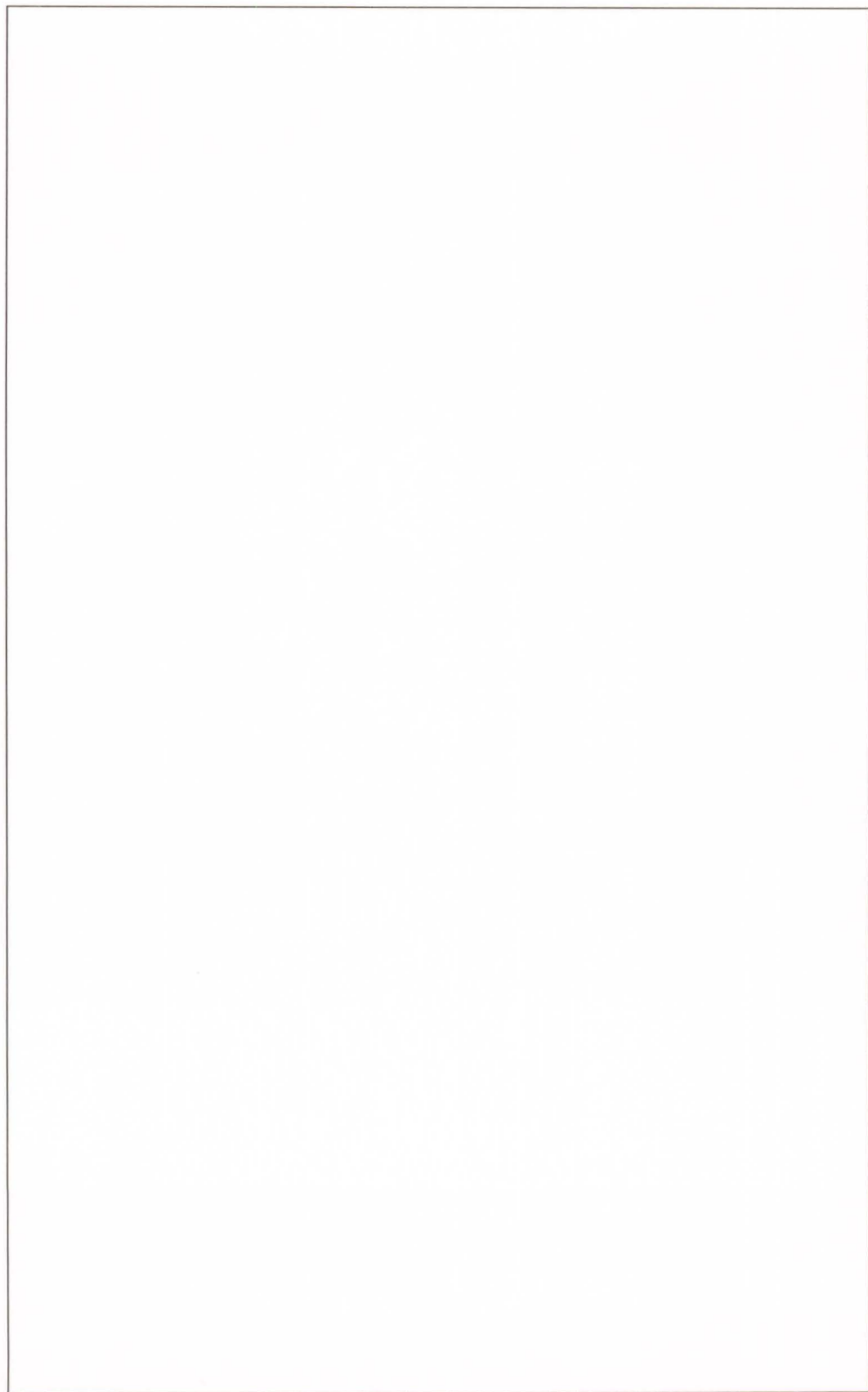
forever, in the grain, on little stumps, only in the midst of this

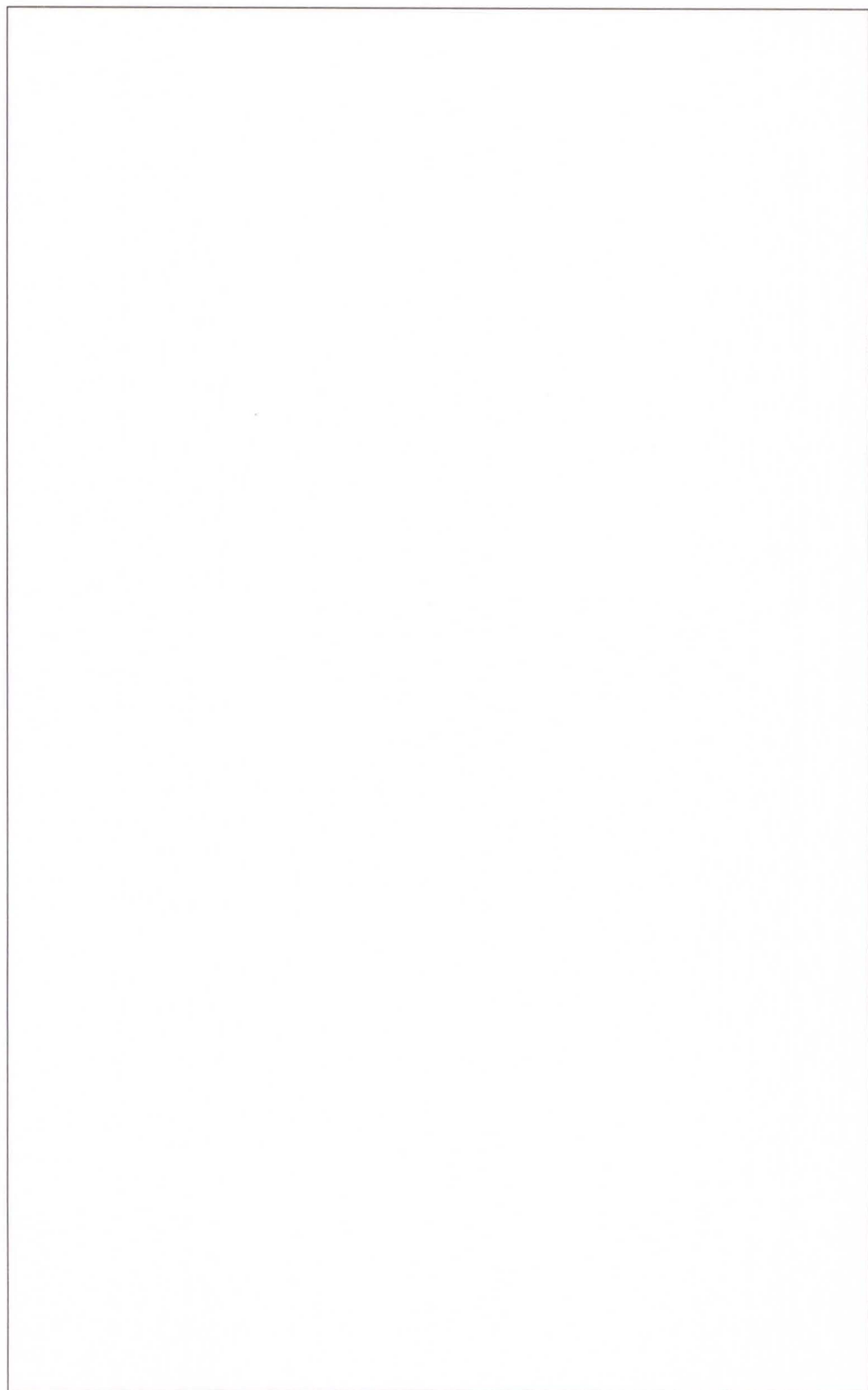
scarlet blot. Say goodbye then, darlings: hot centre to your inches,
years, the limping
journey you were born to take
apart, together. It would be sad. Would be sad & very wet. It would
be sad but for.

For giving me the best day —

You return
to pick hoe
to pick picked
green from the gappy teeth of our once Our
cedar lattice

& Kentish
accents
rattle
the milkless glass bottles of Avalon.

