

I am not alone in thinking that one can
only know, understand, and take possession of
that which one has oneself made.

— Geoffrey Smedley

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FRONT COVER
Numbered Head
(detail/front view)
PHOTO CREDITS

Geoffrey Smedley

Robert Keziere

Andrew Klobucar / SLOW LEARNER: An Interview with Peter Quartermain

Politically and culturally, the 1960s invoke significant transitions within the practice and theory of literary criticism. Postwar Vancouver writing maintained a unique relationship to the counterculture of that period and my conversation with Peter Quartermain, an important literary critic from that period, confirms how significant such history has been to Vancouver's overall cultural development. Peter began his work in Vancouver in 1962, the same year student protests began at Berkeley. In Vietnam, the U.S. had become embroiled in a significantly warmer Cold War, while at home civil rights issues became more and more visible as an expression of American political change. Moving to Canada from the Bay Area, Peter Quartermain took up the position of assistant professor at UBC to acquire what would become a life-long interest in contemporary experimental Anglo-American poetry. In the spring of 2003, for two afternoons following his residency at Capilano College, we talked about some of the decisions and events that have helped shape his cultural position and aesthetic. His many experiences, conversations, drinks, arguments, and debates with some of the most important, challenging writers and poets of this half of the last century summon an invaluable career in criticism, analysis, and, most importantly, contemplation. Very recently, such reflections have stirred an ever-growing and increasingly vital "autobiography-in-process," a work he has divided somewhat tellingly into three parts: "Dumb," "Dumber," and "Dumbest". In Peter's words, "I think 'Dumbest' ends at that point because you can't get more stupid than always trying to live inside other people's heads, doing what they expect you to do. You've gotta go your own way. Well, I must have been 35 or 36 by then. I'm a very late developer; I'm a very slow learner."

Which works mark the beginning of your critical interest in New American writing?

Well, interest anyway, I'm not sure how "critical." If it's a friend who's writing, you read the writing. So I read it. And some of it, of course, was just amazing. And Warren [Tallman] and I would go off for lunch in the second, third, and fourth years I was at UBC — and long after that, too — and we'd talk to each other. We'd have a beer over lunch. We'd already had three or four beers before lunch. And we'd talk. And 90 percent of the time we'd talk about poetry and we'd talk about poets we were reading; we'd talk about Creeley. We'd talk about Duncan; we'd talk about Olson. Olson I could not take. I could not get to Olson and Warren would say this, that, and the other about Olson, like how to read him, but I couldn't do it. Eventually it broke through. And Warren kept saying things like, you know, Creeley has a great ear. Well, I had no notion of what an ear was. But I then started reading them aloud to myself and I started noticing line breaks and stuff and there's an extraordinary delicacy to Creeley.

Were you writing on these poets?

One of the things people wanted to know of a beginning assistant professor is what you are working on. Well, I'd had this post-doc at the University of Pennsylvania, where I was working on this huge and elaborate project, which had to do with habits of exile and Europeanism in America and American writing and the patterns of that in various kinds of literary movements as the western move took place across the continent. And I was going to work all that out into this magnificent great opus . . . of course, it was all rubbish.

. . . Actually it sounds kind of interesting.

Well, when I look back on it, I realize that in some sense my whole career has been exploring a lot of those patterns which had to do with indigenous American poetics versus a postcolonial American poetics — whatever you want to call it. But just then, I started

teaching Williams and I looked at that and I thought, well, it's no good saying that I'm gonna write about "X" because there's nine million books on "X". And I certainly couldn't work on Hawthorne. I'd done my thesis on Hawthorne, but there's no way I could write [a book] about Hawthorne — there's just so much stuff, you know. I'd spend months and months getting the scholarship together. But nobody had written about Williams, so I said to the department, "I'm going to write about Williams." There was one book by Vivienne Koch then, but that was all. So I figured, if you're first on the scene, you can be wrong as hell and it doesn't matter. The point is, you're a pioneer; you'll still get tenure and all that.

Actually, I think it was kind of like an epiphany for me because you've got to live inside your own head. You can't live inside other people's heads, but I didn't *know* that. The whole pressure, of course, was to live in other people's heads, do what you think they wanted.

I mean we're talking about Duncan, talking about Olson, talking about Creeley, Whitehead, etc., etc. What if they're wrong? There is a world out there and we can know it. What I found objectionable about the whole intellectual atmosphere was that it was perpetually concerned about the truth value of everything. They had the truth about poetry. You'd read Yeats. You'd read Eliot. But then there's no Truth in there; I mean you can't tell what Eliot or Yeats is "actually" about — you can't possibly "know" what a poem *really* is. It was very slow learning for me that truth value was not a part of the educational process in that sense — in that notion of objective "rightness" and Truth. The belief that you could sort of step outside of discourse, you know, and decide that the truth is good and then go back into it happily and sort of carry on from there invites a deep insanity.

It seems that the department was strongly steeped in the New Criticism.

Well yes, absolutely. One might call it a fundamentalism. There's a righteousness attached to that notion of seeking the truth and that means that anyone who doesn't see it is not worthy to be considered at some point and that is a very frightening thought. And, of course, we're moving back into that kind of thinking in a significant way.

Just to keep talking about the luck I had in 1970 — and this was a very strange circumstance — Bob Jordan was hired to do a very difficult job two years earlier in 1968: to run a very unruly English department. It was the times of student unrest [and] the uprisings in Paris. He and I didn't get on in terms of administration or anything else, although I can tell you now I have a great deal more respect for him than I did then. I had just got tenure. One of the things Bob did was decide that since this was an English department, we really ought to have visiting poets come and do a residency. That was a pretty radical idea, actually. So he sent out a notice that he wanted to hire a poet, and could the department name some. And Keith Alldritt, bless his heart, said "Look, there's this Englishman named Basil Bunting and he's right now in California and he's free next year, why don't we invite him?" and so Jordan said "Why don't you write to Bunting and find out about him, see if we can get him." Bunting wrote back and said he'd love to come, but was committed to Newcastle University for the next two years. And then when the next two years came along, Bunting came to campus. And for some other reason — totally freaky, God only knows what it was — I was the contact man to look after Bunting when he arrived.

I thought it was your own interest in Bunting that would have brought him here.

I didn't know who he was. I mean, I sort of did since he was a friend of Pound's. And so he was coming, I read his work before he came and I thought, "Yeah, it's kind of an interesting poem." And then came this guy! It's 1970 and here's this seventy-year-old man (now, I've actually attained that age)! Anyway, there is Basil and he arrived and they had made, as usual, the most terrible of arrangements — as in none. He wouldn't get any money until he had been here a month. They had nowhere for him to live. So I got saddled with Basil, but I wrote to him and he said, "Well, find me an apartment that's nice and quiet," and I said I could do that, I suppose. So I had this list of three apartments. Housing was not hard in Vancouver then, and, so when he arrived, I could show him these apartments and he came and stayed with me and Carol — who was then my wife

— and he and Carol got on well and he and I got on well and he had no money, so I lent him some money — I had to borrow money to do it . . . but I lent him some money, so he could go out and buy himself some food! He had nothing!

He had arrived to start teaching in September and didn't have any money. You would if you were appointed in the ordinary way, because you got paid from July 31, so there would be a cheque waiting for you, but when he arrived, there was no cheque for him.

Why didn't Alldritt help out?

I think Keith was away that year. It was just pure accident I got asked. I was the only poetry person, I suppose, except for Warren but they weren't going to invite Warren because Warren was so far out in the next field, they never asked him to do anything. And Basil and I — we are also fellow Englishmen, that was a part of it, I guess. But I learned an incredible amount from those three people. It took me a long time to realize that Creeley was somebody from whom I had been learning for years and years without knowing it. With Duncan it was just straight: go, bang, right there! Basil — he just simply set out to teach me. He'd say, "listen to that; now listen to that." "That's Bach! That's Scarlatti! What's the difference?" Things like that.

How long did he stay?

He was here for one term. Then he went to Binghamton, New York State. He was pretty wretched there and wrote us a lot of letters. And then the following year I had my first leave, and since he was in Victoria for a year, he would come over every weekend, pretty well.

I'm curious as to what UBC thought of him?

Well, Reg Ingram,¹ who died some years ago now, was also one of those people who noticed Bunting. He noticed when *Briggflatts* came out there was a lot of publicity in places like the *Sunday Times* and he had heard about Bunting, and Bunting published poems in the *Sunday Times* and he was publicized there (as a friend of Ezra

Pound's, if nothing else, but you know, *Briggflatts* made a hell of a splash when it came out in '66) and Reg said, "Hey, do you know about Basil Bunting? This is a friend of Pound's that I don't know about." And I didn't know about him either, so I heard him out. And Keith knew about him from the same source. So there was quite a lot of excitement actually in the English department among younger people. So one of the things they did, of course — almost as soon as he'd arrived — was to invite him to give a talk in the English department, which he did — we didn't have colloquia as such in those days. But he gave a talk in the Buchanan Penthouse one evening. Actually I didn't go: he told me not to. "You can just rescue me and take me for a drink afterwards. I don't want you to come. You know what I'm going to say. I'm going to tell them about the 'Poet's Point of View'." And he gave this talk about sound as the central organizing principle of all poetry — that the meaning doesn't matter at all, and everybody was offended. Like, they hated it! They thought he was nuts! Like the senior people just wondered, "Well, what is he going to be telling the students?" And so on, and so on, and so on . . . Knowing how Basil was, he was certainly not too tactful, so that when people would say things like: "Well, don't you really think that people should blah, blah, blah or what about critical work? Don't you think criticism has an important part to play in the understanding of . . ." He would say, "That's just a waste of time!" and dismiss it. So there was a lot of suspicion attached to what he was doing when they found out what he really thought. I mean, he would say other things that were equally true like, "You cannot teach creative writing, I mean, you can't. You can teach people all kinds of techniques and stuff to do, and that could be very helpful. But you cannot teach people to *imagine*. If they have a tin ear they're gonna have a tin ear until they discover they've got a tin ear."

Was creative writing a part of the English department?

No, it was separated by the time he got here. But when he went to Victoria the following year, creative writing was very much a part of the English department. In fact, he was brought over there to teach poetry. And one of the things he said in a newspaper interview was

that you cannot teach creative writing, and there was a terrific row over that. They thought it was just appalling. Robin Skelton had taken over just after he had come, and he gave a statement to the press that Bunting was there on false pretences and was a hypocrite because he thought creative writing could not be taught, when he had obviously accepted a post to teach creative writing. He should give back his money and go back home. I mean, talk about overreacting!

I'd like to return to your own critical interest in poetics, specifically Williams — perhaps with reference to some of your recent essays and correspondences.

My correspondence with various people! Yes, well, with respect to Williams and literary criticism, I often think of the spatial components in his work, not to mention the musical quality. And, of course, there's the humour . . .

Were these specific components that you enjoyed?

What attracted me to Williams was, umm, well, I could *read* it. I mean, there was something so wonderfully open-ended and I guess there's a kind a glorious pointlessness about a poem like "So much depends / upon / a red wheel /barrow / glazed ..." So what! I mean, it's amazingly inconsequential. There was no challenge to the reader to puzzle out a secret, deep, and hidden meaning.

My whole training was to zoom in on the meaning and make sure you get the meaning right. And one thing with Williams was that he denounced that completely. You couldn't make those pretentious, twaddly kind of remarks that people could make about Yeats or about Auden or about Eliot, you know. I mean, when people taught *The Waste Land* and when I read *The Waste Land* — when I taught *The Waste Land* — I'd continually be getting (and I'd be totally dissatisfied with) matters of interpretation: What's going on in Eliot's head? What is happening here? What gave rise to this line here? What does he really mean by such and such and such . . . ? And all that stuff I'd always felt completely inadequate to in the poem. What I think I was trying to do was a kind of archaeological fallacy where I

would try to re-create in my own head what I thought might be going on in Eliot's head, which is of course totally absurd. That would be mad. But it seemed to me that that was the critical project in the hands of a lot of writers. This is the *real* meaning of *The Waste Land*.

And one of the things I remember thinking is, "Christ, I've got to write about something. Well, I like Hopkins, so I'll write an essay about Hopkins" and so I looked in the library and all the index catalogues and saw that there were something like 435 articles on "The Windhover" that had come out in the last seven years! You know, I thought, "Jesus God! Do I have to read all that crap before I can even start writing about the poem? What happened to the poem?" And of course, I thought I wouldn't be allowed to do it any other way because if I did, I'd probably get it wrong! Well, the great liberating thing about Williams was it was so inconsequential, you couldn't get it wrong. I mean of course there's so much you *could* get wrong, I'm not at all easy with readings of the poem to be about land reform in central China! But then there was hardly any criticism of Williams at that time so I'd say that what I read was hardly, um, helpful because, a great deal of the time, it rejected the poem completely. It said things like, not only is it really inconsequential, it's got no real structure. And, of course, I immediately started to think, well, of course it does. I looked at the syllable count, I looked at the line breaks — and that opened it up.

It was then I started realizing how sound was also a very great element in William's poetry. It's kind of a weird process actually, because a part of what I was doing was simply doing the thing for the boss. You know, you got to be working on something, so what are you working on. So I said I'll write on Williams because nobody was writing on Williams. I had read Vivien Koch's book.² Linda Wagner-Martin's book³ came out shortly after I started. But I had a couple of books by Williams and I had the *Selected Poems* and I had a few magazines and what I discovered was that there were different versions of the poems and when I looked at the different versions, nearly all of them had to do with where the line breaks were. And that immediately told me or made me suspect first that one needs to find out which is the version that Williams most liked, that is, where is the definitive text? But also what is going on here has something to

do with the weighting of the voice . . . this is a problem with notation. I'm making myself sound more intelligent here than I was, but this is the sort of thing I was fumbling around with and then I discovered Williams's essay, "The American Idiom Again." It was on the inside back cover of an issue of *Agenda* (by discovered, I mean "read"). So I read Williams talking about Philip Freneau using music as a way of annotating the poem, notating the poem and how it looked on the page. And it was really quite clear that he was really concerned about that stationary appearance on the page as a way of registering the movement of the mind through the words or the movement of the words through the mind and the movement of the words through the voice. Something like that. But there was a dynamic there which wasn't just visual, it was something else. While all that was going on — this was in 1964, one year after Williams had died — *Pictures from Brueghel* came out. That was the one Williams book I bought other than the *Selected Poems*, and I was just knocked out by "To Daphne and Virginia" and "Asphodel that Greeny Flower" (which I thought was just the most amazing poem because it was so much the language of conversation). It was so much like someone just sitting down recording something, you know, just speaking his mind. And in that mind, of course, was a lot of feeling, a lot of passion. And then "Desert Music" was another of those poems. There's that amazing passage in "Desert Music" where he loses his sense of himself as a writer and then comes around and says "but I am a poet, I am, I am!!" — that great amazing, gratifying sense of self-affirmation.

The thing to remember about Williams in those days is that there was one book that had almost legendary status because it was completely impossible to get hold of, *Spring & All*. It was simply not around. It had never been re-printed. Eventually I think around 1967, Frontier Press brought out a pirated version. And another book that was not available was *Kora in Hell*. City Lights had brought out *Kora in Hell* but they'd left out the preface. And the *Selected Essays* of 1954 was out of print. It got back into print fairly soon, but these books were very, very hard to get hold of. Bookstores wouldn't keep him on their shelves. University libraries weren't very keen on having him around. UBC didn't have his *Selected Essays* at that time, as I recall. So what I was doing was I was busy getting all this material and

just faking it. One of the other things that opened up there was students reading Williams — liking him, talking about him. He was so accessible. I don't mean that Williams was a simple-minded poet and I don't mean that the poems were simple-minded. But Williams and his poems are dealing with materials at hand and the materials at hand are the materials in the poem and the materials of the language as they generate further activity in the poem. There's no thesis directing the poem, so that if the poem or the writing is discovering, as eventually I came to see that it is, then you, as reader, are also going through a discovery process. And what you discover is what Williams is also discovering and that is a range of possibilities as the poem goes from line to line to line to line.

