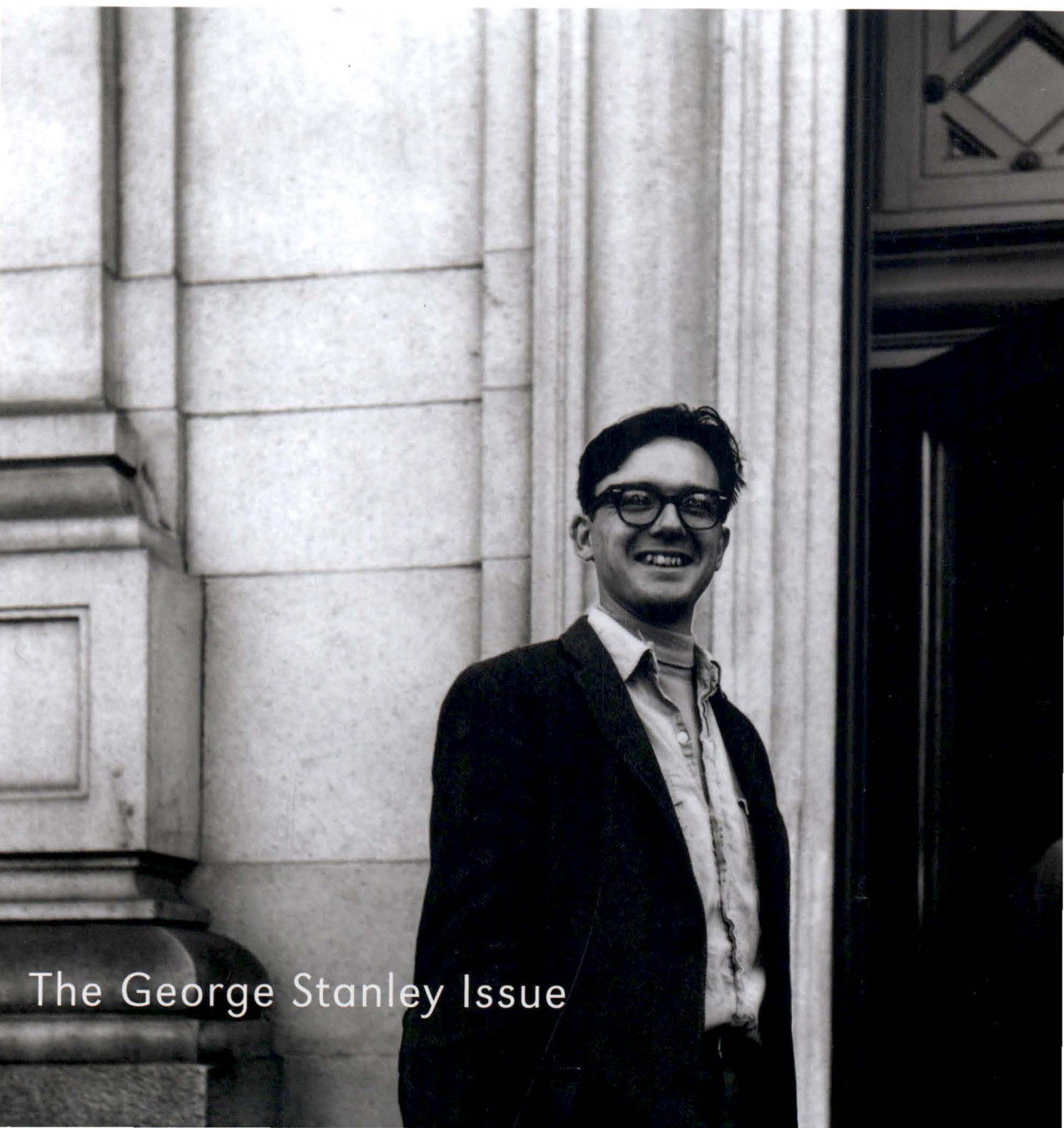


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THE CAPILANO REVIEW



The George Stanley Issue

*The phantoms have gone away
& left a space
for beauty.*

—GEORGE STANLEY

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Cover Image:

George Stanley, UC Berkeley, 1965

PHOTOGRAPHER: TOVE NEVILLE

*Stanley Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection,
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BROOK HOUGLUM & JENNY PENBERTHY / “This is the place”: A Conversation with George Stanley

BROOK HOUGLUM: I’m interested in your experience of 1950s/1960s San Francisco—the poetry meetings, readings, and community that sprang up—and how this community fostered your writing practice. Can you give us some description—who was there, what was most consequential for your writing?

GEORGE STANLEY: I was at the University of California at Berkeley in 1956 and 1957. In 1957 I went over to North Beach on a Saturday evening to Vesuvio’s which was at that time the bohemian bar. The word “beatnik” hadn’t arisen yet. It was a bohemian bar, but everybody knew *that* bar. So a friend of mine said, “You want to go to a *real* bohemian bar...” and took me to a bar called The Place on upper Grant Avenue and that was where I met Jack Spicer. And we had a conversation about Emerson and Thoreau, for some reason. I told him I wrote poetry and he asked me to come to the Magic Workshop which had just started at the San Francisco Public Library. I’m trying to remember who was in that. Certainly Robert Duncan, Joe Dunn, Ebbe Borregaard, Helen Adam.

In that period before 1960 people began to arrive from different places. Some had already arrived. Joanne Kyger came from Santa Barbara; Whalen, Snyder, and Lew Welch came from Oregon. People had come from Black Mountain because Black Mountain College in North Carolina had closed. That would be Ebbe Borregaard, Basil and Martha King—there was an influx of people into the area. Harold and Dora Dull from Seattle.

We began having the Sunday afternoon poetry meetings at Joe Dunn’s apartment on Bay Street attended by Spicer, Stan Persky, Ebbe, Joanne, David Meltzer, Duncan, James Broughton, Ron Primack, Harold, Michael Rumaker. Those meetings went on at Joe Dunn’s, and at my apartment on Pine Street which I was sharing with, I think, Ebbe, and at an apartment on Montgomery Street which we shared in 1958. People read poems and their poems were subjected to criticism by the others—sometimes very harsh criticism.

Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan were the mentors of all of us but there were other older poets in the area who were very important: Kenneth Rexroth and Josephine

Miles were two of the most important and influential. I remember a short poetry workshop at Rexroth's apartment; Ron Loewinsohn and his first wife Sue Rosen were in that group, and myself, and I can't remember who else.

JENNY PENBERTHY: Can you talk about Josephine Miles?

GS: She was Professor of English at Berkeley and very influential. Jo Miles was at many of the poetry readings. I got to know her. I went and visited her several times in Berkeley and the thing about Jo Miles' poetry was that her lines were conversational, in a different way than the plain language of Williams. Each poem was someone having a conversation with you.

BH: How much interaction or tension did you find between the multiple literary groups in the Bay Area?

GS: There were two groups in San Francisco at the time. There were the Beats, and there was the Spicer/Duncan group, which didn't have a name at that time. Later on people began calling it the Spicer Circle. But there was not much contact between those two groups. Thinking of this now I think it is similar to St. Petersburg in 1917 where there were two groups: the Acmeists and the Futurists. They went to the same café but they sat at separate tables. They were not personally antagonistic; they simply had different concepts of poetry. It was the same with the Spicer/Duncan group and the Beats. We didn't see each other very much. But there was no personal antagonism.

JP: Michael McClure's opening remarks at his Vancouver 2011 reading tried to define his relation to the Beats via his friendship with Duncan and Spicer.

GS: I think Michael may have seen that more as one thing, but the fact was that we met at The Place and then later at Gino and Carlo's. That was our centre. That table. There were very rarely any Beats. I cannot recall at any point McClure, Ginsberg, Kerouac, or any of the Beats being there...

JP: It makes sense that they wouldn't be at the same table...

GS: Yes, and one major difference was that the Beats, very early, associated themselves with and took great interest in eastern philosophy—Zen Buddhism and other forms of Buddhism—whereas our group, with the intellectual authority of Spicer, Duncan, and Blaser, having come from Berkeley and having been students of Ernst Kantorowicz, in

effect what we youngsters at the table and the bar were learning was western culture and western politics. Culture and politics. So we were western-oriented whereas the Beats were eastern-oriented. That I think is a major difference.

BH: Figures like Rexroth somehow also straddled camps.

GS: Rexroth comes from an anarchist background, Spicer and Duncan were anarchists—they were all anarchists. I learned from Spicer particularly. I remember thinking that Spicer made his mind open stacks. You could ask him anything and he could tell us anything that we needed to know. Being an anarchist, Spicer could be critical and mocking of the Marxist tradition. So we go back to that big split between Marx and Bakunin. They were on the anarchist side.

JP: What was the age difference between you and Spicer?

GS: Nine years, but he seemed so much older. He looked older than his age, and had such authority about him. I was nine years younger than Spicer and fifteen years younger than Duncan. The rest of us were more or less of the same age—Harold Dull, Ebbe Borregaard, Joanne Kyger, and myself.

BH: Aside from the meetings, what do you recall about the readings scene, or other kinds of gatherings?

GS: After the Spicer workshop, the very next year Duncan did the same thing. Duncan had a class—it was the very same room, I think, of the San Francisco Public Library—but it was kind of a fizzle. It just didn't work. And by that time Joanne and I had become totally disrespectful, so we were very disruptive in the Duncan class and made Duncan very angry. Spicer, of course, was gleeful to see us acting up, and Joanne, particularly, made up these things like the Dharma Committee, or we would appoint the bodhisattva of the week, you know, making fun not only of our own mentors but also of the Beats.

From 1960 to 1961, I was in New York, and between '61 and '65—Spicer died in '65—I don't recall any other poets entering the scene. 1964 was an important year because that's when Stan Persky began publishing his magazine called *Open Space*. And that in a sense brought the two groups back together again. At least as I recall Gary Snyder and other people of the Beat group also published in *Open Space*.

What happened in the latter half of the '60s—the hippies in '65 and the "summer

of love” in ‘66—was that another poetry group came together. This was in 1967 in the Haight/Ashbury district. There was a kind of double centre of poetry: one centre was The Poetry Centre at San Francisco State College, which was run by Mark Linenthal and Stan Rice, and the other was the poetry meetings at Wilbur Wood’s house. Wood was a poet and journalist. And people involved here were Jack Gilbert, Bill Anderson—an African-American poet and journalist—Beverly Dahlen, Linda Gregg, and five or ten other people. So there was a real poetry group meeting in the Haight/Ashbury at the time that the police were firing tear gas canisters—we once had tear gas coming into the poetry meeting. This was really a quite different group. It wasn’t really associated with either the Spicer/Duncan group or the Beats. It was a group that was associated largely with the Haight and with San Francisco State College.

JP: George, what were you publishing in this period? And where were you publishing?

GS: Well the publishing scene starts very soon after The Magic Workshop and after the Sunday afternoon meetings took place. Key figures there are Joe Dunn and Graham Mackintosh, founders of White Rabbit Press. In the first few years they published maybe ten or fifteen small books of poetry. A couple of those were mine. In 1963 they published a double-back of *Tete Rouge* and *Pony Express Riders*. There were double-back paperbacks at the time, where you had two short novels—one would be upside down—so we had double-back poetry. The other was *Flowers* in 1965 and *Beyond Love* in 1968.

JP: And those were all White Rabbit...

GS: No, the first two are White Rabbit, the second one is *Open Space*. The magazine *Open Space* extended to publish books....

JP: You don’t use the term “San Francisco Renaissance.”

GS: I don’t recall the term ever being used before 1968 or ‘69. By that time, both our group and the Beats had been in existence for ten to twelve years. Lots of other poets had arrived, but no other movement had arisen. I don’t believe there ever was a “San Francisco Renaissance.” It’s a name that people made up to describe the fact that in this period—this hot period of the counter-culture in the New Left, when there were literally hundreds of poets, and lots of readings going on, most of the readings being

very political, at least in part, that someone said there's a renaissance in poetry. But it doesn't refer to anything specifically, except the fact that there were a lot of poets around.

The social climate of the '50s and '60s led to there being such things as poetry groups and poetry readings. The radicalization that goes on in America begins in the 1950s with the resistance to McCarthyism and with the civil rights movement, and with a general feeling that the '50s were boring, an era of conformity—In poetry it was an opposition to academicism. But we never did talk much about opposing academicism. It was more an emphasis on what was the new, on what would eventually be... first it came out in an *Evergreen Review* issue called San Francisco Scene in 1959 and then in *New American Poetry* edited by Donald Allen in 1960.

JP: I wondered about that at McClure's reading. Someone in the audience asked why there aren't more poems as good as McClure's out there and McClure talked about the stifling effect of academic poetry and I wondered if this was an old opposition he was referring to.

GS: Well, all the poets we have been talking about as two different groups, by the 1970s are seen as a single movement called the New American Poetry. It's Don Allen's anthology that brings the two of them together, plus the New York poets—Ashbery and O'Hara.

JP: Yes, Frank O'Hara makes an explicit attack on academic poetry.

GS: And Olson had a very strong attack on academic poetry too. Don Allen brought the non-academic poets together. And then by 1980 or so, I'm not sure when, Ron Silliman creates this distinction between on one hand post-avant, which I've never really understood but that's what we are, and on the other hand the School of Quietude. But before that almost all university-based poets were part of a kind of network, they were the people who got the grants, they were the people who had the big careers as professors of poetry and literature. That's the kind of distinction that McClure was referring to. McClure was quite right in saying to the questioner there's lots of good poetry around. It's online. It's in little magazines.

BH: I wanted to go back to New York. What took you to New York and what happened there?

GS: Well, I think it was just time to go. Because one of the things that I always think when I think back to the 1950s is “Joanne and me” because Joanne and I were the closest friends. We had this idea, which we also made fun of, that we wanted to “make it.” And to “make it” you had to go to New York. Spicer ridiculed this. When I decided to go to New York, I thought of myself as having a *career* as a poet. I thought, “I’ve published a couple of little books in San Francisco, now I should go to New York.” Since Ginsberg and Kerouac had hitch-hiked across, I hitch-hiked. I didn’t get to New York; I got to Philadelphia.

When I got to New York I immediately fell in with the New York group. In the Bay Area there was always the division between Berkeley and North Beach. It was almost a sort of town/gown division. In Vancouver, back in the ‘60s before I got here, it was between UBC and downtown. In New York it was uptown/downtown. And the uptown wasn’t the university, it was the Museum of Modern Art. So poets like Ashbery and O’Hara were uptown poets. And downtown were LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) and Joel Oppenheimer, very important to me. So I got into a poetry group with those people. And spent a year there...

JP: ... uptown or downtown?

GS: I was only downtown. I met O’Hara once and I never met Ashbery. I actually did meet Ashbery twice later, once in Paris and once in Dublin. So that was New York. There were no meetings, but there were magazines. There was a magazine called *Yugen* and one called *The Floating Bear*. *The Floating Bear* was mimeographed, and *Yugen* was printed. Both of them, as I recall, LeRoi Jones was the editor. So I had some poems in those. I may have been at LeRoi’s place for Sunday afternoon meetings. I can’t really recall.

New York was a very inexpensive place to live in the summer, but when the winter came I found I had to get jobs and I got a job doing typing from Dictaphone—some terrible office job and I was living in a hotel room and I realized I couldn’t make it in New York. I wanted to go back home. I’d had my one year in New York.

JP: Could we back up to 1958 and the Zukofsky seminar at San Francisco State? What role did that play?

GS: Ebbe Borregaard and I were in that. Not much happened in that. All I recall of it is that Zukofsky and I were quite friendly because Zukofsky was doing his translations

of Catullus, and because I knew some Latin Zukofsky and I talked about that. Later on I visited him once or twice in New York. But I never saw anything coming out of that. Zukofsky had no particular influence on me as a poet.

JP: I'm thinking of a poem that you dedicate to Zukofsky, "The Gifts of Death."

GS: "The Gifts of Death" is the translation from Virgil. That's because Zukofsky and I were talking about translation.

JP: Throughout your career you've been doing translations. I wonder about the place of translation in your practice, and also what languages you know or have a reading fluency in?

GS: The only language I would say I have anything near reading fluency in is French. Some of those early books contain translations from Latin and Greek, and now I translate from French, Spanish, and Russian, but I don't know any of these languages really—I mean fluently. What I know is the grammar and the syntax and, most important, the phonology. I don't have much vocabulary but I have a big dictionary, and so I can work out a poem, by, say, Anna Akhmatova, so that I can read it with comprehension and at the same time hear the way the Russian sounds. I think that phonology is the most important thing.

JP: There's your great translation called "The Wasteland."

GS: This is an obscure Russian writer translated by Lionel Meney at a University in Quebec as prose. But I turned it into poetry. I worked with his French. I did not have access to the Russian. So it's a meta-translation. There's another meta-translation in the same book called "October"—French through Spanish—I don't have access to the French. And right now I've now turned to translation because the way I have been writing poetry for the last ten years or so—what I call free writing, depending on the unconscious and writing as fast as I can—which worked very well for me in poems like "Ripple + 26" and "At Andy's" and through much of the *Vancouver* book—no longer works.

There's a phrase of T.S. Eliot's that has been in my mind for a long time. It's called "the intolerable struggle with words and meanings." And I very recently realized that Eliot is wrong on two counts there. It's not intolerable, and it's not a struggle. It's attention, or attentivity to words and meanings and when you're writing expressively,

say, or out of the unconscious, you're not involved with that. Now I'm beginning to think that when I go back to original work it's going to be more conscious and more concerned with words and meanings than in the past. In the past my biggest strength has largely been spontaneous and... at least half of it has been spontaneous, from the unconscious. But I always have been interested in the choice of the right word. Sometimes the meaning is right but the sound is wrong. Or the sound is right but the meaning is wrong. That's what Eliot called "intolerable."

In the book I'm writing right now, "After Desire" will be the first thing in the book, and the second thing will be a number of translations and shorter original poems of mine—a sort of a transitional section, and then the third part I haven't begun yet. I have some idea where it's going to come from—out of conscious concern with words and meanings.

JP: I must say I resist this idea that the freer forms aren't also engaging words and meaning.

GS: Oh, of course they are...

JP: Perhaps it's the composition process that's different.

GS: If you write spontaneously—I'm not quite sure what I'm trying to say here—I think, for example of the great poets, like Shelley, who wrote spontaneously. I don't believe he lingered over or struggled with words and meanings at all, and yet his choices of diction are always perfect. Astonishing. So I guess I am almost saying there are skills that you have to have. If you don't have these skills built into your mind, then you have to work a bit harder at finding the right word and meaning. But still, when you find it, you know.

BH: Translation is a different process, I guess, in the sense that you are constantly thinking about which word.

GS: Yes, that's right. Maybe Eliot is kind of transitional. That is, from the great poets of the older tradition, who were like great artists, and it came naturally to them, between that and the present day where poets, whether they're considered academic or whether they're considered post-avant, they're all expressive, expressionistic.

BH: What about revision? I'm curious about your process.

GS: Nobody revises more than I do. And that's interesting because Spicer's message of dictation has been widely misunderstood. When I was at the launch of Spicer's *Collected Poems* a couple of years ago in New York, I had to make that point because someone else had said that Spicer believed in automatic writing. It's not true. Spicer used the metaphors of, first of all, the automatic writing that Yeats' wife Georgie had received, which Yeats was really interested in, and secondly the dictation that comes through in Cocteau's film *Orpheus*, where Orpheus, Jean Marais, is listening to Cégeste's voice from the underworld coming through his car radio. That would indicate that Spicer himself believed in direct dictation without any revision. But in fact Spicer made it quite clear when he was talking to us about this that not only was there no contradiction between dictation and revision, but dictation might require revision because you got it wrong the first time. And so when you revise you have to be clear that what you're trying to channel is the poem. And that means you have to cut out all your own personal concerns, lines that you think are good, that kind of thing.

JP: To get back to when you were talking about two styles of writing, the spontaneous, freer forms, and then the carefully chiselled words and meanings, you say nobody revises more than you, I suspect that your more spontaneous style is also revised.

GS: Oh yes.

JP: ... to create the impression of spontaneity...

GS: Oh no. The distinction I'm trying to make is between simply writing a poem—I'm not going to qualify it more than that—writing a poem consciously, and what I started to do about fifteen years ago which was following Peter Elbow's idea of freewriting, also following the idea of stream of consciousness in Joyce, also following Olson's idea that one perception should lead directly to the next perception—well not necessarily a perception, but one perception might lead directly to another act of awareness of one's own mind or body. And so I began writing in that way, writing faster than I could think. Writing faster than I could correct, and that's what I call the freewriting method.

JP: And that would be the first draft that you would return to.

GS: Yes, that's right. Always in ink. Later drafts could be in pencil, but the first draft was always in ink. And that's the method that doesn't work for me anymore. I found

that out in 2008 when I was in Terrace and I filled a whole notebook attempting to write that way and it turned out to be crap. One of Spicer's favourite words: crap. I think that was for two reasons. One, I had been away from Terrace for over ten years and I just was out of touch with the town. But also I think—and I think Spicer would say this—I had now out-smarted myself. What I was taking as being unconscious, even though it was coming very fast, it was actually deliberate.

JP: You were able to write "At Andy's" in the same style ten years earlier and that certainly worked.

GS: I was still in touch with Terrace then. "At Andy's," I think, sort of turns back and begins to talk about the writing method.

BH: You have also been drawn to forms...

GS: I've written a few sonnets. I have no facility whatever. I construct them as someone who has no knowledge of building. But at the same time I've been drawn to that. But not very much.

BH: You mentioned your facility with Latin/Greek in the context of translation. Did this come out of your Jesuit background? What did that education involve?

GS: I went to Catholic grade school with the exception of one year. For some reason in Grade 4 my parents put me into a public school. That was a wonderful year. I learned all about Indian tribes and the rivers of California—things that would never be mentioned in Catholic school. Then I was back in the Catholic school and it was the same thing, you know, the nuns telling you about how long hell lasts and all that...

JP: No geography other than the mythological...

GS: I don't remember anything exciting about grade school except that one great year in Grade 4. But then my parents gave me the greatest gift they ever gave me. They sent me to St. Ignatius High School in San Francisco which was run by the Jesuits. And the Jesuits are very critical of that kind of Catholicism that's taught in the grade schools. The Jesuits set out to liberate us from that kind of Jansenist Catholicism that existed in primary school. One thing I remember one of the Jesuits telling us is that we do have to believe in hell, but we don't have to believe there's anyone there. That was a typical Jesuit remark. They were really wonderful. They were these young men who

were maybe in their mid-20s, on their way to becoming priests, really bright young men—no nonsense, and you didn't talk back to them, but they were brilliant young intellectuals. And the Jesuit high school curriculum contained four years of Latin and three years of Greek. We read Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil in Latin and Homer in Greek. Plus Physics, Chemistry, Trigonometry, so it was a first-rate education and when I went on from there to the University of San Francisco, also a Jesuit institution, for one year, I was there for one week and I realized the place was just a lower level of intelligence compared to that great high school.

I had become very conscious of my Irish background in the late 1960s, when I met James Liddy particularly. But I wondered why wasn't I more conscious of my Irish background before that, and it's because my view of the world was this mythological universe. Having learned all the Greek and Roman mythology through Virgil and others, and also because of my sense of the city, which has always been very strong. That also came from one of the lay teachers at St. Ignatius High School who gave us a unit in English on the history and geography of San Francisco. So that's where that begins. And that kind of sense of the world as being both a religious and a mythological understanding, plus one's sense of the city, that was really the way I saw the world. Even up to, I think—well, New York was different. The army was different. Vancouver was not that much different. That mythological sense of the world and my sense of the city come together in the poem "Pompeii."

JP: Those two subjects are everywhere—there's a lot of classical content in your work.

GS: But it really doesn't change until Terrace. Terrace was the big thing.

JP: In the Jesuit high school, how much religious education was there?

GS: Oh, very little. They figured we'd already had enough of that in grade school. I don't even think religion was a separate subject. I vaguely remember some priest teaching it, but we didn't take it seriously.

JP: There was never any worship component?

GS: No...

JP: You didn't begin the day with prayers or something?

GS: No, certainly not. We wrote AMDG at the top of our papers, though: Ad majorem Dei gloriam, “To the greater glory of God.” Around that time, as I put it later on, I lost my faith. It took me a long time to make that more specific. I was at mass, and the priest held up the host and said “this is the body of Christ” and I thought “no it isn’t” and I thought that meant I’d lost my faith. All I really lost was my faith in that kind of pre-modern understanding of theology. But I thought I’d ceased to be a Catholic. It took me a long, long time to realize that one does not cease to be a Catholic. So now I would describe myself the way Graham Greene did, as a Catholic atheist.

Oh, one thing I didn’t say about Spicer—this is going back to influences, and what did I get from Spicer: what was very important was dictation and the serial poem, but as a poet I was not influenced by Spicer because Spicer’s concept of poetry was pure poetry. He was a purist like Edgar Allan Poe. One of Spicer’s lines is “a perfect poem would have an infinitely small vocabulary.” Spicer’s poetry never had any influence on me. But Duncan’s did. Duncan, I would say, was impure. I’ve never been drawn to purity at all as a virtue, and Duncan was as impure as you could get. I thought of Duncan as a great a-gnostic master: a-hyphen-gnostic master. So the poets who influenced me most in school: Eliot and Auden, and then around the 1960s Duncan, Olson, and Robert Lowell.

JP: What do you mean by “pure” poetry?

GS: It wouldn’t contain things that are not poetic. I remember one time Ron Loewinsohn was telling us about some Philip Whalen poem where he had used the word “asymptote” and Ron thought it was so wonderful that Philip had brought that word in. And somewhere in Jack’s “Letters to Lorca” he talks about how people are always bringing words in from their lives, and all this stuff doesn’t belong in the poem. Spicer ridiculed that and used to say, “Tell us again, what was that word Philip Whalen used?”

I think that there is a concept of pure poetry, whereas a poet like Duncan or Olson would allow anything into the poem. Or William Carlos Williams. Whole passages of prose could occur in the poem.

Before we get away from San Francisco we should talk about James Liddy. I met James when he was visiting poet—I don’t think he was on faculty—visiting poet at San Francisco State College in 1968 or ‘69. We became close friends, but one interesting thing that happened was that we exchanged masters. It wasn’t exactly that. James

introduced me to the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh, and I was in need of a poet, someone who could be a model for me in a way. I'm not quite sure why at that moment I needed that, but anyway I did, and so Patrick Kavanagh's poetry became important to me for several years and some of the poems that I wrote in Vancouver between 1971 and '75 are modeled on Kavanagh. It was originally Graham Mackintosh, I think, who turned James on to Spicer, but Spicer became the most important poet for James, whereas Kavanagh had been previously. James and I became friends. James died two years ago. We were friends for that long period—about forty years. I visited him several times in Ireland and I visited him in Milwaukee. He taught for 25 years or so at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. You, Jenny, also have a contact with Milwaukee.

JP: Lorine Niedecker

GS: Yes, Liddy became interested in Niedecker's poetry and Blaser and Bowering went down to Milwaukee and read at Woodland Pattern Books. But James was one of my closest friends. One of my books is dedicated "To my poetry buddies James Liddy and Barry McKinnon." So James Liddy was extremely important.

BH: And Kavanagh, tell us more about Kavanagh as an influence.

GS: When Seamus Heaney won the Nobel Prize, the *Vancouver Sun* asked George Bowering to say something about him and George passed that task on to me. So I said to the *Vancouver Sun* that Seamus Heaney was one of the six or seven best poets in Ireland since Yeats. I didn't want to elevate Heaney over Kavanagh—Kavanagh was the poet who saved Irish poetry from Yeats. Yeats had become, by the time of his death, far too great, too mystical—the ordinary world was somehow left behind. It was up to Kavanagh to restore the ordinary world, the fields of County Monaghan and the streets of Dublin. So that was very important.

JP: George, talking about recovering your Irish background, I imagine the discovery of Patrick Kavanagh must have had the effect of galvanizing your Irish identity.

GS: Yes, and also visiting my cousins in Ireland and going back to my great-grandfather's grave and yes, for a long time I kind of took that seriously. I don't any longer, because for one thing I've always been aware of how bumptious and vulgar an Irish-American can be.

JP: Did your parents take their Irish-ness very seriously?

GS: They didn't really either. There is a whole middle-class kind of Irish community and it's all a lot of vanity and drunkenness and shamrocks and all this. No, my parents never took any of that seriously. My parents were not that outgoing.

BH: When did you first go to Ireland?

GS: In 1971 with Scott Watson. We made a trip—we spent six weeks in Ireland then three weeks in London and a week in Paris. Here's the anthology my work appears in: *The Book of Irish-American Poetry*.

JP: Quite a surprising number of poets—Creeley? Does Creeley have Irish roots?

GS: Oh yes, Creeley has a wonderful poem about how his mother told him he was Irish and he discovered he had the power and glory of poetry. At one point, probably still true, almost all Irish poets were teaching at American universities, particularly in the mid-west. And so this book is filled with poems by Irish poets teaching in the mid-west, but they were totally unaware of New England, so none of the Irish-American poets around Boston are in there at all. John Wieners isn't in there.

JP: Maybe we could move on to Vancouver.

GS: I moved to Vancouver in 1971 and I found it a very political place, and not just Vancouver. The first half of the '70s were very political everywhere. I'm just reading this novel by Paul Theroux about politics in London in the '70s. Because of the political defeat of the New Left in 1968 there rose up Marxist-Leninist groups with the idea that the revolutionary subject of history was not going to be, as Herbert Marcuse had said, students and other marginalized groups. So it had to go back to the Old Left, and concentrate on the working class. And also the beginnings of second-wave feminism, gay liberation, and the ecology movement all begin around 1970 after the defeat of the New Left. So Vancouver was just rife with all that kind of political activity in the early 1970s.

BH: How did you pick Vancouver?

GS: After the death of Spicer the poetry group had scattered, largely. My parents both died in the late 1960s. My mother in 1968 and my father in 1970. And after twenty years I had finally gotten my Master's degree. Vancouver was the only place I knew people. I followed Robin Blaser and Stan Persky who had moved here in 1966. And I

had visited Vancouver several times between 1967 and '71. One particular time was when Warren Tallman put on a little conference on San Francisco poetry at UBC in 1970. He brought Joanne and Ebbe and myself up. This was a complete flop because the students at UBC in 1970 were not at all interested in us being great thirty-year-old San Francisco poets.

JP: Isn't that odd because in 1963 San Francisco poets were treated as celebrities in Vancouver.

GS: Right. The point was that we were in the past. But I met Scott Watson at that time and so Scott and I began living together here and then he came down in the fall of '70 and lived with me in San Francisco and then we came back up to Vancouver and then we went on our trip to Europe in '71.

As I mentioned, it was a very political period. I became involved with *The Grape* which was the community breakaway from the *Georgia Straight*, then out of the *Straight* developed Vancouver Community Press where Stan and other people were putting out paper-bound books of people's poems and stories—people like Gladys (Maria) Hindmarch and others. And out of that grew New Star Books, so there was that, and writers' meetings which took place. After Scott and I broke up our relationship, I went to live with George and Angela Bowering and at that house on York Street we began to have writers' meetings. They probably only lasted no more than six months or so and there weren't very many of them, but they were really quite good. That's where I met Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, Lionel Kearns, Sharon Thesen, so I was fully integrated into the Vancouver scene. Except, of course, that I was American. In that period there was a lot of anti-American feeling. Also, being American, I had a sort of American attitude which was that I was not taking these Canadians very seriously as poets. Warren Tallman was very angry at both me and Stan for not giving them enough respect. So that went on.

The North Vandals were meeting towards the end of the '70s. I don't recall that there were poetry readings. I recall that we put out a magazine called *The Body*. And there were parties that were wonderful—both parties and intellectual discussions that went on between David Phillips' house and Hope Anderson's house in North Vancouver. I don't remember who made up the name "North Vandals."

JP: That was George Bowering.

GS: And perhaps that was the time that Billy Little became a prominent figure in the scene and certainly one of the most important local poets, to me.

JP: In what way was Billy important to you?

GS: Because his poetry came out of the European/Latin American/Surrealist tradition that was so different from everything that was going on here. He was just an astonishing figure.

JP: How was it for you to leave Vancouver and move to Terrace in 1976? Did it feel like a compromise to be going up north? Did it feel temporary?