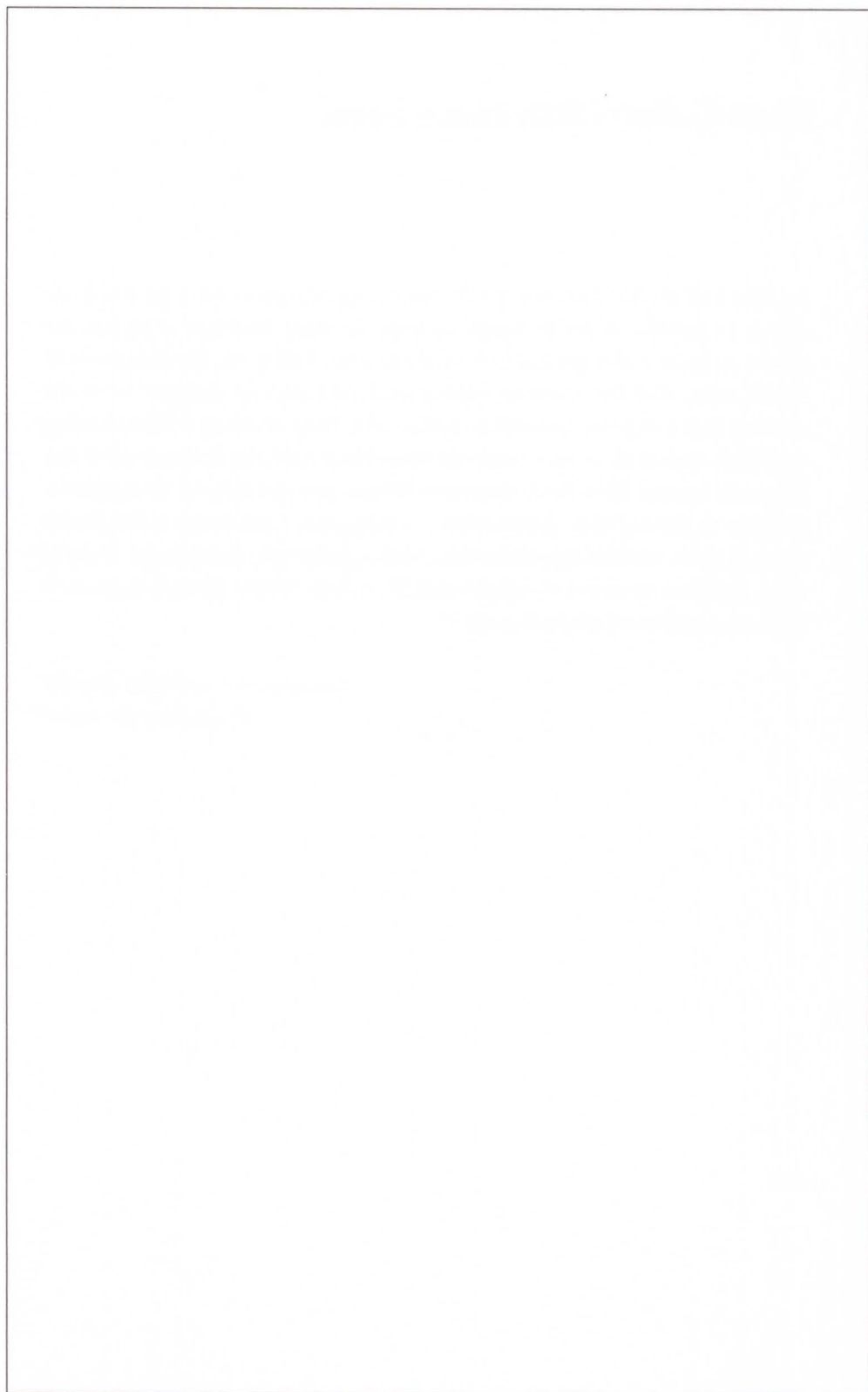


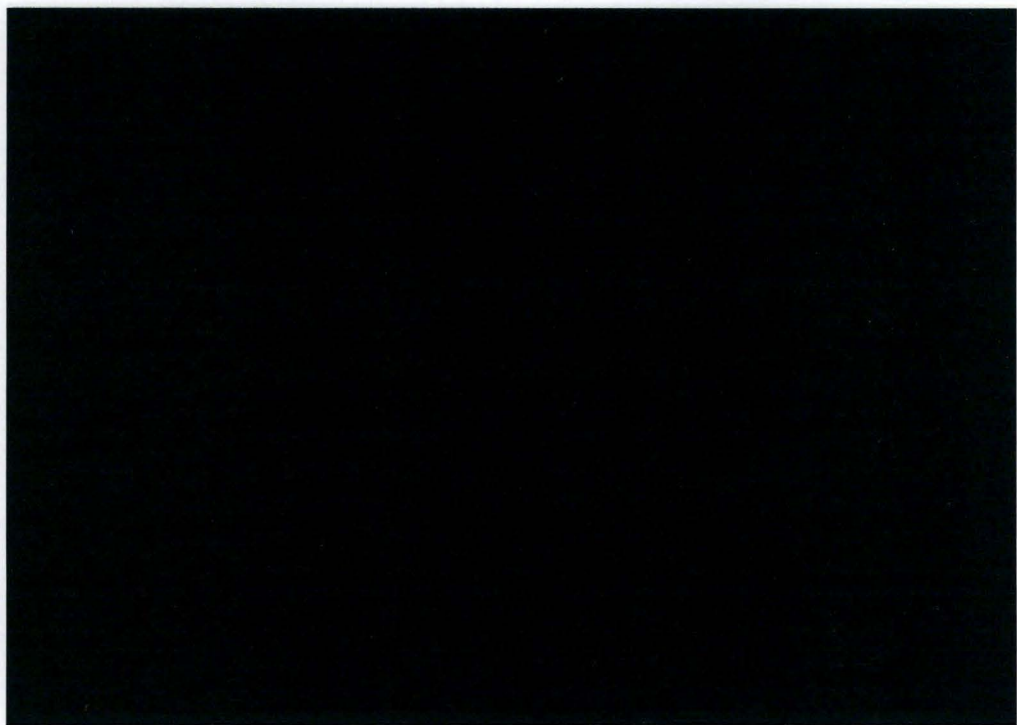


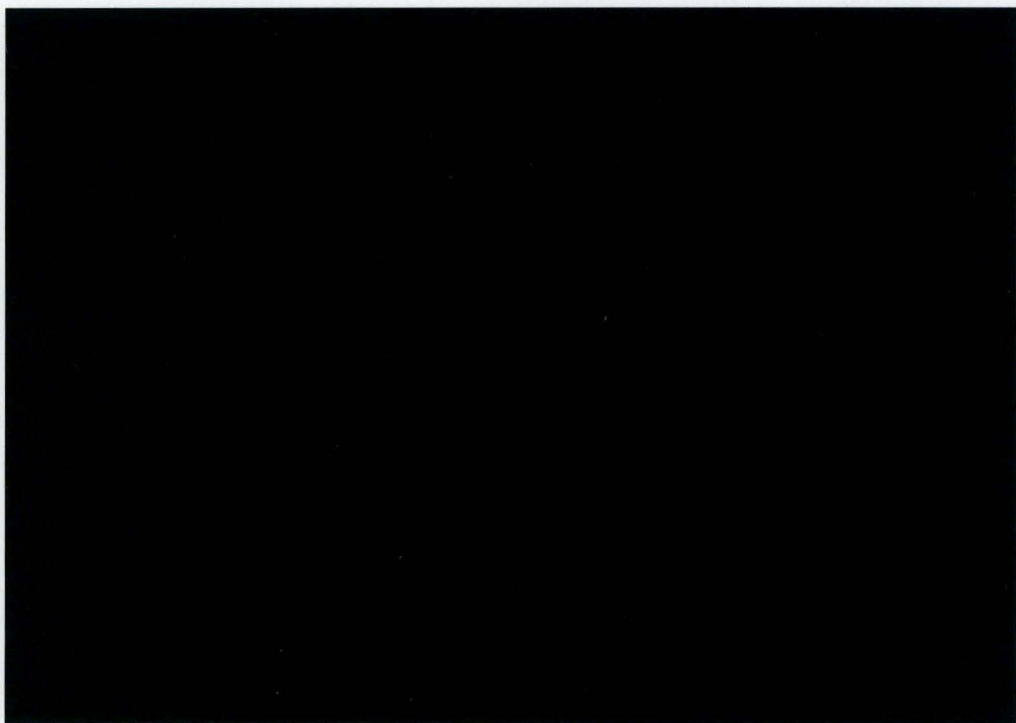
Brian Cullen / little black book

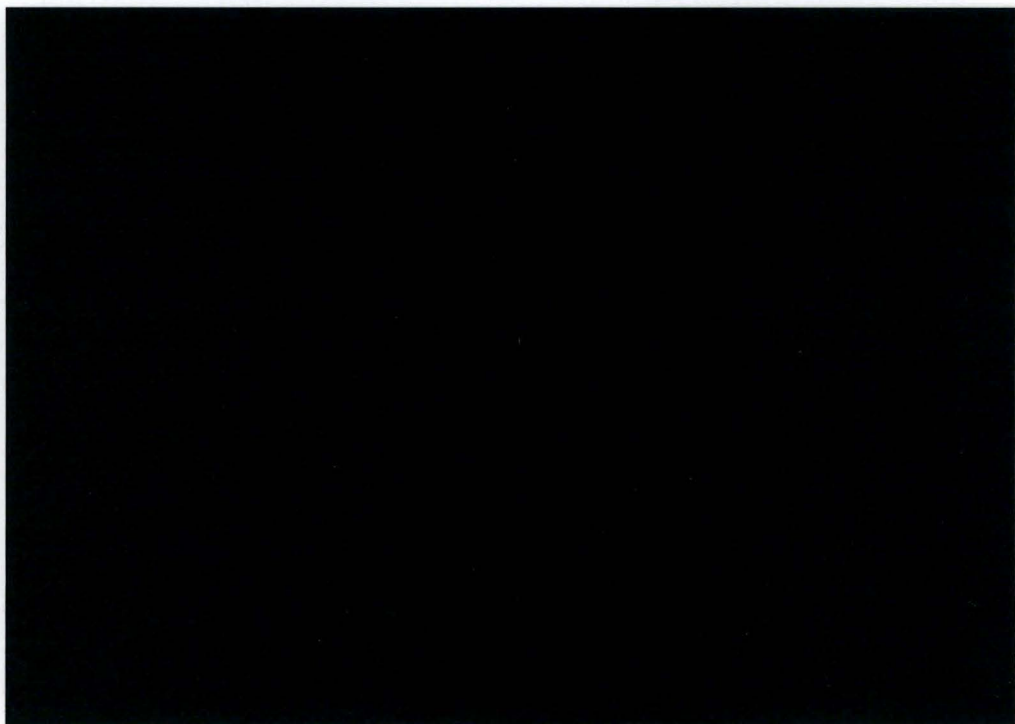
[...]this well known face, this smile, these modulations of voice, of which the style is as familiar to me as myself. perhaps, in many moments of my life, the other is reduced to this spectacle which can be a kind of charm. but that the voice should alter, that the uncanny appear in the division of dialogue, or to the contrary that a response respond too well to what I was thinking without having completely spoken it, — and suddenly the evidence explodes that over there too, minute by minute, life is lived: somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures, or rather in front of them, around them, coming from I don't know what double recess of space, another private world is showing through, through this tissue of mine, and for a moment it is within it that I live; I am no more than the respondent to this interpellation directed to me.