Creeley was also amazing for that. So that when I started reading Creeley afterwards, I found that he too was using the line break, for example, as both a closing down, but also as an opening up at the same time, right? There's a kind of concluding at the end of the line, but then it opens up again like "So much depends/upon/a red wheel". Okay the red wheel is fine, but then bang there's the line break, and then you get "barrow" but what is that? Is "wheel" an adjective or a noun? Okay, so now you've got a half completed sentence, but where do you go from here? The whole dynamic is not giving information and withholding it, so much as seeing a range of possibilities and then narrowing those possibilities, but in the process of narrowing, you are opening up another set of possibilities

Would it be accurate to say that part of your interest in Williams was based on the opportunity to introduce or re-introduce a contemporary poet, while also immediately suggesting a new philosophy of language?

I'm not sure how immediate it was. We're talking about a process that took a year and a half at least. And because a part of it was I wasn't doing something to open up new territory, so much as trying to keep my job. I had to do something and this turned out to be quite congenial. And also it would impress all the scholars and bibliographers in the department because I had to track down all the texts! I mean, some of the variations in the texts were just mind blowing.

But it seems that Williams was able to teach you something that was quite exciting. It wasn't just practical.

The accessibility had a great deal to do with it. Again, I can only use the language that I would use now. It always seemed to me that Williams's poems were never predatory as far as he was concerned. I never had the feeling that Williams was trying to cajole me or manipulate me rhetorically into a particular position. What he was doing was engaging in some kind of, let's call it, "speech acts," though that's rather a dubious term, and inviting *me* to join him in that *act* because he was tracking down a series of perceptions or let's say the rhythm of perception, the ways in which one can (as opposed to one does) observe, say, become aware of, the features in a room, or the features of an idea or the features of a process. So you'd get, like in "To Waken an Old Lady," a whole series of pictures and the amazing thing about them was those images kept changing. One of the poems that I loved to teach was "By the road to the contagious hospital." It was Williams struggling towards articulation, but in the process of that struggling towards articulation, the poem was struggling toward articulation. So it was echoing the life of spring struggling towards articulation. There was something about coming to utterance that was in Williams's poetry which to all of us seemed absolutely engaging. And quite different from someone like Bunting with whom I also engaged, of course, in the 1970s. Because Bunting would say, "Just look; with that poem, it did exactly what I intended it to do." Basil had that sense that poems are under the complete control of the poet. But it was a lot of work for the poet to achieve that control. He used metric devices and he was always going on about the definitive version of the poem.

Whereas Williams, as it turned out, never had that sense of the definitive text of the poem because he kept re-writing it, changing it, re-thinking it, and so on. And I began to realize that when I came across those lines, "Write carelessly so that nothing that is not green will survive." What Williams was doing when people asked him for poems, I mean, I realized that these were the *Selected* poems, when New Directions said let's have these poems, he was just going through his filing cabinet and just pulling poems out of folders and

some were really old versions of the poems and some of them were quite recent versions of poems. And you'll find that a poem in the *Selected* was a version of the 1933 or 1934 *Collected*, but it had been revised since then into some other form or combined with a version in a journal. But, of course, you can't read it if it was in the *Collected* in the first place — those are pretty rare books — then it didn't matter anyway, you know? One version was as good as another. And so, there was this amazing sense that Williams didn't feel possessive about his poems.

These qualities: the constant modification, and the open-endedness have obviously influenced your own work. How did students respond to such ideas? How difficult was it to teach such qualities about the poem at UBC?

Well, there are two things there I think one has to be very careful about. One is that, as far as UBC itself is concerned, one of the great virtues of that place — and I hope it is still a virtue — is that, once you're in the classroom, it's nobody's business but yours what you do there. Which meant at some point that nobody knew what you were doing in the classroom. Well, I mean, at one point they might and would, if there were tons of complaints. If they had taken a course from you, let's say in modern poetry, and they come out knowing a hell of a lot about ancient Egypt but nothing about modern poetry? Then somebody's going to say something to you because they expect those students who come to their class to know about modern poetry, and here they are talking about Geb and the great stretch of Nut across the sky.

Generally speaking, nobody paid much attention to what you were doing. Although, obviously you did have to do certain things and you did have to meet certain requirements. So that's the first thing to notice. The second thing is that the audience that you had — well there's a double audience. One is, of course, your colleagues. Like most academics, we all have somewhat tunnel vision. I could really have a long and knowledgeable conversation with people about the novels of Henry Fielding, or Shakespeare, I suppose, or whatever it may be I'd been teaching, but the North American academic tradition was totally different from the English, from which

I came. So that you tended to gravitate towards people who shared your enthusiasms and who shared very often your own aesthetics. So I spent a lot of time with people like Warren Tallman.

There were some amazing people floating around, who had, as Warren Tallman said, drifted into my consciousness. I managed to teach in the 1960s a seminar on Williams and Zukofsky. I managed eventually to teach, I think it was in 1968, a seminar on Olson. I had no idea what Olson was doing. I had no idea at all. I just could not get Olson. But Ellen Tallman had a tape of Olson reading and that was enormously helpful because I could then start hearing the poem as Olson heard the poem. And we all learned together, a seminar trying to figure it out. That tape made a difference. But I would talk to students about this poetics and we were all nuts about this stuff and that led to all kinds of strange and interesting — and again, *open spaces*, *open places*. But generally speaking the English department as a whole — the academic community as a whole, shall we say — was extremely resistant to that.

I am curious about that since much of what you say about Williams has been properly institutionalized now.

Williams was very much outside the institution. What was being proposed, I think, in the whole personal poetic that attracted me so much was really a radical shift in the way we view the world and also in the nature of knowledge, and how that works, it was also a shift in . . . what term can I use . . . sensibility. I mean, I've written about this; a lot of my thinking on this comes from my reading of Duncan. It has to do with what *he* characterizes as the difference between masterpiece and testimony, and that shift in the poem towards testimony, which I found in Williams. It was so clearly there in Creeley. I found Creeley an absolutely terrifying person in some ways, not as an individual, but reading his poetry — I mean, I read *Island*, his novel and, my god, it just went straight into my psyche and all that indwelling anguish that informs the writing of that novel and a lot of his poetry — *For Love*, for example, so echoed the voice of my own uncertainties and anguishes and angsts and all the other things that young people (and I do still) cope with from time to time. I

found him very, very humbling to read. But, of course, I had to come back to it again and again because it was so accurate a register of a particular human condition, which first was extremely particular, which seems to me very, very important like it was Creeley's "human condition," but which secondly therefore opened up the particularity of my own condition. So it put me in touch in a very important way — I was going to say it put you in touch with yourself, but I don't think that's quite right. Rather, it made you trust your own self in your own situation.

Would you say that the work that you were reading had an effect on how you saw your own work as a professor? How much did it help you articulate your position within the institution? Did the institution appear different to you?

I think that there are two institutions involved. One is the actual place in which you work and the other one is the idea of the university or college or an education — that larger institution to which one presumably professes loyalty, or at least I do.

To go back to the question, it did both of those things. It made me re-think my relationship to the institution. One of the great ironies, I suppose, is that Williams really turned me on. The most immediate and lasting effect it had on me was that it taught me you *shouldn't* write about poetry. You should not *do* that — writing about poems is ridiculous. As Bob Perelman put it some years later, "Any statement about a poem is more general than the poem." And the poem has to do with specifics and particularities. But the institutions for which I was working — whichever one you care to talk about — always insisted of course that you make generalities, that you acquire, you achieve some level of theorization or of general observation about the shape and course of American culture or about the shape of the canon or about someone's importance. And those questions became for me meaningless and they are still meaningless to me in some way. I think it is a total and complete and utter waste of time to ask if so and so is a better writer than so and so, where does so and so fit into the canon? It's interesting to ask if someone fits into a history, if by that history you mean something like gossip. Pound and Williams? How do Williams and Zukofsky and Oppen fit in their

conversations? Did they read each other? Because that's conversation. How did they work around that whole business, whatever that whole business is? How did Oppen stay Oppen? How does Williams stay Williams? How does Zukofsky stay Zukofsky, them reading each other's work, talking to each other? Well those aren't traditional critical questions. Or at least, not as they seemed to me. And the work that got generated out of these conversations seemed tremendously important. Think of, for example — just simply to jump back several generations or more — Wordsworth, Coleridge and Dorothy, that little triangle; D.H. Lawrence would talk to H.D. and Aldington; and gosh, Olson, Duncan, Creeley, and Blaser, I mean these were my contemporaries, I mean they were in the sense that they were alive and around and so on.

There were things I was obliged to teach because there was a canonical thing involved. I mean, if you teach modern American poetry you cannot ignore Robert Frost. So I had to sort out what I thought of Robert Frost. And it was fascinating to find out what I thought about Robert Frost because I thought he was terrible. So I had find out ways to articulate that for the class in conversation in the classroom — and I was quite ruthless about manipulating people, I realize now. I didn't realize it at the time — I changed my mind about Frost eventually, I mean, he did write some good poems, but precious few. And ninety percent of the time, it seems to me, Frost ran away from the poem, by bending and forcing it where he wanted it to go, rather than by following where the poem wanted to go. In some poems, you can really see, very clearly, where that shift occurs.

And that conflict is interesting . . .

That's fascinating to me, except I don't really want to write about Frost. For instance "After Apple Picking" seems to me a classic type of poem that Frost runs away from, but then so is "Birches", which I think is one of his disgusting, "barfy" poems. Or "The Road Not Taken." Except "The Road Not Taken" never really got to that level in the text where he had to run away from it. I mean that's just a little essay, it's basically discursive. But over and over Frost turns his back on the poem — as soon as something he can't control starts

happening in the poem, he turns his back on it. There's this central evasion going on. I can't say Williams never evaded. But when Williams evaded, he mostly circled around something. When he made a poem like "Asphodel" he may be circling but the circling becomes part of it, he keeps coming back to it because he cannot get away from it. He knows he has got to come back to it and the poem enables him to get back to it because he keeps writing the poem. He's forced to write the poem — which is a totally different kind of writing from those poets I didn't want to teach. And there were some poets I just could not get on with. I mean, it took years and years and years and years before I could read Wallace Stevens, whom I now think is a terrific poet. I don't read him very often, though.

This may not be a fair question, but you talked previously about a shift in sensibility or a shift in knowledge. But this shift in sensibility was fairly evident in more than just poetry — wasn't it a wider cultural attitude?

The more involved I got with that whole poetics, the more anguished I became because I was having to . . . well, there was a lot of guilt involved because I was turning my back on my whole tradition, my whole training, that is, my intellectual tradition, my education, where I really had thoroughly been taught. Part of *Growing Dumb* [the autobiographical project] has to do with what I was being taught. What I was being taught was obedience. Don't rock the boat. This is the nature of the world. This is what truth is; this is what knowledge is. This is how gentlemen should behave in the world. This is the place in which certain things happen and this is the place where certain other things happen. It was that kind of ordered cosmos in that way.

A lot of the things that I was reading from — Williams and Duncan — they were so exciting and exhilarating. Duncan's personality was just a knock-out. I mean, God, Duncan could talk for . . . well, he was a great monologist. I remember one session, a Saturday, he started at ten in the morning and he didn't finish until six at night. He went right through, you know. And every so often somebody would say something and he would just start all over again.

It was really like being inside a Waring blender. It was incredible. But it was also profoundly disorienting.

Well, being in a blender would be.

Yeah, exactly. And so I'd come out and at some point I was just being shaken to the core. And later — I don't know how much later — I started reading other writers. Like Gertrude Stein — I mean, God, what a knock-out her writing is because she was doing the same thing and when I discovered — is it in one of the *Narration* lectures? — “Knowledge is the thing you know and how can you know more than you do know,” well, that just knocked me out because it removed knowledge from the library and it put it slam into the realm of experience. Like what you know is, of course, what you know now. But what I know now isn't necessarily what I know tomorrow or yesterday or even five minutes from now. Because what you know is also in some sense what you are conscious of or what you can draw on. One of the things I realized was that it is very, very difficult to get in touch with whatever it is that you think of as knowledge or memory but is tucked away inside your psyche or your mind or whatever. We all know a great deal more about music than we think we know, so that Stein's comment is very, very complicated and far-reaching in many ways. But the knowledge that the institution kept pushing was really a kind of rote knowledge that you'd have to have *instant* access to; it's on the level of what I think of now as information, and it's, well, I thought that was totally absurd. When I say the institution did this, I mean, for example, at UBC for the M.A., before you could write your M.A. thesis you had to do what was called the Reading List exam. And it was an absolutely monstrous examination which was divided into two parts: factual questions and essays. And the factual questions were things like: “What is the date of ‘Pippa Passes’?” “Identify the following quotations.” And there were set books, but the set books were insane because there were about 100 of them and you only had a three-hour shot at this exam and you could take it and fail it. But if you failed it a second time you were out of the program.

Well, I feel lucky I never had to take anything like that. I mean my education was after the 1960s.

Well, if I had to do that . . . ! I mean, I couldn't believe it. I never had to do anything like that in my life because it was so insane. It was totally insane. How was the list compiled? Well, you get a committee of about eight people and they all have their own little period of specialization. And they'd say, "Well you've got to have this and you've got to have this." And then they'd say, no, no, this is far too big, we've got to prune that and they'd go back and prune it and it would come back twice as long. And, of course, if you weren't on that committee, certain things never appeared on that list. Ever! So you got a student interested in twentieth-century writing who's doing a reading examination and there's nothing since Yeats! There's *nothing*. So what is the point of this exam, anyway? This is the kind of knowledge the institution was pushing, pushing, pushing. And at the same time, it was invoked here as the university still invokes the notion that we are extending the bounds of human knowledge, which is such a piece of "garbage-y" rhetoric. I mean it is a totally meaningless statement. Information is not knowledge. Knowledge does not exist out there. It's like, reality is not out there. It's in here. I mean, it's a *relationship*, of course.

Would you say it's more about an interest in cultural standards?

Absolutely. And my anguish was such that, I mean, it really was great agony. I would be awake at night. I started drinking and it all had to do with simply no longer trusting to know what I was doing. And having to fight through all that stuff again. Because what I thought I knew was clearly just garbage. I had to find some other way to be. In a sense, it undermined my authenticity because I was identifying myself, that is, gaining my identity out of an institution and at the same time I was reading books that provided a new kind of identity and responsiveness to my work that at the same time undid that identity.

It certainly is undermining your literacy and to see that connection between literacy and identity is a disorienting experience.

Yes. What did you care what identity was because of course I know who I am.

That's a great way of putting it. The disorientation aspect is fascinating.

You see, the thing that was also going on at that time, though we weren't aware of it, was the collapse of empires, the whole reassertion of ex-colonial, or postcolonial (I hate these words) identitarian politics, whatever you want to call it, which later led to quite severe battles in English departments over what kind of prose is acceptable from students. So that if we had a student who came from, say, Trinidad — or from, we had a Goanese student, for example, who learned English as her first language. She spoke English all her life, but she still had to learn OxBridge. She had to throw out her whole syntax and just start all over again because without that she was not demonstrating any intelligence. Which is a very curious kind of prejudice. And I assume that it all started, that is the one thing I recognized that it was working on the same kind of prejudice that I had. I was amazed — this is part of my education at UBC: when we hired a guy in English and told him to get his Ph.D., who got a job as a sessional lecturer, who was interested in the poetry of Arthur Clough and he happened to have a really pronounced Lancashire accent. And he was absolutely brilliant; he was wonderful. And he just dropped English literature and went into linguistics, got his Ph.D. I'm talking about Fred Bowers, right? And he then became a very good teacher of linguistics, history of languages, and so on. And I could not . . . for months I had enormous difficulty recognizing that he was bright because he had an accent because I had been brought up to believe that if you didn't speak proper English, you didn't have a proper mind, maybe didn't have a mind at all! Well those kind of beliefs die out, but you see how hard they die when you look at the careers of people who did come into university and who very often were very close to failing their candidacy exams

because they were using idiomatic expressions that were not “proper” English. It was something else. So people were getting totally turned off. I mean it’s a class prejudice. I read accent as a class marker.

How important were the Tallmans?

Absolutely, absolutely essential! I spent nearly all my time with the Tallmans and we’d sit and we’d drink and we’d sit and we’d talk and we’d drink and we’d talk. My wife and I would go to his house for parties because that’s where the lives and the interest was. Ellen just knew everybody. Amazing intelligence and warm and sympathetic person. They took me a hell of a lot more seriously than I took myself. Warren used to say, “Peter, you know, one of these days you are going to come into your intelligence.” I’m not sure I ever did, but the thing about that was that it immediately set up a relationship between me and my own sense of myself, which is quite different. He was totally accepting of me. I didn’t have to prove anything. I didn’t have to have a meaning. He never questioned, he never doubted your meaning at all because you are what you are, right? What is the meaning of life? What an insane question. Life is about life. The purpose of life is to stay alive. That’s a very, very hard lesson to learn.