GS: It felt like stepping off a cliff. I'd never lived in a small town before, and I was frightened for some reason. I had not been in good shape before going up there so getting this job was a salvation, but I was terrified of it. But when I arrived there I just instantly realized, "This is the place." I loved it. Just coming down the road from the airport into town I thought, "This is right." Vancouver was not that different from Seattle and San Francisco. But when I got to Terrace, I realized that I was in Canada. Going to Terrace was perhaps the most important thing that happened in my life. And it changed my poetry immensely. I suddenly had a whole lot of world to discover—everything was different. It was a Protestant town, it was a big trade union town, there were bears, I had to fly around in small planes, everything was new, and it gave me a completely new lease on my poetry.

BH: You developed a number of writing friendships there?

GS: Yes, I met Barry MacKinnon once or twice before when he visited Vancouver. I met him at the poetry meetings on York Avenue. But we became friends in the north and I also met Ken Belford at that time. So Ken, Barry, and I became friends and exchanged poems and I know there were publications—I can't quite remember what they were at the time—and there were a number of younger poets. The focus was on Prince George which was the capital of the North. It became an important scene and I think it still is. There's still quite a bit of poetic activity going on in Prince George particularly now that there's a university there, UNBC.

JP: Despite your sojourn in the north, the city remains a steady presence in your writing.

GS: Yes. The city has always been, from my childhood, particularly the time I studied the history and geography of San Francisco in school. I participated in that idea that San Franciscans had at that time of themselves, which was that San Francisco was a world city even though it was not a very large city. We thought of ourselves as San Franciscans, more than as Americans or Californians. I think this is true of people of other large cities like New Orleans or New York or Montreal. I had that consciousness of San Francisco. And that's where the influence of Robert Lowell comes in. My poem "San Francisco's Gone" is influenced quite a bit by Robert Lowell's book *Life Studies*. I would say at least more than half of my poetry is located in cities, with the inclusion of Terrace as a city.

JP: After you won the Poetry Society of America's Shelley Award, you set about reading Shelley's poetry. How did you respond to it?

GS: The Shelley Award came right out of the blue. The Award goes back to the 1930s. It was endowed by Mary B. Sears, who I think must be associated with Sears Roebuck. The criteria for it are simply "genius and need"! That's all! It was a great honour. I had read some Shelley when I was in high school but not since then, so I began reading quite a bit of Shelley and found him to be what he is: one of the very great. Probably the top three in metrical and rhymed verse are Shelley, Chaucer, and Yeats. That's my nomination for the top three.

Bowering and I began reading Shelley together after I received the award. In one of the poetry readings we read the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," he taking one stanza and I taking the next. Blake is certainly up there too, but in a way different because it's not the same strict metrical rhymed verse. Blake writes in ballad forms, or in long, prose type forms.

When I gave my thanks at the reading in New York, I said that I was honoured to receive the same prize that two of my mentors did, Josephine Miles and Robert Duncan. But Miles got it in something like 1932 when she was about 23 years old. Duncan shared it with Denise Levertov. Among other award winners there's a list of the great modern American poets. So I was very honoured to be associated with Shelley and with that list.

JP: What is the relation of your writing to lyric poetry?

GS: Lyricism is very important to me. I interpret lyricism very loosely in a way,

because with the move to free verse, with the abandonment of strict metrical and rhymed forms in both French and American poetry you then have the opportunity for various new kinds of lyricism. I think Duncan's poetry is a great display of many different lyrical forms, some of them free verse lyrical forms, some of them forms he invented. It's a hard thing to define. I think it's somehow taken up with the idea of discourse. If a poem is not discursive in some way, if it's not telling some kind of a story or some kind of a communication then it can't be lyrical. I don't think that language poetry can be lyrical. It's very important to me. For a while, in the mid-'80s or so, I had in my mind the criteria for any poem that I wrote. It was "RST": Rhythm, Syntax, Truth. When I say "Rhythm" I mean that in free verse there has to be a kind of tension which is created by line breaks, which I learned particularly from both Duncan and Olson. The line break is very important. Not just in creating the pause, though I think that's basically what it is, for Olson and Duncan the line is the breath, and so there is a brief pause at the end of a line. There is in formal verse, too, there's always a pause unless there's an enjambment. But the aesthetic side of poetry has always been very important to me and I sum that up as lyricism.

JP: Then there's that expressive side of lyricism...

GS: There's a great natural expressiveness in Shelley. As he was expressing his thoughts and visions he was also, without even thinking about it, putting them into pentameters and complex rhyme schemes. But there's also this great expressivism in Ginsberg which derives from Whitman which derives in part from the prophetic works in the Bible, or in Duncan.

BH: It seems there's a return of interest in lyric modes recently, across many schools of poetics.

GS: I think the whole period of language poetry has pretty much come to an end and now there are things that are just absurd, like Flarf. They're basically collage. I think we have to return to a beaux arts position where we "let a hundred flowers bloom." Many different kinds of poetry. But I don't think we can possibly recover the rhyme and metrical poetry of the past. People like Dana Gioia out of a school called New Formalism, which I call "New Formaldehyde," make the assumption that you can write rhymed and metrical poetry now, but it's not possible. You can't write it unless

you were brought up with it. Unless you were reading it and writing it from the age of five. The last poet who could do that was Yeats.

BH: You were one of the founders of Aboutism—could you tell us about it? What were the tenets, the context? What are your thoughts on it now?

GS: Aboutism was an idea framed as if it were a poetic movement. The manifesto is from Ryan Knighton: “Theory guards us from error; we are for error.”

Aboutism was a reaction to language poetry, and language poetry quite clearly eliminated reference. I think what the language poets were trying to do was similar to what the post-impressionists did in painting. That is, to make a painting not out of the images of the world, portraits, and landscapes and all that, but to make a painting out of paint. So that’s a lesson that one learns from Cézanne. So I think language poetry at a theoretical level, with a classic language poet like Clark Coolidge, was attempting to create an art form simply out of words abstracted from their signification. My sense of that immediately was “You can’t do that.” It’s not possible in language. In visual arts you can take shape and line and colour away from the world and make something new out of them that has nothing to do with any referential object. Abstraction. But you cannot separate a word from its signification. If you have the word “tiger” in a poem the image of a tiger will arise in your mind inevitably. It seems to me that even in the most austere language poets—like Deanna Ferguson or Clark Coolidge—there was always this sort of semantic haze around the poem of the meanings, of the significations that had been excluded but didn’t go away.

My basic idea was that the poets I learned from—Olson, Duncan, Lowell—their poetry was about everything in the world. It was about nature, it was about love, it was about politics, it was about the economy, it was about all the complexity of reality. And to give all of that up, it seemed to me, maybe there had to be a reaction against the poetry as well as the painting and the film of the ‘60s, because they were all dominated by big male egos. You think of Olson and Duncan and you think of De Kooning and Pollock, Bergman and Fellini... Duncan once said, “I make poetry like other men make war.”

There had to be a reaction, and one can say that in visual art it was Warhol who brought all that down, dismissed all that, and in film I think it was George Lucas, oddly enough, with *Star Wars*, but that’s another field. It was time for a reaction, but I

just never saw the point of language poetry, and I see even less the point of things like Flarf.

At the same time, there are some wonderful poets who come out of the language poetry tradition like Lisa Robertson, for example. No one is more lyrical. There are lyrical poets whose reference in their poem may not be the kind of effort that you follow discursively, but it may come through implication, through repetition. Maybe Lisa Robertson is the beginning of the reaction to language poetry, because certainly, Lisa Robertson and Nancy Shaw were the ones that changed KSW. KSW was hard-core language poetry up to that time. When Lisa and Nancy took it over, they opened it up particularly to women poets, and eventually to what it is today, which is poetry, not one particular school.

JP: What are you writing now?

GS: I've been working on translations and finding a great deal of enjoyment in coming to terms with words and meanings and with choices between words and meanings and how using a word in one line means you have to make a completely unrelated choice in another line because of tone, meaning. When I'm working on a translation I don't really have a rational plan and if one thing changes then another thing must change but I hadn't realized that. One has to have a whole line or a whole group of lines in mind to get a sense of the inter-relation.

I'm coming to the end of a group of translations. I have two more to do. Then when I begin again to write my original poetry it will, to some extent, be expressive and it will to some extent come from the unconscious only I'm not going to depend upon the unconscious as if it were some kind of magic lamp to give me the poem. So in a sense I'm going to revert back to what I was doing when I first began writing poetry, which is just writing it.

BH: Writing more slowly?

GS: Yes, writing more slowly, and seeing dictation as perhaps a more abstract concept than something that is required to happen in the actual writing at every moment.

JP: Would you describe the process of writing the *Vancouver* poem as dictation?

GS: Sometimes. The *Vancouver* poem is much more loose. It's modeled on Williams'

Paterson. It's a poem of discovery. And it's what I mean by saying that I'm not interested in pure poetry. Everything, including the kitchen sink, can be in there. Fragments of conversation that that you can't really find. There's even one point in the poem where there's something I write down—"I can't read this"—

I think of dictation from the reverse side and describe dictation as not insisting on what I want to say. To be willing to move however the poem moves—like the Ouija board, where the medium puts her hand on the—what is that thing called? The little triangle—and touches it so that it will move. You don't want to hold it down hard. You don't want to push it but you want to adopt that stance toward the poem that allows it to emerge. And that I would distinguish from a kind of conviction that the unconscious will speak through my speeded-up writing. Writing a bit more slowly is part of it.

BH: What was your approach for "After Desire"?

GS: A lot of that was freewriting, but a lot of it was modified. The poems in there greatly differ. Some of them have been revised so that they are... I've been working with words and meanings. Others are free-flowing and very roughly revised. By roughly I mean "cut those three lines out" without thinking too much about it, but that looks okay the way it is. Like a painter would work sometimes.

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After desire the springs of longing
 dry up, beauty is almost ^{unrecognizable}
~~shocked to be unrecognizable~~
 astonished that you passed it by. (The background?
~~wants to~~ come into sharper focus, by default,
 but the old soul is still tangled up in memories,
 the ^{unmade} undone, ^{misaid} commitment, to whom?
 wears a raccoon-skin coat
 into the heat of the spring. And football keeps us
 going too, politics - ^{reports from} back to the slave trade.
 Always redefining ourselves for a funeral - being asked
 to (real) funerals just sweetens the pot -
 some kind of game or other, always in play
 let beauty go and let ^{life} the world go too, then -
 (a broken world ^{deep} in clear sight, the everyday.

It's Friday again, time to do laundry - it's
 Friday again. Time to do laundry. Throw it
 away, Abby Lincoln sings, discard the heart.
 The world trying to ~~come into sharper focus~~
 has nothing to offer but anonymity ^{major} rules
 even though the old ceremonial robes
 forsown must still be put on
 for full dress occasions.

GEORGE STANLEY / After Desire

Beauty

At a sushi joint I went to infrequently
there was a waiter I called Beauty.

I was tickled by his dark eyes
& his hip-length black apron.
I thought his dad must have been Russian,
he was so tall.

He only ever served me once.

When I'd pass by the restaurant, I'd always look in
to see if Beauty was there.

There was another waiter, looked like Beauty.
Sometimes at first I'd think he was Beauty,
but then he'd come toward the window,
showing some customers to a table,
& I could see it wasn't Beauty.

Sometimes I couldn't tell right away
because of the reflections of cars in the window.
And I was afraid if I peered in too intently,
Beauty would see me, and know.

One night I took Beauty home.
Took? His long legs loped
up the stone steps ahead of me.
I unlocked the door to my apartment
& followed him in.
But when we were face to face,
I didn't know what to do with him.

I didn't want to hurt him
(any more)
I didn't want him to take me in his arms
(any more)
so I let him vanish.

I let him go.

I let him go back to his body.

I let him escape
the violent eye
that fastens on beauty
to possess or destroy.

The Musician

After desire the air lost its voice.

The musician whose black curls were cut
when he went to work in the kitchen
now sits at the end of the bar
in my seat, and I sit perpendicular
to his sadness, watching the game,

and it's class, I tell N., the bartender,
to have the game on, it makes it feel
like a real bar. To go to the bar
& have to pretend it's a real bar.

Not to have to pretend the musician
looks straight ahead in his sadness.
I hear all kinds of voices here,
especially Jack's, always a bad sign,
tells me I'm pretending to write a poem.

Jack would say where are the musician's
black curls? Do you wear one on the corner
of your heart?

And sometimes he doesn't show up
for the Gong Show. If he reads this he would know.

The Phantoms Have Gone Away

The phantoms have gone away
& left a space
for beauty.

And the freedom from desire
leaves a stillness, a moment
when you believe.

This is that moment.
Visions of beauty
in an unfamiliar stillness.

They can be spoken to,
called by name.

Desire will not drag
them home.

Jack

Jack, dead at 40, sees me,
73, in the boring bar, waiting

for something to happen. There isn't even
a game on, just PokerStars.

At the Pub

At the pub I am pretending to drink at the pub, as writing a poem, I am pretending to be writing a poem. This is a valid activity. It is something that before I started thinking so much I thought of as art, or life, or didn't think of at all.

Hard to say what the difference is, between being at the bar, drinking, having a good time without thinking, and going now, having to insert myself into that role, sit on that stool, and think that is a good stool to be sitting on, the act of ordering a beer, a Pale Ale, a good act, & this role to be a good role—but not quite the real thing.

But I guess it wasn't the real thing then either. I guess then I wouldn't have understood the distinction, if it had been put to me. It must be all this thinking, all this knowing. Being at the pub then, writing a poem then, was quite apart from thinking. I didn't think then. I talked a lot, but I didn't think. But now I think this is all made up but it's all there is—save the body.

When I drink at the pub I say to myself, I'm drinking at the pub, & that's a good thing to do. That's the kind of thing a person would do who didn't think so much. It's good to write a poem, too, and if there's a phrase, any two words, a collocation, to consider it, it and its neighbours, the other words & phrases nearby it in the poem, study them, stare at them till they stare back, till you're not there any more & they can move, make the little positional shift something does that's coming to life in a scary world, coming to life to live in that world, maybe to save that world.

The poem I'm pretending to write—is that the poem on the horizon? You'd never know it.

When I drink at the pub I'm pretending to drink at the pub because that's a good thing to do, & when I'm writing a poem I'm pretending to write a poem because those are the conditions of my probation,

but when I ride the bus there's no pretense involved. When I ride the bus I'm just a bus rider.

Walking Slow

Walking slow to catch a fair
complexion.

Snuffling after your former prey,
pale cheek & neck, dark curls.
Do you dawdle, stumble over the man
in his bedroll at 1 PM?

Plan a trajectory to give the sleeper
a wide berth. Hop on the bus,
flash your pass, head for the back,
the right corner seat in the last row.

Always on the lookout for a cute kid.
But backs of heads, white earbuds in ears,
caps. Up front, a woman with a stroller.

"How old is he?" There's the community
of women. "Four months."

"Make room for the stroller" (the driver).

"You have to move." So she can sit down
& hold the stroller by the handle & set the brake.

You Want to Imagine

You want to imagine the words you would like to read
that would tell how the world suddenly came apart

more of how the parts, free of their false togetherness,
asserted their separate beings, the world of power without qualification,

the reality of pity for the innocent,
your own body & soul, blighted,

words that would grasp this process of disintegration, diremption,
as a moment of rebirth—

so the knowledge that no such rebirth is possible is one thing,
the rebirth itself another—

in the city, in lucidity for a moment
on the knife edge between truth (with no qualification)
and meaninglessness. That this observer will go

to one of the hospitals, and the young and
innocent who have never spoken

a script written for them by power
stay in their moments sharply divided
from your departure

and which proceed at a hundred perpendiculars
not to arrive at the same destination

no one to arrive at your destination but you
and power goes on,
a reality around your mind
seen as it would be seen, no interior
knowledge of it visible

just the way the air turns black
with an exudation of knowledge,
its own oil

I would like to read the poem
that departs from truth

at the cost of death
invisible to all but by its kindly stature

disclosing opening out
the eternal world where the others live.

•

The passage of desire like a fact.
The heroism of young parents, another fact,
living with desire and with heroism
of care—how can they have been placed
on this precipice—always at the edge of being?

How can the world be so indifferent?
How can *they* be so indifferent and at the same time
placed at an extreme point, beyond even
 all of their knowledge
and with desire?

Often it is as if everything has stopped
(though everything is moving, the bus is moving)
the heart without desire—is it a heart?
One must begin to gather *knowledge*
like this—the objects of feeling
 without feeling,
the feeling of others,
second-best heart, Frost's
 diminished thing

To make use of the feelings of others,
to make of them a cloak, to hide
from the screaming baby in the brain
(a cloak of invisibility
to hide insensibility)

always turn outward
world of heroism and indifference
and persistence, inertia, at the same time
and beauty—the beauty of innocence
even of one's own innocence
before death. Stripped of even the
 desire for desire,

angry at the leaves you track in,

angry at the self you track in.

Home from peeping at the babies,
vicariously enjoying
the plight of the young
in their extremity
how can you be so indifferent?

•

Les jeunes hommes on their way home from school.
Extinct fantasies.

They come to mind less often now.
Indescribable missingness.

Men and women take their place
(yes, men and women)
(you wouldn't be kidding us now, wouldja Mary?)
and strollers, and you ask, what are babies?
And, what good is a newborn baby
for whom you are already dead.

Electric shock of being looked at by a baby,
suddenly you come into existence, pierced,
then dismissed.

Pierced/perceived,
and to be perceived is to exist.

(Two generations of kids in the pub, X and Y)

The babies seem to stand up in their strollers
& raise their fat arms & grip
lightning bolts in their fists.

Too much pondering, too much walking
the streets ruminating
& then noticing, the strings of language
like chopped up DNA—
the illusion of “thought”
(these babies will wonder what that was)

O mournful. Strike any attitude.
Mark tells me, that’s what sucks,
attitude. So to remain quiet & let
thought silently recede beneath perception
like beneath a door-sill.

They are children, they become young
men & women. And at the meeting
my fellow board members’ faces grow
more sharp & pointed.

When in the restaurant a baby suddenly looks at me
I see myself in the baby’s view—
not there at all, & to recoup,
I look back at the baby
who seems on fire.

To be is to be perceived—by a baby.

The Infant

The infant takes a step & smiles, then turns back to look up at her dad, on the sidewalk outside Olympia.

The infant will live, god willing, in the world to come, will live *into* the world, taking a step, smiling, then look back quick for reassurance.

The world will hold itself ready for her step. The different parts of the world—the doors of the world—will open as she approaches.

Now she finds corridors and now ledges of mountainsides by the sea. All the ways the others live, unknown to them they work together to provide an entrance, a way for the infant.

And soon she is living and making her own way. And far away the police are chasing the bad guys who would corrupt her, and the soldiers are fighting other soldiers, to keep the world open, to keep the world wide, so the children can find the spaces opening wide for their ways.

Their ways through into the centre. Insensibly they lose this sense of making their own ways. They become masters of the partitions. Now they are older and they become the world themselves.

I am at the centre now, I am master of the partitions, I am master of the moving walls, I am the moving wall myself, but in it, moving as it moves, signaling as it signals, I still want my way back from that first step. Back to father, back out of the world, but I must be kind, it is not my turn anymore.

The last thing I see, everywhere, the new infants, descending from their parents' arms to the streets, taking their first step, smiling, then turning

back. There is no way to turn back. Sometimes you can stop and *look* a long way back, to see the family vanishing.

At the same moment you lower them into their graves, you look back & see them living, departing, backward, and now you are master of the partitions, a voice behind a voice in a moving wall.

Memories of Desire

I am unable to focus, I don't want to focus
on desires I can no longer feel.
Desires for power over
a younger, slender guy, a boy,
a son. A surge of anticipation
of the first touch, but first the words,
now mild, now menacing,
touching and talking,
touching after first talking, explaining
why this was good for him—and admitting, sometimes,
I knew it would hurt him more than it hurt me.

As flat on my back, I'd play with my cock,
I'd toy in my mind with the boy's emotions,
& touch his imaginary naked shoulder
paternally. And if it went well,
if the flow of pleasure came unhindered
at the last moment by interruption—
a holding back out of reconsideration—
then I could forget all about it, feel relief,
no different from a good, satisfying shit,
expulsion of waste matter recommended
by all the liberal scientists.

Waste matter of the body, semen.
Waste matter of the soul, desire.

But if at the last moment, the moment of release, I felt qualms,
then the qualms would pursue me throughout the rest of the day

until the decision had to be made about drinking or not,
to either blot out the knowledge of who I am
or go trembling with it into another night.

Memories of desire, memories of guilt,
of the primal scene of father and son reenacted,
the son now older than the father had been when he died.

Memories of desire, of longing, to repeat
the rite of submission, but with the roles reversed,
the fantasy son now reassuring the fantasy father,
yes, it is all right, for you to touch me, to talk to me that way,
I forgive you, finally.

Memories of desire, that now
do not reawaken. Father, again I forgive you,
says the son who never became a father.

Loss of Desire

It's been hard even to move the pen across the paper, suspended between the way the world is, presumed, and the hard to write words, near lies, relating experience.

Not to try to nail it, sentences long or short, bristling with qualifications, somehow *about* the way it is, it goes—another presumption, identity, who could care less?

Shall I slice up the world to offer especially tempting tranches? The poem is not much of a favourite in competition for eyeballs.

Maybe mere words... It always comes back to wheeling words (a difficult task, that, Wheeling West Virginia, especially without wheels. Without inventing the wheel. It comes back to wheeling words past the eyehole, peephole, of approval.

But the memory is of nothing—what is desire but a sense of meaning that dwindles, yes loses (lost) tumescence if you tell a story of it. It was that time, once, recognized, that some kind of node on a lattice, glowing without light. But drawn toward it, and the next time called the same thing, called desire. What was it like? It was almost more like smell than anything else, even though parts of the body gleam in recollection and recollection is a sweeping, stuff more swept away (a sweeping generalization) disclosing a shiny spot. That was it and then every time drawn to it recognizing it as the same and if not drawn to it but only mesmerized by the idea of it, a blatant lie, a whispering in the ear of passion, that it was there. I don't miss it, I miss missing it. I miss the lack of it, the failure, every time, to grasp anything but the scum of, the edgings of the shiny spot, the passion wound up, discharged, and left with the joke of being left out of it, turned away, turned down, a card,

again, not knowing what card (this is bullshit).

Still all I can say is that it was a place,
that desire that made all the difference,
that place that was not the world,
that seemed an ever available recourse,
a fountain to which I could repair—
(that's bullshit). Not a fountain, a dripping faucet, & me down on hands &
knees, an old pipe, in the alley, connected to another & to something outside
my life (my life seen as one of the numberless figures in single file towards
death). A colour out of space (Lovecraft)—it seems so odd to be
without it—out of it—like silence—like a silence experienced by the skin.

Desire for the Self

Laugh in surprise at beauty.
Laugh at your freedom from desire.
The boy boarding the bus may even
flash you a smile: Thanks for not wanting me.

Take this stillness without desire & breathe it.

But there's one boy who won't shrug you off,
and that's the self. Desire wakes at the self,
you follow him home. You look like
one duplicated figure with four legs
trucking down Broadway.

The self sets the pace & you follow,
the step behind keeping step with the step ahead,
the foot, the leg, the torso.

But this guy too
is not playing your game. Turn your self to your face & you see
the same patient mocking smile—don't you get it yet?
Step back & stop & feel the stillness & no, the abyss doesn't open.
What a joy to stand on the earth, in your own bedroom even, & know
your self doesn't want you.

But alas, there's a third, the desirophile,
nervous as hell, next to his reflection
in the bank window, alert to the hint of desire.

And when the desirer goes after the self,
he goes after the desirer. Now it's a six-

legged creature, out of R. Crumb
or Smokey Stover, step after step after step.

And behind the desirophile,
a whole string of desirophiles

After Desire

After desire the springs of longing
dry up, beauty is almost unrecognizable,
astonished that you passed it by. The background
wants to come into sharper focus, by default,
but you know the background.

And football keeps us going too, politics, reports from the slave trade.
Always readying ourselves for a funeral—being asked
to real funerals just sweetens the pot—
some kind of game or other always in play.

It's Friday again, time to do laundry.
The world trying to come into sharper focus
has nothing to offer but the impersonal.
Fair enough, but keep the old identity
in your closet, to be trotted out for wear on holy days.

The first five poems of "After Desire" were originally published in a slightly different form in *The Poker* (Cambridge MA, ed. Daniel Bouchard). "Walking Slow" and "The Infant" appeared in *Blue Canary* (Milwaukee WI, ed. Jeff Becker).

BASIL KING / from "The Green Man"

for George Stanley

There is hunger
There is always hunger
A mouth a page a canvas
A colored eye
A thirsty tongue
Bring him in bring him in
Bring in the forgotten
The twin the initiator
The sky Blue
Green initiator
Bring him in bring him in
The car the automobile
With side walls the house
Between continents
A perplexed roof
Bring him in bring him in
There is hunger
There is always hunger
A mouth a page a canvas
A colored eye
A thirsty tongue
The country is in trouble
No one will come forward
No one will initiate
The New Year
Bring him in bring him in
Bring in the forgotten
The twin the initiator
The sky Blue
Green initiator

JOANNE KYGER / BULLETINS from the PAST

April 8, 1958

Mr. George Stanley
Paper Editions
San Francisco 7, Calif.

Dear Mr. Stanley:

My boss is bigger than your boss. Can you come to a genteel dinner at 949 Columbus Avenue, Friday night, with Genteel Nemi Frost Hansen, and George Papermaster, and myself (clothed in the scotch-taped pieces of Jack Murphy's best poem). Genteel mixed drinks (seltzer water and jug wine) will be served before the dinner of fried Mafia Bartenders and Landlords. At seven o'clock. Pip won't be there, his teeth are gone.

If you can't come please tell me so I can rip out the Connection to Paper Editions and order direct from Vromans in Pasedena and charge it all to you.

Sincerely,

Fuck You
Brentano's Secretary

p.s.: Boycott orders from Discovery

TWO POEMS FOR GEORGE STANLEY

found in JK's notebook
and typed up by John Wieners

A Poem for George Stanley

It's always
the top button
that cool people
leave undone

like

Man

if you go home
at twelve o'clock
you may miss
Budd Schulberg

and like
he may have spent
a week at your pad

Another Poem for George Stanley

when two move together
dance evenly

follow each other
parallel without touching

but with every intricate possibility
necessary for the progression

they know that just one line of song
could be ugly

COUNCIL OF TRENT

For George Stanley in memory of this anniversary
of the establishment of the Council of Trent on
January 18, 1564

(nothing follows)

GEORGE STANLEY'S STATEMENT

"The Dharma Committee does not exist"

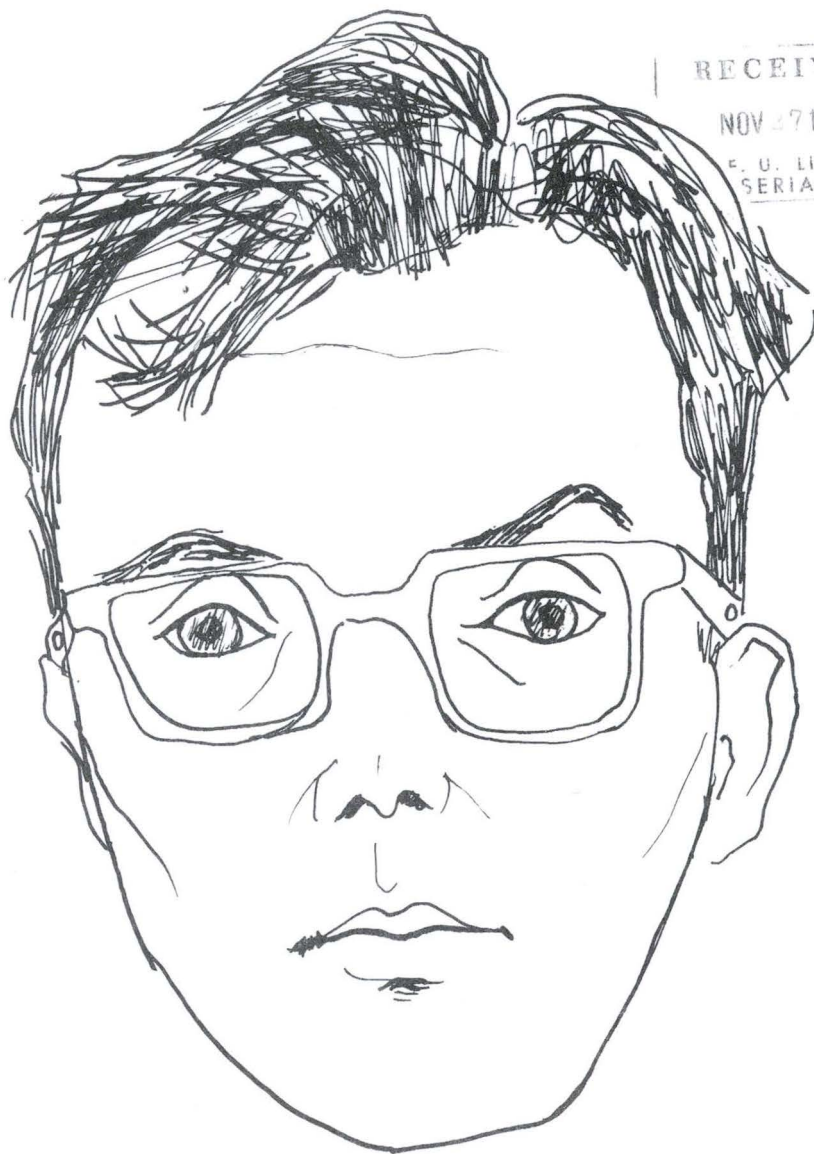
shows him to be owner of that state of mind
known as "enlightened" which
enables one to pass/cut through reason and
achieve the aforementioned statement.

As can be seen in Zen
A is at once A and not-A

We may conclude Mr. Stanley has reached
that enviable state that the Buddha holds

This same state of enlightenment was reached
by Miss Kyger who with the dawning light of TRUTH
in her eyes records this statement on December 4, 1958.

THIS IS NOT THE COVER OF OPEN SPACE#1
IT'S A MASK YOU CAN WEAR IN CASE
YOU'RE SUDDENLY CALLED TO A MASKED BALL.



Bill Brodecky, cover sketch of George Stanley, *Open Space 1* (1964)
Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University

MICHAEL MCCLURE / Pollock's Echo, 1951

for George Stanley

THE SUN COMES AND GOES WITH THE ECHO, the ROSES,
AND THE BIG (flat) EAR,
IN THE CAVE OF DARKNESS.
IT IS PERSONS AND A FALCON FACE
HELD IN THE BEAUTY-RAW-PERFECTION
OF THEIR NON MOVEMENT, NON SWIRLING,
IN A WHIRL OF NUTMEGS AND FOOTPRINTS
AND MOTHER MOTHS BEING MOTHERS OF ALL
WITH THE MAPS ON THEIR WINGS THROWN OVER

WHERE A WALL WOULD BE
if this were not Pollock's consciousness
as it ages and steeps clear in alcohol an the

slithering
away or earlier torments

I
N
T
O
this clear bright
living
that I see myself by

—it hangs on a surface or maybe
is alive in space

Vancouver

KEVIN KILLIAN / George Stanley Picture, a History

I'm trying to remember when Ernie Edwards left San Francisco. He was the great collector among the circle I got to know and love when writing, with Lew Ellingham, the biography later published in 1998 as *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*. Ernie kept everything, in his big flat at Bush and Laguna in the Western Addition: when efforts were made to uncover Helen Adam's experimental "catgaze" feature film *Daydream of Darkness* (produced with the artist William McNeill), Ernie revealed a lustrous print that had been sitting in his closet for thirty years. Where did he keep all the things he had? He must have had a storage unit for his place never looked cluttered. And how did he acquire all of this art in the first place? He was the San Francisco equivalent of those New York civil servants, Herb and Dorothy Vogel, who befriended the conceptual, minimalist artists like Sol LeWitt and Richard Tuttle, and bought 1,200 works over the years, works they could fit into a one-bedroom apartment on city salaries. The artists on Ernie's walls were nowhere near as celebrated as those in the Vogel collection, but Dodie and I would go slackjawed every time we were invited to Ernie's place, for we loved the art of the period both for its connections to the poetry, and for its negotiations with and defiance of AbEx hegemony of the '50s and '60s.