— maurice merleau-ponty,
le visible et l'invisible

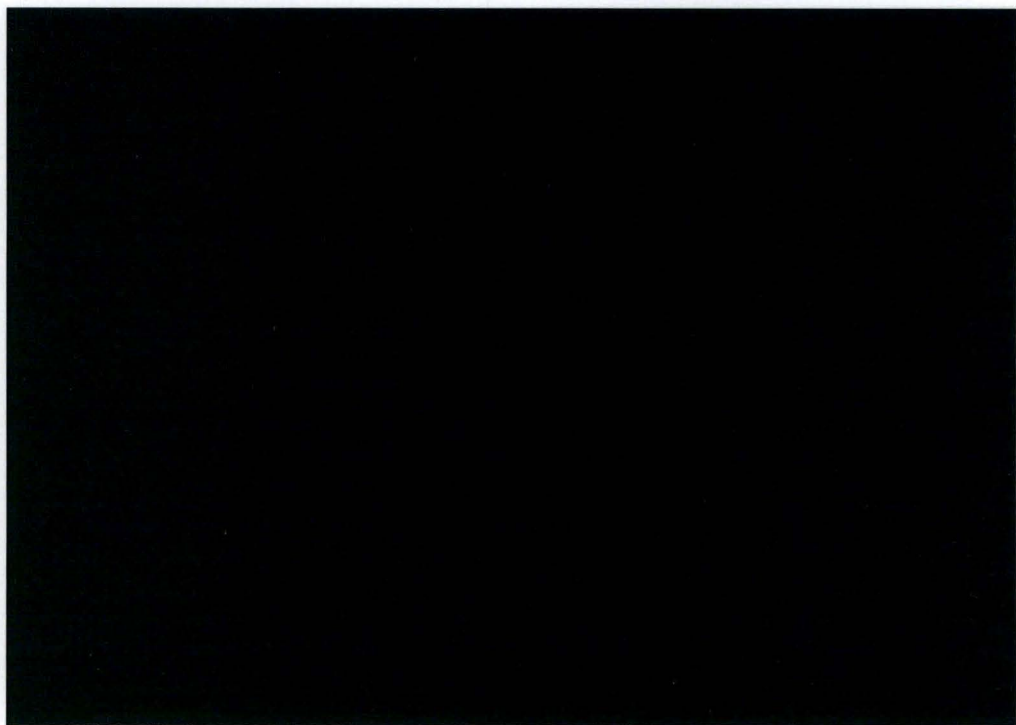




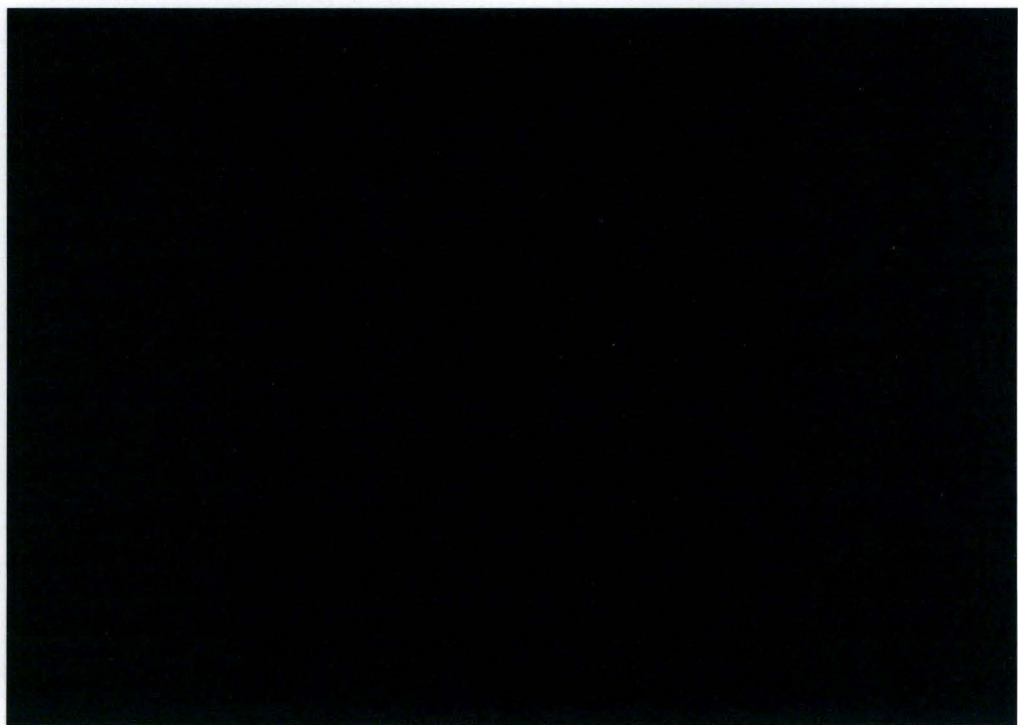


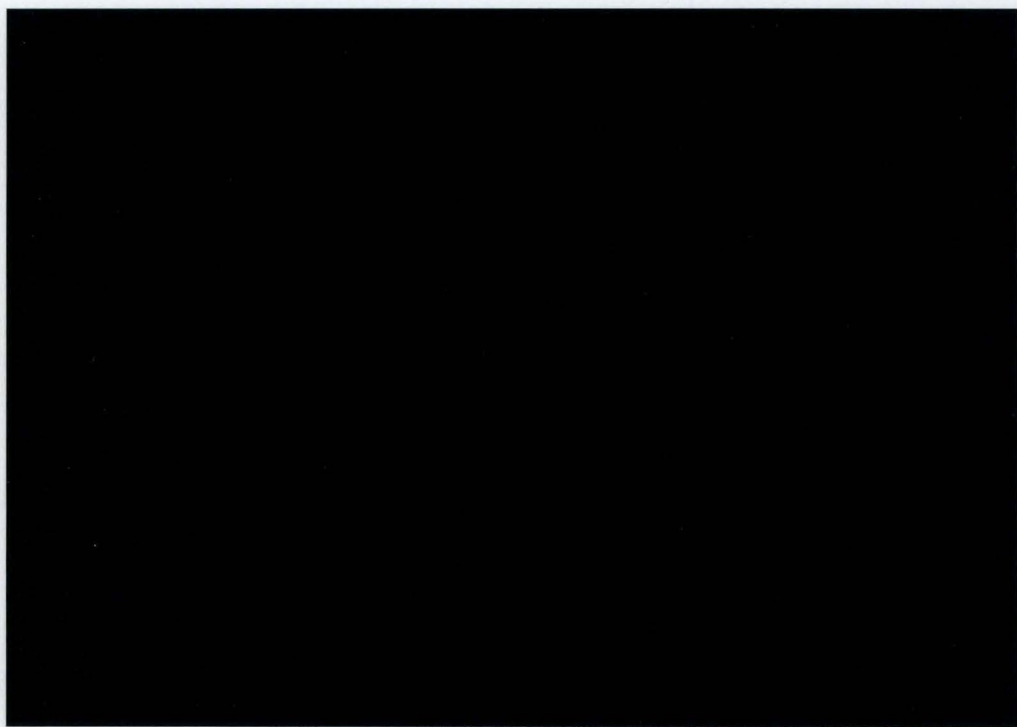


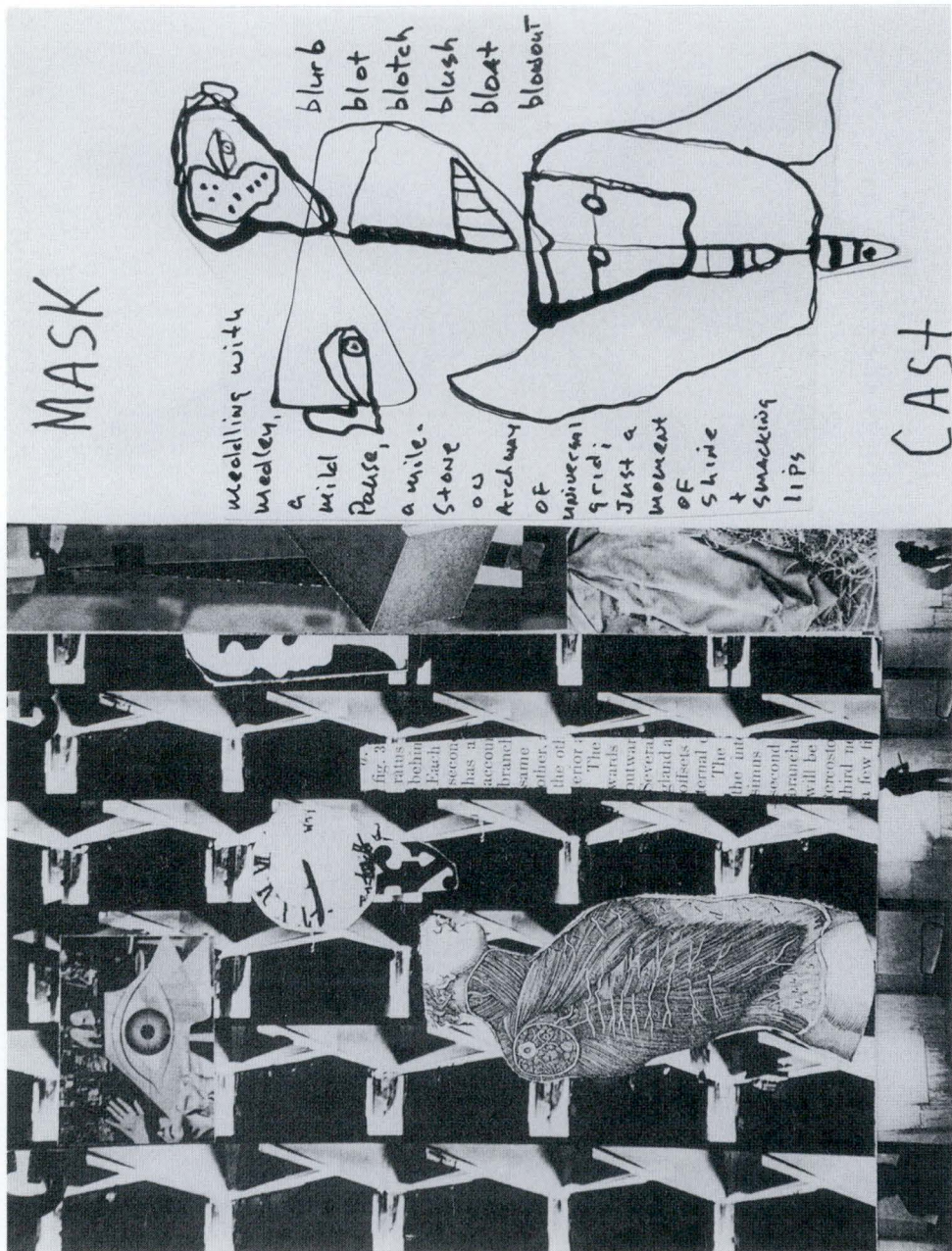












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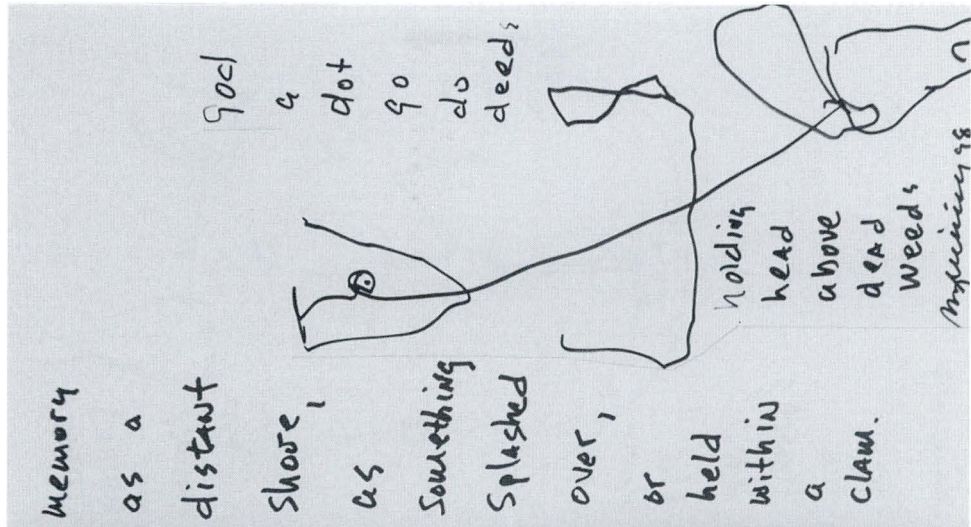
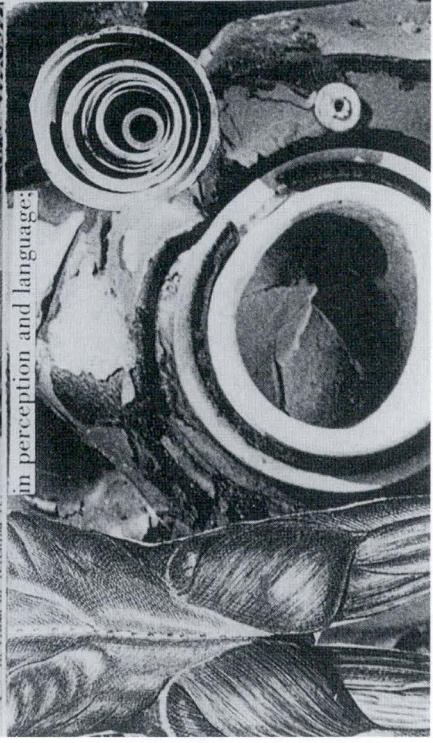
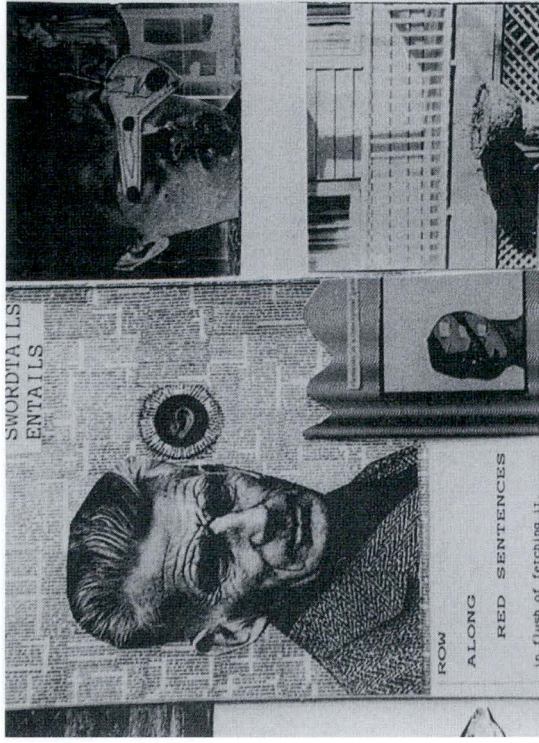
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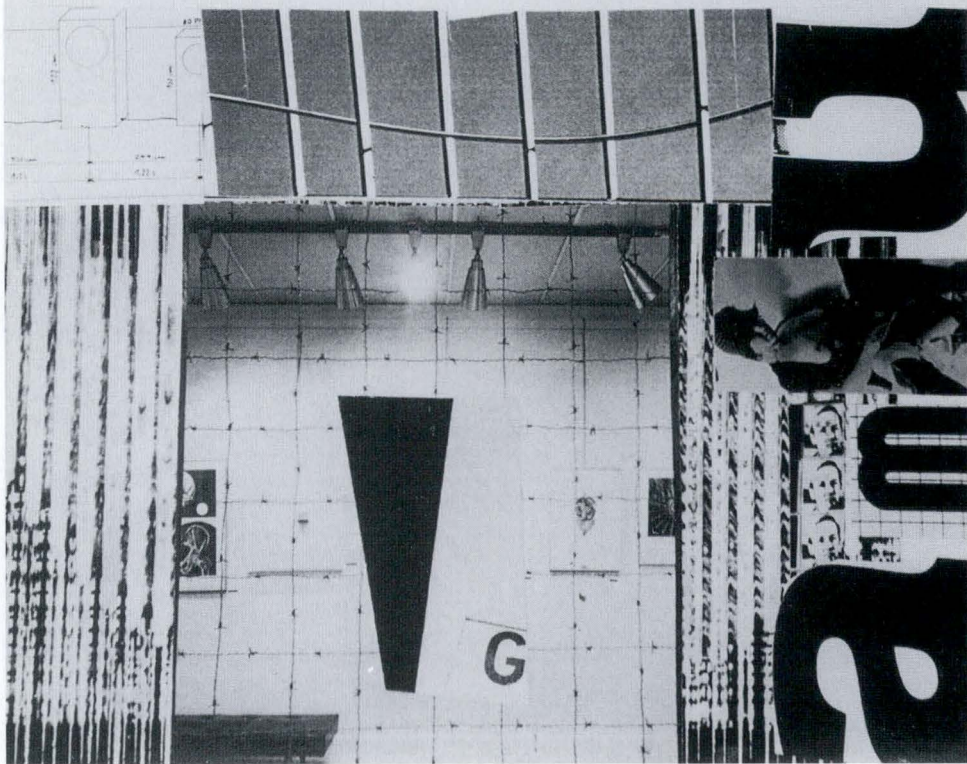
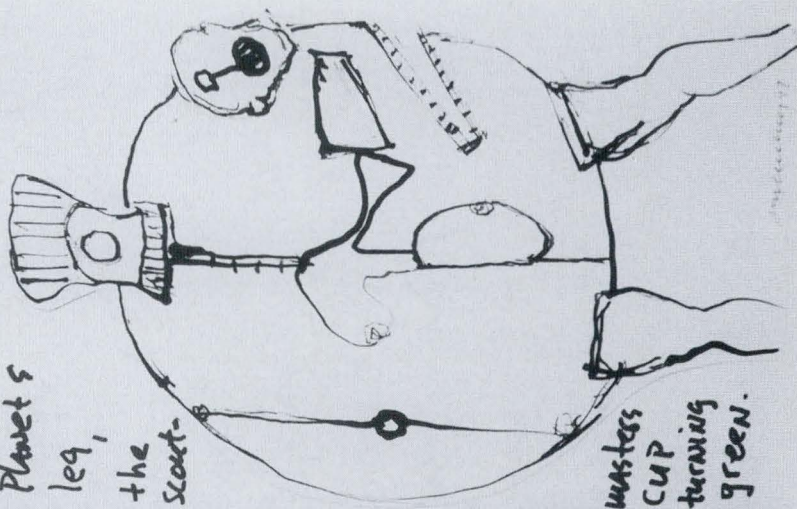
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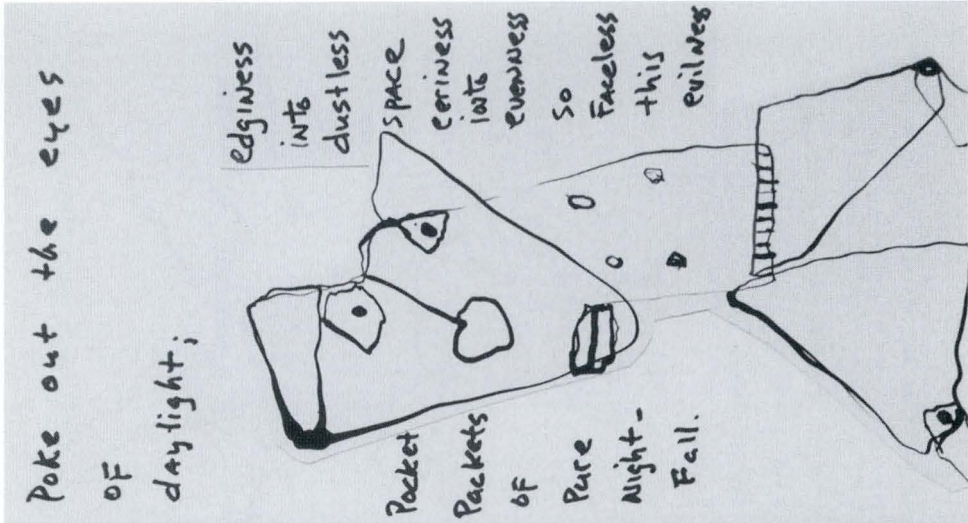
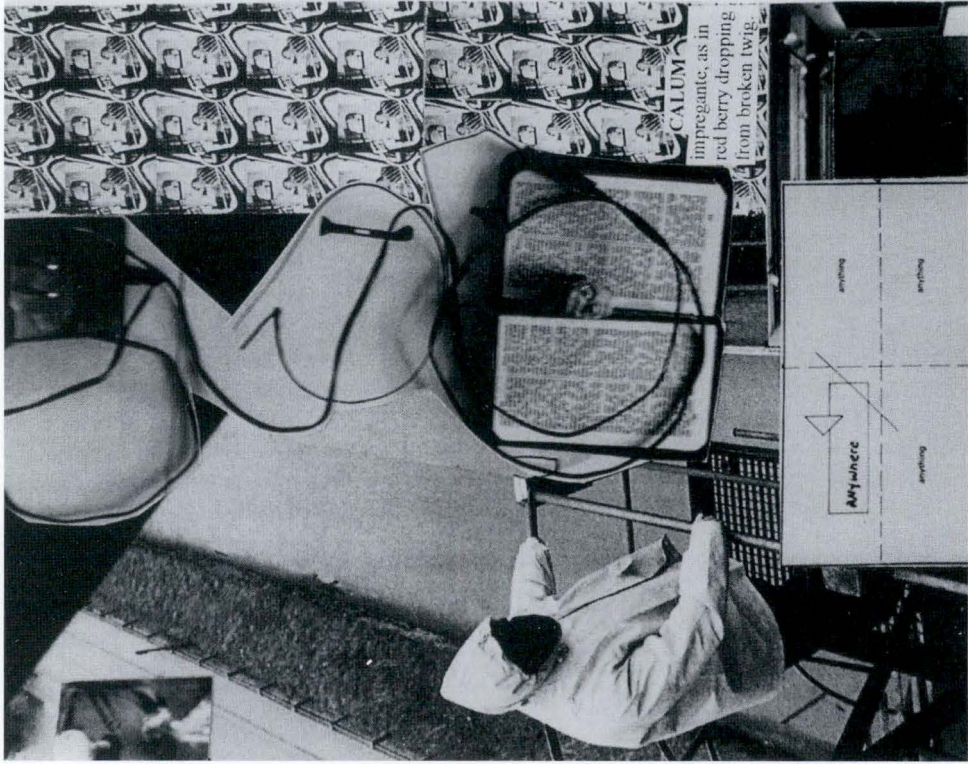


dancing
on
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Planet's
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the
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masters
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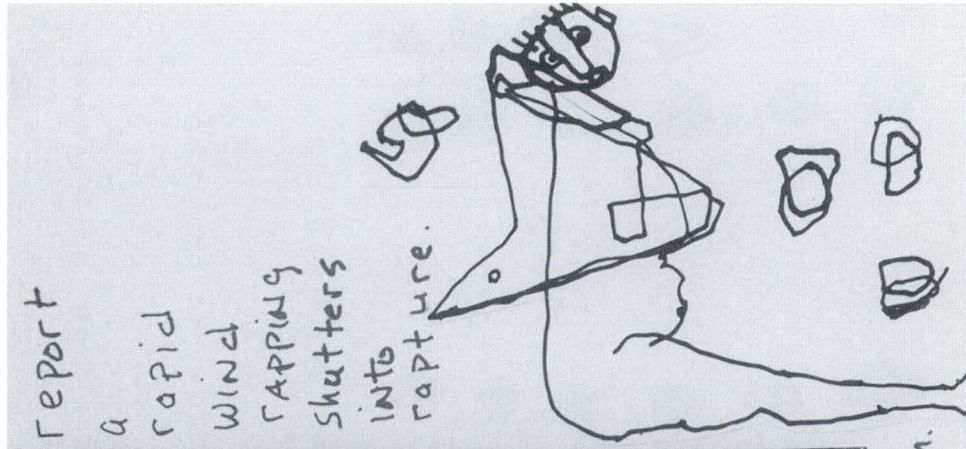


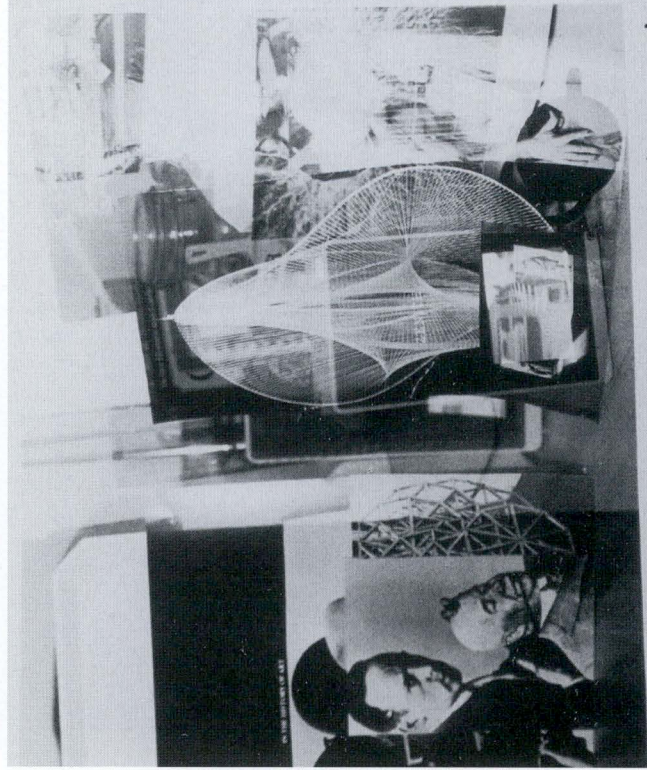
Not once did i drive
thru the 20th Century
+ Not once did i toast
the Notion of Flight,
For i know how
humans
should
Crawl,
+ be
aware
of
their
Surround-
ings.





the live drive of the affair folded him.





all the lies light up + the screen is us, in us, around us

it is the porch of the 21st century. Now, snow white, we can slip

thru ourselves + laugh at the replay, at the toy play, at what not
~~not~~ what

Bob Sherrin / REVIEW: *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*, by Michael Ondaatje

The photographic image is central to contemporary culture, particularly Western culture — even more particularly to the Americanized, global form of it. Commercial cinema is its most popular and widely known constituent, often mesmerizing us with a sleek flow that combines the mundane and the magical, real images projected through the air onto a screen. But often lost in our fascination with film and its progenitor photography is the fact that what we viewers accept as a seamless whole, an accurate document of events, is made up of discrete still images exposed at a rate of 24 per second, accumulated in vast numbers through a nonsequential process, then rearranged, often for months or years, until a final order is created. Much like any narrative form, cinema results from the creation of a large pool of many possibilities from which the storyteller (or storytellers) selects. She may also reshoot, rewrite, and retell as part of assembling those images or ideas: this complex and rarely discussed process is called editing. To many people, an editor is someone with a razor-sharp persona who either delicately snips or wildly hacks at a body of work: that's surgery or butchery, not editing. An editor, rather, must be able and willing to consider details on many levels while simultaneously sensing the emerging narrative as a whole. While maintaining this balance and being sensitive to the new opportunities it may reveal, an editor shapes material, and in cinema the editor's pool of possibilities includes image, sound, speech, and music. Most writers *are* editors, and *all* writers must first create the material they are going to shape — unlike sculptors, for instance, who occasionally may be drawn to a piece of specific material (stone, wood, steel, for example) then by working it, begin to discern the piece (the narrative, the story, the sculpture) they ultimately create or reveal. Writers must first write and filmmakers must first expose film. Only then can they begin to edit, shape, discover both the nuances and the larger structures of their narratives.