Notes

¹ Reginald W. Ingram (1930-89), scholar of early British theatre, author of *Coventry* (UTP, 1981).

² *William Carlos Williams* (New Directions, 1950).

³ *The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study* (Wesleyan UP, 1964).

ryan fitzpatrick / SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER

"roll with the punctures"

glass magnify
light sigh desktop
eyes wake how shoulders
hold ideo
logically overboard
time pinpricks process
hole fluoresce

Black box pulsate open, yawn. Ryan's role
blows up like helium loses hydrogen. Sun
at the front, or is that stumble? Cracks a
joke. Facade cracks authentic and sticks to
brick walls. Scientifically, potential energy
depends on height. Classroom begins
curving, speaking into itself. Do broken
desks have dialect? Do schools work in
organ systems? Spine up; heartbeat
manage.

“insidious relationship of literature”

hold books high now
look may be cold
manage snow maybe
rain in pages
margin a line but life
crooked curve
electron turn to pole

The book is a system of pages, reproducing
reading habits. Crack spines. Who needs
this, English 20-2 asks. Track to source.
Sentences appear in eyes. Walls are
painted a bright white broken black hole.
Does gravity apply? Stars in constellation,
not grammatical defeatism, ask how to
open the book. Can the book be trusted?
Can the book be open?

“procedure and expected results”

teach to labcoat or
ship captain spyglass
reify sit down shhh
maybe later lightbulb
 ekes a eureka
after class indifference

Between lived experience and commodified
experience is inquiry. Small hands build
bridges to cross cardboard rivers. A plan or
ape. Hearts beat quickly. Room cracks
into a system of potential energy. Mr.
Long points small eyes at long bridges that
other classes may avoid based on class
position. Small eyes point bridges to
homeless shelters. An altitude adjustment.

“beware of pissed off vandals”

clouds up public scratch
scrawl mark sighs
hands up
reproducible over
state stands blackboard
high pinholes

Can the book be written into? Palimpsestic graffiti insists teaching into public space. The wall's role blows up. Shawn scrawls on lockers where blame is displaced; Scott is pissed. Who speaks this graf dialect, an other class dialect? Paint from posture. Anarchy, an arch bridge system, subverts pulse. On some days, desks can manage classrooms. Pen to desk.

“inflicts”

whose to say
pages state gravity fall
teach hold-up
push against trickle-down
engage learn mechanism
peg into hole
shrink into singularity

In room 210, student work plugs leaks in walls. Jokes are self-effacing but anaesthetically rhetorical. Heart calms classroom hands mouth deep verbs. Open to social pressure. Solar fission. Nuclear ideologue. Which variables are controlled? Whose? Ann asks if teachers are authentic. Eyes unfocus at sunlight while leading lessons. Blinks lid gravity as potential turns kinetic. Even stars burn out. Even paint peels back.

“the queen’s speech”

star charts open
apart from phoneme sent
weather hence
how hearts start lights
elites look know-how
how for look holds
attent intend

Theoretically, the center falls at the front of the room. Does teaching make magnetic fields? Straight to standard, a broom, a sieve. Breath holds holes. Exchange or pour whose book holds. Rest hold. Resting pulse. Christine relates Shakespearian binary oppositions. Snowstorm run to windows. Can dialect be ignored? Words hold as much as desks as much as legs as much as bridges. Stars in collapse, not constellation.

“this boy’s life among the electrical lights”

spyglass electron letter
 opener or closure
a logos travelog bends
metal malleable hands
grey matter so serious wash
ideolog calls brains into
 hypathesis

Minds can spark to light bulbs. Illume.
Eye is a tourist eye, unsteady. Hyphens
puncture lungs, deflate. Lunging punch.
Somehow, strident idealism cannot crack.
To apply spines. To spin around. In the
Discovery Hall, play is encouraged.
Electrons can conduct through gases,
metals. Speaking into, Katie directs poems
skyward. Pulls to ground. Exhale; inhale.
Sparks grow steady to light fires.

“the sentence is hierarchical; it implies subjections,
subordinations”

stands high arches
calves straight leg part
cuffs smart cut
laughs for sub
version suit jacket
curmudgeon agenda in tow

If, in fact, the book can be written into, then
who does? Author(ity. Right dialects stand
tall for sentences. Awkward construction
belies voice, while voice booms. Ryan
works on his quiet voice. Bricks have the
window's number, but how to teach
linguistic bricks instead? Bridge critique.
Eyes infer funnels, bankbooks, but avoid
income similes. Student cracks reveal
smiles. Hand to lips, a pedagogical quiet.

“a full blank surface, completely filled in”

oxygen slides pencils
back time
flame lungs instead
talk nerves table erase
a race fall incline plane
fly curve spine meme
or why carve marks believe

Smell impairs speed. Voice stench. Halls
fill on breaks and lunch. Do walls hold
students? Lights inscribe bold new
grammatical systems. Pulse enters with
dialect. Eye sees letter before the marker
draws them. Light/dark only carries pages
so far. In real words, social gravity carries
bodies across. Bridges defy rush. Air
pulsates as eyes open. Light like stars but
dispersed. Sometimes chests open to
ribcages to hearts to. Now, questions have
dialect.

John Lofranco / from A TEMPORARY ETCHING

4

Stuck in the city, I want to hit the road again, with one shoulder the way Coach taught,
and roll, down a grassy hill, mixing green and blue like a Wednesday-bland
salad spinner, end up, face up, sun looking sternly down like Dad when he caught

me hiding under a pile of crisp oak-leaf, rake in one yellowed hand,
cigarette in the other, and snarled: "Get to work!" I worked all winter, fought
until I dropped into bed like a crumpled soft-drink cup under the grandstand's

wet metal haunches, and when I woke up, alone on my morbid, high plot,
I was seed-seam bursting to split this atom in three; I'd been unmanned,
needed to find a lover who'd mother. She shouldn't be too hard to spot,

cause I've got the eagle-eyes of a borstal boy looking for love, man.
So I rambled to an impromptu reception where all the people were bubble-gum cards
full of trivia and their outfits matched the trim of the room. The hat stand

was chocolate-warm, like the dirt around the infield at Camden Yards.
The shortstop squatted, her glove the bottom of an eavestrough, making me
want to roll on the turf again, but the tiny sniper spraying snow hard

against the evening crushed the red glow of the aluminium-siding pity
I felt talking to some guy in a talking tie: I rubbed my cheap wine glass with my thumb
while I waited for him to admit he was a poet, and like an electrically
charged dog-fence, the tie tightened every time he approached the opium.

Sometimes, it starts with a pain behind my eye, but moves down fast, focusing attention on my empty belly, the lining of my stomach sagging like a sail on a windless day, lake-still, until, slowly, the last

fat deposits are scraped from inside tissue lining, a spoon looking to lick the dregs of ice cream from the tub; the fat percolates in the nexus of the system, as crumbs, a handful of nuts, sugar cookies, and thick

peanut butter are introduced: enough, barely, to get to the next arcade race-car-game checkpoint. The hunger permeates, bleeding from outside, and I just tumble, crashing the shadowy carousel, vexed

by the scars from when I lost my appetite and ate the golden ring. Sometimes, I'm afraid to eat, for fear of what people will say, cause I'm pretty good at seeing both sides of the issue; if I just wait, an older, thinking-

man said, my thermidorian reaction will come: "You won't be plagued by nitty socialist pox anymore, dirty, red, pus-drenched sores of conscience: dread," as if I were a lion with a thorn in my paw, stabbed eating flowers instead of meaty

desserts, praying for a gust of light that might clean out my issue-paralyzed head, a sun that might burn off all the youthful exuberance painted on the walls of my emaciated mountain den. Sometimes, though, I feel I'm a pawn left for dead,

and the grandmaster who's got black is negotiating my good-bye with the teenage diplomat who's about to knock me off with his knight. My chance will come when the winner, crowned with wreath, looks to the sky,

disregards the standard whisper *sic transit gloria* and somehow, right in the confusing storm of his arrogance, I can slip from the board's shadow, strike out on my own into the wilderness of the living-room night,

my marble carved ergonomically so as not to strain the fingers of bards
not writing *The Waste Land*. But how can I ignore the bloody doom?
Each square becomes a plot for marble innocents whose Tarot card

rang hung: my fellows crying for their mated king, his emblem tipped so soon;
he's gone, snuffed out, returned to his blue-felt home, put away, scrunching
like a child caught on the stairs, put back to bed by the cold, white moon.
Better caught than to suffer adult conversation: I left via the cheese table, munching.

Fertility requires a certain touch, so we flew to a city where garbage trucks with a fetish for fireworks pick through grouchy trash lids for fuses and powder; we got an arts grant and claimed Barcelona, where transcontinental bucks

lock horns on conquistador cobblestone; an oriental arena sprouts tulip towers and bloody bullring floors; sand-carved buildings dissolve in the rain like spring snow: Gaudi's Bedrock *Parc* glistens like brown shredded honeycomb powder,

ground and fleshy, and clean marble tiled from imagination to sand castle, low, rounded into shape by wind. Dusty courtyard surrounded by blue and white ivory stills young rockets partying in the pink-chalk sidewalk San Juan-city below;

incendiary love found a tender spot on Babel streets beneath our balcony. At Sitges: "¡Cerveza! ¡Cocacolagua!" human skin the colour of sand, sand, the hue of a man. "¡Cerveza! ¡Cocacolagua!" Wrapped in cool ebony,

swells swell and gaps grow longer and wider as the pink-palmed hand of the tide rolls in. "¡Cerveza! ¡Cocacolagua! ¡Limonada!" Each crash and clap on the beach louder, more insistent; "Can I get me one of those?" Elastic band

labour pains giving way, one day, to undulating feeding-bra ocean-pap: moon-thirst pulling up. "¡Cerveza! ¡Agua! ¡Cocacola!" a naked child, azure and brown as before the fall, rolls in the mud then bathes, without the slap

of reprimand, aware only of sand and saltwater, not of dirty, nor clean. He matures, gets horny on the beach, falls in love, and thinks it will be permanent. And sometimes, in the ocean, love is the refuge of those who cannot face the pure

agony of their own weakness. The barman fills the gaps with silence: constant as a kiss; playful as a splash — a brown boy on a train platform. Grace: The dark virgin: cold marble, warm hands. A hidden liquid-mountain monument

that disappears behind you. The moment of truth is not the end of the race, but when the sea drops between waves, where the world shuts up, where the roll of the forever-sea disappears from its face,

and you think you're being carried out but the sea chases you like a pup
back to the beach, closer and closer to shore, where panting water drops salt
on your body, and finally, like some bloodshot forget-me-not, the sun comes up:

The shift shines, sharply shimmers; still sitting, the squat star sucks malt
from coral; a tentacle's reach and wave in the wind-current water: "come in, come
in, come over," it says, flinging us back to town. Barcelona at night comes to a halt:

Owl-people ride along insomniac streets, make out on a graffitied bench to some
smell of sunrise. If you go to bed in the park, sunburnt and sea-salty, tomorrow
you are no stranger: come and sit on my side of the tree, make love in the
geranium

garden, streetlight-lit, sweating to the sound of Vespas and the desperate sorrow
of fellow lovers — their breathing the only sounds to reach your ears for miles —
and as the morning comes, though we weren't sleeping, we get up late, borrow

a tandem bike and pedal to the airport, mission accomplished. The pilot smiles:
His face reminds me of the rickety-rackety, hoikety-choik of high school football,
fries and gravy congealing during a fourth period nap, and tie and blazer styles.

We were just boys then, apolitical virgins, raging hormone nymphos all,
heads down in rows, ex-pro wrestler priests patrolling the locker room, the rap
of their garden-rough hands on the blackboard, threatening eternal damnation:
the Fall.

Cameraderie came from our common plight: long beige-blank foolscap
and Father Mulcahy over the P.A. preaching the conversion of Saul,
warning us to chapel, where, if we didn't bother to stop
in for a visit, the Lord might say "who is it?"
when at last we're carried into that Big Hall.

Jes Battis / 13 WAYS OF LOOKING AT GRAD SCHOOL

1

i went to grad school because it seemed like a thing to do
because it seemed to exist more concretely than my own body
it rained as i drove the sky was particularly cruel

2

grad school was a series of parking lots i found
there was a lot of tunneling going on a lot of frantic exit procedures
i needed to unpack i

3

doors were confusing at first
because they were grad school doors they couldn't take you
anywhere
merely talk to you about distance

4

i had an office it was small and mine
grad school couldn't get in or out couldn't knock didn't need to
as it was already everywhere (floating)

5

here at grad school we work to make you a better thinking substance
take this subjectivity hmm feel its cool edge quite astonishing isn't
it how the old things just peel away

6

when i was asleep i would sometimes see a burning ~~bush~~ book
filled with inscrutable letters how they curled and i didn't have
to understand them but then wake to grad school and realize
that i did

7

why do you imagine jobs when you could stay in grad school
with me stay in grad school with me

8

i couldn't leave grad school because i was always there
every escape hatch led back there even the steps that led to
my front door didn't really

9

my parents would introduce me as "grad school" or at least that's
all i would hear at that point the conversation would take a
noticeable
dip i would reach for the cheese and crackers smiling politely

10

this is written entirely in one pronoun which forces you to walk
in on this poem naked turn your head and say “oh i’m sorry” but
you can’t unsee it because it’s a trap i learned it in grad school

11

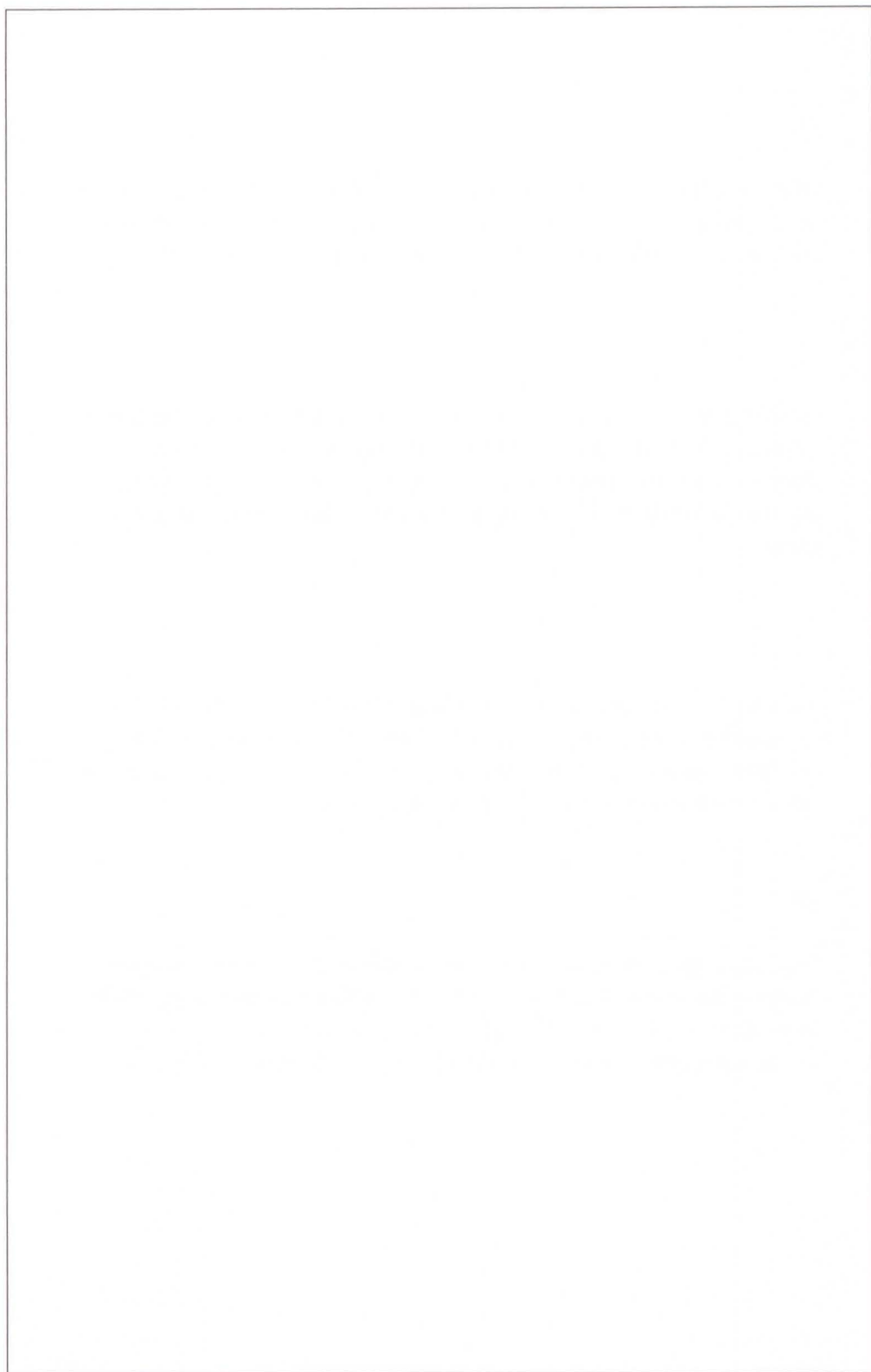
i could never read a book and know it i could never speak without
my hand in some irony i could never enough never get close
never be experimental without letting the scars on my back show
because this is grad school and we ought to be honest with each
other

12

“certain slant of light” was taken i couldn’t use it but really if all poets
are making appearances in their poems then i’m giving it up for
celebrity i’m going to drive out of grad school and keep going until
i don’t feel breath on my cheek until it breaks

13

this i that the author refers to is obviously a split subject obviously
under a lot of stress but “grad school” could mean anything really
[a bone flute] [her blue look] [tender assumption] . . .
. . . or a preposition of some kind we’re trying to narrow it down



Geoffrey Smedley / NOTES ON PIERO'S HEAD

Piero della Francesca is for us what Botticelli was for the nineteenth century. More than anyone from the past, Piero has proved to be an artist of our time. One can legitimately speak of the power and the authority of his compassion. Piero's moral stature rests on his achievement to generalize this essentially human characteristic. Nowhere in Piero is there a hint of false feeling; he is entirely without pretence. His understanding is underpinned by the rationale of classicism. For complaint and blame he substitutes endurance and grace.