He hung Tom Field and Paul Alexander with the conviction and the lighting with which others across town might show off their Rauschenbergs and their Jackson Pollocks. Some, like Field and Alexander, had trained at Black Mountain College before coming to the Bay Area, but others had not; they were the artists who showed at the poets' galleries of the early 1960s—the Peacock Gallery, Buzz, Borregaard's Museum. Anyhow one day Ernie said he was leaving San Francisco and buying a condo in—Utah or somewhere, a smaller place in which he wouldn't be able to keep his collection intact. He liked us, he said, and before he left he wanted us to come by to take away a few souvenirs with us, pictures to remember him by. There were literally piles of paintings on the floor, some in boxes, some not, and we knelt on the floor and sifted through one after another. Well, apparently Ernie wasn't leaving behind any of his Jess pictures!—but there were still plenty of lovely things, and we felt like we were in an episode of *Antiques Roadshow* come to life! Some of the pictures were unattributed, and Ernie would scratch his head and admit he didn't know who had done them nor even how he had acquired them.

We nabbed a study for the giant portrait Bill McNeill had done of Robert Creeley, now in the collection of the Bolinas Public Library (north of San Francisco). We took another McNeill watercolor from the days when he used to live in my building, south of Market in San Francisco, a view from the windows of the apartment next door, Potrero Hill cool and refulgent in the background, the gold towers of St. Joseph's Church gleaming on the left. Another picture stood up against the wall, its back turned to us, lonely somehow. "What's that?" "Oh," Ernie laughed. "That one has to go to the picture hospital, it's in real bad shape." Apparently the picture in question had fallen from the wall, its glass shattered. He showed us its face. "It's by a man you know," he said. "A man who, to my knowledge, hasn't done much in this line since." We stared at the picture and tried to attribute it to an acquaintance, but I, at any rate, was drawing blanks. As it turned out, the artist was George Stanley. "I'll take it!" I exclaimed. Dodie, Ernie and I wrapped up the patient in white shelving paper and brought him to the trunk of the car.

A few days later we wondered how we had not immediately known it was George's work for it seems, in its own way, to partake of the qualities I love in Stanley's poetry. Collage was in the air, the ripping and shredding and slicing of known entities to create worlds without recognizable borders—Stanley was very much doing the work that Jess was doing at the time, and Fran Herndon. Our picture isn't perhaps as finely worked as the best of Herndon and Jess, yet it manages to create its own realignment of textures, tones, and colors, working one corner at a time. Like a child I press my nose into the glass, delighted to recognize as a common object what from yards away appears only as a gesture. "Good Collage/Assemblage," writes the young L.A. based artist Paul Gellman, "involves inserting one language into another... juxtaposing and playing with contrasting imagery from the culture at large. From Dada through the punk era, one finds elements of transgression and mystery created through putting disparate images together."¹ Most obviously for Stanley, collage involves rehabilitating trash and kitsch, making high art out of gooping them together in swatches. Like Herndon's collages of the period, Stanley's

¹ Paul Gellman's unpublished essay is quoted at length in Chris Kraus' essay "You Are Invited to Be the Last Tiny Creature," in her recent book *Where Art Belongs* (Cambridge, Mass: Semiotext(e) Intervention Series, 2011).

work is composed of torn and slit found materials (book pages, scraps of paper, theater tickets, shirt cardboard and patterned cloth) across which is applied a colorful treatment of paint, gouache, and chalk: lots and lots of brightly colored chalk. It looks ready to burst, as if only the glass is keeping it all restrained on one plane. Depth is built up by layering, a layering so complex that like an Escher print you can rarely tell for sure what any particular element is on top of or under. We have had people come over impressed by the artist's fine handling of vegetables. I don't actually see any vegetables per se, but for sure the picture glows and winks with bright vegetable colors—the purple of what we call red cabbage, the drippy yellow and green of zucchini.

And there are texts buried in it, more internal evidence in regards to the dating of the picture, for, after all, the “turn to language” was working not only in New York but everywhere in the world after a certain date (Liz Kotz implies 1952 in her wonderful book about minimal and conceptual art practices and their various hookups with the written and sonic word, *Words to be Looked At*). Some of the various printed matter in Stanley's picture has been varnished to the point of no recovery—a point of reading without recognition. You know there are words but you can't make them out. The text with the most cogent message lists various varieties of horrid American salad dressings of the 1950s, each one “creamier” than the last. (Really a Cold War document?) The largest paper remnant shows the steeple of a San Francisco church, over which is printed, in religious Gothic font, the Cold War message “Go to the Church of your Choice.”—At least I'm guessing that's what it is, the injunction is ripped right in half.

The more I look at it, the more I see. It's not only flat paper here, but corrugated and patterned papers, paper tape you'd unroll to pack up a parcel with, torn color postcards of colorful city life, rugged paper towel saturated in pale blue ink, tiny, tiny fragments, some smaller than an aspirin. Lots of neutrals. Indeed the whole thing just screams of San Francisco. When I first moved here, neighbors told me in all seriousness that the city government required property owners to paint their houses from a stringently limited palette—you know what I'm talking about: fishy, watery colors; yellows that don't have the strength to announce themselves as yellow at all; blues lightened with calcium, like jeans worn right through to the original cotton; tans and mochas and the pale pink of sunrise. It was as if only an inventive and rebellious mind could paint a picture out of such nebulous pleasures.

Dodie and I brought the damaged work to a sympathetic framer who carefully pieced together the broken wooden frame, who found a near match for the peculiarly limpid gray of the mat, and we held on to our treasure for some years, and finally George Stanley came to town, a triumphant event to promote his grand collection *A Tall, Serious Girl: Selected Poems 1957–2000* (2003). To the reading, at a Berkeley bookstore, we secreted our picture under cover of a Hefty bag, and pulled it out at an appropriate moment. Stanley hadn't seen the thing in decades. For a moment I thought he was going to deny authorship of the piece—his face was a perfect blank, the look all his friends recognize, that means he's thinking something especially devastating and true—but then he flipped the picture around and signed the work for the world to see, in a blue “signing pen,” his careful hand climbing towards the right like a gladiolus on a trellis.



George Stanley, *Untitled*, 1960s
Acrylic and chalk on paper and printed matter, 21" x 13.5"



George Stanley, Stinson Beach, California, 1965
Stanley Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University



Fran Herndon and George Stanley, San Francisco, 1960s
Stanley Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University



George Stanley, Joanne Kyger, and Bill McNeill, San Francisco, 1964
Stanley Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University

KIM GOLDBERG / Dear Jack

Dear Jack,

I am delighted to learn that I am being considered for your Poetry As Magic workshop. Regarding your request that I elaborate on my answer to Question 2 in the “Personal” section of your questionnaire, it is not so much my outward physical appearance that resembles *Aneides vagrans* (Wandering Salamander). Although I suppose there are enough similarities—head, torso, four limbs, tail (or vestige of same in form of coccyx). But the resemblance I was referring to is epistemological in nature. For we are each stranded, *A. vagrans* and I, at the centre of an unanswerable riddle surrounding origins. I do not claim to singularly inhabit this mystery in relation to my own species and fellow prospective classmates. However, you did not ask us “Which animal do you *alone* most resemble?” but simply “Which animal do you most resemble?” We are probably all adrift in the same mystery. Or rather, each in our private version of the mystery, since how can any of us really know whether anything exists beyond the outer topography of our own skin? Or for that matter, anything beneath the topography? What if liver, spleen, kidneys are simply conceptual scaffolding erected by our Western notion of the body? The Chinese believe wind is rushing through drafty corridors, doors blowing open and slamming shut, a cold infant wailing somewhere in a back room. Perhaps my innards are made of shoelaces. Or crab nebulae. Or piano chords. Or nothing. Skin itself though has a certain veracity about it, don’t you think?

But the real mystery, the one that I (and probably you too, Jack) share with *A. vagrans*, is one of origins and current position. *A. vagrans* has a disjoint range. That is to say, the species occurs over two separate ranges, but not on the land mass in between. It is found in coastal forests of Northern California and across Vancouver Island in Canada, but not the intervening terrain of Oregon, Washington or British Columbia’s mainland. Herpetologists have sneered, spat and even launched fists (after a few martinis) over their competing theories on the *A. vagrans* enigma. At present, the favored scenario is that *A. vagrans*, partial to living under tree bark, became an unwitting hitch-hiker when large bundles of tanoak bark were shipped

from Northern California to Vancouver Island in the 1800s to serve the Island's growing leather tanning industry. Yet this theory (or any countervailing theory) will never be more than a "best guess," for there is no independent means of confirming it. Even if *A. vagrans* could speak to us, and with conscious possession of transgenerational memory (all of which I believe is possible), we still would learn nothing. For *A. vagrans* knows nothing. It's a matter of scale, Jack. The felling of trees, the shockwaves through brain and bone, the stripping and piling, the safe refuge between tannic hides, the tight bundle, the lurch and drag along rutted corduroy roads by slathering horses, the ceaseless rattling midnight of cargo hold, the dark swelter and hum, the off-loading in Victoria. These forces are so many orders of magnitude greater than the universe of *A. vagrans* as to be not just incomprehensible to our lowly subject, but nonexistent. In much the same way that our own... Well, you see my point, don't you?

And so I rest my case. Although I had not noticed until this moment that I was making one. I had naively thought I was answering a question. I would like to learn how to answer a question without making a case. How to answer a question by chewing its ears off and swallowing them whole. By winding it up in shoelaces and piano chords then spinning it free and watching it wobble down shrieking corridors and logging roads like a crab walks, like a tree rolls. I would like to learn how to answer a question by filling its lungs with helium so I can lose it among the clouds. Or by splitting it. Splitting it wide. Splitting it into two wide lips, fat and juicy as ripe salamanders, and kissing them. Hard.

Love,
Kim

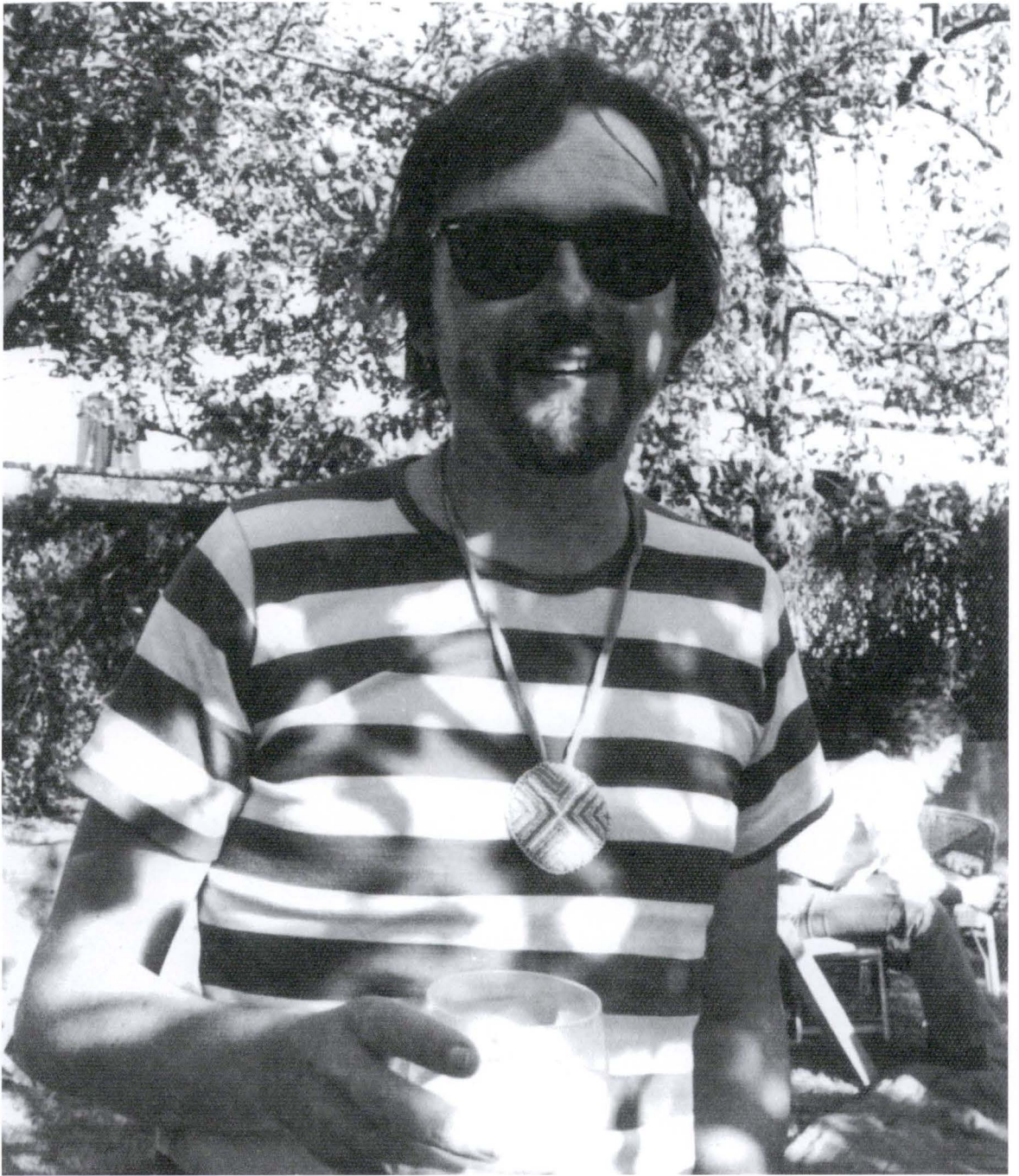
The nature of memory comes into play when contemplating a friendship of 54 years. I tend to see memory in terms of snapshots. Not memories that shape themselves around actual snapshots but recollections that have no apparent antecedent or follow up. This is especially true when it comes to the San Francisco of the late '50s. For instance, there's an image of George and I having a long walk all around San Francisco. I don't recall where we started or whether there was any purpose other than clearing our heads from the previous evening's indulgences and bracing ourselves for our next foray to the bars. The memory is not so much of the walk but of the topic under discussion: the nature of thought. George expounded on his popcorn theory: thoughts arising in the mind sometimes fly from the brain the way corn puffs escape the pot while popping. George and I typically manage to hold differing views, resulting in discussions that go on for quite some time. This time George must surely have won—I can't remember what my stand was! I think his point was that the morsels that escape are discarded and the stuff remaining in the pot is put to use. It may be time to reopen this discussion: perhaps it is the escaped popcorn that is of value. Can you imagine? This sort of stuff has been going on between us for over half a century.

Our group, loosely identified as the people who showed up at Joe Dunn's Sunday afternoon poetry meetings, had been reluctant to self-identify as Beatniks. There were valid philosophical arguments differentiating the various factions of the day. However, in rough brush strokes, we shared clothing styles, black tights for girls, turtle necks (although Spicer never gave up his grubby white shirt and tie), and were also united in favouring alcohol-based refreshments. Here's another snapshot of the mind. It is late. We are heading to Mike's Pool Hall, not to play pool but for the soup, which is just the thing after a long hard night at the bars. Being the late '50s, existentialism is endlessly debated. George, who, among others of our group, is still struggling with the effects of a Catholic childhood, comments on the latest bit of dogma out of the Vatican: the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Is this an attempt to counter the nihilism of the French intellectuals of the day? Where would this lead?

Not only did the “scene” move from North Beach to the Haight-Ashbury, but along came flowers, beads, and colourful costumes. Alcohol was shunned in favour of weed and the various hallucinogenic chemicals being developed which were embraced by Ginsberg and eschewed by Spicer. Beatniks were history and Hippies could care less about existentialism. With the Doomsday clock screaming nuclear annihilation only minutes away, anti-war demonstrations prevailed. World Peace was what we needed. A real photograph of George comes to mind, wearing a beaded medallion in the fashion of the day.

George and I both happened to be living in Vancouver in the early ‘70s (from “April in Vancouver”: “It’s pretty shitty / Living in a Protestant city”) and then Terrace. The next snapshot sees the medallion replaced by a moustache and a proper tweed jacket, attire appropriate to the role of English instructor. Before long, I too joined the ranks of the faculty at the college. While sharing his house in Terrace, George and I refused to behave like the middle-aged instructors we were, but persisted in our long-standing habit of drinking and talking into the wee hours. George did a lot of outreach while in the North, cajoling all kinds of people into noticing a certain kind of magic that is poetry, as in organizing a community poetry reading in Hazelton.

That, too, was a long time ago now and I stopped taking pictures. Back in Vancouver, the Cold War was over and we began to worry about global warming. In his poems, George captures the angst of the threat of the changes coming to our planet or is it to his body? We now talk about climate change as we observe the bizarre decadence accompanying the unravelling of capitalism. We see each other regularly and never fail to have a celebratory birthday dinner together during the year. George never stops writing. That will only happen with his last breath. As he states at the opening of *Vancouver: A Poem*, “There is more here than memory.”



George Stanley, Vancouver, early 1970s



Robert Duncan, Scott Watson, and George Stanley, San Francisco, 1970
Stanley Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University

MARTHA KING / Savor a rose

for George Stanley, 2010

A serpent sheds
a microwave bings

It's
bone melt and brain lapse

It's Queen of the Night

It's
cats and pigs
it's eyes in the wind

But nothing is all one way

*savor a rose that grew saving
sail in the riddler's boat
saw a neon-green penis on the Brooklyn Bridge
at eleven o'clock last night*

BEVERLY DAHLEN / A Reading: Beginning with George Stanley's "Feeling Out"

I met George Stanley when we were both in our 30s and we are now in our 70s, so we've been friends for nearly 50 years. It seems a long time when put that way. Yes, half a century. But we've barely seen one another in all those years because George moved to Vancouver in '71 and I stayed here in San Francisco. We've visited one another occasionally. He's returned to his hometown; I've made a trip [I think not more than one or two] to Vancouver. We've corresponded, though not so much lately. [George refers to our correspondence as "desultory;" that was the note on his last Christmas card. We do always send one another Christmas cards.]

Our first meeting was sometime in the mid-'60s in the office of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State. He had come back to school to take a Master's degree. I was working in the Poetry Center at the time and I recognized him because he was already an established poet in San Francisco. Had he given a reading for the Poetry Center by then? Our readings were held in the Gallery Lounge in those days. It was a simple wooden building on the campus, set up with folding chairs, a reading stand, a mic. We recorded the audio; there was no video at the time. George did read there. Yes, it was in October of '67. [Thanks to the folks at the Poetry Center for looking that up.]

George and I became friends in those days when he was at school. We'd walk down from the old Humanities Building to have lunch in the cafeteria. That was in the time before the famous controversial Moshe Safdie Student Union was built, now named in honor of Cesar Chavez. Our old cafeteria was big, noisy and served lousy food. But we ate and chatted and got to know one another.

I felt intimidated by his knowledge, his wit. He had gone to school with the Jesuits, and so had a first-class education. And I had only a public school background and had been raised Protestant to boot. Not only Protestant, but fundamentalist. George had [I think still has] contempt for Protestantism. Somewhere he refers to Vancouver, his adopted hometown, as "Proddy." But George and I didn't talk about religion much. Our friendship would probably not have survived religious arguments. I was certainly in no position to defend Protestantism [though I think there's much to say in its defense] because I couldn't have held my own in a debate. He had a ready

answer for every point; that's what a good Catholic education will give you.

George did respect my ability as a reader, however, and began bringing his poems into the office to show me. The first poem I remember seeing was "Feeling Out." It was written over several days, perhaps a week: a serial poem. Whether it was "dictated" I don't know, but Jack Spicer had been George's mentor and it seems to have been taken for granted that a single poem could be written as a series of shorter entries. The first part ended with the lines:

I have to tell you, darling,
I don't take this cheap world. (*A Tall, Serious Girl* 92)

Those lines were a clue to what would follow. It was a poem of rejection, not just of the "cheap world," but of the threatening world, the demanding world:

I can
keep you out,
with my chin.
I can keep you out
with my mind. (93)

It was also trying to understand the ways in which the mind rejected the world, how the mind becomes defensive, and in the final parts how the rejection could be reversed. The metaphors were "rock" and "desert" [the "Deadly Desert of Reason"] and later "thaw" and "ripple" and "flood." It is a poem I admire for its honesty, for its analysis. It enacts the literal sense of "analysis," the Greek root of which means "to dissolve it." The flood at the end reveals "the dead rock" which underlies it. Yes, a revelation, but hardly an epiphany. It's a poem that is also uncertain of itself, its metaphors. It questions everything. And this openness to the question, to uncertainties, this willingness to include blank stuttering incomprehension and doubt in the poem continues in George's work. It is an open process and it's there for the reader to see. And I saw that in the poetry, at least, there were no ready answers.

Let me begin again with the poem's title: "feeling out" can be read in the sense it is most often understood, as an attempt to assess a situation, especially a relationship where some delicacy is involved. But "feeling out" can also be read as "feeling outside," bringing one's feelings to the surface instead of burying them. The poem seems to confront a sort of dichotomy between feeling and intellect, a false dichotomy which the poem attempts to overcome: "It's all me."

Among much else that is remarkable in this poem is a passage, from the section “The Ripple,” in which a prediction is made:

Twenty years in the future I was sitting on the edge of my bed
in a hotel room in Montreal, examining my hands.

The passage continues with some detail of the scene and then:

It was all me. There had never been
any other. Had been no one else. Faces, what dreams, I laughed
or remained silent because they
laughed or remained silent. And now not they. Me
on the bed, and it
hanging off there
with no mind of its own
world (96–97)

A mindless cock, the “it,” the part of “me” that is not “me,” somehow not of this world, or in some other world.

The hilarious [and painful] sequel to this poem is “Ripple + 26” (1996):

26, not 20. Years. In the future. I’m sitting on the edge of my bed in a hotel
room in Montreal, yes, but not examining my hands, the spots of age are there,
yes, but I have no wish to examine any part of me...

I imagined... this moment, 20, only it’s 26, years, to ratify (whatever that means,
turn into a rat, I guess) some notion I had of me (& the rat’s loose now, behind the
boards). (209)

And this goes on, punning and rambling for two and a half pages. I don’t mean it’s not a serious poem. It dives in, trying to reconnect with the memories of the events of the original poem, or to refocus the memories, to make sense of them in the present. “And then the Tao came back, I wrote then” (210). But that’s not quite accurate. “Scared went away, found the Tao again” is the earlier text, and in it finding the Tao is an active quest (96).

Finding the Tao, the way, a way to proceed. Taking the next step into an unknown world. What does it mean, this Tao? What can it have meant to George?

Things proliferate,
And each again returns to its root.

Returning to the root is called equilibrium. (*Daodejing*)

Being thrown off balance by the proliferation of events around one, and finding that “equilibrium” again. That’s something like what happens in the poem.

But in “Ripple + 26” the commentary on the passage is nearly a send-up of the original:

I don’t want to deny what the guy 26 years back said—he said “It’s all me”—it was all him—sure, the world has no mind—no one mind—there is no “world”—now that’s a fact—or the lack of a fact.

It seems to me that this is a poem that wants to remain open,

(o false note of closure – thanks, sd the rat, I have lots to say, & I’m driving (there is no rat) (210)

and sort the “real” from some idea or projection of the “real.” But it [the poet? the poem?] also wants completion, an ending that is finally a place, as it was in the earlier poem:

... And it is there and I can step up
into it and use it again It is new (“The Ripple” 95)

And the final lines of “Ripple + 26”:

... wanting to disappear, of course, but be here, if it takes all night, if it takes 26, 47, 62 years to put lust for power behind me. (211)

These are mysterious lines: to want to disappear [to die?] and to want to put an end to the “lust for power.” All would end with one’s death, but how would one put the “lust for power” behind otherwise? Is it a matter of will? Or a matter of pronouns:

It doesn’t matter where you start or where you end, you’re you (I’m you), not me, there is no rat. (209)

This “you” in the first place, the “you” that is really “myself” creates a kind of unity, at least linguistically. “You” and “I” are one. And perhaps this is a kind of binding that is precursor to a sense of compassion and so defeats “lust for power.” But the fictitious rat is there [not there] nibbling away at the edges after all, the loathsome animal undermining our sense of our own civilized selves.

I smell a rat. That rat that is rejected, denied. Does the cock which is not part of this world [not there] become a rat? The aggressive rat might have been a weapon, a stick, as in the poem of that title:

My father stole my cock from me.
He did it with a look.
He tried to put it back
many, many times.

...

a look, a word, a smile.
And all this while
I have used this stick,
this weapon,
to replace the loss.

Now I know it is not
a sexual organ,
and I lay it down. (112)

Rat, stick, weapon:

Here are lines from the earlier "Feeling Out":

And what is inside or outside I don't know. Inside, I was told,
was sin-side. And outside became pout-side. Well, what
difference does it make? Those—what are those things?
Nests, did you call them? I tap them with my stick. The clouds
Yeah, just the clouds. (94)

"The clouds": all becomes misty, hidden. But one glimpses the teaching that makes all thought, all interiority, all the insides of our bodies sinful. No wonder outside was "pout-side." What else could it be? What was left to the child but a sense of alienation from his own body and the confusions induced by that idea? Still, one survives, lives into adulthood and learns to tolerate, somehow, the parental disapprobation.

The figure of the father returns in a later poem called "In Ireland":

My father appeared to me, or rather,
appeared in me...
Appeared in me, shoulder in my shoulders,
lips in my lips, in that attitude
of resignation that marked his old age. (220)

[It is uncanny the way our parents appear in us, willy-nilly. I once wrote “I will always resemble my father as a young boy” but as I age I see his aged face in my own.]

His anger, in childhood,
had propelled me outward,
to seek a world where to be what he was not,
whatever that might be, might be wanted— (220)

But it is in the book’s closing poem, “Veracruz,” that an incredibly complex “family romance” is woven. In the classic Freudian sense of the term, the child’s fantasy is that his parents had adopted him, but that his birth parents were high-born, even royalty. In “Veracruz” the fantastic wish is that his father “had married / not my mother, but her brother, whom he truly loved.” In this myth, the father [magically changed, “like Tiresias” into a woman] becomes the mother of a girl, “a tall, serious girl.” Eventually this girl [Georgia?] gives birth to a son—“the boy I love” (222).

It’s a spellbinding poem, deeply narcissistic, mirroring desires which seem to reflect one another infinitely. Fantasizing the rearrangement of given familial relationships, the poem suggests a whole range of changes and so questions of identity, place and purpose are all opened to reinterpretation, or even reinvention. And the “boy I love” would not only be one’s son but one’s lover, a shocking and forbidden fantasy.

This is a poem that rings changes on many of the major classic myths: Oedipus, Narcissus, Eros and Psyche. It interrogates identity and one’s place in the order of family and history. It unsettles almost everything it finds there. It is truly a subtle magic, and a poem that leaves me, by this ending, wordless.

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WILLIAM CORBETT / Memorial Reading For Michael Gizzi

One of our tribe
Will read too long
Check the time
And continue on.
If this doesn't happen
The night will be unmemorable
Like a wedding absent the drunk
Dentist on all fours barking.
You went to sleep, didn't wake up.
There is a joke in that
You alone could tell.
One of our tribe will fuck up
That's what we do memorably
Throw another poet's book
At your head you told me.
Like J.D. Reed wiping his ass
On Arthur Freeman's cover photo.
I regret not telling you that.

•

This is one ending
Empty Benefit and Benevolent
McCormack Theater, Brown.
Pilar, tearfully, speaks,
Many read crisply without scandal,
Tom sings, "snowplow... New England"
At the close you on tape.
Back down empty streets
Lights on upstairs where you sat
Sharpening your axe for big timber
Wondering if you were good or not.
Some of us do. You were learning to cut
Your way through a wall of human flesh
Dragging your canoe behind you.
The ruder lines will survive.

Sometime in the late 1970s, my brother George and I took a Greyhound bus trip to Monterey, California, to spend a couple of days together. As we are wont to do, we talked without much pause for the entire four-hour trip from San Francisco to our destination. As the bus pulled into the station, the person seated in front of us turned to say: "I have been listening to your conversation for quite awhile and have to ask you if you are both ex-priests!" The correct answer at that time was in the negative for both of us, but the questioner was on to something important.

Our walk together as brothers throughout our lives, save for the predictable conflicts in the teen years, shows that, despite differences in our life occupations, we are reflections rather than contrasts of each other.

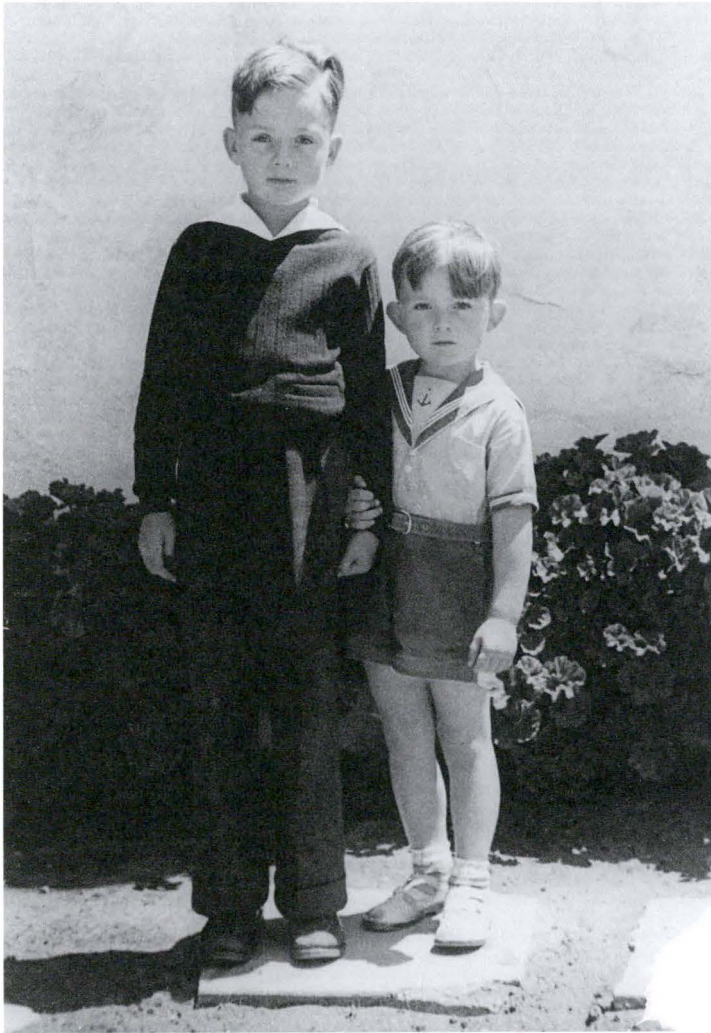
In 1952, when George was a student at the University of Utah, he wrote me a letter in which he described the Salt Lake City winter snow (something neither of us had experienced before) as "white foolishness," and I became aware that language was not limited to purely physical description.

By 1960, my life was deeply enfolded into his, as is still the case. He had come to the Catholic seminary where I was a student and had met the most influential mentor in my life, the instructor who opened my mind to the wonders of philosophy. Deeply affected by Existentialism, both the theory and its popular manifestations, I had begun searching out the bookstores and coffee houses of North Beach in San Francisco. I soon through George came to meet and sit in the presence of Jack Spicer. I stayed in the East-West commune on Baker Street and came to know many of the writers and artists in George's world.

In 1966 I moved to Seattle and in 1971 George moved to Canada. His friends became and still are some of my closest friends, especially Stan Persky and Dora FitzGerald. I have great memories of the Northwest College faculty in Terrace, of poetry readings/rock music gatherings in downtown Vancouver, and of George's developing world through now many years in Canada.

When you read George's "San Francisco's Gone" and his "San Jose Poem," the former lovingly dedicated to me, you get the picture of our intertwining lives.

Many years ago, George was spontaneously asked in a meeting of writers and political activists to offer a moment of blessing. I was not surprised when he told me that. Remember the questioner on the bus to Monterey. George has blessed me beyond measure.



George Stanley and Gerald Stanley, 1941

LEWIS ELLINGHAM / "The dawn wind pats their hair"

"The dawn wind pats their hair"¹

a translation

"glances of life, forever lost"²

a translation

"and all you're left
are your choirs of embarrassed angels,"³

a translation from an essence sometimes under-

stood

glossy

glossolalia,

speaking in

tongues

lips

ululating

besawled

mourner always

there

head turned

slightly

up-looking

eyes fixed the

foci so in-

tense, straining

there even

in sunlight when

the death is behind us, we'll

never know, the

hair, the angel hair

- 1 Logue, Christopher. "An Account... of Homer's Iliad." *War Music* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997: 64).
- 2 Rilke, R.M. *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Trans. M. D. Herter-Norton (London: Norton, 1942: 72. Part II, Sonnet 2, Line 11: *Blicke des Lebens, für immer verlorne*).
- 3 Tagett, Richard. *Demodulating Angel: Selected Poems 1960–2010* (San Francisco: Ithuriel's Spear, 2011: 21, Lines 20–21).