The still photograph has about it an atmosphere of certainty and precision that is mistakenly seen as a mechanical, now digital, exactness — an accurate, objective recreation of a moment in reality. Photographs, in truth, are the result of numerous acts of selection, exclusion, erasure, and emphasis. Even so-called candid images are shaped by the same decisions, often instantaneous and unconscious. Thus, photos do not capture reality. They render or represent, and every photograph when closely studied reveals its maker — her biases and influences. Likewise a mainstream commercial film — that seemingly effortless, crystal clear narrative medium — is fabricated from 130,000 or more such still images. However, unlike a work of written narrative, unlike the photograph, modern cinema is an intensely collaborative process that requires enormous numbers of specifically talented people and enormous amounts of money, making it the most expensive narrative form we know. But despite its current popularity, despite the proliferation of home video cameras and computerized editing programs that allow us to function as independent filmmakers, few of us know how a feature film is finally brought into being. As well, most of us own pens and know how to write, thus being momentary writers, but few of us understand the hidden activities that bring a written narrative into published form.

Michael Ondaatje is a well-known novelist and poet, but fewer people know of his own films, fewer still of his intense interest in the medium. Even fewer have heard of Walter Murch, though millions are familiar with his work, which includes such landmark creations as *The Conversation*, *The Godfather* (all three individual parts, plus the re-edited trilogy), *The English Patient*, and *The Talented Mr Ripley* to name but six of the 27 films he has edited, or for which he created soundscapes and mixes, since working on *The Rain People* in 1968. Over decades, Murch has brought to final form the visions of Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Orson Welles, and many others — including his own film *Return to Oz*. Ondaatje met Murch during the shooting of *The English Patient* and it was then their conversations began. In the year 2000, Ondaatje proposed to Murch that they record their conversations, which they did at irregular intervals over the next year. The published result is *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*. Ondaatje introduces their

discussions by pointing out that the editing stage in his own writing and filmmaking processes is vitally important:

shooting or writing everything for a number of months or years, then shaping the content into a new form, till it is almost a newly discovered story. I move things around till they become sharp and clear, till they are in the right location. And it's at this stage that I discover the work's true voice and structure. When I edited my first film documentary I knew that *this* was when the art came in. When I watched Walter Murch at work during my peripheral involvement with the film of *The English Patient*, I knew that *this* was the stage of filmmaking that was closest to the art of writing. (xviii)

Ondaatje earlier admits that he'd "always been interested, perhaps obsessed, in that seemingly uncrossable gulf between an early draft of a book or film and a finished product. How *does* one make that journey from there to here?"(xii).

Through his conversations with Ondaatje, Murch regularly reveals the invisible activities of the film editor, always placed within the intensely personal context of an artist moving through the creative process. In so doing, Murch responds to Ondaatje's questions, prompts, and comparisons by anchoring his decisions as editor within an evolving portrait of himself, both as an individual artist and as one dedicated to realizing a collaborative vision. Murch's background plays a vital role in shaping his approach to what some consider a purely technical calling. He became fascinated with sound as a young boy who grew up in a New York home where his father painted extraordinary still lifes of common, everyday objects, thus bringing together in Murch's youth a combination of sound and image that he first pursued by convincing his parents to buy a tape recorder — ostensibly to record music off the radio. Instead, he taped street sounds from an apartment window, then began to adhere his mike to pieces of metal that he struck in order to generate original sounds. This step was followed by the revelation of cutting tape, literally slicing it into segments that he rejoined in

order to create harmonies and juxtapositions, even turning the tape upside down to play it backwards or flipping it over to create a muffled soundtrack. Not long after, on the classical station WQXR he heard the compositions of Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, practitioners of *musique concrete*, a form that Murch realized he was already working in — “taking ordinary sounds and arranging them rhythmically, creating a kind of music on tape Up to that point I’d thought that this was just my strange little hobby. But here was validation It was very close to what my father was doing in his paintings: taking discarded objects and arranging them in ways to make you see them with new eyes”(7-9). Murch was 11 years old at the time.

Until his early twenties, Murch assumed he would become an architect or an oceanographer, but as a student at Johns Hopkins, he and a group of friends made short films, and Murch discovered that editing images had the same emotional pull for him as editing sound. Murch later went to grad school at the University of Southern California and there sound and image again came together for him. During this time Murch met and became friends with George Lucas, a fellow student at USC, and Francis Ford Coppola, who attended UCLA. After graduating in 1967, Murch worked at Britannia Educational Films where he edited his first professional film — on the function of the eye. In 1968, after a short stint at Dove Films making commercials and industrial films, Murch received a call from George Lucas, who’d joined with Coppola to shoot *The Rain People*. Lucas asked Murch to come to San Francisco to create sound effects and edit the final soundtrack — as well as become part of American Zoetrope, the film production house that Lucas and Coppola had created.

In addition to his fascination with sound and image, Murch is steeped in a broad spectrum of interests that include many areas of scientific knowledge and metaphysics. He moves easily from his research into Bode’s planetary theories to playing on the piano his own compositions based on the distances among planets. He happily discusses the different perspectives of Medieval and Renaissance life and art and their relationships to cinema, as well as his theories about the link between musical notation and the development of

polyphony — again connected to cinema. Murch is also translating the works of Curzio Malaparte from Italian into English. All these complex interests, and more, feed into Murch's work as a film editor. For example, he considers Edison, Beethoven, and Flaubert the three fathers of film: Edison represents all the technical geniuses who contributed to the mechanical and chemical foundation of cinema; Flaubert contributes his refined realism, spending, for instance, "a whole page evoking tiny sounds and motes of dust in an empty room because he's getting at something"(89); Beethoven brings a heightened sense of dynamics and reveals "that by aggressively expanding, contracting, and transforming the rhythmic and orchestral structure of music you could extract great emotional resonance and power" (89). Murch believes Beethoven moved away from the architectural qualities of composers such as Haydn in which movements seem complete and resemble one another, "as if you were moving through different rooms of a palace When you listen to Beethoven's music now, . . . it's as though you can hear the grammar of film — cuts, dissolves, fades, superimposures, long shots, close shots — being worked out in musical terms"(90).

Murch sees the streams of science, music, and literature feeding into one another through the 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century, dynamism and realism had been fundamentally absorbed into European culture, and "then along came film: a medium ideally suited to the dynamic representation of closely observed reality [R]ealism from literature and painting, and dynamism from music . . . surged together within the framework of film to emerge, within a few decades, in the new artistic form of cinema"(91).

Murch in part sees his work as one "of finding those . . . visual harmonies, thematic harmonies — and finding them at deeper and deeper levels as you work on the film"(29), and to do so Murch submerges himself in the sensibility of the film, becoming acutely aware of the small details, stimulating or mystifying, that make fine editing seem natural even though it is an intricate, multi-textured fabrication. To succeed, Murch must also hold within his vision the larger themes of a film: the latter is what the narrative is "about", the former allows us to see it for ourselves. As much as a writer lingers over the subtleties of syntax, grammar, image, texture, implication,

and suggestion, she also must sense how those shifts and edits on the line ripple through the whole of a text. In both worlds, the artist combines forms of precision with moments of insight and serendipity. In both worlds, the artist works and plays simultaneously, the conscious and subconscious in orchestration.

However, in the world of cinema, the editor faces what most would consider a daunting task. The shooting ratio in contemporary commercial cinema can be as high as 100:1 — 100 feet of film exposed for every foot that eventually finds its way onto the screen in a movie theatre. As Murch points out, “Film travels at one mile an hour through its projector. So in *Apocalypse Now*, we shot over two hundred and thirty-five miles and reduced it all to two-and-a-half miles — a ratio of just under 100 to 1. That’s high, but not unique And how you prune or chop will determine the very character of a film” (136). In his case, Murch combines precise technologies and intuition, even chance, to create the character, the voice, of a film.

As film is shot (“burning celluloid”), Murch along with the director views the dailies, the most recently filmed material straight from the lab, which may include pick-ups — additional footage for earlier-shot scenes. As he watches, Murch creates on his laptop a set of notes that provides a diary of the film’s shooting, a process that always occurs in a pattern different from that of a final script. In fact, Murch creates a formal record of the relative chaos common to exposing miles of film, doing numerous takes of a scene, or shooting it from several angles at once. The result is a pool of possibilities for the editor, but Murch still must personalize this record:

I write down whatever occurs to me about what I see on the screen. And that text appears in the left-hand column of my database. These are the *emotional* responses: How does the shot make me feel when I see it for the first time? Are there any associations? If, say, the image of a banana occurs to me for some reason, I write “banana,” even if I have no reason why. Maybe later I’ll find out the reason Later, when I’m getting ready to put the scene together, I take a second series of notes: these are less emotional and more surgical I’m no longer the lover beholding the beloved, I’m the surgeon looking at

the patient, analyzing her joints and ligaments, writing down the exact footage number at each comment. The free-associative emotional notes give me insights about primary reactions; the surgical notes give me insights about how best to take things apart and connect them again . . . Both columns of notes are always in front of me when I'm assembling the film for the first time, but afterwards, in re-editing, I use them less . . . At a certain point, I've internalized them. (44-45)

As he moves further into the editing/re-editing process, Murch relies on his own instincts to establish and confirm cut points, looking now at what he's called the grammar of film editing:

The decision where to cut film is very similar to the decision, in writing poetry, of where to end each line. On which word? That end point has little if anything to do with the grammar of the sentence. It's just that the line is full and ripe at that point, full of meaning and ripe with rhythm. By ending it where he does, the poet exposes that last word to the blankness of the page, which is a way of emphasizing the word. If he adds two words after it, he immerses that word within the line, and it has less visibility, less significance. We do very much the same in film: the end of the shot gives the image of that last frame an added significance, which we exploit . . . In film, at the moment of the cut you are juxtaposing one image with another, and that's the equivalent of rhyme. It's how rhyme and alliteration work in poetry, or how we juxtapose two words or two images, and what that juxtaposition implies. (268)

Murch understands this process as both organic and constructed, "a mosaic in three dimensions, two of space and one of time" (268), but even more intimately, he relies on his own particular sense of appropriateness for each cut. When he assembles a scene for the first time, Murch does so in total silence, turning off the sound so he can watch the actors' body language, note facial expressions, and thereby sense what they're saying and how they're saying it, "and then at a certain point I flinch — it's almost an involuntary flinch, an equivalent

of the blink. That flinch point is where the shot will end" (268). Murch explains that each shot or sequence of them is a thought rendered visually, and when that thought reaches its full expression, its ripeness, he detects the need to cut to another shot — another thought that works with, against, off the one he's just clipped. But Murch always checks his flinch edits by repeating the process and noting the frame number of his flinches, accepting them as appropriate edits only when the frame numbers of his flinches are identical. A frame discrepancy of two is enough to cause him to reconsider his approach. Often, Murch finds this pause instructive:

When I mark frame 17 and the next time frame 19, I have a feeling that goes with each. When I watch frame 19, I feel, Oh, it was a little longer that time — I can feel it. Then, looking at the counter I realize, That was two frames. In this context, that's what two frames feels like: one-twelfth of a second. But I now have an emotional feeling in my gut about what a twelfth of a second feels like, with these shots in this context, and that's teaching me something . . . What's the rhythmic signature of this scene? And then, of the whole film? Every time conductors confront a piece of music with a new orchestra, they have to determine the rhythmic signature. An editor is doing that with the film. (270-71)

Rhythm implies music or orchestrated sound, something that profoundly attracted and influenced Murch as a boy experimenting with a tape recorder and listening to *musique concrete*. As an editor, as someone sensitive to Flaubert's intimate and allusory realism, Murch also uses sound effects and music to layer suggestions into a scene, hints that create the necessary ambiguity which draws viewers and readers into a narrative in order to complete it, to give it a meaning that is both personal yet often shared with other audience members.

Consider three aspects of one scene in *The Godfather*. Ondaatje asks Murch to elaborate on what he calls metaphorical sound, or "emphasizing the visual by artificially focussing on a possibly disjointed or unrealistic layer of sound" (119). Murch explains that

Roman Polanski alerted him to this aspect of filmmaking when Polanski spoke at USC in 1966, using the example of a dripping faucet and what it might reveal or suggest about a person, about her home, about her relationship to many things. From Polanski's comment, which celebrated the authenticity of sound, Murch ultimately moved to finding a balance "between something being authentic, and celebrating that authenticity, and yet at the same time trying to push the sound into other metaphorical areas" (120).