The authority of Piero's insight rests upon the formal inevitability that he brings to bear. Timeless is an adjective often used in a description of his work. It is justified both by his enduring essay on man and by his use of mathematics which, according to the classical world, is a study of relationships situated beyond time — in that mysterious place the Welsh poet Henry Vaughan later called eternity.

This exhibition has as its point of origin a small drawing of the human head that appears in Piero's manuscript *De prospectiva pingendi*, a treatise in which he validated the geometric truth of central perspective. The drawing consists of two elevations of a head connected by trace lines to eight sections (in two groups of four), using the recently invented convention of architectural drawing to coordinate the elevations and sections. In this case the sections have been taken horizontally, so in effect, there are a series of plan views stacked one above the other. The shape and distribution of these sections represent the prime data used in the various sculptural studies made for the exhibition.

I was a student in 1951 when Kenneth Clark published his monograph on Piero, which he dedicated to Henry Moore. Perhaps it was the coherence of the information in the drawing that prompted Clark to write "no doubt a mathematically-minded sculptor could carry out this model [of the head] almost exactly." I

bought Clark's book in the year it was published and so I can date my first acquaintance with the head from then. It would be hindsight to say now exactly why I acquired the book, but it is true to say that in common with many others at that time I saw, along with the poetry, a strangeness, and an irreducible essentiality in the images. I was already in love with Piero's paintings in the National Gallery in London, and visited them many times once they had been reinstalled after the war. My eyes had largely been educated by Aldous Huxley's brief panegyric *The Best Picture* (1925), in which he made a connection between Piero's figures and Egyptian sculpture.

Later, due to the courtesy of the librarian at the Palatine Library in Parma, I was fortunate enough to be able to study the original small bistre drawing. The question I asked of it became: what, then, is this thing, the drawing of the head? Etymologically, a thing is a gathering, thus I was asking myself: what is it that Piero has gathered into this graphic assembly? How do the various aspects relate, talk to one another? And what finally has he legislated?

The philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote that the exploration of a thing required a "path." The decision to reconstruct the head as a solid seemed to be such a path. I am not alone in thinking that one can only know, understand, and take possession of that which one has oneself made. To know the drawing I decided to remake it as a sculpture.

One unusual feature of the drawing is the array of numbers that are associated with the lines, marking coordinate points on the surface. The coordinated points aid the problem of making a model from the drawing but, more significantly, they are important to the process of plotting the drawing in the first place. Ascribing a number to each salient point of a spatial structure is to make an abstract of it so that the whole figure can then be represented purely as numerals. Leon Battista Alberti was fully aware of the philosophical implications of such an act. The numerical abstract is, in a sense, more durable than the pyramids. Alberti, writing in a Pythagorean vein in *De Statua*, said:

The man who possesses them [the numbers] can so record the outlines and position and arrangement of the parts of any given

body in accurate and absolutely reliably written forms that not merely a day later, but even after a whole cycle of the heavens, he can again at will situate and arrange that same body . . . in such a way that no part of it, not even the smallest, is not placed exactly in the space where it originally stood.

Alberti's method is a memory system. To test it, to see how total the recall might be, I began by tracing all the sections and elevations, cutting them from card, and then fitting them together to make a rudimentary figure. The next step was to fill the interstices with plasticene, to move backwards in time from constructivist space to the solid substance of classicism. It was at this stage that the real problem of modelling appeared. Between each section lay an uncharted wilderness. After successive attempts, the terra incognita between each section was mapped through a process of trial and error, the aim being to render surfaces that made anatomical and architectonic sense. I do not mean literal anatomy or functional architecture. There is nothing literal in Piero's diagrammatic drawing or in the painted heads of the Arezzo fresco cycle to which Huxley called attention. The closest I can get to describing the anatomy is to reflect on the Egyptian sculptural aspect that Huxley saw. It is an art based on the mummy form where the naturalism of life has given way, in death, to the stillness of the unmoving reality, requiring the anatomy of the stilled life: that is to say, the unmoving life of *nature morte*.

Put another way, the anatomy of an Egyptian head is sculptural, not natural, and the architecture of Piero's head is connected to the vault of heaven and the earth beneath. This last observation is meant as a technical statement. The sculpture is based on a careful investigation of Piero's formal means: the geometry underlying the drawing. But it is beyond question that the geometrical procedures themselves play a figurative role in Piero's design, for they derive from identifiable classical sources connected to cosmology and cosmography. Piero made an image that refers both to the human head and the world, which surrounds it.

Piero used geometry both morphologically and analogically. It is natural, given his preoccupations, that the geometry he used in this

drawing of an ideal head is closely connected to notions found in Plato's *Timaeus*, where the form of the human head is likened to that of the world. To make an image of a head enjoying an analogical connection to the macrocosm indicated that Piero needed to gather the various strands of understanding available to him into one *thing*. He had to reconcile Plato's philosophical account with the geometry of Ptolemy, which was the theoretical basis of Renaissance astronomy. Piero connects the various geometrical ideas by employing a common centre point. The location of this point I shall describe later.

The astrological implication of all this is inescapable. Man, the crown and roof of things, is made and moves according to the same geometrical laws that permeate the universe. Geometrical relationships described both in antiquity and by Ptolemy were woven into a seamless whole.

I was drawn into this strange intellectual world, gradually, by asking the question: why did Piero place the horizontal sections with which he divided the head where he did? The answer was that the sections fell at the lowest level of the jaw, at the indentation of the chin, at the parting of the lips, at the underside of the nose, at the hump of the nose, and so on. Bearing in mind Piero's passion for mathematical order, the next question was: does the vertical distribution of the sections have any geometric significance? That is to say, is there some propositional scheme underlying the composition of the head? My instinct was clearly affirmative, based on the fact that the drawing appeared in a textbook that treated optical questions geometrically, which had been written by an artist of the greatest subtlety of mind, who was an accomplished geometer. In the event, the judgment made in advance of the evidence proved to be justified.

Beneath the side elevation the drawing shows two sets of four sections of the head. The trace lines ascend from these sections to intersect the elevation and are then projected horizontally to show the levels at which the sections occur. The sections themselves have sixteen radial lines stemming from a centre point. The intersection of the radii with the respective perimeters of the sections are

numbered in sequence running counterclockwise from 1 to 16. From each of these points trace lines have been drawn to the elevation, but with one significant exception: *the trace line from the centre point has been omitted*. Yet the points at which it would have intersected the various levels of the sections on the side elevation have been labelled with pairs of numbers (reading downwards, 5/13 — 5/13 — 8/16 — 7/15 — 7/15 — 6/14 — 5/13 — 5/13). It is the only trace line that Piero has not drawn.

There is a further omission. From the extreme back of the head shown in section he has drawn a trace line to meet the side elevation at the appropriate location. But in this case he has not drawn the horizontal line that would indicate the level at which this now missing section should fall.

Negative evidence, the absence of necessary facts, is just as important to an enquiry as positive clues. The visual arts require skill not only in revealing but also in concealing. Artists have always been marshalled into the camouflage corps. If these two missing lines are added to the drawing they cross at right angles and their point of intersection proves to be a centre from which the vertical distribution of the various levels can be found by a system of circles fitting exactly within squares. The geometry of doubling the area of a given square that underlies this system was described by Plato in his dialogue *Meno* to illustrate the theory of reminiscence, which purports to show how the mind, guided by a questioner as nimble as Socrates, can recall things that occurred in a previous life. That is to say it was used as an emblem of resurrection.

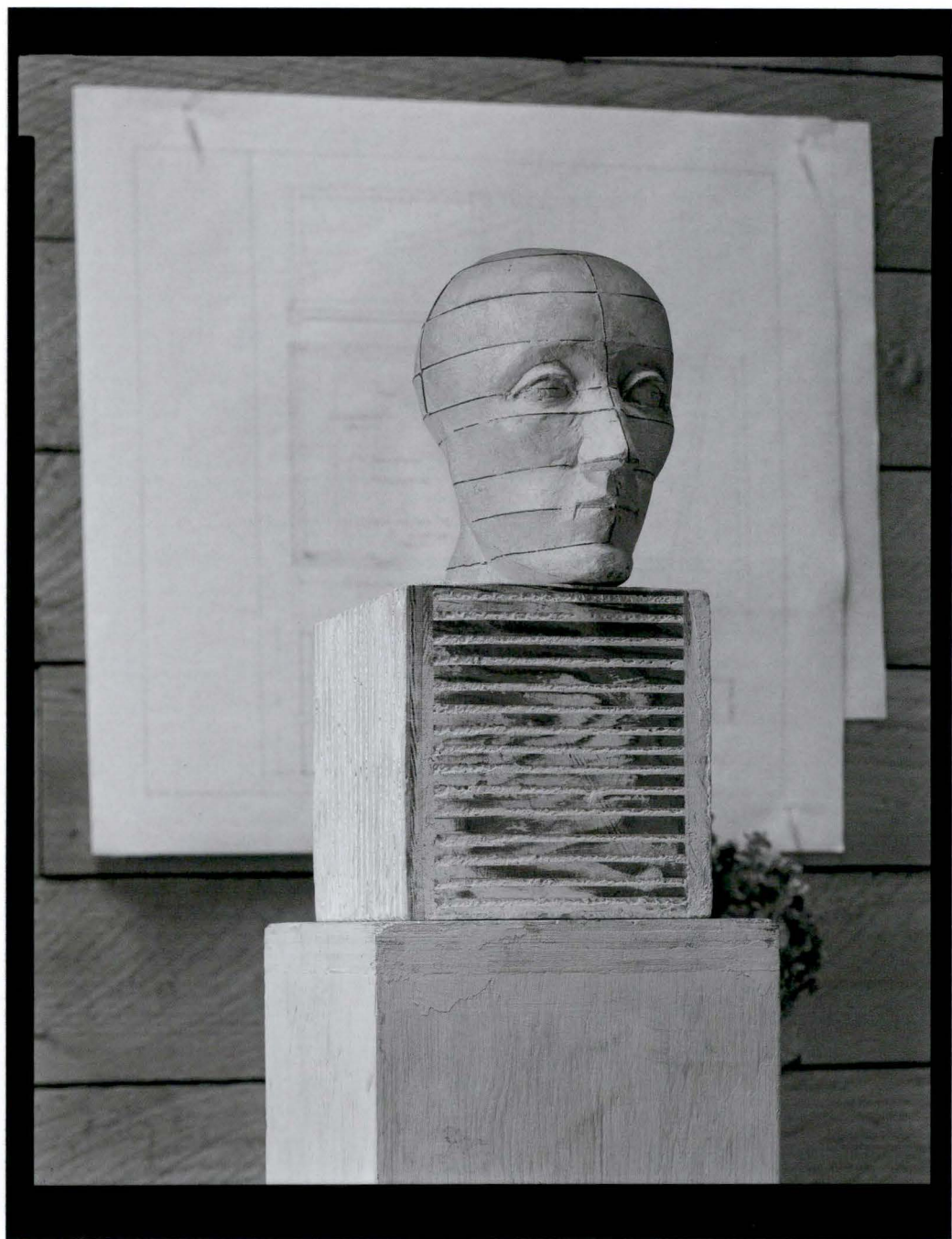
Italian intellectuals of the fifteenth century reckoned that, on some matters, silence is power. The cryptographic interests of earlier times were revived and improved. Alberti wrote a treatise on ciphers and Piero della Francesca hid the geometric construction for his drawing of the head by omitting a central point necessary to unravel its morphology. In fact it is located at the centre of the cranium, which thus serves as a physiological and cosmological centre.

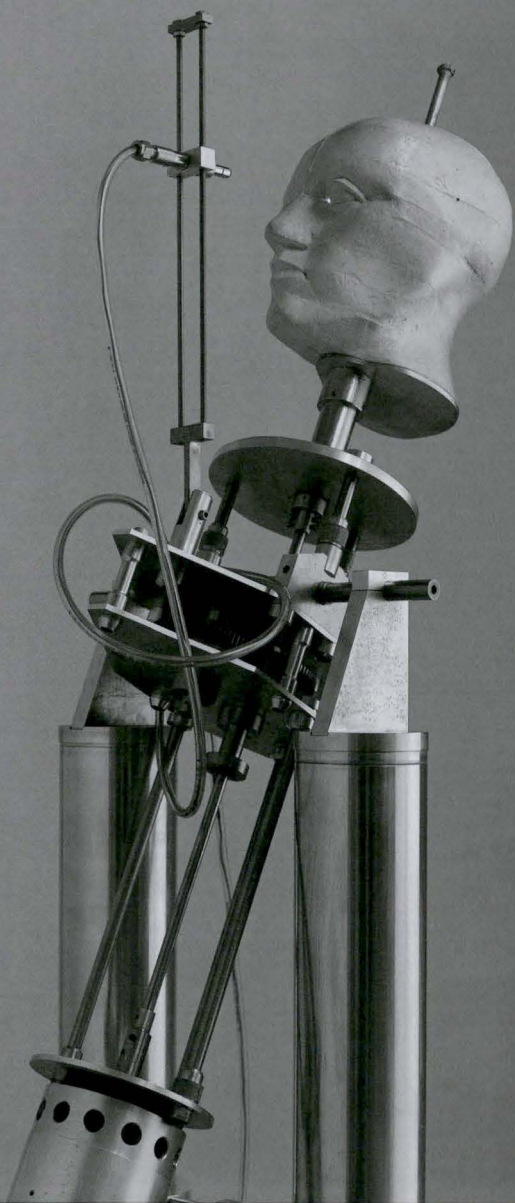
The nexus of thought, speculation, and observation that constituted the intellectual world of the fifteenth century was condensed by Piero della Francesca into his androgynous image of