BARRY MCKINNON / Interview with George Stanley (1998): **Excerpts**

BARRY MCKINNON: I was thinking this morning that there is a point where a young person becomes a writer or calls himself a poet. Do you remember when that happened with you?

GEORGE STANLEY: I can remember when I started writing poetry, but I cannot remember when I started calling myself a poet.... I was one year at the University of San Francisco and I know I wrote there because my poems were published in the University of San Francisco literary magazine, and then at Salt Lake City. I was at the University of Utah and it's interesting that—this is before North Beach—this is 1952 so it's before the beatnik era began and so going to Salt Lake City—which is one of the most repressive cities in America, from San Francisco which is one of the most liberal—that when I got to Salt Lake City I found myself in the counter culture for the first time because anyone who was not a Mormon was in the counter culture. So the counter culture consisted of Catholics and Anglicans as well as gays and lesbians and communists and poets—anyone who was not part of the Mormon establishment—so there I met all these bohemians, that's the general term “bohemian types,” but isn't that paradoxical! I met them not in New York or San Francisco where I was born, but in Salt Lake City. So there I published some poems in a literary mag we started at the University of Utah which was called *Context* and then I stopped writing again. I went into the army and when I was in Mammoth Spring Arkansas living on separate rations in sort of like an auto court by the river working as an assistant poultry inspector—I was very lonely. I started writing poetry again there... then I came back to San Francisco after I was out of the army and I went to the University of California Berkeley....

BM: [Your high school English teacher] Ned Doyle did something to your curiosity in terms of going past California Street.

GS: Well to go north of California Street meant to break away from my family.

Excerpts reprinted, with thanks to Barry McKinnon, from *It's Still Winter: a Web Journal of Contemporary Canadian Poetry and Poetics* 1.2 (Spring 1998). For the entire interview, see: <http://wither.unbc.ca/winter/number.two/stanley/stanley.html>

BM: And once you do that, of course, at that age, most young writers have to find the teachers or connections.

GS: Yes, so I found the teacher—Spicer.

BM: I remember reading that he had a pretty odd and sophisticated test before a student could take his poetry workshop.

GS: He did and I don't remember much about it; it's all in some of that Spicer material. It was a test made up of questions about literature, history, and philosophy and I met him later after the workshop had started. I got into the workshop without taking the test, but later on I saw a copy of the test and—I was very much of a—shall I say, an academic kind of intellectual kid and I would have answered the test quite straightforwardly and to display my...

BM: Erudition?

GS: My erudition, yeah, and if that had happened then I would not have gotten into the workshop because the test was to screen out people who could pass it or who would take it seriously or if you were so...

BM: I think poets *always* have to fail the test!

GS: Or if you were someone like Ebbe Borregaard then you would just crumple the whole thing up into a wad of paper and say, "I'm not going to do any of this bullshit!" and then you would get into the workshop.

BM: The test is the test! What were your first feelings about Spicer?

GS: I admired him immensely and got drawn in by Spicer into these wars that he would have with Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser where I was always on the wrong side, the losing side.

BM: Was there some kind of test of loyalties that had a dimension in poetic thinking? Fights over theoretical matters?

GS: Well, yes, there were fights over... I can't remember. I mean one time I know that Spicer was accusing Duncan of having sold out to New York, and another time he was accusing him of having too many Egyptian gods in his poems and these things were

very very serious to Spicer. Robin would tend to feel aggrieved and Duncan would simply dismiss the whole thing and joke about it, but for Spicer these were deadly serious issues. Spicer wrote about the human crisis in one of his poems. I mean, Spicer really did see what was happening to our species.

BM: You see amazing risks in his lines, a kind of seriousness—his life was on the line.

GS: Yes, with every poem. Once we had a poetry meeting and he read some poems, and I think it was Duncan who said, “Well Jack those are pretty good poems, typical Jack Spicer poems” and he immediately wadded the whole thing up and threw it in the waste basket, and Joanne Kyger went to grab them out of the waste basket and said, “Jack these are beautiful poems, don’t throw them away” ... but Jack would do that. The least hint that he was doing anything that would be immoral—of course he hated the whole concept of morals so that wouldn’t be the word he would use—something “whorish,” that was a word he would use, anything that was whorish that was in some ways selling out to the English Department of the soul or to New York, he would say, “alright that’s it, destroy that.”

BM: So he was tapped into some notion of the purity of the act of writing poetry?

GS: Yeah, and he came to believe that there were forces outside the poem, outside our universe perhaps that were giving him poems. It’s important that he did not identify those with language.

BM: No, his source, he might say, was the radio, or the Martians.

GS: And various people such as Creeley had said something about the poem coming from language—I believe Creeley said that at one point and Spicer rejected that. The language is just the furniture in the room. But this is all on record in some interview that Spicer did—the Vancouver Lectures....

BM: You have many lines that stick with me, lines like “going to the store/ for a pack of cigarettes, going to Prince George.”

GS: The first poem in *Mountains & Air*—“Light up the world with your faith.”

BM: I see those specific details that I really like in your poems, but you also manage

to get lines that have meanings that are very important—meanings that lift out of all those details.

GS: Well that poem I really like. “Mountains & Air” is now 10 or 12 years back and it seems to me that if we were talking about our greatest hits—that’s one of my greatest hits. I go back and I still like that poem. I like the way it is just filled with all kinds of random stuff like Julia Child, or that pack of cigarettes, or the pictures of the graduating class of Prince Rupert Senior Secondary hanging on the wall or the other pack of cigarettes that the pilot holds up and says, “okay smoke.” It is so filled with that random stuff that it is in a way like the world untouched by the so-called creative mind. So the great stuff in those poems just comes out unexpectedly without any rhetorical preparation, and it goes away just as quickly and the whole poem at the end seems to have been almost a kind of a natural event rather than a contrived structure.... The poem starts in Terrace, not knowing why I’m there because it was one of the biggest changes in my life to suddenly be in Terrace...

BM: There is a kind of wonderment about the place in the poem.

GS: That poem does express that sort of wonderment about the place—about the bears, about planes, the mountains.

BM: But not in any, as you say, in an extended narrative about the place.

GS: Well the narrative is implied. The narrative is fragmentary. Sharon Thesen paid me the greatest compliment when she wrote this in an essay—that that poem reminds her of David Hockney, David Hockney’s great art. And David Hockney has that wonderful quality of things not having taken any particular effort to have come into the forms they are.

BM: I think that’s a real secret to poetry. No matter how hard you might work at it—and maybe it’s part of that detachment you’re speaking of too—you want the poem to float by without any screaming, or devices to gain attention—but to be real among other things. Your work does that.

GS: So that’s at a time which was very—a lot of change going on in my life. I wrote a lot of those poems in those little light planes in a sense to control my anxiety about the plane.

BM: Many of your poems mention airplanes.

GS: That's true—that's another characteristic of my poems—a lot of them are involved in some form of transportation. Those poems came almost accidentally and they do retain that kind of accidental quality which paradoxically gives them a kind of a permanent value, but the other side of it is that when you hook onto a poem like a big fish and it's something that you have to struggle with—and you may struggle with it for months and months before finally realizing there isn't any poem there at all, or the other side of it, realizing, yes, there is a poem and it's taken me 6 months of work and it'll take another 6 months of work and all the time in putting all that work in—a great deal of that work is to erase any evidence of the work, so as to kind of fake that quality of having come into the world without any anticipation.

BM: Or preconceptions.

GS: Or preconception, yeah. As if it just occurred to me, except I've been working on it for 9 months and often it does. Cynthia Flood was telling us about W. D. Valgardson. He had been working on a story and he'd done something like 19 drafts of this story and on the 19th draft it occurred to him that he didn't need the first 7 pages, and that sort of thing will happen too in poetry. I remember sitting on the beach at Aquatic Park with Spicer and I was writing a poem in a notebook and I erased a line and put another line in its place. Spicer was watching me and Spicer said, "George always has to put another line in when he erases a line"—but of course, I've gotten beyond that. I'm willing right now to say I'm working on say a 3-page poem and say I don't need the last page or the first page, but I may not realize that till after 19 drafts of the poem. So it can come either way. It can come just unexpectedly—a wonderful poem—or you can spend 6 months working on something that turns out not to be a poem at all, and finally with a great expression of relief—throw it all away....

BM: I was going to ask you, since we're dealing with biography, about your initial connection with Canada.

GS: ... I had no concept of Canada. I thought of Vancouver as being someplace like Denver. The fact that it was in Canada was less important than the fact that they both ended with the same syllable. So I came up here and I got stuck here—that's basically what happened. I ran out of money. I spent the small amount of money I

had. I went on a trip to Europe with Scott Watson and then I came back here and I started working for Duthie's and then I started working for *The Grape* which was an underground newspaper, and then I worked on Opportunity for Youth (OFY) grants with New Star Books and eventually I ran out of money, then I had to go to work loading trucks for CP transport.

BM: Out of that experience at CP you wrote the poem, "Donatello's David."

GS: "Donatello's David," yeah.

BM: ... Just after "Donatello's David" there is another poem about Vancouver—full of great humorous diction. I remember the line—"a 'passel of assholes'"—and Vancouver as a bourgeois gray city.

GS: That poem is "Vancouver in April." I think it was April '75—an attempt to imitate Patrick Kavanagh's...

BM: Yeah, it says "after Kavanagh." "It's pretty shitty / living in a protestant city / and my heart too bleak for self pity."

GS: The idea is terza rima—writing in triplets with funny rhymes. That's what Kavanagh did in a poem called "A Summer Morning Walk." Anyway, to finish that one thing about Canada, I realized that I had become a Canadian and so then I went and applied for citizenship which many of my American friends at that time had not yet done, but I thought it was something I should do so that when the judge asked me, "Why are you taking out citizenship?" I said because I realize I've become a Canadian, I want to formalize the relationship and then he asked me which provinces had joined confederation in what years—and I knew all that—passed the test—so that's how I became a Canadian, but the further irony, the historical irony is that I had come to Canada, come to Vancouver thinking it was just another American city like Denver. After being here and becoming a Canadian, I realized what all Canadians know: Canada is a vastly different country than America. But now that Canada—we were talking about this last night—Trudeau being the last Canadian—Trudeau, George Grant, Al Purdy—that Canada is no longer—it is no more. We're now all part of America because of the global village.

BM: Do you see your time in Terrace as a phase that's ending?

GS: Yes, I do. I see this whole Terrace period of time pretty objectively. Arriving in 1976, like I say, in that town, I just was becoming a Canadian and eventually I started teaching Canadian Literature. That's why I didn't get the job at Capilano College. I would have been at Cap College and never would have come to Terrace except that I failed the interview because I didn't know anything about Canadian Literature. So I began reading—of course I realized as the only English instructor at Northwest College I had to eventually offer a course in Canadian Literature, so I began reading it and I read Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* and Margaret Laurence's Manawaka books which showed me what a Canadian small town was like and of course Terrace is an Ontario town because the people who founded it are from Ontario. Terrace was founded in 1911. There had been settlers there before, white settlers, but the town was started because of the mill to cut ties for the CN—whatever the CN was called then—the Grand Trunk Pacific—and the man who founded it, George Little, set up his mill to cut the ties and then by 1913 there was this enormous pile of tie ends, heap of tie ends, and someone thought it was a great idea to set this on fire—a day I think that was very much like the day of the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. It was hot and windy—a great day to start a fire—and the resulting fire leaped the Skeena River twice and destroyed 70% of the usable timber within 3 miles of Terrace. So as a result of this, the city fathers then brought out all these saplings from Ontario and planted them along the streets of Terrace, so all over Terrace there are now 80 year old trees from Ontario of various kinds and it has the little straight streets and the main street that leads down to the lake, except it's a river, like in Leacock. So that's when I arrived. And as I began teaching I realized that here I am in the very world that Leacock and Laurence, and also Sinclair Ross in a starker way, describe (a town called Horizon in *As For Me and My House*) but then I realized it was changing: it was becoming something else, it was becoming what it is now—a terminal of the global village. So in that period I can see the whole transition from bourgeois society, which was based upon the main street, to what we have now based upon the mall. I can see it as a period in my understanding of society under capitalism and I can see it as a period in my understanding of what Canada was, and what Canada was is coming to an end, has come to an end and I can also see it, I guess, as the centre of my life in a way, my mature years, so to speak, spent in this activity of teaching which I hadn't done much of before.

PETER CULLEY / The Inland Empire

for George Stanley

The weak solder
of Solidarity—Zonko's
"Hang the Sock-reds!!"
in his best Queens in Victoria
under the gaze of Victoria
who looks like Mary Tod
or a bomb-wielding Avignon pope,
under the gaze of the rank & file
who can't wait for Jack Munro
to come in out of the snow
to get them off the hook
& back to Nanaimo.

*"when the poets start
it's time to leave"*

A farewell
no less permanent
for its awkwardness
& accompanying banners:
the year of living vicariously
in the unbearable light of being.

The island highway
is the tinnitus
of the landscape,
fifty words for wet snow
five words over wetter snow
breaking a stick

off another stick
on my breastbone
then banging
the lichen loose
a layer of something
is the thing itself
slurry under slush
under steel toe cow catcher
but it's not the North
not the dog of the North.

This snowball smells like fish
& down the same railroad cut
which carries the ascending whine
& keening rumble of traffic sometimes
bacon, smokes, coffee, acetone
pigshit, cowshit, frying chicken
(if less of the burger onion
startup combo casserole smell
than in years since)
weed, the horse-farm's
goat & always greenwood smoke
at the bottom of the bowl.

Yellowed Penguin pages
ordinary leaves of Donald Allen
failing transmissions from off-island
subject to frequency modulation
& infant theft, the last
ethered sunlight of Grade 11
a slice of lemon pound cake

from which the rind
had been removed.
Morse code
from a coffin.

Idea of North
Protestant North
no California lemons
bareknuckle bonhomie
pubs heated by sweat & breath
& pickled egg farts
terrycloth tonsure
cards 'til daybreak
a winter without hugs or drugs
hockey fights & hockey kisses
the rolling greyscale
of a cheap TV
into which the test pattern
has been burned—
conditional recognition
not so much a poet
as one *marked off*

as that injured aldermanic raven
walking bent through the snow &
toward the fence
with an entitled eye
to the point of death.

•

This snowball smells like expired aspirin
with diesel upchucked copperhead breath—
but then what?

I wish Captain Beefheart
had played more clarinet,
the terrible headaches I would get
after parties from being at
them too long, through orange streets
to the 7-11—plume of vapour heat
in the cold Adanac back room
digitally added with optical zoom—
On Lok tap running closed tight
walking through a big stripe
across Victoria & Hastings a big red stripe
oh it's bad in this kind of thing
when the opera lady starts to sing
& it goes all sepia, an ocarina
hand a sandstone screen,
a quarter inch of pink snow
cast iron stumps where though
they'd taken railings away for the war
Dad said we still paid & paid
getting it back in the form of blades
& Starfighters, well into the decade.

Lend-lease. The price of peace.
People that had figured out,
ways to make money, to tout.
To spiv. Cut your hand on his
wing collar, you could.

A moustache behind, a hood
a brothel creeper, a secret weeper.
A solid ten per cent
his demob suit rent.

Thus from the stage of the Commodore
the Captain turned & said

Read Wyndham Lewis
Apes of God! Apes of God!

meaning, I guess, that even
the over-egged & overdrawn
grotesque dreadnoughts
blundering bitterly through
the baking heyday pages
of the Torquemada modernism
I'm glad I missed
are more interesting
than *you* assholes—
I'm going to go home & paint!

But the Commodore bathroom
is everywhere, they only
pretend to stamp your hand
a pot flung into your face
half-amusingly
forever—never
a good town for crowds

they just up & leave you lonely
rather than bringing
the audience home
rather than just going home.

•

It's never quite clear
what they're up to
the men who live
on wires & shelves.

A shitstorm of data
a shark that walks on land
the amount of snow don't matter
to the phone in your hand.

Mahler's 1st
Jimmy Caan crossing Roebling's bridge
in a Cadillac to deliver
leaves to the Harlem River.

Bird shadow in the big holly
lost in the dust on the shade
forced air feathered melancholy
fluffs the scratch the branch made.

The men who live on wires & shelves
are mute even to themselves.

•

Tough to do
the working class
in wide screen:
the interiors
don't quite add up,
tables bump lumpy chairs bump
bumpy walls & let's face it
this potato-textured
distressed distress
is something you
don't want to see
in letterbox HD—
not meth-breather tubing
with a regional twang,
expository dentistry
soaked in tang—
all except maybe
the pearl of the litter
the squirrel-skinner
with secret pluck
& historical luck.

Tough to look though Joni
from both sides now
the imprinting's all frayed
the head's dragged up & round about
like busted bell bottoms in
a cube of splayed &
pawsmear'd plastic
heavy on the shoulders
eyes a cellular habit

lenses chipped & bouldered
tiny fingers still working
qwerty under the awning
speech replacing gum
chews television for the eyes
metamorphic sum
like watching paint dry
or foggy molecules bead
& dance in the light
from my hat
shakes her head
on the tracks.

•

Class fenced but from the
upside only
not a compound but

an obverse hedgerow Maginot
a pinball's tilted defense,
bumpers to keep the lawn

from sliding downhill
to the holler's more collar-
based trenches & redoubts, with big dogs

& smaller sightlines
curved streams
with salmon-bearing couches

thickets with frogs & birds &
valentine skunk cabbages,
clotheslined yard beasts wired tight

behind a grow so obvious—
from perennial mossy boat & car
to plastic-sheeted dawning pyramid

with the frig-o-seal
pie container lids tied with
orange ribbon

that everyone uses
to mark off
the marked off

tidelines of floods
both frequent &
unseasonal—

that it must be a choice
like lighting the torches
for the return of the DC-3s

laden with Spam & medicine
after the storm of the century
had swept through the valley.

SIMON THOMPSON / Our Man in Terrace: George Stanley

In an interview with Barry McKinnon in 1998, George Stanley talks about his poem sequence, “Mountains and Air,” that appears in his 1983 volume *Opening Day*:

Well, the poem starts in Terrace, not knowing why I’m there because it was one of the biggest changes in my life to suddenly be in Terrace—a kind of place where I’d previously never lived except for a very short period of time when I was in that little town in Arkansas. I never lived in any city of less than a quarter of a million people. (McKinnon)

Stanley grew up in San Francisco, and as a young man spent little time away from it. Nearly everything about Terrace must have seemed new to him. The city is located about 500 miles north of Vancouver, and lies in the transitional zone between two climatic regions. A 1975 Department of Human Resources report notes:

The coastal portion is characterized by rugged mountains and numerous coastal fjords... The climate, although mild, can produce extremely heavy snowfalls... The interior portion is characterized by forested rolling land dotted with numerous lakes.... The annual precipitation averages 30" and the climate is much more severe than on the coast. (Farstad 8)

The region was unlike any to which Stanley was accustomed, as was the community itself. When he moved there in 1976, Terrace was home to about 21,000 people (Terrace Development Corporation 19). Terrace may have been one of the bigger communities in northern British Columbia, but that is not saying much. In 1976, the main industry was logging (Terrace was once known as the cedar pole capital of the world); there were 17 physicians and 5 dentists, no public transit, and a 6000-foot paved runway at an airport that that was lit but lacked radar (Terrace 22). The Terrace Development Corporation report does not mention whether or not the town had much of a coffee house or jazz bar scene, but it seems safe to guess that the answer is “no.” Stanley says, “It also did not have cable TV—just black & white CBC. 4 pubs, 2 cocktail lounges” (Re: Some Questions, Feb. 21).

Reading Stanley’s comment about “not knowing why I’m there” made me wonder whether, with the passing of time, he could offer any further information about his reasons for coming north to work at the then-new Northwest Community College as an English instructor. He kindly replied by e-mail:

I came to Terrace, first of all, for the money. I had been working part-time at a warehouse in Vancouver, not making much money. Drinking too much, smoking dope, seeing a psychiatrist. San Francisco had come to an end for me in the late '60s. Now it seemed Vancouver was coming to an end too. The job offer was my salvation. (Re: Some Questions, Feb 20)

San Francisco, the scene that cultivated Stanley, seems to have ended for Stanley with Jack Spicer's untimely death in 1965. Although he continued his education at San Francisco State University, the vitality of that world, something of a poetry laboratory with Spicer the presiding professor, was gone. Likewise, Vancouver came to an end because, as Stanley wrote in an e-mail, "I seemed to have run out of options (including sources of income)—age 42—no imaginable future, not much self-esteem—etc." (Re: Some Questions, Feb 20).

With his move to Terrace, Stanley says he came to experience what it was like to actually live in Canada:

It was my first real experience of Canada. Vancouver, where I had lived from 1971–76, wasn't appreciably different from other west coast US cities like Seattle or San Francisco. And also, being an American, I was a kind of cultural imperialist, and didn't take Canada seriously. Terrace changed all that. It was (as I learned later) an Ontario town transplanted to BC. It was a Protestant town (mainly fundamentalist), and also a strong trade union town. This was a kind of place I had never experienced before. (Some Questions)

Stanley's comments are telling. First, because spiritual life in Terrace was, and still is, largely Protestant (if one counts by number of churches, at least) Stanley's move represented a break from his Catholic boyhood. Second, 1970s Terrace was a union town: at least 36 separate unions had members in Terrace (Terrace 21). Nearly simultaneous with his arrival in 1976, the faculty of Northwest Community College were "certified to bargain collectively with the College Board" (Terrace – Kitimat 46). I wouldn't say that the Academic Workers' Union of which he became a member exactly replaced the San Francisco and Vancouver scenes he left behind, but it gave him a collective of like-minded people with whom he could engage. Third, his comment about being a self-described "cultural imperialist" put him in a position of having to learn something new. As Stanley says,

I realized that being the English instructor at NWCC I would eventually have to teach a course in Canadian literature, so I started reading it. What I discovered was that Canlit is mostly about life in small towns (my main sources were Stephen

Leacock and Margaret Laurence). So I was learning what I would have to teach at the same time I was learning about the new place I was living in. (Some Questions)

I think that the central value of learning in Stanley's move to Terrace cannot be underestimated in his development as a writer and as a person. For Stanley, moving to Terrace represented an opportunity to move out beyond everything familiar.

How difficult was it? In "Ripple + 26" in *At Andy's* (2000), Stanley makes a reference to the painter Emily Carr that I think is symbolically important in terms of understanding the strenuous task that faced him when he moved north: he writes of "just wanting to locate / myself here as you rather than me. You know, Emily Carr said / when the dark asked her why. You know" (33). Stanley's reference is to Carr's rhetorical questioning of herself in her story "Kitwancool": "My heart said into the thick dark, 'Why did I come?'" And the dark answered, "You know" (Carr 82). Kitwancool, where Carr painted some of her most beautiful and significant work, is about 45 minutes east of Terrace on Highway 16. It is a local point of reference, connected with the history of the region, and with the history of larger artistic movements. Stanley confirms that "... along with Leacock, Laurence and others..." he read Carr's work while living in the place where Carr had worked (Re: Some Questions, Feb 20). I think in some ways Stanley recognized Carr's struggle as his own; Carr's movement away from her home, from the familiar into the unfamiliar, from merged identity to individuation, was likely a resonant pattern for him. When I asked Stanley about the reference to Carr, he wrote:

Carr was visiting native friends at Kitwancool, I think. After dinner she stepped outside the house and had that experience of the dark asking her why she was there. I remember thinking of that question more than once; I can even recall it occurring to me one rainy night in New Hazelton (when I was waiting for a bus or a ride somewhere). What it meant to me... was—what the hell am I doing here in this unfamiliar landscape, who the hell am I, etc. A sense of absolute loss of identity—that was all in the past and now there was just a kind of void—and what the answer, "you know," meant to me was poetry. It was poetry, my vocation, I realized, that had brought me there. (Re: Some Questions, Feb 20)

Stanley also wrote a contemporary record of his struggle to learn a new way of life in his 1978 serial poem *Mountains & Air*, which he self-published in "an edition of 25 or 50 copies with the help of the English department at Caledonia Senior Secondary [in Terrace]" (Re: Some Questions, Feb 21). In the first section, "27/10/76,"

he writes:

Where to get back to the truth
I don't have the truth in my hands
anymore. These little stories
don't even need the language,
they use the peril language. (*Mountains*)

These lines spell out an intellectual crisis for Stanley. In his work from this time, he seems to wonder what's going to take the place of what he knows, or knew. "Where to get back to the truth"—the phrasing of the line is intriguing. Stanley seems to be holding on to the idea that there is a truth. However, the line does not start "how to get back," which would imply that he is looking for some kind of method. Stanley's use of the word "where" speaks to the importance of geographical dislocation to his emerging poetics.

Sharon Thesen, possessor of a sharper mind than my own, long ago recognized the conjunction of Stanley's move north and some change in his poetry. As she notes in her essay "Chains of Grace: The Poetry of George Stanley," much of Stanley's early work is in the style of the San Francisco writers and painters who comprised his milieu in the late fifties and sixties: Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, Ebbe Borregard and the painters Jess, Russell Fitzgerald, and Paul Alexander (two of whose paintings appear in *You*) (Thesen). Interestingly, Stanley told McKinnon in 1998 that in retrospect, the overt influence of this group may have been problematic for the development of his own poetics. "I was influenced by people who were doing very small poems like Creeley and poems of Creeley wit and Spicer's poems and Zukofsky's—but I don't think these were particularly good influences on me" (McKinnon). Nevertheless, Thesen argues that this kind of writing was contextually appropriate and in the spirit of Charles Olson and the Black Mountain-influenced writers who were his peers. "Indeed, the prevailing sense of things, both in *The Stick* and *You*, seems to be one of connection in its various guises as history, geography, politics, sex, conversation, cosmology, and death" (Thesen). However, Thesen notes that the nature of Stanley's work changed with the publication of *Opening Day*, the volume of poetry that contains "Mountains and Air": "*Opening Day*, then, transforms the anxieties of personal and historical continuity seen in *You* and *The Stick* to a point of departure in which the poet is firmly in his world and in his community, the world

appearing as both grace and terror” (Thesen).

By the time of the publication of *Mountains and Air* in 1978, Stanley appears to have accepted the coexistence of “grace and terror.” The section of *Mountains and Air* titled “Tell the Truth” makes this clear. Stanley writes:

Learning to live alone, learning alone
Why? Because there is no other
person yet? No, there may be....
I don't know why I'm here unless it is
to be here. To be here. (*Mountains*)

Stanley also articulates this desire to be in the moment in the second section of “27/10/76.” While the first section of that poem is largely abstract and intellectualized, and draws our attention to the poet searching around for some kind of guidance, the second part of the poem sees the poet's eye drawn to the thingness of the place in which he finds himself, of the fact of the surprising interplay between “nature” and “city.”

The mist rises
off the river.
The bears come down
to eat the garbage

back of Dog n Suds.
Stand up in the road
like little boys
in bear suits.

This is
Big Rock, this is
Carwash Rock,
early in the season (*Mountains*)

The poet does not have a map of this new place. Here the traffic gets blocked by the bears; the poet sits on the river bank and eats; the bears come out of the forest for the scraps. This is not familiar territory, but must be made comprehensible: the bears are “like little boys / in bear suits.” The simile, the rhetorical device, functions as a tool to make the unfamiliar into something familiar. The poet names the parts; he seems to be relying on the grammatical structures of the language to orient himself:

Pronoun, verb, noun. “This is / Big Rock, this is / Carwash Rock.” Twice he uses that construction, breaks the line at “is,” the present form of “to be,” suggesting a poet living in the moment, learning about this new world in which he found himself.

Although circumstances forced Stanley to move north, circumstances also presented Stanley with a series of opportunities: to live in a small town, to experience rural Canada, to adapt his writing to a new landscape. Of his poetry after the move north, Stanley notes:

there [was] no particular technical breakthrough—I’m always making those—or sorting out ideas—I always do that too. I think the big change in my poetry was having to deal with a totally new world—bears, light planes, trees, fundamentalists—even students!

The importance of my time in Terrace, overall, for me, was that it allowed me to “be a man.” By that I mean that in a town whose size made anonymity unlikely, holding a position of importance in the community (college instructor) I had to be a responsible person. (If I had stayed in Vancouver I might have remained an ageing alcoholic adolescent.) (Some Questions)

Stanley’s roles as poet and public figure (instructor, academic head, president of the union) in a town of 21,000 enabled different kinds of relationships with his community and his writing. Of his experience, Stanley remarks, “I would say this: coming to Terrace was the most important thing that ever happened to me” (Some Questions).

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George Stanley, 1970s

KEN BELFORD / Hindsight

For George Stanley

Most of the risks I take are voluntary
but I remember disasters I lived through
that still can't be understood.
I didn't live at the wrong time
or in the wrong place
like along the Skeena flood line
or even in a dangerous place
but I saw the wildfires of the Nass
and lived in a handmade home
on a steep slope
that looked like the upper Volta.
Income continues
when the canyons of the rich slough away in flood.
It takes money to buy design
but risk is the common thread.
I lived in a flimsy economy
and made my home where settlement had been
and I still live near the genesis of change.
Everything varies from occurrence to disturbance
but the gap I mean is widening.
Systems of class are more dangerous
than natural disasters
but our families were failures
and we needed to get away from them
so we took refuge in the mountains.

ROB BUDDE / 'Tankful'

*(& if they dare,
the system, the tangled boundary
(that has no place in what we learn as place)
deflates, at every encounter point
—George Stanley, "Gentle Northern Summer"*

1

The Esso owner shoots me
a scowl when I ask, 'you
from around here.' He is changing
the till and thinks I might rob him.
I consider

tracing the tributaries, the small
flow/large currency, where
the caches are, the upward
ascendancy of cash, torrents
from the station, 5th & Central,
to Vancouver, Calgary,
Toronto, New York, places

we go to
vacation, enjoy the amenities
(after all the fill-ups & hotel
expenses), the infrastructure
bought, at both ends,
by poor envious us

*i would wish
not to be used*

The gas plant chugs out
across the river, the local
thug & his territory—the truck
is god,
icon & driven.

2

Back in the day,
the logs hauled by horse,
those men like the local grocer
bulldozed under by the 7-11
on 20th (the VLA lives on Mars
bars) 18 wheels and the power
of conformity, all the

fast food and box stores smile,
'give back to the community' in charity,
overload the landfill.

*If I bought in bulk,
would knowledge be cheaper?*

We send raw logs, fire them
straight out to China
(me, little, trying to
dig there—like the trees)
& buy the kids meals
with plastic toys made in China
(the logs clog the system
in return) &

deflation occurs not at a point
of political catharsis

but upon the collapse,
the breaking point where nothing
is left, and we leave, get in the car
on empty.

REG JOHANSON / “Who Marks the Changes?": George Stanley at The End/The Beginning.

Jeff Derksen argues that neoliberal globalization¹ is a cultural as well as a political and economic dynamic:

In an ironic twist, neoliberalism invokes the most rigid base-superstructure argument: from the economic, the social and cultural will come—the present may be painful, but it is necessary to clear the economic routes for a level global playing field with great access to diversity and difference. Give up your present to have a future in our image! The end of history, the end of geography, the end of socialism, the end of the welfare state... and many other ideological narrative closures have been levered by neoliberalism in the name of restructuring the present. And the end of this metanarrative... leaves us with the radical continuous present of neoliberalism. (“Poetry” 8, emphasis added).