Murch recalls a key scene in *The Godfather* where Michael Corleone, so far uninvolved in the family business, murders Sollozo and Captain McCluskey. The scene takes place in a quiet Italian restaurant. Michael returns from the washroom with a gun that had been previously concealed in a toilet tank, and as he raises the gun to shoot the men, Murch lays in the screech of an elevated subway train. The metaphorical suggestions here are numerous, obviously prompted by connections made by individual viewers but equally tempered by more universal connotations associated with an unseen screeching train: speed, power, threat, danger, collision — plus all the imaginable consequences thereof. As well, Coppola shot the scene in Italian without subtitles, thus creating for viewers a situation analogous to Murch working in total silence as he first assembles a scene: each viewer must carefully read the actors' gestures, expressions, and body language, as well as the smaller details around them, to sense the undercurrent of negotiation and threat. Finally, the music for the scene is held back until after the shooting — an extended moment of silence — during which some viewers might well recall "Clemenza saying 'Remember, drop the gun. Everyone will be looking at the gun, so they won't see your face'" (122). Only after that silence does Michael toss the gun to the floor and the score intercede. Murch considers this combination of image, sound, silence, and music one of the great aspects of the film:

It's a classic example for me of the correct use of music, which is a collector and channeler of previously created emotion, rather than the device that creates the emotion . . . I think in the long run this approach generates emotions that are truer

because they come out of your direct contact with the scene itself, and your own feelings about the scene — not feelings dictated by a certain kind of music. (122)

Editing is central to any published text. *The Conversations* itself is no exception, yet unlike the nearly invisible activity of the usual film or text editor, Ondaatje has gone to remarkable lengths to create a book that in both its form and contents pays homage to an art form and to one of its great practitioners. First, *The Conversations* as a title alludes to the first film that Walter Murch edited, a work noteworthy for its subtle, unusual combinations of image and sound, mystery and clarity, not to mention the Palme d'Or it was awarded at Cannes in 1974. As well, Ondaatje introduces his conversations with Murch so the reader always knows where and when the two met, as well as what they generally discussed before getting to the conversations themselves — which Ondaatje has edited to maintain the uniqueness of both voices, the pace of enthusiastic discussion, including as well the oral hesitations and idiosyncrasies of actual conversations between friends and peers. Furthermore, a constant pleasure in this text is the range and wit of the images that complement it, that indeed are as vital to its effect as every word on its pages: pulls from films, reprinted sequences of actual footage, script pages, reproductions of Walter Murch Sr.'s paintings, personal photos, editing charts, photo boards, a computer screen of notes, page one of Welles' famous memo on *Touch of Evil*, even edited versions of a poem by Elizabeth Bishop. Like an elegantly edited film, *The Conversations* leave much room for the reader to layer comments over images, to place Murch's and Ondaatje's insights and queries against statements from Coppola, Lucas, Rick Schmidlin, and Anthony Minghella; to savour the leaps and linkages that these discussions engender; to tend the desire to read, think, reread, and rethink. The final pleasure is the one that some readers will experience beyond the frame of the book itself, when they sit in a cinema and enjoy the invisible specifics that Ondaatje and Murch have revealed to them.

Lola Tostevin / TILDEN LAKE

i

The frozen frame holds
the lake still

small tilde on the horizon

where a canoe floats
and the air has no weight.

A lure poised over
the visored head of a fish.

(Any utopian dimension to these images
is solely an ethic of reading. Everything here is dialectical.
The frozen frames contradict the frames that keep moving.)

ii

Images set into motion again.
Like stumbling on a nest sheltering
four speckled eggs for the first time.

Twigs, blades and leaves molded to a bird's
belly pressing against the nest walls. Shaped
and reshaped by each palpitation.

(Or is it the other way around?)
Does the body adapt to forms around it?
To fossilized shells and bone fragments.
Bits of wood and teeth asleep.

One perfect lithocardite carried deep inside
a pocket. Pulse trapped in stone.

iii

(How did these prairie shots get in here?)

Space is nowhere there. Infinity
always on the move. Towards tilling,
towards harvesting. All that space
in need of extension.

The forest belongs to the past.
To the warp and weft of lichens and mosses.

(Have you dreamed of a young forest?)

Even dew drops drop full circle in this northern
geometry where the wind cuts corners and carves
a topography of roots laid bare. Twists
them tight as phenomenological observations.

Fifty frogs plus fifty frogs
makes one perfect equation.

iv

Lens scans the scummy pond.

(Alliteration happens naturally here,
the evergreens everlasting. Cloud-clot.)

Follows an invisible presence
to the island where waves rush.

Tracks loon's long avian bones
as they glide into curve. Baby loon riding
piggyback. A yodel, a slap on water
hoop hoop to the other side.

This must be the intimate immensity
philosophers and poets write about.

Solitude and diffused light.

v

Days when only images speak.

Hardly two words worth hearing except
a scuffling in the brush and the hush
of trout lilies swimming the forest floor.
Belly up their yellow bells.

Hardly a sibilant among the warblers
or the black-garbed woodpecker pickaxing
the parchment bark of *bouleau blanc*
bouleau blanc.

Except for snake from under
a rock. Red panic in a blink. Shriek!

All night, bulrushes rushing
the stooped moon.

vi

The past takes on a cartoon quality
within these accelerated frames.
Fanciful brackets.

(Between present and future.)

Two-dimensional slices where space-time's
track follows a child following a caravan
of ants down a garden path. Their prattle
the thoughts of a multitude.

Steady hum.
Parched voice of a crow.
Gilded tunic.
Midas touch.

Over there young Ishmael
eye to eye with a beached walleye.

vii

In this light, blue
is as true as the foliage
of raven's wing.

Blue makes the mouth water
cold blue in June. Bloodsucker ankles shackled
under the *fauve* green of Elsinore.

The lake slick and pitch-dark,
never pale cerulean swimming.

Except for a *libellule* lull
moving the very depths.

(Oh, *barcarole barque*.)

viii

Where the dark lake soughs, marsh
mouth frog, O little dinosaur
its croak an ancient genre.

Throbs and swells in the purple haze
where beaver rears its pompous head
with Thoreau certainty.

(Tho the lake is not earth's eye
here, the landscape sees itself mainly through the eyes
of a child, where it is destined to become much smaller.)

Another yodel and a slap
delivers the obvious rhyme.

Frog heads for the sun
legs dangling.

ix

The stone wall built with the determination
of a turtle between the house and the lake. Heroic.
(Wall, counsel of resistance
braces itself as snow falls slant and obliterates all forms.)

The house sheds its light, fluent and interfused, a negative of its summer counterpart.

The lake takes on a concrete meaning.

A reversal of dimension and perspective
as the landscape rewrites itself.

The sudden realization that it hardly matters if any of this existed.

(Exaggeration is the surest sign.
It avoids the unfortunate habit of reduction
caused by seasons.)

x

In rewind, the house perched above
the stone foundation moves in both directions.
Past dwelling a dwelling for the past.

The blank screen glistens. Firefly vigil
or interstellar dust.

The constant here is change.
The constant here is everything stays the same.

Stars collapse. Their luminous shards ride
the waves, scatter their elements: iron, gold,
mercury in the blood. The stuff of generations.

These are not metaphors: we of the north are,
literally, stardust.

Chris Haddock & Larry Campbell /
SELECTION FROM *DA VINCI'S INQUEST*,
EPISODE 42, "BANGING ON THE WALL"

ACT ONE

FADE IN

INT. JORGENSEN HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

Lying on the bed, still covered with her duvet, is an eight year old girl, CYNTHIA JORGENSEN. Apart from the airway in her mouth, she would appear to be sleeping. Da Vinci appears in frame. CONSTABLE THURMAN replies from behind him to his unheard question.

THURMAN (O/S)

Cynthia Jorgenson. Date of birth, December one, 1993.

Da Vinci just keeps looking, he doesn't write this down yet. We see the child's bedroom, decorated nicely. The room is neat and clean.

DA VINCI

Who got here first, paramedics or fire?

THURMAN (O/S)

Paramedics, but when we came in, fire personnel were here, too, plus the parents.

DA VINCI

Jesus Christ. That must have been a zoo.

THURMAN

Yeah, it was pandemonium.

DA VINCI

So what, when they got here, she was already gone?

THURMAN

Already gone, mm-hmm.

DA VINCI

But they tried to revive her anyway, eh?

THURMAN

That's right. I think it's hard to see a child and do nothing. The parents were crying, begging them to do something.

DA VINCI

Any evidence this is anything but a natural?

THURMAN

Nothing. My partner took a quick look around. I was talking to the parents. The place is well kept up.

DA VINCI

Yeah, she looks pretty well nourished, too. What do you think?

THURMAN

Yes, sir. You don't know what it is?

DA VINCI

Don't know, no. No clue. Okay, let's talk to the parents.

THURMAN

They're pretty choked up. The mother's being looked at by the paramedics. She fainted dead away, hit her head on the doorjamb.

DA VINCI

Can you just tell them I want to talk to them now? Could you do that?

Thurman exits. Da Vinci takes a longer look at Cynthia.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

This is not good.

EXT. LOWER WATERFRONT ROAD - DAY

A car is parked facing the downtown peninsula, the driver's door open. Shannon and Leary are being led to the car by a CONSTABLE JOSIE HUTCHINS. She's young, attractive, tough, and on top of the scene. Paramedics are packing up. There's a second patrol car as well.

JOSIE

I got a shots-fired call at 6:08. I was up on Pender, and I got here probably two minutes later, tops. I came around the other side, in case there was any evidence near the driver's door, but when the paramedics came in, they made kind of a mess out of things.

SHANNON

He was dead when they got here?

JOSIE

Yeah.

They came around to look at the damage: In the driver's seat, a young man shot in the forehead, dead. In the passenger seat, a young woman, shot in the back, dead.

LEARY

You see anybody on the road, on foot, or in a car on your way in?

JOSIE

No, nobody.

SHANNON

Who called it in?

JOSIE

There was some taxi driver up on the main road. He heard the shots.

SHANNON

Okay, give me his contact number. Maybe he saw something.

JOSIE

I actually already talked to him.

JOSIE

He said that he had looked down this way and he saw this car just sitting here. He maybe saw another car moving along the road going east, but wasn't sure if it was coming from down here or if it was just driving past.

LEARY

Can you see how the passenger's door's open there? She's leaned out, shot in the back.

SHANNON

Yeah. Maybe she was trying to get away.

LEARY

Couple shots in the windshield there.

JOSIE

Well, maybe it happened like this. I mean, these two are parked down here, right? They're getting it on, her skirt's up, her panties are off on the floor. I mean, you can see that. You know, that's what's going on.

LEARY

Yeah, I can see them down there.

SHANNON

Yeah, go on.

JOSIE

Well, a car pulls up. The driver rolls down his window. Gunman gets out of the car, gun comes out, this driver grabs the guy and the gun, and one shot goes wild through the window.

SHANNON

Yeah, it could happen like that. It's possible.

JOSIE

Well, the angles are down, the shooting angles, and that gunshot in the driver looks like it came from close.

LEARY

Yeah. Had to be standing right here.

JOSIE

Yeah.

SHANNON

Did you call in the plates?

JOSIE

Uh-huh. Car belongs to Curtis Tomson. I didn't check for wallets 'cause I didn't want to mess with anything.

LEARY

No, that's a good idea. We should call up Chick, get him and the forensics team down here. They can check it out before we start digging for I.D.

JOSIE

Well, Curtis Tomson's a bouncer at one of

these strip clubs up here on Main Street. He has that parking pass for the club in the window, so . . .

LEARY

Yeah, Number 5. Well, this could be him, then. Gets off work, comes down here with a date maybe.

JOSIE

I'm sure it's him. I woke the owner of the bar, and asked for a description. It's his car, it's the same build . . .

LEARY

Wow. Well, you're all over this, aren't you?

JOSIE

Glad you noticed. I'm trying to impress.

Leary and Shannon exchange smiles.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

Kosmo brings two cups of takeout coffee to where Sue waits, smoking a cigarette.

KOSMO

Here you go. With cream you said, right?

SUE

Thanks.

KOSMO

That cigarette smells good.

SUE

You want one?

KOSMO

No. I just like the smell. My old boyfriend used to smoke those.

SUE

What's his name?

KOSMO

Doesn't matter. So, everything's good?

SUE

Yeah, pretty good. I brought something for you.

Sue takes a photo out of her jacket, passes it over to Kosmo. The photo is of a girl's softball team, the Kamloops Tigercats.

KOSMO

What's this?

SUE

Kamloops Tigercats Softball Champions. You were asking what I looked like before I got down here.

(points)

That's me right there, first base.

KOSMO

That's a tough position. How old were you here?

SUE

14. Five years ago.

KOSMO

You were in pretty good shape.

SUE

Yeah. I didn't like my hair like that, though. Too short, makes me look dumb.

KOSMO

So do you mind me asking how you get from there to here?

SUE

Sometime I'll tell you the whole thing.

There's a silence, then -

KOSMO

So you been doing any thinking about the missing girls down here?

SUE

Yeah, I've been thinking, but . . .

(a beat)

Oh, you know that place I'm staying down on Hastings there?

Kosmo nods, looks at her.

SUE (CONT'D)

There's this guy, room next to me, he's got some heavy warrants on him.

KOSMO

How do you know this?

SUE

Overheard him saying so.

KOSMO

Did you tell any other cops about this?

SUE

No, no. I just wanted you to know.

She takes a drag off her smoke, thinks.

SUE (CONT'D)

And he's too damn loud all the time. Always banging on the wall. I mean, I could see if he was living with a chick and he was hitting the wall instead of hitting her, but

this guy lives alone. What the hell's he
banging on the wall for?

Kosmo digests this, then -

KOSMO

You hungry?

Sue nods.

KOSMO (CONT' D)

Come on.

They head toward the roadside cafe.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE

EXT. NO. 5 ORANGE STRIP BAR - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. NO. 5 ORANGE STRIP BAR - DAY

Leary and Shannon are at the bar. Music blares and a stripper is on stage as they interview the owner of the bar, TED, behind the bar. Shannon is more distracted by the entertainment than Leary. We join them mid-conversation.

LEARY

. . . working as a bouncer, you're bound to
make a few enemies around, aren't you?

TED

Curtis was a pretty mellow guy as far as
doormen go. He wouldn't go looking for a
scrap, but he wouldn't run from it, either.

SHANNON

He was with a young woman that we're trying to get an identification on. Was he dating anybody?

TED

Not that I knew about. He probably had something going on. He played the field.

LEARY

How about one of the dancers here?

TED

Nah. I don't know about that.

SHANNON

Was he into anything that would have got him behind the eight ball, like gambling debts, drugs, that kind of thing?

TED

No. Curtis was a pretty straight-ahead kid. I mean, he wanted to be a cop at one time.

LEARY

Yeah. Got off at 2:00, you said?

TED

Well, that's what his time card says. That's all I know.

He sees a dancer arrive.

TED

Excuse me, guys.

(to the yet unseen dancer)

Ruby.

The dancer, RUBY, is handed a key by Ted.

RUBY
When's my first set?

TED
20 minutes. Thanks for coming in on short
notice, huh?

She starts off.

RUBY (O/S)
No problem.

LEARY
Short notice. She was kind of choked. You
got a dancer bail out on you, or what?

TED
Oh yeah. Probably slept in or whatever.

LEARY
Would she have been working last night?

TED
Yeah.

Shannon and Leary get it.

TED (CONT'D)
Why?

Shannon digs out the photo of our female victim,
LISA.

SHANNON
Was this her?

Ted looks at it, shaken up.

TED
Jesus. Yeah, that's her.

LEARY

What's her name?

TED

Lisa something. I don't know her last name.
I can get it for you.

SHANNON

She have any family or friends here that you
knew about?

TED

That's her roommate coming off the stage
right now.

A young woman in a robe, SYLVIA, steps off the
stage and heads towards the door leading up to the
dressing room.

INT. CORONER'S OFFICE - DA VINCI'S - DAY

Da Vinci enters his office. Helen follows.

DA VINCI

So get this. I go over there to check on
Mrs. Jorgenson and she keels over. Well,
maybe you can call St. Paul's and see how
she's doing.

HELEN

No, they just . . . they called in. She died
on the gurney in emergency.

DA VINCI

(stunned)

She died?

HELEN

Yeah.

DA VINCI

She died?