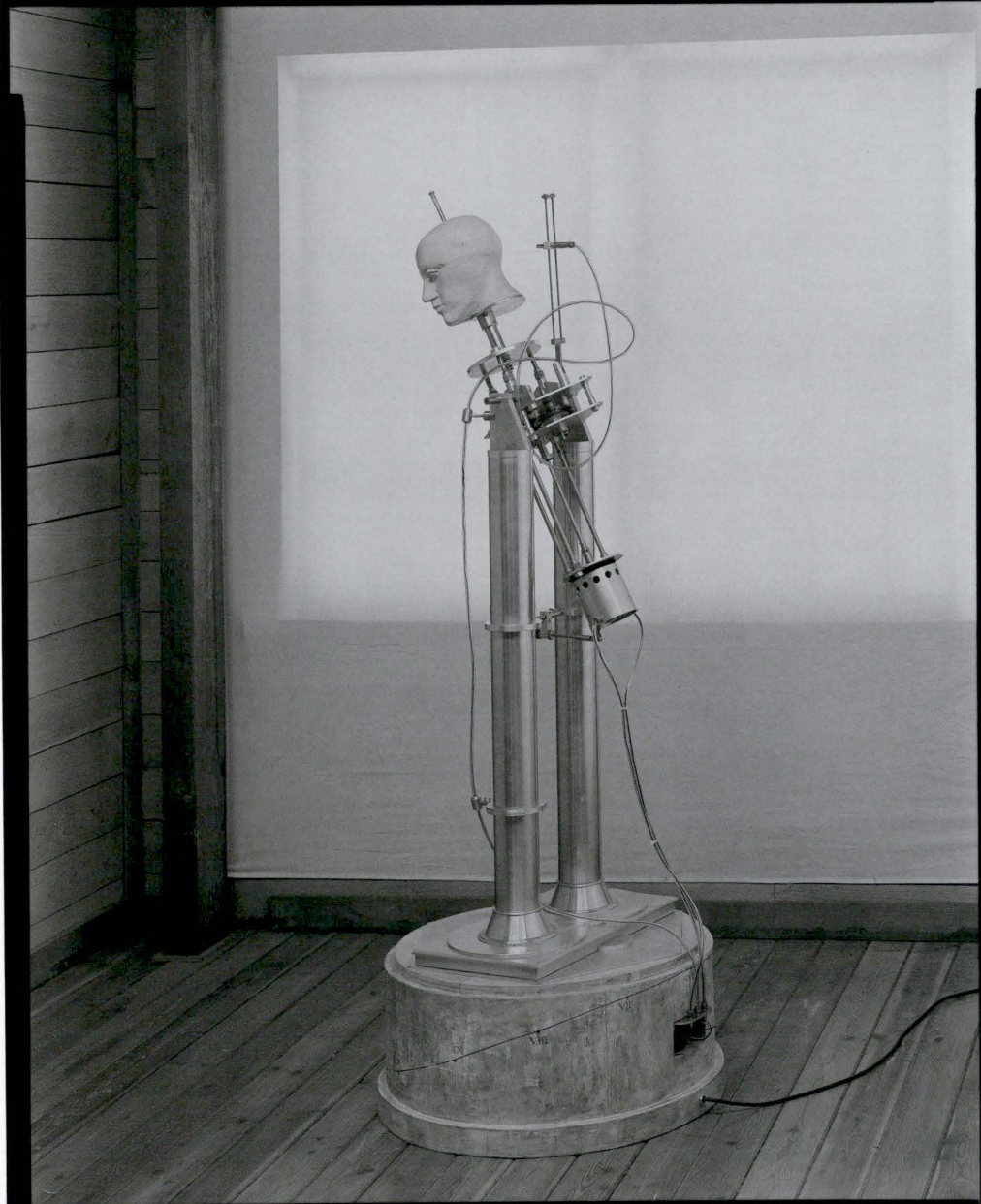
the head. Like the celebrated Vitruvian figure of Leonardo da Vinci, Piero's head is the image of man as the measure of all. Far from advocating a brash control of nature and life, it stands as a dispassionate icon of civilization and civility. My hope is that in spite of the appalling history of the twentieth century, which so deliberately failed to learn from the past, we can quit the age of amnesia and regain a measure of confidence in our own species.

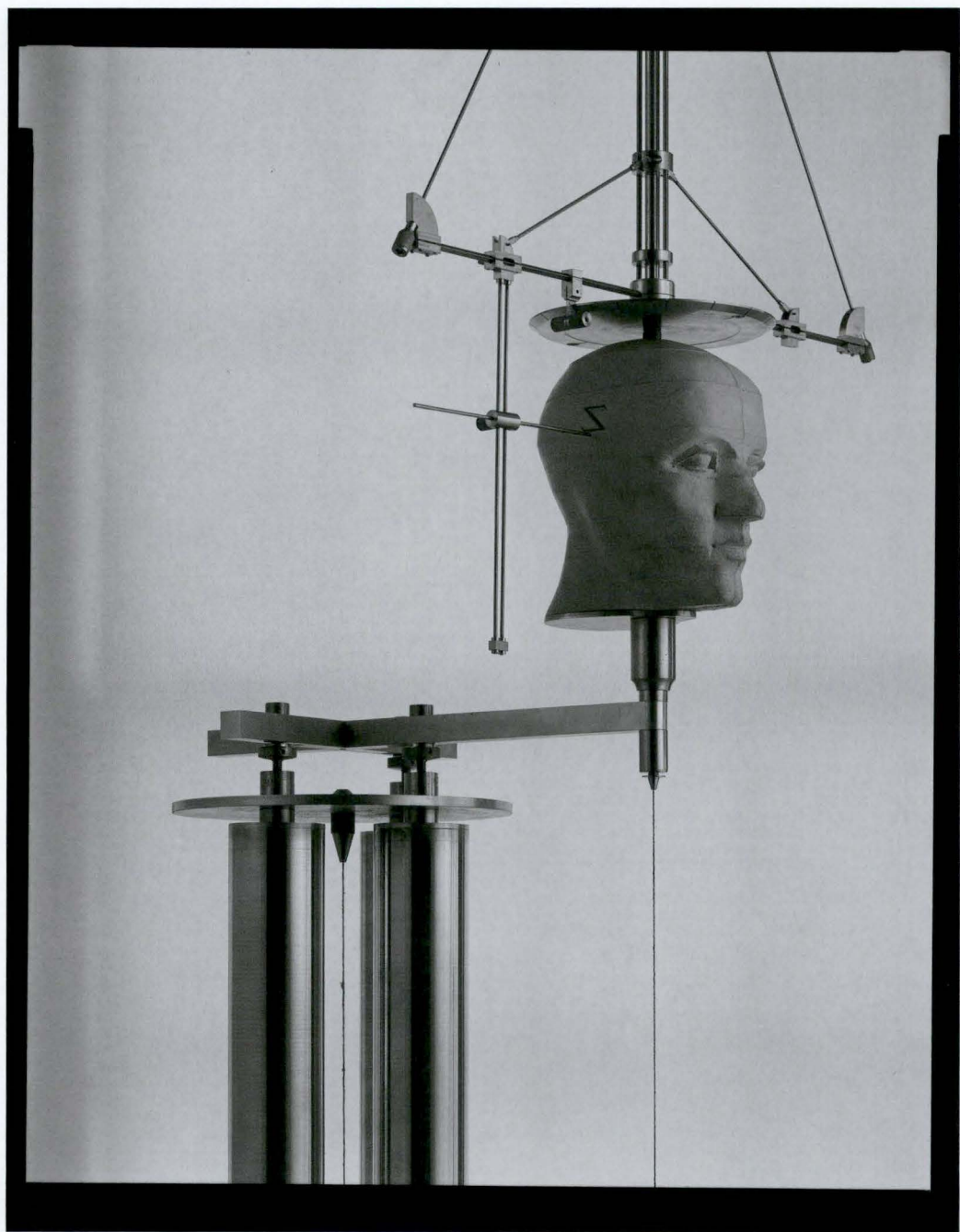
Editor's Note

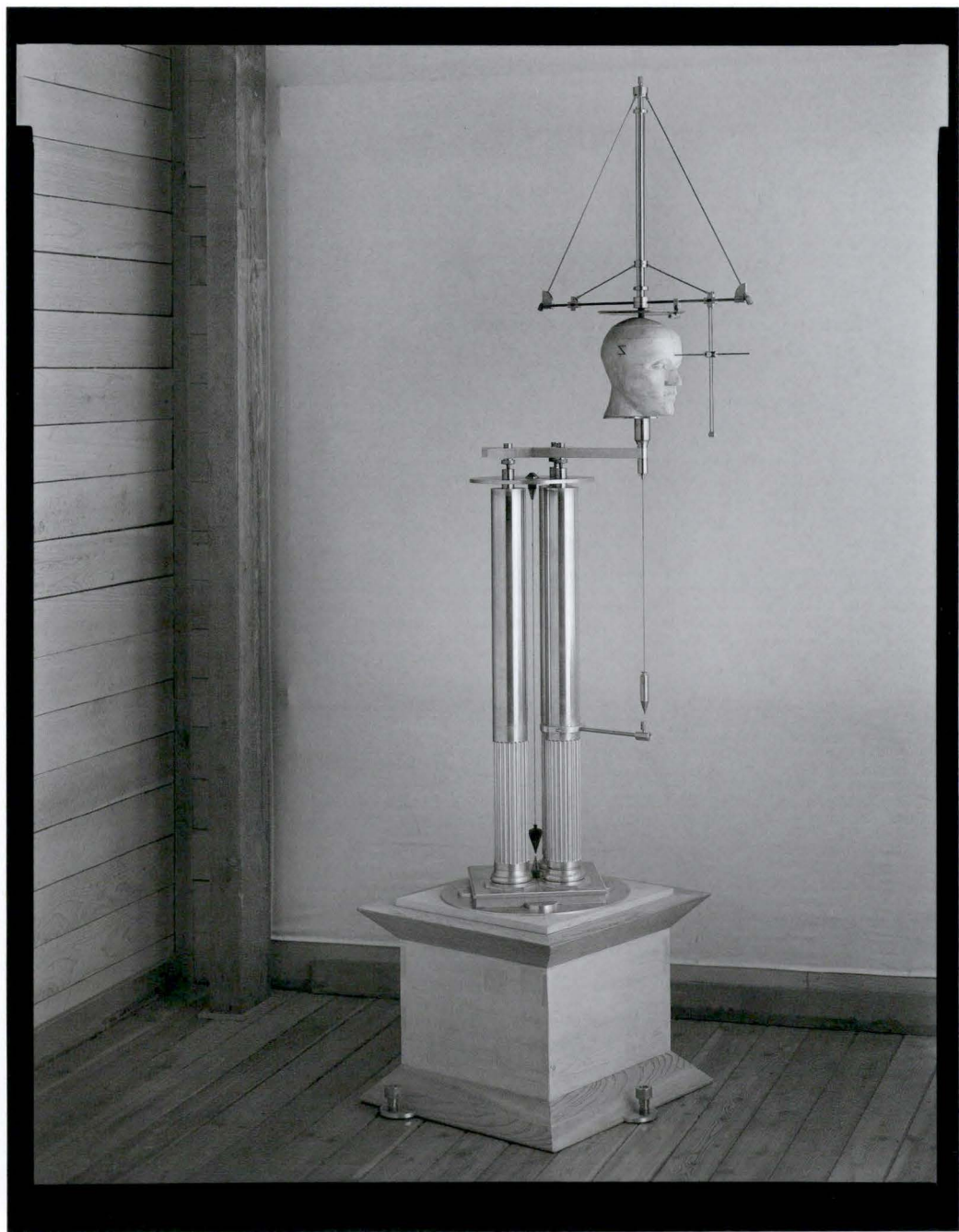
Geoffrey Smedley's large scale sculpture "The Numbers" based on Piero della Francesca's drawings of the human head was lost to the fire that destroyed the Smedley home on Gambier Island, November 21, 2004.