Imagined to have triumphed in the dialectical war with socialism, neoliberalism is set up as the resolution of historical struggles for justice and equality. The neoliberal facts, however, are quite different from the neoliberal dream. Derksen draws on Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff’s analysis of the “experiential” dimension of neoliberalism’s contradictions, which are “absorbed into the private soul.” By “private soul” and “experiential,” I take Derksen to mean the affective quality of neoliberalism’s reach into ordinary life—its stimulation and frustration of desire, its production of anxiety and uncertainty, and its privatization of these affects as the failures or pathologies of individuals. It can appear, as Derksen says, “as a biopolitics that, once assimilated, seeps from your bones to your soul” (*Annihilated* 19). Derksen cites Wendy Brown to this effect:

Neoliberalism carries a social analysis that, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy

1 The terms “neoliberalism” and “globalization,” when used together as “neoliberal globalization,” refer to an economic ideology of privatization, disinvestment in social welfare programs, deregulation of financial and other markets, and the elimination of trade subsidies, among other initiatives aimed at developing a “free market.” This ideology is extended globally sometimes through the voluntary adoption of neoliberal economic principles but most often through the mechanism of debt: in order to qualify for loans from the IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank, and other “development” banks, states (mostly from the global south, the former third world) must carry out “structural readjustment programs” to bring their economies into line with neoliberal principles.

to practices of empire. Neoliberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy: it involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and action*, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player. (Brown qtd. in Derksen *Annihilated* 30)

The experience of this dissemination and extension of market values, by this account, touches whatever is deepest, most intimate, in our lives: neoliberalism calls upon us to show our “worth,” our “value,” to justify our lives according to the logic that everything (must) register, ultimately, in the market that is the final expression of freedom. George Stanley expresses this ideological demand in a paraphrase of the corporate media: “[The newspapers tell us] / how stupid [we] are not to understand / [our] true nature. ‘Born to compete, boys.’ / (‘Born to Lose’ [we say]). ‘It’s not just / the bondholders have you by the short hairs, / it’s your attitude’” (“Abner” *At Andy’s* 9).

I appreciate Derksen’s analysis of the “deep” implications of neoliberalism for the way that it can help us understand George Stanley’s *fin de siècle* poetry. Three of Stanley’s books—*Gentle Northern Summer* (1995), *At Andy’s* (2000), and *Vancouver: A Poem* (2008)—spanning the nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century, reflect an experience of neoliberalism’s “restructuring” of political/social/economic/personal worlds as it plays out, most specifically, in richly-detailed topographies (at multiple “scales”²) of Vancouver and north-central British Columbia. *Gentle Northern Summer* (*GNS*) is a book of despair, marking the loss of cities, family, economies, political conviction, and history. It represents the new world order of capital, despairs of it, recoils from it, yet Stanley eventually finds a poetic form that allows him to *persist* against the “narrative closures” neoliberal ideology has attempted to impose.

GNS begins in the landscapes of the resource economy of north-central British Columbia, in which the real money flows away: “The cash goes to Vancouver (by computer)” (“Gentle Northern Summer” 7), while “4000 miles east... New York bankers / coming out the glass doors of their Park Avenue / ziggurats [do not] see any coal dust... in the edited texture of events their eyes pick up” (“Gentle” 4). Stanley represents the effect on the local community and ecology of global economic interests as the work of “aliens”:

2 Jeff Derksen uses the concept of “scales” to analyze the implications and effects of neoliberal globalization at various sites: the global, local, nation-state, corporation, individual. Neoliberal globalization is not merely a global phenomena, is not only about the transformation of local spaces, is not merely about the changes at the level of the nation-state; its impacts are not restricted to the corporation nor to the individual, but operate simultaneously, and unevenly, at all of these locations.

the clearcuts that hang over us
(like swaths made by the teeth of aliens)
are not part of the views we appropriate,
they are external,
the scraped
slopes evidence value
racked up somewhere, some big account
haul it out
and then we'll go mining and the ranch houses
stay put, tame trees on the lawn, on the crimeless streets. ("Gentle" 4)

The "aliens," come and gone with impunity, leave behind real estate, malls, and the credit economy. The horizon of the imagination, and the trajectory of the new economy, are neatly expressed in the lines "boys go in [to the mill], / workers come out / with credit cards—neat!" ("Terrace '87" 13). Stanley cites a capsule history of this end-of-history moment from "Vivian Pedersen, long-time resident of the Bulkley Valley": " 'Each time', Vivian said, / 'people got moved out of the way, / Indians, then farmers, then came the mill / & mine, & now (swinging her arm wildly) that mall, / that none of them know what's happening to them' ("Gentle" 6). Stanley asks, "who counts / the changes?" ("Gentle" 6).

From north-central BC, *GNS* moves south to the cities of the west coast, revealing the consistency and homogeneity of the effects of neoliberal globalization: Seattle is another locale transformed by its incorporation into the global economy:

Who did this to Seattle? Wiped out the street life,
the bars & greasy spoons on 1st avenue & Pike
that fed Ft. Lewis soldiers in the Korean War
& us in the sixties?
... That grizzled vomit had to go.
They wanted a tasteful place to live their deaths.
They rebuilt quick, condos, afraid
those Ft. Lewis soldiers might come back,
climb up out of the excavations, snake past
the darkened construction fences. In the guise
of street kids. They did. ("Death Thing" 46)

In this interrogation of "who" is the agent of these changes, I hear the "aliens" of the poem above, descending from some global elsewhere to make a generic ahistorical "revitalized" urban space, which means nothing but the increased privatization of that space, a privatization visible in the presence of private security guards patrolling

retail and construction zones. Here Stanley marks the way in which neoliberalism is a class project, as Derksen, following David Harvey, argues, simultaneously and unevenly upscaling urban space and producing “street kids.”

Like Seattle, for Stanley, “San Francisco’s Gone” too, and because San Francisco is Stanley’s hometown the loss is more personal. In “San Jose Poem” which, paired with “San Francisco’s Gone,” mourns and pays tribute to family and its deep weave into the lost city, Stanley marks the changes: “walk up Almaden / past the offshore banks / (the orchards burnt and dozed when electronics came) / think of recent Santa Clara grads hoping to retain the software concession / steal the yup trade from Mountain View, fill the new / Civic Center with suits, music, beds of flowers, & / sprinklers!” (39). Here the old agricultural economy of California has given way to the high-tech industries that in many ways define contemporary capitalism in the global north. In “Civic Center” we hear the irony of a new conception of the public: these “civic” centers will soon bear the names of their corporate sponsors—the Staples Center, Rogers Arena (formerly GM Place), the Air Canada Center, etc. For Stanley San Jose has become a necropolis, as has the poetry that remembers it: “These people are still alive and live on St. Elizabeth’s drive in San Jose (& they are dead & live in this poem, with the often repetitive movements of the dead” (39).

In the “private soul” of the poet, these transformations constitute a profound rupture with history. Stanley experiences the globalized urban spaces as “tasteful places to live... death”—the eternal present of the supposed end of history. In “My New Past,” Stanley claims:

further and further on, but less & less
tied to what went before,
I seem to be journeying. The image is
sand. Peripherally haunted by its random sculpture, unmoving but shifted
under changing skies. Every morning
I wake to a blank, then deduce the separation. I used to go,
1968, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1976...
My new past never happened, is not available for edification. (9–10)

This image of drift, of movement determined at random and without any apparent causality, is echoed by the image of flow in “Raft,” in which “Huck and Jim,” “close at the center, one facing upstream, trying not to remember, feels the pressure of the other’s shoulders, facing down, remembering...” (42). Derksen argues that the

cultural “achievement” of neoliberalism has been to make strategic political and economic action seem natural and inevitable, and to make struggles against this contemporary “common sense” seem anachronistic. Stanley’s image of “drifting” and “flowing,” without agency, figures this condition. Remembering seems to be a trap for the poet, a death to be struggled against. In “Raft” it is Jim, who is looking forward, who is the “precious one,” not the Huck of the poem, who can only remember. The ability to “look forward,” for Stanley, will require a new form for his poetry, which I discuss below.

Stanley locates the cutting-loose from the moorings of history in two poems, “The Berlin Wall” and “The Set.” In the latter, Stanley remembers a time (“’72”) when “we were a part of history” (48). “Do you miss all that?” he asks, “that sense there was a world and meaning outside your mind?” (49). The despair of this situation is openly confessed in “The Berlin Wall.” Though the “beginning” of the neoliberal phase of capital has been pegged at differing moments and places, the fall of the Berlin Wall was the moment when George Bush Sr. announced the notorious “New World Order” of American unilateral interventionism and of a world almost completely dominated by neoliberal economics. Sensing the highly ambivalent politics of the moment, Stanley asks, “Why, now that it’s breached, broken, does it cause / such consternation in me?” (51). The poem develops the answer:

The past is a prison I long for, the past is a holding pen,
the past is eternity because I did not die then.
Now youth breaks out of Kreuzberg and Wedding, out of Pankow
on the east side (side no longer), flows unchecked
across the border, smashes the rest of the broken wall even,
to widen the space
& something in my old heart
wants to stop it, wants to retain
the orderly street, the fading State
offices, gilt-scrolled windows, resembling
banking rooms, that defined my ordinary
middle aged eternity, my stroll, wants to
put the Wall back....
the old must learn that history
is not their house. They must learn, like the young,
to live by their wits. (52–53)

The line “to live by their wits” perfectly captures the precariousness of life under

neoliberalism, a precariousness that is “free” in a sense similar to that Marx gave the word in his analysis of enclosures—“free” *from* the social programs and services that were due to the poor citizen in the so-called “welfare state,” and free *to* sell one’s body, time, and mind in a newly de-regulated, low-tax, high-turnover marketplace. It is not, obviously, a matter of preferring state socialism to neoliberal capitalism, simply that the freedom the breakers of the Berlin Wall got was not the freedom they imagined. Derksen cites Žižek on the distinction between “formal” and “actual” freedom: “‘formal’ freedom is the freedom of choice *within* the coordinates of the existing power relations, while ‘actual’ freedom designates the site of an intervention which undermines these very coordinates” (Žižek qtd. in Derksen “Poetry” 8). Stanley depicts “youth” acting out their actual freedom against the old State, only to break free into the merely formal freedom of the neoliberal post-state. The “old heart” (or “private soul”) senses that the prison of the past and its eternity has been swapped out for a new eternity, the living death of condo ownership in gentrified “tasteful” neighbourhoods, threatened periodically by “street kids.” The “heart,” the “private soul,” had been deeply invested (I hear the irony) in these spaces of the “State,” as they were constituted by the Cold War, by the New Deal, by the bourgeois ideal of the Citizen in Public Space and the class order it implied and which also contested it. In the New World Order of neoliberal globalization, “heart” becomes “wits”—and as Derksen argues, a new “structure of feeling” emerges, one which privileges the calculation of competitive advantages over what appear to be merely sentimental attachments to places and history.

In “The City” the youth that are celebrated in “The Berlin Wall” become fearsome. These are the “street kids” of the poem cited above. Disinherited from the entitlements of the past that gave their elders pensions and careers, they have become contemptuous: “[the street kids] read your thoughts— / how can you live, only caring about money? / how can you live, not caring about caring? / how can you walk by, carefree, thinking / about cars, jewelry, / your mutual funds, security?” (109). Stanley sympathizes with this contempt for the marketized subjectivities of “the suits” which “stride back and forth & get paid for their faces” (110), for he is also contemptuous of them, and their mantra “compete, compute, consume” (109). History having “ended,” Stanley washes up on the shores of a “virtual reality” social world. Encounters with “another” (“not the Other I learned to love in graduate school”) are not encounters

with responsible citizens, but with privatized, “virtual” individuals, unmindful of space, or for whom space is no longer regarded as shared and public: “Another umbrella bumps by me in the rain / touching off a murderous rage... Excuse me, he says, but not politely, / more as if he thought me an imbecile, who didn’t know / this was a public street” (“Virtual Reality” 103). Though Stanley is the one who is accused of not knowing he is in a “public street,” his anger is directed at the lack of civility of “some asshole (from the suburbs),” who, by virtue of being from that non- or anti-city space, has no *civitas*, who has imported his bridge-and-tunnel sense of spatial entitlement into the (formerly) democratic space of the *polis*. Stanley’s “familiar idyllic despair” (“Virtual Reality” 103) is the affect of having lost the battle for a certain form of “public” state, economy, and space, and of having acquired the sad ability to “delete all this” (“Virtual Reality” 103).

Having “marked the changes” wrought by neoliberalism, by the end of the book, Stanley seeks the “consolation of philosophy,” which it seems is cold comfort. Having failed to change the world, to apply Marx’s formula, Stanley is resigned to describing it. The final poem of *GNS*, “The Young Monks Understand Eternity Better,” is part of a cycle of poems about “the abbey” and the “young monks” who inhabit it, from the perspective of Stanley’s alter ego, the “old fox.” From this location of monastic retreat, Stanley observes “the young monks” “playing with their dogs, repairing their bikes. / For them sunlight is sun, not a phenomenon, / & rain rain— / they seem to have bodies / between their minds and the outside world” (118). “The old fox” admires the “eternity” in which they live. For the young monks, “language is trash,” “it has no reality... the young monks ride their mountainbikes / & rollerblade / & ski / in a world forever unnamed” (119). In contrast, the old fox knows

the sunlight to be insubstantial,
a visitation of energy
of the universe, an accidental, phantom universe
that is in fact no more than is signified
by the words *sunlight* and *universe*
in the philosophy of Wittgenstein, Rorty et al
& that having deprived the world thus of any reality
we put language on a pedestal, a plinth. (119–120)

In “Wittgenstein, Rorty, et al” Stanley finds a philosophical explanation for the social catastrophe around him—by this account, we live in a world of mediatized

representations, of virtualities, a flat-screen, mediated world of *games* which the young monks seem to inhabit unselfconsciously and without anxiety. Stanley represents them as experiencing the history-less world joyfully, without the burdens of historical responsibility. But in Stanley's terms this is a negative liberation, the pleasure of Žižek's formal freedom in which there is nothing left to fight for, in which one is freed from the responsibility of seeking justice, since, as Derksen says, in the rhetoric of neoliberalism, justice is the natural, if always deferred, outcome of the neoliberal order. The figure of the poet here is of one who "knows better" but has been rendered irrelevant, since it is the sensual body, and not the historicizing mind, that is privileged now.

Formally, Stanley's poetry adapts to this flat world of phenomena in *At Andy's* and *Vancouver: A Poem* by becoming more disjunctive and fast-switching as it attempts to mark the movements of mind and thought. It becomes a record of perception in which the task of poetry has changed: "what's wrong is somehow I think there's something to write *about*, instead of just writing" ("At Andy's" *At Andy's* 37). Stanley has written "about" a world that is gone and "about" the forces that "deleted" it. Now the form of his poetry will merge with its content: the darts, shifts, illusions, speed, and information of consciousness itself. The "point" becomes to hold on, to not disappear completely in the midst of losses and transformation that erase the locations that once defined him:

Now it's different. Watch the puck for *dear life*. The puck is life—
like a word, in conversation, the huge surrounding fucked reality—
sense of your own body, hunched, & the city, doomed—a terror—
where to fall would be to escape it, but you can't fall, you're
doomed, sentenced. ("The Puck" *At Andy's*)

In fact, this new style is inaugurated in *gns* in the poem "Terrace Landscapes." Here Stanley's work begins a process of triangulation between mind, world, and body. Where does the mind end and the world begin? These lines from "Terrace Landscapes" are a good example of the problem:

Someone, say H (this is the way it always starts—how else can it start?) it starts with H. H. is a person completely unknown, except that the color of his skin is known (well, his gender is known) & the color of his eyes, his waist size, the shape of his ears—& then the way H walks, that is not like anyone else walks, exactly, is it?... there are many things about H that are known—many more that could be known—but the person, H, is not known.... is the world H lives in the world H knows?" (70)

Is the world George Stanley lives in the world he knows? “Terrace Landscapes,” Stanley writes, “landscapes of heart and mind—my heart & mind—mine only?” Here Stanley tries to start from the beginning. In a social/political/economic/affective landscape in which nothing can any longer be taken for granted, in which very few assumptions or experiences can be understood as “shared” (though in the quote above Stanley problematically takes “gender” for granted), Stanley tries to work his way into knowledge through phenomenological description, assuming as little as possible.

If so much is changing so fast, if the soul has become privatized, to whom is the poet speaking? What is the world he or she can depend upon to be shared by, or recognizable to “the” audience? The Canada, Terrace, Vancouver, Prince George, San Francisco, or the justice, history, and economy that the poet knew has become a matter of conjecture. Its reality as a shared experience can be no longer assumed. The very idea of sharing can be no longer assumed. Following the trajectory of this style in later books, Stanley is beginning again, attempting to “mark the changes” at the scale of thought and perception. Stanley’s work at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century is an exemplary, if despairing, “experiential” account of the passing of one global order and the emergence of another. It is this “heart” in Stanley’s work—vulnerable, confused, mourning, mistaking, starting over—that I respect. History, of course, did not end—writing and resistance and resistance-writing continue.

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George Stanley, Western Front, Vancouver, 1981
a benefit reading for MacLeod's Books after the fire
Stanley Archive, Contemporary Literature Collection, Simon Fraser University

SHARON THESEN / George Stanley, an appreciation

On the back cover of George Stanley's 1985 book *Opening Day* is a photo taken by Peter Culley at the "Words/Loves" poetry conference at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George in 1980. George is seated at a cafeteria-style table, holding manuscript pages and wearing hiking boots and a scarf. He looks like he's about to give a reading. Which poems were typed on the pages in his hand? "Mountains & Air," "Donatello's David," or one of my favorites, "Vancouver in April" (*It's pretty shitty / living in a Protestant city / and my heart too bleak for self-pity*)?

I wrote a review of *Opening Day*, and what I discerned in it of George's poetics. It didn't even occur to me in 1986 that "opening day" referred to the opening day of a new store or enterprise, and not, at least primarily, the opening of a day, or day-opening. There I was, going on about Maurice Blanchot and "the Orphic"—in which Orpheus' work is not so much to descend to the depths as to bring his desire (the poem?) into daylight, where the phantasms of poetic vision can achieve "form, figure, and reality."

In an early poem, Stanley wonders what keeps him awake at night "at the conscious edge / peering through vacancy." And in subsequent work, official explanations, civic boosterisms, and the cant passing for public discourse are "peered through" in the spirit of a patient and inquiring Marxism or in that of an irritable yet jolly Jesuit. Poetic intelligence searches within the personal discomfort and unease of occlusion ("What am I forgetting? // The fear") until the poem begins to *actually see*.

the system, the tangled boundary
(that has no place in what we learn
as place—we can't see what we name)
deflates, at every encountered point
draws back w/ a gasp of feeling
unappreciated, dangles some plastic
goodies in our faces, some go-cart

A quality of George's work that I admire in other poets as well—Alice Notley and Robert Creeley, for example—is what Ron Silliman described in his back-cover blurb of *A Tall, Serious Girl* as George not letting himself "get away with anything." Not for George the slide into affect, nor the affectless *aperçu*. George's method is most

apparent in the longer poems, which began to appear in *Opening Day* with “Gentle Northern Summer,” and find book-length form in *Vancouver: A Poem* in 2008. The sublime “Veracruz” and some of the later lyrics and elegies seem to have been honed by the strenuous “free writing” (“what’s free about it?” he asks) verse-paragraph style of the long poems. The exposure of a voice (“i don’t know / myself, don’t care”) that argues with poetry and images of “success”; the refusal to be eloquent or elocutionary (“stuck stuck stuck”); the interested surrender to situations, landscapes, and places (note the number of titles beginning with, or implying, the preposition “at” — “At Andy’s,” “At Mr. Mike’s,” etc.) are some of the elements of George’s particular genius — “an acuity of vision,” writes Silliman, “that is so constantly on target as to be eerie.” George’s procedure seems also at times to resemble the Catholic examination of conscience. The purpose is not to “confess” but to uncover occlusions where they have been lurking, probably pretending to be adaptations to the living of life. This following of the route or path of a fleeting thought or notion to the fullness of its possible manifestation, giving it “form, figure, and reality,” creates some of the great pleasure to be derived from George’s work, especially when it is read aloud. George’s readings can be hair-raising, wonderful occasions. We get to feel like the ear of God. “The poem wrestles you / to the ground,” George writes in *Opening Day*.

There’s a particular poem I remember from *Opening Day*: frontier imagism, from when George lived in Terrace and taught English at Northern Lights College. Let’s see if I can write it down correctly.

The green and blue of the land
scape
The black and white of the night
The red and gold of the pub

I’m sure there is a line break between “land” and “scape”.

•

Okay, I found it, on page 59. It’s called “B.C. for bill bissett.”

the green & grey of the land
scape

the red & gold of the pub
the black & white of the night

I placed the pub at the end of the poem as a destination after traveling through the land/scape and the night, but the poem has the night at the end, and it's so much better. My remembering "blue" instead of "grey" means I am thinking as a Vancouverite and not as a northerner. I don't remember George as a heavy user of ampersands. But the acoustic aptness of the break between "land" and "scape" is unforgettable.

Back in 1986 I recognized the North Central Interior of George's *Opening Day*: sodium-vapor-lit highways in snowfall, wide swift rivers of summer, downtown streets of beer hotels and apartheid, logging trucks crossing the railway bridge. And I also recognize the college classrooms full of teenage boredom; several of the persons George mentions in his poems; Vancouver streets (Granville, Robson, Commercial Drive, West Broadway); and feelings about things, such as not having been totally overjoyed at the fall of the Berlin Wall, and how thinking about poetry makes you think about death. It occurs to me that George and I have lived a shared land/scape in many ways. We were colleagues in the English Department at Capilano College in the 1990s. He wrote poems about Prince George, my home town, and we read together not too long ago in San Francisco, George's home town. And with Ryan Knighton and Barry McKinnon and a few others we were "Aboutists." (It was a pub idea (Les Aboutistes du Nord), but it caused alarm in some quarters that "a poem can be, or could be, about something.") I could never have predicted such a long friendship when I knew George only as one of the poetry gods from San Francisco, but one who, inexplicably, wound up living in north-central BC. And one whose work I have admired and adored for the past quarter-century. "Love and poetry," was George's inscription on the flyleaf of my copy of *Gentle Northern Summer*.

Love and poetry, George.

GEORGE BOWERING / Two Bits on the Green Guy

Recently I mentioned George Stanley and baseball, and Brian Fawcett, who has been interested in George's poetry for many years, said he didn't know that George was interested in baseball. Well, in the year 2010 my wife Jean and I attended four season's home openers with him—in Seattle, Victoria, Maui and Vancouver. I told Brian to check the record: George Stanley is the author of a terrific book of poems called *Opening Day*, a title any self-respecting baseball fan poet would wish to have thought of first. But no, George Stanley's on first. In case you wanted to know.

Well, he is in *Richard III*, Act v, Scene 3, but that's in another field.

George Stanley and I have been going to baseball games together since Connie Mack put away his catcher's mitt. I thought I might tell you ten of the things we do at the ball game.

1. **THE ANTHEMS.** George likes to get there in time to hear the national anthems. I don't, so I usually loiter in the concourse while they are being sung with far too many syllables by some young female pop star wannabe. But George stands up and takes off his hat (though he doesn't do that silly US bit about trying to locate a cap bearing an ad for a transmission company over one's heart). I keep my cap on till the US song about weapons and so on is over. When the Canadian anthem starts, George sings good and loud, making sure we hear him intone "in all of us command." I don't sing at all, because the song is racist, sexist, religionist and anti-grammatical. In Maui a guy sang the Mexican national anthem because the visiting team was the Tijuana Cimarrones. He sang the chorus and all ten stanzas.

2. **HIS BROTHER GERALD.** Gerald is the guy who knows everything and has a dry sense of humour. Not just baseball. Gerald can tell you the name of the Pittsburgh Steelers' backup quarterback. It is twice as much fun when Gerald comes to a ball game with us. A few years ago in Seattle, when George was 66 and I was 64 and Gerald was 63, Gerald picked up tickets for us—at the seniors' price. When we reported this to my daughter, chuckling with naughtiness, she said, "Oh you pulled a fast one on them!"

3. THE EIGHTH INNING. George hates the eighth inning. He thinks they should jump straight from the seventh inning to the ninth inning. He hates the bottom of the eighth a little less, but he really detests the top of the eighth. He has a haunted look around his eyes in the break after the bottom of the seventh. If the visiting team loads the bases in the top of the eighth but doesn't score a run, he is a wet dishrag till the end of the game.

4. THOSE LITTLE DOUGHNUTS. George will ignore those little doughnuts, even if the fragrance made by their preparation pervades section 5 of the grandstand. But when Augie comes from Toronto for his annual vacation, wearing his old Vancouver Canadians AAA Champions tee-shirt, or when Andy's grandson Tyber comes down from Terrace in July, George springs for those little doughnuts. Sometimes I get one, even though Jean is there.

5. THE OLD GUYS WAVE. When some attendees at Nat Bailey Stadium start the wave, thus proving that we are in 1970 and a hick town, George Stanley and I do not rise or throw our hands into the air. We sit there and let the wave pass over us. Sometimes I get up and raise my hands after the wave has passed two sections to our left or right. But we do do the old guys wave. George gets up very slowly, shakily, looking as if he will not be able to achieve the standing position, then agonizingly raises his skinny old arms a little bit higher than his head. Then like an aching tortoise he reacquires a sitting position, sometimes falling into it at last. Then I count to three and begin my own laborious ascent from my seat beside him. In the time we consume accomplishing this feat a normal ballpark wave could have washed over us eight times.

6. THE SEVENTH INNING STRETCH. As soon as the third out of the top half of the seventh inning has been recorded, George gets to his feet, and I follow almost immediately. For a while we are the only spectators standing. Then the voice on the PA system tells the crowd that it is time for the seventh inning stretch, at which point most of the people in the stands begin to get it. We sing the cherished old song enthusiastically. I make sure that I shout the WITH of "take me out WITH the crowd," because 99% of the rubes around us intone, "to the crowd." When it comes to "one, two, three strikes yer out," I always make a point of getting stuck after "two." George likes that. Then, if the home team loses the game, George says, "It's a shame."

7. **SHOUTING STUFF.** There are things we shout at every game, such as, “Rodriguez? What kind of baseball name is that?” Or when another visiting player is announced: “Never heard of him!” When an opposing pitcher lets loose an errant fastball: “Craaaazy wild!” George has a specific rule in this area. He says that you can holler anything you want to at a ball game. It can be any part of speech. “Nevertheless!” he once bellowed. This is a poet speaking.

8. **THE CHICKEN DANCE.** If the entertainment organizers cause the song “YMCA” to be played on the PA between innings, George and I do the actions, but I always forget how to do the bodily spelling. George always gets it right, and I grumble about how difficult baseball can be. But I am getting so that I remember the sequence for the chicken dance. George, though, is again the master. His fingers, wings, hips, clap clap are just simply superior. Next to Vancouver Canadians co-owner Jeff Mooney, George Stanley is the best dancer in the yard.

9. **THE SUSHI RACE.** Some years back the Milwaukee Brewers baseball people decided to hold a sausage race, every home game featuring a race from right field around to first base by three, then four people dressed as giant sausages—bratwurst, Italian, etc. Then the Washington Nationals had a race among four people dressed as giant Mount Rushmore heads—Lincoln, Jefferson, etc. Pretty soon more and more ballparks had such races. There are now racing pyrogies in Pittsburgh, for example. At Nat Bailey, we have the sushi race, a run on the infield warning track from first base around to third base, among a huge round Ms. BC Roll, Mr. Kappa Maki, and Chef Wasabi. The tradition is that Chef Wasabi, with his martial arts headscarf, never wins, often suffering a loss of attention. But when Jean Baird and George Stanley and I get out our quarters to bet on the race, George always bets his 25¢ on the big green blob. He maintains that the law of averages is on his side.

10. **THE THIRD INNING RULE.** George Stanley says that going for a hotdog or a beer before the third inning is just not done. He sneers at the long lineup that forms at the beer counter even before the national anthems. The moment that the ball goes plop into some visiting player’s glove to signify the end of the second inning, George is on his feet, hand in his money pocket. “George,” I object. “Is it really the third inning if the Vancouver pitcher has not released his first pitch in the direction of the plate?” “Mere casuistry,” he replies, and off he goes to get his hotdog. Never a

hamburger. Never a bratwurst or a foot long or a smokie. Always the ordinary hotdog. He proclaims it good. I tried one once. Boy!

Poets belong at the ballpark, is what I am endeavoring to illustrate. George Stanley, author of *The Stick*, is living proof. In his Portland Beavers tee-shirt and cap, he represents the vital connection between a polis and its custodians of the divine art.

TED BYRNE / North of California Street: A Tall Serious Girl

The Words / of a poem are a roundabout way of saying nothing.
—“Phaedrus”

At the moment I can still only puzzle over this book. I love the weight of it, the binding and the cloth. I love the way the title put me off until I discovered its secret, on the very last page. The painting on the slipcover, by Fran Herndon, is as painterly as the writing is writerly. There isn't a colour I could comfortably name, except perhaps blue. Judging by its title—“Eye on the Sea”—the painting is about the sea. But surely it's about paint, or painting. Or about looking at the sea. Or, given its multiple internal framings, about various lines of approach, various blues. The endorsements (encomiums) and the introduction are true, but deadly. The poetry is everything they say it is, but somehow remains uncontained in this big, handsome book.

The poems are not all comfortable being together, although I guess it was inevitable. It's almost like an assemblage of possible books. I found myself making lists, which I do when I'm ill at ease: Eliot (“Pompei”); Douglas Sirk (“Flowers”); “What Ever Happened to Baby Jane” (“Flesh Eating Poem”); *Mad Magazine* and the Jesuit Relations (“Tete Rouge”); Zane Grey (“Pony Express Riders”); “The Dream Life of Walter Mitty” (“Punishment”); Cocteau (“The Death of Orpheus”)... and so on. Or: boy's own serials; post-surrealist assemblage; sixteenth-century English verse; nineteenth century opera; several intoxicants, including sex and camaraderie, all in moderation; the city and that which is not the city (800 mile distant suburbs); the Berkeley Renaissance; the Leisure Poets; exception; Cubist collage; the New York Schools; Bolinas without Buddhism. Or: hyperpoetical; gnostic; apoetical; workerist; erotic; socio-political, but always familial; metaphysical; diaristic. In all of which diversity, in all of its stammering, its perfect articulations, the poetry enacts a grasping after “the poem.”

There is an ideology of the poem that stitches all of this together. The poem as miracle, as gift or force (“The poem wrestles you / to the ground”). The poem, or its source, is something greater than the individual poem; the poet is the vessel of the poem; writing is a writing toward, or an anticipation of the event of the poem

("just keep writing this silly shit & pray for a poem"). This is then dissimulated by a nonchalance, or an anxiety—a structural denial. Extreme elegance of expression—

In a world of flowers
the enclosing is pregnant with silent clockwork
and the shade with death...

—or perfectly metrical moments like

Leaves torn from dry branches
rise in the wind,
birds wheel in a bleak sky...

are mocked by rough verses like

It's pretty shitty
living in a Protestant city
& my heart too bleak for self-pity.

or leveling observations like

Going to the store
for a pack of cigarettes, going to Prince George,
going to sleep, exactly the same
trip.

Even when the source is explicit, something denies it ("It's the Psyche in me that's mad / because Eros has poured flame into me"). The orphic and the refusal of the orphic ("You save me from philosophy / with your Is, Is, Is"). All apparently artless, which is to say artful. And ultimately lyric—odes and songs, even occasional pre-modern forms like the triple quatrains of "White Matches," or the sonnets "After Verlaine," "Icarus" and "Seventh Avenue." He wrestles over and over with the poem. The poem often wins.

The poems speak to each other, sometimes across great distances. But they are also wonderfully self-contained. Like tracks on a recording. We will all have our favorites. The book begins and ends with virtuoso performances—the four poems that constitute "Flowers," and "Veracruz." The first poem, "Pablito at the Corrida," seems impenetrable at first. An obliquity that persists throughout the book, but not in this initial, Eliotic form. Once you get what it's about—the death of a bull fighter—the poem becomes a powerful metonymic description of raped innocence.

The following poem, “Pompei,” involves a similar trauma of the innocents: “poems,” “the eyes of the matrons,” “virginity, the little lost dog,” Pliny the Elder. The first line reads: “When I read this poem I think of Pompei.” That is, the poem is not about Pompei. “Flowers” works out the logic of this displacement, this writing. Flowers die “stoically,” like Pliny, “to prove the syllogism, whatever dies without reason is beautiful,” flowers die without reason, flowers are beautiful. This logic is faulty, and the fault is in the premise, which is disastrous. This is troubling, but not fatal. “In a rational poem / written by the unwounded / he is found out by the unsounded speech, irrational...” The poem keeps coming back to the syllogism,

trying to restate it:
unable to stop the syllogism,
an unquenchable flame in your pants,
an imperishable flower, however fierce,
whatever lives to a purpose grows ugly,
you live to a purpose,
you grow ugly...

But the poem is not about flowers, reason, or the ethics of beauty, it's about fear. Just as the first poem—this poem tells us—was not about Pablito, but about a fearful love. I won't comment on the last poem in this sequence, “Flesh Eating Poem”—it's too scary. Later on he says that when he was a kid he was frightened of ticks in the forest, “then / later it was Korea that was dangerous.” Finally, “to be a person like anyone else / terrifies me.” It's this being a person, “like anyone else,” that the book is endlessly about, which is to say near to, or proximate, as we are.