Da Vinci, devastated by this, sets down his bag and takes off his glasses. Helen is thrown by his reaction and says nothing.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

Okay.

HELEN

I'm sorry. Did you know her?

DA VINCI

No. I never met her until today.

(sighs heavily)

I just feel . . . nothing. I don't know what's going on here. I just feel completely flat.

HELEN

Is there anything I can do?

DA VINCI

I don't know what it would be.

Looks inquisitively at his dictionary.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

Malaise.

HELEN

Malaise?

DA VINCI

It's right beside "malaria" in the medical dictionary.

HELEN

Mm-hmm?

DA VINCI

(reading aloud)

"Malaise - a feeling of discomfort,
uneasiness, indisposition . . ."

HELEN

Maybe that's what you've got.

He looks up at her.

HELEN (CONT'D)

So are you going to call over to St. Paul's
about Mrs. Jorgenson?

He considers this for a second, nods, then
changes.

DA VINCI

(rapidly)

No. I want you to call over there. You call
over there, and tell them I want to do the
autopsy over here, and see if anybody's got
a problem with that.

HELEN

Okay, and if they do?

DA VINCI

They can kiss my blue ass.

She moves out.

INT. CORONER'S OFFICE - DA VINCI'S - DAY

Winston and Da Vinci enter.

WINSTON

Sunny told me you've had a couple of malaria
deaths.

DA VINCI

Yeah, malaria.

WINSTON

I had a guy who died of malaria last month.

DA VINCI

What? You had a malaria death last month, and I'm just hearing about it now?

WINSTON

It wasn't a coroner's case.

DA VINCI

Oh, it wasn't a coroner's case. Well, how were you involved?

WINSTON

Well, he was in the hospital, right, and they already had a diagnosis of malaria prior to the guy dying, so they wanted the autopsy to confirm the diagnosis.

DA VINCI

And you ordered the post?

WINSTON

After you approved it. Yeah.

DA VINCI

No. I think if we'd done that autopsy, I'd remember it, Winston.

WINSTON

We didn't do the autopsy. The hospital did it.

DA VINCI

Okay. Good. So you went to the guy's house and you checked him out. What do you have to tell me about that?

WINSTON

Why should I go to the guy's house? It wasn't my case.

DA VINCI

(getting heated)

Okay, next time you've got something to tell me, something like that, you just make goddamn sure I'm paying attention. I don't need shit just floating by me like this. I don't need it, okay?

WINSTON

Are you finished?

DA VINCI

No, I'm not finished, okay? I want to know who the guy is. Has he got family? Is there next of kin? What?

WINSTON

You know what? I'm going to go get that file. You can check it yourself.

Winston walks out. Da Vinci, still choked, calls out after him.

DA VINCI

Well, get the file! Some time today - not the usual la-dee-dah times you like to put on things.

He picks up the phone and starts dialing. He calls out looking for Winston.

DA VINCI (CONT'D)

Winston?

His call is answered. He turns his attention to it.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

(into phone)

Hello? Hi. Toxicology? Hi. Dominic Da Vinci from the Coroner's - yeah. Yeah. How are you doing?

(beat)

Have you got the bacteriology and the toxicology on that eight-year-old who died of malaria yesterday? You promised me.

Winston drops the file onto Da Vinci's desk.

WINSTON

Knock yourself out.

Winston starts out but Da Vinci gestures for him to stay.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

(on the phone)

Yeah, I don't know how this thing is spreading. It is kind of weird, isn't it?

Still on the phone, he questions Winston and flips through the file.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

Where was this guy? Oh yeah.

Winston points in the file.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

(on the phone)

No, go ahead. I'm listening.

(beat)

Yeah. I really appreciate it. Thanks.

(to Winston)

Do we know how he contracted malaria?

WINSTON

No idea.

DA VINCI

We don't know. We don't know if it was a blood transfusion, IVs, if it's mosquito bites, goddamn it. Nothing?

During the following, Winston listens with increased and intense curiosity.

DA VINCI (CONT' D)

(on phone)

Sorry. Cynthia Jorgenson. Eight years old. That's right.

(beat)

I'm sure about the age.

(waits, heats up)

I'm sure. You know why I'm sure? Because I pronounced her dead.

(waits, confused)

I don't really think that can be right, can it?

(beat)

You what?

(beat)

No. I'm going to be standing right beside the fax machine in my office because you're sending it to me right now.

(beat)

Oh, yeah.

(beat)

Okay. Thanks.

He hangs up. There's an extended silence. Winston finally presses him.

WINSTON

What?

DA VINCI

She's got heroin in her system.

WINSTON

In the eight year old?

DA VINCI

In the eight year old. She's eight years old, she dies of malaria, and now she's got heroin in her system.

Da Vinci storms out.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE

INT. MORGUE - DAY

Sunny is with Da Vinci. Mrs. Jorgenson is now on the table.

SUNNY

Mom's an IV user.

DA VINCI

Yeah? Where?

SUNNY

(indicating)

Here, between the toes.

DA VINCI

She's a regular user?

SUNNY

I'd say so, from the number of scars behind her knees, up in the thigh area, concealed areas. Obviously trying to hide it.

DA VINCI

Okay, so Mom's a junkie. So she's got malaria by sharing a needle with an IV user who's also infected with malaria. That's possible.

SUNNY

She's a user. You can see it.

DA VINCI

Probable. Now, the daughter over here has also got malaria, but got heroin in her system. So what's the story, the mother's shooting up the daughter?

SUNNY

I found a possible injection site on the child.

DA VINCI

Great.

INT. DA VINCI'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Da Vinci's at the computer, writing up a report. Gabriella enters.

GABRIELLA

Hey, Dad.

DA VINCI (O/S)

Hey, honey. How are you?

GABRIELLA

I'm okay.

DA VINCI

I'll be with you in one second.

GABRIELLA

Are you okay? You seem a little down.

DA VINCI

No, I'm not down.

GABRIELLA

It's okay to be down.

He looks at her.

GABRIELLA (CONT' D)

Well, maybe you're just - okay, you're not -
you're not down. You're just a little
reflective or something.

DA VINCI

Reflective? Yeah, that's me all over.
Reflective, yeah. So it's going to be
dinner, it's going to be a movie.

GABRIELLA

What about dinner and a movie?

DA VINCI

Okay, sure.

GABRIELLA

'Cause you haven't - you haven't done that
in a while.

DA VINCI

What's that supposed to mean?

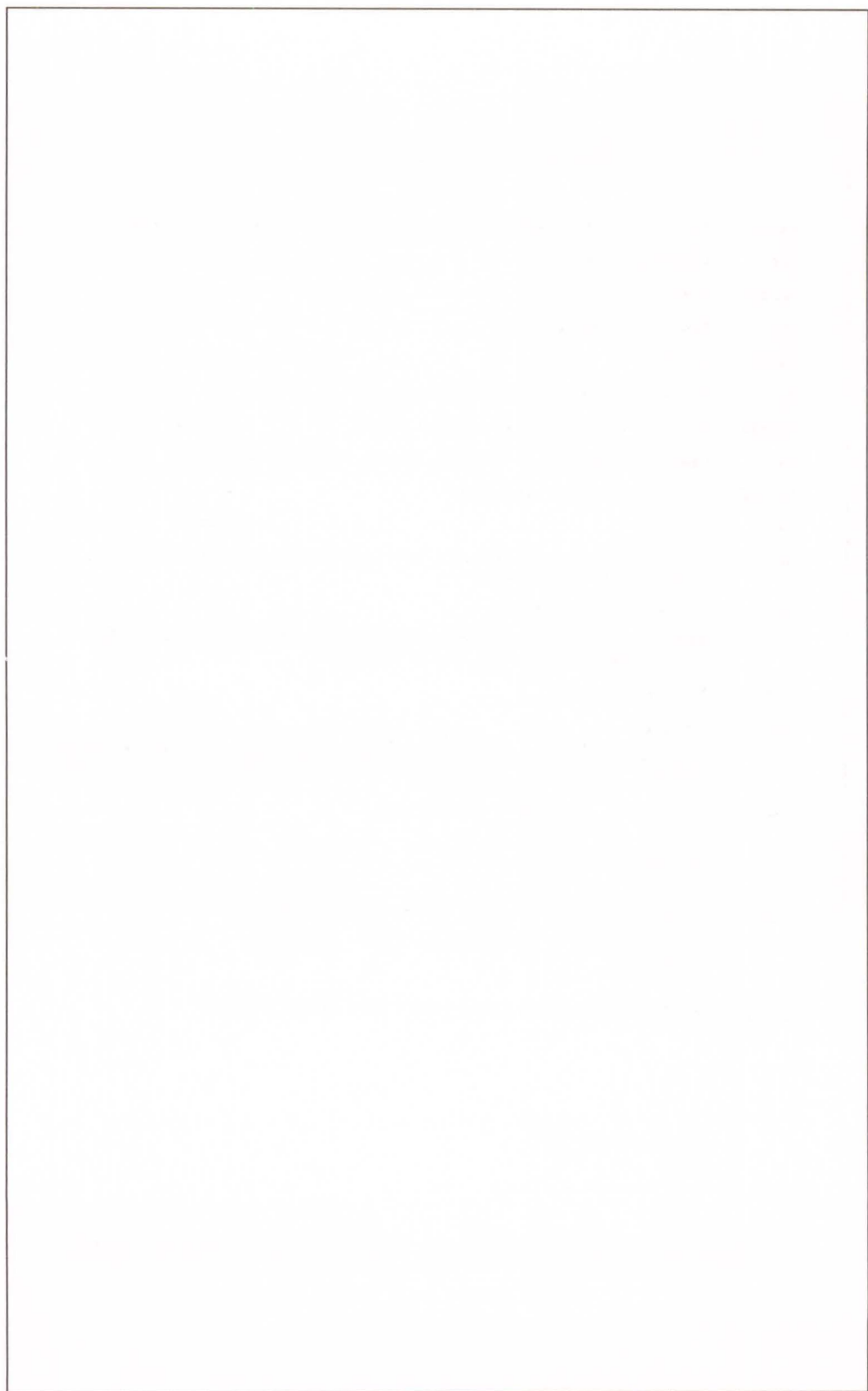
GABRIELLA

It doesn't mean anything. It's just an
observation.

DA VINCI

An observation? Meaning what?

- 30 -



BEDROOM - LAURIE & DEZ

Laurie: Isn't this where you say "It was good" and I say "real good"

Dez: Ah la Hemingway

Laurie: Love:

Dez: Yea, it's real poetry

Laurie: Oh God

Dez: He can't help you try someone else

Laurie: Why can't we really touch each other

Dez: (sarcastically) What ya want, stars, lights and roses

Laurie: Why is it always like this?

Dez: Why not--

Laurie: Love - that four letter word love - it isn't even dirty anymore, just a friendly exchange

Dez: At least it's friendly

Laurie: ~~You've used me and I know it, I used you and you know it.~~ Hell, I feel like a well used, dirty dish rag.

Dez: Try some bleach.

Laurie: You pig!

Dez: *if you want the money lady*
~~What do you want, lies and illusions - that comes before, not after.~~ *you ask for it before not after*

Laurie: You pig! you pig! you-----

In walks ~~the~~ Colin

Colin: Rise and shine, how about giving someone else a -----
oh the pride @ play -
A SILENCE

Laurie: What are you staring at -- your wife at her seducer

unt

Brett Enemark / BEFORE THE BEGINNING: THE MAKING OF *THE BITTER ASH*

In 1963, Larry Kent, a 25 year-old undergraduate at UBC, made a feature film called *The Bitter Ash*. Costing a mere five thousand dollars, not only was it the first feature made in Vancouver, it was one of the first modern features made in Canada. As noted by Piers Handling in his 1986 article on Larry Kent,¹ *The Bitter Ash* was produced a full year before the two films which Peter Harcourt had announced marked the “beginning of a beginning.”² It is tempting to say, then, that Kent’s film originated “before the beginning.” The first screening of *The Bitter Ash* took place on October 7, 1963 in the old UBC Auditorium.

In the early 1960’s, Vancouver had an acute sense of itself as “nowhere.” It not only lacked a history in feature film production, it lacked a history in the production of literary narratives as well.³ *The Bitter Ash* was organic, a kind of “folk” film. For the people involved, who donated their time and labour, the film was a personal statement. As one actor put it to me, she shared a sense that the film would “change the world.”⁴ So it is not simply that it came out of a specific context — the University of British Columbia Player’s Club, the cafeteria in the basement of the Buchanan Building, the streets of the downtown eastside, the city’s rigid division along Ontario Street between the east (containing the workers and the poor), and the west (with its middle class and the big money) — not to mention its bohemia, scattered anywhere rent was cheap — but the film was the expression of a community, representing a vision and a voice larger than that of any single individual.

Larry Kent, writer, director, producer, distributor

In 1957, at the age of 19, Larry Kent arrived in Vancouver from Capetown, South Africa (via England). During those first days, Kent claims,⁵ he couldn’t afford a place to stay. His first weekend in Vancouver was spent on skid row, near the hiring halls and docks, waiting to go to work in a logging camp. Kent recalls being awake for

two nights, walking around or sitting in coffee shops, trying to stay awake while being hounded by the police, who harassed anyone who fell asleep in public. From the beginning Kent saw the city from the bottom up.

After two months in the bush, Kent returned to the city and found work as a printer with Pacific Press, the monopoly that publishes the city's only daily newspapers, the *Sun* and *Province*. By the early sixties he had married and found his way to the UBC Theatre department. In 1962, he wrote and produced a one-act play called *The Afrikaaner* with Alan Scarfe playing the lead. Around this time Kent got the idea of making a film.

While many were active in live theatre, the writing scene at UBC was dominated by poets, none of whom talked about making films. The poets, including the founders of *Tish*, remember Kent as a mature figure with a loud voice, and the source of numerous cafeteria arguments.⁶

Dick Bellamy, cinematographer, editor

Kent's opportunity to make films came when someone at the UBC Film Society suggested he talk to Dick Bellamy, a glassblower who worked for the Chemistry Department. Dick had his own movie camera and had already made several small films. In early January 1963,⁷ the two men met, and after viewing and discussing Bellamy's films, Kent asked Dick to work on his own film project, a thirty-minute drama called *The Street* to be shot on location across the east side of the city. At the time, Bellamy was editing his own thirty-minute film, entitled *Man with a Camera*, a task which he put aside to work on *The Street*.

Like Kent, Bellamy was not from Vancouver. He had immigrated here in 1961 — from Bristol. Dick bought his first movie camera in 1956. Bellamy describes himself as “self-taught” and his first films, of street scenes, interiors, and family members, show a systematic experimentation with light levels, film stocks, and subject matter. As well as developing and printing his own photographs and films, Bellamy was active in the Bristol University Film Society. There he learned editing and worked on a number of short films.

Kent and Bellamy started filming Kent's script in late January or early February 1963.⁸ Kent had enlisted some actors from the

University Players' Club, including Alan Scarfe, Scott Douglas (later Scott Hylands), Patricia Dahlquist, Karl Ferris, Lanny Beckman, Brian Belfont, and others.