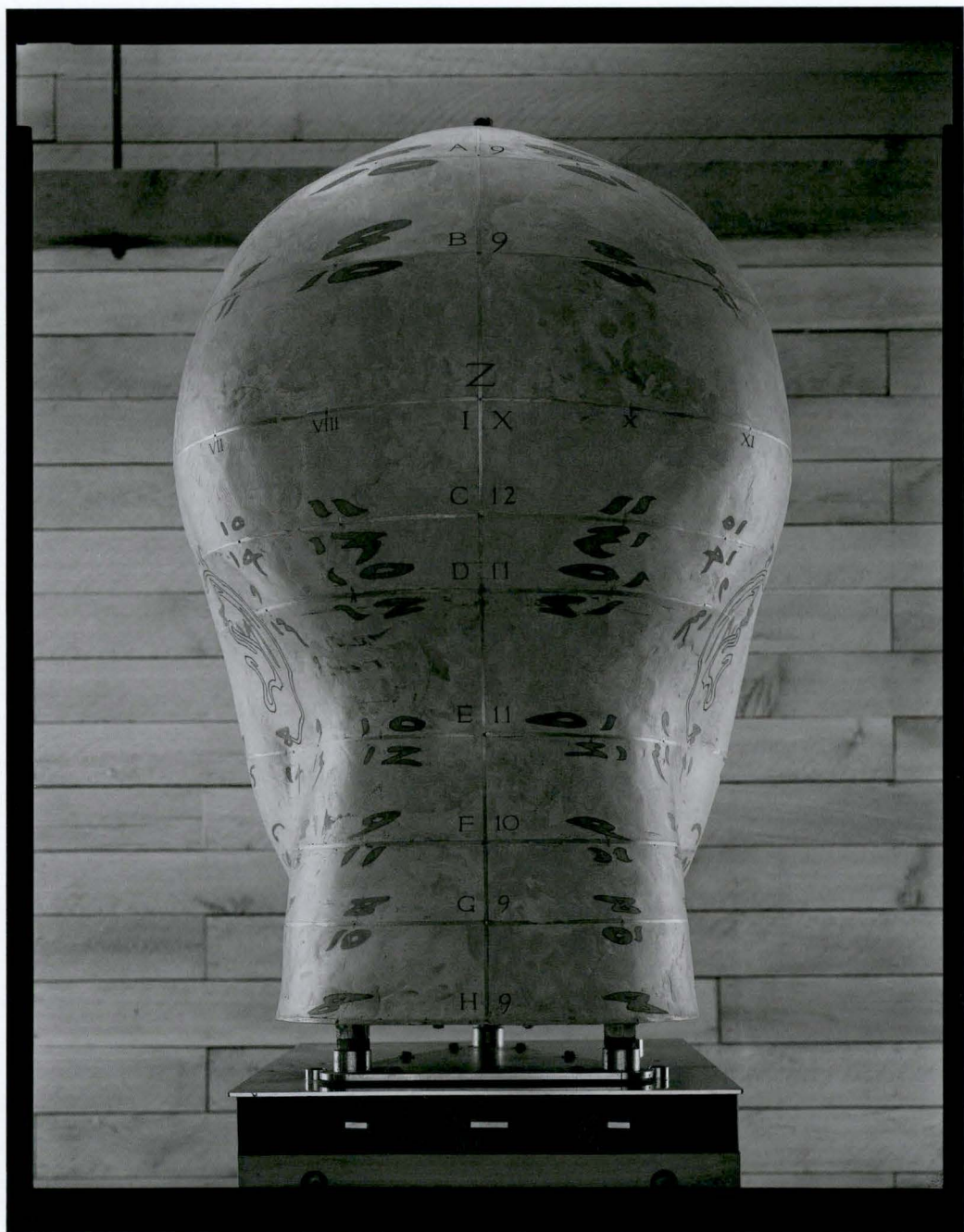


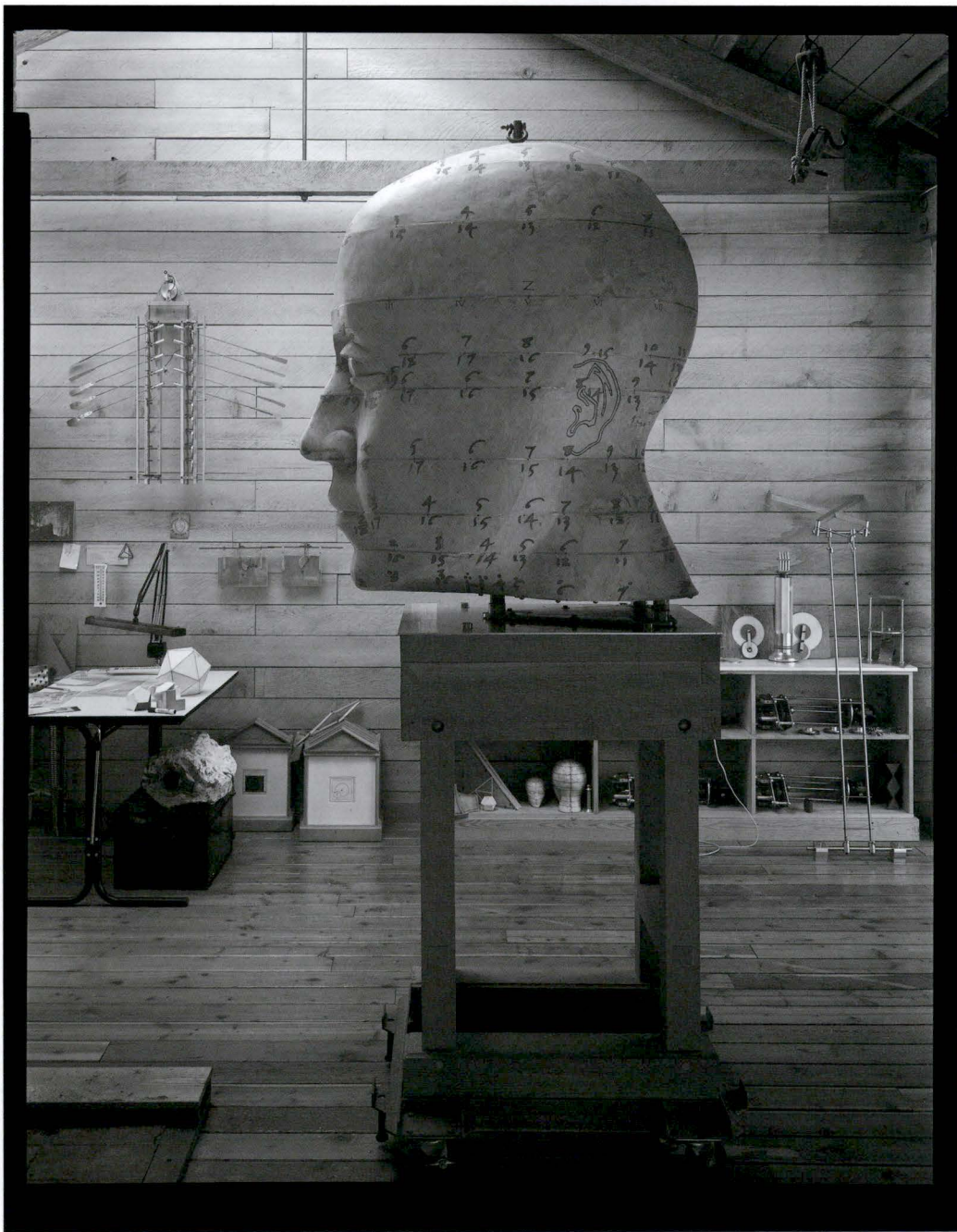


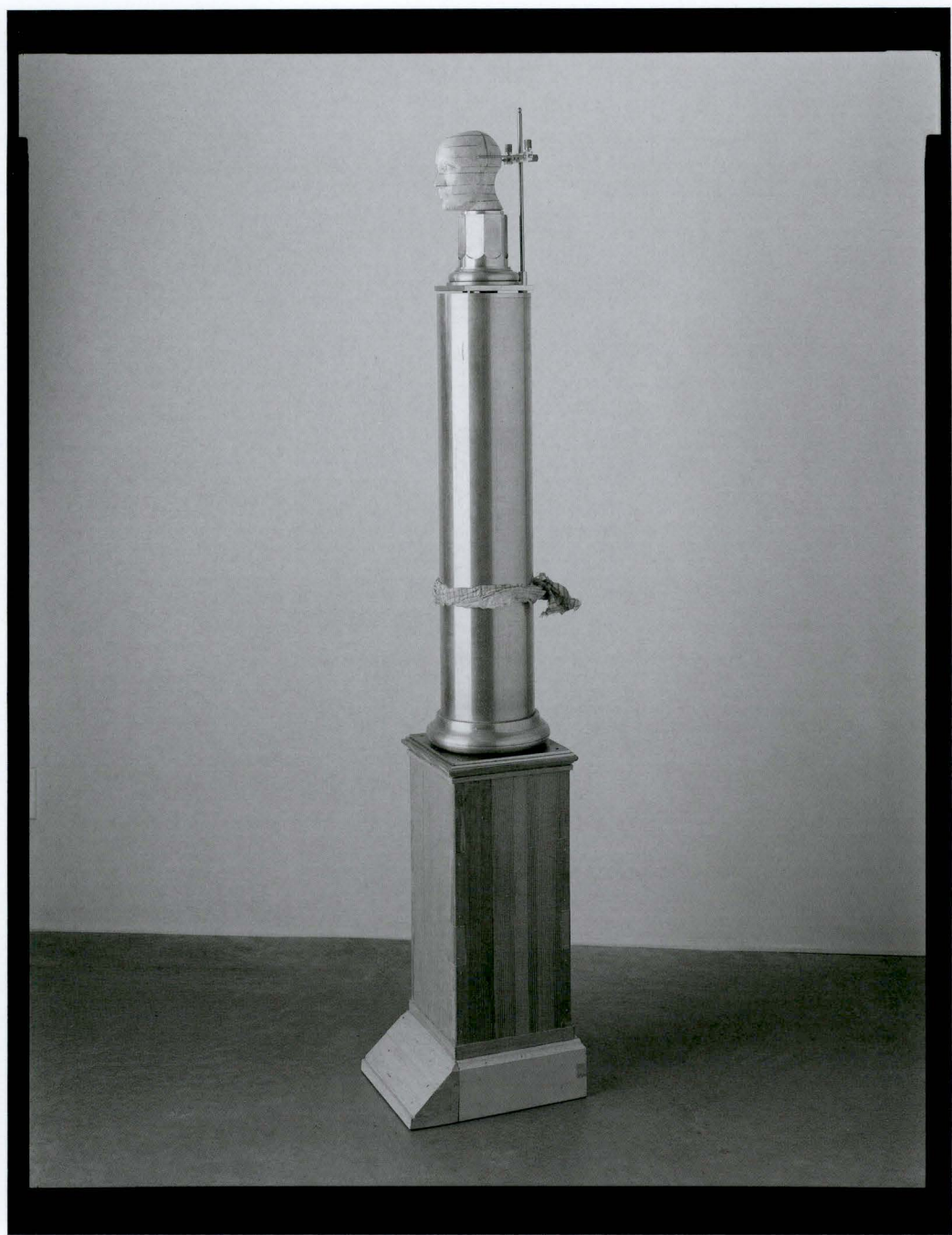












LIST OF WORKS

1. Distance Herm
2. Numbered Head
3. Numbered Head (rear view)
4. Recalled Head
5. Recalled Head (detail)
6. Inclined Head
7. Inclined Head (detail)
8. Head of the Distant Herm — Study III

Stuart Ross / LETTER

April 30, 2003

Dear Heidi Fleiss,

You have really big teeth. They are white. They remind me of a Beetle Bailey comic where Zero was walking by and Beetle said to him, "Hey, Zero, are those your teeth or are you sucking on sugar cubes?" Then Zero's sitting there and the Sarge walks by and Zero says, "Hey Sarge, are you fat or what?" And in the last square of the comic Zero is crumpled up on the ground because the Sarge beat him up. Miss Fleiss, can you guess why the Sarge beat up Zero until he was crumpled up on the ground? It is because the thing Beetle said to Zero was funny, but the thing Zero said to Sarge was not something that would make people laugh. Do not worry about Zero, Miss Fleiss, because he is a comic character and not a real person, so he did not feel anything when the Sarge beat him up until he was crumpled.

Miss Fleiss, I am nervous writing to you. You are really beautiful has anyone ever told you that? I like your movie HEIDI FLEISS: HOLLYWOOD MADAM which I rented and had to pay seventeen dollars and fifty cents overdue penalties because I was late returning it because my cat had a thing with his kidney. I am scared about you hanging around with people who have guns. Please be careful.

I write poems sometimes, Miss Fleiss, and so I wrote you a poem to show you how you have been an inspiration to me in my daily life and goings-on. This is the poem. It is called "An Epistle for the Hollywood Madam, Heidi Fleiss":

I come to sing of Heidi Fleiss,
Who I suspect is very nice.
To simply think about her would not suffice,
So I offer this tribute and hope I don't scare the mice.

Miss Fleiss, I write lots of poems for all sorts of occasions. If you would like me to write poems for you or your friends, like Charlie Sheen or other famous actors and football players, I will be happy to. It's not everyone who gets to know a poet you are lucky.

Speaking of famous people, I want to say that I do not want you to think that I am writing to you just because you are famous. I am writing because I know you are a human being and like everyone else you crave nice words and tenderness and I bet you didn't get much of that while you were unfairly in jail for just running a business and trying to make a buck. I mean, I'm not even in jail and I don't get much in the way of nice words or tenderness myself. People who say they are my friend don't even invite me when they go out and when I lend them money of which I have a lot because of the death incident with my parents, they don't seem in any big hurry to pay me back. I got a fortune cookie the other day and I will read it to you even though it has chicken ball sauce all over it. My fortune cookie says, "Be the kind of friend you want to have." Another fortune cookie I got said, "Travel only by road or rail," but that doesn't apply to what we are talking about.

Miss Fleiss, when they say someone has a magnetic personality, they mean you. Even though we have never met, I saw you in your movie **HEIDI FLEISS: HOLLYWOOD MADAM** and I can't stop thinking about you. I can tell you are very smart and you are also beautiful. You are more beautiful than the girls you have working for you. I bet a lot of people wanted to buy you instead. If I had come to your condominium, Miss Fleiss, and you had said, "These are all my girls, Stuart, please choose one for your pleasure," I would have said, "I am looking at all your girls, Miss Fleiss, and I can see that they are very pretty, but none are so pretty as you, even though you are older than

them.” And also, even though I wouldn’t have said this at your condominium to you, I know that because you are older than them and have lived more, you would know better what to do with me.

Anyway, do you remember that song “Is She Really Going Out With Him?” from a long time ago?

I forgot what I was going to say about it.

Miss Fleiss, I better go now. I know you are a busy lady what with all your movies and books and your famous friends, but if you write back to me, I promise I will write back to you again. I like talking to you because you are a nice person and you have pretty eyes.

Stuart Ross
99A Wychcrest Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6G 3X8

Lea Littlewolfe / THREE POEMS

Rosetown to Swift Current in July

In this year of rains freerange cattle feast on multigreen hay
Puffy lines of caragana border ranch spreads
Quonset steel conceals farming machines
Red and white webbed towers broadcast
Rare decades old windmill pylons whine
Willow clusters recall duck nesting potholes
On gentle slopes cattle dots graze on
ground hugging prairie wool grasses
Wind always the wind sweeps sagebrush studded range
Pronghorn antelope roadkill bloats in sun

Steel grid of wired together power sticks
Along railroad tracks cement pillars of inland terminal elevators
Beside the highway odd triangles of corn-leaf-hued peas
Parasol topped round metal granaries crowd
tumbled down grayed abandoned farmhouses
Agricultural chemicals haze veils over beige gullied low hills
Brown tassled brome and angel hair foxglove billow in western wind
Poplar, elm, maple shade small town streets and graveyards
Yellow green spiky wheat and blue-blue-green alfalfa rectangles
Townships away white early ripening oats form
ragged patchwork of incomplete edges

Decent green grass fades to verdant squares
sun washed tan to the horizon

Belts of pale straw stubble contrast with
spectrum tortured red-brown chemical de-herbed fallow
Dabs of crouching caragana sprinkle yellow canola
Occasional flat topped pyramids of gravel wait
Light undersides of poplar leaves flatten together in
tapestry of browns, greys, yellows, greens
Cattle feed miles away from rustler-carrying highway

High sheeps wool cirrus blankets pale blue sky
Monster hay bales rest fresh green
Symphony of honey smells rise from highway lip:
yellow sweet clover, purple alfalfa, ageing brown brome,
escaped butter yellow rapeseed
Dead porcupines are surprise car target
Motley traffic of paved two-laner jangles against calm prairie
Violet and orange stain alkali flats damp in their middles
Community pasture stretches to hilled smoky edge

Vast bleached green shortgrass rolls north and south
Uniform mat wheat bends in unison
Unnatural boundaries denote human ambition over old bison
pasture
Of a sudden ammonia manure of factory pig production
odorizes my wide-open-windows air conditioning
Late afternoon cumulus spot-shades blown landscape

Aged Lover

lazy rasp respiration
to avoid touching me
you steal the thin quilt
wrap your greedy bulk
round and round
like Cleopatra wrapped in a rug
for Caesar's unwrapping
unrolling into Rome's sidedish history

I want
to touch your wrinkles
sidetrack your grumbly
leave-me-alone-I-don't-wanna-do-it
crumbly aside
sex hour become hex hour
I'll shrivel it reduce it
to elimination function only
I'll unpleasure it
put sweat of toad into
your oldman porridge
on 22nd Street any teen you meet
will find atrophied scrotum and
zero action

Museum

plaster bared breast
Greek penis petite in plastic resin
mottled Manitoba marble embeds primordial mollusk
marching Spartan clings to thin styrofoam
— *and you think I welcome midnight fist*
if I touch your sleeping skin?

copper green coin of millennia
crisp Taj Mahal toy model
Hammurabi's code a mere ribbon on timeline
tiny Eiffel Tower backdrops
the memory of rock collection in *Le Louvre*
— *and perchance as you rage I die*
will you raise a mausoleum to awe the ages?

tipi diorama with willow backrest and stone firepit
video touch screen before lightbulb fake fire
bucksquinned elder knaps flint into museum arrowhead
obsidian shards for viewing only
— *lover, beware my stone hammer*
a solution from antiquity beneath my artefact foam pillow

Marguerite Pigeon / FOUR POEMS

Cock

Once, you were a dog's tongue, pleading at my leg, palm and mouth
for gentle skin you could not hope to interpret. Your panting was faithful and false.

Another night, I clung like a film heroine from a window ledge
of your city's skyscraper. When I fell, the smallish death exhilarated and I forgot
to hate you for your crumbling bricks.

My letter 'I'. My number 1. Wherever you wander, you bring your drum.

I return to you without grudge, see the tiny ark you've built on the rise, a lone helix
trudging up its ramp. With some pity, some enchantment, I bring you the flood.

Cunt

In chintz and velvet, you receive — nearly suffocate — your guests with kindness. You've tried minimalism, trimmed the hedges to please the Joneses, thrown away your dated fur coat.

But austerity has never been your character. You prefer trust. Prefer to think pink.

Through your halls, giggling. Long gloves and rustling satin. Yet you tend your business, at your tunnel's end, adventurously spelunk, scooping to greater depths with a silver spoon, call: "This way to the wellspring of sense and sensibility!" You would fashion yourself the next Panama. Let men confuse access with domination. Your waters are perpetually Caribbean.

When you take my hand, I feel there is nowhere we cannot travel. I feel the shame and exhilaration of keeping company with such an eccentric, independent relative. I was warned against your type, after all.

But what can I do, when your morning bells peal? What else but ride, sidesaddle, beside you, hooves splattering the dewy mud as we laugh and gallop and canter and drop the reins and find ourselves picnicking?

And you've never laid down a blanket without popping the good Champagne.

Hair

Hair entrenches an already-tense truce with the body.

A rich indigenous culture with settlements on the chest's great plains, the wilds of the pubis and the fecund head, its contributions to history are legend.

But a civilized society must respect borders. Like all of nature's creatures, hair must live in harmony with its neighbours. If not, our entire way of life is threatened.

Disturbing aggressions on the part of hair are well documented. It has expanded its territory in recent times, has outposts in the ear and nostril, the big toe. Equally unsettling are its gypsy tendencies: stealing land, abandoning perfectly arable terrain to squat elsewhere.

All of which leads us to ask ourselves: where next? Will hair, gone unchecked, occupy the entire continent, push weeds through the cracks of palms, fur the tongue, and finally choke us in its foreign tangle?

We must look beyond our own deceptively harmless sunflower eyelashes and see the forest for the trees: such affronts are deplorable. We must patrol our borders with tweezers and expel the marauders. That wiry ingrown loop represents our mortal coil.

In the interest of peace, however, I put forward that greater understanding could be gained through compromise and dialogue. Rest assured: hair's survival will not be threatened; head privileges will not be arbitrarily revoked. But we will be vigilant. And we do insist that hair withdraw from its *entente cordiale* with our sworn enemy, the coffin.

As usual, I await hair's emissaries to deliver their pillow-case memos. Interpreters will be on-hand.