At the other end of the book, “Veracruz” culminates one of the themes (“My father stole my cock from me”), an encryption (“an opaque unknown sticking up out of stuff it was born in”), that emerges in the second half of the collection, as it (the collection) becomes progressively less immediate, or less anxious in its proximateness. It starts to look back, as earlier it looked forward. Is nostalgia a mild form of neurosis, or a cure for melancholy? “Veracruz” demonstrates the likelihood of the latter proposition. “Veracruz” is a perfect poem and should be published in those high school text books that probably don't even exist anymore, alongside Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost.

In between are extraordinary poems like “White Matches,” “Punishment,” “A New Moon,” “Phaedrus,” “Paradise Shelter,” “The Berlin Wall” and “Pub Night.”

There is no typical poem that one could offer as an example. In fact, it would be impossible not to give the wrong impression of this book. Right now, re-reading the last half of the book, with its local histories, travels and moral questionings, I'm still drawn to the fractured, intense meditations on the real—for Stanley and Lacan, the real is everything that doesn't work—on love, truth, time and death, and on the practice of self, that seem to be addressed to us, in the city.

In this regard, "Pub Night" might be read as emblematic. "This I record," he writes, like a first century (BCE) Roman, or a thirteenth century Florentine. But like a twentieth century cosmopolitan, his thinking is in unresolved lemmas, a series of unclosed parentheses. In "listening" to his lover, his mind is divided between the other ("you") and—not what the other is saying, but—the "variousness" of what is being said. In this extreme inattention, which makes of the lover, without more ado, what the lover always is in lyric poetry (i.e. absent), it strikes him that "love is true, not just real, not just a sentiment." He records "this" on the torn tab of a cigarette pack. However, "this" is not the trite observation that "love is true," but rather the contention that "Truth has a double / value: obverse / reverse." Strictly speaking, the obverse has priority over the reverse, and yet both sides are always the other side of something: the obverse is a reverse. The line break in the lines just quoted, for instance, immediately gives rise to a reverse that undermines the obverse, namely: "truth" has a double, which is "value." Don't forget, it's pub night, and we can think through all of this with a bit of a slur. That is, it's comic, deadly comic.

A couple of days later, he finds the aforementioned scrap of paper in his pocket and tapes it in his "writing book." There it takes on another status, as it moves through the writing book, toward the "record" that the poem finally is. But, as if to put us immediately off that trail, he tapes it "under" a statement by Robert Duncan: "I never made any vow to poetry / except to cut its throat, if i could / make somebody laugh." He notes in passing, that the "tab of the cigarette pack has an obverse too." Which is to say that his drunken note, to the effect that truth has two sides, is itself on the reverse side (the downside) of a publicity slogan: "Player's / You can't beat / the taste of / Player's." As if the joke has not gone far enough, this is accompanied by a the québécois version: "Rien ne surpassa le gout de Player's," as if to ask, again, which (language) is the obverse, which the reverse. Finally, he tries to resolve all of this by pleading, like a maudlin drunk, that by "obverse/reverse" he means "one Truth, i

hope, not two [majuscule 'T', miniscule 'i'] / ... a mystery, plain & simple." As simple that is

as a glass of beer (& needing many
of same to perceive, no doubt, but
when perceived, perceived with a
lessening of tension, as something
simpler
than terror

A visiting English poet recently said, "When I got to New York, all the talk was of George Stanley." On another occasion, Stanley himself was overheard to say, on the reception of this book, something like, "I've emerged from total obscurity into relative obscurity." It's about time.

Tell me again
what you said, it is possible
everything I think
is wrong.

MICHAEL TURNER / Self-Portrait On George

It's as if everything I say is met with incredulity, insult. He does something similar at readings. After delivering a line, he will look up from his book, straighten his shoulders as if to say, I wrote this or I wrote this?

My first thought when asked to write on George was to draw an owl. Not because he is wise in the way we have come to personify wisdom, or commodify it, but because he looks like one.

In “Letter to Lorca,” Jack Spicer wrote, “I would like to make poems out of real objects. The lemon to be a lemon that the reader could cut or squeeze or taste—a real lemon like a newspaper in a collage is a real newspaper.” I attempted this in my first two books

though few noticed. The poems in these books were not poems in the way we think of Paterson, Gloucester, Black Mountain or San Francisco, but Masters’s Spoon River. Or what Dorothy Livesay called “the documentarian.”

Of course it is not the poems that are important but the insertion of cultural artifacts common to life in a cannery town or a punk rock band—landing tallies, performance contracts—that are, for me, my lemons.

There are no lemons in George’s poems, nor in Spicer’s, only (in Spicer’s case) their consideration, something Spicer (after Rauschenberg) achieved in the collages he made with Fran Herndon, like the one that hangs at Scott’s.

The last chat I had with George took place in front of that collage. I remember what was said, including my recognition of George’s accent, identical to the San Francisco journalists in the Maysles Brothers’ *Gimme Shelter*.

As a child I remember visiting my babushka’s sister on Russian Hill, and then later, as a young man, friends in the Mission, the TV on and an interview with Melvin Belli about Altamont, which was important to punks like us because

Altamont was our father, the Manson Family our mother. That was how we talked in 1983, outside the I-Beam on “New Wave Mondays,” aware of our moment, the tectonics of history, political economy, identity, publicity, a conversation

I tried to convey to George that night as he rocked from heel to toe, his eyes beyond me, surveying the room, asking no one in particular about our public transit system and why, for that reason alone, no one will take it.

Gertrude Stein believed that the essential human being could not be painted, and I agree, if only because I don’t believe in essence. “I wrote portraits knowing that each one is themselves inside them and something about them perhaps everything about them...

[insert lemon]

... will tell someone all about that thing all about what is themselves inside them and I was hoping completely hoping that I was that one the one who would tell that thing,” and this is as much about Stein as it is about me and my attempt to write

on George, whose poems, though new to me when I first read them, were not new until *Gentle Northern Summer*, a book I spent time with, as they say, reading it against what George had written

in the *Georgia Straight Writing Supplement*, or what he surrendered in *The Stick*, or something (what?) from the *Sodomite Invasion Review*, a magazine not unlike the conversations going on at the I-Beam every night but Mondays.

Poets hate sociology not because the State accepts its science but because of something said a long time ago, something forgotten but still believed in, like Judaism, Christianity, Islam...

There is ethnography in *Gentle Northern Summer*, even if it is not called that. There are forests in its poems, and forests outside them. And as with all forests there are economic exchanges, like the ones we find in *Grimms’*, with and without the animals.

The face I have drawn while writing this is an owl’s face. I have added horned-rim glasses but it still does not look like George. It will never look like George because my skills are such that I am able to draw the owl first, not what it might look like.

LISA JARNOT / Snow moon stars twinkle

for George Stanley

on the outside, a
birthday cake, a
shadow, a squirrel
fried up in grease,

in the ninth line
the fifth circle,
circling useful branches
and a package or two of
chips,

in the news,
episodic, contemplating
chains of grace of
these particular
fragmentary evenings,
dreams, and chairs,

a thank you
for a random church,
the goats, and
drinking water,
a return to
first feeling, a
luster-streak
of stars.



George Stanley, Terrace, BC, 1984





George Stanley, Stewart, BC, 1978



“The Aboutists”: Ryan Knighton, Sharon Thesen, and George Stanley, 2002



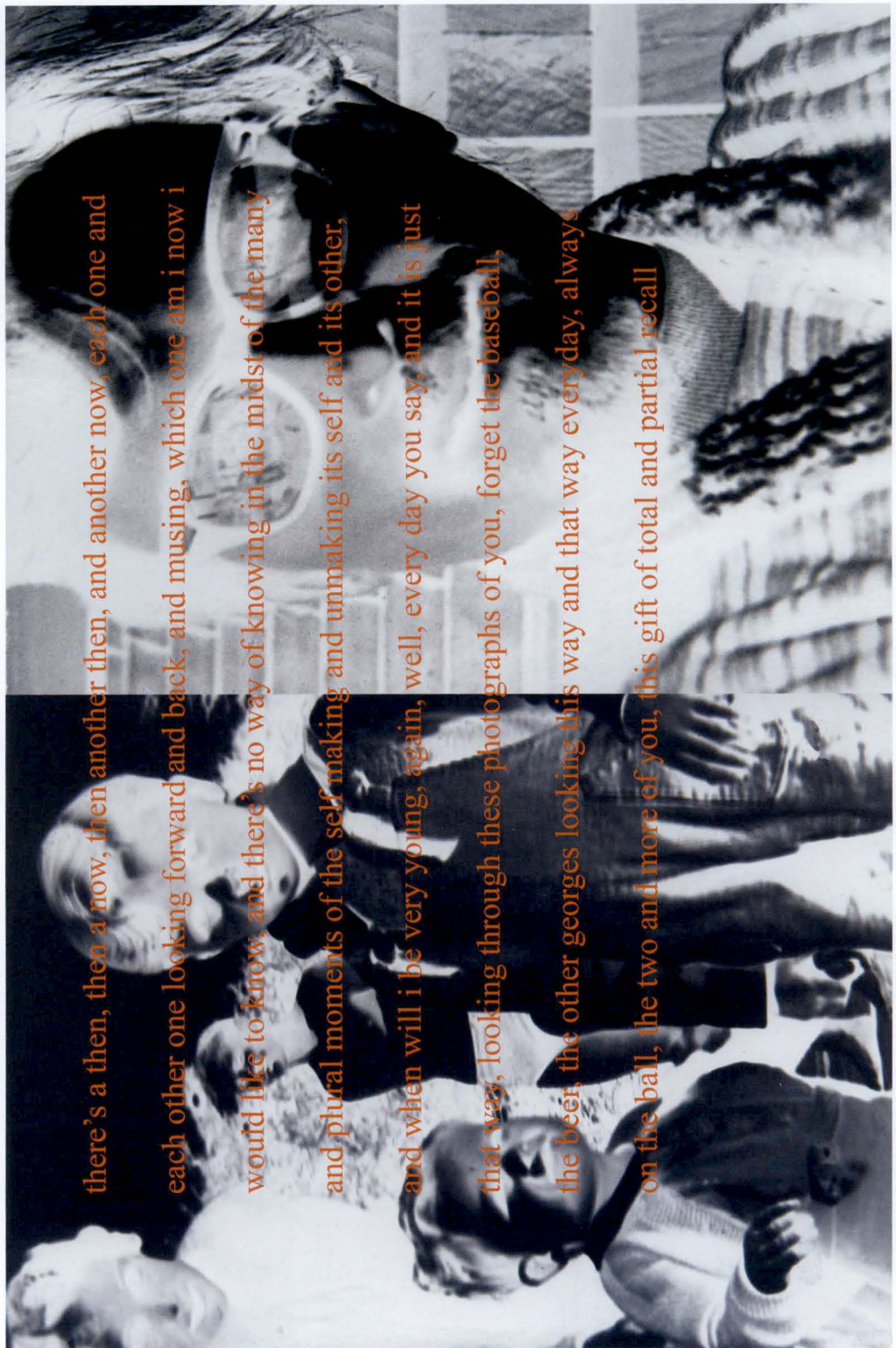
George Bowering, David “Augie” Alguire, and George Stanley,
Nat Bailey Stadium, Vancouver, mid-2000s



George Stanley and George Bowering, Grand Forks, BC, 2004



George Stanley and Joanne Kyger, San Francisco, 2003



Pierre Coupey, *There's a Then* (for GS)

MICHAEL BARNHOLDEN / Winning is Temporary, Friendship is Permanent

Something about ‘The Masses’—an institutional ad high on the wall of Army & Navy. Tony Tryyard phoned up the head office—not sure why—trying to sell them an ad in the Grape?—made some reference to that sign—the guy said, ‘Aw, that was put up years ago’—disclaimed—any connection—to ‘The Masses’
—George Stanley, *Vancouver: A Poem* (New Star Books)

1

The earliest appearance of George Stanley’s byline in the *Georgia Straight* was the week before the Gastown (AKA Grastown) Riot of August 8, 1971. Stanley’s investigative piece on “Operation Dustpan”—a dubious city initiative aimed at clearing the streets of hippies, etc.—was one of many pieces he wrote for the Vancouver weekly in its early years, often using a pseudonym. Stanley appears frequently in the pages of the *Georgia Straight* as Tony Tryyard, intrepid movie reviewer and advertising salesman. The penname or in some cases nom de guerre was an essential piece of journalistic equipment.

The *Straight* was born in an era of conflict in Vancouver in 1967. An oppressive police force was chaired by a mayor known as Tom “Terrific” Campbell, a property developer, who quite simply hated young people. He was quoted as saying: “If these young people get their way, they will destroy Canada. From what I hear across the world, they will destroy the world!” He demanded that the Vancouver Police Department act on his animus. The *Straight* was regularly charged with obscenity; street vendors were arrested for vagrancy; and writers and editors were threatened and occasionally beaten by police.

Poets were well represented among the founders of the *Straight*. I once heard it said that the sale of some of *TISH*’s archive to bookseller William Hoffer paid for the

Information in this article comes from conversations with George Stanley and a founders’ version of how the *Georgia Straight* was created at http://www.rickmcgrath.com/georgia_straight/staffers.html. See also Pierre Coupey’s “*Straight* Beginnings: The Rise & Fall of the Underground Press,” originally published in *The Grape* in 1972, available at this site.

initial publication of the *Straight*. The paper was itself generative of poetry, at least for a while. Poetry was published in virtually every issue. The first issue of the *Straight* contained a centre spread of Michael McClure's poem "poisoned wheat." Poetry books and readings were reviewed. Copies of Robert Creeley's book *Pieces* were used as an inducement to subscribers. At least one of the *Straight*'s many offshoots, New Star Books (Stanley's publisher), is still a vigorous generator of poetry. Many of the founders and original contributors such as Milton Acorn, Dan McLeod, Peter Auxier, Pierre Coupey, Bill Bissett, Stan Persky, Gerry Gilbert, and John Mills were poets. McLeod himself had been an editor of *TISH*. But there was an ideological tension present both among the founders and within the New Left from the beginning. Simply put, there were those who opposed private ownership and favoured a cooperative model arrayed against those who followed Dan McLeod, the putative owner/sole proprietor of the *Georgia Straight* through his formation of the Georgia Straight Publishing Company. The initial rupture was papered over for a time.

2

By 1971, when he moved north, George Stanley had visited Vancouver on a few occasions. Stanley had also served in the US Army, studied under Robert Duncan, and had become associated with Jack Spicer, publishing *Tete Rouge/Pony Express Riders* (White Rabbit 1963), *Flowers* (White Rabbit 1965) and *Beyond Love* (Open Space 1968). Stanley was a newcomer to Vancouver but he arrived well connected. Good friends Stan Persky, editor of *TISH*, which later morphed into *The Georgia Straight Writing Supplement* (GSWS) and GSWS books, and Robin Blaser, editor of the literary magazine *Pacific Nation* and SFU English Professor, preceded him by a couple of years, arriving in Vancouver in 1967. In 1971, Vancouver had a population of 426,256 and a minimum wage of \$1.50 an hour, but a few things were happening.

3

The 1971 protest year began in May with an occupation of the Hudson's Bay Company store at Granville and Georgia, lead by the Vancouver Liberation Front (VLF), protesting their refusal to serve hippies at their lunch counter. Police were called to eject the demonstrators, carting off those arrested for assault and/or

trespass to the City Jail on Main Street. By that night protesters had surrounded the station demanding their release. Police were called in to prevent a feared invasion and occupation of the City Jail, and were immediately pelted with rocks and eggs. Eventually, as the police went into the building two at a time to suit up and return in full riot gear, the riot squad was assembled. It took about three hours before the order was given to clear the streets. No further arrests were reported that night.

The next day many of the same people led by the VLF mounted an invasion of the United States. After penetrating some two and a half miles into American territory and returning along the railroad tracks at Blaine, the protest ended with protestors bombarding a trainload of new cars bound for dealers north of the border with rocks and bottles. They pounded it with fists and clubs as it slowly rolled along: the new corporate reality hauled by the old industrial behemoth.

In June 1971, the Riot Squad was called upon to clear the Four Seasons property, a waterfront redevelopment site at the entrance to Stanley Park that had been claimed as a people's park and camp. It reopened a year later when people scaled the walls and tore down the barricades and renamed it All Seasons Park. In July, there was a week of pitched battles between young people and police after the Sea Festival Riot. In October, the "Battle of Jericho" was fought on the beaches of Kitsilano between police and the occupiers of the Jericho Youth Hostel, who refused to leave when evicted. Also in October, the War Measures Act was declared by Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Seven people were arrested in Vancouver for distributing Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) literature. Mayor Tom Terrific celebrated by launching a roundup of hippies and others that offended him. In 1971 the drinking age was lowered from twenty-one to nineteen, and marijuana and hash busts surpassed heroin arrests.

4

1971 was also the year police decided to get out of their cars. By January, the first steps toward "Community Policing" were underway. The year was shaping up to be a busy one. As Joe Swan summarizes it, "there were over seventy street demonstrations to police, men were continually being taken from their regular patrol duties. Riot equipment became almost standard uniform." If this doesn't sound much like community policing, it's because there was another policing strategy

called “Saturation Patrolling” very much at odds with the stated goals of community policing. In the Gastown area the strategy was known as “Operation Dustpan,” implying that human filth would be simply swept from the streets. A large number of police would occupy an identified trouble area, closing off all exits and detaining and searching everyone within the confines, violating civil rights and employing often-brutal methods of enforcement. According to some observers, Gastown was like a police state that summer. North Shore Investigations and Security Company, a private security firm, offered local merchants a private sector solution to rid the area of the “immediate drug problem,” which included as the third and final step: “start walking all over people.” According to Stanley’s article on “Operation Dustpan” in the *Straight*, this “final solution” for Gastown was approved and supported by Mayor Tom Campbell and his unceasing need for publicity, fuelled by his “indifference to the needs of the community and even to the possibility of violence.”

5

In 1971, the cooperative impulse again took hold at the *Straight*. A group of women objecting to rampant sexism in its pages seized the offices and published the *Women’s Liberated Georgia Straight* on April 8, 1971. All men were excluded from the paper’s offices for the weeklong duration of the occupation. Although the staff working on the paper thought of themselves as a cooperative, McLeod exercised total editorial control at least until January 1972 when, during a two-week occupation of the *Georgia Straight* office at 56A Powell Street, a group of dissident staffers began publishing an alternative newspaper: the *Georgia Grape*. College Printers, the *Straight*’s regular printers, refused to print the paper as long as the name “Georgia” appeared in its masthead. The one and only issue of the *Georgia Grape* had to be printed at Horizon Printers. After the first edition, McLeod obtained an injunction prohibiting the use of the name Georgia, giving birth to *The Grape*, a community paper run and edited by a cooperative.

When they split, Stanley went with the *Grape* faction. *The Grape* wanted to be more than an entertainment weekly; it would cover issues like gay liberation, politics, art, economics and ecology. Besides *The Grape*, the *Terminal City Express* (not the one in the ‘90s) came out of the *Georgia Straight* split. Later *The Grape* became *The Western Organizer*, then the *Western Voice*. Meanwhile, according to *Straight* editor

Rowland Morgan, the *Straight* was subsidized by *The Vancouver Star*,

a sex newspaper in the days when sex was still controversial, i.e. gays and other minorities needed an outlet for their sexy classified adverts. We sold these classifieds for good money, in addition to which the massage parlours all advertised, and the paper's street sales were brisk. *The Vancouver Star* made a tidy profit, and McLeod used its revenues to keep the *Georgia Straight* afloat until he could succeed in switching it to a freebie listings rag.

Around the same time, the Vancouver Writing Series, an offshoot of the GSWs, published eight books and then became the Vancouver Community Press for the last six titles. The initials NSB (for New Star Books) alongside a black 5-point star appear on one of the fourteen books, David Bromige's *Ten Years in the Making*. In his introduction/dedication, Bromige mentions the Vancouver Poetry Commune AKA the York Street Commune at 2504 York and Larch, donating all royalties to the cause. After the publication of Al Neil's *West Coast Lokas*, the changeover to New Star Books was complete; the press would for a time be run by a collective and edited by George Stanley. Another cooperative venture, at least in the beginning, New Star published Stanley's first Vancouver book *You* in 1973. George told me recently that he was informed by one of the collective members, when he took copies of his book in lieu of pay, that the "books were the property of the Canadian working class." Once again the masses were fighting against the masses.

6

1972 was a better year: British Columbia would become a "worker's paradise," at least briefly. George Stanley, at the time neither a Canadian citizen nor member of the left-leaning New Democratic Party, voted to nominate Rosemary Brown in the Vancouver Burrard riding which she won in the September election that made New Democrat David Barrett the Premier of "Chile of the North," as *Barron's* magazine referred to BC in April of 1973. The day after the election the "Majority Movement" was formed in Kamloops to "unite the right" and ensure that the "godless socialists," as W.A.C. Bennett insisted on calling anyone to the left of Genghis Khan, would never be elected again in BC.

STAN PERSKY / A Man and A City

The lure of trying to figure out the enigma of the place where you live recurrently draws writers. If you're a writer in Vancouver, that's especially true; we dwell in a spectacular urban site that often seems like a cross between a multi-ethnic Floating World of glittering condo towers and a shabby netherworld of boarded-up storefronts, discarded heroin needles, and the basket-carts of the homeless rattling through back lanes. Just to complicate matters, the pricey condos often leak, and occasionally, the denizens of the netherworld resist their own destruction.

The stack of books about Vancouver in the first decade of the 21st century includes Doug Coupland's *City of Glass: Douglas Coupland's Vancouver* (2003), Lance Berelowitz's *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination* (2005), Michael Kluckner's *Vancouver Remembered* (2006), and Gabor Mate's *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* (2008), as well as a slew of Vancouver-based novels from writers like Timothy Taylor, William Deverell and Lawrence Gough. However, few poets have produced a full-scale meditation about this west coast Canadian metropolis. Until now, the most notable long poems about Vancouver have been mid-20th century poet Earle Birney's dramatic satires, *Trial of a City and other poems* (1952) and *The Damnation of Vancouver* (1977).

Vancouver poet George Stanley's *Vancouver: A Poem* is, I think, the most interesting book-length poem written about the city to date, and its phenomenological perspective catches the spirit of the times as deftly as a text message. Yet, Stanley isn't a novice writer. The 75-year-old self-described "senior" is the author of a dozen or so chapbooks and volumes—including, just in the last decade or so, *Seniors* (2006), *A Tall, Serious Girl* (2003), *At Andy's* (2000), and *Gentle Northern Summer* (1995)—and he's the 2006 winner of the Poetry Society of America's prestigious Shelley Award.

Since I know the author, a declaration of interest is in order here before taking a look at how a poet sees Vancouver. Actually, to say I "know" the author is a bit of an understatement. In fact, I've known Stanley for 50 years. We practically grew up together in the literary bars and coffeehouses of his hometown, San Francisco; moved to B.C. at roughly the same time some four decades ago; and for about a half-century have been engaged in a running conversation-argument-literary/philosophic-

An early version of this piece appeared in *The Tyee*, February 26, 2009 (TheTyee.ca).

discussion; and we've even made cameo appearances in each other's writing.

The most famous modern book-length poem about a city is William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* (1946–58), an epic-sized collage written in a mixed mode of poetic lines and prose that provides an account of the history, people, and spirit of the city of Paterson, New Jersey as well as a discussion of the role of the poet in society. In short, as Williams says, it's about "a man and a city."

Paterson is the book that George Stanley is reading at the beginning of *Vancouver*, as he rides the bus, "back & forth. Across the city. The 210." The poem's opening line is a stark declaration: "There is more here than memory." It's a terse modernist abbreviation of the classic opening invocation to the muses—the familiar "O, muse / hear my song"—that we find in the ancient Homeric and Virgilian epics.

Stanley's *Vancouver* is a book about the mind of a poet—a poet in Vancouver, as it happens—and about Vancouver, a city that appears in passing glances, in the middle of a traffic-clogged intersection, sometimes from a distance, and even in dreams. The distant view is frequently from a classroom window at Capilano University, on the far side of Burrard Inlet, where Stanley taught literature for many years. But most often, it's a view from within the city's busses, pubs, restaurants and department stores, and in such ordinary places as the lobby of the Kitsilano apartment building where he lives, a building where "the seniors in their apartments" are "waiting for a moment" in the late afternoon.

At other times the city sits there in stolid silence, its buildings weighty as the mountains north of Vancouver in which "we see two rocks, & call them Lions," Stanley says, and later notes, "like lions sculpted by some Assyrian or Henry Moore." Then looking away from the mountains, back toward Vancouver, he adds, "City of death, city of friends."

Stanley immediately challenges William Carlos Williams' catchphrase, "A man & a city," replying, "I am not a man & this is not my city." What he means, I guess, is there's no such thing as "a man" in the abstract, and he certainly isn't the socially-constructed "man" ideologically approved of in his society. At one point he muses, "not to be a man / to be a thought," emphasizing that he's an embodied mind thinking about a city. Still, if you're not a "man" in relation to a city, you can nonetheless be a citizen of the city, as Stanley in fact is—frequently a participant at civic political meetings or a member of the Bus Riders Union.

As for “this is not my city,” it can be read literally that Vancouver isn’t the city where Stanley was born (that was San Francisco). Or more simply, it’s a place he is “not at home in.” Or even, it’s not the same place of rougher edges that he lived and worked in, in mid-life, during the early 1970s.

Reading Stanley, I too remember a grungier version of Vancouver when a barrel-making factory, city councilman Ed Sweeney’s *cooperage*, occupied the oil-soaked shoreline of False Creek, before the chic housing development and its winding lanes replaced it. In the phrase “not my city,” there is a denial of proprietary ownership. It’s not his city in the sense of, Who can claim a city as one’s own?

To Williams’ notion of “a man and a city,” Stanley counterposes his own credal idea of “the darkness of the mind & the darkness of death, / & in between the bright day, bright city.” Stanley’s book investigates those edges of darkness as well as the brightness in between.

I don’t want to minimize the fact that Stanley’s *Vancouver* is a complicated, even difficult, modern poem, which is to say that it’s a work in which a person is actually thinking. Further, the process of writing it is part of the poem, including the very problems of writing. The hesitations, blanks, the anxious sense that the whole thing (even the city) might be an illusion, are all there. What we have, as Stanley says at one point, is “a single ape / in complex light,” and the refrain, “City of death, city of friends.”

Recurrently, Stanley tells himself to “write carelessly, but slowly,” or “write carelessly & / stop focusing.” What he means by the curious admonition to “write carelessly,” I think, is a recognition that relinquishing a certain amount of authorial control over the “material” is a way of allowing the city to come through on its own.

Behind the invocation about how to write this poem, one finds throughout Stanley’s work an almost metaphysical tension between caring and not caring. The notion extends from the most mundane matters, as in caring or not about the outcome of the game on TV in a bar, or the homeless beggar to whom one gives or doesn’t give “spare change,” all the way to big cares about cities, existence, the universe itself. It’s something like Samuel Beckett’s famous declaration, “I can’t go on. I’ll go on.” In Stanley’s version, it’s “I don’t care. I care.” It’s a reminder to us, as readers, to think about what we do and don’t care about.

Naturally, Stanley’s poem is not intended as a comprehensive portrait, history

or analysis of Vancouver. Nonetheless, his local epic is clearly organized in a dozen numbered sections, plus the inserted chapbook called “Seniors,” which is about being old in this relatively young city. After a bit, you get used to the twists and turns of Stanley’s bird-quick mind and his idea of Vancouver. You gradually pick up on his wry humour. For instance, in a 3-line poem titled “Seniors,” he says,

Seniors know everything.

Correction: Each senior knows everything.

The others don’t want to hear about it.

If a book about Vancouver like Doug Coupland’s entertaining *City of Glass* is a view of Vancouver that often seems as though the city is seen through a telescope perched on the cedar deck of a house across the inlet from Vancouver, Stanley’s city is distinctly experienced from *inside*. We’re inside its busses, bars, among its beggars, inside the apartments of seniors where “the horizon of meaning / is just inside / the living room window,” and of course inside the mind of the poet.

The Vancouver that Stanley thinks and dreams and writes about is both the changing city and the city retrieved in time. He shares with Birney’s work of a half-century ago a materialist and economic sense of the urban. Perhaps the more apt affinity is with Donald Gutstein’s *Vancouver Ltd* (1975), a book that insisted that much of Vancouver politics is a battle over real estate. “Sausi’s is closing,” Stanley notes about a bar on west Broadway, “to be replaced by a Banana Leaf,” the name of a small chain of Indonesian restaurants. “Reterritorialization,” he calls it. “We’ll have to find some new place to drink.” Later, he remembers, “In the dream I lamented the passing of bistros / like the Modern, which was Sausi’s three reterritorializations back.”

Behind the reterritorializations, and the constant destruction and reconstructions of capitalism, the city is haunted by its older self. Stanley invokes a time when the large “W” emblem revolved atop the old Woodward’s department store on Hastings, just after World War II, as a “reminder of a certain way of life,” a time when people were regarded “as people,” “not merely plural.” And, we might add, not merely as consumers. It can be seen as a sort of golden age, or the illusion of one. But, as Stanley sharply reminds us, “There’s more here than memory.”

Given the role of poetry in Canadian culture these days, a book-length poem about Vancouver may not get the attention it deserves. The subculture of poetry and poets now takes place almost entirely outside of the view of the general public, more

or less as a specialised discourse restricted to its practitioners. The one thing worth saying about the disappearance of poetry from public view is that we're likely losing a way of understanding something about life that we don't get from other linguistic modes, such as story, discourse or the language of science. Not paying attention to this poetic work would be a mistake.

For all its interesting complexities, Stanley's *Vancouver* offers the straightforward notion that all of us (in Vancouver) have a version or vision of "Vancouver" in our minds, and it suggests the question, "What kind of Vancouver is in *your* mind?" That is, there's a sense in which each of us could articulate, if we wanted or were able to, the city that we experience over time. What would your *Vancouver* look like?

In the meantime, there's George Stanley's capacious mind, trying out ideas about everything from Vancouver to the void in a remarkable poem of urban exploration.

JOSHUA CLOVER & CHRIS NEALON / Public Transport: George Stanley's Vancouver

JOSHUA: For me there are three long poems astride the twentieth century: “Zone,” by Apollinaire; “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” by Ashbery; *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, the film script by Debord that I am willfully counting as a poem. What conjoins the three? Walking. Exhaustion. The sense of something being over, having escaped irrevocably. They are all Paris poems, as it happens, that exemplary city. Much more to say about that, but, to ask the altogether basic question about Stanley’s book: why is the long poem so profoundly indexed to the city itself? Is this relation as self-evident as it seems? Is it culturally specific? What about the 21st century?

CHRIS: I’m going to wait a bit before tackling that larger question about the long poem and the city, and say that it does seem true that walking matters to *Vancouver*—Stanley’s literally staring at the cracks in the pavement in section 11. I’d venture, though, that taking the bus is even more important to the poem, and that it matters that it’s the bus. Taking the bus links what I think are the two great themes of Stanley’s poems since the ‘80s, class relations and aging. In the poems of these years, he’s always asking himself, what is an old person’s experience of the way the vectors of class shape social life of the city? And he thinks about it on the bus. It’s how the old get around; it’s how the poor get around. And the bus and its riders are always forced to be patient by the higher-velocity traffic around them, the world that’s always leaving the old and the poor behind. In section 8 the poet misses the bus because there’s too much traffic to make it across the street in time, and it makes him cry out in a pissy senior version of Hart Crane’s hopefulness: “O my people, stop driving!”

Stanley is merciless with himself when it comes to these questions. In “The Berlin Wall” (collected in *A Tall, Serious Girl*), he recalls visiting Berlin just 18 months before the Wall came down, and watching its destruction on TV, he realizes that the end of the Cold War is the end of the period that included his youth—that, absurdly, he’s sad the Wall has fallen. He imagines a similar Wall dividing Vancouver, dreams of going through its checkpoints, and briefly fantasizes that permission to cross borders is the mark of a kind of state approval that would include the mandatory respect of the young:

If the young can be kept from knowing their power
(which is the power of time), if they can be made to accept
the reigning system, one memo, one regulation at a time,
with its bullshit rationale, then the old will never die.