Alan Scarfe, actor

Alan Scarfe was also born in England but grew up in West Point Grey near UBC where his father was Dean of Education. According to Scarfe, since he wasn't complimented for anything else, and wasn't much interested in school, he "fell into" acting. In 1960, at age 13, he began to attend summer schools in theatre at UBC. It channelled his interests. At age 16 he did street theatre for the summer at the historic town of Barkerville. *The Street* and *The Bitter Ash* were his first films. By then he was 17, but "played older." In *The Bitter Ash* he seems to be the most film-savvy of all the actors. But as Scarfe says now, "if it works it was because I was an intense and strange young man . . . not because I knew what I was doing."⁹

The Street

Shooting began under the walls of the B.C. Penitentiary in New Westminster, where the protagonist, Charlie Reeves (played by Alan Scarfe), is let out of prison. Alan Scarfe remembers being extremely hungover that rainy morning. Bellamy recalls that Larry made no arrangement with the prison authorities and that while Larry directed Alan in front of the prison gates, Bellamy looked nervously at the guards on the walls behind them, holding shotguns. The remainder of the film was shot in various locations: on a rented transit bus, downtown on the streets of skid row, inside a beer parlour, in a pool hall, in a cafe on Hastings known as a centre of the drug trade (the Bluebird), the Anyox Hotel on Hastings Street, as well as in a restaurant near the University. The owner of the Varsity Grill on West 10th agreed to forsake his regular business, in exchange for a fee¹⁰ and the privilege of contributing to Kent's film. On the street, the situation was not always that pleasant. Bellamy recalled incidents when Kent was almost assaulted. "Larry," recalled Dick, "would never back off from shooting a scene." According to Bellamy, Kent was so stubborn about continuing that sooner or later, people realized "you would have to kill him to make him stop."¹¹

With a budget of six hundred dollars, without lighting, a tripod, a complete script, or a scrub tape to record the dialogue as spoken, the shooting was completed and a work print was assembled.¹² But like Charlie, the character who is let out of prison but can't escape the forces that put him there in the first place, *The Street* never saw the light of day. To add sound to the film, Kent had borrowed a magnasynch recorder and a Bell & Howell projector from the UBC Film Society. They were connected together in the radio studio at UBC.¹³ The film was projected while the actors attempted to speak their lines into a microphone in synch with their lips as they appeared onscreen. But when the voices were played back, they didn't match the images. The discrepancy increased as the film played. Larry blamed Dick for the problem, and an argument ensued as the actors stood by, waiting. Eventually everyone went their own way. Larry left with the work print and Dick ended up with the negative. Feelings were strained and there was no attempt to solve what turned out to be a minor technical problem: when they picked up the equipment, they weren't provided with the small gearbox that should have been attached on the mechanical drive shaft between the projector and the recorder.

Ever the optimist, Larry viewed *The Street* not as a failure, but as proof that not only could he make a film, he could make a feature film. All thought of *The Street* was banished from his mind. In the next month or two, during the spring of 1963, Kent wrote the script for *The Bitter Ash*.

The Bitter Ash

When production started on *The Bitter Ash* in May or June, Bellamy was not part of the project. After getting the first few shots back from the processing lab, Kent realized that the film had not been exposed correctly. His new cameraman had reversed his aperture settings, narrowing it for interior shots and opening it up for exteriors. The result was unusable. Finally Kent came unexpectedly to Bellamy's door asking for help, bringing with him several cans of unexposed film. Bellamy hesitated but couldn't resist. "Even when I was angry at him," Dick commented, "I still admired that ability he had to talk anyone into doing just about anything."¹⁴ Bellamy joined

the crew on set (so to speak), where the existing cameraman graciously accepted his demise, but was anxious to learn what he'd done wrong. Bellamy warned Kent at the time that he was going to England that summer for six weeks to attend a wedding and visit his family. Kent insisted that this would be OK and production resumed.

The shooting was largely chronological and, of course, on location. The camera was the same spring-wound Bolex which Dick had used for *The Street*. As a general rule, Dick used a 10mm lens for the interior shots, and the 25mm for exteriors. The film was Kodak Plus-X negative for exteriors and bright interiors and Tri-X for the party sequence. While he did have a tripod, Bellamy notes it was "heavy as lead" and that they "were usually in too much of a hurry to use it."¹⁵ As a result, the camera was handheld throughout the film. As for lighting, Dick "usually designed just to enhance the natural light enough to get an exposure."¹⁶

Working from a single hand-written script, Larry went through each scene with the actors and encouraged them to put their own words to the situation. Without a shooting script, Dick simply "worked around what Larry did." Bellamy recalls "the vocabulary of film was very clear in my mind, not Larry's." Larry, in Bellamy's judgement, was not "very visual" at this time. From Larry's point of view, Dick was overly concerned with the values of fine art. But both were agreed that the film would be shot in what they called "documentary style." Limited to shots of less than 40 seconds, Bellamy believes that this restriction "contributed to the liveliness of the film" because it ruled out long takes, and forced him to use "a reasonable number of different shots to build a scene."¹⁷

Shooting was delayed by six weeks in mid-July when Bellamy went to England. The last sequence they shot before he left was the "rent party." Everyone involved with the film, as well as friends and anyone else, including "outsiders" who were pulled off the street, were invited to Jamie and Carol Reid's house for a party. Participants were invited in full knowledge that there was a film being shot, but the experience was not that of a film set, but an authentic party of which the filming was one aspect. The drug-use which the film alludes to was not simulated. The female lead, 19 year-old Lynn Stewart (now Berresford), recalls being offered "coke." She declined, saying she

“didn’t like coca-cola.” She “hadn’t really heard about coke” at this time, and “didn’t know about dope either.” She remembers Larry telling her “*that* was what was being smoked in one of the rooms.”¹⁸

Over the summer, Kent was anxious about Bellamy’s absence but managed to keep the leading actors together until production resumed in early September. Stewart, Bellamy, and Scarfe recall shooting the lovemaking scene back at the Reid apartment. Imagine flood lights illuminating a small upstairs bedroom in the middle of a hot day. A bed, a camera. Three men and a woman. Sweat. At the last minute Lynn refused to remove her top although she’d already rehearsed the scene topless. Larry became “quite angry” and had to remind her she had promised him she’d do it. In fact, Lynn suggests that possibly the reason she got the part in the first place was that she was the only woman who agreed to do the scene.¹⁹ But now she not only felt nervous about nudity, but “felt terribly inadequate and unskilled” as an actor. She notes “I took my acting/getting it right very seriously.”²⁰ Lynn finally did the scene, but was “very shy about it,” according to Alan.²¹ Scarfe remembers being “extremely irritated” a few minutes later when Larry wanted Lynn to dig her nails into Alan’s shoulders at the climactic moment, and drag them down his back so that the marks would be visible to the camera. At this point, Alan threatened to walk out. He recalls thinking that maybe Larry was “getting off on it.” But Scarfe, too, relented, and allowed Lynn to scratch him, which she did, much to her own satisfaction as she felt it was exactly what Larry and Dick had asked for. When Alan then turned his anger on her, she became “a little miffed” herself; it was “not her idea,” after all.²²

Post-Production

Bellamy started editing the film in a walk-in closet off the kitchen of his apartment during the last weeks of September — he had no negative splicer and had to improvise to make the splices work. “It was a real sweatbox,” notes Bellamy. The noise of the reels disturbed the landlord, who insisted Dick not work past midnight. So he was forced to edit in the heat of the day, and failed to go to work regularly.²³ When asked about the editing of the party scene, which is one of the strongest sequences in the film, Bellamy explained that he

totally disregarded chronological order in assembling the shots. He went through the footage and selected all the images with movement, cutting these out in short lengths. He'd done something similar before when he edited a stabbing scene in a short film called *Guilt* when he was still in England. "The emphasis is on what is happening not on how it happens"²⁴

After the work print had been assembled, it was taken to the recording studio of Robin Spurgin on West Broadway near McDonald. The dialogue was dubbed in 20 minute takes, and a music track was recorded by the Jack Dale group²⁵ and by Clint Solomon on solo guitar (this time with the magnasynch complete). The "wandering synch" in several parts of film was due in part to the lack of a scrub tape. The actors had no exact record of their words at the time of the shooting. Dick Bellamy notes that it was also extremely difficult to edit sound on the "awkward Magnasynch Moviola":

It meant moving between the bench and the Moviola with the track in order to physically cut and paste the sound, and it was easy to lose synch completely if the machine ran on a few frames past where you wanted it to stop. It was so noisy you could barely hear the sound anyway. There was also the problem of reading lips in the long shots on the tiny flickering picture . . . though close-ups were not easy either, depending on the actor. In the end I just ran out of time to improve the sound fit anymore. Let's face it, at 3 a.m. . . . trying to stay awake and running on sheer guts, it's hard to make intelligent choices.²⁶

The editing of the sound was completed at night at the old CBC building at Bute and Georgia, thanks to director Stan Fox.²⁷ Dick worked around the clock for a week.

Even before *The Bitter Ash* was publicly exhibited, the censorship controversy was underway. Sometime during the editing process, Lynn brought her mother to Dick's apartment to see a clip from the film. Dick, who was a little disoriented from his editing efforts, accidentally projected a few frames of Lynn's topless love scene. Not unexpectedly the mother was shocked and determined to suppress

the film. Bellamy recalls being phoned by a lawyer about it, who Dick then referred to Larry.²⁸

Almost 40 years later, Kent has no recollection of Stewart's mother being involved, but concedes that this was possible. Lynn Berresford also has no recollection of seeing the clip in Dick's apartment with her mother, or of trying to stop the film before the premiere. But Kent does insist that she did try to stop the film before it appeared, and this is confirmed by Bellamy and by critic Bob McDonald in his October 8, 1963 review of the film in the university student newspaper.²⁹ While Lynn does remember signing a release and vaguely recalls two lawyers being involved, she retains the impression this was after the premiere, after the censorship controversy hit the newspapers, and after the screenings were temporarily cancelled. She also does not think her mother hired a lawyer. However, a reasonable conclusion is that Dick's version of events is largely accurate, though he's only assuming that it was Lynn's mother who brought in a lawyer for Lynn. Lynn suggests it may have someone else who thought they were acting in her best interest. But something *must* have precipitated Lynn Stewart's attempt to stop the film. Lynn admits that "the making of the film is much clearer in . . . [her] memory than the censorship debacle" which caused her to "doubt" the project.³⁰

Around the same time, about a week before the premiere was scheduled, Larry took the film to Trans-Canada Films to do the mix and make a print. According to Larry, "the mixer saw the film and got very upset about the sex scene. He told Wally Hamilton, the owner, about it and Wally decided to hold the negative."³¹ On Thursday morning, October 3, under fire from his lead actress and the film lab, Larry went to see lawyer Harry Rankin, to show him the film (on the Bell & Howell with the magnasync) to see if he could get the negative back, and to discuss how things might be patched up with Lynn Stewart. After seeing the film, Rankin stated that he didn't think the film could be shown without Lynn's permission.³² He also thought that Larry was within his rights to exhibit the film on the UBC campus.³³ With this assurance, Kent felt legally protected during the censorship controversy that followed the film's premiere the following week.

On Friday evening, Trans-Canada Films returned the negative and the optical sound track for no apparent reason (other than the thought of Harry Rankin chewing on someone's ear³⁴). There was only one other place in Vancouver that could process 16mm film, a lab operated by Bob Elliot located across from the CBC Building on Bute Street. Kent took the film there on Saturday but made no mention of the love scene or his problems with Wally Hamilton. When Kent and Bellamy went to pick up the film on Sunday, the day before the premiere,³⁵ the lab insisted on projecting it before Larry and Dick left, just to make certain there was no problem with their work. Kent hesitated but agreed. They watched the film up to a few moments before the love scene. Suddenly, Kent stood up and announced he was satisfied with the print and that he had another appointment to go to. He needed the film NOW! Much to the disappointment of the lab personnel, who at this point were deeply engrossed in the film, Kent and Bellamy escaped without anyone knowing what they had printed.

"Finally, a very long finally" writes Kent, "Monday came around." Lynn Stewart signed a release prepared by Harry Rankin. She did it "reluctantly," Kent thought, but "we took our print straight to the screening" at the auditorium.³⁶

Postscript

It was probably the first (and only) film premiere in which the leading actors sold tickets at the door. Alan Scarfe recalls "It was like an underground film festival of the Brezhnev era; it was very exciting, everybody was all agog, like it was revolutionary stuff, and you felt like the Board of Governors of the University were going to close the place and put padlocks on the doors."³⁷

The feeling was well-founded. Even though the film was a success with the audience, who gave it at least one standing ovation,³⁸ floods of phone calls to the university administration, the R.C.M.P., the B.C. censor board, and to radio talk shows, "mostly by irate parents," resulted in the closing of the doors on Thursday afternoon, October 10, after six screenings.³⁹ The idea that a student film would go beyond the mainstream in its representation of sexuality was unacceptable to much of the public. One letter writer saw the film as part

of a Communist conspiracy to corrupt the morals of youth. "Our enemy," he writes "knows all too well the power of pictures on the mind."⁴⁰ While declaring himself an opponent of censorship, the film critic for *The Vancouver Province* called the film "grubby" and "gauche . . . badly oriented towards art and technically poor and unworthy of analysis," suggesting that "the title should be changed from *The Bitter Ash* to *The Tasteless Smut*."⁴¹ Even in the student newspaper, there was substantial invective. Of course all this controversy did was to increase the length of the lineups at the doors of the auditorium, which re-opened the following week after it was agreed that as long as only university students, and not the general public, viewed the film, it was legal. Harry Rankin was right. People began to ask why it was that students could see films that the general public could not. Larry Kent was already talking about his next film.

Notes

¹ Piers Handling, "Larry Kent, Lost and Found: A Critical Rehabilitation," *Cinema Canada*, February 1986: 10.

² Peter Harcourt, "1964: The Beginning of a Beginning," *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinemas*, edited by Pierre Véronneau, Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980).

³ See Colin Browne, "The Feature Film in British Columbia, 1927-1985," unpublished manuscript, May 1992: 16.

⁴ Patricia Dahlquist, personal interview, 7 May 2002.

⁵ Larry Kent, in conversation, 30 April 2002.

⁶ Young UBC poets Frank Davey, George Bowering, Fred Wah, David Dawson, and Jamie Reid founded a mimeographed magazine, *Tish* in 1961. See *Beyond Tish*, a special issue of *West Coast Line* 25: 1 (1991) for an account of the Vancouver poetry scene in the early 60's. For general impressions of Larry Kent on campus during this period I'm indebted to Maria Hindmarch, Lionel Kearns, and Jamie Reid.

⁷ Dick Bellamy, journal entry, 12 January 1963.

⁸ The negatives of *The Street* are dated February, 1963.

⁹ Alan Scarfe, personal interview, 8 May 2002.

¹⁰ Bing was never paid, however, according to a letter in the possession of Dick Bellamy. Part of the reality of small independent film production, remarks Alan Scarfe, is that you should *never* expect to get paid.

¹¹ Dick Bellamy, personal interview, 3 February 2002.

¹² Kent did not have a typewriter and the scripts of these early films were either handwritten by Larry or typed in part by Dick Bellamy, who saved a lot of this material. Note that this period was pre-cassette, and there were no portable tape recorders that were truly “portable” or readily available. Live synchronous sound was impossibly expensive.