Yucks

The ass-face cracks a good one, says Paz,
sets fatty two-by-four a-howl or
a fowl, that rubber chicken
clocked over some lug's noggin, Mo-style,
as mouth-Ying and ass-Yang spin,
the klutzy muse tugging Carol Burnett's earlobe
then stumbling *à la* Tripper over sexual innuendo
from sound-stage San Diego back
to stoned Ancient Aztec afternoons,
game priests pissing themselves blue-faced,
clowning under human skins, basking
in the hilarity of a sopping heart held aloft,
like the hick whose chicken runs between
his keystone legs without a head until
the cleaver slams down once more
across its breast, bloody scratches in the dirt.
One last slapstick routine. Oh, stop! *Stop!*
My ribs are splitting and this tickle
feels an awful lot like tragedy plus time plus
my own ancient animal yawp.

Edward Mycue / TWO POEMS

*I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. . . . I am become a name;
. . . I am a part of all that I have met;
. . . Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are —
. . . To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."*

— Ulysses, *Lord Tennyson*

A Nightmare Town Sunset, Creamy Pink, Wind-driven

Acupuncture, allergies, beauty, classes, counseling.
Dating services, family services/fertility, health.
Holistic bodywork, medical, metaphysics, physics.
Recovery, religion/spirituality, skin care, wicca.
Vision/eyecare, support groups, youth services.
Legal notices, pet of the week, single's resources.
Ten year-old photos, swing parties, escorts, massage.
Auctions, bankruptcy, egg donors, help with herpes.
Stopping smoking treatment, home opportunities.
Redlight specials, so tight your head will spin.
Community action calendar, rehearsal space, quiet.
Voter information, mayor, district attorney, ballots.
Lowell High School, John O'Connell High School, bonds.
Lighting, sundial, water gauge, weather station.
Green houses, cold frames, elementary schools.
Electrical wiring for exit/emergency lights repair.
Duckwork, concrete wall foundations, water supply.
Faith, knowledge, phenomenology, severed heads.

LIT HITS

WORLD'S GREATEST ATHS, the great-full DEAD alive (& kicking)

a left arm and leg and hips
been eating potatos abt. a month

going to Chirp for therapy

NOW-a-DAYS

new data is a help to a new world RISING

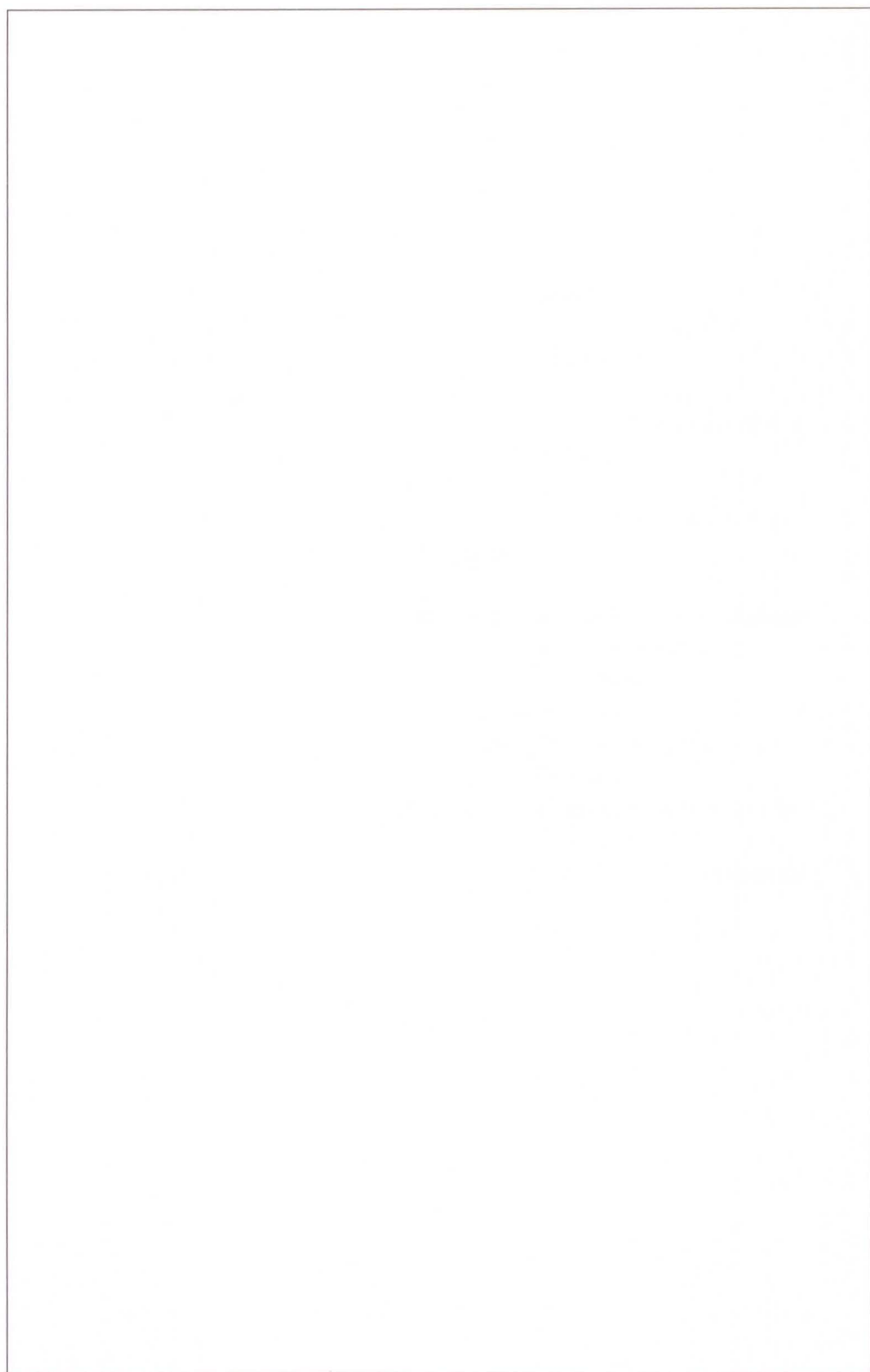
SECOND GENERATION "DEAD"

(blue,green,pink,forest green —
bless you, Jerry Garcia)

(YOU, JERRY, ARE THE MAGISTRATE AND THE YEW TREE)

forget the dark natures, curious
savage
stored in the ice
charm
(and why not!?)

I have worked
editor
: published
years
I work as a clerk
the poet jerk
who has
greenblue energy
divided among sandy night
horses
wading at midnight with a dried mouth
the world's nothing
ATHS
the classical invention
of apparent, feigned
cul-de-sacs
all my own wrenching and still ready
for
surrender.



Clint Burnham / from *SMOKE SHOW*

Yeah well like, she's great. Oh yeah, perfect person for me right now, eh? You know cause she's really focussed, eh? And you know, that's the perfect person for me. You know cause she's like. You know like. You know I mean the other day, she had to register her kid for this class and she like got up, and went there, at I don't know, before 7. I know it was before 7 because I was up before 7 with Sarah and she was gone then.

And mom and dad they're like great. They're really really happy for me.

He sat in his brother's bedroom, smoking a joint, watching the old guy across the yard pile wood. He flipped through the brag book, looking at tight close-ups of an old duffer.

Before they were watching *Cops*. He used a remote with big rubber numbers.

Yeah so we were at the bar eh? And Jessica'n me're there. We went dancing and there was all these guys eh? Real, I dunno, creeps.

Hunh, what were they?

Yeah creeps eh? She looked over at Lucy and laughed. These guys, she shuddered, all touching me. This one guy —

What were they fishermen, cause there wasn't any work so they were in the bar?

Her school when she was 12 or 13 had its dances in the middle of the week so the loggers wouldn't crash it.

Yeah he was a cop eh?

D-o-pe.

Yeah and he kept touching me. Yeah so like. You know.

Well, he was a cop, so?

Yeah. He kept, you know. He was like putting his arms around me,

from behind. Eew. She drew it out like *ooh-hoo-hoo-hoo*. She shuddered again, laughing.

Where was he touching you? On your shoulders?

Yeah. And he should know better, being the police.

Yeah well at least he'd be good for cheap pot.

What? Oh yeah.

There was a skinny guy in some of the photos, with a missing front tooth, scraggly black hair and tinted sunglasses.

Jesse said, so I'm headin' over tomorrow, if you guys want a ride?

Oh yeah, where to, Van?

No, but I can drop you off. Gonna go up to the Interior.

Yeah, you guys going camping?

No, she's going to that blockade. Ray took a sip of beer and put the bottle down, sucking his teeth.

Oh no way! That's so exciting! Jimmy and Lucy were excited.

Well, I don't know, you know, I just want to check it out. But Ray doesn't think it's such a good idea.

I didn't say that.

Yes you did, but I don't wanna argue. I just want to see for myself.

Aw do whatever you want. I just think, you know, with the kid, you're just not just on your own anymore.

Are you going to take Sarah with you? Lucy was trying to divert the conversation, get back to the main topic.

Yeah. Well I'm not going to count on you to protect me, that's not why I love you.

I didn't say that. Why d'you take what I say.

You said — well, hey, why don't you come too?

Not interested.

See? Why not, check it out.

Look, it's just a bunch of idiots. I know those guys.

No, you can just say.

Aw just. He waved his hand and took another drink.

Okay, okay. Sorry guys. Jesse gave them a smile.

Hey, no problem. You gotta work these things out, you know.

Long as you're talkin'. That's what I always say, hey? Long as you're talkin'.

Tom came out at around eight, drinking a cup of coffee, no shirt on. His chest was hairless and his nipples were small brown dots on his chest. He looked in the car and then went back in.

He came out a few minutes later, still just wearing track pants, carrying some masking tape. He took some flowers out of a box and put them on the car, and a doll on the front of the hood. People kept pulling up on the street, three got into the driveway, the rest parked in the ditch. Jeff walked out wearing his suit pants and a shirt and tie.

Hey so that's starting to look pretty good.

Yeah it's not so bad eh?

But we gotta get it done, eh? Getting the ball an' chain on, may as well do it up right.

Later the street was full of cars and trucks pulling in and out. A minivan pulled up, honking, and ushers and bridesmaids got out, the guys with fresh haircuts, in their suit vests, younger brothers, and the girls in dresses, longer versions of the ones the little ten-year-olds were wearing.

Later, the car with the doll on its hood pulled up again. Guys stood around smoking, flicking ash into the flowerbeds.

Mary and her mother came out of the house carrying wrapped stuff in cardboard boxes. Mary perched one on the bumper and her mother opened the trunk. Mary looked at her watch. It was twenty after eleven. Her dad was lining people up on the lawn, pointing his camera like a dog's wet nose.

Jennifer on a common topic: hey you know those rolling papers you gave us?

What?

Oh you know the ones with the maple leaf flag on 'em?

Oh yeah, weren't they funny? Now Lucy and Jimmy remembered.

Oh yeah, my kid's like hey what are these?

Oh no, gotta hide eh? Hide from our parents, 'n hide from our kids. One of Lucy's theories.

Oh no, usually I don't, I mean, I don't get fucked up when they're around but that's the same.

Oh yeah.

Yeah usually, if it's just like regular he just ignores them right? But these were so colourful and they were doing like flags at school or whatever.

Okay, chairs for everyone. Mary carried them onto the concrete apron around the pool.

Up, good pool here though, Tom. Ray was still in the water. Have to do the FOD patrol.

Jesse had some more wine. Oh what's that. One a your military terms?

Yeah, you know, lookin' for garbage. Foreign object debris.

Just relax, grow your hair a bit buddy.

Oh I know. I know I've been hiking around the past few weeks trying to burn off this fat I had in the Forces. You know, all that fucking greasy food they give you, and all you're doing all the time is sitting around. Man, it just builds on you.

Yep, getting lazy. Have to go to the gym next. Well, not tomorrow. Tomorrow I think I'll put my back out moving, have to call in sick.

Yeah sure why not.

Hey so like Finning's looking for mechanics.

Oh really?

Yeah so like you should drop by there. Yeah they're always looking.

Good company to work for.

Yeah. Now that I've learned how to slack off. In the Forces. Got my *if you've got time to clean you've got time to lean* education. Edjumacation.

Yeah no kidding eh? I don't know man, I, man I know you were in it, you know, the military and all, and so you gotta defend it, but when I just figured, you know, there's more submarines at the West Edmonton Mall eh? I mean, our navy doesn't even.

Yeah, you know, well, that's what they've got. I don't care anymore.

Hey so like did we tell you about that party our friend Trevor had? Yeah so he went and got all this stuff from Crappy Tire right? Yeah so he went and got all this stuff from Crappy Tire right, volleyball net, lawn darts, croquet, and we were just like wrecking the shit out of it.

Oh yeah, we're, we were just whaling on the stuff. Broke mallets, and we were playin' some wicked stuff, everyone's totally wrecked, at midnight playing croquet and trippin' —

Yeah I bet you were trippin', that acid pot you're smoking, man this B.C. Bud's freakin' toxic —

— yeah tripping on the hoops. And the neighbours or whatever, they're like calling his landlord, Trev's, cause, and the police, and the landlord calls 'im and says don't worry about it. And the next day —

Yeah yeah the next day they just brought the stuff, on the Monday, back to Canadian Tire and said this is *shit*, what kinda Chinese crap you guys sellin', we want our money back. And no questions asked. So now we call it the Canadian Tire Party Rental.

But like Trev, he was out of control. He moved in that place after his divorce, and so like people are saying hey let's get some rock and roll going, and he's no. Just country. Just wants to sit there feeling sorry for himself, you know? But don't get me wrong, people still came by, in waves, though. We just slept there, had the kid & just crashed. Didn't want to drive after all that.

He helped carry the chairs out to the truck. Okay, and his father opened the back. Alright, we got that squared away. He brushed his hands together.

So, what else you guys up to?

Oh well, you know, your mother and I are planning on maybe checking out the West coast of the Island. We haven't done that much, so we'll just toodle around. See what's there.

Yeah I guess you're all set now.

Well that's the thing.

Said *fuck you* too many times to too many people.

Hey guys did I tell you about her little friend? There's this he's just the cutest little kid right? He's really cute and he comes over and says can Sarah come out and play? So it's good, she's making friends.

Oh she's great Jess.

Yeah she's active, cause she's around lots of different adults, and independent.

Oh I got you guys a present. Here. She passed over a painted rock the size of her fist. Jimmy turned the rock over, it said Jesus Loves You. On top was painted an Indian girl's face.

Oh that's great. Let me see that. He passed it to her. Oh hilarious. Yeah, we've gotta put it in the garden, put it somewhere good.

Yeah so like we were there and she's like just got freaked out by the Happy Rock Lady. You know, she just saw everywhere there's these happy rocks. But Dave was all stressed about it! Yes! It's cause of how he's a really heavy atheist, and he only told Ben about God a little while ago. Cause there was this kid eh? And he was like God made this or God did that or God said it's okay, or whatever. Like God was this regular person. So he had to tell him about it, and Wendy's okay, it's just Dave. We were over there and I just felt like leaving, you know? I mean, he's my brother and everything, but he was being rude, just plain rude. You know I just felt like leaving. . . And everyone couldn't believe it. Wendy was just like, looking at him. I don't know, I mean I know he had things on his mind, I could tell,

but he didn't, you know, specifically tell me. And he didn't have to be so uptight about it. But did he tell you? He was up for the lead role in the play they're putting on, that's why he was so stressed.

So did he get it?

Oh yeah, excellent, eh?

Oh we have to go see it.

Yeah, you should.

Yeah we will.

So what do you wanna do now? You guys want to do something? Go to the beach, the lake?

What lake, no, I don't know.

Oh I don't know, that sounds good. Nice to get out, catch some rays.

Okay I'm going to phone the parks see if it's open. Ray sprang to action, grabbed the cordless.

What?

The lake. They closed it for algae.

So you know Pam's in town, hey?

Hunh? Who? Not —

Yeah, so like Pamela Lee Anderson —

Pamela Anderson *Lee*

Oh really?

Really.

Yeah I guess that makes sense eh? Cause she — anyway, guess her mother's getting some award from the Valley First Nations group, they're, they're honouring her.

They're honouring Pamela? For what, having teepees on her chest?

No, her mom. Her mom is native. You didn't know that?

Oh no, really.

Yeah no yeah, it's true. So.