Yeats concludes “Among School Children” with a lovely dream of unbruising aesthetic labor that even an old man can still perform; Stanley finishes “The Berlin Wall” like this:

And the old must learn that history
is not their house. They must learn, like the young,
to live by their wits.

JOSHUA: I hope you’ll forgive me for letting that vital insight about the bus carry me back to “Zone” one more time:

Now you walk in Paris alone among the crowd
Herds of bellowing buses hemming you about...

In Apollinaire’s scene, the bus is a prehistoric beast invented by modernity, the world’s brand new antiquity that threatens from without, even as it is a marvel. It competes with the antique, always-renewed interior threat: “Anguish of love parching you within.”

As you say, in *Vancouver* the bus is just the bus: sort of a drag, entirely unmythical. And a class marker; to be on the bus is to be proletarian. It’s like the Los Angeles bus that winds through Beverly Hills bearing, without exception, maids. So inevitably he starts thinking about “the masses” and wondering what’s become of them. “When did they—cease to be? Timothy Garton Ash saw them in Budapest around 1990—just after the Wall fell—they were funny-looking.”

If the fall of the Wall is the loss of his youth, it’s also the loss of the masses. Those two things go together somehow. To be old is to have been effaced even from unchosen solidarities, and this is the greatest loneliness.

There is one trace of magic left to the bus: that magic wherein you can at once be getting somewhere you have to go, and reading *Paterson*. He is reading Williams and being thrown back into himself, via the ongoing testing of the double correspondence: Williams is to Paterson as Stanley is to Vancouver—yes and no. It is in regard to this that he insists, repeatedly: “I am not a man & this is not my city.” I read this in a nearly literal sense, concerning his queerness and the fact that he isn’t a Vancouver native.

But there's also a suppressed [thus]: it is because he's not a man that this can't be his city. His identification with Mr. City will always be imperfect, or false. We could call this his Otherness, but that language doesn't help me much. We could also identify it as another arena in which unchosen solidarities—like that of being of as place, sharing that identification with other people even if you don't love them or know them—are foreclosed. Maybe I have arrived already at the kernel of anguish I find in the poem.

The first time I went to Vancouver, I was warned to avoid “Hastings”—meaning, that strip of Hastings that Stanley first describes on page 4, the city's skid row. And I remember being struck by how clean it was; I thought, you should really come down to Oakland sometime! Still, it's even cleaner now, with cafés and lounges with fancy drinks. It's the spiffiest skid row in the world, though I haven't been to Singapore. The gentrification of this district becomes, in Vancouver, perhaps the leading figure for loss, for how the new is a destruction visited on the old.

CHRIS: That seems exactly right. And he wants very much for human solidarity to be the counter-weight to that destruction. I like your description of Stanley “testing” the correspondence between himself and Williams, Vancouver and Paterson: that testing-protocol is in effect as well when he wonders whether solidarity is possible, a question which keeps reverting to another, whether other peoples' happiness could be his own. Sometimes the test is on the bus, to be sure; sometimes it's in pubs. In one sub-section of part 11, on Vancouver's cross-town 99 bus, he recalls happy people to the left and to the right of him, in the last pub he was in: a deaf family signing enthusiastically back and forth, and, on TV above, a minor Canadian cultural triumph, which he pits against the creative destruction we've been talking about:

Newfoundland Labrador choir
takes first in Spain
all under 16
their plane will 'touch down'
'and it'll be Beatlemania'
from one construction site to another

You can hear him thinking, “poor kids...” but at the end of the poem he writes, “I don't care. I care.”

That self-reversal around the question of whether he's capable of feeling social attachment, or whether he's still welcome to try, feels like the driving contradiction

behind his late style, a self-interrupting prose stanza, full of parentheses and dashes, in which he tries, often very movingly, to bring momentary perception in line with history and something like a sense of poetic form:

Watching it go by on the bus, even—that's relativity—I mean watching me go by—
the city. So a catalogue of moments, glimpses—no, just a disconnected (I imagine a
poem about Vancouver in which Vancouver never appears—

I'm tempted, when I read Stanley writing in this mode, to answer your question about the long poem and the city by saying that, in the 20th century, the analogy between the poem and the city is what best gave poets permission to mix registers, jump scales, self-interrupt—both because it's an analogy to a large space, but also because it's a spacious analogy: the city can be like the poem in so many ways. And maybe the most interesting way the analogy works is by doing double duty as an analogy to other poem-city pairings.

At the end of section 11, Stanley provides a redacted translation of Baudelaire's "Foules," on the ecstasies available to the connoisseurs of crowds:

Solitary walker, solitary thinker, he gets drunk
on solidarity. The crowd's embrace is for him a joy
denied forever to the egoist in his walking coffin...

So there's a sense that he's on the bus, dreaming of walking, which gets you in the present tense, and dreaming of other peoples' happiness, to see if it could endure. But it's interesting—he neither develops a Baudelairean irony about the crowd, nor a Whitmanian cosmology of it. He's too interested in its history, in where we've come from. No immersion in the present for its own sake; even forty years ago, he required a *longue durée*:

What blather, '70s
poets quote
the CBC news. Pick up
Braudel

JOSHUA: I think you've made the kind of space/time proposal that I am always taken by: the *longue durée* of epochs, of intersecting and overlapping forces and tendencies, of the impasto of life's dirt piled into cracked strata... that is the space of the city, that becomes visible only by the cross-cut of his traversal. The bus scoring a tranche in

Vancouver. And the long poem, the book-poem, is the conjuncture of this temporal and spatial situation, a phenomenology of reading to capture the whole sense of things. Perhaps that's obvious.

In his great essay on *Paterson*, "The Poetics of Totality," Fredric Jameson (have I mentioned him yet? *Ch-ching!*) suggests that the mid-century general practitioner sort (i.e., Williams) was heir to the gumshoe of Hammett and Chandler, characterized by the ability to enter the interiors of people's homes across the breadth of social classes. It's a brilliant insight, but also tied to an idea that seems a bit nostalgic: "The interior is passing away. Life turns back to become public," wrote the Goncourts in 1860, Baudelaire's greatest year of writing. Stanley's Vancouver has turned its interior out into the streets; even our narrator, who ostensibly has a dwelling, seems dispossessed from any idea of home. History is not your house. And it takes money to go inside, and the interiors that the poor person can buy—the bar, the bus—are provisional at best, and hardly domestic.

And yet this mean public-ation of life is exactly what allows a poet to make that traverse, to encounter the range and the tensions and incommensurable worlds crushing against each other, and to have that be a sustained experience, like the reading. It isn't isolated lyrics, even when he sections them off. *Vancouver* changes! Does anything in Stanley's melancholy change? As you say, he lacks Baudelaire's irony—perhaps another way of saying that there is no sense of refuge even from his position within the poem, Baudelaire's great redoubt. Stanley sinks into the solution of the city even as it torques away from him, even as it tries to vomit out the irritating agents of the old and infirm and poor. He is, in the long afternoon of the poem, still allowed within the gates. This will not last forever. "A territory will keep," he says at the very end, coming to the last page,

until someone has
some other use for it
that will keep us, tracking each one, until
it has no time for us

So who has time, and for whom, and how did they come by it? That seems again like the question of solidarity, but now presented as a two-sided and provisionally awful one. We are all joined by being the playthings of some large and sinister "someone," who finds better and better uses for us until we aren't needed any longer and are then

spat forth from leviathan.

It's tempting for me to end my contribution here with Stanley's parting shot in the Baudelaire-directed poem you cited above:

teach the so-called winners of this world
(if only to bring their stupid pride down a notch)
there's a happiness greater than theirs, and sweeter.
The poet must sometimes laugh at the ones who deplore
his patchy career, chaste life.

But I can't resist this other reflection on time, funny and silly and serrated. And prescient, recalling that the book was finished before the current economic crisis had presented itself:

Daylight saving time ends.
I hope they've stored the daylight
somewhere safe. I hope they've invested it
at the going rate. we'll need it when it comes

STEPHEN COLLIS / DEAR COMMON: VANCOUVER ALIGHTS

for George Stanley

We are everywhere
in flight
annihilating space one
digital widget at a time—
is this how we
want it to be?
Made a city
out of quotations
other voices
lived there too
I caught glimpses of them
in all that glass
their eyes
were neon races
I whispered the names
of bars and restaurants
that no longer exist
as they steered towards
uncertain markets
their boat in the street
a barricade we
could assemble ourselves

This was sort of dreamy
the city throbbing
gulped seajet years
primal terror
of spatial edges
the Marine Building

appears an idiosyncratic
émigré outside time
the fog of Kodachrome
shuttling clicks along
the pier where
changeless nothing pulses
against our fragile
beleaguered real estate bubble

We must speak
our little world
conjured flames sparks
made and unmade
swooning jetty gulls
my little sprocket of love
turning into species being
becoming bees
six-dimensional flag manifolds
houses of uncommons
polluting their lined pockets
these green brown
orange houses uniform
fitting close to the
contour of hill beneath
mountains beside sea
a new Pontiac parked
by a shingle-shod shack
and Buddha smiling
over Hastings Street

Thus we contrived power
electric sign illuminations
geographic billboard space
but that blast
of uneven developments
snuffed our dwarfdom
left us rafts
a nude beach
glaring Hollywood northern
lights of Plutonian
descendants stretching night
to canvas crests
and gabled gateways
to imagined orients east

The impact
on our bottom line
glows in the dark
lighting the dream world
of the collective
its lost halo
of sign culture
consuming sublime objects
Buckingham cigarettes
above Elysium Cleaners
watching and walking
like narrative it
threads us into
seductive structures one
neon tube at a time

Discordant vitality, will
the soft porn of windows
allow us to imagine
other Vancouvers to
alight on? Paris
Café (“chines dishes”
and cheap “meal
tickets”) or White Lunch
(who’s *that* meant for?)—
cars race in reflection
everywhere red is
advertising itself a
young asian boy
drives a pretend shiv
into another’s willing
abdomen—it’s all
good fun—immigration
exclusion head taxes
pomade for the PNE
house after house
confiscated for security’s
racialized insecurity

Dear glittering ghost
to be watching
all this fading
around us—
that old fart’s memories
this fence that once
formed a surface
for postering—

is to watch a
geographical transformation
(oiled by flowing
electronic accounts)
from mill-town glow
to metropolitan glare—
millwrights to lumpen extras
milling around the city set

Are these second
hand shovels good
for disposing of hope?
And these politicians—
were they really
for rent all this time?
The Talk of the Nation indeed
almost naked to seduction
or crowding the windows
of the empire outside
while one's own year
turns another cramped corner
(my Canada is easily
as cruel as yours
with or without
compradors)

Mirror mirror under
Kuo Kong Silk
are those red mountie hats
or new liberty caps?
Nonconforming curios

excite the sidewalk
(now a city scrubbed raw
the sign above you
sells wear and decay)—
New World Confection
whose eyes see this anyway?
what is clean
what is well-lit
this urban desert
a car sits sunk in
after the water has dried up
(Strathcona circa 1967)
or the shark on the marquee
(billboard of the Queen
butterfly bow celebrity
trading cards radios
and new towers
raining down wealth
on the deserted streets)

Dear common, cross
Powell at night
(you are never
really alone like
bees we swarm
our intellectual optimism)—
this is a love story
a recycled badge
used vacuum cleaner
punks outside the wig shop
shadows walking south—

the masters have no
mercy and the
TV is growing arms

Helpless puppets
I've googled your
ideal locations
the land you own
is unownable
magnetic ropes connect
earth's upper atmosphere
with the sun
(now that's a sign!)—
can't we give this
a good solid pull?
The body is porous
what is said seeps
into the skin
we absorb ideology
one camera click
at a time—
clerk waiter usher thief—
the colony dismantled
its neon and shipped
out with the containers
crowding the pier
into unlit "vacant"
space it erased—
boundary fixity surface—
for a moment
let us learn this

then put it in the pocket
of our endless open projects
engaging with closure
one back-lit dance
at a spatio-temporal time

JEN CURRIN / Vancouver: A Cut-up*

The boys & girls at dawn.
Powell Street between each kiss.
Expose some side of it. As if the city.
They aren't even young yet.
Face of a backpacker.
That "we" still "believe."
Gore Street. Gone Street.
What passes for wellness.
Between each kiss. Lucky Rooms.
Dropped acid & sympathy.
All this is important. Transitory.
It's just my take. My lucky take.
There's no need to make anything.
My blue wall?
My telephone?
Squeegie kid, the cough-dreaming.
Hotel Vancouver is walking.
Granville Bridge dead-body-dreaming.
Early apartment blocks. A keyhole.
That we still believe.

Streets & individuals
without any common language.

Mystery down all the trees.
Vancouver
is the mouth.

Any person's emotions: "I care. I don't care."

Between each kiss
buses like shadows.

Thick forest to thought-photograph.

Terror the library.

Public toilets or huddled mass.

Day a crowd.
The first hour in the first garden.

The first writer, the first reverie.

The itchiness-dreaming.

Once imagined living
in common areas.

My fellow tenant and I,
lucky spiders in the art gallery.

The ones walking and asking.

On wheels gliding through shadows.

Sixteen patients in blankets—Did I say souls?

In 1910

Vancouver then—

Will my book explain?

Viaduct. There's no need to make anything up.

Terror/reterritorialization.

Raw longing to be “alone.”

Intolerant of phantoms—

Looks like it's going
to rain.

* All text from George Stanley's *Vancouver: A Poem* and Meredith Quartermain's *Vancouver Walking*.
Arranged by Jen Currin.

DANIEL BOUCHARD / Careless in Vancouver

Late in the serial poem *Vancouver* George Stanley instructs: “Write carelessly, but slowly” (73): a note to himself, a reminder really, as this dictum appears throughout the poem. “Slowly” suggests the kind of control that would allow one to compose a poem with forethought and a firm grasp on whatever material may come while writing, allowing one to be the shaper of image and sound and not someone stumbling clumsily through their own lines. However, the kind of method suggested by this sentence is antithetical to writing carefully: it is not “write carefully and slowly,” but in fact, don’t write carefully at all. Yet there are hints throughout the poem that this kind of “careless” writing can provide the best care possible, the kind of care one takes in craft. If so, this kind of care stands craft on its head. So what does he mean?

“Write carelessly, but slowly” is not the kind of adage to be seen above the desk of a composition instructor. The role of instructor is significant in the poem. In Book 1 William Carlos Williams is referred to as a “guide” and a student frets over not having followed directions properly during an examination (he didn’t double-space). Throughout *Vancouver* the poet is reading student papers and reading books of poetry, including another poet-instructor’s (Kenneth Koch’s) selection of poems by his schoolchildren-students (41). While riding on rapid transit through the city and catching a glimpse of faces “as if the set of the face belied the interior of the mind,” he is moved to reflect on pedagogy: “I could teach this to the young” (45). These are not just interruptions welcomed into the poem as a form of grounding or diversion but a central element of the poem’s structure. He cites Williams again, approvingly, in Book 8 as one who “would write / a long passage of poetry / interrupted only infrequently / by prose” (53–54).

Vancouver’s material is generally established with Book 1: public transportation, reading, teaching, description of the city, memory (“There is more than memory here”) (3) and provisional writing advice and techniques to be applied to the poem at hand. The writing advice—a kind of notes-to-self—are digressions and asides, reiterations and refocusing techniques that verbalize the writing process: “Oh, maybe that, yes” (3); “what about subject position? that revealed coyly, or just blurted out?” (4); “(careful, watch it!)” (4); “—yes, but don’t try to describe—feelings” (4, 5); and “trying

too hard to think” (6). With these self-correcting asides the path of disclosure is made navigable. To read *Vancouver* is very much to read the process of writing a serial poem. When choices or movement become difficult that difficulty is incorporated: “stuck stuck stuck what kind of feeling down in Woodward’s basement...” (6) and again, “Stuck stuck stuck stuck stuck stuck the pub crawl goes by...” (6).

“Write carelessly” first appears in Book 4 (27). Preceding it are two telling fellow adages: “Take refuge in a long poem” and “Avert / inspiration.” The former is taken at face value: we participate in that refuge, just as Stanley takes refuge in reading *Paterson* as well as writing *Vancouver*. In the latter the break after “avert” is curious. “Avert” in common usage is often followed by “crisis” or used as a command as in “avert your eyes” to avoid them being damaged (by a powerful light, etc.) or to avoid seeing something offensive or disgraceful. (With a misty subject like “inspiration” how much more powerful a word to use than “avoid”!) It is difficult to overcome the temptation to read these imperatives as a logical progression even though they appear free from immediately surrounding contexts (if that can be said in such a poem where every image and statement may be argued to be in context, however indirect, with another). “Write carelessly” appears again, slightly elaborated, several lines forward as a self-corrective to the surrounding lines: “all this is too thoughtful—write carelessly, head down, feeling furrow of brow, weight of glasses...” (27).

This determined carelessness serves an important function in *Vancouver*. Its essence is the desire not to overdo things. Write and leave the care of meaning to others. Do your work and disregard the work not yours to do (“drained of the need / of the will / for everything to be marshaled” (42). Careless as a generative tool; careless as a method of letting go of false senses of clarity and meaning; careless as a mode of concentration; careless as a resource for generating or discovering suitable material as well as refining the scope of the poem, providing direction when it strays toward areas that seem obvious or irrelevant. Careless is trusting instincts (another contradiction). Writing carelessness into a poem that is anything but carelessly written takes a certain kind of care, devotion and trust. Careless as chance: “this is not the world” (following an in-the-moment description, and linked by an em-dash to “I really don’t know what I’m doing—”) “It’s just my take. My lucky take” (26). Luck is a relative, with a more positive association, of “careless” but containing more deliberateness than chance. Careless becomes part of the process, a method: “dutiful,

perfunctory—& yet a pleasure / not to have any ‘meaning’ interfere, / long, drawn-out, even before it’s thought. / Let’s be clear / (blank) there’s nothing to say here” (29). Such productive carelessness, assisting in hitting the right notes, requires vigilance.

Vancouver isn’t careless. It isn’t careless in the sense of being badly written or making a series of poor choices. It isn’t careless in the sense that careless writing could have been edited out. On the contrary, over-careful writing is avoided in the pursuit of the careless. (“—what is this all about? Something else than / is given in perception, so shut your eyes. Shut the mind’s eyes. / Fiercely” [46]). Careless functions like a reset button, a fresh start. We can see how this is effected by tracing the appearances and contexts of careless and care. Maintaining a stance of careless throughout *Vancouver* is critical to providing the substantial power this poem radiates as a discursive meditation of the mingling of memory and dailiness.

“Sometimes” he writes, “the mind / is just aware of its / dumbness,” (29) by which he does not mean an unintelligence, but a desire to suppress the mind’s excessive control over the poem. The dumbness is both blockage—“stuck stuck stuck stuck stuck” (28)—or muteness at the moment of writing and a productive void out of which poetry comes “head up into no thought, even though all this district—no place to go—the irremediable—gulf—not between being and nothingness” (27). By exercising less willfulness in the poem, the poet makes possible for himself an element of surprise similar to that a reader experiences reading the poem for the first time.

Book 9 serves as a micro-example of how the redirection to write carelessly is a pacing device as well as one of restraint. About midway through the book, in a break from the vignettes and images of being in the present, is a lengthy paragraph (prose? as in *WCW*?) describing a fellow drinker at the bar who fell asleep and is escorted out. Then there is a section break and a fresh start: “Write carelessly & / stop focusing” and “I’m in the bar, / I’m happy but I’m lost whenever I come / to this point / of embarrassment as if to take over / knowledge that not yet / exists, is, write carelessly, write / at the brink” (65). Book 9 is an elegy: one person in the hospital, another dead. The self-directives amid description then appear, in addition to being a restorative tactic to get the poem back on track, a non-justification for the writing life itself, where everything in the mix is thrown together a bit more sharply than before:

Writing—to see what turns up, or to keep going. Adrienne Rich writing for her survival. To keep going, by this means—& it’s not to fake out a justification—

excuse—in itself—or is it? (now the SeaBus passes the stern of *Cielo di Monfalcone*, Monrovia & turns (?) sharply right (stbd.), so the whole harbour seems to wheel around, bringing the Second Narrows into view, & now the drydocks on the North Shore, & the SeaBus headed for its slip)—or occupational therapy? That the work be interesting, & fill (part of) the time.

To survive—those who are dying? To die.
To write without any justification, carelessly,
ah yes. Not to create any structure. (66)

The statement “Write carelessly, but slowly” appears in Book 10 of *Vancouver*, the culmination of other iterations of this thought. That this formulation is also a further refinement of previous occurrences suggests that it is more an organic and evolving principle than a mantra. “Writing just to get to tomorrow” (73). This insistence of “careless,” now firmly part of the poem and established as a valuable proposition for a new insight into what it means to craft a poem, fades as something not needing to be repeated further.

This essay has focused on a single aspect of *Vancouver* and has largely omitted the material around which the idea of “careless” writing revolves. In closing I wish to emphasize a moment in which the opposite of the word “careless” stands out, not only for the beautiful writing but as an instance of how the effort of keeping it careless is manifest in an articulation of “care”:

If I have only one happy moment & a kind of
sketch of the external-shape of being radiating
outward from this one of all the others, now absent,
but they are the context, they are where the care is,
for them & for me—that I am—most of it let go—
the tree and the rain and the pavement noted, but
most of it not, then what is missing?” (22)

MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN / George Stanley: The Metaphysics of Place

A writer writes. An eye—an I—opens in language. A locus in bio tissue, in ecological flesh, in human history, planetary history, sound, the storacity of human mutterings and calls. Loquacity. Locacity. Two writers speak—two I's navigate rhumb lines spiraling to planetary poles.

1993–5. Capilano College (as it was then called). I leave a seven-year legal career and return to teaching—find myself sharing an office with George Stanley. “The” world, “a” world, reels with 11% unemployment, the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, then NAFTA. Cuts to Employment Insurance and Workers’ Compensation. Threats to health and education. Jobs are outsourced. Foreign ownership by multinationals skyrockets.

Croatians and Serbs slaughter each other. Bombs go off in the basement of the World Trade Centre. The Lorena Bobbitt Trial is comic relief. Black holes do indeed exist. Rwanda becomes another black hole. Quebec votes No. Bombs go off in Oklahoma. The Chunnel opens.

Our students are listening to Nirvana and Madonna, going to raves, piercing and tattooing themselves, watching *Jurassic Park*, *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *Forrest Gump*, and writing essays about Kurt Cobain’s suicide, the Ebola virus, O.J. Simpson, and the Nancy Kerrigan attack.

The office contains two desks, three chairs, a three-drawer filing cabinet and about four feet of shelving suspended high on one wall. There are no windows. The walls are bright cream and blank except for a calendar. Fluorescent lights scrutinize every mark and dent in the furniture, every blotch and stain in the carpet.

Four and sometimes five instructors share this office, including Jenny Penberthy, Dan Munteanu and, briefly, Miriam Nichols. George has the best desk, the one under the shelves and the calendar. This is only right because George was here first, the year before the rest of us. It’s right too because George is a poet, a senior instructor of many years’ experience, and because George has an air about him of knowing what’s what. I too have a strong sense of territory and whenever possible I claim the other desk, the one beside the filing cabinet which is the only place one can store teaching materials or student papers without having them mixed up or lost in someone else’s.

Most of us are teaching four sections.

Sometimes the office is mayhem, with students from our various classes seeking help from two or three of us at once, standing up, or squirming on borrowed rolling office chairs. We put the matter of desks and chairs, adequate space, on the Department meeting agenda, then the Division meeting agenda. The Chair of the Division tells us that such requests are “embarrassing,” our focus should be solely on the welfare of the students. We hatch schemes for lifting desks and chairs from nearby classrooms and hallways, and finally add a small side-table. This becomes Dan’s territory. “My” desk is also Jenny’s.

It’s peaceful when just George and I are there. Something about the way he responds makes me think twice about what I have just said to him. A hesitation, a pause, before he fills the silence. His speech takes on a certain artifactual quality, the act of speaking is made visible as an act of ordering the world that could have been done otherwise. Speaking is a construction of the real rather than a reactive impulse. Years later I would realize how the triangulation between language, real, and construction of real is central to George’s poetry. One’s relationship to words and “the real” is always at stake. For instance, in *Vancouver: A Poem*, George writes of watching both himself and the city as he rides the bus, imagining “a poem about / Vancouver in which Vancouver never appears” and wondering “what about the subject position? that revealed / coyly, or just blurted out?” (4).

George takes us into the mind observing its own observing (“some voice—not to describe—that / I hear thinking—I overhear” (*Vancouver* 35), the consciousness that writing orders the real the moment a word surfaces, this activity tantalized by an unword—the observing self—mind—soul. An activity circling round a place, a point of view. Plato’s ideal forms hang like shades in the background.

Landmarks. The mountains, the inlet, the trees.
The sun. The soul with their names. Seeks
to be entangled with them—oh, not the names,
the others—says she does, anima. But in truth—
no, in illusion, illusion upon illusion, transparent
like glass doors—plays a private game
with words—they’re *her* words—like a doll’s tea set—
she doesn’t want to be any part of the dollies.
She thinks she’s grown up.

She doesn't want to be any part of the world.
Outside the playroom, outside the house. (*Vancouver* 20)

The landscape described in the poem often slips into the hills and valleys, streets and tower-blocks of being in names—caught in a web of body, viewpoint, language and void that keeps knowing and the knowable at stake. Landscape turns out to be inside the mind (a place in one's head) or outside or both or neither: "I imagine winter— / the city in the mind—the trees, the branches, waving, blowing / all around & the rain blowing, but the city still there, dark, in / the mind. So non-existent, that way. There when you don't see it, / as you wake in it. In a bed, in a room, in the city" (*Vancouver* 36).

George writes, "not to locate myself in a landscape / ... but rather to free the landscape" and to carry out "an excavation of darkness—of self—of poetry" (*Vancouver* 55–56). The locus of speech is at stake, along with the word-beams making some things bright and others dark. We think we are safe because we can say these word-places and place people when they speak: "A place, then any place is safe, if you are there" (*Vancouver* 71). But such places are as fictional and unstable as a gas station at Broadway and Maple appearing in a Gough novel, but now is merely a vacant lot (71). The one place that "stays the same" is the "unnamed." This place outside words "goes on forever" (71).

At Capilano College in 1994 or 95, I remember thinking for a long time that George had come from Prince George—what would it be like to live in and write about a place where your name was royalty? The power in this grew with the fact that Stan Persky liked to drop in and talk to George. They seemed to be buddies, Stan hanging out on the door frame expounding his views particularly on literature, which we English instructors were supposed to know about. What! you haven't read V.S. Naipaul?! He looked at me aghast. I brushed him off but inwardly raged at this slight that seemed to come from "the men." Later I discovered that George too had been intimidated by Stan: "Vancouver—being there—feeling marginalized—out of it. / Stan's cracks about Terrace, & not just that but a feeling of / being a hick or old-fashioned romantic"; "Stan & Scott hip to the new writing—narrative. Stan telling / me, with a bit of an I-told-you-so voice, Bernstein is replacing / Creeley (now retired) at Buffalo" (*Gentle* 64).

At the time, I felt excluded, disconnected from any important writers' group,

scrambling to catch up to a literary world I hadn't paid attention to for several years, uncertain of my own voice—authorship/authority. I had discovered I wanted to write, had even written a collection of stories that had been considered by Anansi. In an era of fragmentation, my fragments didn't fit.

Why don't you write about the world, George said, in response to what I don't know—we must have got on to my writing woes. He had to turn around to face me because his desk looked into the corner away from the door (handy for ignoring distracting passers by), whereas mine looked out toward the door. I left thinking evil thoughts about how men always accuse women of writing the personal instead of the public, thinking evil thoughts about unified rationalist Platonic world views imposed by patriarchal culture. In a mood, I guess, I wrote "The World":

Why don't you write about the world, he said, instead of personal relationships. Whose world, I ask. There is only one world, he retorted, Socrates said the world ceases only when we go to sleep, and he didn't mean physical sleep either. Look, he said, there's a cup on this table. That's the world.

White china, gold, rimmed, roses painted on the side. Surface slightly fluted, spirally elongated, its bloodline to mug, not high-handled tea-chalice. You'd find it in Moe's secondhand on Main Street among the plastic end tables and footprint ashtrays. Part of some bridal set, which she, crystallized, crinolined, had opened at the church basement bash, while her head ached and her feet screamed in their pointed white heels. Smiled, kissed her brother-in-law on both cheeks for the lovely tea set. Wrapped it back in its tissue. Her tissue. His issue. Her flesh welded to his.

Like lignin in cell walls, buttressing the cellulose layered over random network of fibrils. She put the cups with the other gifts in her cupboard, starting her married life. Serving instant coffee and chocolate chip cookies to relatives. Occasionally traveling to the intercellular space near the middle lamellae. Tiny wedges of time not accounted for by husband or children or her part-time job at the bakery.

All but two broken in spills or accidents, these going to a nephew's housekeeping room, when she'd saved enough for the new set in the maple Arborite buffet. The nephew scraping by on occasional teaching jobs, leaving it in the eight-foot windowless cube he shared with four others at the college.

The walls usually do not form an unbroken barrier around the cell but often contain tiny holes through which protoplasmic filaments may communicate with adjacent cells. I see the cup on the fake woodgrain table, the Spanish girl whirling her skirt in last year's calendar, the filing cabinet, the light glaring on the streaked yellow wall behind his fist, for a split second the table and the cup separated by space from its impact.

end had opened
had light skirt glare
had ached only elongated
spirally whirling
a network of broken spills
random filaments the crinolined buttress
for Socrates' sleep near the Spanish cells

I gave the poem to George, feeling bold about the fragmentary lines at the end. After the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers who had taken Vancouver by storm in 1985, grammar and world view had to be blown apart. Case closed. What could he possibly say about it?

Nothing. George remained silent. Or so I thought. And I remained doubtful of someone who could claim one reality—"the world!"—existed. Thinking his world would just erase mine; very well, I would remain outside, till hell froze over. I was still steamed about it when I went to Naropa in July 1996, complaining to Robin Blaser, who said, "Well, George likes to stir the pot; he's a very good poet," and to Norma Cole, who said, "We are *all* writing reality" and then talked about claiming the right to do that—"coming out" as a writer.

Then, lo and behold, in 1997, George asked me for my poem "The World" for an issue of *Tads* he was editing. *Tads* was a little magazine put out by a group of writers who met regularly in a pub, he told me. George Bowering was in the group. *Tads* and *Dads* they called it, because everyone in the group was either a tad (in their 20s) or a dad (in their 60s). There was a distinct non-fit here so far as I was concerned. But a publication was a publication and God knows I wasn't getting much published in "real magazines." I refused to go to the pub for the launch (it sounded so male). I was so insecure. Now, darn it, I've lost the copy George gave me. And wish I had gone to that pub. It was an important and formative group including several young writers, such as Reg Johanson and Ryan Knighton, who grew into significant literary careers.

So insecure I was about "the world," not seeing I too was closing it off in huge generalizations. Somewhere in the '90s, George handed me a copy of his self-published *Gentle Northern Summer* (1993), Gestetnered in typewriter face on 8½ x 11 inch paper with hand-numbered pages and table of contents—human fingers banging levers onto a ribbon, instead of pages stamped by machines. A loaded logging truck

barrels out of the forest on the front cover. Inside was a note in the green ink we marked papers with: "I wanted you to have this copy of my chapbook. George." The same series of poems appears in the 1995 New Star edition, with the addition of "San Francisco's Gone," "San Jose Poem" and the long, major meditation on language, place, knowledge and landscape: "Terrace Landscapes."

Gentle Northern Summer includes a short poem, "*The World is the case*" (8) whose title is the first line of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In my edition, the line reads "The world is everything that is the case"—"the totality of facts not of things" (Wittgenstein 31). This is the book that ends with Wittgenstein's famous statement: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (189). There is a world of statements, but the sense of the world lies outside these and cannot be said (183). Much of George's writing explores this boundary between the factual and sayable and that which is beyond the grasp of words: that which we could agree is "the world" and that which undermines our security in sayable, congealed knowledge. The poem points out that we sicken of putting together a puzzle just exactly when it gives us maximum information. Poetry and life work the same way. The poem "A Sleepwalker" reminds us that humans operate in a matrix of illusions and dreams; when we forget this and try to nail something down in "the truth" we die our own solitary deaths (*Gentle* 58). The poem "Terrace Landscapes" contrasts the "imagination of the land," ("geometric, Platonic... forms into which the people / and animals can fit their dreams") with the "imagination of the town" which "is imposed, a ruled pad" (*Gentle* 65).