¹³ Kent has no recollection (in conversation, May 20, 2002) now of trying to add sound to the film but he acknowledges that they must have had that intention. Bellamy’s memories are quite detailed and sound “familiar” to Scarfe and Dahlquist. Scarfe recalls the word “magnasynch” coming out of Larry’s mouth over and over in high volume.

¹⁴ Bellamy, e-mail communication to the author, 16 May 2002.

¹⁵ Bellamy, “*The Bitter Ash*, Notes after seeing it again for the first time in 38 years,” unpublished signed statement, 8 February 2002.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Berresford, personal e-mail correspondence “a” with the author, 25 May 2002.

¹⁹ Berresford, personal e-mail correspondence “b” with the author, 25 May 2002.

²⁰ Berresford, personal e-mail correspondence, 24 May 2002.

²¹ Scarfe, personal interview, 8 May 2002.

²² Berresford, 24 May 2002.

²³ When confronted by his employers about his absences from work, Bellamy told them he was making a movie part time. His boss replied that he would soon be making movies *full time* if he didn’t show up for work at the university. Bellamy had to promise to work Saturdays for the next year in order to make up for his absence during this period. (Bellamy, personal interview, 3 February 2002.)

²⁴ Bellamy, personal interview, 3 February 2002.

²⁵ *The Jack Dale Group* consisted of Jack Dale (piano), Wilf Manz (drums), Jimmy Thomas (bass), and Norval Garrod (guitar). In the film credits, which Bellamy lettered at the last moment, Garrod's name is missing. Dale (also a talented photographer who went on to teach at York University) previewed the film, prepared some ideas, and brought those to the scoring session. A major influence on the group, at this point, was *The Modern Jazz Quartet*. (Jimmy Thomas, personal interview, 13 May 2002.) At recent public viewings, someone in the audience almost always asks if a recording of the score is available.

²⁶ Bellamy, personal e-mail communication, 16 May 2002.

²⁷ Bellamy, "Notes." Bellamy knew Stan Fox from a summer school film production course Fox had taught at UBC in 1961. (Bellamy, telephone conversation, 21 May 2002.)

²⁸ Bellamy, personal interview, 11 May 2002.

²⁹ See Bob McDonald, "Ash Smoulders Out of the Can," *The Ubyyssey*, 8 October 1963.

³⁰ Berresford, e-mail correspondence, 25 May 2002.

³¹ Larry Kent, "Bitter Memories," unpublished e-mail correspondence, 22 April 2002.

³² Ibid.

³³ Kent, personal interview, 7 April 2002.

³⁴ This is my speculation based on knowing Rankin's reputation as a "people's" lawyer and outspoken leftist politician who played a prominent role in Vancouver politics for almost 40 years. Rankin died in early 2002, before his role in this affair became known to me.

³⁵ See Bob McDonald, "Ash Smoulders Out of the Can."

³⁶ Kent, "Bitter Memories."

³⁷ Alan Scarfe, personal interview, 8 May 2002.

³⁸ Mark Voelkner, "A Smash," *The Ubyyssey*, 11 October 1963.

³⁹ Ron Thody, "AMS Slams Door on Movie," *The Ubyyssey*, 11 October 1963: 1-2.

⁴⁰ I.C. "Power of Pictures," letter, *The Vancouver Province*, 12 October 1963.

⁴¹ Mike Tytherleigh, "Student Movie Grubby," *The Vancouver Province*, 10 October 1963.

Michael Turner & Bruce LaBruce / SCENE FROM *UNTITLED VON GLOEDEN PROJECT*

Introduction

Near the end of the nineteenth-century, a young German aristocrat named Wilhelm Von Gloeden left art school and traveled to Taormina, Sicily, to repair his tubercular lungs. At his cousin's urging, he took up photography, acquiring a large-format camera. His first works were landscapes, but it is through portraiture that we know him best.

Taormina, in those days, was a poor fishing village. Many of Von Gloeden's models (mostly adolescent men) were Taormina residents, and he often dressed them in togas and laurel leaves — if he dressed them at all — for his Greek and Roman *mise-en-scènes*. ("Antiquity", like photography, was the rage, the former due in part to a series of archaeological finds in the Eastern Mediterranean around that time, the latter because it was new.) In return for their work, Von Gloeden gave his models "gifts."

Meanwhile, in the rest of Europe, while some plotted a "dictatorship of the proletariat," those of privilege imagined an innocent, less complicated utopia — arcadia — where people roamed the countryside in a state of protracted meditation — as evidenced in Von Gloeden's pastoral photographs, which were finding private audiences among the continent's wealthier patrons. However, it wasn't until a lucrative licensing deal with a postcard manufacturer, in the early-1900s, that Von Gloeden's photos became accessible to everyone. By then fans included Oscar Wilde, Isadora Duncan, Douglas Fairbanks, Gabriele D'Annunzio, all of whom traveled to Taormina under the pretext of visiting Von Gloeden's studio.

Now, I say "pretext" because what these visitors were *really* interested in was not Von Gloeden's studio but his models, who, although showing signs of malnutrition (distended bellies, rickets) revealed bodies closer to theirs than previous representations — the Caliban body, as opposed to the wispy Ariel. Plus many were well-endowed.

By 1922, when Mussolini came to power, Taormina was also well-endowed, no longer a fishing village but a full-fledged tourist town whose income derived largely from the sex trade. Although many of Von Gloeden's glass plates were confiscated or destroyed by the Fascist Squadristi, some managed to survive, and to this day remain iconic gay images, the most famous of which is *Caino*.

The Taormina of the present looks nothing like the fishing village of a hundred years ago. It is a quaint place, the architecture a mix of Rococo and Victorian Italianate, its narrow cobblestone streets lined with souvenir shops, restaurants, Gucci and Prada. The main attraction is the Greek theatre atop the hill. At any given moment, the place is swarming with tourists.

While much of the souvenir imagery is devoted to its three-legged sun god, Trinacria, or the tempestuous Etna, one thing you don't see is evidence of Von Gloeden. One has to ask for that. And if you get a response (and you will, because everybody in town is familiar with the photos) you are led to a shop with a curtained room full of postcards, posters, books, videotapes, t-shirts — all of it dedicated to the work of Von Gloeden, all of it for sale. A lucrative, though hidden, shrine to the man who made Taormina what it is today.

Which is where our film begins, in present-day Taormina, with filmmaker Bruce LaBruce (40s) arriving to prep his own film — based on the life and work of Wilhelm Von Gloeden. Although he has done some research, he knows nothing of his subject's historic impact on the town, nor does he know how the town felt about his employing young men as models — information he intends to get through a series of interviews arranged in advance of his arrival.

To assist him, Bruce hires a translator, a referral from an attendant at a tourist kiosk. The translator, Stella Rossi (30s), is an ambitious though lowly employee of the Taormina Chamber of Commerce. Like some Sicilians, she is ashamed of the Von Gloeden legacy, preferring to acknowledge the town's natural beauty — not Indo-European sex tourism — as the reason for its success. As you can imagine, things get ugly. The more Bruce discovers about Von Gloeden and his impact, the more Stella and her cohorts try to thwart him.

The scene I have selected occurs early in the film, the first interview. (Bruce, I should add, knows zero Italian.)

— Michael Turner

INT. "MRS. GRIMALDI'S" APARTMENT - DAY

CLOSE ON PAINTING - a traditional fishing scene. A beached boat, a lone fisherman picking through his net.

PANNING DOWN - A very old woman (80s). In black. She is seated in the middle of a love seat; in front of her, a coffee table. Her name, for all intents and purposes, is "MRS. GRIMALDI". In her hands, a postcard - the same postcard ("Boy With Horns and Javelin") as the one held up in the previous scene. She is looking at it, shaking her head. She looks at her guests as if to ask, Why me?

REVERSE POV -

BRUCE is taking aim with his DV camera.

BRUCE'S POV: ON "MRS. GRIMALDI" - A DV image.

BRUCE (OS)

Mrs. Grimaldi, I have it on good authority that the man in that photo is your father, Guiseppe Lupini. Can you tell me anything about him? Did he ever speak to you about his work with Wilhelm Von Gloeden?

STELLA

(to "Mrs. Grimaldi",
in Italian)

SUBTITLED: As I told you on the phone, Mr. LaBruce is a British detective. He is investigating the distribution of child pornography, and he wants to know if you've seen anybody in the neighbourhood selling pictures like the one in your hand.

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian)

SUBTITLE: I don't understand. These pictures are everywhere. What's the big deal? And why are you showing me this? Why not show me a picture of the man you're looking for?

STELLA

(translating)

She says she's not sure of your intentions. She's worried you might not be who you say you are, that you might be trying to blackmail her.

BRUCE

Tell her everything she tells me will be held in the strictest of confidences.

STELLA

(to "Mrs. G", in Italian)

SUBTITLE: He said they don't have a photo yet. Just evidence. He wants to know if you can describe the man selling these pictures.

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian)

SUBTITLE: How can I describe a man I haven't seen?

STELLA

(to Bruce)

She thanks you for your discretion. And yes, she knows about Von Gloeden and her father.

BRUCE

Ask her if she could tell me the story of how they first met.

STELLA

(in Italian)

SUBTITLE: Thank you very much for your time, Mrs. Grimaldi. Oh, and before we go, the detective noticed you were making something in the kitchen. He wonders if you would be so kind as to share with him your recipe?

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian, brightening)

SUBTITLE: Oh, it's quite simple really.

STELLA

(to Bruce)

Von Gloeden lived near her father.

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian)

SUBTITLE: You take a two pound chicken.

STELLA

Her father was working as a shepherd . . .

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian)

SUBTITLE: Put it in a pot with six cups of water . . .

STELLA

. . . when Von Gloeden approached him . . .

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(In Italian)

SUBTITLE: Add a pinch of salt . . .

STELLA

. . . and touched his genitals with feather duster . . .

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian)

SUBTITLE: Some pepper corns, garlic and celery . . .

STELLA

. . . then threatened to tell his friends he was a faggot . . .

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian)

SUBTITLE: . . . and boil it till the skin comes off.

STELLA

. . . if he didn't pose naked for photos.

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

SUBTITLE: Reduce heat. Add tomatoes, oregano, a bay leaf and sugar.

STELLA

He was never paid for his work.

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian)

Then put the lid on.

STELLA

And Von Gloeden told his friends he was a faggot anyway.

MRS. GRIMALDI turns to Bruce, smiling.

"MRS. GRIMALDI"

(in Italian, smiling)

SUBTITLE: Would you like to stay for dinner?

STELLA

She says she'd like to be paid in cash.

BRUCE lowers his camera, reaches for his wallet.

"MRS. GRIMALDI" looks confused.

BRUCE

(to Stella)

We agreed on fifty Euros, right?

STELLA

I told her a hundred.

BRUCE scowls, takes the money from his wallet, puts it on the coffee table. "MRS. GRIMALDI" gives STELLA a baffled look.

STELLA

(to "Mrs. Grimaldi",
smiling)

He says he'd love to. But he has to catch a plane.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

GUYR. BEINING's *The Compact Duchamp, Amp after Amp* came out last year via Chapultepec Press and two more sections from *Measuring the Night* will be out later this year from Marimbo Press. From the surrealist magazine *UR VOX*, 100 images from his *A Beckett Silhouette* can be viewed at w.w.w.urvox.net.

City of Vancouver Mayor LARRY CAMPBELL continues to consult for the Gemini award-winning television series *Da Vinci's Inquest*. He established the first Vancouver District Coroner's office in 1981 and was appointed BC Chief Coroner in 1996.

MARK COCHRANE teaches writing and literature at Kwantlen University College, occasionally reviews books for the *Vancouver Sun*, and studies law at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *Boy Am I* (Wolsak & Wynn 1995) and *Change Room* (Talonbooks 2000). He lives in Vancouver.

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BRETT ENEMARK is a *bricoleur* of identities writing poems and stories on and off since 1970. Immigrating to Vancouver from Prince George in 1965, he is currently the invention of two eight-year-old girls adopted from China. He teaches film history and aesthetics at Simon Fraser University.

CHRIS HADDOCK is the Series Creator, Writer, and Executive Producer of Canada's top-rated dramatic series, *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Haddock also created *The Handler*, a new prime time series for CBS. He is currently developing a crime noir musical, two features, and an HBO movie.

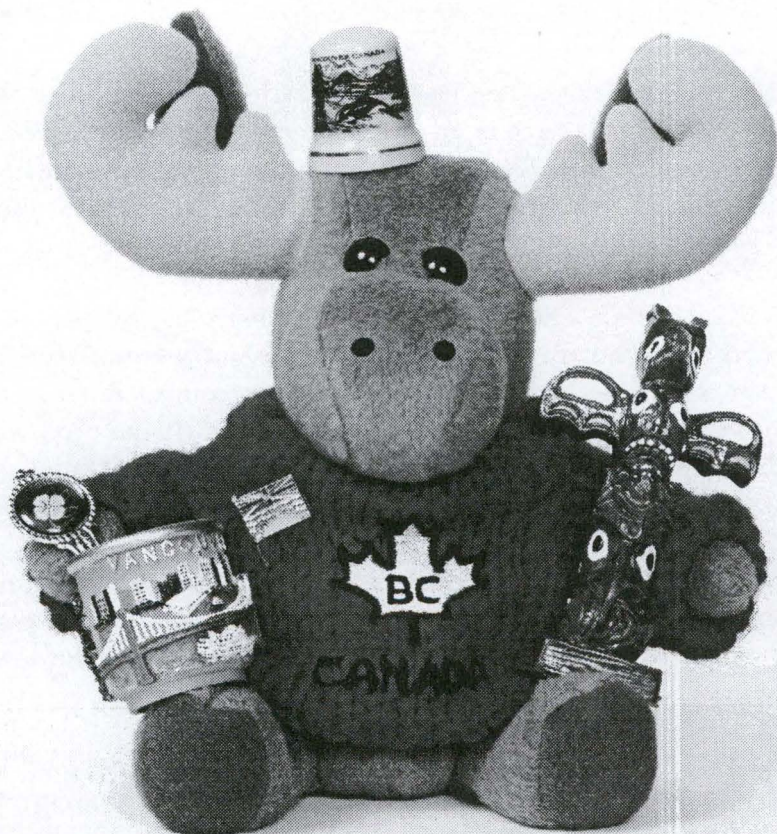
BRUCE LABRUCE's films include *No Skin Off My Ass*, *Super 8 1/2*, and *Hustler White*. LaBruce is a photographer and columnist for magazines such as *Honcho* and *Inches* and was recently named a contributing editor to New York's *Index Magazine*. He has two books, *The Reluctant Pornographer*, his premature memoirs, from Gutter Press, and *Ride, Queer, Ride*, a survey of his work from Plug-In Books.

BOB SHERRIN is a writer and visual artist who has published and exhibited his work in Canada, the U.S., Scotland, Switzerland, and India. He lives in Burnaby, BC and teaches in the Humanities Division of Capilano College in North Vancouver.

LOLA TOSTEVIN has published five collections of poetry, one collection of critical essays and two novels. A sixth collection of poems, *Site-Specific Poems*, of which "Tilden Lake" is an excerpt, was recently published by Mercury Press. She is working on a third novel.

MICHAEL TURNER is a Vancouver-based writer of fiction, screenplays and art criticism.

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