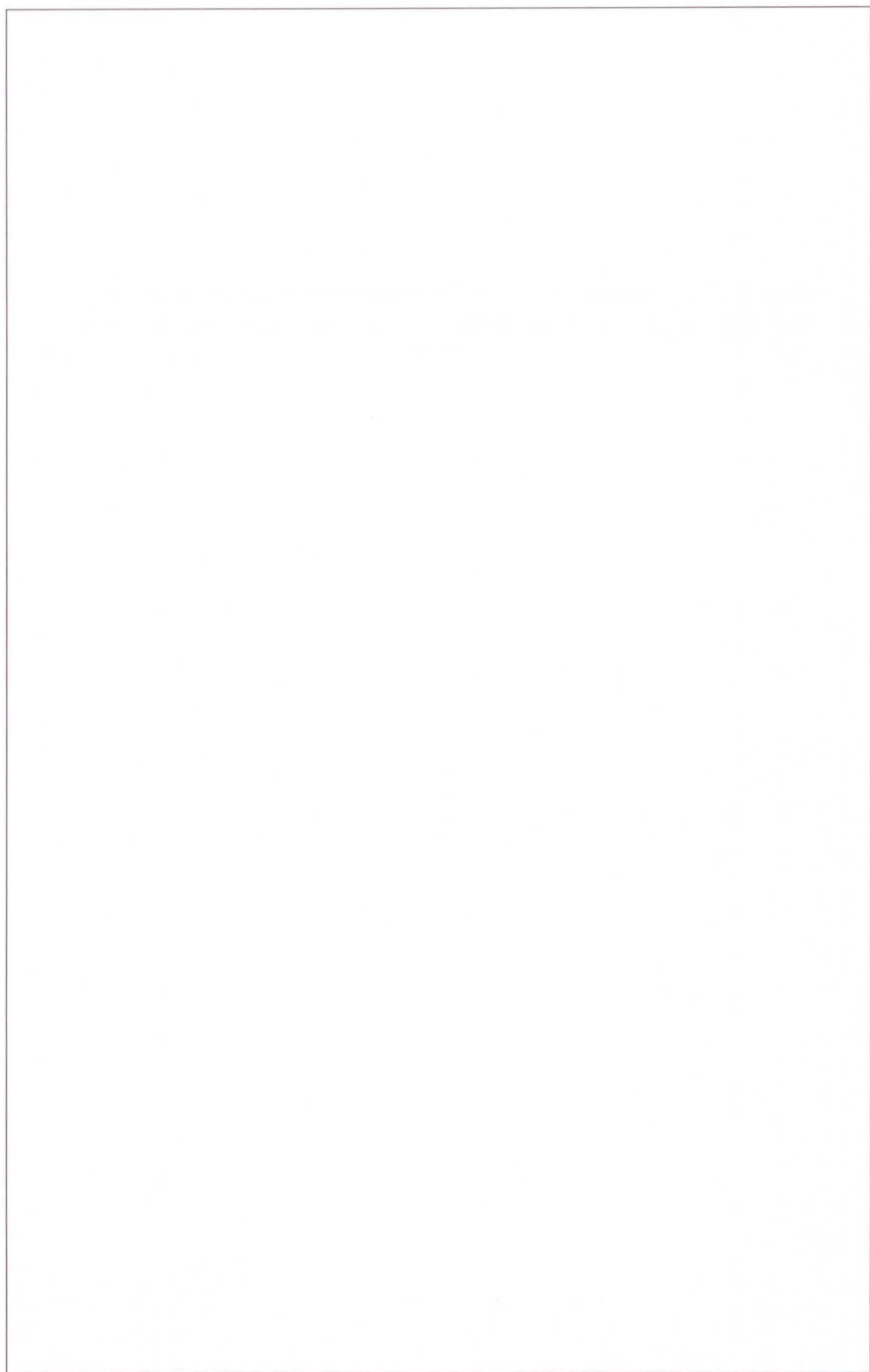
So —

So yeah so she's in town, think she might be down there. Cause you know Dave went to high school with her.

Oh really, excellent.

Yeah I think they actually had a date or two, back before she became popular.

He pulled the tampon out of her and put it next to the bed. He started licking her and she rolled over, sat on him, closing her eyes.



Sharon McCartney / from *THE LOVE SONG
OF LAURA INGALLS WILDER*

The Whatnot

"So that's a whatnot," Pa said.
— By the Shores of Silver Lake

If I could just get back to the woods,
I could clear my thoughts. Listen to
the wind strumming the pines.

I look around, say to myself: stove,
stovepipe, churn. Tablecloth, quilt,
bedstead. But none of these has meaning.
The face of God eludes me. I don't
even recognize myself, my body plastered
with pasteboard and paint, a façade
of scalloped paper edging, tricked out,
over-accessorized, gussied up with baubles,
trinkets, figurines — pink shepherdess,
brown and white china dog —
smug, useless things.

The table cold shoulders me, sniffing.
No matter. As I age, I care less and less
for company, a comfort to fade, no longer
the latest, the rage. What a joy it would be
to forget oneself, go incognito, incommunicado,
non compos mentis.

My back to the wall, cornered, I remain
anomalous, an oddity, attracting more attention
than I deserve. Three legs, five shelves
and a question: why am I here?

The Writing Desk in which Laura Hides the \$100 Bill
She and Almanzo Will Use to Buy a Farm in Missouri

The hundred dollar bill was a secret. My mother locked it in the desk.
— On The Way Home, Rose Wilder Lane

I try to pretend it's not there. Present myself
to the world, all the unsullied goods and
furnishings packed around me, as if I am

what I ever was. Varnished wood, polished
but a simple design, utilitarian, unadorned.
Such a strain, every inch of me on edge,

fretting. I never knew fear until now —
imagine a ransacking, hinges snapped,
green felt lining scraped, torn. Why me?

Why not the fiddle? The churn? I didn't
ask for this — to be singled out, set apart,
every assumption about life, my role,

upended, as if letters from home, the folks,
that I held so dear, were confiscated,
a sheaf of foolscap dumped. And, overall,

a sense of shame — I'm handled gingerly,
hushed tones, as if I were fragile, on the verge.
I hide a thing that must not be spoken of.

This will be resented. Secrets divide. I am
booted from the secure stockade of the past
to face the new wilderness, weaponless.

Ma's Rocker

*Then Ma began to sway gently in the comfortable rocking chair. Firelight
ran up and down, up and down the barrel of Pa's pistol in her lap.*

— Little House on the Prairie

Cruel or sad — I'm not sure which —
to make me this way, bent and braced,
arms always open, always wanting
more than she wants to give. I have
my pride, which I tend to humour,
tell myself I can be happy without her,
how each year she is heavier,
straining my joints, bringing me down.
But to live, to know joy and despair,
is to rock and I can't rock alone.
An emptiness carved into me, not
vacancy, but capacity, designed to hold.

Each time she leaves, I must relearn
inertia, stasis. Balance my thoughts.
Forget the wooded past, dim memory
of the creek bed, a stand of saplings,
and the unreal future, the disorder
that rolls beyond the open door.
Try to rock in the realm of possibility,
syncopation of the uneven floor,
my only option to inch imperceptibly
across the planks, a progress so slow
she would only notice by looking away,
by comparing where I am now with
where I was the last time she cared.

One of Pa's Traps

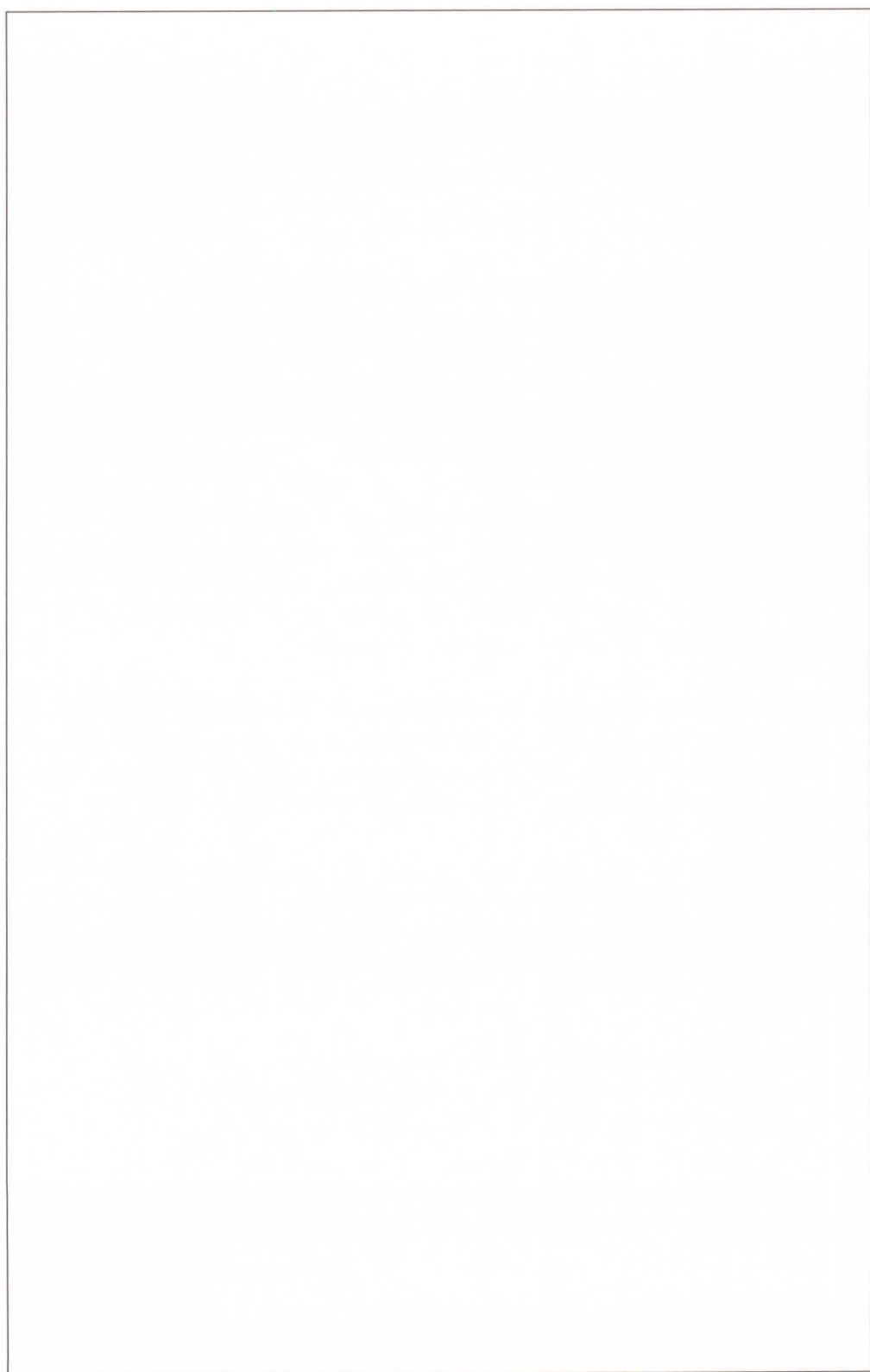
*There were small traps and middle-sized traps and great bear traps
with teeth in their jaws that would break a man's leg if they shut onto it.*

— Little House in the Big Woods

I don't mind the dying, thrash and gnaw,
muskrat, mink, otter, fox. Their brief warmth
flows over me, softening — not the fear and rage
of the forge, the hammering, but tenderness,
care, the joy of connecting, until the coldness
sets in. A consequence of my nature —
wrong place, wrong time, wrong paw.

But the one that escapes upsets me, scrawny
young hare, how stunned I am, confused,
the rattle of failure, inadequacy, as she skitters
off, zigzagging, ears flat, a panicked glance
backward as if I might pursue. Then,
emptiness, silence, not the usual aftermath.

I don't know what to think — the taste of her
still, a clot, a tuft stuck between my teeth.
Sprung, useless, I hunger for her. But having
unsnared herself, rejecting me, she would never
come back. Or would she? She must have
more sense than that, more sense than me,
greased, chained, snapping my jaws on air.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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LEA LITTLEWOLFE: On the shores of one of Earth's largest freshwater lakes, I live and work and write and make love. The great novel of my clan is in the works. I am slow in the task because, as time passes, the discernment of truth versus fiction becomes more attenuated — and in the final analysis doesn't matter. Thus myth replaces both truth and fiction.

JOHN LOFRANCO lives in Montreal and writes about hockey and the news for www.maisonneuve.org. He runs 3km in less than 9 minutes.

SHARON M^CCARTNEY is the author of *Karenin Sings the Blues* (Goose Lane, 2003) and *Under the Abdominal Wall* (Anvil, 1999). The poems in this issue are from a new manuscript, *The Love Song of Laura Ingalls Wilder*, that uses voices from the "Little House" children's books of Laura Ingalls Wilder.

EDWARD MYCUE has poems forthcoming in *European Judaism*, *LiNQ*, *Minotaur*, *The Blue Mouse*, *Shearsman*, *Short Fuse Poetry Now*, *Big Scream*, *Spin*, *6 X 6*, *Rfd*, and *Jejune*. He lives in San Francisco, California; was born in Niagara Falls, New York; grew up in Dallas, Texas; studied in Boston, Massachusetts and Elsinore, Denmark; taught in Achrenensua/Brong-Ahafo, Ghana; has had books published in Australia, England, and the United States.

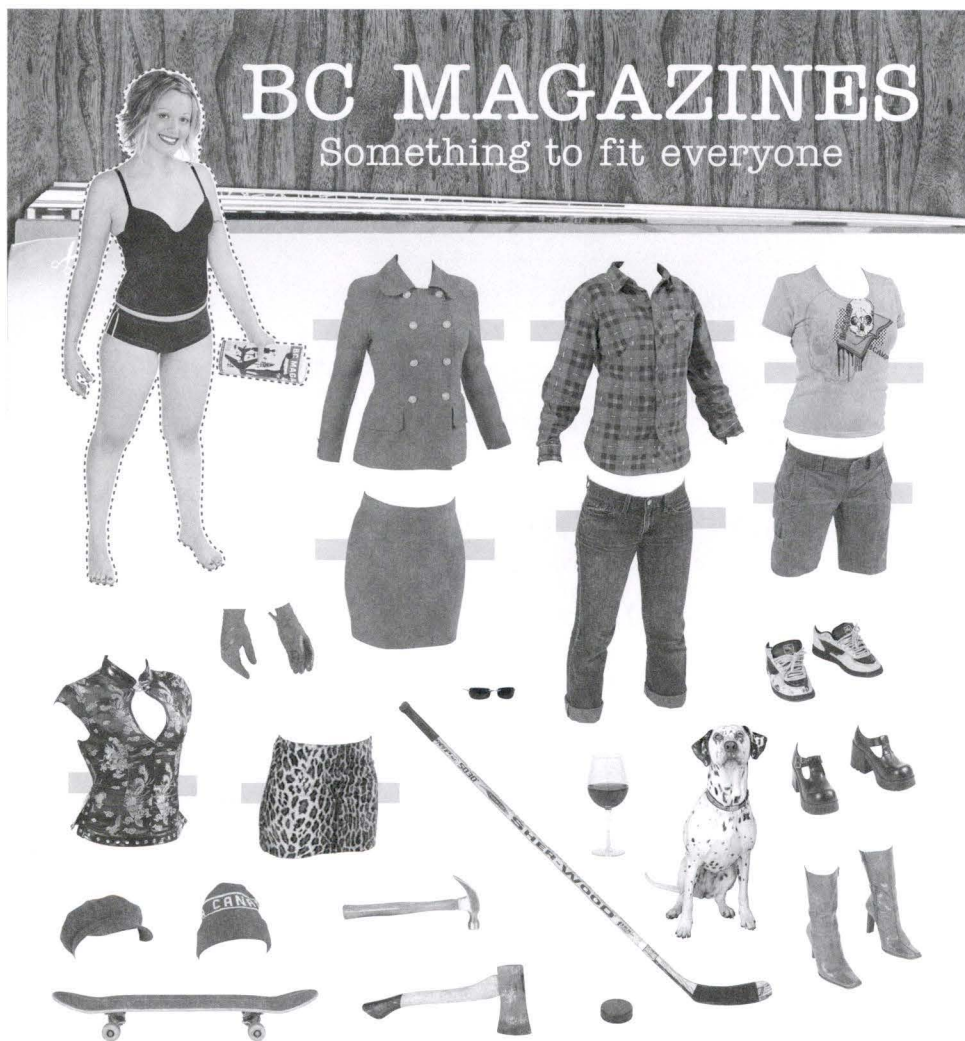
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