In "Raft," George imagines a man made of two men riding the flow of life, one looking back at memories of "boardinghouses, communes, bars, / working in offices & mills, / weddings & funerals & wakes" and the other looking forward: "I thought I knew those places. / They were the world, each one" (*Gentle* 41). "I hold in my mind a map / that is the map of the world," says the forward-looker, while at his back is the dreamer (*Gentle* 42).

The world is in the mind. We dream it together. "The people float in the net, their minds go / on & off, images of other people & places flash, wink, in / their minds, against a picture they all agree is *this place*, / earth" (*Gentle* 69). How long can we "see" anything that we think is out there, the poet muses, and what exactly is the "light" that we're shining, and what is dark? How much can we know of our means of

knowing? “The light shineth, & the darkness is forgotten. And what the / light shines on? And how long does the light shine, before it / goes out again, & the darkness returns?” (*Gentle* 69). “Or is there any darkness? Only a world, our world, located / on a planet, which we are subjecting to extraordinary stress” (*Gentle* 69).

“Terrace Landscapes” imagines a person named H. with many observable features and “many more that could be known—but the person, H., is / not known” (*Gentle* 70). As if to say the locus that is the person—that crossroads of discourses—must always remain beyond pinning down to “the truth,” just as “the world” must. “Is the world H. lives in known?” the poem asks, “Is the world H. lives in the / world H. knows?” The act of knowing is an act of imagination: “Imagine, if you want to, / that the world we know H. to inhabit is the world H. knows / he inhabits. The same world ... located on a planet” (*Gentle* 70).

George told me to write about “the world.” There’s only one world—what could he have meant? Long afterwards I found he had thought about it a great deal. Even more amazing, he had written a response to “The World,” entitled “A Man”:

The cup didn’t break (I prefer to think),
only jumped, jiggled, when his fist hit the fake
woodgrain table, as did a couple of pencils,
a plastic ballpen, a paper clip. ‘Shit,’ he said.
To no one.

Fragments of a thought. Age, experience, destiny.
But strike that last one, for one who believes the universe
has no purpose, he has no purpose, walked
(well, stepped, a foot or two, in an eight-foot cube)
to where the windows ought to be, & stared.
The mountains have some kind of eternal—rejected
several complements, majesty, bare quality, finally
settled on aura, he mused, at least to those
who call them mountains. The earth is as smooth
as an orange, said the devil. He let that one
go by. They were gods, or the habitations of gods,
so we (thinking, men) could crawl between earth
& heaven, at least that.

Sky gods, she said, looking up from the stack of papers
she was marking. So that was out, too, taking refuge
in stories. The whole stratification slipped,
towards the intertidal zone, the female soup.

I could identify with my breath, he thought.
This skin, this lexicon, but a bag, the eternal
pastry tube... (*At Andy's* 16–17)

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BARRY MCKINNON / Excerpts from *Into the Blind World*

into the blind world—
the *new life*—the essential tremor /refusal
of diminishment

I see in a double
space—conjunction & irony, that part blind I'm made
to see. it is not Dante's forest exactly. more—
so a sense

/a kind of open door
is beginning /closing—dark turning
—light I didn't expect.

old flesh renews, that the dim
eye makes almost nothing matter. *looks to*
what I find ahead.

I believe—

fear kept
me speaking, or all would cease to be. so I spoke & the forest flew by
& city lights distorted—the cold stars of love and dark—the beginning, a journey, a
descent

the ghost of myself still
alive,
to address the infected world, to stall & cease advance, to the forest one fears
to enter

sad desire/ without a mask—
to journey solely at night dark to the armies
circling themselves—the forest of knives

invisible to those who never make it

or recognize

desire: one heart to pull
the other retract—that the gap maintains its depth & distance
to hell—the hidden road & the river one dares

•

now monstrous bonds to bear

no delight

distorted drunks, demons, the dismal—

drunk, & *glad* to be

—in the wrong room, singing

a tavern full of...

no hope

the crack head whore—the one-eyed man, bound &
thrown pleading to the ground.

shame

necessity

no music in the desert to cohere.

these synonyms when I write *these days*
are sisters: *incoherent*, *unrequited*
and *incomplete*

the empty holds their beating wings, quavered voice
these conditions we sense no journey could amend

the moon is bright, the stars cold, clear ends

delete return

—my mother's womb
the words & what I see—bones, & pulp
weeping—

recognize some other self as me
to guide where I was once before
is it onward on that dismal road,
when the traveler's journey to the end
becomes the end/the bottom of the universe?
no laughing matter

•

I'm still alive in the splash—
gray light. but my guide seems gone
a life

space curved to return
itself beginning as end (weightless/unmoved—
I listen for the horn ahead. well past the forest
whose sticks I gathered to make it shore to shore
was the horn my driver
or the invisible direction of the future riven to wait until
it comes to me? *this hole*, this...

/hell is its *nothing*
to give
or bear.

time waiting

in the celestial vestige—

if I could see or write this speech

illuminate

the fox trotting on the road ahead

the sick & dying

the snowball's chance in hell

•

happy in hell?

what other world?

the woman—a configuration, that she wait, call, be?

in all what was

I was?

detained, to wait, to see/

the bullies/demons who *could not* out wait me gave up?

release to give me release to an interval

that shows the beauty of what it might contain: gold leaves/September breeze—the outer world—that I saw *all* first, and then *heard* its speech, & music

when I quaked?

that world. there was no other, as there is *not* now?

an earth to convince light versus dark?

my father *really* gone, his last breath, *where?*

•

oh where

in any where—range of... I know I was

to the sight

of *what* it was when the quaking shook me to
my fractured prayer. *hell* no release, nor appeasement,
no way out.

these thoughts, a burden, yet contain me,
—accuracy or mistake, that I could not see beyond
/ to whatever world I could retain eludes me or gain?

this the sum of another matter, stupid thought of totality
when the grim prospect makes it final—*held*

a button pushed. I saw, what looked human to be
gloom. *worse* than gloom

•

I thought this in the outer world and still think it here
unsure on a string of faith, the driver will return

in the hope I have—this blind ascent to...

what time and light ahead

JAMIE REID / Messages to and from

i

for George Stanley

not to be a man

to be a thought

—George Stanley, *Vancouver: A Poem*

George Stanley lives far away from me
in this same city, so that I miss him now,
as often as I think of him and how rarely
I see him in the flesh, he going one way on the bus,
and I another.

He is nevertheless one of the ones
I see most often, because he is always there,
the most loyal and persistent of our own gang of local poets
at our gatherings.

I have seen him often
in my life, more often than many others
of this city who I also miss, missing him
slipping aslant through the city, sitting
with his plants and his paintings alone in his flat
thinking the words of some poem, thinking a thought
to be spoken later when we see him in the flesh,
“feelings
without words,
about places.”

I saw him first in San Francisco
in the bar now grown semi-famous, the site
of what is now called
a literary renaissance,

then barely known
except by poets.

There,
in pique and anger,
I threw a glass of gin and tonic
on George Stanley's lap one night.

In later years, he said he thought it charming.
But I think he truly just forgot.
And I think he doesn't still remember.
How simple these words seem, how difficult
the ideas and feelings that, called to mind,
they call to mind, these many
missing moments, slipped away in time.

ii

George has a kind of taut Jesuit calm
that covers up his in-dwelling human kindness, his desire
to find a place in the place he is in. He speaks
in measured syllables, an air
easily mistaken for self-satisfaction, though he is never
entirely satisfied. There is always
something missing
in the puzzle he is trying to put together with his words, finding
pleasure when the words seem to come together and be fit together.

iii

There are two at least of each of us in each of us. I and another,
he and her, she and him, ego/alter ego, artist/anima, poet/muse,

dancing with each other,
even as we stand still, amidst the thronging of our friends,
their shadows crossing each other on the floor and walls,
the poems emerging from the web of shadows in our minds,
finding their way toward words, with words,
companions of our minds.

iv

Late one night while drinking Irish whiskey,
oddly prideful, George told me his imagination of the game of chess,
a hidden human drama, bishops
sidling diagonally, on the slant, knights
leaping by surprise from square to square.

Within each piece
a human entity compact inside, expressed externally
by its mode of movement, held in place or freed to move
by the configuration of the other actors in their ever on-going game.

The point of chess, to kill the king, no corresponding
king to kill in the give and take of real life and politics,
we citizens, George and the rest of us, moving in small single steps,
slides and leaps, pawns, bishops, knights,
shifting identities, to secure our lives, to be one of us,
to remain on board,
the endless dance in which the moves cannot be known
in advance, the music issuing from a place almost
beyond our hearing, a distant cave in the midst
of the forest of our words.

v

These days, George buttons his jacket and his mouth
and leaves our bar parties early. There may have been a time
when he stayed later than all the others. But now,
The Commissioner
goes home. The dance goes on. This poem
gets out of hand, loses its bearings, finding
another footing, going on, regardless.

vi

When he is not with us, George
sits at home alone, shops for food on Broadway,
travels to Ireland, Mexico, or to his former homes,
San Francisco and New York,
thinking about us, his fellow citizens,
the city, the poem to come
and the poem after that.

The pieces of the game
lie in their box, fingered one by one, brought
to the inner attention, organized, then muddled,
then organized again. A music begins,
a poem emerges,
a figure in the dark, amidst the flow of shadows,
a decipherable figure, a flow, a movement, a moment of sight and hearing,
almost out of sight and hearing, halts into the clearing,
finding its way to words.

vii

He says today we no longer can choose the language that we speak
as if there was a day not long ago when we could.

When we were young?

Before we were born? Who is we? Do today's young
have the luxury of a choice to speak a language different from the one we,
their elders, we so-called seniors, speak,
our words erased, new words and concepts in their place?

When we die and disappear,
does our grammar and syntax disappear along with us?
Who's listening here? Who hears?

viii

The commentators aver that his poems live
outside of time, but when the time comes
for the Commissioner to arrive, he comes on time
to meet with us.

Inside himself, he carries a woman who walks the Malecón
in Veracruz, a girl taller than himself, more serious,
who comes to him in waking as though in a dream,
herself the fully grown child of his own desire,
the imaginary daughter of his own father,
the mother of the boy he loves.

When George speaks, it is the echo of her voice we hear,
coming from the seashore, from the forest,
from the very heart of our City,
transposed from Veracruz and other ports of call.

GEORGE BOWERING / A Ballpark Figure

His parents knew how to be Irish, giving one son to the Church and letting the other become a poet.

He got born in a poet city, and then he went to Utah, and then he went to Terrace, not Paris, Terrace.

He lived with me and my family twice, a perfect gentleman, didn't scare us, we're not Irish.

George really likes tradition—he starts a new one whenever he can, gives it a name, could have been a saint.

But he's the commissioner of everything, he rules on questions proposed by idiot poets; we love him and his judgment.

Could have been umpire in chief, making instant preposterous poems in the grandstand behind home plate.

His parents should have had a dozen Irish sons; they would have become a San Francisco Renaissance.

People need his poetry the way they need oxygen, especially when they don't seem to see either one.

He has his faults, just the way the marble used to make Michelangelo's *pietà* has its faults.

He makes you sit there dreaming up extravagant sentences, while he composes a poem with trucks in it.

The poem just drove down here from Terrace, and George has a pen hidden on him somewhere.

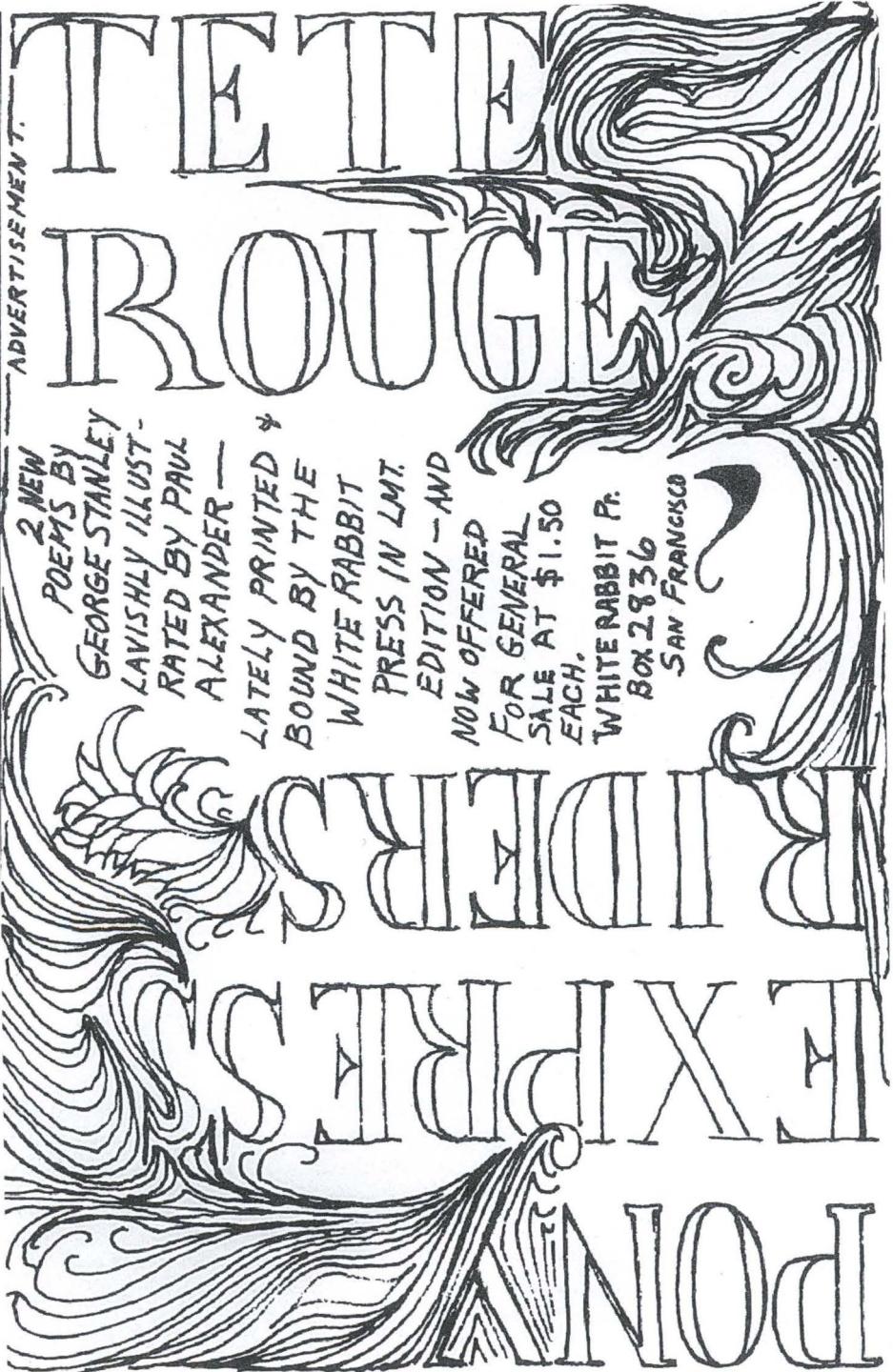
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Contributors

MICHAEL BARNHOLDEN's books include *Circumstances: Alter Photographs* (Talon 2009); *Street Stories: One Hundred Years of Homelessness* (Anvil 2007), and *Reading the Riot Act* (Anvil 2005). He is the publisher of LINEbooks, and managing editor of West Coast Line. He teaches English at Emily Carr and the Native Education College. He claims to have met George Stanley at the York Street East Commune in the early seventies at a writers' meeting.

KEN BELFORD is the author of seven books of poetry. Belford has lived in the roadless mountains of the headwaters of Northern BC's Nass River for half his life. He writes a lan(d)guage of subsistence, with a sub-text of origins and evolution.

DANIEL BOUCHARD: "I was introduced to George Stanley's poetry by Kevin Davies. Then, editing the small magazine, *The Poker*, I wrote to George for poems and happily published his work in three of the nine issues that appeared. We met when George read in Boston in 2003."

GEORGE BOWERING is an old-time Vancouver writer. His latest poetry book from Talon Books is *My Darling Nellie Grey*. He is the 2011 recipient of the Lieutenant-Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award. In 1971 he and George Stanley both lived at 2499 York St.

ROB BUDDE teaches creative writing at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George. He has published seven books (poetry, novels, interviews, and short fiction), his most recent books being *Finding Ft. George* (Caitlin Press) and *declining america* (BookThug). His book *Poem's Poems* is forthcoming from Snare.

TED BYRNE is a Vancouver poet. Recent work includes *Beautiful Lies* (Capilano University Editions) and *Sonnets: Louise Labé* (forthcoming from Nomados). He first met George Stanley on page 15 of *Caterpillar 11*. He has always remembered the lines, "Tell me again what you said, it is possible everything I think is wrong." He envies Mr. Stanley's status as a foreign-born Irishman and his absence from *The New American Poetry*. "North of California Street" first appeared in *The Rain* (www.rainreview.net).

JOSHUA CLOVER is a scholar, poet, and journalist. His most recent books include *The Matrix*, a book of film criticism, and *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About*. He is currently a Professor of Poetry and Poetics at the University of California, Davis. He was one of the judges who awarded the Shelley Memorial Award to George Stanley in 2006.

STEPHEN COLLIS's most recent book of poetry is *On the Material* (Talon Books 2010). George Stanley has occupied important real estate in his cognitive map of poetry since he moved to Vancouver in the 1990s.

WILLIAM CORBETT is a poet and memoirist who lives in Boston's South End and teaches writing at MIT. He has edited *Just the Thing: Selected Letters of James Schuyler, 1951–1991*; is on the advisory board of Manhattan's CUE Art Foundation and directs the small press Pressed Wafer. His current books are *Albert York* (Pressed Wafer) and *The Whalen Poem* (Hanging Loose Press). Note on "Memorial Reading For Michael Gizzi": Michael Gizzi and Craig Watson's Qua Books published George Stanley's *A Tall, Serious Girl: Selected Poems: 1957–2000*, edited by Kevin Davies and Larry Fagin. This made George's poetry more

available in the United States than it had ever been before.

PIERRE COUPEY, writer, editor, educator, visual artist, first met George Stanley in the late '60s across a table of beer in the Cecil, and years later was happy to have him as a colleague in Capilano's English Department. Pierre's work is represented by Gallery Jones in Vancouver and the Pacific Northwest, and in Spring 2013 his work will be the subject of a three-decade survey jointly curated by the West Vancouver Museum and the Art Gallery of the Evergreen Cultural Centre.

PETER CULLEY's books include *Hammertown*, *The Age of Briggs & Stratton*, and *To the Dogs*. He lives in South Wellington on Vancouver Island. He met George Stanley beside Pierre Coupey's pool in North Vancouver in the spring of 1978.

JEN CURRIN has published three books of poetry: *The Sleep of Four Cites* (Anvil Press 2005), *Hagiography* (Coach House 2008), and *The Inquisition Yours* (Coach House 2010). She teaches writing and literature at Vancouver Community College and creative writing at Kwantlen University and for Simon Fraser University's Writer's Studio.

BEVERLY DAHLEN's work includes four volumes of the open-ended series *A Reading*, the most recently published of which is *A Reading 18–20* (Instance Press 2006). *A Reading: Birds* is soon to be published as a chapbook by Little Red Leaves Editions new "Textile Series" edited and designed by Dawn Pendergast. Ms. Dahlen has also published widely in numerous periodicals and anthologies. She last considered George Stanley's work, *Vancouver*, in an article for the online magazine *Jacket*.

LEW ELLINGHAM: "I've never been with so tight a group: 'the Spicer Circle,' 'Green Street

poets'—the early 1960s in San Francisco cemented friendships, many to last a lifetime. George Stanley the only native of the group. I was born in 1933, George in '34. We lived together for awhile. Those magic years."

DORA FITZGERALD: "Born: Hoboken, New Jersey. Moved to San Francisco in 1957. Met George during endless bar crawls. Had twins on Ibiza, returned to SF, then to NY where I married Russell FitzGerald. Arrived in Vancouver in 1970, worked various social work positions including Asst. Prof. at UBC. George and I shared a house in Terrace while we were both teaching at NWCC. Moved to Galiano in 1990."

KIM GOLDBERG's latest book is *RED ZONE*, a poem-diary of homelessness in Nanaimo, BC, where she lives. Her previous collection, *Ride Backwards on Dragon*, was a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Award. Despite her university degree in biology, she has yet to kiss a salamander.

BROOK HOUGLUM teaches writing and literature at Capilano University and is the current editor of *TCR*.

LISA JARNOT is the author of four collections of poetry including *Night Scenes* (Flood Editions). She lives in Sunnyside, Queens, New York where she works as a freelance horticulturalist.

REG JOHANSON is the co-author, with Roger Farr and Aaron Vidaver, of *N 49 19. 47 – W 123 8. 11* (PILLS 2008) and the author of *Courage, My Love* (Line Books 2006). He teaches writing and literature at Capilano University in North Vancouver, Coast Salish Territory.

KEVIN KILLIAN, a US poet and novelist, met George Stanley in the mid-'80s, perhaps at the White Rabbit Conference/Jack Spicer Symposium held in San Francisco in June of 1986. Killian's

most recent books are Volume II of his *Selected Amazon Reviews*, edited by Jason Morris, and *Spreadeagle*, a novel.

BASIL KING—painter and poet—was born in England, attended Black Mountain College and spent some important years in San Francisco in the late 1950s where he and George Stanley first met. Basil's latest book, *Learning to Draw/A History*, is being published in 2011 by Skylight Press.

MARTHA KING was born Martha Winston Davis in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1937, attended Black Mountain College as a teenager, and married the painter Basil King in 1958 in San Francisco where their friendship with George Stanley began. She's lived in Brooklyn, NY, for some 30 years.

JOANNE KYGER: "Up from Santa Barbara to San Francisco in early spring 1957 I went to work for Brentano's Bookstore, downtown at the City of Paris. A friend soon introduced me to North Beach and a very small bar called The Place, where I met John Wieners and Joe Dunn, who invited me to the informal Sunday afternoon poetry meetings run by Duncan and Spicer. After attending a few Sundays, George Stanley, a loyal member, took me aside and said, pointedly, 'Some people are treating these occasions like a party. If you want to continue attending, you'll have to read your poetry.' After a week of highly fraught preparation, I did. And passed the 'test'. And became an 'official' part of the Sunday afternoons."

MICHAEL MCCLURE's *Indigo And Saffron: Selected and New Poems* is fresh from the University of California Press. McClure and Ray Manzarek are wrapping up their third cd—*Live From San Francisco*. At 22 years old McClure was the youngest reader in the Six Gallery event.

BARRY MCKINNON: "the task of poetry? What I've wanted. The poem itself (an artifact/real place)—& I've also wanted the very moments of its act & its energy (integration/location)—to include, as well, a necessary disintegration of its conscious and unconscious premises. By this I mean the practice I see in George Stanley's consistently remarkable work: he writes/builds a line that seems dismantled at the same time—to reveal accurate processes of mind and life moving to their jagged truths."

CHRIS NEALON is the author of *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* and *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in The American Century*, as well as two books of poetry, *The Joyous Age* and *Plummet*. He teaches in the English Department at Johns Hopkins University.

JENNY PENBERTHY has known George Stanley since 1992 when they shared an office at Capilano College. In those early days of negotiating office computers, Jenny remembers George's sage response to a dilemma: "Have you tried the right side of the mouse?" Jenny is a former editor of *The Capilano Review*; she's happy to be a board member, a role she shares with George Stanley.

STAN PERSKY teaches philosophy at Capilano University in North Vancouver, BC. He's the recipient of the 2010 B.C. Lt.-Governor's Award for Literary Excellence. His forthcoming book is *Reading the 21st Century: Books of the Decade, 2000–2009* (McGill-Queen's 2011).

MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN and George Stanley shared an office and many English Department happenings at Capilano College in the mid-'90s. Her most recent book, *Recipes from the Red Planet*, was shortlisted for a BC Book Prize for fiction. *Nightmarker* was a finalist for the Vancouver Book Award, and *Vancouver Walking* won a BC Book Prize for poetry.

JAMIE REID is a veteran Vancouver poet, first published in 1961, author of four volumes of poetry and several chapbooks, editor in early '90s of *DaDaBaBy*, a magazine of poetry and commentary. He first met George Stanley at the legendary Gino & Carlos bar in San Francisco in 1964.

GEORGE STANLEY was born in San Francisco in 1934. He attended the University of San Francisco and the University of Utah, then spent three years in the US Army. He attended the University of California (Berkeley) for a year, then dropped out of university for eleven years, most of which time he spent in North Beach (and New York) bars. In 1971, after receiving his M.A. in English from San Francisco State College, he moved to Vancouver. From 1976 to 1991 he taught English at Northwest Community College in Terrace, and from 1991 to 2003 at Capilano College (now University). He is the author of thirteen books of poetry: *The Love Root* (White Rabbit 1958), *Tete Rouge/Pony Express Riders* (White Rabbit 1963), *Flowers* (White Rabbit 1965), *Beyond Love* (Open Space 1968), *You* (New Star 1974), *The Stick* (Talon 1974), *Opening Day* (Oolichan 1983), *Temporarily* (Gorse 1986), *Gentle Northern Summer* (New Star 1995), *At Andy's* (New Star 2000), *A Tall Serious Girl: Selected Poems 1957–2000* (Qua 2003), *Seniors* (Nomados 2006), and *Vancouver: A Poem* (New Star 2008). He was given the Shelley Memorial Award by the Poetry Society of America in 2006, was a finalist for the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize in 2009, and was Writer-in-Residence for *The Capilano Review* in 2010. His poems have been translated into French and Italian.

GERALD STANLEY is a retired mental health counsellor living in Yachats, Oregon. As a volunteer, he chairs the committee that advises the Lincoln County government on mental health issues. He maintains an interest in academic and popular philosophy.

SHARON THESEN's poetry books include *News and Smoke: Selected Poems*; *A Pair of Scissors*; *The Good Bacteria*; and mostly recently, *Oyama Pink Shale*. A longtime resident of Vancouver, she taught English at Capilano College and was an editor with *The Capilano Review* until 2005. She now lives near Kelowna and teaches in the Department of Creative Studies at UBC's Okanagan campus. Sharon and George Stanley once sat in adjacent chairs getting their shoes shined after having gone through U.S. Customs at YVR.

SIMON THOMPSON is a professor of English at Northwest Community College in Terrace. His first book, *Why Does It Feel So Late?*, was published by New Star Books in 2009. He currently occupies NWCC's George Stanley chair of poetry.

MICHAEL TURNER is a Vancouver-based writer of fiction, criticism and song. As the Ellen and Warren Tallman SFU Writer in Residence he curated "to show, to give, to make it be there": Expanded Literary Practices in Vancouver, 1954–1969 at SFU Gallery (Burnaby) in 2010. He blogs at this address: <http://mtwebsit.blogspot.com/>

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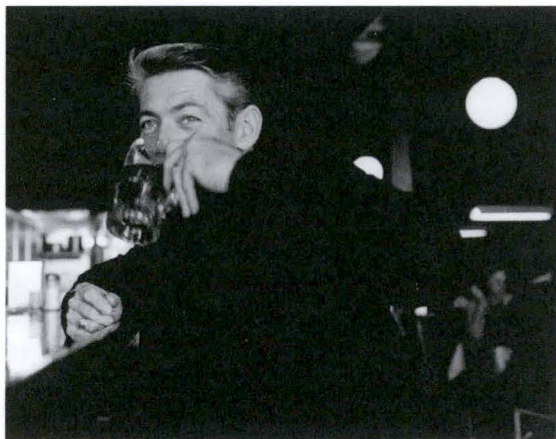
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Many thanks to Tony Power for his help with this issue.

The Capilano Review invites entries for our fall contest:
1st annual Robin Blaser Poetry Award

Statement from the contest's inaugural judges, Peter and Meredith Quartermain:



Following Robin Blaser's thought in essays such as "Particles," "The Irreparable" and "Language is Love," we are interested in poems that explore discontinuities/particles.

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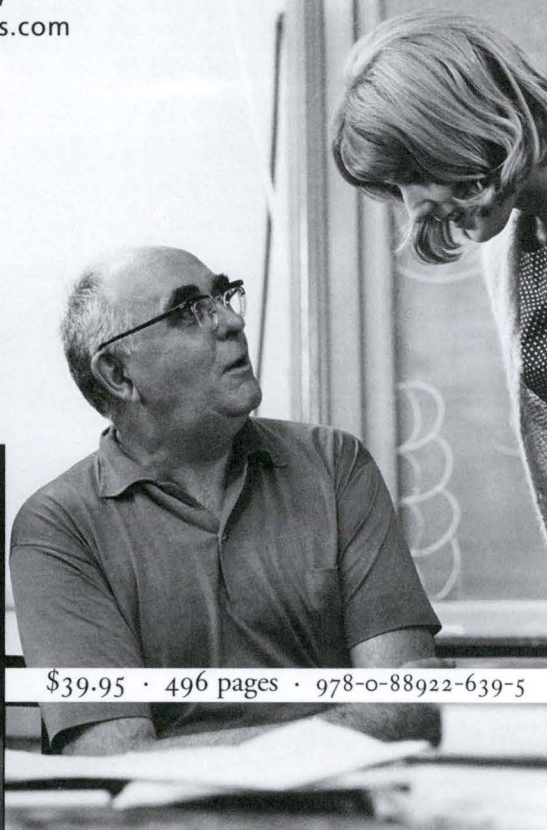
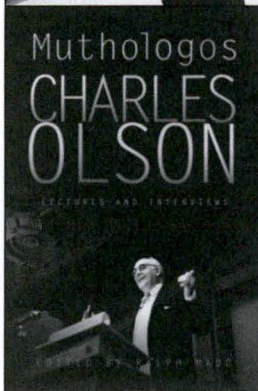
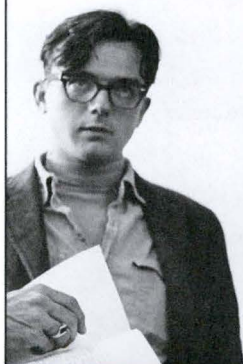
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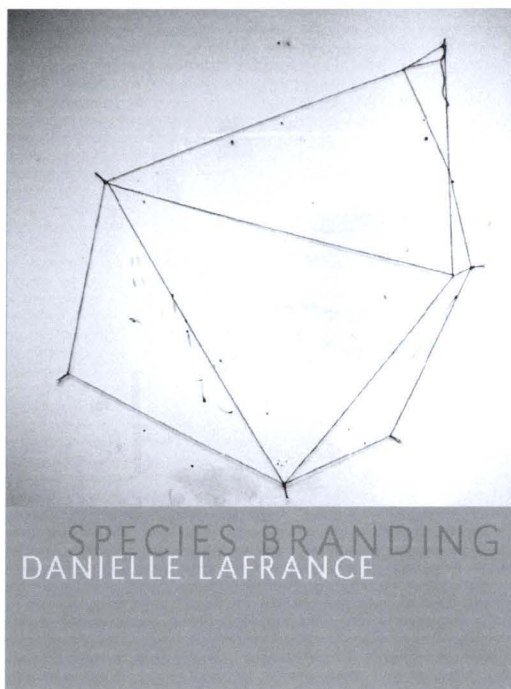
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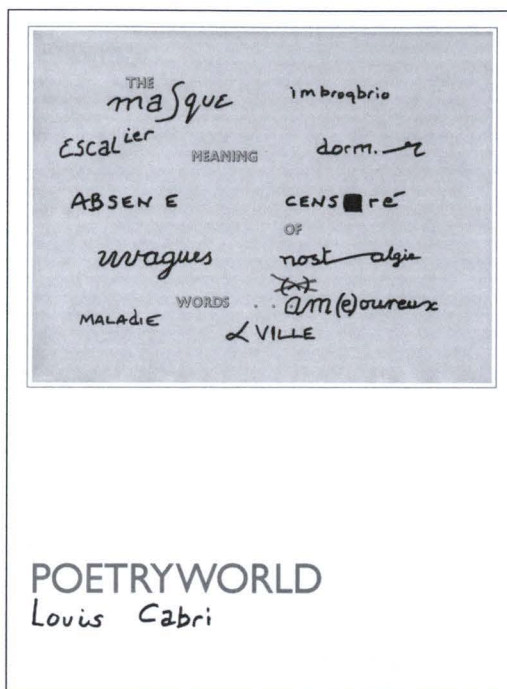


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